

CHALLENGE



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Haiti: Fight for Minimum Wage Continues

Workers Expose Bosses' State

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI, July 12—Workers have kept their word: The fight against the capitalist bosses for an increase in the minimum wage continues into its third day. Class struggle is intensifying, with several thousand workers and students demonstrating in the streets of the capital. After marching for miles, they arrived at the Parliament and called on legislators to reject the report of the High Council on Salaries, which recommends a measly 35-gourde increase in the daily minimum wage of 300 gourdes (US\$4.60).

Reinforced by two loudspeakers, the militant protestors marched through downtown streets and residential neighborhoods, singing and chanting slogans against the bosses. In particular, they targeted Jovenel Moise as a “puppet of the bourgeoisie,” the famously corrupt capitalist ruling class that bleeds workers for profit. Moise is a protégé of former President Michel Martelly, the brutal thug who ran a plundering police state and collaborated with MINUSTAH, the hated United Nations occupation army that caused a cholera epidemic in Haiti. In 2015, Martelly’s ruling-party machine propelled Moise into a runoff despite exit polls showing he’d received only six percent of the vote in a low-turnout, massively fraudulent election (Haiti Sentinel, 11/19/15). So much for capitalist “democracy!”

Minimal Wages, Maximum Profits

The rulers’ justification for the unlivable minimum wage is that it will create more jobs. While the bosses’ media admit to an unemployment rate of 40 percent (indexmundi), 80 percent of the working class lives in wretched poverty. Another seven percent are employed in the private sector, which rarely pays the legal minimum. If 300 gourdes per day doesn’t create jobs, 335 won’t, either!

The protesters, mainly young women between 21 and 35, were demanding a minimum daily salary of 800 gourdes (US\$12), which might meet at least some basic needs, including health care. One young woman said, “At 23, I should be at university instead of wasting my strength for the bosses and a few pennies.”

Another worker said, “If we continue to work for this tubercular wage, we will never be able to feed our children, house ourselves, or have decent health care.”

The protesters didn’t mince words, openly calling out the state for protecting the capitalists’ interests. In one chant, they said, “We don’t have a government, it’s in the service of the bosses; we don’t have a president, he’s in the service of Apaid, Becker, Alain (local big business owners)...”

‘Burn and Crush the Bosses’

All along the march, the workers raised the miserable situations they are forced to endure by the profit system: “Some supervisors whip us workers...Many of us work 12 hours a day...If we want to earn 500 gourdes (US\$8) a day, we have to produce 300 dozen T-shirts.”

One, marching with four companions, said passionately, “I have been working for one boss in outsourcing



since 2003, before there was a union. When I protested about working conditions, I was booted out. But I continue to fight. Now we have more organizations, we can do as in other workers’ revolutions, burn and crush the bosses.” He clearly has a desire to end the bosses’ murderous reign.

Another worker who accompanied him added, “I believe that if workers organize and are not afraid, they can do anything.” Showing a keen understanding of capitalist exploitation and surplus value, the chorus of five concluded, “Without us the bosses are nothing, it is our work that makes them wealthy!”

These workers suffer under inhuman conditions. How can a parent or a young person live on a salary that is scarcely enough to pay the cost of transportation to get to work in the first place? That is why they chanted unequivocally: “We’ve had enough, time to revolt!”

One comrade called on students to unite with striking clerical workers at the State University of Haiti (UEH) and street vendors demanding permanent marketplaces, and to build a single force against the bosses and the state. Workers see that the struggle must be organized apart from mass union organizations that are tools of the bosses who try to entice workers with crumbs. Enough of crumbs! The working class creates all wealth! We have the right to share it among ourselves!

From the Masses, to the Masses

Some phony leaders carry the red flag and say they are for revolution. But they have shown time and again that they are merely opportunists, spouting meaningless slogans as they try to mislead workers into reform-

ist politics. More and more workers are seeing through these political hacks. Engaged in struggle and discussion with comrades in Progressive Labor Party (PLP), they are developing confidence in our comrades and in our ideas. They are beginning to see the difference between PLP and other groups. As our ties in the working class deepen and we struggle ideologically and in class battle side by side, we are developing more and more confidence in the working class as well.

Workers’ struggles in Haiti, according to one young worker, are sharpening: “They have become more mature than before. But we have to be on guard against the opportunist politicians and mass leaders.” It is in this context, despite our modest numbers, that our PLP comrades are giving leadership in mass mobilizations and in leading class-conscious chants and songs.

University students are also developing more confidence in our Party. They believe our line is correct and are reassured when our comrades are present in many different battles. Their banners signal the unity of students with workers’ struggles, especially since many of the workers are their fathers and mothers.

Communism is the future of our world. As one worker said at today’s demonstration, the world cannot be transformed without the struggle of workers against the bosses and their agents. PLP is fighting to organize the international working class as a single fist, to put an end to the misery of capitalism once and for all and build an anti-racist, anti-sexist, egalitarian communist world.

As PLP maintains, “Together we are unbeatable! Join us!”🇵🇸

JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL FIGHT FOR COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

★**EDITORIAL**
Venezuela
Crisis Rooted
in U.S.-China
Rivalry
page 2

★**COLOMBIA**
Teachers Strike,
Bosses Counter
with State Terro
page 4

★**CHICAGO**
Smash
Racist Health-
care, Build
Communism
page 4

★**TEXAS**
Break Bosses’
Nationalism with
Internationalism
page 5

★**HISTORY**
PLP Honors
Workers’ Battle
Sites in Chicago
page 8

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.

★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, Latin, 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?


CHALLENGE is for the working class, produced by the working class. 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

Venezuela Crisis Rooted in U.S.-China Rivalry



Venezuela has become a flashpoint for the global crisis of capitalism and the escalating fight between big-power imperialists to control the world’s oil. The division between the Chinese-backed Nicolas Maduro regime and the U.S.-backed opposition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), reflects the shifting tectonic plates of inter-imperialist rivalry. Once the unchallenged power in Latin America, U.S. rulers are under challenge by rising Chinese imperialism. China is Venezuela’s second-largest trading partner, just behind the U.S. By 2025, the Chinese capitalist bosses have pledged to increase trade with the region by \$500 billion and foreign investment to \$250 billion (foreignpolicy.com, 3/6).

