

# CHALLENGE



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## Solidarity With Trayvon Martin

# Youth Indict Racist System



John Jay Students picketing against racist murder

**BROOKLYN, NY, April 6** — “Who are we? Trayvon!” was chanted repeatedly by students and teachers picketing the John Jay campus here protesting the racist murder of black teenager Trayvon Martin. This was among the many actions angry high school students and teachers organized as news of his death reached the campus. As many of the black and Latino students have been targets of previous racist attacks, we were able to sympathize with Trayvon’s parents. No one could defend killer Zimmerman as it became clear that racism was a major cause of this murder.

The student government, the debate team and the school newspaper confronted racism, with teachers conducting lessons on the case; students making and distributing posters throughout the campus’s four schools; announcements were made in classes and posted on Facebook calling on students to a picket line outside the school.

Some principals were supportive but others opposed this action, threatening their students by holding assemblies warning them about participating. One black principal released her students early out of fear.

The original idea was to stand outside of the school and lock hands in Trayvon’s memory. But the protest flowed naturally from previous picket lines protesting the segregation involving the new school the Department of Education introduced into our building (see 2011 CHALLENGES). Racist attacks created by the capitalist system are affecting our lives every day so we must stand together and fight the divisions it heaped upon us and on the working class.

Even though this was a half day, students showed commitment by coming to school, creating posters and encouraging their peers to join the protest. This united the school community which was fighting not only for justice in Trayvon’s case, but against racism in general as well.

When we chanted back and forth in front of the school, the cops surrounded us, but the students didn’t back down, making it clear what we think of their racist tactics. Students wore black hoodies in memory of Trayvon, while knowing that Trayvon is not the only victim of racism in the class struggle. The action caught the attention of the neighborhood. Some encouraged and congratulated us for our courage while others crossed the street to avoid us.

We’re aware that such racist attacks could happen to any of us; we all go to a school in a predominately white, middle-class, neighborhood. However, the more we fight such racist attacks the more we’re able to open people’s eyes and show them how these attacks are caused by the system we all must fight against.

But this will not stop here. We’re continuing to encourage our classmates to come to rallies and protest the racism in all the class struggles facing us every day. Attending the May Day march on April 28 is a great way to continue this fight.✪



WASHINGTON, DC — “Tear down the whole damn system!” chanted Howard University Students (see page 4).



Students at Brooklyn’s Clara Barton H.S. demonstrate their hatred for racism.



NEW YORK CITY — PL’ers join hundreds of anti-racists in a militant demonstration against police genocide of black youth.



# Obama's Reelection Campaign: Imperialist War

The intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry between U.S. rulers and those of China, Russia, Japan and the European Union confronts the U.S. with a crisis both domestically and internationally. Ever fiercer global competition for markets, resources and trade routes is driving down U.S. profit rates. To protect and defend those profits, the capitalists' lifeblood, they will inevitably wage a broader war.

Obama's value to U.S. capitalists lies in his readiness to expand U.S.-run military operations toward this goal. Equally important is his ability to mislead and pacify workers by posing as a lesser evil than the Republicans.

Obama deployed an additional 30,000 GIs in Afghanistan. He has launched death-raining drones over Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. He invaded Libya behind a NATO smokescreen. He maintains thousands of mercenaries in Iraq. His Army Special Forces assassinate U.S. enemies, including Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda's leadership, all of whom the CIA trained in its 1980s war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. On the high seas, the U.S. Navy stalks and kills teenage pirates who were driven

there by imperialists dumping toxic waste in their fishing waters, ruining their livelihood.

Obama has based U.S. Marines in Australia as a warning to China's bosses over a pending contest for oil beneath the South China Sea. And his \$60 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia fuel the U.S.'s proxy war with Iran being played out over Syria as the Pentagon arms its junior allies in the Middle East.

## Mass-Murdering Mouthpieces Front for Obama

Accordingly, Obama's ruling-class handlers are making war the cornerstone of his reelection bid. "Obama is preparing to emphasize an issue that few Democratic candidates have embraced in the past: national security" (New York Times, 4/7/12). Obama's gang has recruited mass murderers from the Bill Clinton era as its ministers of propaganda: "In the coming weeks, Obama advisers plan to release a list of national security 'surrogates' — high-profile Democrats like former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and Wesley Clark, a retired general — who will write newspaper op-ed articles, give speeches and take Mr. Romney to task every time he opens his mouth about foreign policy" (NYT, 4/7/12).

Albright was challenged on "Sixty Minutes" over her boss Clinton's eight-year sanction policy denying food and medicine and destroying water purification facilities that killed a half-million Iraqi children. She replied, "We think the price is worth it." NATO chief Clark, meanwhile, headed Clinton's 1999 Kosovo blitzkrieg that wiped out thousands of civilians.

The capitalists' wars by definition perpetrate mass murder. The Pentagon trains GIs in racist demonization of Arabs and Muslim workers to be better able to win them to become indiscriminate killers. A thousand U.S. military bases encircle the globe, the bosses' springboard for raining racist terror on the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and Latin America. The imperialists' slaughter of workers around the world is inextricably linked to racist murders within the U.S. It gave a blank check to George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin; to the shooters who mowed down three people in the black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma; to the KKKops in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and other major U.S. cities.

## Obama v. Romney: How Best to Serve U.S. Imperialism?

The shouting match between two sets of war criminals, the ones advising Obama and those behind Republican challenger Mitt Romney, has already begun. In late March, Obama was overheard promising Russian president Medvedev "more flexibility" after the November elections in talks on nuclear weapons. Romney & Co. pounced on the chance to question Obama's militarism in National Interest magazine. Calling Obama's Iraqi and Afghan military drawdowns "premature," they criticized Obama for betraying weakness not only to Russia but to Iran, Cuba and Venezuela.

The president's brain trust fired back in a letter in Foreign Policy magazine to re-establish Obama's credentials as warmaker-in-chief. They declared that he was indeed prepared to use "military action, to prevent the Iranian regime from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

The Obama bunch then took Romney to task for calling Russia "our number one geopolitical foe." They lectured him like a schoolchild for forgetting growing archrival China: "Do you believe there are other entities that pose greater challenges to American economic and strategic interests in the 21st century?" Even more tellingly, they likened Romney to the ineffectual George W. Bush and his go-it-alone approach to intensi-

fying worldwide conflict without seeking allies and rubber stamps from the United Nations.

Regardless of Romney's misstep in ranking the U.S. rulers' lengthening list of geopolitical foes, he is clearly calling for a major U.S. naval buildup in the Pacific. But even though Romney's camp consists of diehard imperialists who serve top contributors like Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase, it nevertheless disagrees with Obama on two big points on war mobilization: allies and taxes. A closer look at the signers of the two camps' position papers suggests a replay of the policy divide between the two very different U.S.-led wars in Iraq: the on-the-cheap, go-it-alone invasion model of 2003, favored by tax-cutting Romney, versus the spare-no-expense force advanced by Chief of Staff Colin Powell under George H.W. Bush in the 1991 ouster of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.

