

# THE MILITANT

INSIDE

**Cuban 5: 'The poor face savagery of the US 'justice' system'**  
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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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## Oregon actions demand 'Free Hammonds,' open land use

BY NAOMI CRAINE

Some 300 ranchers and others marched in Burns, Oregon, Jan. 2 to protest the imposition of draconian additional five-year federal prison time on Dwight and Steven Hammond. The two area cattle ranchers have already served out their original, much shorter sentences for set-

**FREE DWIGHT AND STEVEN HAMMOND!**

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ting backfires on their property that burned small sections of adjacent government-controlled land. After the march, a small group of armed protesters occupied the nearby Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

The main liberal media and much of the petty bourgeois left paint the protest, and anyone who supports its demands, as reactionary, racist or "domestic terrorists." An editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* derided what it called "#YallQaeda knuckleheads." David Atkins, a blogger for *Washington Monthly*, argued that

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## Workers face depression as capitalist crisis grows

Industrial production contracts, layoffs spread



Real wages for production workers in the U.S. are at the same level as they were in 1970, while boss-imposed speedup has boosted profits through doubling output per worker.

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Shrinking demand, evaporating profit margins and overproduction worldwide in most products of basic industry, from steel to coal to oil, signal spreading contraction in manufacturing and a downturn in world trade. In this context, stock markets plunged in China, New York and elsewhere as 2016 opened, wiping more than \$2.3 trillion off the books around the world. In the U.S. the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 6.2 percent

— more than 1,000 points.

Propertied families in the U.S., who for decades have seen little percentage in investing in plant and production, where profit rates were falling, have been ploughing their money into stocks, bonds and other paper in search of higher returns, boosting stock prices on the market to levels today that have no relation to the real economy.

"At the peak of every speculative bubble, there are always those who have persistently embraced the story that gave the bubble its impetus in the first place," investment adviser John

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## Washington seeks bloc with Moscow, Tehran in Mideast war

BY MAGGIE TROWE

In the face of the five-year civil war in Syria, sharp conflicts between Sunni- and Shia-dominated regimes and brutal assaults against the Kurds by the Turkish government, Washington is attempting to forge a strategic bloc with Tehran and Moscow to achieve a measure of stability and protect U.S. economic and political interests in the resource-rich region. The Barack Obama administration's goal is for the new alliance to engineer a cease-fire in Syria and concentrate its armed might against Islamic State's grip on large swaths of Syria and Iraq.

"In today's world we're threatened less by evil empires and more by failing states," Obama said in his Jan. 12 State of the Union talk. "The Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation."

"And the international system we built after World War II is now struggling to keep pace with this new reality," he said, pointing to the need to "help remake that system."

Obama's nuclear deal with Tehran last year was a key stepping stone toward creation of the new alliance. And, in recent talks with officials in Moscow, Secretary of State John Kerry has made it clear that a cease-fire

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## Chicago protesters vow to step up fight against killings by cops



Reuters/Frank Polich

Following Jan. 6 funeral service for Bettie Jones, killed by Chicago cop day after Christmas, her daughters, Latisha and LaTonya Jones, left and right, led chants against police brutality.

BY ILONA GERSH

CHICAGO — "We have to stand together against the police. Pull it together and stick together," Latisha Jones, daughter of Bettie Jones, who was gunned down by Chicago police the day after Christmas along with neighbor Quintonio LeGrier, told some 350 people packed into the New Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist

Church Jan. 6 for her funeral. "This police killing has got to stop," her sister LaTonya Jones said.

"It was not an accident, it is a pattern," said Jason Ervin, alderman in the city's 28th district. "Until we as a community stand together, it will continue. Let's take this moment of pain and change it into a powerful message."

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## Colonial plunder of toilers deepens as debt crisis grows in Puerto Rico

BY SETH GALINSKY

Six months after Gov. Alejandro García Padilla said that the Puerto Rican government's \$73 billion debt is unpayable, capitalist bondholders are still collecting and filling their bank accounts on the backs of working people on the island.

"There's a crisis across all of Puerto Rico and it's because of the savage capitalism we face as a U.S. colony," retired construction electrician Miguel Sánchez told the *Militant* by phone from Florida, Puerto Rico, Jan. 12.

Puerto Rico's gross domestic product has dropped more than 14 percent since 2006; 12,000 businesses and factories have closed; and 225,000 jobs have been eliminated, including 25,000 government workers laid off.

The island has a net loss of 1,200 people every week, as youth especially head to the United States looking for work.

The government defaulted on a \$36 million interest payment owed Jan. 4,

but paid more than \$850 million on other debt service the same day. Debt service is projected to equal nearly 40 percent of government revenue by the end of this year.

To pay the bondholders, the government last year raised the sales tax to 11.5 percent. Pensions for government workers have been reduced, the

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LA Pac 9 port workers win ruling, advance fight for union

Pa. Steelworkers support unionists locked out by ATI



# UK flooding: Workers bring solidarity, gov’t cuts funding

BY HUGO WILS

MANCHESTER, England — For the second time in less than a month, thousands of people’s lives in the U.K. have been turned upside down by widespread flooding. A new round of rainstorms hit areas across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over the Christmas holidays, causing flooding in northern urban areas, including the cities of York, Leeds and Manchester.

Although rainfall has been unusually high, with three storms crossing over the U.K. in December, what has been visited on working people is a disaster bred by capitalist social relations, not nature.

In recent years nearly 10,000 homes in the U.K. have been built annually on floodplains, mostly geared towards working people. “Because there is such a housing shortage then if something gets built, people will move into it despite the flood risk,” Guy Michaels, co-author of a report for the London School of Economics on the effects of floods, told the *Financial Times* Jan. 1.

At the same time the government has cut funding for flood prevention by 10 percent since 2010. A major flood defense plan for Leeds was vetoed by government ministers in 2011. It was replaced by a cut-down scheme that offered protection only in the city center.

Cold-blooded government calculation of the financial value of each plot of land determines what areas get flood protection. To get funding, each

flood defense proposal has to meet a test proving £8 (\$11.60) of damage will be avoided for every £1 (\$1.45) spent.

In York existing infrastructure wasn’t up to the task. In response, the Environmental Agency took steps that led to the flooding of more than 600 properties.

Widespread anger over inadequate government spending on flood controls has led to growing calls by a number of capitalist politicians for nationalist measures. UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage said “we” must “start putting our own people first,” saying Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron allocates too much money to foreign aid.

“Why do we spend money in Bangladesh when it needs spending in Great Britain?” Simon Danczuk, Labour Member of Parliament for Rochdale, a town in Greater Manchester hit by flooding, told BBC Radio Manchester.

“This kind of disaster can happen in many parts of the world. I come from Nigeria where you get even less government help than here, so I wouldn’t say just help people here, people need support wherever they are,” Abigail Ngeewa told members of the Communist League from Manchester on her doorstep in Lower Broughton in Salford. Her home is on the left bank of the River Irwell that flooded Dec. 26.

“When I realized the scale of what was happening I grabbed a few people and we set up an emergency refuge at St. Boniface’s Social Club on Lower Broughton Road, somewhere for peo-



Reuters/Andrew Yates

City center of York in northern England lies flooded after river Ouse burst its banks Dec. 28.

ple to go get a cup of tea, food and support,” said Vera Winter, who played a key role in relief efforts organized by area residents. “We put it out on Facebook, all kinds of people brought cleaning products, food and so on.”

“The council and police came to our houses telling us to move our possessions upstairs. They said the water was rising fast and we may need to get out,” said Edward Brady, a retired engineering worker whose house backs onto the river bank. “They could have done a lot more to prepare.

“I don’t have insurance. The Salford municipal council is giving us all £500 [\$725] and I’m grateful,” he said. “But that only goes a little way towards what I need.”