Meanwhile, falling oil prices have triggered widespread shortages of food, medicine, and basic services. In public hospitals, the maternal death rate has increased five-fold; the infant mortality rate is up more than one hundred-fold (New York Times, 5/15/16). After more than three months of widespread societal unrest, involving millions of Venezuelans, the Maduro regime has killed more than 100 protestors as it moves to rewrite the constitution and consolidate power. In response, U.S. bosses are threatening economic sanctions against the state-owned oil company, “which could be disastrous for the average Venezuelan citizen, as the already decrepit Venezuelan economy would sink deeper into depression” (oilprice.com, 7/23). It’s clear that both sides represent dead ends for workers. The deepening crisis in Caracas is yet more proof that the brutal and volatile profit system can never serve the needs of the international working class.

Venezuela is crucial to the global competition for control over oil. Venezuela is the third-largest oil exporter to the U.S., behind only Saudi Arabia and Canada (mysanantonio.com, 7/18). It possesses the world’s largest proven oil reserves, estimated at 302 billion barrels, surpassing Saudi Arabia’s estimated 266 billion (opec.org). In a period of permanent war in the Middle East and the growing inevitability of global world war, oil is the lifeblood of modern-day capitalism, from factories to imperialist militaries. Neither U.S. nor Chinese rulers will give up Venezuela without a fight—a conflict guaranteed to drag workers there further into misery.

Chinese Imperialism: False Hope for Workers

In 1999, former President Hugo Chavez was elected on a platform that attacked U.S. imperialism and promised “21st Century Socialism” in Venezuela. Under Chavez and his successor Maduro, Venezuela exercised increasing autonomy from the U.S. and began tilting toward Beijing. In 2001, Venezuela became the first Latin American country to enter a “strategic development partnership” with China (NYT, 2/15).

Between 2007 and 2014, leveraging the power of its finance capital, China loaned \$118 billion to Latin America, with 53 percent of loans going to Venezuela (Brookings, 5/8). These investments primarily targeted development of energy, mining, and infrastructure (thediplomat.com 4/15). For China, Venezuela is both economically and geopolitically important: “The Venezuelan alliance offered a crucial beachhead for engaging in a region where it lacked cultural and historical ties, nestled in the backyard of the United States — its principal geopolitical rival” (NYT, 2/15). Given Venezuela’s influence in Central America and the Caribbean through its subsidized oil program, China has quickly become a major player throughout the region.

Trading One Imperialist for Another

While a China alliance may have offered a temporary refuge from the grip of U.S. imperialism, it has also exacerbated Venezuela’s economic crisis. To guarantee its tens of billions in loans, Beijing insists on being repaid in oil. Due to a slowdown in China’s economic growth, along with overproduction of oil and natural gas from fracking in the U.S., oil prices plunged in 2014 and again in 2016. As a result, with an outstanding debt of \$62 billion, Venezuela has been forced to double the amount of oil it ships to China. Even so, it is behind in its repayments (Bloomberg, 6/18).

In an attempt to hedge their bets, Venezuela’s bosses are also seeking significant ties with Russia. Before oil prices fell in 2014, Venezuela was set to become the largest importer of Russian military equipment by 2025. In February 2017, the Russian foreign minister reaffirmed Moscow’s support for the Maduro government, declaring that bilateral relations “are on the rise” (Council on Foreign Relations, 7/18).

Desperate U.S. Imperialists Fund Capitalist Opposition

In the face of China’s rise, Venezuela is one of many countries that the U.S. can no longer unilaterally control. But despite their relative decline, the U.S. bosses retain a significant ability to influence and destabilize. As of 2015, the U.S. remained Venezuela’s largest trading partner at close to \$24 billion, mostly from oil exports to the U.S. (state.gov). To protect its imperialist interests, the U.S. ruling class helped train and support organizations that staged a failed coup against the newly elected Chavez in 2002 (oig.state.gov). Since then, the U.S. has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to fund opposition groups (Guardian, 2/18/14).

MUD, the main organization mobilizing the resistance to Maduro’s rule, is a right-wing coalition representing pro-U.S. sections of the Venezuelan ruling class. Among other things, it calls for privatizing the

Continued on page 5

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Chicago Project Trains Communists, Builds Working-Class Confidence

CHICAGO, July 17—More than 100 members and friends, ages 11-72, women and men, Asian, Latin, Black, and white participated in the weeklong Summer Project. The goal of the Summer Project was to support the political struggles in Chicago, educate ourselves and our base, and reach out to workers across the region with a revolutionary communist analysis.

Communist Agitation

On the first day, during a cookout in the park, comrades and friends worked together to develop a political editorial for CHALLENGE. We struggled together to understand the complex ideas of inter-imperialist rivalry and then write about them in a way to help working-class readers understand and see the need to fight back.

The next day we went to three bus barns to talk to bus operators. In Chicago, the bus and train operators are in different locals of the Amalgamated Transit Union. Local 308, the train operators, had held a strike authorization vote with 97 percent voting in favor of a strike. They have been working without a contract for 18 months and management wants to make cuts to their healthcare and pensions. Progressive Labor Party (PLP) encouraged members of Local 241, the bus operators, to support their brothers and sisters in local 308, and to take a strike authorization vote of their own (see letters, page 6). The bus operators were impressed to see so many young people up at 4:30 in the morning distribute them leaflets and newspapers on their way into work, and had a wonderful response to our militant, revolutionary message.

After our morning with the bus operators, we gathered to study political economy. (It is based on the understanding that the economy is a political relationship between classes—under capitalism that relationship is one of exploitation of the working class by the capitalists for profit. Political economy also helps us understand how capitalism is a historical process that must be replaced by communism.)