Highlighting Romney's list of signatories are alumni of the neo-conservative Project for a New American Century: Eliot Cohen, Robert Kagan, Dov Zakheim. They belong to the U.S. capitalist faction that cooked up the 2003 invasion under George W. Bush. That war's occupation force numbered less than 200,000 and represented only four nations — 148,000 from the U.S.; 45,000 from the United Kingdom; 2,000 from Australia; and 194 from Poland. As neo-con War Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said at the time, "You fight with the army you have." Today these on-the-cheap hawks favor letting Israel bomb Iran.

Obama's endorsers, on the other hand, embrace Powell's "broad coalition, wielding overwhelming force" a strategy that required higher taxes for the first Gulf War genocide. The Pentagon coordinated 750,000 troops from 34 nations to oust Saddam's forces from Kuwait, though it could not get the green light — or the financing — to unleash this force to invade and occupy Iraq.

The present pro-Obama supporters hail mainly from the ultra-militarist Center for a New American Security (CNAS), which is advised by serving officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. Obama's defense undersecretary and CNAS founder, Michele Flournoy, was the first to sign the letter to Foreign Policy. Virtually, all the rest have ties to the CNAS. The group's biggest current project is to enlist India's billion-plus population in a pro-U.S. military alliance against China.

In order to mount the widespread wars contemplated by U.S. imperialists to protect their worldwide interests in energy and minerals, they will need higher taxes to be drawn from both the super-rich and the working class. That's the reason for the recent massive cuts in budgets for schools, health care, social services and wages — federal, state and local.

## Turn Obama's War Against Workers into A War Against Capitalism

Obama's high-priced militarization requires a war on U.S. workers. It's the primary reason for the job cuts and wage freezes against hundreds of thousands of government employees and teachers, and the looming cuts of Medicare and Medicaid. The ruling imperialists' war plans leave next to no funding to help tens of millions of unemployed, plunging them into poverty. And there's a direct link between the Obama camp's bloody international ambitions and the enforcement of racist terror against black, Latino and immigrant workers. By intimidating and super-exploiting these groups, the capitalists can force white workers to accept lower wages and health benefits. And by dividing groups of workers, the rulers also forestall rebellions against their rising fascism.

So the path is clear for communists in the Progressive Labor Party, our friends in the shops and unions, in the schools and on the campuses, in the churches and the communities, and especially among the soldiers, and among all militant anti-racist workers and youth: Organize and lead class struggle in all areas where our class is under attack, in every city and country where PLP has a base.

Our participation in these struggles will enable us to carry out our most crucial task: to win masses of workers and youth to understand that our only way out of the hellish profit system is a communist revolution. Our aim is a society run by and for the working class, the producers of all value. Building our Party is therefore the order of the day.

Join PLP and march on May Day!🇺🇸

## OUR FIGHT

★ **Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to destroy capitalism and the dictatorship of the capitalist class. We organize workers, soldiers and youth into a revolutionary movement for communism.**

★ **Only the dictatorship of the working class — communism — can provide a lasting solution to the disaster that is today's world for billions of people. This cannot be done through electoral politics, but requires a revolutionary movement and a mass Red Army led by PLP.**

★ **Worldwide capitalism, in its relentless drive for profit, inevitably leads to war, fascism, poverty, disease, starvation and environmental destruction. The capitalist class, through its state power — governments, armies, police, schools and culture — maintains a dictatorship over the world's workers. The capitalist dictatorship supports, and is supported by, the anti-working-class ideologies of racism, sexism, nationalism, individualism and religion.**

★ **While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions worldwide. Capitalism returned to Russia and China because socialism retained many aspects of the profit system, like wages and privileges. Russia and China did not establish communism.**

★ **Communism means working collectively to build a worker-run society. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. Everyone will share in society's benefits and burdens.**

★ **Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of "race." Capitalism uses racism to super-exploit black, Latino, Asian and indigenous workers, and to divide the entire working class.**

★ **Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women — sexism — and divisive gender roles created by the class society.**

★ **Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One international working class, one world, one Party.**

★ **Communism means that the minds of millions of workers must become free from religion's false promises, unscientific thinking and poisonous ideology. Communism will triumph when the masses of workers can use the science of dialectical materialism to understand, analyze and change the world to meet their needs and aspirations.**

★ **Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!**

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## Why Articles Are Not Signed

The fact that CHALLENGE/PLP articles are not signed grows from PLP's criticism of the cult of the individual in the former socialist Soviet Union and China. We do not want to encourage the possibility of building up a "following" around any particular individual. While an article may be written by one person, the final version is based on collective discussion and criticism. Many times this collective discussion even precedes an individual's writing of an article.



## Obama No Lesser Evil PL'ers Expose Dems' Attacks on CUNY

**NEW YORK CITY** — Evil, yes; lesser, no. That was the point PL'ers and friends made about Barack Obama at a recent discussion in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). The PSC is a local of City University of New York (CUNY) professors and staff within the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). After a delegate in our local proposed a resolution to criticize the AFT's endorsement of Obama, we took the opportunity to explain that all politicians under capitalism, regardless of their appearance or label, are the capitalists' servants.

The first order of business was a discussion about the recent attack led by Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic governor, on the wages and pensions of New York State's public workers.

The retirement age has been raised, forcing workers to put in more years for lower benefits. More of them will be funneled into the 401(k) system, a highly unstable retirement plan that depends on the stock market — and which wiped out millions of workers' pensions after the 2008 market crash.

Since taking office last year, Cuomo has also imposed a three-year wage freeze on 120,000 state workers, who now also must pay more for their health premiums — an effective wage cut.

Meanwhile, the governor has cut billions from public schools and health care, leading to layoffs of teachers and hospital workers. At

CUNY, which absorbed a \$103-million cut, student tuition will rise \$300 for each of the next five years, an overall increase of 37 percent!

By leading this anti-worker attack, Cuomo has demonstrated that all politicians everywhere — be they Democratic, Republican, Labor, Center-Left, or Socialist — serve the bosses. There are no "lesser-evil" politicians or bosses.

The delegates in attendance were rightly critical of Cuomo and his racist plan, one of the worst attacks hitting New York's public workers in a long time. There was unity about the need to take action and fight back against it, and Cuomo's "Democratic" label did not matter. Later, when we were discussing the resolution criticizing the AFT's endorsement of Obama, it became clear that "lesser-evilism" is still a powerful ideology. The delegates' arguments and our responses:

*Myth: Obama will give us more room to operate as a progressive union.*

PL'ers pointed out that Obama has passed the National Defense Authorization Act, which gives the police the right to detain any person indefinitely and without legal representation. He signed H.R. 347, a law that makes it illegal to enter a public space if a Secret Service agent is present. This law is directly aimed at stifling protests and demonstrations.

*Myth: Obama needs to be defended because he is black and his presidency is a blow to U.S. racism.*

As the housing crisis has disproportionately affected black families, wiping out generations of slowly built-up savings, Obama has done nothing about it. He has responded weakly or not at all to the recent epidemic of racist police murders. He has expanded the racist wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. He has said nothing about racist unemployment, education or health-care that continues to afflict black and Latino workers in disproportionate numbers.

