

# CHALLENGE



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## Thousands Strike vs. Israeli Apartheid

**TEL-AVIV, January 5** —

Fifteen thousand African refugees, mostly working class, demonstrated in central Tel-Aviv against their racist treatment by the Israeli government. This climaxed a week-long strike of 30,000 by most African refugees and immigrants in Israel — mostly in restaurants, cleaning and housekeeping — protesting their maltreatment by the capitalist regime. They are also demanding an end to their deportation to the “Open Residential Facility” — actually imprisoned in barbed wire detention centers with three roll-calls a day in the Negev desert.

However, among Jewish workers in the southern Tel-Aviv slums, this demonstration drew mixed feelings and even hostility. Why? Because the Israeli bosses’ regime, with a hand in the crisis and in genocide in East Africa, has even turned the arrival of a handful of refugees — 60,000 in a country of eight million, less than 0.5 percent of the population — into a humanitarian crisis. In working-class slums around the country, particularly in Tel-Aviv, the long-time residents and refugees both suffer. Haaretz newspaper (6/25) reported that Israel is the world’s sixth largest exporter of weapons, and traded \$2.4 billion worth of instruments of death in 2012 alone. All this is subsidized by the Jewish and Arab workers’ tax money, as well as that of U.S. workers’ taxes. Meanwhile, a handful of well-connected businessmen enjoy its fruits.

Among the happy customers of this industry of death is Isaias Afwerki, Eritrea’s tyrant, who buys weapons at discount prices from the Israeli bosses’ government. This dictator has enacted a mandatory “Civil Service” in his country, sometimes even for decades, which is nothing but slavery, all for the profits of the ruling clique surrounding the tyrant. Those who try to escape this “service” to preserve their freedom risk imprisonment, torture or even death. Most Eritrean refugees in Israel have escaped from the claws of this dictator.



Similarly, the Israeli regime, with U.S. backing, sells weapons to the belligerents in the Sudanese civil war, in which hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed, and millions more rendered homeless since 2003.

So the Israeli government has a hand in forcing Africans to flee their homes and risk crossing the Egyptian border (facing death from Egyptian soldiers) to reach Israel. As long as the Eritrean dictator continues to oppress workers there, if refugees return to their home country many will be killed, most likely by Israeli weapons.

Tens of thousands of refugees from East Africa have reached Israel’s southern border. The Israeli government quickly dumped them in the slums of southern Tel-Aviv, without a work permit and without any aid. Adding tens of thousands of unemployed refugees, who don’t know the local language, to already impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods is a recipe for humanitarian disaster. And, indeed, crime rates have risen sharply, providing city hall with even more excuses to not invest in maintenance in the slums. All of this was perpetrated by the Israeli ruling class and its govern-

ment.

The rich profit in three ways. First, a group of tens of thousands of workers without work permits, who face hostility from their environment, are a huge reserve army of cheap labor for Israeli bosses. They’re unprotected by Israel’s already flimsy labor regulations and work for very long hours at below the minimum wage with no social benefits — all for the super-profits of their bosses.

Second, the humanitarian disaster in the slum neighborhoods, with additional racist filth spread by the regime, turns the slums’ long-term residents against the refugees, whom they now blame, in many cases, for the situation there. This is divide-and-conquer, pure and simple. It pushes Jewish workers to blame their African sisters and brothers for their own misery rather than blaming the real culprit, the regime and the ruling class.

Third, because slum life is intolerable, the government can now pretend to “solve” this problem by imprisoning people for a year without trial when their only

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## 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. While capitalism needs unemployment, communism needs everyone to contribute and 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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### WHO WRITES FOR CHALLENGE?

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.

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## Editorial

# Workers of the World, Unite vs. the Warmakers!

The world's imperialist powers are debating the best way to prepare for the next potential world war—a conflict that would no doubt exceed the wholesale killing of the working class in World War I (50 million) and World War II (100 million). Will 2014 prove a repeat of 1914, the first eruption of global war? Can the U.S. uphold its military guarantees and forge credible coalitions, or will it forsake its allies as imperialist rivalries sharpen?

These are the big questions coming out of the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where leading capitalists hold their annual convention. U.S. and U.S.-leaning billionaires and their lackey politicians, think tankers, and media stars assemble at the luxurious resort to ponder the future. Their earnest deliberations, of course, are more focused on their profits than the millions of workers' lives they are all too willing to put at risk. This year's main sponsors at Davos included imperialist heavyweights JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as British and French oil giants BP and Total. The theme was especially ominous: "Reshaping the World."

But the bosses' vision is limited by their class outlook. Their "reshaping" ignores the role to be played by the international working class. In the same way, their analysis of World War I failed to account for the outbreak of the 1917 communist revolution that established workers' power in what became the Soviet Union. (Caught short, seventeen capitalist countries tried to crush the Soviet revolution with an eight-year invasion. They failed.) Nor, a generation later, did the bosses anticipate the communist seizure of power in China that was sparked by World War II.

Both of these revolutions transformed the lives of hundreds of millions of workers. Both inspired more billions of workers worldwide. Unfortunately, they were also the first communist-led revolutions and made serious political errors. Under the guise of socialism, the Soviet Union and China eventually reverted to capitalism. Both societies had retained too much of the baggage of capitalism, notably a wage system that created inequalities between different groups of people.

### Two World Wars — Two Communist Revolutions

But for the international working class, the positive lessons of history remain clear. Two world wars generated two communist revolutions. As today's leading imperialists prepare to fight it out for profits, markets, energy and cheap labor to exploit, our class must organize itself for the next imperialist world war. We must prepare for a successful communist revolution that will have learned from previous mistakes.

In particular, we must win workers to see the necessity to abolish capitalism's wage system. We must rely on the collective wisdom of our class to distribute the fruits of social production according to the communist principle: "From each according to commitment, to each according to need." No more bosses, no more profits, no more racism, no more sexism. And no more imperialist-driven wars.

For U.S. rulers to uphold their military guarantees, they must deal with U.S. workers who stand in growing resistance to a draft. Workers are disgusted with the decade-long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the millions of casualties there. They are fed up as they see hundreds of thousands of GIs return home without limbs, emotionally broken or suicidal. In addition, economic crises are afflicting tens of millions, driving masses out of their homes and into poverty and raging unemployment. Our youth cannot find their first jobs. Aging workers are suffering permanent joblessness.

These conditions fall mostly on black, Latino and Asian workers and youth because of the racism intrinsic to capitalism. Without racism, and the divisions and super-exploitation that stem from it, the rulers' profit system could not sustain itself. This is why we're seeing the bosses train their mad-dog police on these targeted groups.

The Progressive Labor Party has a job to do — to lead workers to the understanding that the bosses' oppression will end only when its source — the profit system — is destroyed. Communist revolution can emerge from still another global imperialist war, but it won't happen spontaneously. We must build PLP into a mass party in the two dozen countries in which we are now organizing.

Meanwhile, the bosses' think-tankers plod their path towards wider wars. One insightful insider at Davos was leading economist Nouriel Roubini, who had predicted the mortgage bubble and the bosses' latest economic crisis two years before it happened, in 2006. He has toiled for the boss-

### CFR Boss, Bent on Rebuilding Homeland for War, Buys Strategic Railroad

By pushing fracking and horizontal drilling techniques to the limit, U.S. oil and natural gas bosses have indeed put energy extraction on the wartime footing Haass requires [see editorial]. But the transport of this lifeblood of capitalist industry and its war machine lags behind the capitalists' needs. They must depend increasingly on railroads, 19th century infrastructure being further weakened by late-20th century neglect.