Capitalist education and media will have you believe that these are complex ideas that only experts can really understand. But PLers know the working class can and must know how capitalism exploits the working class—so we can fight it. Veteran and new, Black, Latin, Asian, and white, we all worked together to break down these ideas and connect them to our lives.

When we later sold CHALLENGEs at CTA bus stops in the afternoon, Black workers on the South Side of Chicago were happy to see an



organization calling for the destruction of racism. By the end of the day, we had distributed 1,000 papers to workers in Chicago! We received the same response throughout the Summer Project, as we held many CHALLENGE sales. One day as we were rallying at a hospital, a sheriff van with imprisoned workers drove by, and as the workers heard what we were saying on the bullhorn, some lifted their fists in solidarity. A comrade reflected that “they were like all of the working class—imprisoned by capitalism but still keeping a fight back spirit alive.”

Our last day was spent in a predominantly Latin neighborhood situated right next to Cook County jail. The jail is the largest single-site jail in the U.S., with a current population of about 7,500, and an average of 70,000 people passing through its cells each year. We marched to the jail, making the link between racist mass deportations and mass incarceration, with speeches and chants in both Spanish and English. The response to the paper and our march was overwhelming.

Communist Education

Education is a weapon, and we made sure we were well-armed during the Summer Project. Each day there were study groups covering topics ranging from the political economy of healthcare, to the divisiveness of identity politics, to the history and role of policing in the U.S. Through these interactive sessions we gained deeper understanding of how the world works and how we have to change it. One college comrade realized during the discussion about political economy that “they really just exploit us on the job everyday.” Other comrades shared ideas and resources so we all emerged stronger to defeat the capitalist system.

We didn’t just read to educate ourselves—we also wrote! We spent the first part of the Summer Project writing, drawing, editing, and translating the next issue of CHALLENGE. Producing the paper in this collective way was enlighten-

ing—both for those of us who work on it regularly and those of us who didn’t know everything that goes into producing the paper every two weeks. The new issue was printed in time to use on the last day of the project and it was great to see everyone rushing to read what we had put together so collectively. We should make efforts to always produce CHALLENGE more collectively.

Another day, one of the most fun ways we learned during the Summer Project was when we rented a school bus and went on an inspiring labor history tour of Chicago, to see the places of communists’ and PL’s long history of fightback (see back page).

Communist Culture

Throughout the summer project, we all lived, worked, ate, and learned together. We saw what communist culture looks like—sharing, building each other up to achieve new heights, struggling with each other in honest commitment to build the best Party we can, and committing to hard work for the needs of the working class. Over the week many young and new comrades who were hesitant to give a speech at the beginning, by the end of the week, got on the bullhorn. They shared personal stories that have informed their political views and led chants like “the only solution is communist revolution!”

We had newcomers share viewpoints that expanded our analysis and become leaders. Seeing the growth in everyone as communists was beautiful. By the end of the Summer Project, two people joined the Party! We are excited to grow PLP and build anti-racist class consciousness among the international working class. We can’t wait to get back to our jobs, schools, and communities, where we will build on what we learned this summer, and get our class one step closer to destroying this capitalist system.✪

Four-Year Struggle for Kyam Livingston Cultivates Working-Class Unity

BROOKLYN, July 21—A speaker for the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) chanted, “How do you spell racist? NYPD.” It grew in power as other workers joined in. This was the 4th anniversary of the death of Kyam Livingston, who died in police custody when she was denied medical care. The speaker continued, “Justice for Kyam Livingston, killed in a Brooklyn cell! Until we get rid of this damned capitalist, racist system there is no justice.”

This was our 48th monthly demonstration as about 50 people rallied for Kyam on the corner of Church Avenue and E. 18th Street. We were young and old, men and women, Black, white, Asian and Latin. It was also a day of remembrance for Kyam, who became ill while awaiting arraignment on a minor matter and was refused medical care while she cried in agony for seven hours. Kyam’s mother, Anita Neal, has led this battle for justice. Her fire, her organizational skills, and her unrelenting demands for justice have inspired all of us.

We have been involved in the struggle against racism and other evils of this capitalist system for many years. Giving up was never an option. How to move the struggle forward was the only question. All of the moments we spent together—making plans for the next demonstration, eating together, sharing stories—brought us closer. We became family. We became comrades.

During this campaign to gain justice, respect, and acknowledgement from a brutal, racist system, members of PLP have been making the point that these movements that fight for justice bring people together need to eventually lead to a revolution and a communist world—a world without borders or racism. A world that the workers will organize and control based on worker needs, not capitalist profits.

At the rally, we distributed several hundred leaflets and petitioned for a corner signpost in commemoration

of Kyam. The demand is to claim the spot for a working class woman who was murdered through the neglect and cruelty of the racist capitalist “justice” system. Several hundred CHALLENGEs were distributed. People on the street got involved in many discussions with us as passersby began to understand that this was the fourth anniversary and that this struggle has been continuous.

One of the members of our committee spoke on behalf of his local church. The church’s Justice Committee has been in this struggle since day one. He said a system that allows such racist outrages should not be allowed to continue. Kyam’s mother spoke of her anguish and how much she misses her daughter. She spoke of how our Justice for Kyam group has been working collectively with no acknowledgement from local politician. She spoke about a small scholarship fund she started for local Junior High School students, and how she wants a signpost with her daughter’s name. But she knows that a signpost will not bring justice—nothing will bring back her daughter. A signpost means the struggle must continue. Let’s fight to win that signpost to remember Kyam and make it a step on the way to a better world.