Some area residents echoed arguments of capitalist politicians who claim the problem is London’s neglect of the economically less prosperous north of England. “It’s part of the ‘north-south divide,’” said Cathleen Cainey, a retired sewing machine operator. “They seem to forget about us up here. We didn’t get sandbags, nothing.”

“What you’re facing is part of the bigger picture of how the capitalist rulers have no solution to the challenges we face,” said Communist League member Peter Clifford. “The solidarity and what working people are achieving here show what we are capable of as a class.”

In Rochdale a group of Syrian

refugees responded with solidarity, joining efforts to fill sandbags. “We saw the pictures on TV and wanted to help,” Yasser al-Jassem, a teacher who came to Britain on the back of a lorry from Calais, France, in May 2015, told the *Daily Mirror*. “I put out a call through WhatsApp and immediately had many other Syrian refugees join me.”

*Peter Clifford contributed to this article.*

## The Stewardship of Nature Also Falls to the Working Class: In Defense of Land and Labor

Statement of the Socialist Workers Party in *New International* no. 14



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## THE MILITANT

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*The ‘Militant’ joins those fighting for an end to the deportations.*



Casa de Maryland

Dec. 30 rally at White House against move to deport Central American immigrants.

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# Socialist Workers Party backs defense of Somali meatpackers

BY NAOMI CRAINE

“We met with workers in their homes, outside the giant Cargill meatpacking plant where more than 150 Somali workers were fired in December in a dispute over their right to pray, and in small stores affected by the firings,” reported Jacquie Henderson from Minneapolis. She was part of a team of members and supporters of the Socialist Workers Party from Colorado, California and Minnesota who visited Fort Morgan, Colorado, Jan. 9-11 to learn more about the workers’ fight and be able to build support for it.

“Many wanted to learn more about a party like ours,” she said, especially after seeing the *Militant’s* coverage of party leader Joel Britton joining Imam Musa Baldé in speaking at a meeting protesting an attack on a mosque in Alameda, California.

“Dozens of workers stopped to talk at Cargill’s afternoon shift change Jan. 11,” Henderson said. “Twenty-four bought copies of the *Militant* and one Spanish-speaking worker with 20 years at the plant subscribed. He disagreed with some of his co-workers who said that perhaps the Muslims were just trying to get more breaks. ‘I do think the Somali workers have a problem with the company denying them time to pray,’ he said. ‘The company has been trying to push all of us back on our break.’”

“One Caucasian worker who was picking up his brother and got a copy of the paper said he wasn’t for companies and governments interfering in people’s lives, ‘like in Oregon, where the two guys were put in jail for taking care of their land,’” Henderson wrote.

“We have been taking initiatives in

defense of Mohamed Harkat, who the Canadian government is trying to deport,” wrote Katy LeRougetel from Calgary, Alberta. Originally from Algeria, Harkat is one of the “Secret Trial 5” — Muslim Arab men subjected to arbitrary detention and threat of deportation using “security certificates.” The certificates allow the government to use secret evidence that neither the defendants nor their lawyers can see.

“Members of the Communist League here have spoken with co-workers about this attack on all workers’ rights,” said LeRougetel. “Several have signed letters opposing Harkat’s deportation. I spoke about the case at a candlelight vigil in front of City Hall Jan. 6, organized by the Hussaini Association of Calgary to protest the execution of Sheik Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia. There were lots of nods when I said that attacks on Muslims and mosques were encouraged by the government’s ‘war on terror.’”

In Miami, SWP member Amanda Ulman and Munawar Chaudhry of Muslims for Peace and the Al Ahmadiyya Muslim Community shared the



Militant/Rich Stuart

**Jacquie Henderson at Cargill plant gate in Fort Morgan, Colorado. Socialist Workers Party team expressed solidarity with fired workers in fight to defend prayer breaks, win jobs back.**

platform at a Militant Labor Forum Jan. 8. In December the SWP participated in a public meeting that Al Ahmadiyya organized in Hallandale Beach as a memorial for those killed in the attack by Islamic State supporters in San Bernardino, California, and in response to attacks on several Florida mosques.

“We will continue to join with others

in protesting these attacks,” said Ulman. “Washington uses the violent massacres in San Bernardino and Paris to justify its military policy in the Mideast. This is what encourages those who attack Muslims and mosques. Defense comes from public mobilizations.”

Chaudhry said that statements of solidarity “give strength to Muslims in times like this.”

## Oregon actions: ‘Free Hammonds,’ open land use

**Continued from front page** while Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter protesters “are met with batons and tear gas,” the cops are letting the Oregon occupiers off the hook, saying they should get the same treatment as Islamic State terrorists.

While most local residents say they would like the occupiers to leave, many ranchers and farmers in Oregon and around the country back the demand to free the Hammonds and oppose growing government regulations that burden

ranchers and others trying to make a living off the land.

Federal authorities charged 73-year-old Dwight Hammond and his son Steven, who have owned ranch land bordering the Malheur refuge since the 1960s, with conspiracy and arson for several controlled fires that inadvertently spread to public land. They set the fires both to protect their ranch from nearby wildfires and to control intrusive weeds, a common practice.

In 2012 Dwight Hammond was convicted on one count for a 2001 fire. His son was found guilty in that blaze and one in 2006, which burned one acre of public land while protecting their ranch’s winterfeed from a wildfire started by lightning.

The federal government’s charges against the Hammonds included a mandatory five-year prison sentence under the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. After the convictions, trial Judge Michael Hogan refused to impose the mandatory terms, saying they would be “grossly disproportionate.” Citing the constitutional protection against cruel and unusual punishment, Hogan sentenced Dwight Hammond to three months and Steven Hammond to one year in prison, which they served.

The government appealed, and the 9th Circuit Court ordered the district court to resentence them. The Hammonds reported to a prison in California Jan. 4 to begin serving the longer terms.

“This is a good example of why we need land reform in the U.S., especially for poor farmers,” Willie Head, an African-American farmer in Pavo, Georgia, involved in struggles to defend working farmers and their land, told the *Militant*. “What really bothers me is that the son and father were convicted of arson and given a sentence, and then the federal court of appeals judge decided it wasn’t enough and increased it. That’s a dangerous precedent.”

Following the Jan. 2 march, some people — news reports suggest perhaps a couple dozen — took over the unoccupied headquarters of the nearby Malheur wildlife refuge. The group is head-

ed by Ammon Bundy, who owns a truck maintenance business in Tempe, Arizona. Calling themselves Citizens for Constitutional Freedom, they demand the Hammonds’ release and an end to federal control of land in the West.

Bundy’s father, Cliven Bundy, is a large-scale ranch owner in Nevada. He had an armed standoff with the Bureau of Land Management in 2014 over \$1 million in unpaid federal grazing fees.

### Protests over restrictions on land

Harney County has a population of about 7,000, spread out over 10,000 square miles. Timber mills and a mobile home manufacturing plant have closed since 1978, leaving farmers, ranchers and some agriculture-related and retail jobs. As in other rural areas throughout the West, disputes over grazing and other land use on government-owned land go back more than a century.

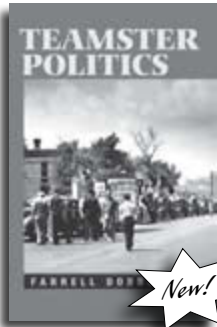
The first national reserve lands were set aside in the 1890s, provoking clashes with homesteaders, miners and small ranchers over access to timber, grazing and mining. The 1934 Taylor Grazing Act effectively ended homesteading, and set up a system of permits and payments for grazing on public land that especially favored larger landowners.

Since the 1970s, ever more government regulations, often in the name of environmental protection, have been imposed on federal land use, impacting family farmers and ranchers the hardest. Today the Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies control 85 percent of the land in Nevada and over half in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Utah.