*Myth: Democrats are not as viciously and openly anti-woman as Republicans.*

Obama has deported more than one million immigrants, more than George W. Bush ever did, separating countless mothers from their children and wives from their husbands. Furthermore, he has said nothing about the attacks on women coming from the Republicans. Most federal employees earning less than \$50,000 are women. In 2010, Obama ordered federal salaries frozen for two years.

*Myth: Obama is not as anti-education as the Republicans.*

We challenged this claim at the microphone by noting that he supported the wholesale firing of teachers in Rhode Island. The president and his Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, are squarely behind the charter school movement and the racist attack on public education. Obama supports merit pay for teachers, a way of blaming educators for the fact that the education system fails so many students.

Another aspect of the discussion reflected the long-term struggle that PL'ers have undertaken in our union. Not a single delegate tried to defend the actions of Obama or the Democrats. Not a single delegate disputed the facts that showed Obama to be a servant of capitalists and the overseer of a violently racist system. In fact, a principal officer in the union admitted that both Democrats and Republicans are both parties for capitalists.

These views are the results of years of hard work to inject communist ideas into union debates and to constantly struggle for greater class consciousness and militancy. Our task now is to use this space we've created to recruit new PLP members.

This is never an easy task. Though there was enthusiasm for the Occupy movement within our union, much of that energy was channeled into the idealistic notion that sniveling politicians would be swayed by the demonstrations into "doing the right thing," like voting for stricter regulations and more oversight of banks. This lie must be exposed!

Electoral politics is a dead-end for workers. Our strength lies not in our ability to influence politicians, but in the fact that an organized working class doesn't need them or their CEO masters! We must expand the limits of our thinking about what is possible. Our members and friends have decided to meet before each PSC delegate assembly to plan how to carry on the struggle within the meeting and expand the limits of ourselves, our Party and our class. ☺

## Block Bankers' Racist/Sexist Eviction

**ORANGE COUNTY, NEW JERSEY, March 31** — "Bail out the people, not the banks!"

"You can't rob the bank, but the bank can rob you!"

"Don't evict Susie Johnson: Shame, shame, shame!"

These were just some of the vigorous chants heard on a quiet street in Orange, NJ when 35 committed protesters managed to block the eviction of an 80-year-old woman who has been a victim of predatory lending. The sheriff's deputies were powerless to carry out their appointed task of removing this elderly woman, suffering from diabetes and incipient Alzheimer's disease, from her little house.

The financial records of Mrs. Johnson's mortgage were "lost" in 2004. She asked again and again to have the paperwork restored to her. Without her being informed, her mortgage was then bundled and moved from bank to bank. Although she obtained a reverse mortgage, this was snatched from her (that's right — she was not allowed to make payments on it!) and sold by Wells Fargo to Chase. Mrs. Johnson was informed a year ago that she was being evicted for nonpayment.

### Sexist, Racist Eviction

These kinds of scams are depriving millions of people in the U.S. of their homes. The pattern of predatory lending is especially sexist and racist: black women are five times as likely to have been offered predatory loan contracts than equivalent white men with identical financial profiles.



This is not to say that most white men — other than those at the top — are benefiting from the system either.

The protesters outside Mrs. Johnson's house came from a range of organizations participating in the New Jersey "Coalition for jobs, peace, justice, and equality." Various labor unions, tenants' rights organizations, anti-foreclosure groups, women's organizations, and civil rights groups are working together around a series of demands seeking to protect the working class — especially in urban centers — from the ravages of the

current financial situation. There is definitely no end to the "recession" in Newark and its nearby suburbs.

The coalition displays a number of the weaknesses and contradictions that accompany liberal formations. While people generally distrust the government, there are plenty of illusions that a "good sheriff" will not carry out his/her duties, if enough popular pressure is applied.

The "banks" tend to be separated out from the rest of the capitalist system. But the people in the coalition are a multiracial group of com-

mitted activists. When one speaker spoke about the long-term as well as immediate goals of our movement — including establishing a social system whose purpose is to produce fully realized human beings rather than profits — she received warm applause.

PL'ers need to root themselves in movements like this one in New Jersey, to participate in the struggle for immediate gains, to make friends, to build a movement that can target capitalism as the "real enemy" of the great majority of the world's people. ☺

## The Real Scandal

# Racist School Bosses' Cuts Abuse Workers, Students

**LOS ANGELES, April 7**—The continuing scandal at Miramonte Elementary School shows the systemic racism within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Two teachers were arrested in late January and early February for child sexual abuse, the district reacted by removing the entire faculty and staff from the campus.

The administration of Miramonte had ignored the complaints of parents and students about the abusive teachers for years. Their refusal to listen to immigrant students and their parents exposes the administration's gutter racist attitude towards the community.

Miramonte is the second largest elementary school in the state and was still on year-round schedule, which the district knows hurts student learning (they changed to regular schedule after the scandal). In recent years, Miramonte has been treated by the district as a temporary holding place for many teachers, as younger teachers get pushed out of positions due to layoffs and seniority reassignment.

It is clear that the removed staff had nothing to do with the scandals at Miramonte, but the district is trying to pretend that it cares.

However, we know better. LAUSD has a racist attitude towards the immigrant and black communities here. PL'ers handed out a flier in the neighborhood. Many parents of Miramonte students responded really well when we said, "From Miramonte to the teacher layoffs resulting in overcrowded classrooms to the custodial layoffs resulting in filthy schools, LAUSD has seen the L.A. working class as its enemy." Some parents gave us their numbers to try to organize a community meeting in order to fight back.

Comrades took the same flier to the displaced Miramonte staff. While they got a good response, many teachers seemed nervous of speaking out against the District. Unfortunately we missed a small rally some parents had had in support of their teachers and staff the day before. We hope that our contacts will help us stay on top of such events in the future. Staff, parents and students must unite and condemn the racism of LAUSD and the capitalist education system.

The teachers' union and the staff unions have done little to help these teachers. The teachers' union had us wear a ribbon to remember the teachers. The District clearly is using this to attack teachers, going through files and using any excuse to remove teachers while they push for furlough days and have laid off 9,500 teachers.

We can see that politicians and bosses especially attack the working class whenever they face an economic crisis. This capitalist economy can't provide for the safety and education of our students and ensure safe working environments for a full complement of staff. We don't need it. If our schools were run not by the racist LAUSD but by the working class, who care for their children, then they would be safe and receive a truthful and pro-worker education.

The ruling class, bosses of the biggest banks and oil companies along with their politicians, will never give us that. They need an education system that teaches obedience and minimal skills so that working people will never question their system.

Only a communist society based on the needs of workers, not the profits of bosses, will have the interests of our students at heart. And that requires a communist revolution.✪

## Protest Trayvon's Murder: 'Tear down whole damn system!'

**WASHINGTON, DC, April 9**— "Racist murder — tear it down! The prison system — tear it down! The justice system — tear it down! THE WHOLE DAMN SYSTEM — tear it down!"

These chants echoed from Howard University students marching through the community to join over 300 anti-racist marchers protesting the racist murder of Trayvon Martin. It followed two weeks of organizing that began on March 24 when over 2,000 people mobilized in response to a social networking call for action from three Georgetown University students, assembling in front of the District Building that houses the corrupt City Council.

