

THE MILITANT

INSIDE
'Natural' disasters are result of capitalist profit drive
— PAGE 7

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 80/NO. 34 SEPTEMBER 12, 2016

Washington, Ankara push attack against Kurds in Syria

BY NAOMI CRAINE

The Turkish government is expanding its military intervention in Syria, with the open aim of smashing Kurdish fighters who, for the first time, have begun carving out an autonomous territory of their own in Syria, along Turkey's southern border. Washington is backing the Turkish incursion, while still calling the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) an ally in the fight to defeat Islamic State.

This latest seemingly contradictory position reflects the problems the U.S. rulers face as they seek a realignment of relations with Moscow, and with the largest governments in the Middle East — that of Iran especially, as well as Turkey — that Washington hopes can help achieve stability and defend its imperialist interests in the region. It's working people there, including the Kurds fighting for their sovereign-

Continued on page 4

Flood disaster in Louisiana is product of bosses' greed

BY STEVE WARSHALL

The heavy, relentless rains started Friday, Aug. 12 and continued for nearly five days. After more than 31 inches of rain fell on Central Louisiana, at least 13 people are dead, more than 20 parishes have been devastated, some 40,000 houses damaged or destroyed and tens of thousands forced from their homes.

Authorities say the catastrophe for working people is a natural disaster, a "1,000-year" event, impossible to plan for. But in fact what happened is a social disaster created by the workings of capitalism.

After the last big flood in 1983, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies met and designed plans to make further social disasters less likely — constructing a canal, a dam and new reservoir to siphon off high water, new levees and other projects. None were ever carried out. Too ex-

Continued on page 7

Socialist Workers Party: Back coal miners' fight!

Join pension, health care rally Sept. 8 in DC



UMWA

United Mine Workers union rally in Brookwood, Alabama, Oct. 14, 2015, demands U.S. government take action to defend pensions and health care benefits of retired miners.

A message of solidarity to coal miners from Alyson Kennedy and Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidates for U.S. president and vice president.

The livelihoods of tens of thousands of retired miners and their dependents are under attack. The coal bosses are shutting down mines — especially union mines — throwing miners out of work and forcing those who re-

main to toil longer hours under worse conditions to keep up production and profits. They are using bankruptcy courts to get out of their obligations to miners' health care and pensions.

This is a central front in the assault by the bosses and their government to make the working class pay for the growing crisis of their exploitative and oppressive capitalist system.

The Socialist Workers Party backs

Continued on page 9

Hundreds debate gov't moves to keep mosque out of Ga. county



Johnny Kauffman/WABE

Meeting in Covington, Georgia, Aug. 22 debated Newton County Commission moves to block building mosque and cemetery. Edmond Hall, above, speaks against Muslim center. Others, including Sam Manuel, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. Senate, condemned moves to keep mosque out. Anti-Muslim rhetoric divides and weakens working class, Manuel said.

BY JOHN BENSON
AND RACHELE FRUIT

COVINGTON, Ga. — "The Socialist Workers Party condemns the attempt to prevent the congregation of Masjid Attaqwa in Doraville from building a mosque and establishing a cemetery in Newton County," said Sam Manuel, SWP candidate for U.S. Senate from Georgia, at an Aug. 22 town hall meeting here. It was organized by the Newton County Commission to provide a platform for people to ask questions or comment on the proposed project.

The county recently adopted a five-week moratorium on permits for places of worship that would prevent the

mosque from being constructed.

Three hundred people packed each of two back-to-back meetings. The majority of the 70 people who spoke opposed the mosque. Some said they thought Islam was a "death cult," others expressed concern that the congregation would impose Sharia law on the county, or that the land could be used for an Islamic State training camp. Several people said they were worried they could be poisoned by the drinking water because Muslims don't embalm their dead. Speakers were asked not to identify themselves.

"Decades of war in the Middle East

Continued on page 6

N. Carolina officials attack voting rights despite federal court ruling

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

North Carolina has been a crucial battleground in the fight to defend voting rights for African-Americans on the heels of the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that gutted key components of the Voting Rights Act. The

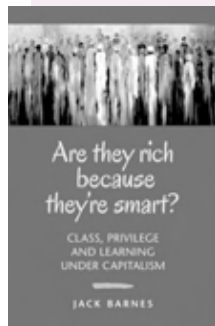
act was a historic conquest of the mass struggle for Black rights in the 1950s and '60s that smashed Jim Crow segregation

Following the 2013 ruling, North Carolina's government adopted harsh new restrictions on the right to vote. Protests by the NAACP, unions and other groups as well as legal chal-

Continued on page 9

Are They Rich Because They're Smart?

Class, Privilege and Learning Under Capitalism by Jack Barnes



"In the coming battles forced upon us by the capitalist rulers workers will begin to transform ourselves and our attitudes toward life, work and each other. Only then will we learn what we're capable of becoming."

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See page 8 to contact the Socialist Workers Party or Communist League nearest you.

Our party is your party!

Inside

SWP vice-president candidate visits McLeod County 2

Build 'Free Oscar López' rally, concert in DC Oct. 9 4

Protests denounce French anti-Muslim 'burkini ban' 6

—On the picket line, p. 5—

North Sea oil and gas workers hold strike over jobs, pay cuts

Teamster bus drivers and aides in Illinois strike for first contract

— SWP CAMPAIGN IN THE NEWS —

Vice-president candidate visits McLeod County

The following article appeared in the Aug. 14 edition of the Hutchinson Leader, the local paper in McLeod County, Minnesota, a rural area west of Minneapolis. It was published with the headline above and the subheading, “Socialist Workers Party’s Osborne Hart says the working class is the steward of the land and environment.” Reprinted with permission of the Hutchinson Leader.

BY JEREMY JONES

A candidate on a United States presidential ticket was in McLeod County this past weekend, but many readers may not recognize his name.

Osborne Hart is the vice-presidential candidate for the Socialist Workers Party, running alongside the party’s presidential candidate, Alyson Kennedy. While chatting with a Leader reporter in downtown Glencoe Sunday afternoon, Hart, an experienced civil rights activist and union supporter, called for an end to what he described as a “slow, grinding depression.”

“Working class people create the wealth in society, but we have no control over it,” Hart said.

And he doesn’t believe his party is the only group unhappy with the direction of America. He pointed to the popularity of Bernie Sanders and GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump as signs that the working class is looking for options outside of party establishment candidates. But Hart was critical of Trump, and of Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton.

Clinton, he said, offers to lead America down the wrong path with promises of building on President Barack Obama’s legacy.