Hundreds of residents attended a community meeting in Burns Jan. 6. Many thanked those occupying the Malheur refuge for bringing national attention to the Hammonds’ case and to the issues around grazing rights. Most also said occupiers should leave, not wanting the situation to escalate into a deadly confrontation like the 1993 FBI assault on the Branch Davidian sect in Waco, Texas, in which more than 80 people, including 17 children, were killed.

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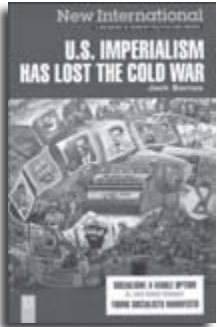
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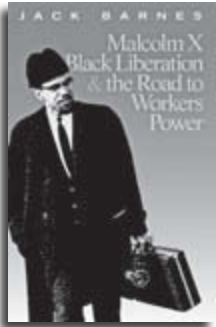
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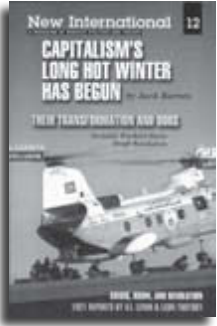
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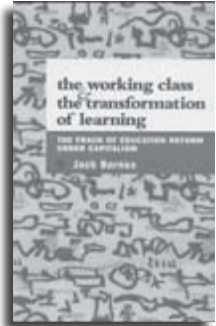
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# Washington seeks bloc in war

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in Syria has to be put in place, even if it means that Bashar al-Assad, that country’s bloody dictator, remains president.

Paris, Berlin and other European Union rulers are pressing Obama in this direction and the United Nations has set Jan. 25 for a conference on Syria’s future. But clashes between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Russia, discrimination by Iraq’s Shia-led rulers against the country’s large Sunni population, and the brutal war by Ankara against Kurds pose real obstacles.

After two small U.S. Navy boats strayed into Iranian territorial waters Jan. 12, authorities there first seized and then released the 10 sailors and their vessels. Tehran’s action “hailed as a sign of warmer relations,” the *New York Times* wrote the next day.

Washington balks at introducing larger levies of ground forces, but is stepping up use of its military might. Obama pointed proudly to U.S. warplanes “nearly 10,000 airstrikes” in Iraq and Syria and said the fight against terrorism will mean more.

Competition between Iran’s Shia-led government and Saudi Arabia’s Sunni monarchy for domination of the region — already evidenced in the proxy war in Yemen — became sharper after Riyadh executed 47 Sunni and Shia opponents of the government, including Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a cleric outspoken in defense of Saudi Arabia’s oppressed Shia minority. After demonstrations against Saudi Arabia took place in Iran, Riyadh cut off diplomatic relations and called emergency meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council, an association of Gulf monarchies, and the Arab League to condemn Tehran.

Islamic State, a merger of former al-Qaeda terrorists and officers of Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi army — forces who met in prison after Washington invaded and disbanded Iraq’s military — is a reactionary gang of thugs and bigots. It has seized territory in Iraq and Syria, brutalizing local populations, filling a political vacuum left by decades of betrayals by Stalinist parties and bourgeois nationalist forces of struggles by workers and farmers for independence.

Washington praised the recent success by Iraqi forces in driving Islamic State out of most of Ramadi. But in fact the operation was carried out by a 500-member elite U.S.-trained counterterrorism force backed by more than 600 airstrikes by the U.S. government and its allies. Regular Iraqi army troops, who fell apart and fled when IS took control of Mosul and Ramadi a year earlier, played little role. The bombings, combined with mines placed by retreating Islamic State forces, left the city in ruins and its popula-

tion displaced. Islamic State still occupies the area east of the city.

Retaking Islamic State’s stronghold in Mosul, a city four times the size of Ramadi, would require either significant Kurdish fighters, new U.S. forces or a transformation of the Iraqi regular army.

### Assad advances in south

In Syria Assad, backed by Tehran’s ground troops and Moscow’s bombs, has gained strength. Assad’s troops pushed into southern Syria, a stronghold of opposition forces supported by Sunni governments in the region and Washington.

The battle is centered near the Golan Heights, the region occupied by Israel since 1967, where a large deposit of petroleum has recently been discovered. While Russian President Vladimir Putin assured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in September that Iran and its proxy Lebanese Hezbollah militia would stay away from the Golan Heights, Hezbollah troops are part of the forces moving into the south.

Assad’s forces have imposed a brutal starvation siege against Madaya, on Damascus’ outskirts, cutting food shipments for the 20,000 residents there since October, leading to the deaths of at least 23 people.

In the face of worldwide outrage, government forces allowed relief organizations to deliver food to the town in mid-January.

Nearly 400,000 Syrians live in areas under siege.

### Attacks on Muslims, political rights

Washington, Paris, Brussels and other imperialist powers continue to whip up fear of Islamic State terrorism at home, amidst attacks against Muslims and mosques, laying the ba-



Reuters/Khalil Ashawi

**After Friday prayers, protesters in rebel-controlled town of Maaret al-Numan in Idlib province, Syria, march Jan. 8, demanding Assad government, known for brutal starvation sieges, lift siege of Madaya where 23 had died. U.N.-organized aid trucks arrived Jan. 11.**

sis for closing political space for the working class as a whole.

The U.S. House of Representatives, with overwhelming bipartisan support, passed legislation Dec. 8 to restrict its visa waiver program for 38 countries. The law, if passed by the Senate, will require any foreign national who has visited Iraq, Iran, Syria or the Sudan in the past five years to obtain a visa before entering the U.S.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel has backtracked from calls for unlimited immigration after attacks on women outside a Cologne railway station, in the midst of revelry on New Year’s Eve by groups that included young North African and Middle Eastern men. More than 500 complaints have been filed, 40 percent for various sexual offenses, including two charges of rape. There were reports of similar attacks in Helsinki.

Widespread publicity and scare-mongering around the attacks have strengthened moves in Europe to restrict the entry of refugees from Syria and elsewhere and fueled physical attacks by rightists. In Cologne six people of Pakistani origin were attacked Jan. 10 by a group of about 20 people, and a Syrian-born man was beaten in a separate attack.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations in the U.S. continues to report a step-up in threats and assaults on Muslims and mosques here. In Dallas, Anthony Paz Torres visited Omar’s Tire Shop and asked if Omar was Muslim, which he is, CAIR reported Jan. 9. Paz threatened to return and kill people.

He returned two weeks later on Christmas Eve, opening fire and killing one person and critically injuring another while he shouted “Muslim,” CAIR reported.

# Chicago protesters step up fight against killings by cops

### Continued from front page

Antonio LeGrier, Quintonio’s father, called 911 to get help when his son began acting angry and carrying a baseball bat. He also called Bettie Jones, who lived downstairs, and asked her to let the cops in when they arrived. When she did, one of the cops shot both of them dead. The cops say Jones’ killing was an “accident.”

Some 200 people attended LeGrier’s funeral at the same church three days later. LeGrier, 19, was taking classes in electrical engineering at Northern Illinois University. A number of his former high school classmates attended the service.

Ja’mal Green, 20, and Lamon Record, 16, spoke in the open mike part of the program, saying they were activists against police brutality. “Police killings are not the result of just the cops, but the system,” Record said. “All lives matter!”

“The fight isn’t over,” Green added. “Let’s unify!”

“In the last five years, 78 were killed by police in Chicago, most of them Black,” said Rev. Jesse Jackson of Rainbow PUSH Coalition at Jones’ funeral. “They call it an ‘accident’ when they killed Bettie Jones. Does that mean it was OK to shoot LeGrier? The police who did the shooting are still on payroll. Those who witnessed them are still on duty.”

