

# SOCIALIST ACTION

Free  
Julian  
Assange!

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## WORKERS OF THE WORLD HOLDING CIVILIZATION TOGETHER— AND DYING IN THE PROCESS!

### 'Moron' Trump's COVID-19 cure? Back to work!

BY JEFF MACKLER

U.S. capitalism's would-be savior, the "moron" President Donald Trump, sees his re-election prospects tied to a "re-invigorated" economy based on sending U.S. workers back to work close to the height of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 62,000 Americans have died of this pandemic as of this writing. Another 2,000 more perish daily. Yet "back to work" is ever on the agenda of Trump and the ruling rich, whose statisticians hunt for a "safe" mathematical formula that factors in ever-changing rates of infections and deaths with corporate profits lost.

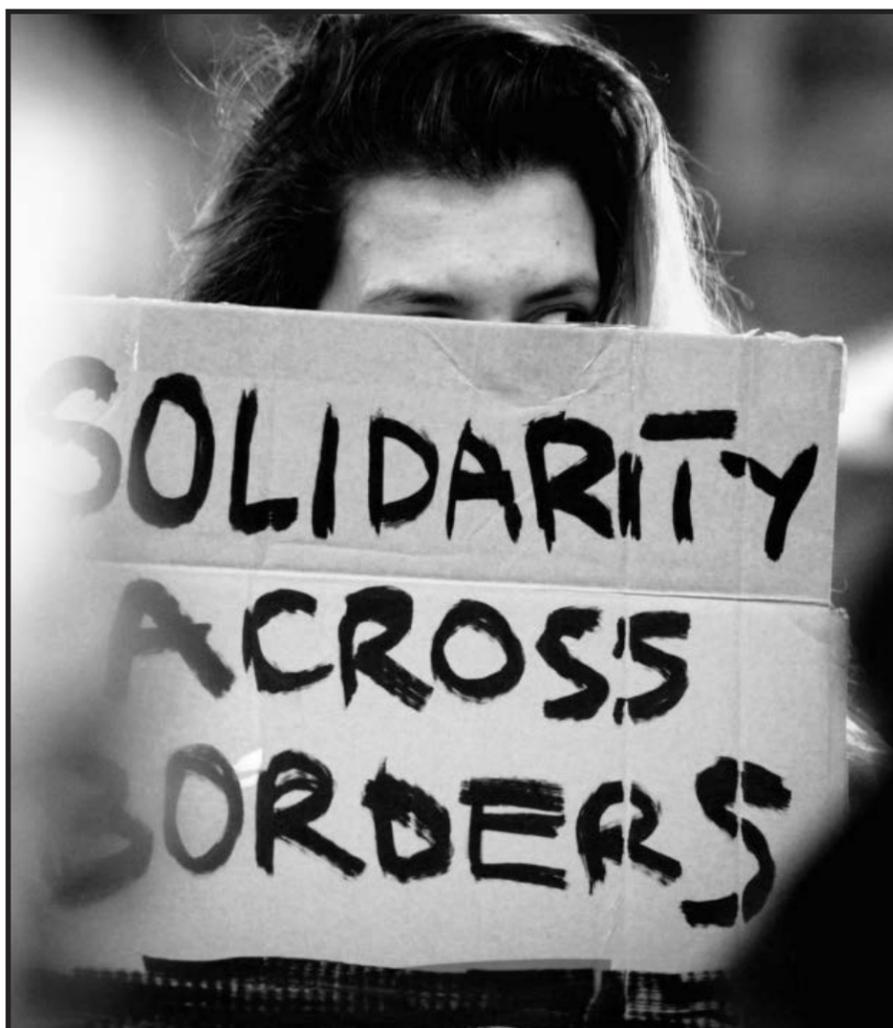
Few deny that whatever the calculations regarding the safety of a generalized return to work, they will soon after become obsolete when an inevitable second wave of this terrible disease, estimated to be far worse than the present horror, takes its toll.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director Robert Redfield reported on April 21 that "There's a possibility that the assault of the virus on our nation next winter will actually be even more difficult than the one we just went through... if the two respiratory outbreaks exist [COVID-19 and the seasonal winter flu] at the same time. This would strain the healthcare system in unimaginable ways." In the absence of an immunizing vaccine, estimated to be 12 to 18 months away, yet another disastrous wave is on the horizon. And the first wave is far from over.

Many of the dead are low-paid workers, disproportionately Black, Latino, and Native American and often part-time, from whom predatory capitalism requires vital services to keep their warehouses, supermarkets, slaughterhouses, food processing plants, fast food chain conglomerates, etc., running as fast as possible.

The dead and stricken include health care workers, public transportation workers, as well as civil service personnel who repair damaged power lines and sewer systems, fight fires and provide many other vital services. All are victims of a system that has proved incapable of providing even the most modest critical preventative tools, like effective face masks and other PPE (personal protective

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### Layoffs skyrocket, Virus deaths soar, Opposition grows

BY JAMES FORTIN

At a news conference on April 9, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said the economy was deteriorating "with alarming speed" – not particularly newsworthy to the already-informed ranks of the recently unemployed, now numbering over 30 million. The same words also tragically apply to the ongoing spread of COVID-19 through the U.S. and the rest of the world.

The U.S. economy is in a shambles not experienced by working people since the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Millions of workers, thrown into an economic morass not of their making, are beginning to witness – with many participating in – actions, picket lines, and strikes most everywhere for health protections, wage increases, health insurance coverage and for control literally over their own lives. They are publicly questioning why

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# System Change, Not Climate Change!

CLIMATE CRISIS COMMENTARY

By JAMES FORTIN

“Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science.” Really? Physicians for Social Responsibility is opposed to this new rule promoted by the Trump-trashed Environmental Protection Agency. It requires disclosure of personal information such as names and birthdates of parties whose data is used for scientific evaluation. Not surprisingly the rule disallows an analysis of about 35,000 medical records that provide evidence of significantly increased risk of acute asthma attacks in people living near fracking operations. A “direct censorship of science,” say the physicians. Others say Orwellian doublespeak.

**Arctic sabbaticals for airline executives?** Aviation accounts for about 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to a host of other negative impacts, every round-trip trans-Atlantic flight emits enough carbon dioxide to melt 30 square feet of Arctic sea ice. However, biofuels, advanced wing designs, hydrogen-powered engines and electric motors for aircraft taxiing may become viable combinations to decarbonize air travel, some researchers say. To not disturb their profound thinking on the subject, perhaps each airline CEO should ponder that from their own 30 square-foot patch.

**Money can't buy you love.** Nearly 70,000 Maine voters signed a petition to overturn by referendum a proposal disguised as “clean” energy by an electric power consortium. The petitioners would reverse governmental approvals for a transmission corridor that includes a clear-cut the width of the New Jersey turnpike through an area of woodlands and lakes prized by hikers, sportspeople, and ecological groups. The consortium in turn is spending \$19.5 million in slick ads to fight any rollback to their \$1 billion project. Yet, 65% of those polled are still not singing their tune and just plain don't love the idea.

**More Signs of the Times.** In a picture from a Seattle youth environmental event one placard read, “Stop Denying, Start Trying,” while another mused, “When Leaders Act Like Kids, The Kids Become Leaders.” But they were polite enough to not even name the current White House occupant.

**Two kinds of climate change.** Since the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil disaster of 2010, offshore oil drilling has become even more perilous. In that disaster 12 died, 3 million barrels of oil fouled wetlands and beaches, and hundreds of thousands of marine animals perished. Now Gulf of Mexico drilling is even deeper and riskier, oil production there is greater than in 2010, and government safety inspections of the industry are fewer. Sad to say, but the climate for oil industry regulation in Congress has waned while both major parties ignore doing anything about the looming climate catastrophe as a whole. The only climate that *should* change is the climate for a system that does not work.

**Not all “hoaxes” are the same.** First, climate change was a “hoax.” Then the President deemed coronavirus to be one as well. Surely there must be differences. Well, columnist Thomas L. Friedman has publicly corrected the big boy on TV, “Because there is one huge difference between the coronavirus and climate change: *Climate change doesn't peak,*” and it's “*forever.*” There is no herd immunity to climate change. There are only endless impacts on the herd.”

## Shipyard workers defy U.S. Navy

By JAMES FORTIN

Shipyard workers at Bath Iron Works (BIW) called-off from their shifts March 24 in response to company demands they work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 60% of the company's workforce of 6,800 simply did not come in, according to Tim Suttter, a spokesperson for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Local 6, which represents the majority of BIW workers.

Bath Iron Works is a builder of guided missile cruisers and destroyers for the U.S. Navy. The shipyard has taken its controversial step to keep production going regardless of the health risk, even though two workers have tested positive for the coronavirus. Work on these ships requires significant amounts of close contact between workers in enclosed areas and small compartments, environments conducive to the spread of the disease. A tuberculosis outbreak at the shipyard infected nearly 600 workers in 1989.

The Union previously has requested that company management close the shipyard and provide paid sick leave. The company refused, instead offering workers the option of either coming in to work or taking two weeks of unpaid leave. BIW management has refused to back down and has the support of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, James Geurts. Earlier this week Geurts wrote, “I understand that this national emergency presents a challenge and we are dedicated to working closely with you to ensure the safety of the workforce and the national security mission,” adding “If you work in a critical infrastructure industry ... you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule.”

The spontaneous action at the Maine shipyard is one of dozens of recent worker-led protests around the country. Workers everywhere are demanding the right to safe working conditions in light of the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic. Retail workers at Office Depot and Target have been told they cannot wear masks prompting protests. Health workers demanding adequate protective equipment have staged infor-

mal picket lines at hospital entrances. Amazon workers in New York have walked off the job to insist on sanitized work environment. There are many more examples of working people demanding their bosses remove death from the list of workplace hazards.

BIW workers come from throughout the southern area of Maine to work at the Bath facility by car, vans and buses, some traveling as much as two hours to get to their jobs. If COVID-19 spreads at BIW the disease will likely be transmitted throughout the state. Union leaders wrote in a statement yesterday that “we go home every night to our families, husbands, wives and children. Some of us or them have pre-existing conditions that put us all at a greater risk of serious complications if diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus.” Another shipyard worker asked, “who will build their damn ships when we are all sick or dead?”

Bath Iron Works is wholly-owned by General Dynamics Corporation, the fifth-largest armaments contractor in the U.S. making nuclear submarines, ships such as those produced at BIW, and military communications systems. In 2018 it had a net income after expenses of \$3.34 billion. Workers at BIW have voiced resentment at the intransigence of BIW management and the Navy given the profitability of the company. Union labor there had conceded to contract concessions during their last negotiations. “We stuff their pockets and they stuff it to us,” explained one worker leaving his shift.

As of this writing about 30% of the shipyard workforce refuses to come to work. BIW workers have secured support from the entire bi-partisan Maine congressional delegation, as well as from the Maine Legislature's House Speaker and Senate President. Community support for the workers is growing and is evident as expressed by letters to the editor of the local newspaper.

Then again, it takes quite a bit for large corporate conglomerates, especially war industry profiteers with absolutely no conscience, to put people before profits. ■

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## Join Socialist Action!

**Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers' movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where a wide range of groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.**

**In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers' party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite – whose profit-based system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.**

**We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics – not alliances with the bosses' parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a labor party based on democratic fighting trade unions in alliance with the oppressed and exploited.**

**We support the struggle of those who are specially oppressed under capitalism – women, LGBTQI people, national minorities, etc. We support the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities, including Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. We are internationalists, and hold that workers of one country have more in common with workers of another than with their own nation's capitalist class. We seek to link struggles across national boundaries, and to build an international revolutionary movement that will facilitate the sharing of experiences and political lessons. We maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International.**

**Socialist Action believes that the capitalist state and its institutions are instruments of the ruling class, and that therefore they cannot be used as tools of the working class but have to be abolished and replaced with institutions of direct working class rule. That is why we fight for revolution. When we fight for specific reforms, we do so with the understanding that in the final analysis real social change can only come about with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a workers' government and the fight for socialism. Our ultimate goal is a truly democratic, environmentally sustainable, and egalitarian society organized to satisfy human needs rather than corporate greed. We invite you to join us in the struggle to make the world a better place!**

**For info about Socialist Action and how to join contact: Socialist Action National Office, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA, 94610 or call (510) 268-9429, socialistactionnews@lmi.net**

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they are bearing the brunt of the economic collapse and why more is not being done, and not being done quickly enough, to help them.

At the same time, we are exposed to the daily scenes of exhausted nurses and other medical personnel, many holding back tears, everywhere pleading for the ventilators and personal protective gear they lack to save patients and themselves from COVID-19. As of April 22, the U.S. is approaching a million infected by the virus with over 55,000 dead. The contagion is rapidly spreading to new hot-spot death zones in Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans and to countless additional places in between. Health care workers, too, are taking their demands public in labor actions coast to coast.

### Socialism for the rich

These protests by segments of the working class have a context. Working people have been the target of austerity measures taken by Democratic and Republican administrations alike over the past 40 years. These twin parties of U.S. capitalism have been ardent enablers of the ruling class to globalize its economic system in the name of profit, thereby exporting work to lower-paying overseas markets, while eliminating jobs, cutting wages and decimating all manner of retirement and health care benefits domestically.

Simultaneously, the social safety net in the U.S. has been shrunken with food programs slashed, public housing privatized, and hospitals closed. The greatest migration of wealth in history from workers to the ruling rich has transpired, making the working class today less secure, more impoverished, and not as healthy than it was when Jimmy Carter – the “liberal” who ushered in Ronald Reagan – was president, more than 40 years ago.

The current financial “stimulus” package passed by Congress is accelerating this process, with massive sums of free money made available to the companies and banks of the ruling rich while pacifiers are given to everyone else.

In the package passed unanimously by Democrats and Republicans individuals are scheduled to get a one-time payment of \$1200. On the other hand, aircraft manufacturer Boeing, the creator of the faulty 737Max jet that has taken hundreds of lives in two preventable crashes, will get \$17 billion. Airlines will get \$58 billion even though they are flush with cash from 10 years of record profits.

Ultimately to the detriment of all workers, large corporations will get \$500 billion in cash plus massive tax cuts which they do not need. Banks, now salivating over their stimulus drinking trough, will get trillions of dollars’ worth of credits and loan performance guarantees from the Federal Reserve Bank – all of this while workers payments are delayed, food banks which they have been forced to rely on, go empty, and Trump is actively urging states to send workers back to work before COVID-19 has been tamed.

### Life and death struggle

Safety issues have been the spark, and fearing for their safety, about a hundred Amazon workers at its Staten Island, New York warehousing operation walked off their jobs on March 30, demanding that the company clean and sanitize the warehouse after workers there tested positive for COVID-19.