“He’s going to be the first two-term president in U.S. history to be in war his whole term,” Hart said. “Just last week he was talking about bombing Libya. War is expanding ... Clinton, as a senator and secretary of state, has rubber stamped all war measures.”

Like Clinton, Hart said, Trump only has answers for the upper class, and not working Americans.

“He says he will make America great again,” he said. “I don’t know what he is talking about. The period he is talking about had Jim Crow, had the draft ... there was a whole section of working people whose wages were determined by the color of their skin.”

He criticized capitalism for imbalances as well.

“It is based on the exploitation of the majority,” he said, adding that new technologies, medicines and access to food and health care should be used to improve life for everyone.

“But everything has been turned into a commodity for profit ... instead of addressing human needs,” Hart said. “Public education has been battered and reduced, it has become a commodity.”

Hart, 63, has been a lifelong fighter for black rights, and has joined struggles against police brutality and segregation. He protested the Vietnam War, joined the defense of United Steelworkers, and has spoken in de-



Hutchinson Leader/Jeremy Jones

Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. vice president, speaks with June and Marlen Wichelman during interview at Happy Hour Cafe in Glencoe, Minnesota, Aug. 7.

fense of the Cuban Revolution. He ran for mayor of Philadelphia in 2015, and has worked as a meatpacker, steelworker, on railroads and in warehouses and Walmart.

What they would do differently

Hart calls for a “massive public works program.” He said such a project should be tackled by giving jobs to Americans at union wages, and include the construction of modern roads, schools, hospitals and improved internet availability.

He also wants to see universal health care “from the cradle to the grave.”

But how would such massive undertakings be paid for?

“There is plenty of wealth out there,” Hart said. “It needs to be used for the people who make it.”

Kennedy and Hart call for all U.S. troops to return home.

“Intervention creates vacuums,” Hart said, adding the voids are filled by terrorist groups that harm the working people in those countries.

One federal issue that has been of keen interest to many McLeod County residents these past few years is the Environmental Protection Agency’s interpretation of “waters of the United States.” The language is included in the 1972 Clean Water Act, which seeks to regulate water use and maintain clean water. A recent ruling from the EPA

opens up more county ditches to federal jurisdiction, depending on the interpretation.

Hart compared the burden federal jurisdiction of ditches placed on farmers to limits placed on ranchers with free-range grazing livestock.

“In terms of the environment, farmers and ranchers are one of the most conscious people,” he said. “They are conscientious about the environment, but they face these massive regulations.”

Hart called the working class the steward of the land and environment, and said that working people can solve environmental problems when allowed to.

“What did government regulation do for people in Flint (Michigan)?” he asked.

Hart also called for a minimum wage that will keep pace with inflation. He said that not only have wages fallen behind inflation, but they have fallen behind the increased productivity of American workers, and the profits they are creating.

Warm reception

Hart said that McLeod County is not the first conservative-leaning county where he has had a warm reception. Residents in Glencoe and Hutchinson are among those who signed a peti-

Continued on page 5

THE MILITANT

Fight to defend pensions for all workers

Bosses and capitalist rulers are moving to eliminate or slash pensions, including to Teamsters and coal miners in the U.S. and other working people worldwide. The ‘Militant’ covers the fight to defend workers’ pensions and to make them a government-funded social right for all.



Reuters/Rodrigo Garrido

Rally in Santiago, Chile, Aug. 21 demanding government-guaranteed pensions.

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SWP: ‘Working class needs to take political power in US’

WATERVLIET, N.Y. — “I’m registered as a Democrat, but it really doesn’t matter. They’re both awful,” Mary Whitney told Socialist Workers Party presidential candidate Alyson Kennedy at her doorstep Aug. 22. Whitney is a member of the United Steelworkers union working at Saint Gobain’s nearby abrasive materials plant.

“The media and liberals are frantic saying Trump has to be stopped, you have to vote for the lesser evil,” Kennedy said. “But both Trump and Clinton, the Democrats and Republicans, represent the capitalist class. Their economic system, capitalism, is in crisis and cannot meet the needs of the majority.”

Whitney told Kennedy and SWP campaigner Dean Hazlewood about what workers at her plant and others in the area face — speedup, layoffs and decades of attacks by the bosses.

“The Honeywell workers locked out in Green Island know me on the picket line, I bring them donuts,” she said. Kennedy joined United Auto Workers Local 1508 members on the Honeywell picket line later that day.

“My boss at Saint Gobain wants to get rid of me,” said Whitney. “I’m always fighting for the rights of younger workers. But they don’t know the importance of fighting.”

“Because the bosses have no answer for their problems, the deepening capitalist economic crisis will continue to bear down on the working class. Young workers, all workers, will explode into battles to defend ourselves and our class,” Kennedy said. “I don’t know how long it will take, but I’m confident this will happen.”

“At a certain point during the Great Depression in the 1930s, workers couldn’t take it any more and launched massive strikes and organizing struggles,” she said. “The Teamsters union in the Midwest, whose leadership included members of my party, led in a way that maximized the workers’ power and won popular support from farmers, the unemployed and others, resulting in gains for the working class.”

As part of advancing these battles, Teamster leaders pointed to the political course workers needed as a class, from opposing the rulers’ war preparations to the battle for equal rights for Blacks to

the need for workers to build their own party and take power, Kennedy said.

Kennedy showed Whitney the new book *Are They Rich Because They’re Smart? Class, Privilege and Learning Under Capitalism* by SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes. “No, they’re rich because of us,” Whitney said, laughing as she read the title.

Whitney got the book to go with a *Militant* subscription. She joked that had she met the SWP earlier, she would have been even more of a thorn in the bosses’ side. She said she would show the party’s literature around on the job.

— Jacob Perasso



FRESNO, Calif. — “It was probably more than 500 people who responded,” Justice Medina told Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidate for vice-president, here Aug. 18.



Militant/Carole Lesnick

In Fresno, California, Aug. 18, Justice Medina, left, tells Osborne Hart about protest he helped organize against police brutality.

In July Medina helped organize a large and lively action to protest the June 25 Fresno cop killing of Dylan Noble, a 19-year-old unarmed roofer.

“It was my first step for activism in Fresno,” said Medina, who is 20. He called the action “because I don’t like violence and I hate abuse of authority.”

“Fresno cops arrested me right after the protest,” he said. “I was charged with organizing an event without a permit and with obstruction of the sidewalk.” Medina has an Oct. 13 court date.

Ever since, “police cars sit in front of my house and cops stop me and my relatives for no reason,” he said.