The collective work of our Justice for Kyam Committee has touched the hearts and fighting spirit of



the people of Flatbush. Many times when we were on the street handing out leaflets or collecting petitions, people thanked us for consistently being there and being involved in this effort. Many joined the rallies and took petitions and leaflets to give to their friends. Over the four years of this struggle, hundreds of people have been involved in these rallies

As has been the custom, at the end of the rally Anita gave out balloons and flowers. We marched to the middle of the intersection, stopping traffic. Holding Kyam’s ashes in an urn, Anita made a tearful speech about how much she misses her daughter and about her anger at the system that claims to care but just abuses. As the sky was beginning to darken, orange balloons were released and flooded the sky, as they disappeared upwards. ☺

Venezuela Editorial

Continued from page 2

country’s oil industry, an open invitation to even more theft and profiteering (coha.org 8/13/15). But U.S. imperialism’s grip on Venezuela continues to slip. In April, Venezuelan authorities seized a local General Motors assembly plant, forcing the company to halt production. Several other U.S. companies, including Coca Cola, Ford, Clorox, and General Mills, have either left Venezuela or scaled back production significantly (NYT, 4/20).

‘21st Century Socialism’: Workers’ Nightmare

As Venezuela descends further into chaos, the dangers of Chavez’s “21st Century Socialism” can be seen more clearly than ever. Social reforms promised under both Chavez and Maduro—for literacy, redistribution of wealth, healthcare, and land reform—drew mass support from the working class. But because they relied on high oil profits and imperialist China, they could not possibly be sustained.

As socialism in the Soviet Union and China eventually decayed into state capitalism, socialism in Venezuela allowed local capitalist bosses to keep their profits—stolen from workers’ labor—while making a few temporary reforms. As history shows, socialism can never lead to a true communist society rid of money and exploitation. Images of Venezuelan workers in long lines for food and medicine, holding inflated bolivars (Venezuelan currency) that drop in value as they wait, reveal the destructive inequalities of capitalism in full bloom.

The U.S. bosses are using the crisis to build anti-communist ideas, arguing that Venezuela represents the failures of Marxism. But what is happening in Venezuela has little to do with the failures of workers’ power and everything to do with the horrors of cap-

italism and imperialism. Many workers fell prey to Chavez’s cult of personality and nationalist politics, which called for siding with “lesser evil” imperialist China over the U.S. By putting their faith in fake leftists like Chavez and Maduro, Venezuelan workers have been left disarmed, with no organized, revolutionary mass movement to lead the fightback needed today.

For far too long, these frauds have misled the working class throughout Latin America. From the revolutionary-turned-liberal FMLN in El Salvador to the anarchistic, phony leftists of the FARC in Columbia, a lack of class consciousness has made the working class vulnerable to misleaders’ poisonous nationalism and reformism. Despite the revolutionary appearance of millions of protesters demonstrating against Maduro’s regime and burning police motorcycles in the streets of Caracas, Venezuela’s opposition movement is far from revolutionary. Driven by anti-working-class, dead-end electoral politics under MUD, it is steering toward a lethal alliance with U.S. imperialism. Today’s Venezuela is reminiscent of 2014 Ukraine, where a “revolution” was essentially a right-wing coup, funded by the U.S., to bring prominent Ukrainian neo-Nazis into power.

The only hope for workers in Venezuela and throughout Latin America is an international revolutionary communist party that rejects nationalism, capitalism, and alliances with “lesser evil” imperialists. A party that organizes to smash imperialism, racism, and sexism, and that fights for a world rid of money and profit. A party that rejects the cult of personality seen in Cuba and Venezuela and organizes around the collective leadership of the working class through democratic centralism. Progressive Labor Party is that international, revolutionary communist party. Join us in the fight for a better world! ☺

The Rise and Decline of U.S. Imperialism in Latin America

The current crisis in Venezuela is more than one hundred years in the making. In 1895, the US intervened to settle a border dispute between Venezuela and the British bosses in neighboring British Guiana. By doing so, the U.S. asserted itself as a rising world power and the top-dog imperialist in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1914, the U.S. strengthened economic ties with Venezuela after oil was discovered there. Over the next several decades, it openly invaded countries throughout Latin America that refused to play ball with US imperialism: Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Often, the aim of intervention was to facilitate financial investments and guarantee repayment of debts. In 1915, when the U.S. Marines invaded Haiti, one of the first orders of business was to seize the national bank. By the time the U.S. occupation ended in 1934, the imperialists had slaughtered up to 15,000 thousand Haitians.

During the Cold War, from the 1960s onward, Venezuela was crucial to U.S. leverage over imperialist rivals in the region, mainly the Soviet Union. For decades, Venezuela towed Washington’s line, backing U.S. coups and military interventions throughout Latin America, including the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the 1973 overthrow of the elected government in Chile.

In the 1970s, the tectonic plates of global capitalism began to shift. Venezuela and other members of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) began to exert greater independence from the U.S. Several OPEC members nationalized their oil, limiting direct control of U.S. companies like Exxon. In 1973, OPEC used an embargo to force up the price of oil. Venezuela’s oil profits quadrupled. In 1976, Venezuela officially nationalized its oil industry.

After a brief economic boom, Venezuela’s economy suffered when oil prices fell in the 1980s. In 1982, the Venezuelan government agreed to an austerity program dictated by the U.S.-controlled International Monetary Fund. IMF loans were a weapon of finance capital to attack, discipline, and impoverish masses of Venezuelan workers. In 1989, in a protest known as El Caracazo, thousands descended on Caracas to rebel against the growing poverty. The Venezuelan government responded by massacring over a thousand workers. The same year, the Soviet Union fell, shaking the confidence of hundreds of millions of workers around the world that communism was possible. Diminished class-consciousness paved the way for charismatic personalities and misleaders like Hugo Chavez to take center stage and steer any future movements into capitalist reformist politics. ☺

LETTERS

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

Political Economy 101:
Exploitation of Workers

This summer project has been a fantastic continuation of the Progressive Labor Party's yearlong work! It is fitting that we found ourselves in Chicago, arguably ground zero now for U.S. bosses' assaults on the working-class.

The racist Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system is cutting \$46 million from its budget, which targets mainly Black and Latin students (who make up nine out of 10 CPS students). Mayor Rahm Emanuel helped suppress information about his kkkops' racist murder of Black youth Laquan McDonald. And recently, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) train operators passed a strike-authorization vote—the CTA has forced them to work without a contract in squalid conditions for over a year.