At another Amazon facility in Chicago, workers picketed on April 4 demanding the same while a long line of protestor in cars, blaring their horns and featuring homemade demand signs, drove by the main gates of the distribution warehouse.

Similarly, in Memphis, Tennessee, at about the same time, half the workers at a Kroger warehouse also walked out from work demanding company action to prevent the virus’ spread when a co-worker

## layoffs skyrocket, virus deaths soar, opposition grows

was determined to have the coronavirus.

Although involving fairly small numbers in each action, coronavirus safety concerns prompted union sanitation workers in Pittsburgh to follow suit, as well as non-union poultry workers in Georgia, bus drivers in Detroit and Birmingham, Chrysler auto workers in Michigan, and shipyard workers in Maine. But the largest job action to date involved 17,000 carpenters and painters in the Boston area who were told on April 6 not to come into work by their unions to protest lack of protection gear and the inability of workers to engage in social distancing on the job.

The lack of workplace safety measures to fend off the coronavirus have accelerated union organizing campaigns in a number of companies, including Trader Joe’s. In other cases, such as at the GE aviation division, workers have demanded that GE bring back laid off workers to make ventilators to fight the pandemic.

Clearly, not only is there growing awareness of the threat that COVID-19 presents to many workers on the job, but also a new militancy is developing to protest and to demand action to stop bosses

enterprises, so it did not order or stockpile adequate medical equipment or supplies either.

In the health industry, workers are insisting that PPE be provided to keep them safe while working with COVID-19 patients and demanding that hospital management and the government step up to provide these items. National Nurses United (NNU), which has 150,000 members and represents the 10,000 nurses at HCA Healthcare, the country’s largest and wealthiest for-profit hospital conglomerate, held picket lines and speak-outs in front of 15 NCA hospitals across seven states earlier this month.

Over the past decade HCA made a profit of \$23 billion. Yet, in a recent survey only 7% of nurses at the health care chain say they have enough PPE to protect staff and patients during these times. Sixty-five percent of those polled said they did not have access to N95 respirators, perhaps the most significant items needed when treating COVID-19 patients. “For the wealthiest hospital corporation in the United States to show such disregard for the health and safety of its caregivers, is disgraceful and unconscionable,” said Jean Ross, President of National Nurses

to fathom that nurses who have been exposed to patients with the virus are not tested for the virus, are being told to re-use protective gear, and are assigned care to COVID-19 patients without proper protections ...I find it blatantly irresponsible and a dangerous practice. We see what is happening in other areas of the nation when doctors and nurses contract the disease and are unable to care for patients.” Similar comments were echoed by Stacy Chamberlain, International Vice President of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers in Portland, Oregon

Objections to working under dangerous COVID-19 conditions is now evident from health and pharmacy workers, grocery workers, postal workers, transit workers, home aides, truck drivers, sanitation workers, and farm workers – all while offering absolutely essential services to the economy. Increasingly the nation is becoming a virtual war zone. It’s nurses and doctors and EMTs skirmishing with the established health response system, particularly the Trump failures to stockpile PPE and virus test kits.

It’s Amazon workers, and retail employees, and the unemployed and oppressed



who insist that they work through the pandemic.

### Anarchy of capitalism

An April 8, CNN poll indicates that 55% of the American people now believe the government has not done a good job at fighting the COVID-19 contagion, 52% disapproving specifically of Trump’s pandemic performance. This stems in large measure to the highly publicized plight of health care professionals on the front lines of the pandemic decrying the lack of necessary test kits, masks gowns, hospital beds, ventilators and adequately trained personnel.

As working people throughout the economy are beginning to realize that the system is stacked against them, health care employees are learning a deadly lesson as well: that the PPE and respirators needed to save lives are just commodities to the capitalist class, produced by private enterprise whose goal is profit, not saving lives.

Living by the economic mantra of “just in time” manufacturing developed in in the 1980’s it was not profitable for these companies to make and stockpile such commodities in volume, so it simply was not done.

And the public health and safety of its citizens was nowhere near a priority for the capitalist government protecting these

United and a registered nurse.

While engaging in safe ways to prevent negative impacts to their patients, health care workers around the country are speaking out. Nurses at Harlem Hospital in New York demonstrated in front of the hospital after their management limited their access to personal protective equipment, including N95 masks.

“This is a story about the fight for our lives,” said one nurse needing the mask. And at Chicago’s Cook County Hospital health care workers at Chicago’s Cook County Hospital are staging mini-sit downs, telling management to “come find me in the break room when you have PPE,” according to a report from Labor Notes.

At Detroit Medical Center, Sinai-Grace Hospital emergency room nurses were told by management to leave the hospital after the group protested working conditions that jeopardized their health as well as their patients. Jamie Brown, President of the Michigan Nurses Association, responded in support of the workers saying they have “a tipping point ... the best thing any RN can do for their patients, their families, and their coworkers is to speak out rather than remain silent.”

Edward Smith, Executive Director of the District of Columbia Nurses Association slammed hospitals there. “It is hard

minorities against their employers and the capitalist system, demanding change and testing the resolve of their opposing class. Pick an occupation and there is concern for safety. But there is more than just a whiff of change in the air.

### Whole new deck of cards

As a society we are on new turf, but on a comparable trajectory evidenced during an important time in our recent past when meaningful victories were won. An ever-expanding number of Americans now know someone or a family member who has been infected, who has died, or who is struggling to survive financially.

The American people surely and increasingly are being impacted by events not seen on such a scale since the late 1960’s and early 1970’s period of the Vietnam War, when the impact of 58,000 U.S. troops dying overseas personally affected millions at home. Tens of millions were moved into action.

The deaths from coronavirus and the economic incapacitation of millions today are not dissimilar in scale. New movements and struggles for economic and social justice will come from this, the character of which is yet to be witnessed but should be expected. Our involvement as socialists in these new struggles, however, will help to shape the victories yet to come. ■

# Defend the indigenous peoples, afro-descendants and peoples' organizations of Latin America

A CALL BY THE COMMITTEE FOR THE ABOLITION OF ILLEGITIMATE DEBT (CADTM) OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

(See list of endorsers and signatories on Socialist Action website)

The crisis that the COVID-19 has provoked globally presents a crossroads to the peoples of Abya Yala - Latin America. The popular organizations are the first line of resistance against the worst expressions of the decomposing system:

We are going through a complete crisis that threatens life in all its forms. The COVID-19 has become a pandemic at a time when the capitalist crisis is intensifying and the economic clout is repeatedly trying to make the working class bear the onus of recomposing the corporate profit rate. This coincides with the weakening of the health systems, the deterioration of living conditions and the destruction of the public sector as a result of the neoliberal shift. The asphyxiation to which we are being subjected by the foreign debt, international organisations and the permanent oppression of imperialism against our sovereignty is leading to a scenario with very serious consequences.

In an America where we refuse to accept structural adjustments and the imposition of new imperialist policies, and where our peoples have first hand experiences of important popular uprisings in recent months, the pandemic has become a pretext to legitimize the presence of the armed forces on our territories and to implement adjustment measures and the deterioration of the living conditions of the working class. Likewise, this crisis has once again revealed the brutality of patriarchal violence against women and sexual dissidents, as well as the historical exclusion of indigenous peoples and people of African descent, who are forced to face the pandemic in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

In the best tradition of our people, we are the organizations of the people, workers, peasants, indigenous peoples, feminists, Afro-descendants, and neighbours, who are putting their bodies, heads and hearts to work out immediate responses, but also to project a way out of this crisis through a path towards a better society instead of returning to capitalist normalcy. This will be possible if we give our best as peoples. The community ties and the popular, territorial and regional unity that we maintain during this battle will be part of the fabric that will build the horizons of transformation of our Abya Yala America.

In the face of the lack of housing, we occupy territories and build houses; in the face of the lack of work, we organize co-operatives, recover factories and tackle closures and layoffs; in the face of the bosses' attacks, we fight for better working conditions; in the face of the lack of education, we create schools; in the face of the oppression of women and dissidents, we build popular feminisms; in the face of exploitation, we build grassroots trade union organisations and fight against precariousness and for decent wages; in the face of the climate crisis, we develop agro-ecology; in the face of monoculture and food monopolies, we build peasant agro-food territories to guarantee food sovereignty and autonomy; in the face of militarisation, paramilitarism and drug trafficking, we substitute cultures and fight for peace.

Our alternative is life against those who offer us death.

In the face of the policy of closing borders and fragmentation, and in the face of xenophobia and neo-fascism proposed from above, we return to the horizon of



continental solidarity and the unity of peoples.

Faced with the policies of the capitalists, in order to use the crisis as a cover for adjustment, let us deepen and rethink our historical struggles for the defence of territories, life and the socialisation of wealth, let us build popular and community power.

Therefore, we demand from the governments and we call on the people to:

1. Give priority to life over debt. No to the payment of external debt, thorough investigation (full audit) and cancellation of the external debt. It is criminal to skimp on health and rights to repay the IMF and other creditors. Health and social protection systems to cope with the pandemic are the priority. We must recover our strategic wealth and the management of our banks and foreign trade, the permanent source of economic leakage from Latin American countries. Only a policy of economic sovereignty, stemming from the advance of popular power, can mitigate the economic and global crisis we are beginning to experience.

2. Fighting inequality. Extraordinary tax on the rich, on the profits of banks and big business, on those who organised the flight of capital. That governments take on the role of eliminating the inequalities promoted by the market, that the necessary investments in emergency policies be financed by confronting the concentration of wealth, and not by reducing workers' wages. Reorient the production chains of large corporations to produce inputs to combat the Coronavirus, as well as the diseases we endure without state attention, such as malnutrition, dengue fever, sleeping sickness (Chagas disease) and tuberculosis.

3. Urgent strengthening of public health systems: urgent and priority investment in the public health system, nationalization of private health and strengthening

of state measures to contain the pandemic. The pandemic reaffirms the need for universal health care for all, strengthening public promotion of these services. That states take control of the production and administration of all goods needed to address the crisis with the participation and control of workers. Elimination of the patent system on medicines in order to fully develop research and scientific applications to solve human problems, and recognition of original and traditional medicine.

4. A job with every right. Guarantee of a universal income for all, prohibition of dismissals and suspensions. It is essential to recognize the rights of workers in order to live in dignified confinement. Let this urgency not be a pretext to continue to advance precarious work. No to the closure of companies. The state must support their occupation and their recovery by the workers.

5. Housing and dignified living as a social right, confinement can only be achieved under a roof, with guaranteed basic services and in a healthy neighbourhood. Evictions, payment of rents and services must be suspended; housing policies must be oriented towards a comprehensive urban reform that guarantees access to housing in decent neighbourhoods for all working families. Universal access to water, light and gas and improvement of working-class neighbourhoods: there can be no fight against the pandemic without all inhabitants having access to drinking water, gas and electricity at home, in the neighbourhood or in the community. No house left without a person, no person without a house. Requisitioning of empty properties for the homeless population and for popular shelters.

6. Fighting hunger and guaranteeing universal access to food, giving priority to the financing and role of cooperative,

community and family-based agro-ecological agriculture in the food supply of populations, canteens, picnic areas and community kitchens: it is necessary to make progress in promoting access to food, as a means of reviving the economy and not provoking a supply crisis. Guarantee a basic food basket with regulated and tax-exempt prices. Demand sanctions against price speculation and monopolisation by supermarkets and middlemen. Cancellation of peasants' debt, redistribution of productive land and the establishment of protection systems and agro-ecological colonies financed by the state.

7. Against the commodification of nature, we must reclaim sovereignty over our common goods such as water, gas, oil, land, strategic wealth that is usurped by economic vampires with the collusion of local governments and entrepreneurs. Full respect for the territories of the original peoples and reconsider the economic and extractive model. The exploitation of natural resources must respect the mother earth and the peoples who inhabit it.

8. Strengthening of health protection and humanitarian aid with a guarantee of sovereignty of the territories of the original peoples, indigenous and African nationalities, especially those whose habitat is in vital ecosystems such as the Amazon, for whom the epidemiological threat could mean genocide. Strengthening self-government and its systems for the territorial and cultural survival of the lives of indigenous and Afro peoples. Prohibition of evictions and actions that violate the sovereignty of indigenous peoples.

9. Genuine policies to deal with male violence: with social isolation measures, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women may increase. That for women, both cissexual and transgender, the use of information technology is not enough to combat violence against women. It must be prevented and eradicated. Budget for the prevention of femicides and trans-femicides. Shelters for people in situations of violence, special economic subsidies for survivors. Employment and education plans for women and dissidents.

10. More prevention, not repression: Many governments have used the context of the coronavirus to intensify the logic of repression and surveillance and to increase the imprisonment of the poorest, community leaders, human rights defenders and mother earth. It is time to reduce the prison population as a public health problem.

There is also a need to upgrade the authorities themselves and the community guards who take care of ancestral territories and are an effective community institution or a body to take care of life.

11. No to imperialist political, economic and military intervention: we categorically reject the use of the crisis as an excuse for military interference in Venezuela by Yankee imperialism and its partners, the constant murders of indigenous and popular leaders in Colombia, the fierce repression of the putschist regime in Bolivia, Honduras and the anti-peoples government of Piñera in Chile, the expansion of extraction projects in indigenous and peasant territories.

We demand the lifting of the blockades against Cuba and Venezuela.

12. Internationalist Humanitarian Aid: We call on governments to request humanitarian aid from Cuba and other countries that have technical experience in the fight against the pandemic and that can help contain the Covid-19 epidemic in the cities where the pandemic has spread the most, such as Guayaquil and São Paulo.

Against the wealth of a few, for the sovereignty of the people.

For life! No to the IMF!

As the peoples of Latin America struggle: Internationalist solidarity! ■

BY ANN MONTAGUE

As the news outlets are covering developments in the spread of the coronavirus 24/7 and there are daily press conferences with President Trump and the coronavirus Task Force, the State Department and the U.S. military are taking Henry Kissinger's advice: "Never let a serious crisis go to waste."

While the novel coronavirus spreads throughout the world, killing over 200,000, the U.S. is continuing its imperialist assault on Venezuela and its ongoing coup attempts, denying the country badly needed funds for its health system and sending U.S. Navy destroyers and Marines to the country's coastline.

On March 19, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) rejected a request by Venezuela for a \$5 billion loan to help it fight the coronavirus pandemic.

A spokesperson for the Washington D.C.-based IMF claimed that the reason it would not consider the request was that loans are "predicated on official government recognition by the international community" and it had "no clarity" as to who is Venezuela's rightful head of state: President Nicolas Maduro, who was democratically elected by the people of Venezuela, or Juan Guaidó, the U.S.-backed leader of a failed but continuing right-wing coup attempt who declared himself president in January.