“The police are set up to ‘protect and serve’ the tiny minority of capitalists,” Hart said. “They’re not reformable. But



Militant/Jacob Perasso

Longtime union member Mary Whitney, right, talks with SWP presidential candidate Alyson Kennedy and campaign supporter Dean Hazlewood in Watervliet, New York, Aug. 22.

our protests are very important. They build confidence and solidarity and can push back against the cops, getting some of them charged with a crime or fired. To end cop brutality, working people need to take political power out of the hands of the ruling rich.”

Hart said workers and farmers in Cuba overthrew capitalism and U.S. domination in 1959, transforming themselves as they gained political consciousness and a sense of their own self-worth.

They reorganized society from top to bottom to meet the needs of working people, he said. The former regime’s police, brutal guardians of the interests of the bosses under capitalism, were dismantled and replaced by revolutionary-minded workers.

“When I was in Cuba a few months ago,” Hart said, “I saw a traffic stop in Havana where the driver got

into a heated discussion with the officer. There was no violent attack or abuse, unlike what a cop here or in Philadelphia, where I live, would likely have done.”

“Working people create all the wealth,” Hart said.

“Yes, and it’s stolen from us,” Medina responded. “Let’s keep in touch.”

— Joel Britton



QUEENS, N.Y. — “We are here to bring solidarity and join you in opposing attacks on Muslims and mosques,” SWP presidential candidate Kennedy told Bazlur Rahman of the Al-Furqan Jame Masjid mosque here Aug. 21.

The mosque’s imam, Maulama Akonjee, and his assistant Thara Uddin were murdered in broad daylight Aug. 13. Kennedy was joined by a delegation from the party in New York, including Norton Sandler and Jacob Perasso, SWP candidate for U.S. Senate.

“This is important for the working class,” Kennedy said. “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

— Jacob Perasso

New Zealand forum: ‘Support Kurdish struggle!’



Militant/Baskaran Appu

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — “It is in the interests of working people around the world to support the Kurdish struggle for self-determination,” said Osborne Hart, left, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. vice president, at a special Militant Labor Forum here Aug. 28. The meeting protested the assault launched by Turkish tanks and troops, U.S. warplanes and Free Syrian Army forces against Kurdish fighters in Syria.

Hart was joined on the platform by Abbas Ahmed, speaking, from the local Kurdish community, who outlined the Kurdish people’s fight for a homeland and how they had been divided among Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. “We are the biggest nation in the world without a country,” Ahmed said.

“Turkey doesn’t want Kurds independent and strong,” he said, joining Hart in speaking out against Ankara’s military assault against Syrian Kurds gaining autonomy. “But there will be no peace in the Middle East without the Kurds.”

“I bring the solidarity of the Socialist Workers Party to the Kurdish people’s fight for a homeland,” Hart said. “We demand that Washington gets out of the Middle East, and we demand U.S., Turkish and Syrian hands off the Kurds.”

Patrick Brown, center, Communist League candidate for mayor of Auckland, chaired the meeting. He said the League extends its solidarity with the fight for the “national rights and freedom of the Kurdish people.”

— JANET ROTH



Militant/Róger Calero

“We join you in opposing attacks on Muslims,” Kennedy told Bazlur Rahman, right, at Al-Furqan Jame Masjid mosque in Queens, Aug. 21. At left is SWP leader Norton Sandler.

Build ‘Free Oscar López’ rally, concert in DC Oct. 9

BY SETH GALINSKY

A broad and growing coalition is building a rally and “freedom concert” in front of the White House Oct. 9 to demand the release of Oscar López Rivera, jailed in the U.S. for more than 35 years for his participation in the fight against the colonial status of Puerto Rico and for independence.

“In Puerto Rico there is a broad consensus in favor of freeing Oscar,” Eduardo Villanueva, spokesperson of the Human Rights Committee of Puerto Rico, said by phone from San Juan Aug. 26. “We are organizing this event to show that in the heart of the United States, in the belly of the beast, like José Martí used to say, there is also broad support. We want Obama to exercise his constitutional powers and release Oscar.”

Villanueva is a member of the executive committee of the Coalition to Free Oscar López, formed to organize the event. The coalition includes longtime supporters of independence, church leaders, unions, local elected officials on the island and in the U.S., as well as former staff members of current Gov. Alejandro García Padilla.

Buses are being organized from New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, including union participation from Service Employees International Union locals 32BJ and 1199. Congressman Luis Guterres from Illinois and New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito have spoken out in support of the event.

The fight to free López has been expanding. The deepening economic crisis in Puerto Rico, with the colonial government bankrupt, has battered working people. Many have left, coming to the U.S.

President Barack Obama signed a law June 30 imposing a fiscal control board on the island, which he will appoint, to

ensure payment to wealthy bondholders and hedge funds on Puerto Rico’s \$72 billion debt. “Obama keep your fiscal board and return Oscar to us,” is a popular sign at demonstrations against the measure.

The imposition of the board and the resistance against it “is a confirmation of the legitimacy of the struggle Oscar was waging” when he was arrested, Villanueva said.

López’s fight was strengthened by the freeing of the last of the Cuban Five and their return to Cuba in December 2014. The five Cuban revolutionaries, framed

Continued on page 9



Oscar López at Juneteenth celebration organized by Black prisoners in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Washington, Ankara push attack on Kurds in Syria

Continued from front page
ty, who pay the price in blood.

At least 380 Turkish troops and 40 tanks are in Syria, fighting alongside roughly 1,000 combatants from the Free Syrian Army. The FSA is a loose coalition of groups that oppose the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, most of whom have received aid from Washington. Backed by Turkish and U.S. airstrikes, they took the border town of Jarabulus, which had been occupied by Islamic State, on Aug. 24 with little or no resistance from the jihadist group.

Directed by Turkey, these forces immediately pushed south and west, into areas where the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of Kurdish and Arab forces led by the YPG, have been winning ground from Islamic State.

All the powers intervening in Syria are “pursuing their own interests, not Syria’s,” Saadeddine Somaa, an FSA combatant and former major in Assad’s army who entered the country with the Turkish forces, told the *New York Times* from Jarabulus Aug. 29. “The problem is the same everywhere in Syria.”

“But within days of crossing into Syria, backed by Turkish planes, tanks and special forces troops,” the *Times* said, “Somaa found himself fighting Kurdish militias that, like him, counted the Islamic State and the government of Bashar al-Assad among their foes.”

Ankara’s aim is to control a 55-mile stretch of Syrian territory along the Turkish border from Jarabulus, on the west bank of the Euphrates River, to Marea. This would block the Kurds from connecting the autonomous region they have won in northeastern Syria with a Kurdish-controlled enclave around Afrin, north of Aleppo.