Spectacular crashes of trains carrying North Dakota crude oil, including one in July that incinerated 47 people in Lac Megantic, Quebec, are becoming commonplace. To rectify this problem, arch-imperialist Haass and his capitalist allies are seizing direct control. The tellingly named New York-based Fortress Investment Group, where Haass is a major owner and director, just bought the bankrupt Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway. This is the line whose unmanned train full of Dakota crude wiped out Lac Megantic. It feeds North America's only East Coast refinery north of New Jersey in St. John, New Brunswick. Haass's motive is not to make amends to the families of the 47 working-class victims. His interest lies only in restoring the strategic shipments the deaths so inconveniently curtailed.

es' International Monetary Fund, the Rockefeller-led Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the U.S. government. Roubini tweeted, "Many speakers compare 2014 to 1914, when WWI broke out and no one expected it. A black swan in the form of a war between China and Japan?" Later that day, January 23, he noted, "Echoes of 1914: backlash against globalization, gilded age of inequality, rising geopolitical tensions, ignoring tail risks."

In economist lingo, "black swan" and "tail risk" mean surprise events with catastrophic consequences.

### World War I A Product of Imperialist Rivalry

But while noting the growing opposition to the effects of globalization (the bosses' code word for imperialism) and inequality, Roubini ignores the fact that World War I was no surprise. Capitalist historians cite the surprise assassination of the Archduke of Austria as the war's trigger in an effort to hide its underlying causes. In fact, the leading imperialist countries were already fighting for control of colonies in Africa and Asia with naval blockades and military conscription to build up their armies. For a parallel, one need look no further than the current battles for control in Africa. French troops are descending on that country's former colonies as the U.S. and China vie for control of oil, gas and vital minerals on the same continent. Can global conflict be far behind?

Then there's the Far East. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, seemingly spoiling for a U.S.-backed military showdown with China, backs Roubini's grim assessment: "[He] has escalated the war of words, telling ... the Davos conference ... that the increasing tensions between China and Japan were similar to the competition between Germany and Britain before World War I... [Abe] then went on to argue that China's annual double-digit increase in military expenditures was a major source of instability in the Asia-Pacific region. Mr. Abe previously stoked controversy in December when he visited the Yasukuni Shrine, where Japanese war dead are commemorated, including 14 Class A war criminals" (New York Times, 1/24/14).

But while Abe hopes to goad the U.S., Japan's post-World War II protector, into supporting near-term (and possibly nuclear) war with their mutual Chinese foes, ill-prepared U.S. rulers aren't so quick on the trigger. Preempting Abe, CFR director Joseph Nye thinks the U.S. and its allies have more time to build up for a confrontation with China. "Whereas Germany in 1914 was pressing hard on Britain's heels (and had surpassed it in terms of industrial strength), the U.S. remains decades ahead of China in overall military, economic, and soft-power resources" (World Affairs, 1/13/14).

### Warmakers Desperate to Rally A Reluctant Working Class

Nye's procrastination meshes with CFR president Richard Haass's warning that U.S. policy makers need both time and urgency to rally the home front for a potential World War III. The publicity for Haass's new book *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* notes:

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# Enough is Enough! Workers' Armed Struggle in Michoacán

**MICHOACÁN, January 26** — Progressive Labor Party applauds the angry workers in Michoacán who have had enough of the drug cartels' violence and have picked up guns and fought back. In an inspiring example of working-class rage, many workers not only took up guns, not only attacked the criminal cartel but also attacked the police and federal agents.

This armed struggle marks the intensification of the conflict between the exploited and the exploiter. It also illustrates another contradiction: the dialectical concept of appearance vs. essence. It appears that this workers' uprising against the cartels is spontaneous and fully rooted within the working class. But in essence, there may be another cartel arming and directing this movement as well. There also may be opportunist elements within Mexico's ruling class helping them.

The workers are attacking a symptom of capitalism, not its cancer. Either way, the fact that many workers have turned to armed struggle to challenge the cartel brutally dispossessing them as well as the capitalist state apparatus is a very positive development — workers here are not lulled by pacifism and are willing to pick up arms to fight the bosses.

A major question is, where did these workers get their guns? They appear to be following Mao Tse-Tung's tenets of guerrilla warfare. A small group began with a few hunting rifles and shotguns. They then raided the police stations and some of the cartels' arms caches.

This is one way how PLP can arm itself, develop a Red Army and seize state power. However, our primary way is by organizing directly in the bosses' military, backed by a mass base in the working class.

The armed workers now have automatic weapons

and armored vehicles. Needless to say, much of the ruling class is worried about masses of armed workers taking power into their own hands and thereby setting an example to workers worldwide — from Cambodia, to Bangladesh, to France to the U.S. — armed struggle against capitalism!

PLP also recognizes that politics are primary. Though the armed workers have had enough — “Basta Ya!” (Enough is enough!) — they are not fighting to seize the means of production, institute the dictatorship of the proletariat and transform society through communist revolution. We must recognize the contradiction between the positive aspects of workers arming and organizing themselves against a ruthless oppressor and the fact that without destroying the systemic structures of capitalism, they wind up either simply putting a new boss in charge or preserving the social order that allows Mexico's capitalists to rule. In fact, the cartel they're deposing actually started as an armed reaction against exploitation!

We applaud the armed struggle, but we're critical of the lack of a political thrust alongside a populist reaction to the terrible exploitation and brutal violence that the cartels enact upon them. The armed workers also recognize that the Mexican police and agents, despite the millions that they receive in U.S. aid, are ineffectual in stopping the cartels.

The police, the agents, the bosses, the banking system, the Drug Enforcement Agency and a whole line of federal agents all make some money off the very lucrative drug trade. The poisoning of the working class reaps big money flowing into a lot of pockets.

A breaking scandal is exposing how U.S. rulers di-

rectly helped the Sinaloa Cartel. Another scandal, “Fast and Furious,” reveals how the U.S. directly supplied weapons to the cartels themselves.

PLP recognizes that the cartels are part of capitalism's exploitative apparatus because they divide and brutalize the working class and make vast profits for the bosses, either indirectly through money laundering or directly through kickbacks, bribes or outright gun sales that echo the British gun-running in Africa during slavery.

The vast majority of the armed workers appear to be those who were deported from the U.S. and are refusing to passively accept the burden of brutality that the workers in Michoacán have stoically accepted until now. This illustrates a consequence of the U.S. deporting so many workers into Mexico and destabilizing the extortion rackets on which the ruling classes of the U.S. and Mexico have been enriching themselves.