Guaidó is the current figurehead of a years-long effort by the U.S. to overthrow the Maduro government, during which the U.S. has piled up endless sanctions on Venezuela in its economic warfare against the country, nearly wiping out Venezuelan oil production and exports, seizing billions of dollars in Venezuelan bank accounts around the world and turning the money over to Guaidó.

Venezuela requested the loan from the IMF from a special fund designated to support countries' response to crises. The money would strengthen the capacities of the Venezuelan health system. President Maduro expressed to the IMF that he believed that working with the World Health Organization (WHO), receiving solidarity from other nations and social discipline they could defeat the virus.

This was the first IMF loan request from Venezuela in nineteen years. Venezuela has also received medical aid from Cuba, which has sent a delegation of 137 doctors to the country to treat patients with Covid-19.

Days after the IMF rejected Venezuela's request for aid, the European Union stated that it was in favor of the request, making it clear that the U.S., which holds veto power over IMF decision-making, was responsible for denying the loan.

Following the IMF's refusal of the loan to Venezuela, Juan Guaidó announced an offer of \$1.2 billion in loans from inter-

## U.S. weaponizes COVID-19 against Venezuela



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro rejects drug-trafficking charges at March 30 press conference in Caracas.

***In addition, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration document of December 2019 does not even mention Venezuela. It says 90% of cocaine comes from Columbia and 6% from Peru.***

national financial institutions to fight the virus, only if the government agreed to enter an "emergency unity government" with Guaidó and his coup-makers, which would not include Maduro or any of the other 14 Venezuelan officials recently named in ridiculous drug trafficking charges fabricated by the U.S. Justice Department.

### Cuba send massive medical aid

On April 22, Reinol Garcia, the Director of the Cuban medical mission in Venezuela announced, "Cuba has 21,600 health collaborators in Venezuela. Twelve thousand are researching possible cases in all Venezuelan communities. They have completed 350,000 rapid tests to detect the virus including house to house visits with the social isolation measures. Cuban doctors are also working in Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers assisting patients with other pathologies."

In the meantime, the day after Barack Obama broadcast his official endorsement of Joe Biden as the Democratic Party nominee for president, Biden made his position clear in an interview that he supports President Trump's attempted coup in Venezuela. Biden described his policy as "restoring democracy in Venezuela." The Trump/Biden policy supports the violent effort by right-wing elites to overthrow the elected government of President Nicolás Maduro. Biden also

parrots the Trump position that Maduro is not the legitimate leader of Venezuela.

Ignoring the crippling effect of U.S. economic sanctions against Venezuela in the midst of a pandemic, Biden makes his position clear, "Maduro's regime [sic] is responsible for incredible suffering. The U.S. must stand with Guaidó to restore democracy." Biden's support for U.S. "regime change" in Venezuela is consistent with his cheering on the Bush/Cheney invasion of Iraq.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) recently stated that the U.S. economic sanctions against Venezuela have prevented the country from having access to lifesaving medications, medical equipment and food. A study by the economists Jeffery Sachs and Mark Weisbrot, published by CEPR last year, concluded that from 2017 to 2018 U.S. sanctions killed more than 40,000 Venezuelan citizens.

### Trumped-up drug-trafficking charge

On March 26, U.S. Attorney General William Barr announced that President Maduro and more than a dozen other government officials will be indicted on "drug trafficking charges," steps similar to those taken against the Noriega government in Panama before the U.S. invaded in 1989 and overthrew the regime. Menacingly referring to the Venezuelan government as "the former Maduro re-

gime," Barr announced a reward of \$15 million for the arrest of Maduro.

Pino Ariacchi, the former director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime responded, "I have been dealing with the issue of drugs and crime for over forty years and never encountered Venezuela. There is no illegal drug trade between Venezuela and the United States".

In addition, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration document of December 2019 does not even mention Venezuela. It says 90% of cocaine comes from Columbia and 6% from Peru.

Five days later on March 31, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that economic sanctions would be removed from Venezuela in return for President Maduro's resignation and the creation of a 5 person "Council of State" approved by the United States. Future elections would ban Maduro from running and the U.S. designee for President would be Juan Guaidó.

This proposal was immediately rejected and on April 1, during an update on the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump announced that U.S. Navy destroyers carrying helicopters and ground troops, along with surveillance planes, were headed to Venezuela on a "drug interception" mission. According to the Associated Press, the U.S. deployment is one of the largest in the region since the 1989 invasion of Panama.

### Sanctions on oil tightened

Chevron is the only U.S. oil company still active in Venezuela. The company has received a series of 90-day waivers that exempted them from U.S. sanctions. They currently have four joint ventures with PDVSA, the Venezuelan state oil company.

According to *Venezuelanalysis*, "On April 22nd the United States Treasury Department gave Chevron until December 1st to wind down all operations in Venezuela. The U.S. multinational now is forbidden from drilling, selling and buying Venezuelan crude. Dividend payments to PDVSA are also prohibited. This also applies to oilfield service companies Baker Hughes, Halliburton, Schlumberger and Weatherford International."

Venezuela relies on crude exports for 95% of its hard currency earnings. According to Reuters, the Trump administration sees the tightening of economic sanctions in the midst of a pandemic as "a compromise" between those who believe forcing Chevron to leave will further weaken the Venezuelan economy and others who defend keeping a "corporate beachhead" in the country.

End All U.S. Sanctions!  
Bring All the Troops Home!  
Self-determination for Venezuela!

BY DON HARMON

Why are so many working people in jail and always a disproportionate number of the oppressed minorities? Here is the fightback narrative: America is a racist, classist nation, founded on the principle that billionaire and multimillionaire white men are created equal, and therefore should have equal opportunities to make super-profits from an exploited workforce of lesser humans, namely working people.

The capitalist class believes that this unexceptional nation, founded on the time-honored customs of serfdom, slavery and genocide, continues to oppress African American, Latino and Native American people as it sees fit.

This is a system that dooms millions to lives very different from the privileged few who are ensconced in Shaker Heights, an enclave of the pale one percent with its stately brick mansions, four-car garages, century-old trees, manicured acres — all nestled midst the poverty of working class Cleveland.

## Release prisoners from COVID-19 death sentence!



So let's have a closer look at the state of our African American, Latino, Native American and working class white sisters and brothers deep in the bowels of the Marion Correctional Institute. More than 80% of Marion's prison population has tested positive for COVID-19 — over 2000 inmates, plus 154 staff members. The staff at this prison, any prison, come and go of course, which is

yet another great way to spread the virus. Sarcasm alert: Hurray! America is number one!!

Here's a sampling of other Ohio prisons. At Pickaway County, as of late April, over 75% — or 1645 inmates — are COVID-19 positive. At Franklin Medical Center, where Ohio inmates suffer even more, 110 of 111 have tested positive. A report by *Time* magazine says, "Inmates sitting in soiled diapers or beds for hours. Feces in the showers. Urine caked on beds. These are just some of the conditions reported by inmates at the Franklin Medical Center in Columbus — conditions that were problems well before coronavirus hit the facility."

Belmont Correctional in St. Clairsville, Ohio has 30 inmates who have tested positive. A legal complaint by Derek Lichtenwalter asking for early release due to COVID-19, says "Bed areas are so crowded that I am within three feet of at least twelve people and those twelve

are in the same position. This means that there are 126 people in my 'dorm' that are within 3-4 feet of each other. The common areas are overcrowded and what this means is once it gets to the prison it will be spread quickly through the population."

Cook County jail in Chicago now has over 800 cases of COVID-19 and 7 deaths. Almost 1600 prisoners have been released. Without exception, of course and again, a disproportionate number are from the nation's most oppressed nationalities.

These infection numbers will inevitably rise. More people will die. Is this the kind of nation we want to live in? Hell no.

### ACLU Study

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has recently produced a study with these stark observations: their COVID-19 model finds "nearly 100,000 more deaths than current estimates, due to failures to reduce jail populations."

(continued on page 7)

# ... back to work as COVID-19 spreads

(continued from page 1)

equipment) to guard against infection, not to mention test kits to detect the virus and then safely quarantine its victims to prevent its insidious advance.

We live in a racist, white supremacist social system where Black, Latino and Indigenous people always suffer first and worst. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Black people are 25 percent of the population, some 67 percent of infected COVID-19 victims are Black. Among the dead, 81 percent are Black. Capitalism always takes its greatest toll on the poor and oppressed. The Milwaukee breakdown is not exceptional. It is only exceptional in that it is one of the few cities to release the racial breakdown of COVID-19's victims.

## Trump's Lysol or bleach cure

A disclaimer here is partially in order. It was Trump's fired former Secretary of State and previously ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson who first privately attached the "f\*\*\*\*\*g moron" label to the president. He did so after Trump had exited a National Security Council meeting, leaving those who remained to ponder his suggestion that the U.S. increase its tactical nuclear arsenal 100-fold!

Trump's reactionary views on the three unfolding cataclysmic threats to humanity's future now include his denial of fossil fuel-induced climate change, his pursuit of a new generation of nuclear weapon, and now his COVID-19 pandemic policies that placed the U.S. first in the world in the number of people afflicted and the number of those who have died.

Needless to say, Trump and his bi-partisan predecessors have been fully aware that the origins of COVID-19 and similar viruses like MERS and H1N1, lie in the corporate plundering of the world's ecosystems – ever bringing humans in closer contact with previously isolated disease-carrying species – and the abject failures of scientific research practiced under profit-first capitalism.

The statement with which the moron Trump – no quotation marks this time – most outraged the medical community and others came on April 23 during the president's daily two-hour press conference, where Trump suggested an "injection inside" the human body with a disinfectant like bleach or isopropyl alcohol to possibly help combat the virus.

"And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute," Trump stated following a presentation by William N. Bryan, an acting under secretary for science at the Department of Homeland Security. Bryan, a Trump bureaucrat with zero background in the biological sciences, was discussing the virus's possible susceptibility to bleach and alcohol, as a cleaning agent on surfaces.

"One minute," the president stated, interrupting Bryan, "And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning? Because you see it [the coronavirus] gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs. So it would be interesting to check that."

A day later the *New York Times* featured a front-page rebuttal entitled, "Science Fires Back Loudly on Trump's Cure All," stating, "In Maryland, so many callers flooded a health hotline with questions that the state's Emergency Management Agency had to issue a warning that 'under no circumstances' should any disinfectant be taken to treat the coronavirus.

In Washington State, officials urged people not to consume laundry detergent capsules. Across the country on Friday, health professionals sounded the alarm. Injecting bleach or highly concentrated



rubbing alcohol 'causes massive organ damage and the blood cells in the body to basically burst,' said the medical director of the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System, Dr. Diane P. Canello. 'It can definitely be a fatal event.'

Clorox and Lysol manufacturers warned Americans not to inject or ingest their products! A day later, the Food and Drug Administration warned that hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine, two malaria drugs that Trump has taken to frequently recommending as remedies for the coronavirus, can cause "dangerous abnormalities in heart rhythm in coronavirus patients and has resulted in some deaths."

The F.D.A. added that "The drugs should be used only in clinical trials or hospitals where patients can be closely monitored for heart problems." There is no evidence that the drugs are in any way effective at treating COVID-19.

Trump's medical idiocies were soon after covered up by his obedient media team; in the case of injecting deadly chemicals into one's body they asserted that Trump was merely being sarcastic to the "fake media." The video of the media conference refutes this assertion. Meanwhile, in Chicago, tragic reports of people dying from ingesting such poisons have been broadcast on National Public Radio channels.

## The real state of the U.S. economy

The COVID-19 pandemic has brutally revealed that the U.S. economy was never in a healthy state, unless the skyrocketing casino stock market and related speculative ventures that have made a handful of multi-millionaires into billionaires – the "one percent" – are taken as a measure of good health.

Casino capitalism indeed! A system where the house always wins and the 99

percent lose. It is these paper money speculators and the corporate behemoths behind them, enriched by unprecedented billions and now trillions of dollars in bailouts, and even more in zero interest "quantitative easing" loans, who press for their wage slaves to return to the workplace with little or no medically-established criteria.

Within weeks of the bailout it has become clear that the promise of increased unemployment benefits that would fully cover the lost wages for each laid off worker, including freelance and part-time workers, is a fiction.

To date only 10 states have even begun making payments under a new federal program to these groups who are not covered under the typical unemployment insurance. And now we learn that the banks have been allowed to deduct various amounts from the much hyped one-time \$1,200 "stimulus" checks, including overdrafts owed to the banks as well as other forms of debt.

Another provision in the new legislation, supposedly aimed at helping small businesses, allows banks assigned to distribute the money, like JPMorgan Chase, one of the richest on earth, to circumvent application procedures and contact its "small business" customers directly to facilitate the government payments. These "small businesses," defined as employing less than 500 workers, are often multi-million – and even billion – dollar corporations.

## Myth of 3.5% unemployment rate

In a matter of days, the initial \$348 billion allocated to them evaporated while the vast majority of mom and pop style operations were left at locked starting gates.

Trump's touted pre-COVID-19 3.5 per-

cent "lowest unemployment rate in decades" has proven to be a terrible fraud, a product of Labor Department statistical manipulation in the extreme aimed at excluding categories of "discouraged" workers who have stopped looking for jobs as well as workers who have worked perhaps a few days in a particular quarter, part time workers and workers who are not receiving unemployment insurance!

Prior to COVID-19, the Department of Labor's official "labor participation rate," a measure of the actual number of all eligible workers with jobs, was closer to 65 percent. That is, the remaining 35 percent were essentially jobless! With 30 million workers filing for unemployment benefits over the past five weeks – a number equaling the total number of net new jobs generated in the economy over the past nine-and-a-half-years, today's real jobless rate is closer to the worst years of the Great Depression, where half the workforce was either totally unemployed or working part-time jobs at less than poverty wages.

## Workers' living on the edge

"The coronavirus pandemic has shown how close to the edge many Americans were living, with pay and benefits eroding even as corporate profits surged," wrote Patricia Cohen in a front-page April 16 *New York Times* article. Cohen continued, "But perhaps more significantly, the crisis has revealed profound, longstanding vulnerabilities in the economic system."

Cohen quotes Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, to wit, "We built an economy with no shock absorbers... A lot of the people in the economy are living at the edge, and you have an event like this that pushes them over. And we are unique in the advanced world in having people at the edge without a safety net below them."

This absence of a safety net is no accident. One example is the massive bipartisan cuts over the past decades in hospital and healthcare expenditures coupled with a largely privatized health care system based significantly on employment at corporation that ever press for reduced benefits. It is no coincidence that the U.S., touted as the richest nation on earth, ranks first in the world in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths.

The *Times* proceeds to recount the state of the economy and working class life before the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing to, in their terms: "Years of limp wage growth that left workers struggling to afford essentials" with "irregular work schedules that caused weekly paychecks to surge and dip unpredictably. Job-based benefits were threadbare or nonexistent. In this economy, four of 10 adults don't have the resources on hand to cover an unplanned \$400 expense."