Vice President Joe Biden, meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara Aug. 24, demanded that the Kurdish forces pull back to positions east of the Euphrates. Since then, some U.S. officials have complained that Ankara is not paying enough attention to fighting Islamic State, while Washington continues to support the Turkish incursion.

The YPG says its combatants have withdrawn. Forces allied with the Syrian Democratic Forces remain in the area and have clashed with the Turkish-led operation. One of their spokesmen is Shervan Derwish, who earlier served with the Kurdish forces who fought off Islamic State in Kobani last year. “We will defend ourselves,” he told the *Washington Post* Aug. 27 as the Turkish and Free Syrian Army forces pushed toward

Manbij, 20 miles south of Jarabulus.

In Geneva Aug. 26, Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov both stressed their opposition to an autonomous Kurdistan in Syria. They spoke at a news conference following talks seeking to put together military coordination in Syria.

Washington wants “a united Syria,” Kerry said. “We do not support an independent Kurd initiative.”

Kurds “should remain an integral part of the Syrian state,” said Lavrov, warning that any division of Syria “will trigger a chain reaction throughout the region.”

There are millions of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Iran as well as Syria.

U.S. rulers seek ‘global realignment’

Reaching a deal on Syria with Moscow has been a central focus of the Obama administration’s Mideast policy for some time. A recent article by Zbigniew Brzezinski in the *American Interest* magazine, titled “Toward a Global Realignment,” points to some of the reasons why.

Brzezinski, national security adviser to President James Carter from 1977-81, had been a major proponent of the view that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 Washington was firmly established as the one global superpower and should act aggressively to reshape the world in its interests. The attempt to do so, however, has led to the accelerated unraveling of the imperialist order, including the devastating wars that have torn up the Middle East, extending to North Africa and Central Asia.

He argues that the U.S. government “must take the lead in realigning the global power architecture in such a way that the violence erupting within and occasionally projected beyond the Muslim world ... can be contained without destroying the global order.” This, Brzezinski says, can only be done by forging “a coalition that involves, to varying degrees, Russia and China.” Such a coalition would in turn encourage “responsible use of force by the region’s more established states (namely, Iran, Turkey, Israel and Egypt.)”

A variant of this policy is what Obama is pursuing, and will be the course of the next administration, whoever occupies the White House. But the reality of conflicting interests of different ruling classes, amid a deepening worldwide crisis of capitalist production and trade, makes the prospect of a U.S.-dominated coalition stabilizing the world a pipe dream.

The civil war in Syria is a case in point. Washington intervened shortly after the Assad regime brutally crushed protests demanding democratic rights in 2011 and then bombed and unleashed chemical weapons against its opponents. The capitalist rulers in Moscow and Tehran back Assad, but also seek stability. The rulers of Turkey and Saudi Arabia — Sunni-dominated governments that see Shiite Iran as their major rival in the region — have in turn backed various factions fighting against Assad.

Washington’s moves, and others’ counter moves, have created space for the emergence of the reactionary Islamic State, many of whose commanders are former officers from Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq. All this contributes to a war that no side can win and has left hundreds of thousands dead and driven millions from their homes, with no end in sight.

Meanwhile, the Erdogan government continues its attacks on the Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey. “Military curfews are continuing in many towns and villages,” Ertugrul Kurcu, a member of parliament for the Kurdish-based Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), told the *Militant* by phone Aug. 29. “As many as 1 million people are affected, including 300,000 who’ve had to leave their homes.”

Kurcu condemned Ankara’s actions in Syria, saying, “The Kurdish inhabitants have been there for centuries, why shouldn’t they decide their future?”

Opening Guns of World War III: Washington’s Assault on Iraq

by Jack Barnes
In *New International* no. 7

“The Kurdish people have come to the center stage in world politics as never before, not primarily as victims, but as courageous and determined fighters for national rights.”
— Jack Barnes

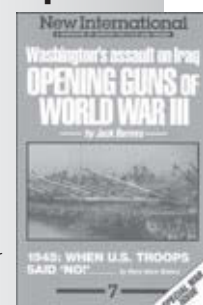
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US Imperialism Has Lost the Cold War

by Jack Barnes
In *New International* no. 11

\$16. Also in Farsi, French, Spanish, Swedish

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U.K., U.S., Turkey, Syria — Hands Off the Kurds! The Class Struggle in Turkey After the Attempted Coup. Speaker: Tony Hunt, Communist League. Sat., Sept. 10, 6:30 p.m. Donation: £2.50. Room 301, Hilton House, 26-28 Hilton St., M1 2EH. Tel.: (0161) 478-2496.

—CALENDAR—

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—ON THE PICKET LINE—

MAGGIE TROWE, EDITOR

Help the *Militant* cover labor struggles around the world!

This column gives a voice to those engaged in battle and building solidarity today — including miners fighting attacks on retirees' pensions and healthcare, workers locked out by Honeywell and 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

North Sea oil and gas workers hold strikes over cuts in jobs, pay

LONDON — Some 400 workers on seven Royal Dutch Shell oil and gas rigs in the North Sea have taken sit-down strike action to protest wage and job cuts and deteriorating conditions. These were the first strike actions on North Sea rigs in three decades.

The workers, members of the Unite and RMT unions, are employees of Wood Group, a maintenance and construction contractor. They organized a 24-hour stoppage July 26 and a 48-hour strike Aug. 4-5. A planned three-week walkout was called off after the employers agreed to talks.

More than 98 percent of the unionists voted for action. They have protested outside Shell and Wood Group offices here, in Manchester and in Aberdeen. Unions around the world have sent messages of support.

The workers are protesting the third in a series of cuts to jobs, pay and conditions in the last two years, as companies drive to make workers pay for the steep drop in oil and gas prices. Unemployment claims in Aberdeen, the center of the U.K.'s oil and gas industry in the North Sea, have more than doubled since the end of 2014.

Wood Group recently imposed a new work schedule: three weeks on, three off, instead of two on, three off. This amounts to working five extra weeks per year with no increase in pay, and allowed the company to cut the workforce by 20 percent. On the rigs, working a 12-hour shift every day is the norm.

Speaking anonymously to the industry publication *Energy Voice*, one worker estimated Wood Group's latest demands would cut his overall pay 30 percent. "They're cutting our sickness benefits, holidays," he added. "We're working in a very dangerous environment. ... I do a lot of safety work off-

shore and I genuinely believe that it is a disaster waiting to happen."

Energy Voice quoted a Wood Group spokeswoman who said, "Our employees' safety and welfare is our priority."