The speakers at that initial rally, while emotional and passionate, were generally disappointing politically. Five deejays from local radio shows spoke along with several ministers, representatives from other organizations and the corrupt chair of the City Council. None had a plan of action.

At the end of the rally, PLP members and friends spoke on their bullhorn and attracted about 200 people. We called on people to come to an organizing meeting at a local church the next day. We addressed revolution, communism and the link between the racist injustice system and capitalist exploitation. Many participants cheered, others nodded in agreement and 20 people signed up to be organizers.

Twenty-three people came to the organizing meeting the next day and planned a major community event for April 4, the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose murder sparked widespread rebellions throughout black communities across the U.S. These rebellions won jobs for black workers, but have been largely eroded ever since. Over 150 people came to April 4<sup>th</sup> event, marked by strong speeches and a commitment to action.

The following Saturday, April 7, over 300 people marched as part of the "million hoodies" march. A highlight was the feeder march of over 40 Howard University students who took to the streets in the community with bold chants and banners on their way to the main event. It was then that residents and passers-by cheered the students' "tear-it-down" chant and gave clenched-fist salutes to these young activists.

At all these events, PL'ers distributed hundreds of CHALLENGES and PLP flyers analyzing the murder of Trayvon as a product of capitalism's racism and its criminal Injustice system. PLP looks forward to bringing more of these new young organizers into the revolutionary movement.✪



## Worker-Student Alliance Mobilizes vs. Cuts, Union Hacks

Workers and students on our campus had not shared each other's problems in a long while, but on the Day of Action against cuts to public education this would change.

"Hi everybody," began one worker. "My co-workers and I are here to begin organizing with students. We face the same enemies. The university bosses who raise your tuition attack us too. Our contract is almost up and we have zero faith in the union's leadership. Worker-student organizing has succeeded in the past and it can work again."

Students enthusiastically and overwhelmingly supported the call to build tangible solidarity with rank-and-file workers. As anxiety gave way to excitement, an energetic exchange of ideas followed. The group discussed future organizing possibilities while bearing in mind workers' concerns about their union. They would meet again in a week.

Meanwhile, union officials monitored the group and reported the workers and to their higher-ups and fired the organizer who facilitated the initial meeting. Then workers were harassed for criticizing the union leaders.

A week later the Worker/Student Alliance met again. The union hacks crashed the meeting and began making excuses for their errors.

But the decision of union officials to target and fire organizers, along with their lack of transparency, and the resulting instability they've triggered are deliberate. These things are happening just months before contract negotiations begin but due to the officials' unwillingness to listen to workers, the union is in shambles. With the union leaders' lies exposed, the workers repeatedly asked them to leave and students supported the call.

Once the hacks left, the group discussed the struggles ahead. Cuts to public education may lead to layoffs and benefit reductions for workers as well as course cutbacks, tuition hikes and mounting debt for students. The cuts are racist as they will disproportionately harm working-class, immigrant, Latino and black communities. Students and workers on and off campuses are fighting these attacks but have a long way to go.

Recognizing that workers and students have collective power and common cause is only the beginning of a process that can possibly intensify on May Day 2012 by supporting the call for a general strike. Ultimately the struggle all students and workers face is against capitalism. Militant reformism cannot change the essence of capitalism, but struggles against the cuts, with communist leadership, can help educate workers

and students to fight for a different world, a communist world.

While the cuts ravage social services across the board, the ruling class allocates billions for imperialist wars and prisons. Confronting and fighting imperialism and the state is eventually where the fight against the cuts will have to focus if we're to build a new world. To fight the cuts we must fight imperialism.

Locally, it's likely the university will pit workers against students. The union bosses may even facilitate that process by settling a contract at the expense of student grievances. For them, "solidarity" means securing their bottom line — "The union's interest uber alles" (above everything else), even workers and students.

Furthermore, expect racism from the university whose service workers are approximately 70% Latino, and from the union who readily disregards worker input.

"What are we fighting for? Who are our targets? What do we hope to accomplish?" Group action will answer these questions. One thing, however, is already clear; this is an alliance of rank-and-file workers and students determined to remain autonomous from the union and its lies, limitations, opportunism, and weaknesses. Onward comrades!✪



## Afghan War A Grab for Oil and Mineral Wealth

Imperialist nations — notably the U.S., Russia, China, and members of the European Union — need two things when they go to war: a public pretext and a real reason. The one is never the same as the other. When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan shortly after 9/11, the pretext was to chase Al Qaeda out of the country and defeat the U.S.-created Taliban, who were shielding the formerly U.S.-backed Bin Laden and his followers.

The U.S. ruling class and its government tried to use this pretext to win over the working class, and particularly the soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. The rulers knew it would be much harder to sell the real reason for the war: to protect the projected TAPI gas pipeline originating in Turkmenistan and passing through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. All wars in the Middle East — large and small, direct or by proxy — represent efforts by rival imperialists to secure control over energy sources, mainly oil and natural gas.

More than a decade later, energy remains a big part of the reason for the capitalists' sustained war. Oil and gas will compel the U.S. to continue to occupy Afghanistan even after most combat personnel are removed to face more pressing wars for profit elsewhere. But since the 2001 invasion, the rulers have found another reason to stay, besides energy: Afghanistan is rich with all sorts of hard-to-find minerals.

Shortly after the invasion, geologists from the U.S. Geological Survey, a science organization under the Department of the Interior, were sent to Afghanistan to survey the area and determine where mineral reserves

were located and in what amounts. Under direct protection of armed Marines, these geologists have discovered fabulous stores of wealth scattered around the country, including of dozens of heavy metals and rare earth elements.

While few people outside the scientific community have heard of these minerals, they are critical components of lasers, airplanes, batteries, and computers, among many other technological products. Many of these minerals have no known substitutes. (See "Afghanistan's Buried Riches," *Scientific American*, October 2011.)

The pretext given by the U.S. government for its systematic search for these minerals is to "generate wealth to raise the people of Afghanistan out of poverty and reduce their need to produce opium, the source of heroin." (Afghanistan and Pakistan, together known as the Golden Crescent, produce more opium/heroin than all the countries of the so-called Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia.)

In reality, however, the people who live in regions rich in natural resources will be sacrificed by the millions as rival imperialists fight to control this wealth. To supplement their guns and bombs, the capitalists buy off and corrupt local rulers at the expense of these nations' workers.

Until workers of all nations unite to cast off our imperialist oppressors and the capitalist system that spawns this murderous rivalry, this cycle of death and misery will continue. The Progressive Labor Party alone has the potential to forge such unity among the world's workers and put an end to capitalism's deadly rule. ☪

## Spain General Strike: Protesters Attack Storm Trooper Cops



**BARCELONA, SPAIN, March 31** — This week, thousands of workers and youth squared off against a mass of cops in the center of this city during a nation-wide general strike protesting austerity measures that is impoverishing millions. The general unemployment rate is 25%; for youth it's 50%.