They note that "in less than two decades, the share of income paid out in wages and benefits in the private sector shrank by 5.4 percentage points," reducing pay by \$3,000 a year, and making it even harder for working families to "meet their basic needs." For millions of workers, health care costs rose twice as fast as wages over the past decade.

Again, this was before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Today, the data demonstrating a society in decay stands out as never before.

Lines of cars stretch for miles as families wait to pick up groceries from a food pantry; jobless workers spend days trying to file for unemployment; outside hospitals, sick people line up overnight to wait for virus testing.

And 53.5 percent of all renters – millions of whom spend more than half their incomes on housing – have lost their jobs in the pandemic.

## Predatory capitalism unmasked

Most instructive about all of the above is that its source is the nation's "news-

paper of record,” *The New York Times*, that before largely limited its reporting to glib commentaries touting the nation’s strong economy, rising stock markets and “historically low” unemployment rates – factors they previously estimated would help facilitate Trump’s re-election. Today the *Times*, perhaps the leading Democratic Party media advocate, along with much of the corporate media establishment, finds it convenient to place the blame on Trump for the nation’s deepening economic crises.

In these strange new times the more sophisticated capitalist media understand that a bit of criticism of the elite more generally is in order so as to appear balanced in their explanations of why, seeming out of the blue, such *now* widely understood injustices have come to pass.

“Powerful forces like advancing technology and globalization are partly to blame for workers’ economic instability,” writes *The Times*, while neglecting to explain that the replacement of human labor by advanced machines and robots, that is, technological advances, and the offshoring of what were once living-wage union jobs to nations that impose near slave-labor wages, is inherent in the world capitalist system.

Deadly competition forces all corporations to struggle to maintain ever-declining profit rates at the expense of their workers. That’s the central reason for substituting machines for workers, for increasing numbers of low wage zero benefit, part time jobs, for assembly line speed up, for destruction of pensions, for increasing the use of mass incarcerated prison labor at 50 cents per hour, for the super-exploitation and persecution of immigrant labor and for generalized union-busting that obliterates historic gains in union contracts.

And it’s the same for endless rounds of deregulation in every field, from environmental protection to pharmaceutical drug testing. It’s the same for the privatization of public education and the parallel increasing privatization of social services. These are all inherent features of today’s so-called “free market,” no government interference, de-regulated neo-liberal capitalism, the modern-day version of the old predatory system run in high gear to make U.S. corporations more competitive on world markets.

Add to this the endless wars abroad and its ever-increasing production of fossil fuels – perhaps capitalism’s two most profitable enterprises – and we come close to a succinct explanation of capitalism’s *raison d’être*!

In this context it is no surprise that the lion’s share of the present and ongoing



multi-trillion dollar federal bailouts go to the ruling rich, who unswervingly “regulate” and oversee *their* capitalist system in *their own* interests.

#### Trump estimates COVID-19 fatalities

Just a few weeks ago 60,000 to 100,000 represented the range of U.S. COVID-19 deaths estimated by the Trump administration. As we write today, the lower figure has already been surpassed. The upper figure can be expected to be reached within a matter of weeks, with no end in sight and no reasonable expectation of the number of future deaths.

A bare fraction, less than one percent, of the U.S. population has been tested for COVID-19, making any serious death toll figures impossible, since it is impossible to know how many have even contracted the virus. Worse still, reports from nearly every state indicate that test kits, not to mention effective masks and related protections, are shockingly unavailable.

Thus, there are no hard facts to accurately tell us the numbers or percentage of people infected with COVID-19 but still asymptomatic who are capable of spreading the disease. Without serious data on this critical matter, any notion of sending working people back to work is tantamount to sending people to their death – a prospect that is nevertheless being contemplated by those who invariably subordinate human life to capitalist profit.

#### After the deluge: Workers will pay

As of this writing, over one million in the U.S. have tested positive for the virus. But again, less than one percent of the population has been tested. In the mad rush to bail out the corporate elite most

economists and financiers have been relatively silent on the question, Who will pay for these multi-trillion dollar sums aimed at bailing out capitalism’s corporate elite? The present official U.S. debt today stands at \$21 trillion, an unprecedented amount roughly equal to the entire annual GDP of the U.S., that is the total market value of all the goods and services annually produced in the U.S. economy.

Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell has virtually sworn that there be no limits to ongoing government bailouts, including amounts that dwarf the multiple trillions gifted to the corporate elite during and after the Great Recession that began in 2008, to fend off the wholesale failure of the nation’s banking institutions while millions lost their homes to foreclosure and otherwise suffered greatly in one of capitalism’s periodic and inherent crises.

Taxing the rich to pay off these debts has never been on the ruling class agenda. Indeed, the opposite has always been the case, exemplified by the ever-increasing, always bipartisan Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump-era corporate tax cuts. Few doubt that the years ahead, as with the decades past, portend anything other than deepening encroachments on working class life, including the imposition of ever new forms of regressive taxation and social cutbacks. This time, however, the creeping assault on working people will shift into high gear.

#### The fightback begins

But this time, we can fully expect that yesterday’s relative passivity, resting on the false hope that things will inevitably improve, perhaps with the next election, will give way to massive working class fightbacks fully capable of shaking the

dread system’s very foundations. Unprecedented millions, perhaps tens of millions, and more are today keenly aware that they are not isolated individuals who must suffer isolated and demoralizing fates. Predatory capitalism is being daily and increasingly exposed in all its horrors, inequalities, injustices and greed as never before.

Marx’s observation in his famous “Communist Manifesto” says it all: “What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers.” Workers of the world unite! Today’s increasingly conscious working class, for whom socialist ideals are emerging as immediate solutions, will soon take to the streets in myriad forms to make them a reality.

Today, a fundamentally irrational capitalism digs ditches to daily throw away incredible tons of all kinds of food that the billionaire capitalists cannot sell for a profit while millions of workers stand in long line at usually charity-based food banks to survive after their jobs have been terminated by no fault of their own. And the food conglomerates are rewarded with government billions to pay for what they have wantonly destroyed. Wherever possible landlords look to serve eviction notices to the millions who live month to month.

During the Great Depression, big business agriculture burned literal mountains of potatoes while millions starved, a horror repeated with impunity today. At this very moment in time, the U.S. is fully capable of producing more than enough food to feed the entire nation, not to mention much of the world. Yet increasing numbers here and everywhere suffer and die daily from starvation.

The problem, as a new generation is rapidly coming to understand, is the capitalist system itself.

It cannot be reformed. The ruling one percent who own and control the wealth of the nation and its associated means of production, must be replaced by the democratic rule of the vast majority, the working class in all its magnificent manifestations – its workers of all colors, origins and ages, oppressed nationalities, immigrants, women, LGBTQI – in short, the vast majority who produce the nation’s wealth yet are excluded from directly and democratically deciding how it should be allocated.

Winning this shining new egalitarian socialist future begins with the construction of a mass revolutionary socialist party whose ranks stand among today’s best fighters and whose united and massive mobilizations point the way to storming the heavens and bringing a new and vibrant society into being. Join us! ■

## ... Prisoners

(continued from page 5)

Their conclusion: “As society at large adopts better social distancing measures in places other than jails, jails increasingly become a primary vector for infection. The takeaway is clear — social distancing measures can only be effective if we extend them to jails as well.”

The liberal ACLU focuses on jails because 66% of this population are pre-trial detainees, thus presumed innocent and not convicted of a crime. The study says, “Hundreds of thousands of people are there because they cannot afford to post bail. The average time an individual spends in jail is 25 days.”

The ACLU continues: “As a result of the constant movement between jails and the broader community, our jails will act as vectors for the COVID-19 pandemic in our communities. They will become veritable volcanoes for the spread of the virus.”

This happens in two ways. The first they call “Churn of the jail population,”

meaning that “individuals are arrested, sent to jail, potentially exposed to COVID-19, released on their own recognition, post bail, or are adjudicated not guilty and are subsequently released. Upon release, the virus will spread through their families and communities unless the individual is quarantined.”

The second is that “jail staff come to work each day and are exposed to COVID-19, then return home and infect their families and communities. This applies to jails, prisons, and detention centers. There are 420,000 people who work in jails and prisons in the U.S.”

Why does the ACLU limit its study to the jail population and the staff who attend them? Because two-thirds of this population have not been found guilty of any crime. The ACLU properly asks why their pre-trial lives should be risked by the obvious lack of social distancing? Shouldn’t they be released so that they don’t contract the virus? But let’s take this issue one step further.

#### Rehabilitation, not punishment

What about the convicted felons who languish in America’s prisons, not to mention the over 80 percent of the prison

population who are there for non-violent crimes? Should they be released? Or should they be condemned to their fate by allowing the virus to do its deadly work? Keeping them locked up is a forced experiment in “herd immunity,” the barbaric notion that some right-wingers call “culling the herd.” Aren’t we better than that?

Is our present-day mass incarceration punishment working? Does it lead those who receive such treatment to become better citizens? Never! The evidence is clear. In the racist, classist society that exists today, a society without hope for tens of millions who live in poverty and deprivation, over 50% of today’s released felons re-offend.

Consider this fact: The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. With only 4 percent of the world’s population but 21 percent of the world’s incarcerated, the U.S. locks up over 2 million people— the majority— African American, Latino and Native American. Over 4.5 million more are on parole or probation, under the jurisdiction of this *injustice* system.

As Michelle Alexander wrote in her

book *The New Jim Crow*: “Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination — employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service — are suddenly legal.”

This entire rotten racist and classist system of jails and prisons has to go. It is not enough to just free the pre-trial detainees. It is not just, not humane to abandon society’s victims to the terrible fate of capitalism’s most oppressed. Indeed, history demonstrates that among the first acts a new and revolutionary society decrees and implements is the liberation of the old institutions of repression and the freeing of its jailed victims. In the society that socialists seek to bring into being, there will be no prisons, nor poverty, nor the daily degradation of human beings. No one will be denied a decent job, along with quality housing, education and healthcare.

What’s that old trade union phrase? “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

**FREE THEM ALL!  
LET OUR PEOPLE GO!**

# Free Julian Assange! Defend Civil Liberties!

We reprint below two speeches from the April 19, 2020 webinar entitled “The Prosecution of Julian Assange and the Fight for Free Speech.” Joe Lombardo is the National Co-Coordinator of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) and Jim Lafferty is the Executive Director Emeritus of the Los Angeles National Lawyers Guild and a board member of the LA area ACLU.

Attracting thousands of viewers, the event was live streamed in the U.S. and around the world. (See [unacpeace.org](http://unacpeace.org) for the video.)

Moderated by Jeff Mackler, Steering Committee member of the newly-constituted Committee to Defend Julian Assange and Civil Liberties and author of *Obama’s National Security State: The Meaning of the*

*Edward Snowden Revelations*, the webinar featured presentations by the defense committee’s co-chairs, Noam Chomsky, Alice Walker and Daniel Ellsberg. Other speakers were Assange’s London-based attorney, Jennifer Robinson, Nathan Fuller, Director of the Courage Foundation (formed to defend WikiLeaks founder Assange, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden

and other whistleblowers), and Nozomi Hayase, journalist, liberation psychologist and contributor to the new book, *In Defense of Julian Assange*.

The webinar was sponsored by the Committee to Defend Julian Assange and Civil Liberties, the Courage Foundation ([couragefound.org](http://couragefound.org)), the National Lawyers Guild and UNAC.

BY JOE LOMBARDO

Julian Assange’s struggle for free speech and freedom is critically important for the antiwar movement and for any movement for social change. The right to speak out and protest is essential to our movements. Julian Assange was doing just that; he was speaking truth to power and so the powerful U.S. government seeks to shut him down permanently via burying him in a U.S. prison with a threatened sentence of 178 years. If they succeed, other journalists who criticize the U.S. government—regardless of what country they are from—will fear when they speak the truth, and so will we.

It was the “collateral murder” video that Chelsea Manning sent to *WikiLeaks*, and they published, that enraged the U.S. government the most and made them go after Assange. I saw that video at the founding conference of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), where it was shown to the 800 activists present. It was introduced by Ethan McCord, who was a soldier at the massacre in Iraq that the video records. Through that experience, Ethan McCord began questioning the war and later became a vocal opponent and then a speaker at our antiwar conference.

The video depicts an American helicopter flying above a group of people in Baghdad. Some were reporters and had cameras, but the Americans did not know what they were carrying, and so they shot and killed or wounded the whole group. Taken from the helicopter you can hear the American soldiers laughing as they shoot and kill the civilians and reporters on the ground. Soon after a van arrived to try and help the wounded. The soldiers fired on the van, killing the driver who was the father of two young children who were in the

## The right to print the truth about U.S. wars

back seat. The children were both wounded. Soon after American soldiers arrived on foot. Ethan McCord was one of them. He carried a young girl from the back seat of the van and had to pull out a piece of glass that was stuck in her eye.

This was a war crime. It is one of many that the U.S. is responsible for in its never-ending wars. The U.S. covered it up. They classified the video and made

essary service for the people of the world. They told the truth.

By classifying this video we were all denied our right to know what the U.S. did and continues to do around the world. The U.S. military, which today operates in 172 countries, has 20 times the number of foreign military bases than all other nations in the world combined.

To the warmongers, the truth is a crime



the entire incident disappear until Chelsea Manning sent the video to *WikiLeaks* and they published it.

The U.S. routinely classifies anything that it does not want people to see. There were no secret military codes or information about maneuvers or secret weapons. The video just showed a war crime. And war crimes should not be covered up. War crimes should be exposed. That’s what *WikiLeaks*, Assange and Manning did. They provided a nec-

and not their illegal and immoral wars. So, the U.S. has gone after Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. It can be expected to do so with regard to all truth tellers.

This U.S. war on the truth is growing in intensity. Conducted in the name of “national security” or their phony “war on terrorism,” every form of war is justified, including overt wars, drone wars, Special Operation wars, death squad and privatized army wars.

The Telecommunications Act, enacted

under the Clinton administration, removed many of the safeguards that prevented media domination by wealthy right-wing groups. When we organize in the streets today we are likely told that there is a police-established “free speech zone”—often a far distance from the event we are focused on—to which our

The attacks on Julian Assange come in the context of these ever-escalating assaults on free speech and democratic rights.

Today we meet virtually via this webinar format because the coronavirus prevents us from meeting in person. The authoritarian leaders around the world, including Trump and the U.S. government, are using this crisis to press for legislation to advance the interests of the wealthy at the expense of working people. They are establishing new rules with little opposition. These include attacks on civil liberties.

However, the crisis is also creating a new consciousness among millions of people.