— Jonathan Silberman

Teamster bus drivers and aides in Illinois strike for first contract

MINOOKA, Ill. — Bus drivers and aides, members of Teamsters Local 179, went on strike against Minooka School Districts 111 and 201 Aug. 18, just after the school year began in this town of 11,000 southwest of Chicago.

"We need benefits and overtime pay," John Keese told the *Militant*. "We have no insurance. Safety is also an issue, as the buses are overcrowded, with as many as 100 students on a bus



Militant/Salm Kolis

School bus drivers and aides on strike in Minooka, Illinois, Aug. 22, fighting for first contract since voting in Teamsters union last year. Safety and health benefits are key issues.

rated for 71."

"This is the first contract for the 135 drivers and aides here," said Tina Nall, a driver for six years. "We won the union last December and began negotiating our first contract in February."

"This strike isn't just about us," she continued. "It's about growing the labor movement. Unfortunately, we have too many union members crossing the line."

Strikers explained that over the past three years maintenance has deterio-

rated. When state inspectors "red flag" a bus as unsafe, it isn't taken out of service.

Aides haven't gotten a raise in seven years, Cheryl Mathias said. "We earn \$11.58 an hour on a five-hour split shift."

Many drivers passing by honked their horns in support.

The school district is using bus mechanics as drivers, a member of the union negotiating team said.

— Dan Fein

SWP candidate visits McLeod County, Minnesota

Continued from page 2

tion that placed Kennedy and Hart on the Minnesota ballot for U.S. president this November, along with seven other states. It is that support that brought Hart for a visit here and elsewhere in Minnesota, where he spent a few days knocking on doors and chatting with locals on the street.

"What we've found (is) ... working people are open to looking at the world differently," Hart said.

Hart acknowledged the popularity of Sanders, who described himself as a socialist Democrat during his campaign. He said Sanders brought to the electoral process a message of the people demanding more from the 1 percent of Americans who hold the majority of wealth. But Hart said a key difference separates Sanders

from the Socialist Workers Party.

"He thought capitalism could be reformed," Hart said. He said his party wants to move the country away from capitalism. Capitalism, he said, is "in an irreversible crisis."

Despite campaigning, Hart said the change he seeks won't happen on Election Day.

"Pulling the lever doesn't do it," he said. "That's why we campaign year round."

The party actively seeks to aid protesters and unions wherever possible. Social change, and fair labor practices are both important causes to Hart and Kennedy.

Revolutions, Hart said, require the mobilization of the working class. He cited civil rights movements to end black segregation and to grant women

the right to vote as movements that required massive turnout and demonstration from Americans when there wasn't a poll. He also pointed to the right to vote for 18-year-old Americans as the result of public pressure. At the time, young soldiers were dying in Vietnam without the right to vote.

Even though the ticket is not on the ballot in all states, Hart still encouraged voters to consider his party on Election Day if they are not satisfied with the other candidates, or are considering voting for one they dislike simply to oppose another they dislike more.

"With lesser evil politics, you always get evil," he said. "We say vote for us whether we are on the ballot or not, that will be a demonstration."

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



September 13, 1991

HARTFORD, Connecticut — Fifty demonstrators gathered here August 30 to demand "Freedom and Justice for the Puerto Rico/Hartford 15! Drop the Charges!"

The event marked the sixth anniversary of the launching of the FBI operation that resulted in the arrests of 15 Puerto Rican independence activists.

They were brought from the island of Puerto Rico to Connecticut and forced to spend many months in pretrial detention before a public outcry forced their release. The case of the Hartford 15 has received international attention because it highlights Puerto Rico's status as a colony of the United States.

In 1989, five of the 15 were put on trial. Four were convicted on charges of conspiracy in connection with a 1983 robbery. These four received sentences ranging from 15 to 65 years.



September 12, 1966

Increasing numbers of unionists are recognizing the urgent need for wage-escalator clauses in union contracts. Without such clauses to provide for wage increases in compensation for price increases, real wages will decline sharply.

But also, it is being recognized that there are serious flaws in the escalator clauses now being included in union pacts. The biggest defect is that virtually all of them use as their official guide the Consumer Price Index of the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

It has become increasingly apparent over the years that the BLS figures are rigged to minimize actual increases in living costs. The index does not take into account the widespread practice of lowering quality standards as a means of raising prices.



September 13, 1941

The famous Minneapolis Union Defense Guard, organized three years ago by members of Local 544 of the teamsters union, will be the center of the government's case in the trial of 29 leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and of the Motor Transport and Allied Workers Industrial Union, Local 544-CIO.

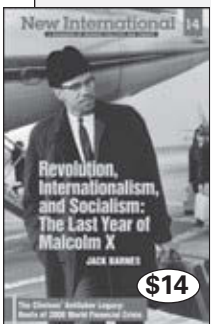
Originally the government set out to convict the defendants on the basis of their militant opposition to the Roosevelt war program and the shackling of the labor movement to the war machine.

However, a council of war decided it was too dangerous to press the case on the basis of their anti-war policy, which might win much popular sympathy for the defendants, and it was decided instead to accuse them of "arming the workers," which they claim was the function of the Union Defense Guard.

Recommended reading

The Clintons' Antilabor Legacy: Roots of 2008 World Financial Crisis

in New International #14



"The Clinton administration consolidated an anti-working-class shift in Democratic Party domestic policy that increased the *political convergence* of the two leading parties of the employing class."

— Jack Barnes

pathfinderpress.com

Debate on Georgia mosque

Continued from front page
in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria — that have killed tens of thousands of toilers, most of them Muslims — have been overseen by Democratic and Republican administrations alike, from Bush to Clinton to Bush and Obama,” said Manuel, who did identify himself. “The crisis unfolding in that part of the world is a result of the unraveling of the U.S.-imposed imperialist world order.

“We also face the consequences of the world economic crisis, from continued high unemployment to lack of health care,” Manuel said. “We need a movement independent of both capitalist parties that fights for all workers, including those who are Muslims.”

Half a dozen people joined Manuel in standing up in defense of the right of Muslims to build in the community. “If this discussion was happening 100 years ago, there’s a good chance it would be about my people,” commented Kendra Miller, who said she was of Jewish descent.

“I don’t think many of you really know how they are as a people,” said a 17-year-old African-American woman who didn’t identify herself. “I would like to say that not long ago people like me, Black people, were treated the same way.”

Mohammad Islam is the Imam of Masjid Attaqwa mosque in Doraville, a suburb of Atlanta, who organized to purchase the Newton County land. He came to the United States from Bangladesh 24 years ago and now leads a congregation of some 200 members, mostly Bangladeshis. In an Aug. 24 meeting with SWP leaders, he explained that they have no place to bury their dead and to pray before the burial.