The CTA attacks also have a sexist nature to them. Many CTA bus drivers are Black women, who have no access to private rooms to pump breast milk. All the drivers also deal with disgusting port-o-potties the CTA expects them to use during routes.

We held a strong CHALLENGE sale at one of the CTA bus barns. Most workers were receptive. One woman worker who took the paper noted the sell-out union contract bans any actual strike actions. The bosses and the union leaders work together to stop workers from fighting back! To win we have to break the bosses' rules. We run the trains and we can shut them down. And we'll never see revolution if we can't even defy the bosses' laws!

At another sale at a train station in the city's South-side area, we got a chance to put working-class theory into action. One comrade met a 17-year-old homeless Black youth. Even though the sale was over, we stayed until we were able to find him a shelter, buy him some food, and offer transportation money. That's the spirit of communism—sharing resources equally, and not hoarding them.

But perhaps the most important development came during a discussion on political economy, later that day. We all agree that workers of all colors are exploited to varying degrees, with Black workers being super-exploited. However, while we agreed that white workers are also exploited, are they "oppressed?" We argued back and forth about what that term means to our class. I initially said that white workers are exploited, but not oppressed in the sense of laws passed directly disenfranchising them. Black workers, on the other hand, have lived that reality in AmeriKKKa for ages.

But then I wondered—the U.S. ruling class once passed laws limiting Eastern European immigration. Irish workers dealt with direct discrimination in job hiring during the 19th century. So is that an accurate interpretation of the term? I don't know, but realized it is an imperative conversation to keep on having, as we fight for communism. I'll remember this Summer Project for years to come!

★

My First Communist Speech

This Summer Project in Chicago was an eye opening experience. The city has such a rich history of class struggle and worker fight back: from the Haymarket Square Riots to being the blueprint for residential segregation and the birthplace of a 14-year-old boy whose murder spearheaded the Civil Rights Movement [Emmett Till was beaten and lynched while visiting Mississippi in 1955, for supposedly whistling at a white woman, who later recanted her original story. Emmett's mother chose to have an open casket at his funeral in Chicago, to show the world what racism had done. Tens of thousands attended the funeral or viewed his open casket. Photographs of his mutilated body were published all over the United States and galvanized the young Civil Rights Movement]. Being here with PLP, and the work being done here is adding to that history.

Part of the project was looking into the healthcare industry and its racist oppression of workers. We had a rally outside Cook County hospital, and for the first time I made a speech on the bullhorn. At prior rallies, I have done chants on the bullhorn but not a full-fledged speech. I discussed the racist policies plaguing the healthcare system. For example, I pointed out the lack of treatment for common ailments (diabetes, high blood pressure, allergies, and the like). Also how all workers, but especially Black and Latin workers receive subpar care in comparison to the ruling class. The greedy bosses in hospitals, in pharmaceuticals, and

other businesses in medicine have turned healing the sick into another way of making profits. As someone who works in health advocacy and equity, this sickens me. But it is this anger I have towards people who exploit the healthcare of workers as well as the optimism I have for the future that drives me to work harder. Talking about healthcare under a communist society will be helpful when I bring that back to my friends and coworkers. Especially as it is now clearer to me that healthcare is achievable for all workers.

★★★★★

Hiroshima & Nagasaki: U.S. Bosses Guilty of Genocide

August 6 and 9, 2017, mark the 72nd anniversaries of the two largest terrorist attacks in human history: The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. military in 1945. In the past, CHALLENGE has well-documented the real reasons behind the bomb dropped on Hiroshima: (1) To warn the then-socialist Soviet Union that the U.S. had an atomic bomb *and* that the U.S. would not hesitate to use it, and (2) to end the war with Japan before the Soviet Union could become part of the surrender negotiations, even though Japan had already offered to surrender and Truman had rebuffed the very same offer that was accepted following use of the bombs.

But why was a second bomb dropped on Nagasaki? The story behind the second bomb is even more horrendous (if that is possible) than the first one. It turns out that the U.S. military developed two different designs for an atomic bomb. The designs differed in the atomic fuel (uranium vs. plutonium) and the method used to actually detonate the bomb. The Hiroshima bomb had been tested in July 1945 in the New Mexico desert. But the other design had not. So what did the racist, murderous U.S. ruling class decide to do? They "tested" the other design by dropping a second bomb on Nagasaki.

I can't think of anything that any ruling class has done that even comes close to what the U.S. ruling class has done and continues to do to the world's working class, both nationally and internationally. I hope that we can use this anniversary to rededicate our efforts to rid the world of capitalism, the most deadly, racist, and sexist economic-political system in history.

★★★★★

March to Commemorate 1967 Newark Rebellion

On July 12, several hundred folks gathered for a march and memorial to the men and women who were shot by the police and National Guard during the 1967 Newark rebellion. People testified as to how there were no roof snipers, as reported, or "senseless rioting." Many of the scores of victims were shot as they sat in their own apartments.

A Newark cab driver, John Smith, had been arrested for an alleged traffic violation. Cab drivers and Newark residents demonstrated outside the precinct, and five days of fight back began. The reaction followed years of racist harassment and oppression, much like the events leading up to the Ferguson rebellion.

At the memorial, a woman read the ballistic record of the victims, citing the names of 27 killed, one as young as 10, another 73 years old. All were recorded as having "insufficient evidence as to cause of death," except for one man whose body contained bullet fragments. The woman explained how her pregnant mother had been shot—a line of bullets running from her stomach to her ear—while she sat by the window of her living room caring for other children.

The rally was organized by the People's Organization for Progress, a reform group that believes in community oversight of the police and the need for revolution, but without changing capitalism. The main spokesperson referenced how racism has been used to divide and conquer the working class, but without mentioning the necessity for Black/white unity to forge the struggle for progress.

One hundred CHALLENGEs were sold. People showed interest in the recent article on the Harlem rebellion of 1964. One man, who had come in a wheelchair, noted that he had been a part of the Harlem rebellion. Another man asked for two copies of the paper, and said he knew one of our comrades who had been a leader of Progressive Labor at that time.