When we emerge from today’s necessary confinement and isolation, we must push back against these new rules and attacks on civil liberties which the powers that be will seek to make permanent long after the present COVID-19 pandemic has passed. We can expect that there will be many more aroused people ready willing to fight for civil liberties and democratic rights, for the rights of Julian Assange and *WikiLeaks* and to oppose today’s endless wars for plunder and profit.

The attack on Assange is an attack on all of us. We recall the refrain that helped organize the early labor movement in the U.S., “An injury to one is an injury to all!” Let’s free Julian Assange. ■

BY JIM LAFFERTY

Julian Assange is being prosecuted by the United States under the old Espionage Act, passed during World War I, for use against spies. He is the first journalist ever charged under that Act.

He’s charged with conspiring with Chelsea Manning to publish the Iraq War logs which, among many documents, contain a video, now known as the “Collateral Murder Video”, showing American troops committing war crimes, as they gun down 10 Iraqi civilians, including two children and two *Reuters* reporters.

In prosecuting Assange for espionage, the Trump Administration has dug deep, and come up with a buried subsection of the Espionage Act to prosecute anyone who simply “receives” or “retains” or “possesses national defense information.” Matt Taibbi, in the new book entitled *In Defense of Julian Assange*, makes the point that if the government is allowed to get away with using this tool to successfully prosecute reporters and publishers, in very short order we will have no reporters and no publishers.

Shamefully, not all in the U.S. media, or all on the “left” and in the civil liberties community, have supported Julian Assange as they should have; have not un-

## We must defend Julian Assange ...

derstood the threat to themselves, as well as to a free press and the democracy that depends upon a free press, that is threatened by the prosecution of Assange.

Many on the “left” have been dissuaded from supporting Assange because of one or another of the false charges and rumors circulated against Assange, circulated in some cases by the U.S. government.

Hillary Clinton didn’t lose the 2016 election because of anything Assange did. She lost it because of what she did not do. And both women involved in that phony, so-called “Assange sex scandal” months and months ago publically denied that he ever assaulted them, that the Swedish government’s charges were not true!

But what is true, and what should greatly alarm us, is that the Trump Administration is hell-bound on a campaign to silence any journalists and publishers who dare to expose the too-many-to-name crimes and corrupt acts of the U.S. and other western imperialist countries; crimes such as the multitude of U.S. war crimes in the Middle East disclosed to the public by Julian Assange, in *WikiLeaks*!

And what is also true, sisters and brothers, is that our brother Julian Assange is now facing 175 years in a U.S.

prison if he is extradited back to the United States.

Meanwhile, Julian has been locked away for a year in an isolated cell in England, where, so far, his on-going extradition hearing has made a kangaroo court look good. His treatment in England, according to the medical doctors who have examined him, amounts to torture; torture that has taken a grave toll on Julian, physically and mentally.

Locked away in solitary confinement, Julian can’t even talk to his lawyers for more than 10-minutes at a time...and then with great difficulty.

Speaking of Julian, Nils Melzer, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, says, “In 20 years of working with war victims, violence and political persecution, I have never seen a group of democratic states unite to deliberately isolate, demonize and abuse a single individual for so long a time and with such little respect for human dignity and status of rights. Julian Assange’s collective persecution must end here and now!”

And Julian Assange, himself, on May 13 of last year, writing from his horrific British imprisonment, tells us that, “I am unbroken, albeit literally surrounded by

murderers, but the days when I could read and speak and organize to defend myself, my ideals and my people are over until I am free! Everyone else must take my place. I am defenseless and am counting on you and others of good character to save my life....Truth, ultimately, is all we have.”

And so, sisters and brothers, the question that confronts us today is this: will we let Julian Assange’s case become a final nail in the coffin of a free and independent press in America? Or will the almost unimaginable injustice of his case arouse our justifiable anger and inspire us to fight like hell to save Julian’s life, as we fight like hell to save freedom of the press? For without a free press we will never win back our now clearly lost democracy.

And so I urge us to keep reaching out to our sisters and brothers, as we are today, and tell them the truth about Julian Assange; and, urge them to join the growing numbers of Assange supporters who are fighting to save Julian Assange’s life and, even more critical, fighting to save freedom of the press in America; freedom to write and speak and publish the truth!

For Julian is right: truth, ultimately, is all we have. ■

# COVID-19 and 'Shock Doctrine'

Twenty-six million are out of work – the highest number since the 1930's Great Depression. We have passed the 55,000 mark for coronavirus deaths—undoubtedly a gross undercount.

But even this depth of human suffering can make a billionaire's eyeballs bulge in anticipation when they look at the financial fallout—and potential opportunities. Why? For those at the top able to survive a deep crisis such as this, the playing field changes.

The system recalibrates *vis a vis* billionaires versus workers and one boss against another boss through the elimination of the weakest.

Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine, The Rise of Disaster Capitalism," (*Picador*, 2007) is an eye opening and extraordinarily relevant book in 2020—thirteen years after its first publication.

Klein's central thesis was expressed simply by Rohm Emanuel, the one-time Chief of Staff in the Obama administration and former neo-liberal Chicago Mayor, who once said, "Never let a crisis go to waste." Its meaning? As Klein explains, the corporate rulers know from history the strategic necessity for, "using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering." Social "Trauma" can be defined as either 'human made,' i.e., a war (Iraq), the economic "shock" of the Margaret Thatcher/Ronald Reagan years, the 9-11 tragedy or "natural" phenomena like a hurricane, a Tsunami, or a coronavirus pandemic.

No matter the calamity, says Klein, catastrophes are fresh meat for capitalists. As Trump and both political parties shower the bloated big corporations with over \$500 billion in aid, virtually without oversight, 2020's Covid-19 pandemic confirms Klein's "Shock Doctrine" thesis, but she also adds that it also can be an amazing opportunity for ordinary working people to force changes.

In an April 6 interview with *"The Intercept,"* Klein attacked the stark inequalities of capitalism that COVID-19 revealed, especially for the African American community.

"It is more lethal for people whose immune systems are already weakened. African Americans have more stressful lives because they have more stressful jobs or multiple stressful jobs but also because pollution is unevenly distributed in the United States because of environmental racism and so this is an added irony to the fact that the fossil fuel companies are getting their wish list fulfilled in the mix of this pandemic and rolling back all of these controls on air pollution and water pollution.

"The fossil fuel companies are getting their wish list fulfilled in the mix of this pandemic and rolling back all of these controls on air pollution and water pollution. Many workers are feeling their power in a way that they had not previously and there is a realization that they are indeed essential workers and



***Said Richard Baker, a Republican Congressman from New Orleans, "We finally cleaned-up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."***

they have been treated systematically in ways designed to belittle the value of their labor and we are seeing work stoppages across the economy and I think we'll probably see more of those."

### What is the "Shock Doctrine"?

Naomi Klein is so right. Her "Shock Doctrine" story began with the free-trade ideology of the Chicago University economics professor, Milton Friedman (1912-2006). Friedman became the economic guru of the fascist Augusto Pinochet, President of Chile. Pinochet murdered tens of thousands of leftists and trade unionists after he seized power in 1973 in a CIA orchestrated military coup against the elected Socialist Party government of Salvador Allende. Amidst the horror and repression of military dictatorship, Friedman reshaped Chilean society with his "free-market" vision.

His reputation on the conservative Right enhanced, Friedman and his co-thinkers, nicknamed "the Chicago School," became some of the ideological founding fathers of U.S. "neo-liberalism," a modern form of "laissez-faire" or free-trade capitalism. Free-trade means capitalists rip-off huge profits without obstruction from government regulation, be it through the absence of labor rights, stock market regulations, or the progressive taxation of the rich. Government ownership of services are to be rapidly privatized, sold at bargain basement prices to corporate crooks.

Friedman celebrated the corporate class as social visionaries. The governmental interventionism of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his "New Deal," which provided social services and minimal labor rights—after mass worker mobilizations, i.e., militant strikes—was viewed by Friedman's school of eco-

nomics as an outmoded relic of 1930's liberal capitalism.

The mood Friedman tapped into was a reflection of capitalism in crisis as profit margins were being squeezed by international competition and declining rates of profit. Capitalists shed all remaining moral hesitations and remnants of 1960's altruism in the race to bolster the "bottom line." Naked capitalist greed was always king, but its psychopathic, me first mantra was updated to give it an undeserved ideological "gravitas" by Friedman & Co.

Klein's book details how Friedman's philosophy re-configured U.S. economic policy beginning with Ronald Reagan, George Bush I and II and, with some modification, essentially became the reigning ideology of the Clinton administration and, subsequent to her book's publication, the Obama years, too.

### How low can you go?

Klein used these amongst many examples of the "Shock Doctrine" in recent history:

- The 9-11 attack saw the creation of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act's surveillance state, both bi-partisan measures. In 2006, Bush II signed the Defense Authorization Act, granting the president the ability to impose powers of martial law. With the repressive legislation in place came torture and indefinite detention and all the horrors of Guantanamo, much of which was performed by private contractors. With the repression also came the increased terror, harassment and deportation of immigrant workers (ICE), which meant increased profits for agribusiness and the service industry.

- The Shock Doctrine—or to use Bush II's Iraq battle-cry "shock and awe"—

was in full view in New Orleans in 2005, a city ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Encouraged by a Democratic Mayor, real estate vultures descended upon largely African American neighborhoods intent on "ethnic cleansing" via the gentrification of a city traumatized by over 1,500 deaths and the crass racism of Bush II.

The spread of Friedman's capitalist fundamentalism was not at all confined to the U.S. In Poland, in the early '90's, following the ouster of the corrupt Stalinist regime, the U.S. government orchestrated, with the help of the "liberal" Soros Foundation and the imperialist International Monetary Fund, a privatization drive that turned publicly held economic institutions into private, often U.S. held, corporations. The "shock" of transition threw millions into poverty, bought-off its labor leaders and hijacked the Polish economy.

- South Africa's epic transition from official apartheid in 1994 was to a "post-racial" neo-colonial, neo-liberal society subservient to the U.S. dominated World Bank. That relationship was solidified by neo-liberal deals cut with imperialism by the Nelson Mandela leadership and his successors. The double irony was the centrality of the South African Communist Party of which Mandela was a member.

Today, the Black majority is in some ways worse off economically than it was under apartheid, where a white elite still runs the country. The current South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, is also president of Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and is personally worth \$450 million. Black South Africans justifiably complain of an 'economic apartheid.'

On the April 15 "Democracy Now" TV program, Klein urged the movements for change to seize the moment, "If there is one thing history teaches us it's that moments of shock are profoundly volatile, we either lose a whole lot of ground, get fleeced by elites and pay the price for decades, or we win progressive victories that seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier. This is no time to lose our nerve. The future will be determined by whoever is willing to fight harder for the ideas they have lying around."

Unfortunately, Naomi Klein endorsed Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders and is apparently willing to vote for Joe Biden as a "lesser evil." Despite her ostensibly radical analysis and calls for movement-building she advocates – no doubt not the first time – that activists dig themselves deeper into "the graveyard of social movements" – the Democratic Party.

But, Klein's first choice, Bernie Sanders, is leading his many followers back into the swamp of the Democratic Party and "Shock Doctrine" politics. Trump, Biden and Sanders are representatives of a capitalist system that writes the script for all of these players.

Too bad for "pragmatic" socialists out there taking the bait, including Naomi Klein. ■

## ... Caribbean struggle

(continued from page 13)

The DR's military, cops and civilian racist goons used bayonets, machetes, clubs and knives, throwing dead Haitians into piles or into the sea. Afterwards, "Good Neighbor" Roosevelt and his administration politely addressed the D.R. government butchers by framing the massacre as a regrettable, i.e., forgettable, "controversy." The CPUSA did little in response to the massacre, wrote the author. Stevens called it, "a retreat from the anti-racist commitments of yesteryear."

Unfortunately, Stevens cites Grover

Furr as a guide to her research, a Rutgers professor who specializes in white-washing the post-Lenin dictatorship of Joseph Stalin and his privileged bureaucratic caste. The Stalin machine murdered the old leadership of the Russian Revolution, smashed worker's, democracy and betrayed revolution world-wide, including in the Caribbean. Furr's contribution, she says, "deeply contributed" to the book.

Stevens notes Lenin's passing in the book without assessing its impact on the politics of the rapidly bureaucratizing post-Lenin regime. The challenge to Stalin's reformism represented by the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union and the

creation of the Fourth International in 1938, led by Leon Trotsky, was not mentioned at all by Stevens—not an accident.

Similarly, Stevens' impressive mass of information lacks systematic conclusions, such as on the critical question of whether working class parties should support capitalist governments. Was it right, even given the fascist threat?

Readers would likely seek such answers in a book about revolution. When the workers' movement supports its class enemy it always ends in defeat, if not disaster, just as the Caribbean example, and many others, have shown.

Lastly, I must point out that the book

lacked information on the Haitian guerilla army known as the "Cacos," led by resistance hero Charlemagne Peralte, who waged a relentless war on the U.S. Marine occupation until his murder by a U.S. assassin. Haiti's armed resistance will forever remain a precious legacy for all anti-imperialists—no less so than Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Venezuela.

Nevertheless, and despite its serious faults, the "Red International and Black Caribbean" will remain an invaluable source book for anti-imperialists for years to come.

I hope Stevens stays on the case. ■

By Barry Weisleder

World War 1 spawned the Russian Revolution, the Winnipeg General Strike, and spurred union recognition. Following World War 2, out of the debris of fascism and holocaust, the welfare state emerged. What will be the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic? Qualitatively enhanced social responsibility, or regression to capitalist austerity?

Somber facts define the dawn of a new era. The current plague, the fourth in two decades, won't be the last. It has plunged the world into a Great Depression. Stock markets tanked. Unemployment skyrocketed. As of April 18, six million Canadians have applied for emergency federal aid. It's unprecedented.

The reflex of the vast majority of people is to seek remedial action from...who? Giant corporations? Big banks? The Business Council of Canada? No. People expect the government to act, to cushion the blow, to spend massively so that lives may be saved.

Reform-minded journalists, like Erica Ifill and Les Whittington, writing in *The Hill Times*, separately intoned: "Market fundamentalism is dead. We are all socialists now." It is a gross exaggeration, to be sure. So then, why does it resonate with millions?

Because capitalism is revealed as a feckless and fraught system that, if it continues, dooms humanity. The private profit world order has shrivelled biodiversity, pauperized billions of people and is speeding the train to climate catastrophe.

In response to enormous pressure from below, bumbling capitalist regimes either improvise massive (but inadequate) social income programs and slowly move to restore health care services that should never have been cut, or they just deny pandemic reality.

#### Catastrophe at nursing homes

A case in point is the scandalous situation in long term care facilities. Nearly half of Canada's COVID-19 deaths occurred in nursing homes, where aged and vulnerable residents live and eat in close proximity to each other, and where staff have been carriers or become infected.