“Today the whole world knows Bettie Jones, from France to South Africa,” Jackson said, pointing to the worldwide media coverage of the killing.

The funeral was attended by more than a dozen co-workers of Bettie Jones from the Alpha Baking Company — members of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union Local 1 — and members of Action Now, a community group active in Fight for \$15 and against police brutality and public school closings.

“Her death demonstrates the dysfunction between the police and the community they claim to protect,” said Rev. Dr. Marshall Hatch in his eulogy. “Our communities are not ‘hoods,’ they are neighborhoods, with people who work in bakeries and respond to neighbors in need.”

Action Now members broke out into a chant, “No justice, no peace! No racist police!”

“Amen to that!” said Hatch. “Let’s hear it one more time.” The chant thundered through the church.

The families of both Jones and LeGrier have filed lawsuits charging the city with causing their deaths.

Protests demanding the city take action against the cop who killed Jones and LeGrier take place as the Chicago Police Department and Mayor Rahm Emanuel face mounting pressure over

revelations about a series of cop killings and release of videos and other evidence that until recently had been suppressed by city officials.

On Jan. 4, U.S. District Judge Edmond Chang overturned a March federal court ruling that policemen Raoul Mosqueda and Gildardo Sierra were justified in killing Darius Pinex during a January 2011 traffic stop on Chicago’s South Side.

Chang ordered a new trial and imposed sanctions against the city, finding that senior city lawyer Jordan Marsh intentionally concealed crucial evidence in the case and lied about it. Marsh resigned hours later. This is the second time in seven months the judge has sanctioned the City of Chicago Law Department for withholding records in a police misconduct lawsuit.

Sierra was involved in two other on-duty shootings in the months after Pinex’s killing. In one, Flint Farmer died after Sierra, mistaking his cellphone for a gun, fired 16 shots at him, including three into his back as he lay prone on the ground. Farmer was unarmed.

A criminal investigation was launched by the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office and federal authorities, but no charges have been filed. Sierra resigned from the department last year, while the city settled a lawsuit brought by Farmer’s family for \$4.1 million.

—**MILITANT  
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# —ON THE PICKET LINE—

MAGGIE TROWE, EDITOR

## Help the *Militant* cover labor struggles across the country!

This column gives a voice to those engaged in battle and building solidarity today — including workers fighting for \$15 and a union; locked-out ATI Steelworkers; Verizon workers opposing concessions; construction workers demanding safe conditions. I invite those involved in workers' battles to contact me at 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018; or (212) 244-4899; or themilitant@mac.com. We'll work together to ensure your story is told.

—Maggie Trowe

## LA Pac 9 port truckers win ruling, advance fight for union

LOS ANGELES — After two years of strikes and organizing, port truck drivers at Pacific 9 Transportation here scored a victory when the California Labor Commissioner ruled Dec. 14 that they should be classified as employees, not independent contractors. The ruling orders the company to pay them \$6.9 million in wages lost due to the misclassification. The average individual award to the 38 drivers who filed the complaint is \$182,270.50.

The decision means the truckers may join the Teamsters union and will be paid by the hour instead of the load, increasing their income. Workers at Pac 9 have struck six times, and in July began an indefinite strike. Many drivers now work for other companies and picket Pac 9 on their days off.

The stakes are high. There are some 600 trucking companies at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, employing about 12,000 drivers. Bosses profit by classifying most of them as independent contractors, forcing the workers to shoulder fuel and maintenance expenses and unpaid waiting time. There are some 50,000 misclassified drivers nationwide.

The ruling angered the bosses, whose Harbor Trucking Association issued a statement saying employee status "means loss of freedom and control

over working hours, schedule, whether to work or not, and assets and equity such as a \$100,000 truck and lucrative contractual relationships with trucking companies."

"We demand a union and wages," Victor Molina, who has driven for Pac 9 for three years and was suspended along with 11 others for striking, told the *Militant*. "The company was cheating a lot, so we began to fight. We've had a lot of strikes, but I think the last one was stronger. We had support from other workers and from the Teamsters."

"It isn't just a handful of drivers that are misclassified — it's all of us," Daniel Linares, one of the 38 drivers, said in a Dec. 23 Teamsters news release. "We aren't going to back down now. We'll continue suing and striking these companies until they abandon the misclassification scheme."

"They control everything," Linares told the *Militant*. "They tell us which loads to pick up and where to drop them. There's no money for us, just the companies. But a lot of drivers know about the situation, and little by little the word is getting spread."

"We anticipate a flood of other drivers coming to the Teamsters to find out how to file a claim," said Barb Maynard, a spokesperson for the union. "Momentum is on the drivers' side."

—Daniel Huinil and Bill Arth

## Oregon actions: 'Free Hammonds!'

Continued from page 3

The FBI and other federal authorities have set up a command center in Burns, but so far have not attempted to dislodge the occupiers, based on policies adopted after confrontations like the one Waco. "They're collecting intelligence, doing surveillance, have familiarized themselves with the layout of the refuge buildings, may be intercepting calls and contacting people who may have had a falling out with the occupiers," the *Oregonian* reported Jan. 12, citing former federal agents.

The Hammonds say Bundy does not represent them, and they don't support the occupation.

"The protesters have no claim to this land," said Charlotte Rodrique, chairwoman of the Burns Paiute Tribal Council, at a Jan. 6 press conference. "It belongs to the native people who continue to live here." The Burns Paiute have their own disputes with the U.S. government, including increasingly bureaucratic obstacles about fishing and hunting on federal land. But, Rodrique said, the occupiers are endangering "the safety of our community and they need to leave."

Bundy says he backs the Paiutes' land claims.

Rancher Cory Shelman told a Jan. 11 community meeting in Burns that "local federal employees — who have reportedly been followed and felt rat-

tled by the out-of-town visitors and anti-government rhetoric — have 'a right to their jobs' and should be treated with respect," the *Oregonian* said. "But he also said he doesn't think it's constructive to label Bundy a 'thug' and believes Bundy has committed a public service by raising the issue of federal land management."

## 25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



January 25, 1991

In the final weeks leading up to the opening of a brutal war against Iraq, the U.S. government initiated a series of steps aimed at harassing and intimidating immigrants from the Middle East.

Under the guise of "security" against "terrorism," FBI agents began interviewing some 200 Arab-Americans throughout the United States. According to the *Washington Post*, Deputy Attorney General William Barr said the interrogations are intended to "solicit information about potential terrorist activity and to request the future assistance of these individuals."

On January 10, the U.S. Justice Department directed immigration authorities to start photographing and fingerprinting anyone entering the United States with an Iraqi or Kuwaiti passport.



Vonie Long

Members of United Steelworkers Union in Brackenridge, Pennsylvania, locked out since mid-August, picket Allegheny Technologies plant, Dec. 30. Other unionists joined in solidarity.

## Pa. Steelworkers support unionists locked out by ATI

BRACKENRIDGE, Pa. — On Dec. 30, I delivered a 400-pound carload of canned goods, nonperishable food and \$360 to the United Steelworkers Local 1196 union hall. Members here and at 11 other mills in six states have been locked out by Allegheny Technologies Inc. since Aug. 15.

The donation from Steelworkers Local 1165, my local, was part of a solidarity effort by USW locals at ArcelorMittal mills in several states. Their contracts covering some 13,000 members expired Sept. 1. ArcelorMittal, like ATI, is demanding steep concessions.

We took the contributions to Brackenridge because there is coordination between 1196 units and other ATI locals.

My father, Vonie Jr. (I'm Vonie III), went with me. Dad is a retired 40-year Steelworker.

Before we reached the hall we drove up to a picket shanty at a main gate of the facility, located in the shadow of the recent \$1 billion upgrade to the plant.

We introduced ourselves and joined six brothers at the burn barrel. Steady traffic passed us, honking their horns and giving the thumbs up.