Demonstrators dragged dumpsters into the middle of main avenues and set them on fire to block police vehicles from passing. They threw cans, bottles and debris at the cops, the elite Mossos D'Esquadra, who were dressed like storm troopers with large black helmets and visors, all black clothes with no identification.

The Mossos, carrying batons, shot tear gas and rubber bullets at the protesters. The streets were filled with gas and smoke from the tear gas and burning dumpsters. The cops used armored vans to attempt to push the dumpsters to the side to enable police cars to pass. When eight police vans fled the scene, the crowd cheered.

Workers in Spain are suffering from the same worldwide capitalist economic crisis afflicting their brothers and sisters across Europe — declining wages and pensions, mass unemployment and cuts in benefits. The bosses' government is trying to shift the burden of the crisis onto workers' backs in an attempt to maintain profits. Only destroying that capitalist system will bring any relief to the working class that creates these profits sucked out of their labors. ☪

## France: Election Rivals Agree: Defend Bosses, Attack Workers

**PARIS, April 6** — Hunger, poverty and unemployment are the lot of millions in France — and the upcoming presidential elections won't change a damn thing.

According to an April 3 opinion poll, Socialist candidate François Hollande will beat right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy in the second round of presidential elections on May 6 by a 54% to 46% vote.

On April 4, Hollande announced that in his first 50 days in office he would: freeze gas prices for three months, allow people who had worked continually for 41 years to retire at age 60 and raise the back-to-school allowance by 25%.

Over the summer, he pledges to put a surtax on banks and oil companies, a 75% tax rate for incomes over 1 million euros (US\$1.3 million) and reinstate the inheritance tax on big fortunes.

And in the fall he promises measures to stop profit-boosting through layoffs and downsizing, and to introduce worker participation on big-company boards of directors, rent control and to create 150,000 jobs.

Sound too good to be true? It is!

Hollande simultaneously announced that: "We'll need all forces for the country's recovery. That's why, the day after the presidential election, I'll meet with the top 40 companies on the Paris stock exchange, even if many of their directors didn't vote for me. I'll tell them: 'You're the spearhead of the French economy. We need you, and you need the government. We have to take up the challenge of France's recovery together.'"

That means the Socialists will run France with and for the capitalists, as they have always done. Hollande will take orders from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development



(OECD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In a November 28 report, the OECD called for a third austerity plan to cut 8 billion euros (US\$10.5 billion) from the government budget, on top of preceding plans which cut 19 billion (US\$25 billion).

Conservative French journalist Anne-Elisabeth Moutet told BBC Radio 4 that Hollande "will have to have sort of more wide-ranging cuts. Half the people in his immediate entourage already acknowledge this. They will not say this in public, but his economic policy is not going to be very different from Sarkozy."

On April 10, 2010, the IMF reported that past "successful" budgetary adjustments have taken seven years on average. It wants the current austerity programs to continue at least that long.

So the Socialists are only going to worsen conditions for the working class, the hungry and the jobless, a racist move since a disproportionate number are of Arab or African origin. Considering who the Socialists are, that's no surprise. In his 2010 doctoral thesis on the party, Socialist Party analyst Thierry Barboni indicated that:

• In 2000, 88% of the members on the party's National Council were elected officials.

Not one member was a worker. Thirty-four percent were executives and academics, 36% worked in intermediate occupations (such as health care professionals) and 12% were top civil servants;

• The party organization in the 10th arrondissement of Paris reflected the party membership generally: in 2006, 69% were middle-ranking and top executives;

• He who pays the piper calls the tune. In 2006, 25% of party finances came from dues paid by elected officials, and 38% from state financing controlled by the central party apparatus.

It doesn't matter who's elected, Sarkozy or Hollande. Either way, another austerity plan is in the works. Conditions will worsen for:

• The 8.2 million people (13.5% of the population) living below the poverty line, on less than 950 euros (US\$1,244) a month. (French statistical bureau report, 3/2012);

• The 4.9 million jobless (17.3% of the working population) (Unemployment office report, March 2012);

• The 3.7 to 7.1 million people (6.0% to 11.5% of the population) who are malnourished, of whom 10% have symptoms of scurvy, 25% suffer from hypertension, and 56% are overweight or obese. (Brest symposium, 12/2007)

Here in France, and around the world, dreams of voting to reform capitalism are exactly that — dreams. The only way to eliminate the poverty, hunger and unemployment caused by capitalism is to organize a revolutionary communist party to overthrow it. ☪

# LETTERS



We encourage all CHALLENGE readers to send in letters and articles about their experiences fighting the bosses worldwide.

## Afghan Women's Fight Rages On

I recently saw film footage of women, waving red flags, without head coverings, marching joyfully on the streets of Kabul. It was 1978. The People's Democratic Party, (PDPA) a Marxist party, had just taken power after decades of building an anti-capitalist movement to end poverty and exploitation and to bring workers' power to Afghanistan.

Today women have lost the rights they worked years to gain. The rise of violence against women has led to high suicide rates. In the last 30 years Afghanistan has become a battleground between super-powers. The country is devastated; violence, poverty and unemployment prevail. A combination of external forces and internal PDPA mistakes created this situation.

One glaring internal weakness was the PDPA became divided by the leadership's personal egotism which focused more on building a power base than on developing a communist ideology. The energy of thousands of dedicated comrades was wasted in this internal struggle.

When the party came to power certain corrupt leaders brought in their own supporters who were interested in personal gain, not building a communist society. They imprisoned and killed those who opposed them and under the banner of communism these leaders and their gangs alienated the unorganized masses, opening them to the anti-communist propaganda of the Afghan ruling class, the imperialists and Arab fundamentalists.

PLP, an international communist party, is learning from these past mistakes. PLP wants to build that party and link the fight of Afghan workers to their fellow workers worldwide. Join us.

*Afghan Red*

## International Solidarity Marks Minnesota Occupy March

On January 28, in international solidarity with our working-class brothers and sisters of Tahir Square and our fellow anti-capitalists in Athens, London, Paris and Rome, the Minnesota Occupiers held Occupy Space Day in Minneapolis. It was thrilling!

A contingent of 70 demonstrators marched through the Steven Square and Eliot Park downtown neighborhoods protesting income inequality and housing evictions. Minneapolis has one of the Midwest's highest eviction rates, after Chicago. Our demonstrators were men and women, black, white and bi-racial, union activists, workers and college students. While many were reformist in outlook, many others were anti-capitalists.

The Minneapolis cops harassed us initially but left before the march's main event. In Eliot Park where the march ended there was an anti-capitalist speech declaring international solidarity with our working-class brothers and sisters in Egypt and with other global protestors against racist, imperialist capitalism.

The speech was in front of an abandoned church that Hennepin County declared county property. An unused church could be used as a workers' cultural community center. However, the county bosses want to hold onto it rather than give it to workers, so we took it!

One speaker declared, "We take this property in the name of the Minneapolis oppressed!" The doors were forced open and we had a party! We held it until the cops forced us to clear out or be arrested. We all left together, orderly and disciplined.

Despite that outcome it was a small victory because workers are slowly learning we don't have to take oppression, that we can collectively fight back. Workers took all the CHALLENGES I had. Personally the march and occupation made me think of the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1968 general strike in France.