At one care center in Dorval, Quebec, provincial health officials forcibly entered to discover many seniors utterly abandoned, dehydrated, and laying in a fetid swamp of their own urine and feces. Quebec and Ontario requested the Canadian Armed Forces to send medical personnel, in an effort to save imperilled folks from a grisly end.

In late April, the Ontario Nurses' Association won a temporary injunction at the Ontario Superior Court. It gives nurses the right to decide which personal protec-

# Northern Lights

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## We Won't Go Back!



tive equipment (PPE) is needed when working in long-term care homes with COVID-19, and the power to enforce infection control measures, such as keeping residents with COVID separate from those not infected, in places like Eatonville Care Centre in Etobicoke where dozens of seniors have died.

But questions persist. Why is the long-term care sector so unregulated? Why was inspection of facilities so radically reduced in recent years? Was the top priority profit maximization? Is that why most personal care workers are paid low wages, limited to part-time hours, without benefits, without sufficient protective gear, forcing many to labour in multiple settings, even at the risk of spreading disease?

Could this infernal arrangement be the result of political lobbying by the major shareholders of Katasa Groupe Developers, which owns Maison Heron in Dorval, or Revera Inc., Extendicare, Centric Health Corp., Sienna Senior Living, and Vigil Health Solutions, just to name a few of the largest players in the field? Moreover, why the hell is any long-term care service in the hands of private, for-profit operators? The sick and the aged no longer produce surplus value. Does that

make them expendable?

The demand for nationalization here is obvious. It coincides with the demand for public ownership of major enterprises, including the pharmaceutical industry, Big Oil and Gas, giant banks, and the telecoms.

Urgently needed is democratic control of the land development and construction firms (to enable the creation of social housing on a mass scale), monopoly retail chains (for re-distribution of their superprofits), and agri-business (to prioritize healthy food and ecological farming methods). Sharing the trillions in wealth of the huge mining and forestry firms, and reducing the military to a domestic disaster relief and rescue role, will fund free public transit, free post-secondary education, along with a generous reinvestment in public health and schools.

On April 8, the *Toronto Star*, Canada's largest circulation daily, editorialized for an "industrial policy." It pointed out that a commitment to "free markets and unfettered globalization...left Canada scrambling for crucial medical equipment, relying on factories halfway around the world." The *Star* rarely misses a chance to wrap its tepid reform policy in the Canadian flag.

Really needed is a democratically planned economy, with workers' control extending from Canada, to the USA and the world. Clearly, the prospect of a global socialist revolution is not imminent. But the idea of it is glimmering on the horizon, born of necessity, as the working class grapples with the pandemic, and prepares for its aftermath.

#### Need to build a fightback

The present crisis is pregnant with opportunity and danger. Recall that the Chinese character for 'crisis' expresses both meanings. On the one hand, emergency measures give Capital and the far-right opportunities to rule by decree, step up racial profiling and confinement, and bolster fascist mob violence (evident in India and the USA).

They may make border closures permanent, and violate labor agreements, Indigenous Peoples' rights and environmental regulations. An Economic Depression can be used as a weapon to curb demands for equality, including between the global North and South, and to privatize more public services.

At the same time, the survival of capitalism requires collective action (bailouts, stimulus measures) that business is not normally willing to concede.

This creates an opportunity for workers who understand that instead of trying to save the capitalist economy, just to have it repeat the post-2008 scenario, we should fight to transform the economy. We should strive to confront the health and climate crises with democratic and socialist policies.

How? Build on the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit. Act on palpably reduced air pollution by rapidly replacing carbon fuel with green energy generation. See the industrial re-tooling that now manufactures more ventilators and PPE as an irreversible step towards planned production to meet human needs, not private profit. Turn government subsidized research for a COVID-19 vaccine into a publicly-owned pharmaceutical industry. Demand permanent Basic Income for all, regardless of citizenship status.

Homeless people are being allocated rooms in empty hotels. Free childcare is provided to front-line health workers in need. Why just now? Good quality housing, food, childcare, education and transit – we now know that these are rights and necessities, not privileges. They must be enhanced, made permanent. It's time to organize in work places, unions, New Democratic Party (NDP) associations, social justice movements and in local communities to demand rapid progress, to insist on revolutionary change.

The prime directive is simple: We Won't Go Back! ■

## Shirley Douglas (1934-2020) Mel Watkins (1932-2020)

By Barry Weisleder

The working class lost two sincere, dedicated, social justice seekers in early April. Shirley Douglas, a leading public health care advocate, actor, and daughter of former New Democratic Party leader and Medicare founder Tommy Douglas, passed away at age 86. Mel

Watkins, who co-authored the Waffle Manifesto in 1969 and led the largest left opposition in the history of the New Democratic Party (NDP), died on April 2 in his 87th year.

Both Douglas and Watkins belonged to a generation of left-wing social democrats who eschewed the proclivity of NDP and Labour leaders to follow opinion polls—rather than fight for socialist principles.

I knew Mel Watkins personally, and had the pleasure of engaging with his powerful intellect and enjoying his wry humour when we both served on the leading bodies of the Waffle Movement. Thus, his departure is more poignant for



me. Like his friend and Waffle co-leader James Laxer, whose untimely death in February 2018 is still felt, Mel was a *mensch*, a person of integrity and honour. He campaigned selflessly for ideas, not ego. He showed the power of a political orientation to the working class and its labour-based party. Mel demonstrated how a battle for public own-



ership and industrial democracy inside the NDP could earn the attention and solidarity of hundreds of thousands. That is precisely why Stephen Lewis and the top brass threatened the Waffle with expulsion.

Sadly, nationalism overshadowed Mel Watkins' socialism. Canada is an imperialist state and economy. It plunders the

resources and peoples of less developed countries, not to mention its internal oppressed nations and Indigenous peoples. Thus, Canadian nationalism is reactionary. It is far from being allied to the cause of anti-imperialism in the way that revolutionary nationalism was a motor force of working class and national liberation struggles in places like Cuba, Vietnam and Palestine.

Writing in the April 3 Rabble News, Karl Nerenberg observes that "The Waffle didn't last." But he doesn't offer an explanation. It wasn't just the Waffle's misplaced Canadian nationalism, which increasingly came to the fore after Watkins and Laxer set up the short-lived Movement for an Independent Socialist Canada (MISC). It was the fact that the Waffle didn't complete the struggle for socialist policies, for a Workers' Agenda, inside the comparatively large NDP membership. The MISC cut the cord to the most politically aware

(continued on next page)

By GARY PORTER

# COVID & BIG OIL

As of April 10, Canada had over 21,000 cases of Covid 19 and 431 deaths from the novel coronavirus. “Elective” surgeries were cancelled over three weeks earlier, leaving patients, mostly older folks with painful joints and low mobility, some who had waited up to two years for surgery, to wait even longer. Hospitals in Canada are strangely quiet, waiting for the wave of patients to arrive – gasping, fevered, weak and coughing desperately to clear their lungs and inhale oxygen as the plague swings its deadly scythe around the globe.

As Canadians isolate themselves at home, or work in masks and gloves, if they have them, to provide food, medicine, and other essentials, the number of layoffs mounts. Federal funds allocated to offer support are rolling out, small in amount and missing many of the needy. Rental fees and mortgage payments continue in most cases. Fifty-three per cent of Canadians live paycheck to paycheck. Including mortgages, the average Canadian adult owes more than \$71,000. Nearly 60 per cent have no savings.

For the vast majority of workers, life under the capitalist system of wage labour leaves no margin for calamity. Only essential services – food, drugs, essential transport, utilities, etc. – are permitted to operate. You cannot eat, drink or be ventilated by the fossil fuel industry. There is no way in hell that new oil and gas infrastructure is essential under plague conditions, or any conditions.

Yet oil and gas companies are continuing to dig and lay down pipelines in multiple Canadian provinces, and in American states including Minnesota, Montana, Pennsylvania and Virginia. At a time when crude oil prices are very low and natural gas prices are at record lows, the decision to barrel ahead with infrastructure projects is a morally damning condemnation of the oil and mining cartels. So says Thea Riofrancos, a political science professor at Providence College, and co-author of *A Planet to Win*, in an interview with Truthout.

Shelter-in-place orders have checkered their way across North America over the past few weeks. Protests against these projects have been forced to move online for safety. A protest movement that had taken aim at stopping the Coastal GasLink Pipeline from being built through Wet’suwet’en territory in British Columbia by blocking railroads, ports, highways, bridges and ferries, with huge economic impact in Canada, is now resorting to petitions and the fomenting of Twitter storms.

Other, more neighborhood-based efforts, like a campaign to stop a high-pressure natural gas pipeline through the Pimmit Hills neighborhood in Fairfax County, Virginia, have shifted from rallying and door knocking, to online fundraising for an anticipated legal battle.

Some local elected officials, like Pennsylvania State Sen. Andy Dinniman, have



voiced support for calls to shut down fossil fuel projects during the pandemic. But lawmakers in Kentucky, South Dakota and West Virginia passed “critical infrastructure” bills in March, joining a growing list of states with legislation that criminalizes protest against oil and gas projects.

New Democratic Party (NDP) Premier John Horgan in British Columbia has allowed the construction camps on the massive Site C Dam to provide power for huge fracking operations. The Coastal Gas Link pipeline, which violates the unceded land of Indigenous peoples, and the Trans Mountain pipeline twinning project from the Alberta tar sands to Vancouver, remain in operation. Several thousand workers are in work camps, sleeping in bunk houses and eating in cafeterias. They live and labour in a COVID-19 Petri dish. Horgan, the Leader of the labour-based NDP in BC is taking a strong stand for the Oil billionaires and against the workers.

This is not new for social democrats, but always repulsive to see. These camps are simply defined as “essential services” in

workers, and quickly declined to the status of a middle class, academic sect.

The proof of the pudding was in the eating. Both Watkins and Laxer later individually rejoined the NDP, the former becoming an NDP candidate for Parliament in 1997 and 2000, the latter serving briefly as chief of research for the federal party.

Watkins never stopped speaking out in opposition to militarism, war and unjust trade deals. He persisted in advocating for Indigenous peoples’ rights, Quebec self-determination and environmental protection. But the challenge of building an insurgent socialist movement in the mainstream workers’ organizations would have to be taken up by others, including the NDP Socialist Caucus.

A shortcoming of much of the left, even of radical social democrats, con-

cerns the fundamental class character of the capitalist state. In order for the overwhelming majority to rule, to be able to institute an egalitarian society in harmony with nature, the working class will be obliged to dismantle the existing state and replace it with organs of popular power, from the bottom up.

The completion of that task will require the leadership of a very different kind of party than NDP or Waffle leaders ever imagined. Nothing short of a disciplined, revolutionary workers’ party is necessary.

Political differences aside, Mel was a gem.

As the working class, women, the racially and sexually victimized, and all the oppressed continue to strive for a better world, we are proud to say, in the fashion of our Latino comrades, “Companero Mel Watkins, presente!” ■

a cynical ploy to rush the projects forward while opponents are busy trying to stay alive.

Prime Minister Trudeau, and his billionaire Finance Minister, venture-capitalist Bill Morneau, are allocating billions to these oil infrastructure projects. Premier Jason Kenny, the arch-conservative Premier of Alberta, “invested” a billion dollars and guaranteed \$6.5 billion in credit to XL pipeline to funnel filthy Alberta oil to Texas.

For First Nations, whose unceded lands underlie pipeline paths, there is a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. In accordance with the public health emer-

gency declared across Canada on March 17, and a provincial state of emergency in British Columbia imposed on March 18, Wet’suwet’en home sites and the community’s healing center are under lockdown, according to the Unist’ot’en Camp Facebook page.

Tensions between Wet’suwet’en land protectors and the Canadian government reached new heights in March after Canada’s federal cops, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), broke a barricade, arrested and forcibly removed three Unist’ot’en matriarchs and four other land defenders. “Reconciliation” talks scheduled between hereditary chiefs and Canadian officials earlier in March were inconclusive.

“Meanwhile, we face a steady stream of transient workers and RCMP who put our people and communities — and especially our elders — at risk,” the Facebook post explained.

All of this seems crazy on the surface. This work is evidently not essential. In fact, it is wholly undesirable, as it increases Green House Gas emissions on a grand scale. But to the global profiteers, including the massive oil cartel, it makes a lot of sense. During crises, when the population is in a state of shock, and “shelter in place” has immobilized protest, and when public attention is focused on survival, the time is right to divert billions from the state to obscenely rich and powerful oil companies and to push the construction, at full speed, of very unpopular and ecologically destructive oil and gas infrastructure.

This is what Naomi Klein calls “Disaster Capitalism.” It is the capitalist practice of stoking fears of privation and death amongst working people, and like vultures, grabbing huge amounts of public funds, forging ahead with unpopular projects, and making hay while the sun is hidden. It comes as second nature.

The oil and gas cartel is so persistent, so insistent on profit, on being allowed to ruin the earth as a habitat for humanity and other species. So are the governments they buy. The only way to stop the capitalists is to nationalize them, to phase out their carbon extraction activities, and employ their accumulated trillions as rapidly as possible to establish publicly owned and worker-managed green energy infrastructure. Regulation will not work, given the immense scale and short time prerequisites.

The dominance of the oil cartel requires the transfer of their assets from private to public hands now. ■

## Manitoba chiefs request Cuban doctors; Ottawa says NO!

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, on March 30, appeared to reject a request by a group of First Nations in Manitoba for Canada to allow Cuban doctors into their communities to bolster their health care services in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) Grand Chief Jerry Daniels wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on March 27 requesting the federal government open its doors to Cuban Health Brigades, which are currently in several countries, including Italy and Honduras responding to the COVID-19 epidemic.

SCO represents 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota communities in Manitoba. Freeland said Canada has enough medical resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic without international help.

Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer, said the Public Health Agency of Canada could draw quickly from other jurisdictions to augment health services for First Nations in the event of an outbreak.

Southern Chief’s Organization Grand Chief Jerry Daniels said “Canada does

not have enough health care workers to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to address the numbers of upcoming cases in First Nation communities,” he said in the statement.

“What our communities need is more health care workers on site in our communities.”

David LeDoux, chief of Gambler First Nation about 350 km west of Winnipeg, said having Cuban doctors on site would mean ill community members wouldn’t have to be sent to access outside medical services.

“First Nation citizens want to stay in their communities as much as possible,” said LeDoux, whose community is a member of SCO.

“Without an increase of health care workers on site in communities and appropriate medical equipment and supply, our patients will have to be sent outside of their communities for urgent medical care.”