At the hall we were greeted with many thanks as we stacked the car's contents onto a banquet table that bowed under its weight.

Mark Miecznikowski, Local 1196-01 unit chair, walked us through the hall explaining the local's activities there, at the picket locations and throughout

the communities. ATI's footprint runs through several boroughs along the Allegheny River. He proudly showed us a large archive display dating back to 1942 when the USW was formed and to its predecessor, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, which was part of the labor battles of the 1930s.

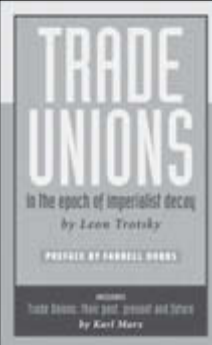
Then he accompanied us to many of the picket locations.

The locked-out sisters and brothers said they appreciate the support shown by other unionists, and are trying to find optimism in recent National Labor Relations Board decisions favorable to them and in the tentative agreement between U.S. Steel and the USW.

Every picket location now has an enclosed shanty and wood burner.

We ended up back at the union hall where we had a hot meal and coffee with a few sisters and brothers coming from or preparing for picket duty.

—Vonie Long, USW Local 1165 president, Coatesville, Pennsylvania



"More food for thought (and action) than will be found in any book on the union question."  
— FARRELL DOBBS

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January 25, 1991

In the final weeks leading up to the opening of a brutal war against Iraq, the U.S. government initiated a series of steps aimed at harassing and intimidating immigrants from the Middle East.

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On January 10, the U.S. Justice Department directed immigration authorities to start photographing and fingerprinting anyone entering the United States with an Iraqi or Kuwaiti passport.



January 24, 1966

NEW YORK, Jan. 18 — The 13-day transit strike was of great significance for organized labor even though the Transport Workers Union new two-year contract falls far short of rank and file worker demands. It was the most effective demonstration of the latent power of American workers in many years, and its lessons will surely be absorbed by union militants across the country. The unity and fighting spirit of the 36,000 transit workers in the face of injunction, jailing and press attack was like a fresh breeze in the union movement.

Opposition to the strike by both the Democrats and Republicans ran counter to the illusion still held by many workers that they had any friends in either capitalist party.



January 25, 1941

Those who are interested in the struggle of the Negro people for full equality have special reason to remember Lenin on this anniversary of his death.

Lenin taught that the workers must take *power* away from the bosses: take away their power to hire and fire, their power to control the factories and discriminate against Negroes in hiring and classification of work; take away their control of the armed forces through their mercenary hirelings, the officer caste, whom they train to Jim Crow the Negro; take away their control of the press, the schools, the church, the movies, all of which they use to perpetuate the system of "white supremacy," and thus keep white and colored workers divided and the bosses in power.



# ‘It’s the poor who face the savagery’

## Cuban 5 talk of their lives within US working class: How Cuban Revolution’s class va

BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

*Nothing that happened is about us as individuals. It’s about the Cuban people who we represent.*

ANTONIO GUERRERO  
February 2015

On September 12, 1998, in “shock and awe” predawn raids by the Clinton administration’s federal police force, the

### INTRODUCTION TO NEW BOOK

US government arrested ten Cubans living and working in south Florida and announced to the world that they had captured a network of “Castro’s spies.” Five of those arrested rapidly cut deals to collaborate with their jailers and disappeared from history.

The other five from that moment on began writing a new chapter in the history of the Cuban Revolution. A new chapter in the struggle of the international working class and popular masses to free themselves from imperialist oppression and capitalist exploitation.

Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, and René González are today known around the world as the Cuban Five, and in Cuba as the Five Heroes.

In face of intense pressure from Washington’s prosecutors, each of the Five refused to turn traitor to themselves and the revolution they were defending. They spurned threats, enticements, and banishment to seventeen months in the hole. They refused to plead guilty to frame-up charges hurled against them by the US government or “plea bargain” with their prosecutors. They proudly defended the work they were doing to pro-

tect their people against terrorist attacks launched with impunity from US soil by Cuban enemies of the revolution — explaining how and why their actions were in the interests of the vast majority of the American people, as well.

With unbroken dignity and confidence, the Five faced the full “savagery” of the capitalist justice system they describe in these pages.

Tried and convicted on bogus charges that included conspiracy to commit espionage and, in the case of Gerardo Hernández, conspiracy to commit murder, the Five spent sixteen-plus years helping to lead — by their own conduct and example within prison walls — the international “jury of millions” that came together in the fight to win their freedom.

On December 17, 2014, that battle ended in victory. The US government commuted the sentences of Gerardo, Ramón, and Antonio, the three who remained behind bars on US soil. They were welcomed home in a spontaneous explosion of joy as millions of Cubans poured into the streets. “From that moment on,” Antonio said, “all the time in prison was erased.”

The year since their release has been one of sharing the joy of being reunited with their loved ones — a victory, in René’s words, “against the extreme cruelty of the most powerful empire in history,” which attempted to “separate, destroy, divide, and humiliate our families.” It has also been a year of “coming down to earth,” as Ramón has said, learning firsthand from the people of Cuba and the world as they “land and get up to speed,” leaving the years of walls and bars behind.

For Cuba, the release of the Five was a precondition for responding to a shift in Washington’s fifty-five year policy



“We must understand why it’s necessary for capitalism to disappear as a system,” René González told June 2013 national congress of the Federation of University Students in Havana after his return to Cuba. Students need to “go beyond the classroom. ... We can’t forget that many people aren’t in school, but they produce the wealth with their hands.”

of refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the government and institutions established by Cuba’s victorious socialist revolution. On the day the Five were reunited on Cuban soil, Cuban president Raúl Castro and US president Barack Obama announced that diplomatic relations between the two countries, broken by Washington in 1961, would be reestablished.

In making that announcement, Obama acknowledged that the political course implemented by eleven administrations, both Democratic and Republican, had failed to achieve the US rulers’ objectives. Despite decades of US-orchestrated economic strangulation, attempted diplomatic isolation, political slander, and provocations — not to mention years of terrorist operations, assassination attempts, a failed invasion, and even the threat of nuclear annihilation — Cuba’s toilers still refused to submit to Washington’s dictates. It was time to try different methods.



*It’s the poor who face the savagery of the US “justice” system: The Cuban Five talk about their lives within the US working class* is not an account looking back on the hardships of prison or the battle that won their freedom. It looks to the future, addressing something even more important.

What is it that enabled the Cuban Five to act as they did over those sixteen years? What prepared them to set the example they did?

Suddenly, in September 1998, they were not only Cuban revolutionaries, living and working in the US precariously and temporarily like other immigrant workers, at the same time that they carried out important work in defense of their homeland. In a single day, they became Cuban revolutionaries and communists deeply immersed in the US working class.

Like millions of others, they experienced firsthand the meaning of capitalist

“justice” in the US — what Ramón calls “an enormous machine for grinding people up.” In the United States, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world, right now, today, some seven million men and women — a number equaling nearly two-thirds of Cuba’s population — are either living behind bars or shackled to some kind of court-supervised probation or parole.

“We lived in a microcosm of the outside world,” Gerardo notes. “We came to know the problems of many places.”

Over these years, the Five learned about the class struggle in the United States from the inside. And this included the discovery, to their own surprise as Ramón writes, of the impact of the victorious Cuban Revolution — from its very first years — on important layers of workers and youth in the United States.

*It’s the poor who face the savagery of the US “justice” system* addresses the realities of class relations in the US without exaggeration or distortion, as the Five draw on their own experiences with an uncommon depth of understanding, objectivity, and humor.