“Land is very expensive, especially in Atlanta. We found this 135-acre site for sale in Newton County near another cemetery and at a price we thought we could raise,” Islam said. “Our plan was approved by the Newton County Commission, and we closed the deal last August.”

Islam said that they were not invited to the Aug. 22 evening meetings and that they learned about the moratorium on the religious buildings from the news.

“We are not in a hurry. It is more important for us to have good relations with those who will be our neighbors and to answer any questions or concerns that they have,” Islam said. “Yesterday a group of Newton County residents accepted our invitation to

visit our mosque and get to know one another.”

Over the past five years, officials in Lilburn, Kennesaw and Snellville, all cities across metro Atlanta, have used zoning laws to deter Muslim projects from being built.

Between 2009 and 2015, the Georgia Council on American-Islamic Relations has documented more than 40 incidents in which mosques faced interference, local building moratoriums, vandalism and harassment.

The NAACP, CAIR and more than a dozen Muslim groups have asked the Department of Justice to investigate the Newton County moratorium.

Ronnie Johnston, mayor of Covington, and the other four town mayors in Newton County, wrote to the county commission Aug. 26 urging them to remove the moratorium on places of worship and that a meeting be set up with leaders of the proposed mosque. “We will all have to work to undo some of the ill will you created by your actions,” they said.

On Aug. 27, supporters of SWP candidates Manuel and Alyson Kennedy and Osborne Hart for president and vice president campaigned door to door in Covington, introducing the party and its program. They discussed how to fight against the effects on working people of Washington’s imperialist wars abroad and capitalist depression conditions at home. They took the opportunity to discuss what workers thought about the proposed mosque and cemetery.

Steve Shope, an electrician, told SWP member Susan LaMont he was concerned that building a mosque in Newton County might attract terrorists to the area, even though he thought the people with the mosque are not terrorists themselves.

“I don’t want to label anybody,”

Miami forum: ‘Oppose attacks on Muslims, mosques’

BY ANTHONY DUTROW

MIAMI — Imam Muhammad Saeed, from the Baitul Naseer mosque in Hallandale Beach, and Cynthia Jaquith, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. Senate from Florida, joined in opposing attacks on Muslims and defending freedom of worship at a public forum here Aug. 20. The program was organized at the Militant Labor Forum after the assassination of Imam Maulama Akonjee and his assistant, Thara Uddin, in Queens, New York, a week earlier.

Protests denounce French anti-Muslim ‘burkini ban’



Reuters/Neil Hall

Dozens of women held a “beach party” outside the French Embassy in London, above, Aug. 25 to protest the banning of Muslim women wearing full-body bathing suits by some 30 municipal governments in France. Similar protests took place that day in Berlin and in Leucate, France, one of the towns that imposed a “burkini ban.”

Over the summer some Muslim women have faced fines and police harassment for wearing headscarves and other clothing of their choice to the beach. A video from a beach in Nice shows a woman surrounded by armed cops, apparently being forced to remove her long-sleeve top. The ordinances officially bar “beachwear which ostentatiously displays religious affiliation,” in the name of “public order” and “secularism.”

France’s top administrative court overturned the burkini ban for the town of Villeneuve-Loubet Aug. 26, saying the decree was an “illegal infringement on basic freedoms such as freedom to come and go, freedom of conscience and personal freedom.” But neither the fight over such discriminatory moves, nor the debate on the rights of Muslims has ended. Ange-Pierre Vivoni, Socialist Party mayor of Sisco, Corsica, vowed not to withdraw the ban there. Prime Minister Manuel Valls, also of the Socialist Party, has supported the decrees. Former President Nicolas Sarkozy called for a nationwide ban on the burkini as he launched a new presidential bid for his Republican party Aug. 25.

— NAOMI CRAINE

Shope said. “I don’t see how what the terrorists are doing accomplishes anything for the Muslim people.”

“It’s important for us as workers to be conscious that anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions cut across working people coming together to fight in our common interests,” LaMont said. “And the seemingly endless U.S.-led

wars in the Mideast are what have created the conditions in which reactionary terror groups like Islamic State recruit and grow. And they are responsible for hostility and discrimination against Muslims.”

After the discussion, Shope said he’d like to try a subscription to the *Militant*.

Further reading ...

“This is a book about the dictatorship of capital and the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

— Jack Barnes in “*Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power*” \$20

“To believe that a socialist revolution in the U.S. is *not* possible, you would have to close your eyes to the spreading imperialist wars, civil wars and economic, social and financial crises we are in the midst of.”

— Mary-Alice Waters in “*Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?*” \$7

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‘Natural’ disasters are result of capitalist profit drive

Below is an excerpt from “*The Stewardship of Nature Also Falls to the Working Class: In Defense of Land and Labor*,” a statement adopted by the July 2007 convention of the Socialist Workers Party. The entire document appears in issue no. 14 of the magazine *New International*. Copyright © 2008 by *New International*. Reprinted by permission.

[T]he social disaster that followed Hurricane Katrina in 2005—ravaging low-lying parts of New Orleans inhabited largely by working people, most of them Black, as well as elsewhere along the Gulf Coast—shined a spotlight worldwide on the “values” of U.S. imperialism’s ruling families and the state that serves their class. The moneyed rulers had known for decades that flood levies would give way when a strong hurricane hit near the city, yet they refused to dip into the surplus value they wring from the unpaid labor of working people in order to rebuild and reinforce the seawalls. Workers across the region, despite the acts of solidarity they displayed toward each other throughout the crisis, bore the deadly consequences of wretched housing; lack of emergency flood protection, transportation, and evacuation procedures; and longtime, morale-sapping cop corruption and brutality so endemic to life under the city fathers.

Despite the rulers’ sentimental pretense of “rebuilding” New Orleans, toilers there continue to bear the brunt of capitalist greed and indifference to



Above, Militant/Jacque Henderson Aug. 29, 2008, march in New Orleans protests conditions three years after Hurricane Katrina. “Cajun Navy” volunteer, right, rescues neighbors from recent flooding in Louisiana. Capitalist profit drive creates conditions that turn natural events like these into social disasters, with workers facing the deadly consequences.

this day. Life or death, a home still habitable or forced diaspora—a few feet above or below sea level marked the class divide. ...

In late 2006 a number of daily newspapers carried obituaries of a prominent U.S. geographer named Gilbert White. “Floods are ‘acts of god,’” White had written in 1942, “but flood losses are largely acts of man.” White’s studies documented the fact that throughout most of the world the poorest layers of the rural and urban populations live on or near flood



plains, either to scrape out a living or because better-protected areas are reserved for the propertied classes. ...