These armed and masked workers are not fighting for some religious ideology, but actually challenging elements of the state apparatus in order to improve conditions of workers in this life, here and now. This struggle will not end the tyranny of the cartels, since too many capitalists are enriching themselves from our class's addictions. It lacks a communist center, its politics and, most importantly, a Party to organize it and defend the working class's gains. That communist Party is PLP and it needs to be built in the furnace of the Michoacán uprising. The PLP, both in Mexico and worldwide, will continue to struggle to bring communist politics to this armed struggle. ☸

## Workers, Unite vs. the Warmakers

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*A rising China, climate change, terrorism, a nuclear Iran, a turbulent Middle East, and a reckless North Korea all present serious challenges. But U.S. national security depends even more on the United States addressing its burgeoning deficit and debt, crumbling infrastructure, second class schools, and outdated immigration system.*

The problem facing U.S. rulers is that their retrenchment from costly open warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, a calculated measure to help them prepare for wider global war, risks misinterpretation by key allies. Commenting on Davos, London's influential Financial Times (1/20/14) noted:

*The most important emerging theme in world politics is America's slow retreat from its role as global policeman. Some of America's closest partners now talk openly of a diminished U.S. global presence. Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister, recently gave a speech in which he said: “The United States gives the impression of no longer wanting to get drawn into crises.” As a result, he said, America's allies are increasingly factoring in their calculations ... the possibility that they will be left to their own devices in managing crises.*

### U.S. Rulers Direct Worldwide War Machine

Secretary of State John Kerry seized the Davos pulpit to fire back. There he tried to reassure the critical U.S. allies that are now uncertain about U.S. support and continued U.S. control of crucial Mideast oil:

*I must say, I'm perplexed by claims I occasionally hear that somehow America is disengaging from the world — this myth that America is pulling back, or giving up or standing down,” Kerry said. “In*

*fact, nothing could be further from the truth. “The most bewildering version of this disengagement myth is about a supposed U.S. retreat from the Middle East. You can't find another country, not one country, as proactively engaged, or that is partnering with so many Middle Eastern countries as constructively as we are, on so many high-stake fronts.*

Kerry said U.S. military engagement across the globe was “as broad and as deep as at any point in our history.” A recent article by whistleblower Nick Turse on the liberal TomDispatch website backs up Kerry's militarist promises. It reveals low-profile U.S. global war preparation despite the Iraqi and Afghan drawdowns:

*[I]n 2012 and 2013, U.S. Special Operations forces were likely deployed to — or training, advising, or operating with the personnel of — more than 100 foreign countries. And that's probably an undercount. In 2011, then-Special Operations Command spokesman Colonel Tim Nye told TomDispatch that Special Operations personnel were annually sent to 120 countries around the world. They were in, that is, about 60% of the nations on the planet.*

### Build Progressive Labor Party

How many workers are aware that military deployments cover more than 1,000 U.S. bases worldwide, particularly in oil-rich regions? The bosses are warning us that they are ready to send us into the most lethal wars in world history. In the meantime, they heap wage cuts, home foreclosures, racist attacks and permanent joblessness on our backs to pay for those wars. Our only answer must be to build the Progressive Labor Party into an organizing force for the international working class. Our only goal must be to enable communist revolution to emerge out of the ruling class's hellish war plans. ☸

## Thousands Strike vs. Israeli Apartheid



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“crime” is their skin color. This makes the government appear as “saviors” to many workers having been brainwashed by racist ideas. Racism like this serves only the rich and ravages the workers.

A solution to the neighborhoods' crisis would be to allow the refugees to hold legal full-time jobs, such as in agriculture, instead of dumping them in poor neighborhoods with no jobs. Even a tiny fraction of the tycoons' riches — all stolen from us, the workers — could rebuild the south Tel-Aviv slums in order to provide good housing and jobs for their residents. But this is unprofitable for the tycoons. They want all of us — regardless of skin color — as slaves to hate each other rather than to hate them.

All workers of all creeds must blame the real culprits, the racist capitalists and their servants in the government. Once the working class unites and seizes state power, we could manage the economy collectively in an egalitarian manner, so that everyone — regardless of skin color or their area of origin — will have decent, safe, dignified lives. This is the essence of the communism for which the Progressive Labor Party fights. ☸



# Workers Shafted by Boeing-Union-Gov't Sweetheart Deal

Seattle area workers have gotten two sharp lessons lately in the limits of reform and why only a revolution that dumps capitalism can make real change for the working class. In one week, a judge condemned SeaTac airport workers to poverty-wage slavery despite a referendum that passed a \$15 minimum wage law. And Boeing machinists found their boss and their International union leaders forcing a disastrous 10-year contract down their throats after they had rejected it in a 2-1 vote.

These two sharp attacks came on the heels of a feeling of victory by many workers, as the town of SeaTac, home of the airport, voted for a \$15 minimum wage — highest in the U.S., defeating a harsh campaign by some of the country's biggest corporations, first to keep the issue off the ballot and then to defeat it. When neither worked, they got a judge to declare that the town law didn't apply to businesses on the airport or Port of Seattle property — which means most of the jobs in SeaTac.

The contract overwhelmingly rejected by the Boeing workers, members of machinists' Local 751 International Association of Machinists (IAM), followed Boeing's long-term plan to rid itself of unions and decent wages and benefits. The contract would liquidate their pensions and destroy their wages. No sooner had the machinists voted down the sellout contract than Boeing began plotting with the top leadership of the union to ram the contract down their throats anyway.

Walking away from renewed contract negotiations, Boeing met with top union officials to plot a new vote. On the first day of the Dec. 25-to-Jan. 1 "winter break," a holiday won in previous contract fights, the IAM International leadership announced a new contract vote for Jan. 3. That was timed to reach as few members as possible and insure low turnout, since many older and more militant workers use vacation time to extend the holiday.

The contract was the same bad deal, but this time the media, local politicians, and the International leadership launched a coordinated full-court press to get a "yes" vote. Radio and TV ads, editorials, and mayoral press conferences all told workers that if they voted no again they would ruin the lives of their children and destroy the economy of the Puget Sound area and Washington state forever.

Even that was not enough: the IAM International leadership rigged the vote. They required special eligibility cards, but many at the 17,000-member Everett plant never got them and had to wait in long lines in the cold to obtain "good standing" cards. Ballot counting was moved from the central Seattle union hall to various local halls making it more difficult to monitor. Clearly the fix was in. This is what capitalist democracy looks like!

With 25% of the membership absent, as planned, the contract passed by a razor thin margin of only 600 votes. Members sobbed openly in the Seattle union hall while others cried "bull\*\*\*\*!" and one demanded the Local leave the International.

## A Historic Defeat

The defeat this represents for workers cannot be understated. Local 751 was the largest and most militant local left in the IAM. The precedent set by this sellout contract has probably dealt the Local a fatal blow.

Under this new deal members lose their defined-benefit pension plan, conservatively estimated to reduce Boeing's retirement costs by 40%. Pay increases change from 2% per year, barely keeping up with inflation, to 1% every two years, a reduction of 75%. The health care plan was gutted. Wage scales were frozen. That means that by 2024 when the contract expires, the three lowest labor grades will be minimum-wage jobs.

And to top it off, workers forfeit their right to strike

for ten years! The fact that this rollback is occurring while Boeing rakes in record profits (\$4 billion last year) only adds insult to injury. And, while turning relatively good paying jobs into minimum-wage jobs with no benefits, Boeing is getting \$8.7 billion in tax breaks from the state of Washington, the largest "corporate welfare" payout by a state ever. No surprise that this sweetheart deal was spawned by Boeing lobbyist David Schumacher who is now director of the Office of Financial Management for Gov. Jay Inslee.

The ripple effect through the state was immediate. Boeing has demanded a 15% price cut from its suppliers who employ thousands in the Seattle area alone. As a result pay freezes, benefit reductions, and speed-up have become normalized for workers already living paycheck to paycheck.

Teachers find themselves under attack as the state legislature has retaken the offensive on tying teacher pay to standardized testing results. At the University of Washington graduate instructors in at least one department began the quarter with a lecture on how meager wage increases in the union contract would cost them Teaching Assistant, Resident Advisor, and teaching positions.