Gambler First Nation already has an agreement with Cuba for one doctor to come and live on-reserve, but visa issues have kept it from happening. ■

# ... when 'Big Oil' goes viral

(continued from page 14)

counterattack delivered on 8 March – a bombshell announcement that the Kingdom was also no longer committed to the negotiated production limits, and would seek to increase its oil supply to 12.3 million barrels/day in April (up from 9.7 million barrels/day in March) and then further boost its production capacity to 13 million barrels/day as soon as possible.

With the prospect of an additional several million barrels of daily supply about to hit world oil markets, the price of the key international benchmark for oil, Brent Crude, dropped more than 30 percent in the space of 48 hours. Global stock markets also plunged, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling a record 2000 points on 9 March, the largest ever intra-day loss.

Regardless of the immediate conjunctural factors, the longer-term strategic motive behind the Russian and Saudi decision is clear. For several years, both countries had seen U.S. oil producers, un-

the future. The problem, however, is that storage space is highly limited (particularly on land) and there are logistical and technical costs associated with bringing oil to where it can be safely stored away. Analysts have estimated that around three-quarters of the world's storage capacity is already utilized, and that limits will be reached by the end of May.

By mid-March, leading pipeline companies in the U.S. were worrying that oil producers might attempt to use their infrastructure to store oil rather than transfer it somewhere else, and thus began insisting on a bill of final receipt before they would accept any new oil. And because it is expensive to shut down or temporary halt oil wells (and land leases sometimes contain clauses that require continuous production), oil companies may prefer to give away their product rather than halt work; indeed, in mid-March, traders were bidding for Wyoming Asphalt Sour (used mostly to produce bitumen) at negative 19 cents per

continues to sit around \$20/barrel then more than 500 firms would be pushed into Chapter 11 over 2020-21, the largest number of such filings in modern history.

## Winners, Losers ... and the Climate

It is certain that all parts of the fossil fuel industry will face a severe crisis over the remainder of this year and into 2021 – but what might this mean for our ecological future? Unfortunately – unless fossil capital can be effectively challenged now – a likely scenario is that a significant wave of bankruptcies in the energy sector will actually accelerate the further centralization of control by the largest oil majors. 'Big Oil' – Exxon, Shell, BP and a handful of others – are much better positioned to survive this crisis than other smaller producers.

They tend to be vertically integrated firms, i.e. they are active across the entire energy value chain, including refining, and thus will have some of their losses in crude production offset by the lower cost of fuel inputs for their downstream operations.

This scenario is precisely the one that leading financial firms are expecting to

trial facilities – essentially allowing these polluters to 'self-monitor' their own pollution levels, according to a recent report in the *New York Times*.

This new policy has been rolled out by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as part of addressing the COVID-19 crisis, but tellingly, it was also one of the key demands raised by the American Petroleum Institute in a letter sent by these Big Oil lobbyists to the Trump administration on March 20. It is not just the fossil fuel industry that is attempting to use this crisis to roll-back environmental regulations, large banks and financial firms are similarly pushing for a relaxation on climate change reporting requirements and a delay to climate change 'stress tests.'

While oil prices are today at historically low levels, they will not remain there over the longer term. There is a strong possibility of a sharp rebound in prices as we emerge from this crisis – an outcome that will incentivize a renewed wave of investment and expansion in fossil fuels globally (much as happened through the recent history of U.S. shale production).

## Power of monopoly

The poorer oil exporters will face much more serious problems as a result of the current plunge in oil prices. These include Ecuador, Venezuela, and Iran – the latter two contending also with savage U.S.-imposed sanctions. States such as Nigeria – which depends upon oil for 57 percent of government revenue and over 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings – will find it exceedingly difficult to meet budgetary demands, a problem that will have deadly consequences in the midst of the current pandemic.

Similarly, for Iraq, where oil exports make up 90 percent of government revenues and a large proportion of the population depends upon the public sector for wages or pensions, it is difficult to see how the expected shortfall in funding will be addressed. The problems these countries face, however, should not be blamed on low oil prices; instead, longstanding legacies of colonialism, the destruction wrought by Western-led wars and occupation, and the relations of debt and dependency that bind these countries to the centers of the global economy need to be placed upfront in tackling this pandemic.

Nigeria, for example, may depend on oil for a large proportion of government revenues – but more than half of these revenues are spent simply on servicing existing foreign debt. Any attempt to move beyond fossil fuel dependency at the global level must challenge this combustible mix of oil, debt, and finance.

At the time of writing, there is talk of a possible deal between the US, Saudi Arabia, and Russia around oil production levels. It is unlikely that such a deal would have any sustained effect on the price of oil given the vast destruction of demand that has occurred in recent weeks.

Some observers have noted the irony of seeing leading Republicans who had previously called for the dismantling of OPEC because of its 'cartel'-like behavior now demanding greater market collusion with Saudi Arabia and Russia over prices.

There is certainly no doubt that the mutually reinforcing crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic downturn are indeed provoking a whole range of unexpected political realignments, strange bedfellows, and new openings for political change.

But this moment is also one where previously existing arrangements may be reworked and consolidated in the interests of the most powerful. We face the very real danger of an emboldened and resurgent oil industry, positioned ever-more centrally within our political and economic systems. Such an eventuality would be a disastrous outcome to this current pandemic.



hindered by any production limits, continue to gain market share at their expense.

By threatening to flood the world with more oil (and here, Saudi Arabia's actions are particularly decisive, due to its unique ability to quickly ramp up production capacity) the price of oil would fall significantly. Saudi Arabia and Russia would need to endure the pain of low oil prices for several years; in the meantime, high-cost U.S. producers would be driven to the wall.

## An Oil Price War Meets COVID-19

However, in the days following this massive supply shock to global oil markets, it quickly became evident that a much larger blow to oil prices was looming as a result of COVID-19's escalating spread outside of China. For oil producers, the tsunami of demand destruction greatly magnified the effects of the Saudi and Russian announcements, and pushed oil prices towards single digit levels. By March 29, the price of the U.S. benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil had dropped by more than 60 percent since the beginning of the year, falling below \$20/barrel, its lowest level in 18-years. The international benchmark, Brent, dropped to \$23.03/barrel, the lowest since 2002. Importantly, these benchmark prices often don't reflect the actual real price that a barrel of oil costs in the physical market – with traders reporting some types of oil selling for as low as \$8/barrel. Amidst predictions of \$10/barrel, oil companies began to slash their spending on further exploration, rig construction, and capital expenditure.

In the face of these extremely low prices, oil producers have been scrambling to store their oil in the hope of making a profit when prices rise sometime in

***Nigeria, for example, may depend on oil for a large proportion of government revenues – but more than half of these revenues are spent simply on servicing existing foreign debt.***

barrel, effectively asking producers to pay them in return for taking the oil off their hands.

All of this presents enormous pressures across the entire oil value chain, from crude oil producers (companies and countries) through to refining and the petrochemical industry. Firm bankruptcies and the shutting down of oil wells are almost certain in the immediate weeks, and will likely be concentrated among those producers who rely upon relatively high oil prices, e.g. U.S. and Canadian companies active in oil sands and shale production. Indeed, this prognosis was confirmed in the Dallas Federal Reserve March Monthly Survey on Oil and Gas, where industry respondents commented that the prospect of "the domestic oil and gas industry has never been bleaker" – this was "a perfect storm of disaster" and "the single worst reset in energy prices in [a] lifetime."

The net result will undoubtedly be a sharp increase in bankruptcies among such U.S. energy companies over 2020 and 2021. Indeed, the first of these casualties occurred on April 1 with the filing for Chapter 11 by Whiting Petroleum, the largest independent oil company in North Dakota (the second-biggest U.S. oil producing state). Whiting is almost certainly the first in a coming wave of energy company bankruptcies; indeed, Rystad Energy estimated on April 3 that if oil

see unfold over the next 12-18 months. Goldman Sachs, for example, noted recently that while the current crisis will undoubtedly "be a game changer for the industry," the probable outcome is that "Big Oils will consolidate the best assets in the industry and will shed the worst ... when the industry emerges from this downturn, there will be fewer companies of higher asset quality." Inter-industry disputes over state support to the ailing shale industry in the U.S. also reflect this possible outcome.

Here, as Justin Mikulka meticulously documents, large oil majors such as Exxon have sought to hasten the collapse of smaller producers and have vigorously opposed any state support to the shale industry. Mikulka cites the CEO of one shale firm, Pioneer Natural Resources, who told CNBC that efforts to engage the Trump administration in support of shale producers were not going well, because "We've had opposition from Exxon who controls API [American Petroleum Institute] and the TXOGA [Texas Oil and Gas Association] ... they prefer all the independents to go bankrupt and pick up the scraps."

For this reason, the current moment presents a real danger for climate justice campaigns. In the U.S., for example, the Trump administration has agreed to loosen environmental regulations for power plants, factories and other indus-

**“RED INTERNATIONAL AND BLACK CARIBBEAN” Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939** by Margaret Stevens, Pluto Press, 2017

By MARTY GOODMAN

Margaret Stevens’ is one of the few writers to examine the fascinating revolutionary history of the Caribbean and Mexico as a partisan of revolution. Her book is a detailed look at the struggles and betrayals between the two World Wars at the hands of U.S. and British racism and imperialism. Stevens deserves praise for her pioneering work, which is surely a revelation to many North Americans, ignorant of past struggles in the Caribbean.

Her ground-breaking book details how Caribbean Communist parties and movements challenged the almost overwhelming power and viciousness of the imperialist powers. In addition, Stevens documents how communist movements were profoundly affected by the rightward shifts of the Stalin leadership in the Soviet Union. Stevens weaves a fascinating, but also tragic story, particularly concerning Haiti, but there are some missteps in her overall narrative that I will leave until the end.

Besides Cuba, no other country in the Caribbean has successfully confronted racism and imperialism. And, as Stevens correctly frames it, overcoming both is the task of the Caribbean Black working class itself.

For 400 years, the Caribbean was cast into the hell of slavery only to be replaced by neo-colonialism, capitalist exploitation and racism. Stevens’ focus is on the resistance organized in the post-WWI period by the Communist Third International of worker’s parties, established in 1919 by Russia’s revolutionary government led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

### Role of Third International

In the Western hemisphere, the Third International was first headquartered in Mexico City by the Mexican Communist Party (MCP), which had united in 1925, if not before. The MCP contributed toward the unification of the Cuban communists in 1925; in Haiti in 1930 (others say 1934) and in Puerto Rico in 1935.

In 1926, the Third International moved from Mexico to New York City, under the guidance of the Communist Party U.S.A (CPUSA). Cuban Communist Party leader Blas Roca said this about the U.S. party, “The CPUSA was instrumental in supporting the CP of Puerto Rico upon its inception...just as it had been for the parties founded in Mexico, Haiti, and Cuba.”

The English speaking islands however, Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, the Bahamas, St. Kitts, and St. Vincent, were shaken by powerful anti-racist, anti-colonial workers’ struggles. But they did not establish communist parties between WWI and WWII.

Spurred by the Communist International, the CPUSA played an outsized role in anti-racist campaigns throughout the hemisphere, although insufficiently in the minds of several Black CP leaders, with which the author agrees.

By 1930, reports indicate, the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) had grown to 14,000 members at the start of the global depression, 900 of them Afro American. Harlem’s newspapers like *the Crusader*, *Machete* and *the Emancipator* and organizations like the African Blood Brotherhood contributed mightily to the ferment of the “Harlem renaissance” and with it a new sense of identity, from the “Back to Africa” movement of Marcus Garvey to revolutionary socialism.

Important, too, was the assistance to the development of the CP’s in Puerto Rico and Cuba (CPC) by New York’s Spanish Harlem radicals. Likewise, Haitian communists living in NYC played an outsized

# Unknown history of class-struggle in the Caribbean 1919—1939

role in developing a Communist movement in Haiti.

In 1931, a catalyzing struggle for these early communist parties, in addition to the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, was the international movement to free the “Scottsboro Boys,” nine African American young men living in Alabama framed-up on racist charges of raping two

Stevens observed, “Invoking Haiti as a site of resistance was strategically necessary precisely because it doubly exposed the harsh realities of American empire overseas and racist super-exploitation of black laborers in the U.S. itself.”

In December 1929, Haitian workers stoned U.S. Marines in a multi-day battle in which five peasants were shot and

the 1935 General Strike. Mass deportations of militant Jamaican sugar workers—some known as the “Red guards”—and Haitian workers began in 1933, with Washington’s blessing.

As the author explains, the “Black Belt” was increasingly forgotten as Stalin’s “Popular Front” strategy lurched rightward following the triumph of Hitler in 1933. To strategically preserve the endangered USSR, Stalin and his followers looked to pressure Western so-called “democracies” and capitalist politicians for aid in thwarting Nazi aggression.

Hardly “democracies,” however, the West controlled a rapacious worldwide imperialist system that included colonies in the British West Indies and Puerto Rico, as well as vast portions of Africa and Asia. Of course, Wall Street and the other Western imperialists cared little for the fate of the world’s first worker’s state.

During the Popular Front years, the CP’s were not merely trying to pressure “democratic” capitalist governments and dissing revolution, but supporting, at least initially, capitalist governments themselves in Cuba (Fulgencio Batista), the Dominican Republic (Rafael Trujillo) and Haiti (Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier). Some prominent CP’ers joined capitalist governments as individuals (“Papa Doc and the TonTon Macoutes,” Diederich and Burt, 1968). Cuba’s Batista even praised the CPC in 1939 as, “Promoters of democracy.” Stevens observed that, “Batista would become the champion of communists.”

### Roosevelt: The ‘Good Neighbor?’

In the U.S., the CP embraced the liberal millionaire, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and his racist Democratic Party—the party of Southern apartheid!—dubbing it “anti-fascist.” To deter revolution in the Western Hemisphere FDR announced his “Good Neighbor Policy” in 1933 to distract attention from the bitter memory of dozens of U.S. backed coups and military occupations, “legitimized” by Washington’s infamous “Monroe Doctrine” and “Platt Amendment.”

Liberal icon Roosevelt, during the bloody U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-34) and the ensuing guerilla war waged by the “Cacos,” was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and supported the unobstructed U.S. rule over Haiti (Stevens) and even going so far as to brag that he wrote the 1918 Haitian constitution! As President, Roosevelt withdrew from Haiti in 1934, but only after the murder of thousands of Haitian patriots.