★★★★★

Healthcare Workers Fight to Unionize, Defy Management

Workers at Morris Heights Health Center in the Bronx are celebrating after voting overwhelmingly to unionize and join 1199 today. The organizing drive was initially spearheaded primarily by Black and Latin women at our center—nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and social workers. The struggle only triumphed, though, after they won the support of the most numerous and oppressed workers—the medical assistants, school health assistants, clerical staff, maintenance workers, and others.

Management did their best to defeat the organizing drive, distributing letters and emails urging the workers to vote no, meeting with them in small groups at their job sites, and in a last ditch effort, calling a center wide "town hall meeting." After years of disrespect and being underpaid, workers spoke volumes at that management-sponsored meeting, rejecting their claim that we didn't need a union because "we are family." On the day of the election, there was a palpable buzz of expectation and empowerment from this struggle. One co-worker who regularly reads CHALLENGE had the issue with the headline "Demolish Racism" boldly displayed on her desk, a response that inspired me to share PL's ideas even more.

Management further tried to divide the workers by attempting to prevent "professionals" (Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistant, so forth) from participating in the election and joining the union by claiming that they too are supervisory staff. In fact, the ballot of the professional staff had an additional question to vote on, essentially asking if we are willing to be represented by a union with "non-professionals." The resounding answer was YES.

The point of being organized is to stand together as one and fight for each other. We want one union, and our own union should not have separate divisions. There may be different job functions, but the important issue is that our strength is in our unity. In the end, workers from all categories stood shoulder to shoulder against the administration's desperate attempts at divisiveness and intimidation. We all understand that the real struggle is about to begin in our fight for a decent contract, and we will carry our solidarity forward to the negotiation phase of this struggle.

At a time when every aspect of workers' lives is under attack in this country, our solidarity is a breath of fresh air for all. We see the increasing anti-immigrant and racist violence in daily life across the country and globally. We see the worsening poverty and its disastrous effects up close and personal in our community here in the Bronx. We see the disparate healthcare issues in poor communities of color, the pervasive unemployment, and sadly, we see that the future is not bright for the youth in our school clinics. Our unity is an indication that we can overcome the divisions and racism that this country was founded on, and fight together to end this system that is oppressing and exploiting all workers.

It is important that we at MHHC, who are dedicated to serving one of the most oppressed communities in this country, fight back for a better life. Many of the workers at MHHC in fact come from this same community. Our resolve to stand together can be an inspiration for others to fight back in these increasingly difficult times. It gives us hope that some day we can rid ourselves entirely of the capitalist system that is destroying us and our families. ☺

Break Bosses' Nationalism with Communist Internationalism

On the fourth of July, the day celebrating the birth of U.S. imperialism, we organized an "Anti-fourth of July" BBQ to educate our base about the dangers of nationalism and to win them to a more international view. The BBQ brought out a significant group of families, friends, and neighbors. It was organized around ideas that came from our base about how to organize events that involve more participation from everyone.

To kick off the BBQ a comrade expressed how nationalism is a threat to all working people because it's an ideological tool of control. She explained that patriotism gives working people a false sense of identity and belonging to a group that includes their oppressors. U.S. patriotism is always divisive because it promotes racism against the people who are not considered to be "real Americans." She also mentioned the U.S. is bombing seven different countries, more Americans are incarcerated than anywhere else in the world, and three million immigrants have been deported. Due to the bosses' propaganda, the working class falsely believes that "their" country is looking out for their best interests, but in fact the bosses' aims and ambitions drive this system.

What About the Working Class?

We read a short one-page excerpt from historian Howard Zinn that explains how independence from the English meant nothing for slaves, the indigenous, and poor white farmers. It explains how the ruling class uses nationalism to make poor working people fight and die in wars they do not benefit from. The article puts the history in

a class perspective and argues that no slave, indigenous or poor person benefited from the victory of the American Revolution—only rich white male property owners did. Slavery continued to exist post-revolution, the indigenous continued to be beaten off their land, and poor white farmers were promised land but got very little or none at all. Today, working people must understand how nationalism is used by the bosses to justify racist attacks and drum up support for imperialist wars.

Need No Borders

In the following small group discussions, we talked about why borders exist, and how only the ruling class benefits from borders. We discussed how nationalism plays into the attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are fleeing countries destroyed by U.S. imperialism. We then talked about the solution to capitalist nationalism—working class internationalism. For their survival, the ruling classes of the world needs the working class divided, so that we are weakened. Organizing the working class on the job and in the factories—breaking the bosses' racist, sexist, and nationalist divisions—is the only true way to fight the capitalist system and establish power for the working class.

Many in our base added constructive ideas to the discussion. Whenever the working class starts to understand these ideas, it's one more qualitative step towards a communist future. More participation from our friends and coworkers is key to getting everyone to understand and think about these ideas more critically. Workers can organize to understand this system and smash it.✊

Forum: One United Working Class vs. Sexism

On June 22, I joined my community organization for a forum on sexism. I did not expect the conversation that was to come, in which a fight to understand sexism also became a fight for multi-racial unity.

The forum began with a total of 35 men on one side of the room and the women on the other. Not sure if the men did this on their own or not, but whatever the case, being a communist man, I felt it my responsibility to sit with the women. The leader of the forum began to dissect what is a woman and what is a man. It soon became two long lists of what men and women ought to be by society's standards. I tried my best to raise the fact that women are paid less than men as well. Not to the benefit of male workers but to the benefit of this profit system, which is run by both women and men.

Right as I was getting the nod of approval from the audience, the woman leading the group read a quote from feminist Audre Lorde. Unfortunately, I don't have the quote but I remember that it was about how the fight for equality for women, for the LGBTQ community, and the fight against racism are linked and tied together, which is true.

This is when a lawyer from the organization, a Black man, stated, "I am sorry but we cannot worry about the LGBTQ community or white people's problems because there are more pressing issues in the Black and brown communities."

A Black woman felt this was the last straw. She said, "Now I don't wanna be conflicting."