“Anyone can write a poem,” Antonio tells students at the main science and engineering university in Havana. “But to spend seventeen months in the hole and sixteen years in prison and create paintings that don’t contain a shred of hatred



Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino and Fernando González, U.S. working class with Mary-Alice Waters, Pathfinder Press, (center); and Róger Calero, Pathfinder, who took this photo. Interview

Coming February 1 . . .

**“They chose five distant points for us to serve our unjust sentences. . . . But nothing could stop the Five from marching together with our people and our supporters the world over in the long battle for freedom.”**

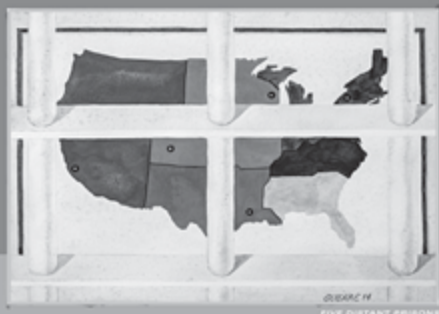
—Antonio Guerrero

Five Cuban revolutionaries, framed up by the U.S. government in 1998, spent up to 16 years as part of the U.S. working class behind bars. Each reached out to fellow prisoners with respect, solidarity, and through their own example — and won respect and support in return.

What prepared the Cuban Five to act as each did? Above all, it was Cuba’s socialist revolution, whose class character and values their conduct exemplifies. With understanding, objectivity and humor, in this 2015 interview they talk about U.S. capitalist society and its “justice” system. And about the future of the Cuban Revolution.

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THE CUBAN FIVE talk about their lives within the US working class



**“It’s the poor who face the savagery of the US ‘justice’ system”**

*Includes 40 photos from their years in prison and since the Cuban Five won their freedom and returned to Cuba.*



# gergy of the US ‘justice’ system’

values prepared each of them to reach out to fellow prisoners with respect and solidarity



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Courtesy Ramón Labañino

Above, Labañino, July 2011 with other Cubans incarcerated at federal prison in Jesup, Georgia. Clockwise from top left, Diosdado, Santy, Labañino, Miguel, Shorty and Lázaro. In Cuba, “it’s normal for people to help each other, to cooperate,” says Labañino. “It’s not ‘good policy.’ It’s a fact.” René González adds: “We earned the respect of others ... because we treated others with respect.”



Courtesy Gerardo Hernández

The Five “didn’t become ‘prisoners,’ says Mary-Alice Waters. “They broke through the prison bars, sustaining their freedom through reading and study, art and poetry, writing and drawing, running and handball, chess and parcheesi” — and by their own example helped lead the international “jury of millions” that came together to win their freedom. Left, handbill for Cinco de Mayo program at Victorville federal penitentiary, where Hernández spoke about the history of Cuba and Mexico at invitation of fellow prisoners. Above, Hernández, center, at same prison in 2006 with African-American fellow prisoners Brasco, Burke, Red, and Pope.



... that’s a product of the way we were educated as revolutionaries. It’s something we were able to achieve thanks to the revolution.”

Antonio’s words express one of the most important things readers will find here. As Antonio and René tell the students, nothing equipped them for that morning in September 1998 except the Cuban Revolution itself and the course followed by the revolution’s leadership from its outset. What prepared them was the education and values (the proletarian internationalist education and values, I would say) that they had internalized as young people growing up in Cuba.

“Let’s take, for example, the situation in which we found ourselves when we were arrested in 1998,” Antonio says.

They put some guy in front of you asking you to admit to something you didn’t do. He tells you that if you “co-operate,” you can get back all the material things you had, you’ll go back to your normal life.

If not, the man tells you, “We’re going to give you such a long sentence that you’re going to die in prison.”

So you have to be prepared for this.

You have to have already developed within yourself an understanding of what you will do at such a moment. Once you pass that test and say no, you begin to realize you’re happier than those around you. People see you and say, “Damn! Why are you laughing all the time? Why are you so happy?”

The prisons of the ruling classes are not unknown territory for working people fighting to defend their interests. That fact is amply confirmed by the frame-ups and mass incarcerations that have marked strike battles, insurrections, national liberation struggles, and proletarian revolutions around the world for a century and more. How revolutionists, communists, conduct themselves in prison, however, is always a test anew. Towering figures like South African revolutionary leader Nelson Mandela and Cuban leader Fidel Castro are both examples, as is Malcolm X coming from a different trajectory.

The account that follows opens a window on the political lives of the Five behind bars. The example they give us is worthy of study and emulation.

There is no romanticism of prison life in these pages, no pretense US penal institutions are anything but unreformable instruments of class retribution and punishment. There is no pretense they are anything but a grotesquely magnified reproduction of the social relations, values, and “business practices” of the dog-eat-dog capitalist world that have spawned the US “justice” system. And that includes the controlled fostering of violence, gangs, drug trade, and racism to “organize” prison life and break the spirit of the human beings incarcerated.

The vast prison network spread across the US is but the forerunner of the horrors im-

posed on other people’s lands in places whose names have become infamous, such as Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram.

One of the most powerful sections of the book is the stories of fellow Cubans the Five met in prison in the US, not a few of whom had spent time behind bars in Cuba as well. “In US prisons they aim to dehumanize you; in Cuba a prisoner is another human being,” sums up the diametrically opposite social relations and class values they describe.

Within US prison walls, the Five also enjoyed solidarity and respect, won through the acts of respect and solidarity they extended to others. Their account is peppered with examples. Many readers will be surprised to learn, as René notes, that “all of us were able to do our time without any problems from officers or other prisoners.” But that was not pre-ordained. It’s an expression of the social norms they internalized and acted on as Cuban revolutionists.

In Cuba, “it’s normal for people to help each other, to cooperate with each other,” Ramón says. “It’s not a question of a ‘good policy.’ It’s simply a fact,” the consequence of a revolution that overturned the cutthroat social order of capitalism, and of a leadership that for decades has maintained that course against all odds.

That is the example Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando, and René brought with them into their lives within the US working class.



Unlike revolutionaries imprisoned for political acts in many countries, the Five did not enjoy the luxury of serving their time together. As the cover painting by Antonio depicts, they were sent to “five distant prisons.” After receiving their draconian sentences — three of them

life without parole — Gerardo and René never saw any of their brothers again. Antonio, Ramón, and Fernando spent only a brief time together at the Miami federal detention center in 2009 when they were brought in for resentencing hearings.

The fact that each of them was on his own for so many years — and yet they acted as one — provides an additional gauge of the strength of their political habits and moral stature.

“I promised myself that I’d use the time in prison for my own benefit,” Fernando explains, “that I’d leave with my mental and physical health intact. . . . I spent a lot of time reading. . . . I told myself over and over that just because I was passing through prison, I didn’t have to become a ‘prisoner.’”

“The jailers want to destroy you. They want to break your physical, moral, and mental integrity,” René notes. “You learn the first day that you have to resist

**Continued on page 8**



Militant/Róger Calero

René González (left to right) in August discuss experiences within the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples. Above, continued with Five, including René González, in December.



Militant/Dan Fein

Ramón Labañino shared the *Militant* newspaper with others in prison and urged them to read it, saying: “People murdered by the police. McDonald’s and other workers demanding higher wages. Wal-Mart in trouble. This is the real United States. Tell me what TV station gives you information about these things.” Above, Chicago, Nov. 10, 2015, march by fast-food workers and others for \$15 an hour and a union.



# Capitalist crisis grows

Continued from front page

Hussman wrote in his newsletter Jan. 4, entitled “The Next Big Short: The Third Crest of a Rolling Tsunami.”

The “story” in 2007 was that the bubble in speculative paper wrapped around sub-prime housing loans would never burst. Today the “story” has been that stocks and investments in China, Brazil and other “emerging markets” will just keep growing.

But the spreading industrial contraction and crisis in “emerging market” economies indicate the jig is up. Those hit hardest are workers and farmers, who face grinding depression conditions.