This is a great time to be alive because the PLP will show millions of workers globally the revolutionary path to communism!

*Minnesota Red*

## Can't 'Wait and See' While Bosses Close Hospital

Over one thousand workers flocked to the auditorium at Downstate Hospital, so many that two



## NEW YORK CITY, April 10 — Trayvon Martin Protest

more rooms had to be opened up to accommodate several hundred more via teleconference. The administration had finally called a town hall meeting to talk about the proposed closing of the hospital, moving beds to the newly acquired Long Island College Hospital (LICH). Never in memory had so many of the Downstate community gathered for one event.

While nothing definite was announced regarding the closing or layoffs, the bosses proceeded to outline a grim economic situation for the hospitals' Medicaid cuts, Medicare raids on the hospital, (auditing records and taking back funds paid for care provided years ago), low patient census (something plaguing all hospitals in the city), and the "high cost of labor." Earlier in the week Downstate President LaRosa had fired off an e-mail announcing a hiring freeze, rumors about massive layoffs are rampant. The bosses angered workers by using this as a forum to ask us to sacrifice, work harder and "fill beds" in the hospital.

Three bosses, LaRosa, CEO Carey and CFO Litznitzer, who make hundreds of thousands per year each, said that one of the problems the hospital faces is a workforce that has pay and benefits that are too expensive! When they acquired LICH they created a private company called Staffco to employ the workers there, making sure to maintain their lower level of benefits.

LaRosa said the administration wants to keep both hospitals open. But he also said they have many contingency plans. While he did not say this, one plan attractive to them is moving services to LICH, effectively privatizing the workforce at a much lower level of benefits. Also he claims that a \$140-million bequest was used to upgrade LICH plant (though those who work there deny this). LICH is a 500-bed hospital, but only 250 beds are open. As one worker said in the meeting, the average annual salary in Downstate's neighborhood is \$34,000 while the average salary in LICH's neighborhood is \$94,000.

Our response to these attacks cannot be "Wait and see." We can't let them pit Downstate workers against LICH workers. The bosses kept saying we are not two institutions, we are one. Well we need to demand of our unions CSEA, PEF, UUP, NYSNA and 1199 that workers at Downstate and LICH be united as one to fight the bosses' attack on us and our patients.

We need to build a Downstate/LICH contingent at PLP's May Day march through Flatbush on April 28th to build a movement that will exchange health care for profit for a communist system run by workers for workers.

*SUNY worker*

*P.S. There was an error in last issue's article about Downstate. The unions did not endorse Cuomo in the last election.*

## Ex-prisoners Picture A Communist System

Recently I attended a conference on the effects of mass incarceration in the U.S., something receiving great attention in liberal circles since the publication of Michelle Alexander's book, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblind-

ness."

Present were people recently released from prison and were part of a rehabilitation program, community residents, organizers from churches and prisoner-support groups and representatives from drug-reform NGOs.

We watched a film, "Voices of Abolition," narrated primarily by Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore of Critical Resistance, an anti-prison organization that "seeks to abolish the Prison-Industrial-Complex" (<http://criticalresistance.org>). Their analysis of the role of drugs in imprisoning large numbers of black and Latino workers indicted capitalism, but although they did discuss eliminating prisons, they failed to mention getting rid of capitalism!

The film featured one prisoner re-entry program — A New Way of Life — begun by Susan Burton, an ex-prisoner herself, who purchased a house and made it a home for women just leaving prison. She's organized several of these homes in Southern California.

In a workshop with women from one such home, residents were asked to draw large pictures of the kind of community they wanted to live in. They drew pictures of houses, gardens, schools, parks, playgrounds, health care centers, all planned as a community, but not one picture of someone making it rich, opening a business, becoming a movie star, or let alone going off to fight a war against workers in other countries. These women drew pictures of what communities under communism would look like!

I think CHALLENGE should include more articles depicting the structure of communist society. Yes, we must destroy capitalism, but we must also show how a communist society will address the needs of the working class.

*In struggle, West Coast Comrade*

## How to Mobilize for May Day

A few comrades have been working in a non-profit group in our city for the past six years. The contradiction between the reformist Democratic Party politics of the non-profit and the revolutionary communist politics of the PLP and CHALLENGE is becoming clearer to our friends as we continue to participate in various events and campaigns together.

Our study group has grown to between 10 and 15 consistent participants. Our distribution of hand-to-hand CHALLENGES and networks of friends has grown to 85 per issue. When we discuss and debate the Party's ideas, our friends have the opportunity to observe how PLP relates to the working class and in the class struggle. They are beginning to understand how imperialist rivalry works and the inevitability of war as it relates to workers worldwide. Our study group's goal this year is to mobilize 80 to 100 workers and their families for PLP's May Day march and event.

PL'ers always insist that the working class must rely on itself, led by politically conscious workers who organize power from below. We must not rely on the politicians and their press who always serve

**continued on page 7**



# LETTERS

continued from page 6

the needs of the capitalists. PL'ers fight to put this idea into practice in the fight against attacks on workers on the job, unemployment, budget cuts and racism. Progress is slow, but we are growing, determined and committed.

A comrade

## Union Retirees Lead in Honoring Trayvon Martin

The March 27 delegates' assembly meeting of AFSCME's District Council 37 was discussing its normal business. As a non-voting retiree delegate, I asked for a moment of silence for Trayvon Martin. The reaction of the other delegates was stunned approval. The leadership must have been embarrassed because I pointed out it was unusual for such a call to be made from a delegate rather than one of its leaders.

After the moment of silence, I said the retiree executive board had voted to send a letter to Trayvon's parents expressing our sympathy and outrage at their loss. I urged the leadership of the 110,000 members of DC 37 to do likewise and each of the other 56 locals of this council to also take action. I closed by saying I was sick of the numbers of young black men who have been murdered under similar circumstances.

After I spoke, I was approached by many other delegates and who thanked me (an older white male) for speaking out.

Red Retiree

## Fascistic Movies: Thatcher to Shakespeare to Hoover

I want to call people's attention to the fascist movies that the bosses have been pushing. The "Iron Lady," which uses the considerable talents of Meryl Streep to present Margaret "Murderer" Thatcher as a hero. She is shown crushing the miners' strike, destroying the social network, and starting wars to prevent an uprising. We are supposed to feel sorry for her because she is suffering from dementia. But in the end, the net effect is to feel sorry for her more than the people whose lives she destroyed.

Another fascist movie is "Coriolanus," based on a Shakespeare play, in his most reactionary mode. Again, pretending to be a critique of the strong macho warrior, it ends up showing his call for dictatorship in ancient Rome. The masses are shown as gullible fools easily manipulated by the Peoples Tribunes who are shown as corrupt. In the end, his fascist approach is shown to be correct. Though he is brutally killed, his vicious anti-people ideas still live.

Finally, there is J. Edgar Hoover, starring Matt Damon. Again a ruthless fascist evildoer is presented in a sympathetic light, reflecting KKKlnt Eastwood's ideology that even though the law may be used to do injustice, you can't have democracy without it. Hoover's role in allowing the beating and killing of civil rights workers, his vicious framing of members of the Communist Party, his collaboration with the Mafia, and his destruction of the Black Panther Party are all swept under the rug.