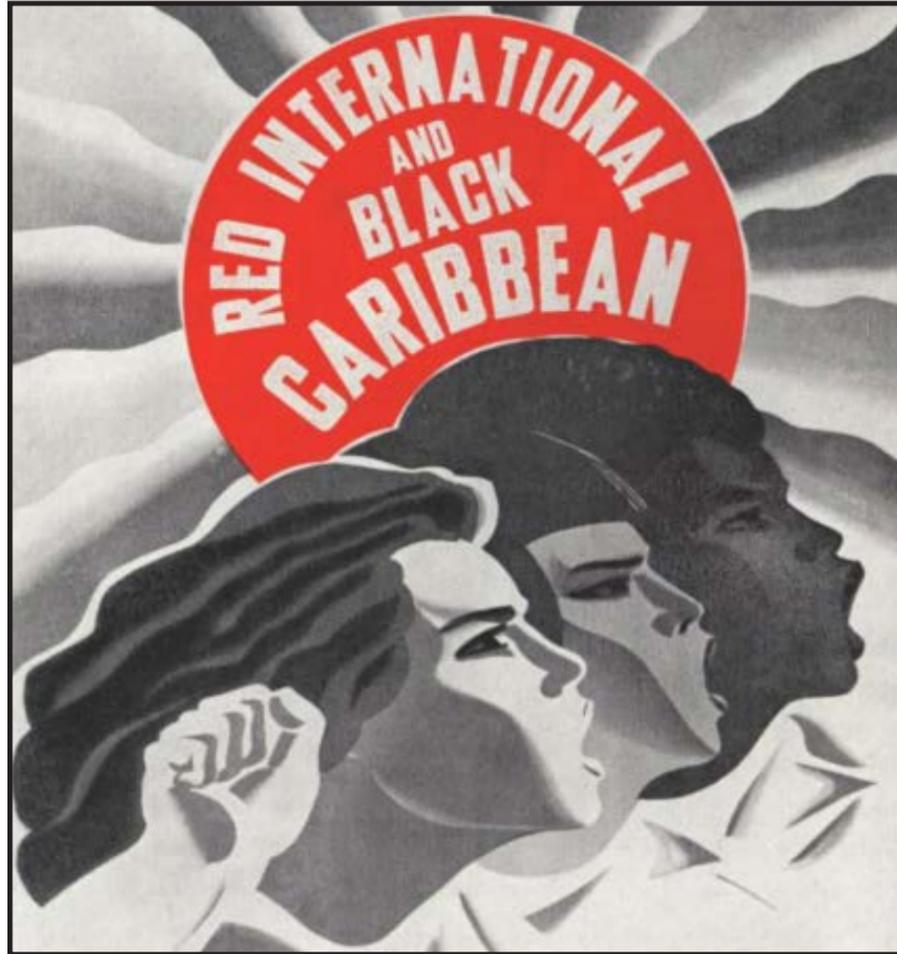
As the book’s author put it, “The CPUSA and Communists across the Hemisphere were averse to challenging very directly the leadership of the “Good Neighbors” in the White House and other ruling elites in the region.”

By 1935, the Cuban CP backed a “reform” capitalist politician, Grau San Martin, who supported a “50% law” that sought the chauvinist exclusion of non-Cuban workers, forcing the emigration of Jamaicans and Haitians—all with the CPC’s “critical” support. Many Haitians fled to find work in the sugar fields of what became the ‘killing fields’ of the Dominican Republic to find work.

The 50% law resulted in a chain of events that led to the horrific mass murder in 1937 of up to some 14,000 Haitians (Stevens), others say up to 30,000 Haitians.

The U.S.-trained, hideously racist, Dominican Republic (DR) dictator, Rafael Trujillo, ordered a bloodbath of Haitians entering along the Haiti/Dominican Republic border in 1937. Stevens quotes an Oct. 2 rant by Trujillo promising to rid the D.R. of, “Dogs, hogs and Haitians.”

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white women. Large international protests were organized in the U.S. but notably also in the mostly Black Oriente Province of Cuba and Haiti.

Important also was the fight to free the Afro-Cuban, Junco Sandalio, a prominent Communist labor leader, who bore the nickname, “The Negro Champion.” Solidarity rallies were also organized by the CP in the U.S. Once freed, Sandalio was forced to flee to Mexico.

These major campaigns were supported by the influential American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), International Labor Defense (ILD), and the All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL), all CPUSA aligned or CPUSA influenced organizations to one degree or another.

Within Cuba, says Stevens, the CPUSA’s Black leader, James Ford, played a prominent role in the rise of the 1926 Soviet-style Realengo 18 or Commune 18 in the mostly Black Oriente Province in Cuba and in the 1933 Cuban “revolution.”

In Haiti, a struggle erupted to free Jacques Roumain, a founder of the Haitian Communist Party and author of the classic Haiti novel, “Masters of the Dew.” Roumain agitated for Black identity and solidarity with the Scottsboro boys and was arrested in 1933 in an anti-communist crackdown. After his release Roumain moved to Paris where he worked with well-known Cuban communist and poet Nicolas Guillen, Harlem poet Langston Hughes and Spanish Civil War anti-fascists.

### Haiti: Epicenter of struggle

As surprising as it may be to some, Haiti once loomed large on the U.S. Left. Of great importance was opposition to the bloody U.S. Marine occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). Otto Huiswood, head of the CP USA’s ‘Negro Department’ told organizers, “To mobilize the party ... to hold mass protest meetings and also to demonstrate against the action taken by the Hoover administration in Haiti.”

killed. In response, on Dec. 14, the CPUSA organized an angry mass protest of an estimated 5,000 in New York’s City Hall plaza against the occupation and the repression of mass strikes and protests. Among the 17 listed arrested at City Hall was CP leader James Ford. Among those brutalized by cops was Haitian CPUSA leader Henri Rosemund, knocked unconscious. Rosemund was perhaps the most prominent political leader in New York’s needle trade strike in early 1929. Utilizing his links between New York’s CP and immigrant communities, Rosemund mobilized his Haitian base within the Haitian Patriotic Union and the Anti-Imperialist League to launch a protest of some 5,000 women in Haiti in opposition to the arrival of a U.S. “Commission” to investigate “human rights violations.” The protests later grew up to 30,000.

The CPUSA’s *Daily Worker* newspaper loudly proclaimed, “Stand by the Haitian Revolution!” In the month after the City Hall demo over 100 Haitians joined the CP branch in New York.

Of great importance for the CPUSA was the concept of a “Black belt” homeland in the deep U.S. South, a concept promulgated in 1928 by Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, four years after the death of USSR leader, Vladimir Lenin.

### ‘Black Belt’ Movement

A “Black belt” did indeed exist within the former slave-owning South, and according to the CPUSA, it extended into the Caribbean, encompassing the Black majority in Oriente in eastern Cuba, a region of militant labor struggles. As Stevens notes, Stalin’s concept was mechanically adopted as a key demand for Black “self-determination,” without bothering to consult the U.S. Black masses about their own liberation, i.e., to integrate or live within a separate territory, despite Northern migration.

Indeed, Oriente was a hotbed. Sugar workers seized control of U.S. sugar estates several times in 1933 and supported

## When Oil Markets Go Viral

BY ADAM HANIEH

*The COVID-19 crisis has led to a huge drop in the demand for and the price of oil globally. In this article, Adam Hanieh looks at what this might mean for the global economy. The article has been edited for space. For the complete version, see [International Viewpoint](#) online.*

The ecological dimensions of COVID-19 have become increasingly prominent in much recent discussion, with several important contributions exploring the pandemic in relation to capitalist agribusiness, widespread loss of biodiversity, and the destruction of natural ecosystems.

There is, however, a further element to COVID-19's "ecology" that deserves much greater attention: the ways the escalating pandemic intersects with, and is simultaneously acting to accelerate, a profound shock to the fossil fuel industry. Global oil markets are undergoing an unprecedented transformation as a result of this shock, and while longer-term trajectories remain open, this moment will undoubtedly shape the politics of oil – and the prospects of mitigating climate change – for decades to come.

With states representing over 90 percent of global GDP stuck under some form of lockdown, and the simultaneous shuttering of large swathes of global manufacturing, transport, industry, and retail – the demand for oil and oil products has dropped to historic lows. Indeed, it has been estimated that the reduction in U.S. automobile use alone has led to an astonishing 5 percent fall in global oil demand – about the same as if the whole of Europe, Africa and the Middle East had simultaneously stopped driving.

The International Energy Association's Executive Director, Fatih Birol, estimated on March 25 that global oil demand could fall by about 20 million barrels per day, a prediction that has now been revised up to 30 million barrels per day. This plunge in world energy use is unparalleled in both speed and depth, exceeding all other major crises of the last century – including the 1929 Depression and the 2008 global financial crash. And just as energy demand is in free-fall, world oil supplies look set to significantly increase following an announcement in early March that Russia and Saudi Arabia would remove limits on oil production levels.

### Anatomy of an 'Oil War'

Combined with the effects of the pandemic, this 'Oil War' has pushed global oil prices to multi-decade lows, and left producers rushing to find storage space on land and sea for their oil, rather than sell it at a loss. With global storage fast approaching full capacity, some oil traders are actually now expecting producers to pay them for taking oil off their hands. All of these factors have led analysts to forecast a record number of bankruptcies among oil companies for 2020, an eventuality that could imperil a range of important banks and financial institutions in a manner redolent of 2008.

But what might this extreme shock to energy markets mean for the future of the fossil fuel industry and the possibilities of ending oil-dependency? Some commentators have speculated that this might all be a little bit of good news in the context of the COVID-19 calamity – the pan-

demical could "kill the oil industry and help save the climate" as a headline in the *Guardian* newspaper exclaimed on April 1, with the demise of many smaller oil producers and the weakening of oil majors such as Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, and British Petroleum bringing us closer to a transition away from fossil fuel use.

Such rosy scenarios, however, tend to abstract from the realities of a catastrophe capitalism that is inexorably tied to the extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels, and which has deeply embedded 'Big Oil' in all facets of our lives. Like all moments of sharp change, the eventual path we take out of these multiple, intersecting crises – an oil price crash, severe eco-

is typically extracted through fracturing the rock by pressurized liquid (hence the term 'fracking'). There are a variety of ways of calculating the 'break even' cost of shale production and this figure changes depending on the particular oil field and the prevailing costs of technology, labor, taxes and so forth – but a widely quoted figure is that most U.S. shale producers require a price of \$45 or more to turn a profit. By contrast, Saudi oil has a production cost of around US\$4/bbl and Russian oil around US\$10/bbl.

These comparisons need to be interpreted with care, as Saudi Arabia and Russia are states not companies, and they depend heavily on oil and gas revenues to

inventories that resulted from this additional U.S. production – coupled with a moderation of Chinese energy demand, a sputtering global economy, and the move towards greater use of renewable energy sources – brought the period of high global oil prices to an abrupt end in mid-2014. The price of Brent fell by 70 percent through 2015, eventually bottoming out at around \$30/barrel in early 2016. This was the largest drop in oil prices in three decades. With the U.S. experiencing its first decline in annual oil production since 2008, many smaller and highly leveraged companies went under – for 2015, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimated that the combined losses of major publicly traded onshore producers reached a staggering \$67 billion.

U.S. oil producers were not the only ones hit by the price rout of 2014-2016. All major oil exporters confronted mounting budget deficits and hemorrhaging of their reserves – this included Saudi Arabia, which burnt through more than one-third of its foreign reserves between the oil price peak in 2014 and end-2016. In the face of these mounting fiscal pressures, two of the world's leading oil-producers,

Russia and Saudi Arabia, took steps to strengthen global oil prices through a series of coordinated cuts to production. This *de facto* alliance was formalized in a mutual pact, dubbed OPEC+, which was established between the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and 11 non-OPEC countries in December 2016. Until it unraveled in early March this year, OPEC+ proved successful in keeping the price of oil within a narrow band of around \$50-\$80.

### Consolidations and bankruptcies

For U.S. oil companies – who were not bound by any of these international agreements – OPEC+ proved extremely fortuitous. In the wake of the 2015 plunge in prices there had been a wave of consolidations and bankruptcies in the U.S. oil industry, and the stabilization of relatively high oil prices served to reinvigorate domestic oil exploration and production. Indeed, by January 2020, daily U.S. oil production was to reach over 12.7 million barrels, an increase of nearly 45 percent since December 2016 and up from less than 5 million barrels/day in 2008.

These figures starkly demonstrate that while most of the world's major oil producing countries sought to limit their production levels in line with OPEC+, U.S. oil companies were essentially left free to increase their levels of production unhindered. As Keith Johnson noted in *Foreign Policy* on March 27, "No country has added more oil to the global glut in recent years than the United States—and despite the recent plunge in crude prices, U.S. producers are still increasing output."

However, on March 6 this year, the OPEC+ alliance was to break apart spectacularly after Russia rejected a call by OPEC to cut global oil production by a further 1.5 million barrels/day. Not only did Russia refuse OPEC's request, it also announced that it would no longer abide by the initial December 2016 agreement. This decision was swiftly met by a Saudi

*(continued on page 12)*



***Combined with the effects of the pandemic, this 'Oil War' has pushed global oil prices to multi-decade lows, and left producers rushing to find storage space on land and sea for their oil...***

nomical downturn, and virus pandemic – will depend on our capacities to build effective political alternatives to Fossil Capital. We need to pay close attention to the possible winners and losers that might emerge from this current moment, and be wary of equating the temporary (albeit severe) collapse of an oil-based economy with the demise of the system itself.

### The Middle East, Russia, and U.S. Oil

Beginning in the early 2000s, world oil prices rose steadily on the back of the increasing global demand associated with the rise of China. Prices fell back sharply in 2008 with the global economic crisis, but soon resumed their upward trajectory and eventually peaked at around \$114/barrel in mid-2014. This was a financial boon for most Middle East oil exporters (and carried major consequences for the political dynamics of the wider Middle East region), but the extended period of rising prices also benefitted marginal producers elsewhere in the world.

Most significantly, investments in the development of so-called 'non-conventional' oil and gas supplies – reserves that are difficult and significantly more expensive to extract than conventional fossil fuels – were strongly incentivized during this prolonged period of high oil prices.

Of particular relevance here is U.S. shale – crude oil that is held in shale or sandstone of low permeability and which

meet their budgetary needs – in this sense, the 'breakeven price' of oil for these states is much higher and fluctuates according to levels of government spending.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that consistently high oil prices through most of the first two decades of the new millennium helped to attract large investments into shale field development and drove significant improvement in extraction technologies for these non-conventional supplies.

This, of course, was an unmitigated ecological and social disaster, which rested fundamentally on the repeated deployment of state-backed violence against Indigenous populations in the U.S. (and Canada) in order to make way for pipeline routes and other infrastructure. But the result was a spectacular boom in U.S. domestic oil production.

### OPEC+ and 2020 Oil Price War

Between 2009 and 2014, the production of U.S. shale oil tripled, propelling the United States into the top rank of oil producers globally. Remarkably, the U.S. became a net exporter of oil in early 2011, and overtook Saudi Arabia to become the world's largest producer in 2013 – a position it has maintained until this day, and a far cry from the panicked predictions of 'energy dependence' that had marked U.S. policy debates in the early years of the new millennium.

However, the huge increase in global oil