## The Limits of Reform

Events in Seattle reveal the limits of reform. Anything that workers win capitalists immediately set about undermining. To win back the gains lost in this new contract, Boeing workers will have to aggressively fight back in the streets and on the shop floor. For workers in SeaTac to gain a living wage they will need to learn to strike and shut their shops down rather than playing within the capitalist's "democratic" system. To end exploitation once and for all we must drop the mirage of reform altogether and fight for communist revolution!✊

## Christie BridgeGate Scandal: Rulers Need Discipline for 2016 Election

**NEW JERSEY, January 29** —There's more than meets the eye in the public exposé and slapdown of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie over his closing lanes on the George Washington Bridge to create chaos as payback to local politicians who opposed his re-election. And the "more" is not just the continuing revelations of withholding Sandy aid funds and other dirty tricks.

It would be easy for workers and students who have been on the receiving end of Christie's budget hatchet, or his disgusting thuggery towards anyone who seriously challenges him, to simply be thankful that "what goes around comes around" or even to be gleeful over his troubles. But communists and others who fight the capitalist system that Christie and all other politicians serve owe the working class more than this superficial response.

First, the media, including the liberals who are denouncing him now, has built up Christie big time. He has been portrayed as a voice of sanity in a party heavily influenced by Tea Party extremists. The Star-Ledger, biggest Democratic newspaper in the state, endorsed him in the 2013 election. After Hurricane Sandy, and Christie's appearance with Obama during the clean-up, national TV gave Christie a major platform, and helped promote his presidential candidacy.

Until now, this has assured his reputation as a (sometimes over-the-top but) tough negotiator, who ultimately "gets things done" by working with the Democrats. But what has he "gotten done?" The Democrats have given Christie 90 percent of the cuts he demanded. Christie himself has especially lauded his ability to "reach across the aisle," getting

the Democrats to join his vicious attacks on teachers and other unionized workers in 2010 and 2011.

Second, although he may be more "in your face," Christie certainly didn't invent retaliatory and vindictive politics in New Jersey or anywhere else. Democratic leaders such as Steve Aduvato, Donald Norcross, Steve Sweeney and Sheila Oliver are masters of it. Most recently, these power-brokers stabbed their own 2013 Democratic gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono in the back after she portrayed herself as independent of them.

Of course, Buono would not have been "bueno" for the working class. Although portrayed as "left-wing" or "progressive," even her own platform proposed very little for workers, including a measly \$1-an-hour increase in the minimum wage. Under capitalism, any NJ politician elected has to answer to Prudential Insurance Co. and the other big New Jersey bosses.

But the real significance is not local. The most powerful section of the U.S. ruling class is trying to ensure that the key candidates in the next presidential election will work in a "bi-partisan" way. The dysfunctional state of Congress and the presidency hurts their reputation as the "world's only superpower" while they can't get on with the massive repair and upgrading of infrastructure that they

need to prepare for the next big war. Their plans to project U.S. military power to counteract China's growing economic and political influence in South Asia and the Pacific are stalled.

The last thing they need is a major presidential candidate who doesn't go along with the program, or whose dirty tricks go too far. A major slap-down of Christie's well-known arrogance and egotism was also in order. Not necessarily to push him out, but to keep him "within limits." Christie's public "apology" is his attempt to reassure the rulers behind the "Bridgegate" media frenzy that he can still be a team player for capitalist

class interests. Whether they take him at his word, or decide to drive him from the national scene is not for us to predict.

Workers can be sure that the Progressive Labor Party will not be fooled by "lesser evil" politicians or bosses who portray themselves as friends of the working class. The lesson of Bridgegate is this: workers need to keep our eye on the bigger picture of imperialist rivalry, war preparation, growing fascism and the fear of rebellion and revolution that drive the rulers' political moves. No politicians, but only communist revolution can change that.✊



Last year's May Day led by high school students. Onward to 2014!

# Working-Class Mothers Fight Chicago Bosses for a New 'La Casita'

**CHICAGO, January 15** — On December 6, nine of the last 17 protestors, who tried to save the Whittier Elementary School field house — endearingly called La Casita — were found not guilty of trespassing charges instituted by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Applause rang out in the normally quiet West Side courtroom after the charges were dismissed.

These community fighters and Chicago Public School teachers were charged with misdemeanor criminal trespass after they formed a human chain outside the field house last August 17 trying to stop its demolition. The protestors made sure the moms were not arrested that day.

Cook County Associate Judge Clarence Burch agreed that the prosecutor didn't prove that the field house — a separate building next to the school — was operated and funded by the government. Interestingly, neither the witnesses for CPS called to testify nor the prosecutor had seen a copy of the so-called "demolition" work order handed to them by the defense lawyers. It turned out to be a "construction" work order. The judge asked, where was the "construction" in all this when the building was being demolished?

One defendant, a former Whittier School teacher and teachers union organizer, felt that the verdict was "a real victory for people who want to stand up for the rights of children." Another protestor, however, felt it didn't bring back the field house which served as a community center and library. "I know how much La Casita meant to the community. They need a new place."

A playground, a turf field for soccer and two basketball courts replaced the razed field house. According to the school director, these new courts will be lent out to other schools, with revenues going to Whittier School. The question still remains as to who will benefit from this new renovation, the Whittier school kids, the existing community, a new charter school or Cristo Rey High School.

A CPS work order to demolish La Casita was found online, and it turned out that Ward Alderman Danny Solis had approved TIF money (a city fund created with property taxes for "blighted" areas) to be given to Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, (a school having only one Jesuit priest) across from Whittier. Discovering that public monies were to be used for a private high school while Whittier had no library fueled the 2010 sit-in to save the La Casita field house, already being used as a community center BUT also to include a library the kids desperately needed.

Whittier Elementary School was not one of the Chicago public schools targeted for closing this past school year. But the massive anti-racist fightback of the Whittier parents and supporters made such an impact on every school and community in the city and beyond that the CPS, Mayor Rahm Emmanuel and Solis were temporarily held back.

But the fact remains that this land grab in a predominantly Latino neighborhood was a racist attack on all of us. The Chicago banks and real estate developers have grander schemes as the lower east side of the Pilsen neighborhood as well as other areas continue to be gentrified. Orders to demolish La Casita came from CPS, with ward alderman Solis (who had ordered the gas shut-off

to La Casita some years back) giving the go-ahead. Neither CPS nor the cops felt they needed a "valid" demolition permit.

Neither CPS, the cops nor the judge (continuously smiling throughout the hearing) exist to serve the working class. Not under capitalism. So why were they found not guilty? Viewing the court proceedings, one would have thought the prosecutor bungled the job. But did CPS lose? In the long run, they accomplished what they were after. The parents and supporters using La Casita for meetings and workshops up to the day of the demolition nor the protestors were no longer seen as a threat.

This victory was short-term. There still exists a small group of parents and supporters wanting to fight CPS and the city for a new community center and library. They fear that Whittier School, sooner or later, will be turned into a charter school or an appendage of Cristo Rey High School. Without a community center to reach out to its residents and push for unity, the community is left to fend for itself.

Property taxes are rising and working-class families are losing their homes. The Pilsen area is becoming more "blighted" but no TIF monies are being used to save it. Instead, three large corporations have taken millions from the Pilsen TIF. Between 2001 and 2005, Chicago International Produce Market (\$9.5 million), the Steiner Corporation (\$3.5 million) and Target (\$5.3 million and not part of east Pilsen) benefited from the east Pilsen residents' tax dollars.

By 2004, no TIF funds had been used to support school improvements at any of the three schools in the Pilsen area. In 2008, Developers were reimbursed \$14.4 million (25% of the total TIF) and given \$22.1 million in forgivable loans. Between developers and project costs, the City gave more than half (65%) of the Pilsen TIF money to private developers!