I said, "please do."

She said, "I've been to countless rallies and marches and you know who I see there most? White people. There are many white people in this fight against

racism. When I was at a rally at Riker's Island, about to get shot and arrested, guess who was there with me, a bunch of white people. I can't turn my back on anyone who fights for me."

The lawyer jumped back in to say, "let me clarify what I was saying, I don't mean any disrespect, all I'm saying is I can't see myself fighting for a people with privileges and wealth when Black people are not free."

A Latin woman countered with, "We're all oppressed so what's the difference?" The facilitator wanted to close the discussion with the privilege theory stating that we all have privilege.

I had my hand up for the longest and she let me give the final closing statement. I said, "Everyone is exploited by the system and the rulers use racism to do it. Dr. King knew it well when he gave a speech about white factory workers demanding livable wages. The boss there replied, 'Take what I give you, or else I'll hire a N****r, pay him half and get rid of you.' The rulers of this system need to oppress us at different levels to maintain their profits." I continued to say, "The concept of privilege is a way to have us bicker about who's wounded more, when it's the rulers of this system who have the privilege and have the money and power to do whatever they want. That's privilege."

I got the phone numbers of the women who spoke in favor of multiracial unity. I later invited them out to a movie to watch the James Baldwin documentary, *I Am Not Your Negro*. Unfortunately, one of them who said she would come had to babysit. She was able, however, to give great feedback on the movie. We've stayed in contact, and she is very interested to learn more about our ideas of how we can fight back against racism.✊



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

Rise of Noose lynching & KKK

NYT, 7/6 — It was the beginning of the night shift... at the United States Mint in Philadelphia...when a white male coin maker strode...to the workstation of an African-American colleague....carrying a piece of rope....looped and twisted into a hangman's noose, according to...president of the Mint workers' union....

It is the latest in a series of reports...involving nooses...that point to the return of the hangman's rope as a potent expression of racial animus.

Nooses, long a powerful symbol of bigotry directed at African-Americans, have been found hanging from a tree outside the Hirshhorn Museum on the National Mall; in a gallery at the National Museum of African-American History and Culture; outside an elementary school; and on the campus of American University, where bananas with hateful messages were hanging from nooses on the same day that the first black woman was set to assume the presidency of the university's Student Government.

"To me a noose is a lynching," said Taylor Dumpson...who became the...president....

Nooses have also been found in recent months at a middle school in Florida, at a high school in North Carolina and at a fraternity house at the University of Maryland....At the same time, members of the Ku Klux Klan...appear to be stepping up their public activities. Robe Klansmen appeared at a gay pride march in Florence, Alabama...and the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan are planning a rally in Charlottesville, VA....

...The rash of noose cases is part of an uptick in such crimes...that began during last year's presidential campaign and...has continued...over the election outcome....The hangman's rope...became a particular ob-

ject of racial terror in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when 4,700 people...—men...women and children — were hanged from trees, telephone poles and bridges across the nation....

Ms. Dumpson said she grew up knowing..."what a noose was. I knew the history, just as much as I knew the history of the Confederate flag.

Racist arrests for smoking while Black and Latin

NYT, 7/17 — ...Black and Latino New Yorkers are far more likely to be arrested for smoking in public than whites, who are just as likely to use marijuana.

These arrests have virtually no public safety benefit and can cause lasting damage to people who often have had no other contact with the criminal justice system....They can be denied jobs [and] housing....

A new analysis...shows that longstanding racial disparities have persisted. African-Americans and Latinos make up about half of the population but...make up about 85 percent of those arrested for low-level marijuana offenses....

African-Americans are arrested at 15 times the rate of whites in Staten Island and in Manhattan and several times the rate of whites in Queens....

...The study said: "The young people arrested for marijuana possession are ordinary high school and college students and young workers, the latter sometimes building families. They are not career criminals."

Yemen: UN scraps vaccinations for cholera caused by Saudi-Iran war

NYT, 7/12 — The United Nations...was suspending plans for a cholera vaccination campaign in Yemen because...the ravages of war there would make such an effort ineffective....

... [The] conflict...has crippled the country's health system and hampered access to...areas threatened by the contagious disease....The number of Yemenis afflicted with cholera reached 313,000 and the death toll

exceeded 1,700....

...The outbreak...has deepened a...crisis caused by a...war that has raged for more than two years between a [U.S.-backed] Saudi-led military coalition and Houthi insurgents backed by Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival....

The war had killed about 10,000 people and created the risk of widespread famine in Yemen....Nearly three million people are acutely malnourished.

GW, 7/21 — Cholera is everywhere....The Abs district was the scene of a deadly airstrike by the Saudi-led coalition...that demolished a hospital,...killing 19 people and injuring 24. Many other hospitals have been shut down, hit by airstrikes or turned into military barracks....The MSF cholera treatment center in Abs town alone is receiving 460 patients a day....

The country's cholera epidemic is spiraling out of control, and has reached more than 300,000 suspected cases....More than 1,600 people have died...nearly half of all the suspected cases are children.

U.S. Airstrikes killing thousands in Iraq and Syria

NYT, 6/19 — The United States-led coalition fighting the Islamic State since August 2014 has been killing Iraqi and Syrian civilians at astounding rates. The result has been a "staggering loss of civilian life" as the head of the United Nations...Inquiry...said last week....

Estimates by...Airwars, a watchdog group, says coalition airstrikes have killed nearly 4,000 civilians....One reason for the huge increase...is that the United States is dropping more bombs....In...Mosul...a 500-pound bomb aimed at two snipers there...killed 105 Iraqi civilians on March 17....

The Pentagon will no longer acknowledge then its own aircraft are responsible for civilian casualty incidents...The United States military has been responsible for 95 percent of airstrikes in Syria and 68 percent in Iraq....The air war began some 22,000 airstrikes ago...

Chicago: PLP Honors Workers' Battle Sites

CHICAGO, July 13—A feature of the Progressive Labor Party's (PLP) recent Chicago Summer Project was a "Labor History Bus Tour" around the city. The tour showcased locations of historical working-class battles dating to the nineteenth century, and locations of current struggles involving PLP.