And in the opening scene, the movie perpetuates the lie that Bolsheviks were responsible for bombings and destruction of property.

As in "The Iron Lady," fascist repression is presented as the best response to bank robbers, kid-

nappers, and terrorists. Their view is that fascism is the best alternative to anarchy that will emerge if the revolutionary communists move to organize the masses. But as PLP gets bigger with million of workers answering the call of the red flag during this time of racist imperialist anarchy, all the Iron Ladies, Coriolani, or FBI agents won't be able to stop us.

Red Movie Buff

## Occupiers Shout Down Racist Governor

Occupy American University (AU) took on racist Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona and won! Brewer recently signed into law SB1070, a racist piece of legislation legalizing racial profiling against anyone who may appear to "look" illegal by the police. On February 24, students walking home from their evening classes were supported by forty peers chanting, "Racist, sexist, anti-gay! Jan Brewer go away!"

When the College Republicans invited Brewer to speak on campus, Occupy AU responded by organizing around the question "Do I look illegal to you?" They spilled out of the main building after they crashed Jan Brewer's speech on "illegal immigration." As the protest continued just outside of where the governor was speaking, students climbed to the roof of the building and hung a banner as allies told stories about the hardships immigrant workers struggle with in the U.S.

Chris, a student at AU, reflected on the success of the evening saying that many of his peers "have been pacified and tricked into thinking everyone has equal access to free speech." Chris was ecstatic because things were beginning to change on campus. "We engaged Jan Brewer and won," he continued. "For the first time ever, the people shouted down Jan Brewer's expression-oppression."

AU Occupier

## RED EYE ON THE NEWS

Below are excerpts from mainstream newspapers that may be of use for our readers. Abbreviations: NYT=New York Times, GW=Guardian Weekly, LAT=Los Angeles Times

### Dumping nuclear poison on Navajos

**NYT, 4/1** — The abandoned mine here, about 60 miles east of the Grand Canyon, joins the list of hundreds of such sites identified across the 27,000 square miles of Navajo territory in Arizona, Utah and New Mexico that are the legacy of shoddy mining practices and federal neglect. From the 1940s through the 1980s, the mines supplied critical materials to the nation's nuclear weapons program.

For years, unsuspecting Navajos inhaled radioactive dust and drank contaminated well water. Many of them became sick with cancer and other diseases....

Two days of exposure at the Cameron site would expose a person to more external radiation than the Nuclear Regulatory Commission considers safe for an entire year....

There are still no warning signs or fencing around the secluded and decaying site....The old mine has become a sort of toxic playground.

"If the level of radioactivity were found in a middle-class suburb, the response would be immediate and aggressive," said an expert on uranium. "The site is remote, but there are obviously people spending time on it. Don't they deserve some concern?"....Cattle are grazing there. And people are eating those livestock....

For some Navajos, the uranium contamination is all of a place with their fraught relations with the federal government.

### Immigrants' detention: nightmare

**NYT, 3/28** — Immigrant detention is one of the fastest-growing forms of incarceration in the United States. There are more than 30,000 men, women and children in immigrant custody, spread throughout jails as well as detention centers, some of which are outsourced to private companies....

The new ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] guidelines...do not offer...alternatives to jail-like detention, even for unaccompanied minors, the elderly, the disabled or pregnant women....

Clearly these new standards are far from luxu-

rious....More than 110 people...have died in immigration custody since 2003....

In May 2010, the Supreme Court ruled...that public health officials could not be held liable for failing to provide medical care to detainees....This ruling further reduced the accountability for mistreatment.

### Liberal capitalism helps fascists

**GW, 3/29** — The Obama administration intends to resume funding for Egypt's military, despite...objections from human rights and democracy advocates....

### China expects to be world leader

**NYT, 4/3** — ...Mr. Wang...is dean of Peking University's School of International Studies...[and] has wide access to senior American policy makers, making him an unusual repository of information about the thinking in both countries....

Mr. Wang writes that the Chinese leadership, backed by the domestic news media and the education system, believes that China's turn in the world has arrived, and that it is the United States that is "on the wrong side of history." The period of "keeping a low profile," a dictum coined by Deng Xiaoping in 1989, and continued until now by the departing president, Hu Jintao, is over," Mr. Wang warns.

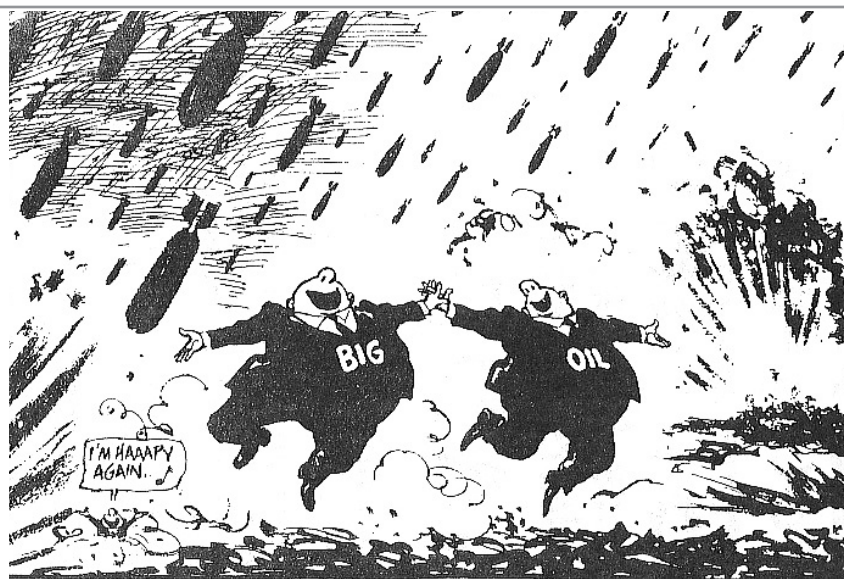
"It is now question of how many years, rather than how many decades, before China replaces the United States as the largest economy in the world...."

There was an increasing belief on both sides that the two countries would be "antagonistic in 15 years."

That would mean major military expenditures by both countries to deter each other, and pushing other countries to take sides. "The worst case scenario is that this could lead to actual armed conflict...."

### Europe 'safety net' fails workers

**NYT, 4/2** — Europe's long-running...crisis...is pushing a rising tide of workers into precarious straits in France and across the European Union.



Today, hundreds of thousands of people are living in campgrounds, vehicles and cheap hotel rooms. Millions more are sharing space with relatives, unable to afford the basic costs of living.

These people are the extreme edge of Europe's working poor, a growing slice of the population that is slipping through Europe's long-vaunted social safety net....

Economists, European officials and social watchdog groups are warning that the situation is set to worsen....The population of working poor will explode....It is rising even in more prosperous nations like France and Germany.

"France is a rich country...But the working poor are living in the same condition as in the 19th century. They can't pay for heating, they can't pay for their children's clothes, they are sometimes living five people in a nine-square meter apartment — here in France!"