So, under capitalism who wins? The previous Local School Committee (LSC) group of 2010 and the supporters that led the sit-in three years ago no longer exist. Because of financial troubles and low morale, many involved parents dropped out of the struggle before the demolition occurred. Others have become cynical over the loss of La Casita.

Three Whittier moms, steadfastly involved in the 49-day sit-in, are now part of the present-day Whittier School LSC. Two of the moms, and most of the other members, publicly approve of CPS's demolition of La Casita and of the newly constructed soccer field, two basketball courts and the new playground. One mom, who had joined the Party during the sit-in, is now LSC president and a true parliamentarian. She chairs the meetings and makes sure that parent speakers don't go over the allotted time, especially if the topic is one which criticizes the LSC or CPS. The other mom who was very active doesn't attend the LSC meetings anymore or the La Casita parent group. She may be taken off for lack of attendance. The remaining LSC members include the school director (a very close friend of the ward alderman) and the assistant to Ward Alderman Solis. Therefore, none of the three moms have defended the existing La Casita parents' group when they've brought up the fight for a new community center and library at the LSC meetings.

As much as a community center and library are drastically needed, the fight-

back needs much more. This writer, also a member of the small La Casita parent group, will struggle to win her friends to join a PLP study group and the Party.

One Whittier/LaCasita mom and friend of the Party has written opinion letters and submitted them for CHALLENGE. She is a staunch, outspoken fighter for her class here in Chicago and in Mexico. She has fought cynicism and subjectivity involving some Whittier moms. She is disliked for her critical comments regarding CPS. She works hard cleaning homes and streets, makes jewelry and knitting apparel to help her family and send money to her needy

family and friends in Mexico.

Our group will continue to fight for a new "La Casita," raise money and send clothes that are very much needed in Mexico and beyond. But if we really want to win, we must fight for keeps. That means building a mass PLP and becoming communists. That means struggling with each other to continue the fight, helping each other despite obstacles the capitalists throw at us. Onward in the fight for a communist world!✪

## Lenin: A Giant Revolutionary



January 21 was the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Vladimir Lenin.

Lenin was his revolutionary name. His birth name was Vladimir Il'ich Ulyanov. Lenin was perhaps the greatest revolutionary who has ever lived. We still have a great deal to learn from him. Certainly he is one of the giants, along with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, pioneers of communist thought. They exposed the basic contradictions between capitalism and the working class.

Other great revolutionaries have come from the working class; Stalin was one. Lenin came from the petty bourgeoisie. They showed that, in the last analysis, what counts for every individual is his or her ideology, and what he or she decides to dedicate their lives to.

Like Marx and Engels, his great teachers and models, Lenin dedicated his life to the exploited and oppressed of the world, the working class first of all, but also the peasantry and those super-exploited by colonialism and racism.

We should study Lenin's works — critically, of course. But respectfully too, since we have much to learn. Hard to do: be both critical and respectful. It's something we have to learn to do better.

Lenin represented a whole movement, and an entire historical epoch. He did nothing "by himself." At the same time, he pushed the working-class struggle for communism ahead by his tireless efforts.

We, and class-conscious workers, intellectuals, students, and others everywhere, owe him an immense debt. The best way to acknowledge that debt is by working for communist revolution the best we can.✪



# LETTERS

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

## To Be A Communist, Advocate It!

On January 20, I attended a local NAACP meeting honoring the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It proved to be an enlightening and uplifting experience. I described the rise of racism and the racist prison-industrial complex.

Initially I hesitated to raise the question of communist revolution as the way to end racist oppression. Then I thought, "What's the point of being a communist if you're not going to advocate communism?"

I then explained that the only real way to eradicate racism was through a genuine communist revolution that would place the workers in power and attempt to create an egalitarian society. I made the case that it was the capitalist system which breeds racism to enrich the ruling elite and divide the workers.

I also pointed out that groups like the Klan and the Nazis would not be holding rallies in a communist society and that racism would be outlawed. Those who advocate it would be severely punished. Most seemed to agree with these sentiments.

None of those present, a good number being black workers, were shocked or turned off by my comments. I told them I would get them an issue of CHALLENGE, which I said did an excellent job making the case for a communist revolution and always took a strong stand against racism.

I realized that it's necessary to have confidence in the workers — though they're inundated with bourgeois ideology and anti-communism — to understand our communist views.

Of course, they wanted to know how this revolution would come about. I replied that there had been successful revolutions of this sort in the past, and that there could be in the future when millions were won to this perspective.

Some seemed skeptical but were open to hearing my viewpoint.

I realized that I would need to be more open about my communist politics. For me, this was a major step forward.

*Red Coal*

## Internationalism Ignites Commitment

I have been involved in international work since I joined PLP. To be honest, it was the international work that brought me into the Party. I was at a May Day dinner and was listening to someone give an amazing speech over the work that was developing abroad. I was captivated and motivated by what I was hearing. Within the next couple of months I found myself participating in an international Summer Project. I found myself more invested in the work but also it was a bit nerve-racking. There is so much potential for growth but also the constant threat of fascism that could cause everything to crumble, with many lives at stake.

Throughout my trips abroad, I developed strong relationships with the individuals who were just as invested as I was. They became my second family in my new home away from home. Our trust was built on the foundation of our decision to fight back against the bosses, in favor of the international working class.

My commitment was not tested until the end of the last Summer Project. The day before we were to fly back home, we were assisting some comrades with a project at one of their universities. It started off as a normal day with nothing major planned. Around noon, we heard that there were some demonstrators in front of the university posing as students to agitate some soldiers.

The students on the campus we were visiting closed the gates and told everyone to remain inside to avoid being associated with what was happening. We heard shouting, drums, and the sound of tanks rolling down the street. An older comrade and I were in the courtyard chatting. Then we saw a student look over the tall fence and start running toward the building. There was much confusion. Then we heard from one of the students that we should get inside as soon as possible because the soldiers were heading to the university.

But before we had a chance to ask why, we heard rubber bullets hitting the fence. Students began running into the building at full speed. I made sure that the older comrade was in front of me so that she wouldn't be left behind because

she could not run as fast as the rest of us. I was also preparing myself in case I got hit. Luckily, we made it into the building without being hurt.

This was a defining moment in the growth of my commitment. I thought to myself, "What if this happens again?" The older comrades — and even the younger ones — aren't always going to be able to get away from danger so easily. This was when I knew I was in it for the long run. I have shared my commitment with my comrades here and abroad. It isn't going to be easy, but is bringing us one step closer to getting the type of world that all workers deserve.

*International red*

## Imperialist Rivalry Behind Ukraine Fight

The U.S. actions in the Ukraine are a continuation of a decades-long imperial dogfight over the strategically important states of Eastern Europe. Current efforts to topple the Ukrainian government, which U.S. imperialists deem to be too friendly to Russia, has resurrected some familiar themes in this struggle. In the U.S. press, Russia is depicted as an evil imperial force "bullying" the Ukraine into submission (NYT, 11/19/13). This is juxtaposed with the well-intentioned Americans and Western Europeans who only want to bring "democracy and prosperity" to the former Soviet bloc.

The fact that U.S. diplomats are in the Ukraine publicly calling for the overthrow of a democratically elected government in order to replace it with one more servile to Western interests does not seem to faze leading papers like the New York Times. The history of U.S. inter-

vention in Eastern Europe toppling popularly elected regimes in Bulgaria and Albania is completely forgotten (*The Communist*, 2012).