“Coal producers around the U.S. are slashing production, as low prices make mining unprofitable,” industry outlet oilprice.com said in October, “with Central Appalachia reporting the sharpest cutbacks.”

Patriot and Arch Coal — the two largest U.S. coal companies — have declared bankruptcy, along with Alpha Natural Resources. Patriot’s Hobet Surface Mine and Samples Mine cut production 43 percent in the third quarter.

Faced with a glut on the world market, steel bosses are shuttering mills, laying off thousands of workers. U.S. Steel is idling its Granite Steel Works in Illinois, putting 2,000 steelworkers on the street.

More than half of the 11 iron ore mining operations on the upper Minnesota Iron Range are closed. Shutdowns began in March and unemployment checks are running out. The Mesabi Nugget iron plant and Mining Resources concen-

trate plant say they are closing for the next two years.

The ripple effect means thousands more, from support workers to waitresses, face shutdowns and job losses.

A quarter of a million oil workers have lost their jobs worldwide as overproduction has pushed prices through the floor. A year ago, the business press gushed with stories about the shale oil boom in North Dakota. Today, “in North Dakota, oil field equipment sits idle,” KX4-TV reported Jan. 4. “The rough necks laid off, they dump their campers in Tom Novak’s junkyard on their way out of town.”

The *Wall Street Journal* predicted Jan. 11 that a third of all U.S. oil producers could end up in bankruptcy.

Cuts in oil and coal production and the manufacturing depression mean rail bosses are slashing jobs and cutting routes. “Carloads have declined more than 5 percent in each of the past 11 weeks,” Bank of America reported this month, calling it a “substantial and sustained weakness” not seen since 2009.

CSX railroad announced it is laying off 277 workers at the Tennessee Erwin Yard and another 180 at the Kentucky Corbin Yard. Union Pacific has put more than 2,700 rail workers on furlough, saying transport of agricultural and industrial products, chemicals, intermodal trade and coal has tumbled.

Canadian rail volume is down 15 percent and Mexican volume 20 percent.

Plants that build rail cars are looking at layoffs. “I don’t know when, and I don’t know how big, but you don’t need a crystal ball to figure out that orders are down,” Scott Slawson, president of the United Electrical Workers union local at GE Transportation, told the Erie, Pennsylvania, *Times-News*.

Workers in the United Kingdom face similar pressures, as “almost every part of the manufacturing sector suffered declining production,” the *Financial Times* reported Jan. 12.

In Brazil authorities cancelled the annual carnival parades because the country faces “what is expected to be the worst recession since at least the 1930s,” the *Times* noted.

Capitalist bosses and their hired advisers in government and the media have no answers. Years of government stimulus measures — from seven years of zero interest rates, slightly increased by the Federal Reserve in December, to “quantitative easing” money-printing



Workers at Lide Shoe Factory in Guangzhou, China, go on strike demanding severance pay. In response to plant shutdowns and layoffs, walkouts by Chinese workers are on the rise.

schemes where the Fed bought hundreds of billions of dollars of government bonds and largely worthless mortgage-backed securities from banks — have failed to kick-start investment in production and jobs.

Instead, capitalist investors continue to speculate on stocks, junk bonds and other commercial paper here and abroad. “To say that the financial markets are presently at a speculative extreme is an understatement,” writes Hussman.

## Production slows in China

The economy of China — looked to in recent years by capitalists around the globe as a “miracle” engine of world growth — is running out of steam. Manufacturing there declined for the 10th straight month in December.

China, which bought more than \$2 trillion of goods and services from the rest of the world every year to fuel its export economy, has now had a decline in imports every month since October 2014, according to government data. Directly impacted are partners throughout Southeast Asia, including Japan, South Korea and Australia; “emerging market” regimes from South Africa to Brazil; Germany, the leading economic power in the eurozone that exports large amounts of machinery to China; and mining and manufacturing in the U.S.

In response to plant shutdowns and layoffs, Chinese workers’ strikes and protests are on the rise — nearly 2,800 last year, double those in 2014, according to the China Labour Bulletin — and workers’ resistance has won higher pay.

The capitalist media, pointing to the U.S. Labor Department’s report that jobs increased by 292,000 in December, claims U.S. capitalism is on the road toward full employment and recovery.

The official U.S. unemployment rate for December was unchanged from the previous month at 5 percent. But millions of other workers can’t get full-time jobs. This includes more than 6 million forced to accept just part-time hours — 20 percent higher than before the onset of the 2008 economic downturn.

The December statistics include thousands of temporary retail workers hired — and now fired — in what turned out to be a lackluster holiday season.

The government has eliminated millions of so-called “discouraged” workers from the workforce count. The labor force participation rate remains at a nearly 40-year low.

“Anyone claiming that America’s economy is in decline is peddling fiction,” said Obama in his State of the Union speech Jan. 12, claiming that a “manufacturing surge” has “created nearly 900,000 new jobs in the past six years.”

Real wages for production workers remain at their 1970 level. But production per worker has more than doubled, with more goods being created by fewer workers through boss-imposed speedup and disregard for safety.

Warehouse bosses are introducing new bar-code reading devices to boost the number of scans — already about 3,000 a day — that workers do in pick-and-pack operations each shift. Warehouse workers have among the highest rates of occupation injuries and illnesses in private-sector industries, the Labor Department reports.

Using new scanners that eliminate having to push buttons shaves off half a second per scan, James Bonner, general manager of Exel Logistics, told the *Journal*. That speeds up picking rates by 10 to 20 percent over a 7.5 hour shift.

## Cuban Five

Continued from page 7

this, and that the measure of your victory in doing so will be to leave prison a better person than when you walked in. Each of us, according to our own individual characteristics, adopted that as our strategy.”

And that is exactly what they accomplished. They didn’t become “prisoners.” They didn’t turn in on themselves. They turned outward with pride and confidence. They broke through the prison bars, sustaining their freedom through reading and study, art and poetry, writing and drawing, running and handball, chess and parcheesi. They corresponded with their tens of thousands of supporters across Cuba and reaching to every corner of the world.

And above all they reached out with respect, with solidarity, and with their own example to fellow workers in prison, to the human beings with whom they shared their daily lives and struggles for the better part of their adult years.

Today, René tells students in Havana, that history “is now in the past. We are five Cubans like any of you. We will take our place in the trenches and, like each of you, we will be judged by the work we do.”

Whatever that future brings, the Five have not only written a new page in the history of the Cuban Revolution. They have added an immensely important page to the history of the US working class as well, another intertwining of the class struggles in our two countries.

For that we thank them and the Cuban people they exemplify. In every sense, their example will bear fruit.

January 7, 2016

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# Free Dwight and Steven Hammond!

Working people should back the demand for the immediate release of cattle ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond, sent back to federal prison after they already served their initial sentences for arson over fires set to protect their land. This and other issues brought to the fore in Harney County, Oregon, since the start of the year are important for workers and rural toilers across the country.

The Hammonds’ five-year extended sentences were imposed under the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, part of the mushrooming of mandatory minimum sentences that have led to soaring incarceration rates over the last 30 years. Many workers have become familiar with how these laws are used to bludgeon out “plea bargains,” and to punish those who insist on their right to a jury trial with draconian sentences.

Those who call the people occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge “domestic terrorists” help lay the groundwork for federal agents to use military might against them. We should never forget the FBI’s murderous 1993 assault on the Branch Davidian religious sect that killed 86 men, women and children in Waco, Texas. “This heinous crime exposes the true face of the bipartisan imperialist government in the United States — its imperial presidency, Congress, armed forces, cop agencies, and courts,” said a statement issued by the Socialist Workers Party National Committee. The imprisonment of the Hammonds and related developments take place in the midst of a deepening economic contraction that has hit workers, small farmers, farmworkers and others in rural

areas the hardest.