### US world police — a corrupt force

**GW, 3/23** — To the editor:...Let's look at the track record. OK, so the US and the rest of the west have come a cropper in Iraq and (it now seems) Libya, but maybe they did better somewhere else?

Surely the evidence is desperately thin....There is plenty of evidence from Latin America alone of the US intervening against democratically elected movements that just happen to threaten its interests....Equally we only have to look at Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, not to mention Israel in the occupied territories, for evidence of abusive regimes receiving explicit military support....

We ought...to question the US's self-declared role as the world's policeman....

MORE ITEMS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PLP.ORG



# Hunger Games Spawns Racist Reaction

The *Hunger Games* film not only has been wildly popular but has also caused a racial controversy, possibly related to the casting of a small number of black actors. The main character, Katniss, is described as having dark hair and grey eyes, but was played by blonde, blue-eyed Jennifer Lawrence with her hair dyed brown. However, the few black characters in the movie have been attacked in racist comments that surfaced on social networks such as Twitter and Tumblr.

The fury felt by some fans of the books involves two of the tributes, who conquer readers' hearts, represented in the film by a black 13-year-old actress from California, Amandla Stenberg and Nigerian born Dayo Okeniyi. Some of the hateful comments filling the internet were: "Kkcall me racist but when I found out Rue was black her death wasn't as sad." "Awkward moment when Rue is some black girl and not the little blonde innocent girl you picture."

It was shocking that most of these comments came from teenagers, who apparently deleted their accounts when other fans began exposing them. The author of the books, Suzanne Collins, clearly described the character: "a twelve-year-old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes..." While she reminds Katniss of her blonde little sister, Prim, she clearly states it is her size and personality that resemble Prim, not her skin color.

All this shows how racism saturates this society, so much so that young adults feel compelled to write hateful comments about imaginary characters. This relates to an article posted on a website about gossip and culture aimed at women titled, "I see White People: Hunger Games and a Brief History of Cultural White-washing." The writer says the system brainwashes us with racist thoughts, to the point of influencing our imagination so that many people assume if characters aren't described explicitly they must be white.

The media pushes racism so much so that most "black movies" are advertised in black neighborhoods and they tend to be produced by people like Tyler Perry who only casts black people in stereotypical situations. Popular sitcoms like *Friends* or *Seinfeld* only portrayed white characters; non-white people appeared very rarely, merely to convey the idea that, "hey, we're not racists." Black and Latino actors in films appear in far fewer numbers, and many times are cast as criminals. Asians are portrayed much of the time in stereotypical martial arts roles.

A *New Yorker* article (3/30 reports on a Canadian man who followed all these racist remarks on the internet and composed his own page displaying all of them, simply because he was so astonished and disappointed at the wrong attention the *Hunger Games* film was receiving and decided to shame the racists who posted these comments.

The *New Yorker* writer says that what's "more important, and no doubt disturbing [is what the] ignorant tweets say about a certain generation's failure of imagination." The writer doesn't seem to understand how racism goes hand-in-hand with this racist system.

She uses the analogy of "a few bad apples," when clearly these teens are displaying what this system teaches them. The writer commented on the second quotation above: "The

phrases 'some black girl' and 'little blonde innocent girl' are ringing in my head, as are thoughts of heroes in our imaginations who are white until proven otherwise [Superman, Spiderman and other popular super-heroes], a variation on the principle of innocent until proven guilty that, for so many minorities, is routinely upended."

The creator of the page posted this quote saying, "Remember that word innocent? This is why Trayvon Martin is dead." He sees how, in this society, white is tied to innocence and his example of Trayvon is perfect, as he was shot for being a young black male in a predominantly white neighborhood.

We must understand that one step isn't so far from the other and must expose any kind of racism, whether in the form of jokes or ignorant comments. We have to educate people on how capitalism uses racism as a tool to divide us. We need to win people to see past skin color and understand that we are all the same; we are all part of the working class. Only united will we create a communist society that eliminates ethnicity and doesn't judge us by our color.✪

## MAY DAY 2012 March with PLP

April 28:

**Chicago: Union Park (Lake and Ashland) at 12 PM**

**New York: Flatbush and Nostrand in Brooklyn at 11 AM**

May 1:

**LA: Olympic and Broad at 12 PM**

**Oakland: Fruitvale Bart Station at 3 PM**

## Catching Fire: Depicts Oppression but Avoids Solution

*Second part of the Hunger Games book review*

In *Catching Fire*, the second book of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, Suzanne Collins expands her criticism of capitalism and hints at more collective solutions to the problems faced by workers.

As our heroine, Katniss tours the Districts after the *Hunger Games* end, the government expects her to play the role of a star-crossed lover. However, Katniss discovers signs of both increasing fascism and increasing rebellion. While her District suffers extreme poverty, starvation and dangerous working conditions in the mines, others are policed by terrorizing Peacekeepers who shoot first and ask questions later. Katniss witnesses this first hand in the agricultural District 11, where workers are mainly black and have begun to defy the Capitol.

Frightened by what she has seen, Katniss wants to run away to the wilderness. She is surprised to discover that they are inspired and want to stay and fight. Katniss shares their rebellious spirit but is afraid to risk the lives of her friends, sister and mother.

Before Katniss can put a plan in place, Panem's rulers organize a new special *Hunger Games* event, pitting former winners against each other to provide an excuse to kill off Katniss and other possible symbols of fight-back. Katniss plans to sacrifice her life in the "games" to protect her friend Peeta who she believes will be a more eloquent voice of the rebellion. Other tributes act more collectively, pulling Katniss into an alliance that is more successful than she and Peeta could be alone. By the end of the games, Katniss has begun to realize that the rebellion is more organized and well-developed than she had guessed and that she is expected to be a part of it.

*Catching Fire* shows even more of the horrors of the fascist society of its world than *Hunger Games* did. It also hints at the power of the collective and the possibility of

a workers' revolution. Its parallels to the current capitalist crises are so clear that all the mainstream reviewers comment on them. But Suzanne Collins is certainly not a communist, and her books do not offer a communist interpretation of our world.

The fantasy genre allows the books to distance themselves from the real problems of today. Although there are clear parallels, it is possible to read the books as imaginings about the future, not a real commentary on today. There is almost no analysis of why the government of Panem is so cruel; it is just taken as a given.

While there is some collective and rebellious activity in *Catching Fire*, the reader sees everything from Katniss's perspective and Katniss has a very limited view. She herself is never really won to work collectively except when it benefits her and those she loves. Her instinct is always to escape or to defend her loved ones, not to organize or fight the system. Others try to change her mind, but mostly the rebellions go on around her, supposedly inspired by her actions in the first book, but never letting her in on plans. She is seen as somehow too emotional or independent to participate in a collective plan.

If PLP were leading the rebellion against Panem, she would not be an unwitting symbol but would be learning to analyze the political situation and lead class struggle.

It's no accident that these books do not provide a communist solution. They would not be taught in hundreds of schools or be made into blockbuster movies if they did. Their criticism of fascism does resonate with many workers, which makes them important for us to read and discuss. As communists, we must teach young fans of the books the lessons the books do not touch: the laws of capitalism and the need for collective struggle and revolution.✪

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