Newspapers carefully avoid mentioning fascists such as the virulent Ukrainian anti-Semite Oleh Tyahnybok who paraded around with Sen. John McCain on his recent visit to the country (Counterspin, 12/20). Just as they forgot to mention former Nazi Laszlo Pasztor who became U.S. imperialists' man in Bulgaria or Albanian fascist Sali Barisha, and so forth.

The current fiasco in the Ukraine is the latest effort by the U.S. imperialists' to place "the vipers, the blood-suckers, the middlemen" the people that "make our kind of country click" in charge of the country. These words were spoken by Bruce Gelb, a U.S. capitalist and diplomat, while plotting to undermine the collapsing Soviet republics as head of the U.S. Information Agency in 1990 — and they are as true today as they were then. Whatever happens in the Ukraine, one thing is clear: workers in Ukraine will lose.

*Red Beard*

## The Kennedy Assassination: Conspiracy?

This is a response to the December 11 CHALLENGE editorial "Rulers Use JFK Assassination Anniversary to Fuel War Drive" which argues that the Kennedy assassination was the work of a conspiratorial group of domestic oil interests angry over Kennedy's threat to end their oil depletion allowance (tax break).

This argument advocates a mechanical view of history that reduces the dynamics of class conflict and inter-imperialist rivalries to the choices of a small group of individuals.

CIA coups and secret meetings of think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations show that the bosses "conspire" on a regular basis. However, as Marx said, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please."

The conspiratorial thinking pushed by the media teaches the working class that the bosses are all-powerful and that we are helpless to stop them. Marx's dialectical approach teaches us to look at both the necessity of economic laws and the contingent role played by other forces. This helps us see the cracks in the capitalist system and gives the working class the tools to destroy it.

The oil depletion allowance was first introduced in 1926 to stimulate oil production in the U.S. Under this allowance, 27.5% of annual oil revenue was tax exempt. For almost 50 years, the oil industry — from oil industrialists like Rockefeller to newer oil bosses like H.L. Hunt — all profited from this tax break. The Kennedy family was also invested in "domestic" oil and in 1950 purchased Arctic Oil and later Kenoil and Mokeen, all of which drilled primarily in Texas and Louisiana.

Following World War II, there were multiple attempts, both by presidents and Congress, to reduce this oil allowance. In 1950, President Truman proposed to cut the allowance almost in half. None of these individuals were assassinated.

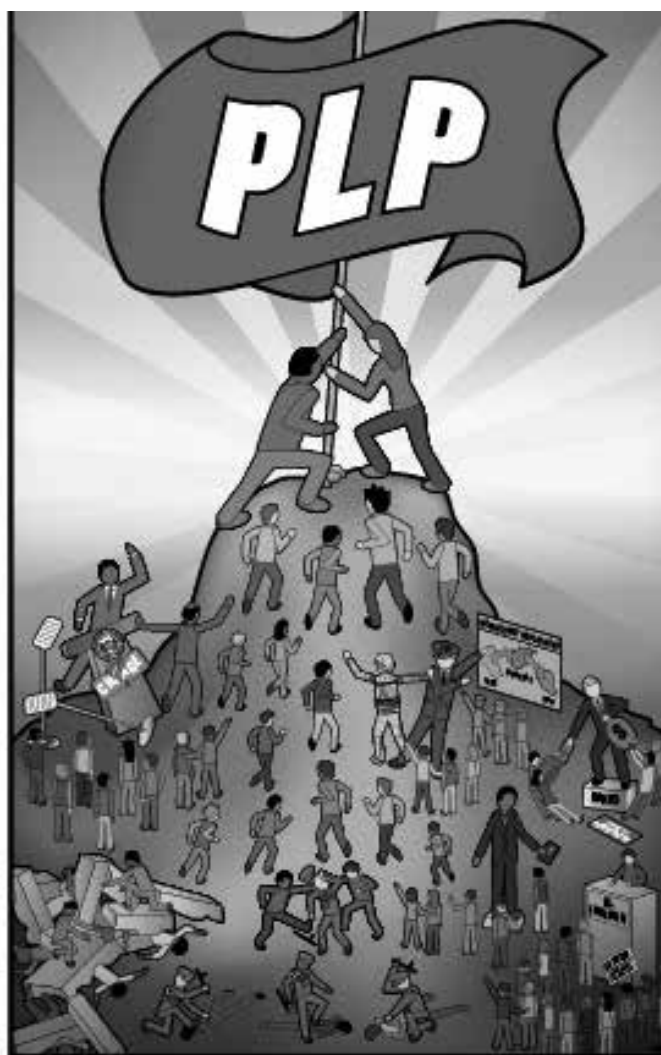
As President, Kennedy faced a balance of payments crisis — more dollars were leaving the U.S. than coming in. This crisis was the product of economic attacks by U.S. imperialist rivals. So Kennedy pushed to expand U.S. exports with a more open "free-trade" policy.

Kennedy understood that in the context of the Cold War, "free-trade" was necessary to prevent developing nations from siding with U.S. rivals like Russia. Many in the oil industry favored trade restrictions, specifically on foreign oil imports. However, too many limits on imports might drive large oil-producing nations like Venezuela into the arms of U.S. rivals.

Following the Suez oil crisis, serious debate ensued within the ruling class over the national security implications of oil policy: whether to protect the domestic oil market by taxing imported oil or to encourage imports to preserve domestic reserves. The debate in this period was not split neatly between "domestic" oilmen and "international" finance, as the next example will show.

In 1962, Kennedy began pushing for new trade legislation and brokered a deal with Oklahoma oil magnate Senator Robert Kerr. Kerr is a prominent figure in much JFK conspiracy litera-

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**FIGHT FOR A COMMUNIST WORLD**  
**BUILD THE INTERNATIONAL PLP!**  
**PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY**

# LETTERS

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ture and rubbed shoulders with oil moguls who conspiracy theorists claim helped murder Kennedy. Unlike President Truman who ignored the demands of Texas oil bosses a decade earlier, Kennedy agreed to meet their demands and to increase restrictions on foreign oil imports.

In exchange, Senator Kerr agreed to drum up support for Kennedy's Trade Expansion Act of 1962. It was this act that led to U.S. participation in the GATT international trade negotiations, allowing the U.S. to knock down global barriers to trade in the name of U.S. imperialist expansion. This Kennedy-Kerr deal demonstrates just how interconnected the interests of "domestic" oil were with broader international goals of U.S. imperialism.

In early 1963, Kennedy proposed a comprehensive tax plan to improve the unemployment rate and to help fix the U.S. balance of payments. His proposals promised to drastically lower corporate tax rates and to cut overall taxes by \$13.6 billion. His plan also proposed complex changes that would effectively reduce the oil allowance by 5%. This was the first time as President that Kennedy had attempted to make any changes to the oil allowance.

There was some backlash among the oil lobbies and in the press. Much of the fighting was inside the Kennedy Administration itself, as Kennedy-appointed bureaucrats fought over changes in oil policy ("Note Reveals Split Over Oil Policy," The Spokesman-Review, 3/14/1963). But his proposal did not "threaten to eliminate" the allowances and the issue died a few months later after Kennedy abandoned the tax proposal.

Facing economic recession, the oil allowance was cut for the first time in 1969 from 27.5% to 22%. And in 1974, the oil allowance was finally eliminated. No one involved in eliminating the oil depletion allowance was assassinated.

The idea that U.S. domestic oil interests assassinated Kennedy because he was going to eliminate their tax break both inaccurately describes the actual Kennedy

administration's policies and distorts the interpenetration of ruling-class interests within the U.S. around questions of inter-imperialist rivalries.