Union Stockyards: Hotbed of Class Struggle

We started at the former location of the giant Union Stockyards, once a world famous animal slaughterhouse known as the "hog butcher of the world." Formerly sprawling over a square mile, thousands of Black, white, and women workers waged intense class struggle against the capitalist meatpackers who treated the workers horribly while stealing millions of dollars in profits. The Union Stockyards were named after the Union side of the U.S. Civil War. Basing the stockyards entirely on war production needs, the northern industrial capitalists settled on the site to pack meat for soldiers in the war. We reviewed stories from *The Jungle* written by radical journalist Upton Sinclair in 1906, and the memoirs of a leader in the old communist movement, William Z. Foster, who organized labor unions in the slaughter houses in 1917 during World War I.

Despite filthy and deadly working conditions inside the plants, most workers were not organized into labor unions. Those who were had craft unions based on their job titles. They were also divided by race—in 1917, of 60,000 packinghouse workers, 12,000 were Black. However, only the Butcher Workmen's Union allowed Black workers to join. We found their old union hall and we stopped by the old main gate to the stockyards, which held pictures and information of what life was like in those meat factories.

We also learned how the bosses are always relentless in their efforts to maximize profits off their workforce. In the winter of 1917-1918, Foster described how the meatpacking bosses were afraid of a strike inside the plants during a mass union campaign that was uniting the various craft unions to fight the oppressive conditions. A major union at the time, and still today, was the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which represented skilled, white workers. In this struggle the AFL misleaders prevented the workers from striking and agreed to a government mediation process for the workers' grievances. Many workers came forward to expose the treatment they suffered under. Armour, one of the biggest meat bosses, testified that he had made 40 million dollars in profits in 1917 alone. So to avoid a shortage of food stuffs during war, the packing house bosses raised wages, gave workers 10 hours pay for 8 hours work, and a lunch break.

It was apparently a victory. But as soon as the imperialist war was over, the stockyards were flooded with spies, goons, and "organizers" who moved to return to the craft union style in the plants. Foster, who was an organizer and leader in the old Communist Party, made no mention of study groups or leadership training programs. Progressive Labor Party has learned that we have to be involved in reform struggles with the working class while also educating workers on

the evils of the capitalist system.

Haymarket: The Birth of May Day

We also made stops connected to the famous Haymarket events in 1886 that led to the creation of the international communist holiday, May Day. These events did not fall from the sky. In the 1870s, Chicago was the fastest growing city in the world. Fortunes were being made off the backs of immigrant workers. Families lived in deplorable conditions. At the time, one of the biggest capitalists in Chicago was Marshall Field, founder of a department store chain today known as Macy's. After the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, workers all around the world sent money to the Relief Fund. Workers later discovered that Field and his cronies controlled the Relief Fund money, and were using it for themselves.

Working class outrage, alongside the struggle for an eight-hour workday, grew. In April of 1886, angry workers marched around the new Board of Trade's opening banquet with a beautiful red flag, led by Lucy and Albert Parsons, a Black and white couple. By then, the struggle for the eight-hour day had struck a chord with masses of workers and thousands were demanding it. Revolutionary socialists like the Parsons and August Spies joined these struggles and tirelessly organized and educated workers around revolutionary ideas inside the workers' unions and community organizations.

On Saturday May 1, 1886, thousands marched down Michigan Avenue singing labor and revolutionary songs. Factories all over Chicago closed down. The city was tense. Then, at a gathering on May 3, the police fired at a group of workers supporting the McCormick Reapers strikers, killing two with no remorse. The city bosses were looking to retaliate!

Overnight the workers called for a demonstration in Haymarket Square, at that time a busy intersection and commercial area, to protest these murders the very next night, May 4. The rally was small and breaking up, when the police charged up the street and opened fire. Someone, possibly a police agent looking to provoke chaos, threw a bomb, and seven cops died in the chaos. The Chicago bosses used this incident to suspend the legal rights of anyone suspected of radical politics and to harass working-class leaders. They used their newspapers to build disapproval of the workers.

Seven of the workers' leaders, including Albert Parsons and August Spies, were charged with murder and convicted. Before being executed,

they were allowed to address the court, which they did for three days. Their speeches have gone down in history, especially Spies' final warning to the bosses: "There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!" All seven denounced the bosses' court and capitalist wage slavery. All were defiant to the end.

At the birthplace of May Day, we sang the Internationale, the anthem the international working class, with fists in the air and the admiration for working-class fightback in our hearts.

Humboldt Park: Fightback Against Police Terror

Next we stopped by Humboldt Park where, in June 1977, Progressive Labor Party held a march the morning after a Puerto Rican community had rebelled in response to the police murders of two Puerto Rican youth. A comrade told us of how PLers marched to the police station where the killer cops worked, holding signs and red flags, and distributing CHALLENGES. The cops were unsettled by the group's boldness and by the great respect of the youth who came up to them and cheered them on!

La Casita Vive!

Lastly was a stop at "La Casita," the site of a struggle by parents of elementary schoolers fighting to have a library built at their school. For years, the local bosses denied this school a library, which mainly serves the children of workers from Mexico. Many parents pushed to renovate an old park building alongside the school into library. For years, nothing. Then, when these same bosses announced the old park building would be demolished in order to build a soccer field for a nearby mostly-white, upper-income private school, the parents rebelled! For 43 days straight, parents, fellow workers, and PLers occupied the old park building, which they called "La Casita" (the little house), to physically prevent the demolition. The students' parents, mainly from Mexico, while worried about deportations, were determined to fight for their children to have a library and had had enough of the way the politicians and school bosses treated them. La Casita was eventually torn down, but the morale of some parents was strengthened through their contact with the Party.

This concluded the tour. The Summer Project participants were a wonderful group of young and old, committed, multiracial and multigender PLP members and friends. The struggle continues, and we must continue fighting for as long as we live!✊

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