Ranchers and farmers have been increasingly affected by the explosion of government red tape making it harder to make ends meet — especially for those who work the land themselves. Owners of large capitalist enterprises find ways to make the system work.

The capitalist state has been growing since the end of World War II. The Barack Obama administration has accelerated the expansion of federal regulation. In many Western states, where a majority of the land is under government jurisdiction, this leads to fights over access to grazing, water and other necessities for ranchers and farmers.

Mass meetings in Harney County have made it clear there is widespread support for freeing the Hammonds and for demands against government restrictions that cripple those working the land.

The purpose of the Socialist Workers Party is “to educate and organize the working class in order to establish a workers and farmers government, which will abolish capitalism in the United States and join in the worldwide struggle for socialism.” This points to the alliance needed between workers and working farmers to put an end to the dictatorship of capital and its increasingly devastating consequences for the toilers in city and countryside.

The Cuban Revolution set an example. After taking power in 1959, workers and farmers carried through a far-reaching land reform. Land there can’t be sold, and the right to use it is guaranteed to those who work it — gains that continue to this day.

## Colonial plunder deepens in Puerto Rico

**Continued from front page**

retirement age raised and social services cut. In addition the government has delayed giving out tax refunds, slashed annual year-end bonuses, delayed paying suppliers and dipped into cash reserves.

Yet capitalist companies still see dollar signs when they look at the island.

Daniel Solender, lead portfolio manager at Lord Abbett investment company, told Bloomberg News the same day as the default that “there are good opportunities” to make money on the Puerto Rico bond market, citing interest rates of up to 30 percent.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Jan. 4 that retailers H&M, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue all debuted on the island in the last year or will do so soon. While 20,000 fewer cars were sold in Puerto Rico in 2015 than in 2013, more luxury cars are sold per capita in San Juan “than almost anywhere else in the U.S.,” the *Journal* said.

“When the governor says that he’s going to stop paying the debt, he’s not speaking seriously,” Roberto Pagan, president of Puerto Rican Workers Union Local 1996, an SEIU affiliate that organizes board of education workers, said in an interview. “When he said that he’s going to put the people of Puerto Rico first before the bondholders, that’s false.”

Edwin Morales, vice president of the Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico, said from San Juan Jan. 10 that due to emigration and a drop in the birth rate, the number of students has dropped from 700,000 in 2008 to 379,000 today. “But the class rooms are overcrowded,” he said, because the government has shut down schools and laid off teachers. “There were 1,527 public schools in 2008. Now there are 1,330. They want to cut that in half.”

“Emigration has been an escape valve for the government,” Morales said. “If it weren’t for that, there would have been a social explosion.”

### Carrying off Puerto Rico’s wealth

About 40 percent of the population receives food stamps or other public assistance from U.S. government programs.

“The false idea that the U.S. maintains Puerto Rico is widespread,” Ángel Figueroa Jaramillo, president of the electrical workers union UTIER,

told the *Militant*. “But every year the U.S. companies take out tens of billions of dollars in profits. They are carrying off Puerto Rico’s wealth. And that’s why Washington wants to keep Puerto Rico as a colony.”

The government averted a collapse of the health care system in December when the U.S. Congress approved 100 percent parity for Medicare payments for Puerto Rico’s hospitals — which had previously been reimbursed at a much lower rate than in the 50 states. But it’s the insurance companies that benefit the most from the increase, Figueroa said.

“I retired about 15 years ago after the government of [former governor Pedro] Roselló sold the hospitals to private companies,” Luis Epardo, a former hospital worker, told the *Militant* Jan. 12 from Aguadilla. “They sold the hospitals at a ridiculously low price, but kept hold of the debts.”

“All over Puerto Rico you can see empty houses in every town,” he said. “They look like ghost towns. The malls, Walmart, Sears, J.C. Penney have gotten all the business and the small business can’t compete.”

The Puerto Rican government with the support of President Barack Obama is pushing for Congress to change federal law and allow 18 different Puerto Rican government agencies and utilities to declare bankruptcy to “restructure” the debt, which would give control of all government finances to a U.S. court-appointed financial review board.

Epardo, a supporter of independence of Puerto Rico, is opposed to the bankruptcy plan. “Even the supporters of statehood for Puerto Rico are against this,” he said. “It would be like giving the bondholders war booty.”

Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera, jailed in the U.S. for the last 34 years for his activities in favor of independence for the island, wrote in early January that instead of paying the debt, the people of Puerto Rico should demand “indemnization for all the pain, exploitation, repression, persecution and destruction we have experienced since 1898, when the United States invaded and militarily occupied Puerto Rico.

“We are poor,” he said, “but we are workers and we have the right to say no to the demands that Wall Street and Washington try to impose on us.”

## Frank Boehm, 65, was supporter of SWP

BY JOEL BRITTON

OAKLAND, Calif. — Frank Boehm, a long-time supporter of the Socialist Workers Party, died Dec. 30 of abdominal cancer. He was 65 years old.

Like many of his generation, Boehm participated in the movement against the Vietnam War, when he was a student at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. Convinced Washington’s war was an extension of the ruling capitalist families’ drive for profit and imperialist domination, he joined the SWP’s youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance, in the late 1960s.

In 1969 members of the YSA in DeKalb were assaulted by thugs from an ultrarightist group calling itself the Legion of Justice. Men wearing ski masks and armed with tire irons and mace raided the apartment that served as the YSA headquarters and beat the Young Socialists there. Boehm and other YSAers worked with the SWP branch in Chicago, which had been attacked by the same outfit, as had other groups, including the Black Panther Party and the Guild Bookstore, to mount a broadly supported and successful defense campaign to push them back.

Boehm joined the Socialist Workers Party and moved to New York in the early 1970s. He served in the national office of the YSA, taking on central leadership responsibilities in a period of rapid growth for the revolutionary group. He served as New York City party organizer and was active for a period in the Oakland-Berkeley branch.

Boehm resigned his membership in the party in the mid-1970s to pursue a career in dance. He performed ballet and jazz dance and became a choreographer, dance teacher and producer.

Boehm and his companion, Hanna Takashige, traveled to Cuba in the early 1980s to begin collaboration with famed Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso on a film about her life and the National Ballet of Cuba.

Alonso’s ballet company was closed down in the 1950s under the U.S.-backed Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. It was reborn in 1959 with the full support of the new revolutionary government. It became recognized as one of the best ballet companies in the world, and, in the spirit of the revolution, one that took ballet into factories, schools, hospitals and town squares, in the countryside and city, as well as in theaters.

“Frank wanted to show the role of dance in the Cuban Revolution,” Takashige told the *Militant*. “To show how ballet should not be some rarified thing only for the enjoyment of people able to pay a lot of money.”

Boehm and a team he recruited filmed dockworkers drumming and dancing, dances organized by soldiers and people in all walks of life. There are scenes of a project of Alonso’s to bring ballet to people with disabilities, including a dance class with blind children.

Due in part to difficulties presented by the U.S. economic blockade against Cuba, the film was never completed. Recently, Takashige said, Boehm hoped the opening of relations between Cuba and the U.S. meant he would be able to finish it.

Boehm remained a supporter of the Cuban Revolution, celebrating the victory winning the release a year ago of the final three of the Cuban Five imprisoned in U.S. jails. He continued to support the Socialist Workers Party, following the *Militant* closely, reading Pathfinder books and contributing financially to the party.

*Betsey Stone contributed to this article.*

### Correction

The article “Fight for \$15 Fast-Food Workers Support Calif. Farmworkers” in the Jan. 18 issue misspelled Petra Reynaga’s last name and should have said that Ben Fields sent soccer balls signed and paid for by members of Steelworkers Local 5 to the farmworkers’ holiday party.