The Progressive Labor Party's theory that inter-imperialist rivalries drive world events is a critical tool in understanding the development of the world situation. Conspiratorial thinking does not add to this understanding, but limits it in severe ways. We must always struggle to provide the best dialectical and historical understanding of the world to the working class.

A Challenge Reader

**CHALLENGE Comment:** In response to the criticism, the essence of the editorial was not "who killed Kennedy" but how the finance capital wing of the ruling class is using the anniversary of his assassination to promote the drive towards war. The first five paragraphs deal with this and revive JFK's militaristic appeals for "sacrifice" and "service." It details what "sacrifice" means for the working class but also says this "won't solve all their [the ruling class's] problems. For U.S. capitalism to survive, they know they must discipline their own ranks."

The editorial notes this discipline relative to JPMorgan Chase, as it does later on in citing Kennedy's disciplining U.S. Steel in the Sixties. Both these outfits are part of that main wing. While the ruling class holds state power, it is not monolithic. Overall the editorial pointed out that there is a split among sections of the capitalist class depending on where they make their main profits and who represents the longer-range interests of the survival of their system.

Then, in the sixth paragraph, it cites a similar split in the 1960s related to "JFK's reported plans to revoke the oil depletion allowance." Then it says, "According to one theory, Kennedy was killed by domestic oil interests who were unwilling to cut their profits for the imperialist cause." We don't say who killed JFK, just that he had many enemies who could have done it. There is plenty of evidence of how — in the weeks before the assassination — Texas oil interests led by H. L. Hunt engaged in a widespread campaign to attack Kennedy. An ad appeared in Dallas newspapers with Kennedy's picture, saying "Wanted for Treason." Maybe no one got killed over the oil depletion issue directly, but the Hunts were nearly bankrupted after their failed move to corner the silver market.

Let's assume these forces were not behind the assassination. But the fact is, some forces were looking to kill him, unless one believes that Oswald — a patsy if there ever was

one — did the deed by his lonesome. Later the editorial says, "The dominant wing of U.S. bosses wants to portray JFK's murder as something other than a fight within the ruling class. Leading Wall Street banker and Warren Commission member John J. McCloy argued that it was 'beneficial for domestic tranquility to conclude that Oswald acted alone'" (New York Times, 8/20/97). McCloy was a top member of the ruling class. He was picked to oversee U.S. actions in post-World War II Germany and was CEO of Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank. So his views certainly represented the rulers' main wing.

Obviously McCloy (and at least some of his cohorts on the Commission) seemingly had concluded (or knew?) that some people other than Oswald had conspired to kill Kennedy. However, they didn't want the general populace to understand that there were ruling forces who had cause to eliminate him, even if conflict over the oil depletion allowance was not a factor.

The editorial, in detailing all the divisions within the ruling class, then and now, and even divisions within the main wing itself, follows the letter-writer's quote of Marx's approach that, "Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please." It is difficult to get away from the fact that somebody or "bodies" did "conspire" to kill Kennedy. Various representatives of the ruling class conspire all the time, as the letter-writer points out.

The letter says that, "Conspiratorial thinking does not add to...understanding the development of the world situation" and conflicts with PLP's "theory that inter-imperialist rivalries drive world events." But the fact remains that various capitalist forces DO have cause to fight each other, and conspire to do so. If the ruling class wants to hide its own behind-the-scene machinations, it will use the notion of "conspiracy" in a way that stigmatizes that idea.

"Conspiracy" is not limited to "thinking" but represents actions by various forces. From a communist point of view, it is important that the working class understands that and uses it to both expose and oppose all capitalists who engage in our oppression. This counters the outlook that "the bosses are all-powerful and that we are helpless to stop them." To the contrary, understanding that there are divisions among the rulers, and what's behind those divisions, does "help us to see the cracks in the capitalist system and gives the working class the tools to destroy it."



## 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

### Drones kill 'enemies' worldwide

Liberal Opinion, 12/18 — U.S. drone attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries may be militarily effective, but they are killing innocent civilians in a way that is obscene and immoral....

...President Obama has made drone attacks his go-to weapon....Armed, pilotless aircraft allow the CIA and the military to target individuals in enemy strongholds without putting U.S. lives at risk. But efficacy is not legitimacy....

Obama has greatly expanded the use of drones, and his version of the terror war looks a lot like a campaign of assassination....

Under what theory...does the president order drone strikes in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia...? It would seem the definition of "enemy" is, basically, "someone the United States decides to target."

All of this is true even if the drones kill only their targets. But of course there is "collateral damage."

### One year, 260 priests in child abuse

NYT, 1/18 — The Vatican defrocked 260 priests for the sexual abuse of children in 2011.

### Food stamp cuts and slave labor wages

Thom Hartman Blog — Starting today, 47 million Americans...will see their [monthly] food stamp benefits drop by an average of \$36 per household. That may not sound like a lot, but it's a huge difference to a family trying to feed itself on an average of \$270 a month.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, 87 percent of SNAP recipients live in households with children, seniors and people with disabilities. And at least 900,000 veterans rely on food stamps as of 2011. These people are not takers as many...claim, these are our children, our parents, our neighbors in need....Many of

them...work hard at regular jobs, but they just can't survive on the slave labor wages that are paid by so many corporations.

### U.S. bottom half is far behind

NYT, 1/7 — The reality of rising American inequality is stark. Since the late 1970s real wages for the bottom half of the work force have stagnated or fallen, while incomes of the top 1 percent have nearly quadrupled (and the incomes of the top 0.1 percent have risen even more).

### Pols' tough love can't create jobs

NYT, 12/29 — Another misperception is that ending [unemployment] benefits will help end unemployment. In that scenario,...practicing tough love [jolts] dependents into finding jobs. That...is not how it works. Long-term unemployment is high because there are not enough jobs, not because millions of Americans have suddenly lost their work ethic. At last count, there were still nearly three unemployed people for every job opening...

### 'Zero tolerance' a racist dragnet

NYT, 1/16 — To The Editor: "Zero Tolerance, Reconsidered" points to a national trend to end the criminalization of young people in our schools.

In New York City, during the 2012-13 school year, there were more than 53,400 suspensions. Black students made up almost 53 percent of those suspensions, when they make up only 27 percent of the student population. Although we've seen a decrease in suspensions, the racial disparities have not changed....



And charges include...suspensions for "defying authority," a vague, catchall infraction.

### Deceive, falsify and profit

Thom Hartman Blog — A special report by Talking Points Memo [TPM] found specific examples of insurance companies contacting people before the first start date and trying to lock them into higher-priced plans....

When a TPM asked [an applicant's] insurance company why they were using such deceptive methods, a spokesman just said that the customers know they have other options. Although it's not clear how many of the cancellation letters being received throughout the country are a result of these same dishonest tactics, it's likely that many...companies are pulling the same scam. These cancellations...are because [of] insurance companies trying to rip off more people....

...Companies will always put corporate greed over people's health and wallets.

MORE ITEMS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PLP.ORG



# Syria: Centuries of Repression, Division and Exploitation

Syrian workers have suffered from tyrannical oppression long before the current war between opposing capitalist, nationalist forces. For centuries they have been exploited by colonial and imperialist masters, or by homegrown dictators controlled by external powers. But like other workers in the Middle East, working class in Syria has yet to build a revolutionary movement that could lead them to a better life. Time and again, it has been manipulated by local and international rulers — from Turkey and France to Russia, Iran, and China today. As a result, the history of Syria is one of religious and ethnic divisions, with workers fighting workers against their own best interests.