“‘The basic problem is how to get people off the flood plain,’ he said. ‘And after all these years, here we are with Katrina.’” “Perhaps we may envisage a new kind of army,” White had said in his 1942 article, a global “peace force, of young people recruited and trained under international di-

rection for the task of building healthy and prosperous communities.”

A worthy proposal. One deserving of the response, paraphrasing Ernesto Che Guevara: *To have an army of revolutionary rebuilders, you must first make a revolution.*¹ To forge a “new kind of army” of “young people recruited and trained for the task of building healthy and prosperous communities,” working people must first have a revolutionary ethos, élan, discipline, and determination that is conquered only in the course of a suc-

cessful fight for power. Without the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, for example, the mass campaign that marshaled the enthusiasm and capacities of more than 100,000 youth in 1961 and wiped out illiteracy in a single year, transforming that generation of young people in the process, would have been unimaginable.

So long as the extraction of surplus value in warlike competition for profits dictates the production and distribution of wealth, land will remain private property and rental housing for the toiling majority will be built where the propertied classes don’t want to live. It will be constructed where workers can “afford” the rent, including often on flood plains.

Only the leadership of a workers and farmers government, conquered in revolutionary struggle, can lead working people to even *face* confronting the vast worldwide pathologies of capitalism, let alone bring to bear their creativity, energies, discipline, and solidarity to cure them.

Flood destruction in La. is social catastrophe

Continued from front page
pensive, they said.

But developers and banks found money to finance and build more houses on low-lying land near area rivers, putting more and more working people at risk.

Little notice was given before the rain hit. The storm dumped as much water as a hurricane like Katrina, Barry Keim, Louisiana’s state climatologist, told the press. Because it didn’t have a federally designated “name” like Katrina, it just “snuck up” on people, he said.

The Louisiana Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness estimated that as many as 160,000 homes have been affected by the flood. Already, more than 120,000 households have applied for federal disaster assistance. One of the hardest hit areas was Livingston Parish, just east of Baton Rouge, where 75 percent of the homes have been destroyed.

Across the region, more than 30,000 people needed rescue. Many were saved not by state or local officials, but by what locals call the “Cajun Navy” — working-class people and neighbors who had set out with their personal boats looking for people who might be in trouble. Many traveled miles, including Katrina veterans, to come to the devastated areas and help.

One of the volunteers from Baton Rouge was Abdullah Muflahi, owner of the Triple S convenience store, the place where Baton Rouge police shot and killed Alton Sterling two months

ago, leading to outrage and public protests. Muflahi met Socialist Workers Party vice-presidential candidate Osborne Hart when he joined the protests there.

“The flooding devastated this entire area. And for most people the crisis is ongoing,” Muflahi told the *Militant* in a phone interview Aug. 28. “People who lost their homes are now fighting for insurance payments and FEMA claims. Many people have complained to me that they were promised less than half of what they lost.

“Many who live here are also renters — and they lost everything and literally have to start over again,” he said. “Their home is wrecked; their car is flooded and totaled out by the insurance company; and almost everyone else near you is in the same situation. These are problems faced by tens of thousands in this area.”

“When the rains slowed down, people brought out their personal boats and trucks to do the work,” Muflahi said. “Without this volunteer help, I fear many people would still be out there and things would be a lot worse.

“If people’s homes were destroyed they have no place to go and no one giving them much help,” he said. “There are shelters, but they are mostly full.”

Working people in the area face a devastating housing crisis. “There simply aren’t habitable homes available for rent,” National Public Radio reported Aug. 19. And if you didn’t have flood insurance — and many

didn’t — you face economic calamity.

The state government and FEMA have announced a program along the lines of “Rapid Repairs” — a program initiated by FEMA in response to Superstorm Sandy in New York. The program was notable for one thing — workers hit by the storm said it was structured to reward contractors for doing substandard repair work.

Residents in deadly Maryland explosion point to landlord, city

BY ARLENE RUBINSTEIN

SILVER SPRINGS, Md. — “The explosion that destroyed part of this complex, killing seven people and forcing over 100 into homelessness Aug. 10, could easily have been prevented,” Glova Scott, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. Congress in the District of Columbia, told workers she met going door to door at the Flower Branch apartments here Aug. 21.

Shortly before midnight, an explosion and fire tore through 14 apartments. The National Transportation and Safety Board is probing the blast. NTSB investigator Ravi Chhatre told the *Washington Post* it will take a year.

Residents say they smelled gas in the building weeks before the explosion. Adriene Boye, who lived in the complex, reported it to the property management. They did nothing. He called 911 emergency services July 25.

1. In August 1960 the Argentine-born leader of the Cuban Revolution, Ernesto Che Guevara, himself originally a physician, told a group of young medical students and health workers in Havana that “to be a revolutionary doctor ... there must first be a revolution.” In *Che Guevara Talks to Young People* (Pathfinder, 2000), 2007, printing, p. 52.

“They came and told us it smelled like incense,” and they left, he told NBC News.

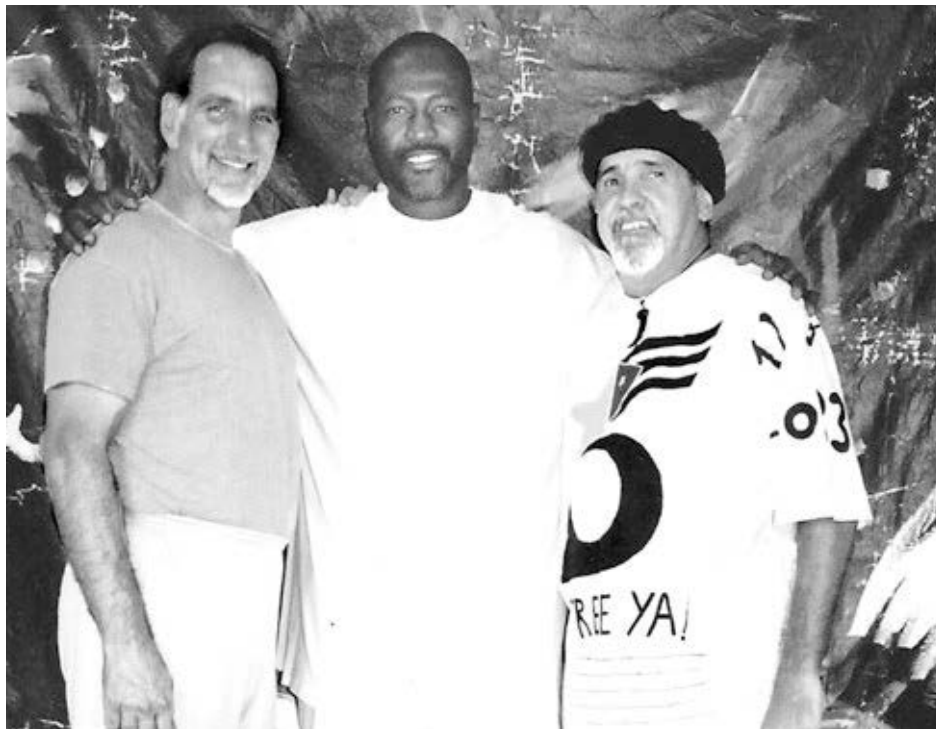
“The landlord just cared about his rent and the government didn’t do anything at all,” Scott said.