For four centuries, from 1516–1918, Syria was a province of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. During World War I (1914–18), the British and French were anxious to wrest control of the Middle East from Turkey as a counter to Russian influence and also to protect newly discovered oil reserves. They encouraged Arab nationalism, on the rise since the late 1800s, and enlisted Arab armies by promising them independence after the war. In October 1918, Arab troops within the British Army were the first to reach Damascus. They declared a Syrian Arab state to be ruled by Emir Faisal. The new state's territory was to include Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

## British, French Imperialists Divide Spoils

The victorious troops were unaware, however, that the British and French had already signed a secret agreement, the Sykes-Picot treaty, to divide the Arab world between them after the war. In the Balfour Agreement, ratified by the League of Nations in 1920, Britain also promised the Zionist movement a Jewish state in Palestine. Syria and Lebanon were declared under French control, with the British taking Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. This effectively ended the Arab nationalists' dream of incorporating Palestine into Greater Syria. It also created substantial anti-Zionist sentiment.

The Arab leader King Faisal, who had signed off on the Balfour Agreement in the hope that a Jewish state would dilute French control of the region, was removed by the French from Damascus after a series of small failed rebellions. The following year, in 1921, he was installed by the British as ruler of the newly created country of Iraq. Meanwhile, Syria and Lebanon were administratively separated by the French, with separate nationalist movements growing in each territory.

The French were harsh colonial masters in Syria. Political activity, civil rights, and news media were suppressed. The urban elites were favored and harsh treatment meted out in the rural areas. In 1925, the Great Syrian Revolt became the largest and longest-lasting anti-colonial insurgency in the inter-war Arab East. Mobilizing peasants, workers, and army veterans, rather than urban elites and intellectuals, it was the first mass movement against colonial rule in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it was based on nationalist rather than class ideology. The French maintained military and economic dominance of Syria until 1946, when they left the country under pressure from the United Nations, a body controlled by the U.S. and the Soviet Union (USSR).

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two strongest competitors for power and influence around the globe. The Middle East, a vital source of oil, was of strategic im-

portance to both camps. In 1948, in an attempt to reduce British influence in the area, the USSR supported the creation of the state of Israel. Arms from Czechoslovakia, a Soviet ally, were instrumental in the Israeli victory in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. But as Israel became a firm Western ally, the USSR switched sides and condemned Zionism. Seeking a stronger foothold in the energy-rich region, the Soviets allied with nationalist regimes in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Iraq.

In 1955, Moscow invited Syria and Egypt to join a pro-Soviet pact. Turkey, a U.S. ally, attempted to dissuade Syria by mobilizing troops along their common border. When the USSR threatened to respond with military force, however, Turkey backed down. Over the next five years, the USSR provided Syria with more than \$200 million in military aid to cement the alliance and counter U.S. influence. The Soviet bloc was countered by a U.S. bloc of pro-Western governments: Israel, Iran (prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution), Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

In 1958, Syria joined Egypt in the United Arab Republic (UAR), a pan-Arab union dominated by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser. It withdrew three years later because of Egyptian domination. After another period of instability, the secular and nationalist Baath Party took power in Syria just one month after doing the same in Iraq.

In 1967, when Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt were defeated in war with Israel, Syria lost the Golan Heights to the Zionists. Although Moscow didn't back its allies militarily, the Soviets pledged \$2.5 billion in aid to Syria and severed diplomatic ties with Israel. In 1971, the Soviets established a naval base in the Syrian port city of Tartus. One year later, Syria and the USSR signed a peace and security pact that paved the way for more than \$135 million in Soviet arms deliveries to Damascus. By then, a Baathist minister of defense named Hafez al-Assad had seized power in a bloodless coup.

## Threaten Nuclear War?

In October 1973, Syria and Egypt launched another war against Israel. Initially taken by surprise, the Israelis battled back and even crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt. When Israel gained the upper hand, the Soviets panicked. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev threatened to send Soviet troops into the theater of war. A Soviet naval vessel allegedly bearing nuclear arms awaited his instructions in the Egyptian port of Alexandria. In response, U.S. President Richard Nixon reportedly increased the national security warning to DEFCON 3 and placed the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet on high alert in the Mediterranean Sea. With U.S. assistance, Israel emerged victorious. To maintain leverage in the region, Moscow agreed to compensate the defeated Arab states with new long-range missiles and high-tech aircraft. In return, Syria pledged not to turn to the U.S. for assistance.

The 1975 civil war in Lebanon strained the Soviet-Syrian relationship. With Christians, Sunnis, Shiites, Druze and Palestinians all fighting one another, Assad sent troops to protect the Christians. Fearing a victory by anti-Baathist Muslim fundamentalists, the Syrian leadership made a temporary alliance with Israel. The Soviets supported the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and other Muslim groups, hoping their victory would transform Lebanon into a friendly state. A ceasefire imposed by the Arab League in 1976 left the Syrian

Army as a large "peacekeeping" (read: occupying) force in Lebanon. When Israel invaded its northern neighbor, Lebanon, in 1982, hoping to drive out the PLO and gain more territory, Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters were the main force that eventually defeated Israel. Although Iran depended on Syria to cross fighters and weapons into Lebanon, the superior military prowess of Iran's proxy forces essentially left Iran in control there.

Soviet opposition to the Syrian presence in Lebanon grew with the ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. He wished for a diplomatic resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict and opposed Syria's desire to become a military equal with Israel. Soviet arms shipments and advisors to Syria were cut in half by 1989. As Russian influence in Syria waned, the U.S. made peace overtures to Assad. But he rejected the offers and continued to support Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian resistance, Iran and the Iraqi insurgency.

With Vladimir Putin and Assad's son, Bashar al-Assad, both coming to power in 2000, Russia and Syria grew close once again. By 2012, Russia accounted for 78 percent of Syrian arms purchases. Putin's commitment to increasing Russian naval power has heightened the significance of its only naval base outside its own territory — in Tartus, Syria. Within the China-Russia-Iran axis fighting for control over Middle Eastern resources, Russia faces significant competition from China, now Syria's third-largest importer.

## 'Communist' Party Not Too Communist

A communist party was founded in Syria in the 1920s. Like other communist parties in the region, it was closely tied to Moscow. The "socialist" Baath Party, representing Syria's national ruling class, fell in line with the Soviets' goal to promote local anti-Western nationalism; the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) was ordered to ally with the Baathists in the 1950s.

Today the SCP supports Assad in his fight against Western imperialist interests. These phony communists offer little criticism of Assad's anti-worker, neoliberal economic policies, or of the corruption and cruelty of a regime that has impoverished millions of Syrians. But as CHALLENGE has pointed out, the "rebel" forces are no better. Some of them represent Islamic fundamentalism tied to Sunni Muslim states like Saudi Arabia or Qatar. Others are aligned with Al Qaeda or with secular nationalists aligned with Western interests. None of the leading rebel forces represent the working class in Syria.

For centuries, religious and nationalist hatreds in the Middle East have served successive sets of rulers in their effort to weaken potential opposition to their grab for power and resources. Workers in Syria — like workers in Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Palestine, Jorda

n and Lebanon — can flourish only when they overcome the divisions built by religion and nationalism. They will thrive only when a new communist movement based on class solidarity is built without capitalist borders. Our Progressive Labor Party group in Israel/Palestine, which unites Jewish, Arab, and migrant workers, is a small but vital step in this direction. ☺

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