Yamileth Reyes told Scott and SWP campaigners that she knows something about disasters like this. She moved to the U.S. after Hurricane Mitch destroyed her home in Honduras in 1998.

“The rulers and the press say these are ‘natural disasters.’ But they are social catastrophes caused by capitalist social relations, and they happen far too often, from Katrina in New Orleans to the flooding in Baton Rouge today,” Scott said. “That’s why the Socialist Workers Party campaigns to build a movement of millions that can take political power out of the hands of the capitalists and put it into the hands of the working class, to reorganize society on new moral and social values.”

Dignity, courage of Cuban 5 inspired fellow prisoners

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Roddy Rodríguez in *Voices From Prison*, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for August. Rodríguez served time in prison alongside Cuban revolutionary René González in Florida. He describes how he was transformed through his relationship with René. González and Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando González were known as the Cuban Five. Framed up by the FBI in 1998 for monitoring counterrevolutionary Cuban groups in Florida to prevent violent attacks on Cuba, they received harsh sentences. René González was released in 2011 and the last three were freed and returned to Cuba in 2014. The dignity, courage and discipline of the Five in prison, along with the struggle mounted by the people of Cuba, their revolutionary government and the solidarity of millions worldwide, made this possible. Copyright © 2014 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.



Roddy Rodríguez, right, in T-shirt he painted saying "Free Cuban Five," with Cuban revolutionary René González, left. "René is a man of principles, like all of the Five," said Rodríguez.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

INTERVIEWER EDMUNDO GARCÍA: Roddy [Rodríguez] was in the same prison with the Cuban antiterrorist fighter and Hero of the Republic of Cuba, René González. For several years, between 2004 and René's release in September 2011, Roddy got to know René, and this left an imprint on his life.

How did you meet René?

RODRÍGUEZ: I arrived at the Marianna prison in 2002. In 2004 a hurricane destroyed the place and the National Guard took us out. After two months, I was part of the first group that went back. The next day a group was brought in from another prison, and René González was among them.

I was introduced to him by a fellow Cuban who said, "Hey, man, let me introduce you to the spy." Everyone there called them "spies" — that's the way it was and they accepted that. It's what they were accused of, even though they were never involved in espionage.

That's how I met René, and I can truly tell you it has been one of the friendships that changed my life the most.

I was raised in a home where there was a lot of hostility toward the government of our country. Today I thank God that my thinking is completely different.

I believe in God, and in prison I was seen as the one who brought in religion. I have to tell you that so you'll understand what follows.

When I first met René, right off the bat I told him that I believe in God. I expected René to take me on, to start arguing with me.

What happened? He replied, "That's great. I don't. But I believe that a true Christian will want the best for humanity, and if my friendship with you helps you become a better Christian, I'll be

very happy." That had a tremendous impact on me.

So that's how our friendship began. We lived two cells apart. We weren't cellmates because we each had too many things —especially books — to fit in the same cell. We would see each other whenever the doors were opened, except when René went running. It wasn't easy to keep up with him — he ran a lot.

It was my relationship with René that began changing the way I thought. I began to see things for myself, and eventually I was convinced.

In prison I met people from different countries — out of respect, I don't want to mention which ones — and it pained me to notice that some couldn't read or write. Then I thought about the Cuban people — even those who are here — and I told myself, "Wow, there's not a single one who doesn't know how to read! I come from a country that's been blessed."

Now I understand all the positive sides of Cuba that I didn't see before. And all that I began to understand thanks to René.

René is a man of principles, like all of the Five. He would tell me, "Principles have no price, because whoever has them won't sell them, and whoever sells himself doesn't have principles." I believe their principles have helped make them popular and respected in the prisons they've been in.

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I'll never forget the time René got me a book of Bible stories from the library. He asked me, "Would you like to read this book together?" It was in English — I can read English but he reads it well — and he began to translate it into Spanish. We read the whole book — the story of Abraham, everything.

Things like that made me realize René was not some fanatic, that he was true to his principles. He lives up to what he says. You can tell him what you think, without upsetting him. He respects your ideas. "You have the right to say what you think," he'd always say. "Just as I have the right to think as I do."

GARCÍA: Did other prisoners have the same respect for him?

RODRÍGUEZ: I think everyone did. I'll never forget this young Black guy, his cellmate, who composed a rap song with a political theme about the US and sang it for everyone in the yard where we held events on special occasions like July 4 or Christmas Eve. I can't tell you exactly what his political ideas were, but I think perhaps he was inspired by his relationship with René, by coming to understand the cause of the Five. Many people didn't know what was happening around the Five and when they learned they were surprised. We even had a T-shirt made with the symbol of the Five and the star from the Cuban flag. ...

GARCÍA: Were some of the Cubans in Marianna hostile to René?

RODRÍGUEZ: You might say they weren't so much hostile to René as they were to themselves, because they said things in his presence that could hurt, or shock. For example, someone, I don't remember who, said one day, "My mother went to Havana for cataract surgery and she had to bring her own towel and sheets."

Well, like Peter in the Bible, who marched forward sword in hand, I always spoke first. "Really," I said. "And how much did she have to pay for the operation?"

"She had to bring her own sheets. It would have been an outrage if they had charged her," he replied.

"You're right," I said. "When we took my father to the Beraja Medical Institute in Miami for cataract surgery, we didn't have to take towels or sheets. But they charged him \$1,200 for each eye. I don't know how many boxes of sheets you could buy with that. Would you rather bring sheets or pay \$2,400?"

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SWP: Back coal miners' fight!

Continued from front page

the miners and calls on working people to join the Sept. 8 rally by the United Mine Workers union in Washington, D.C. Both of us will be there to join in demanding that the U.S. government guarantee retirement funds and health benefits for coal miners.

Coal production in the U.S. in the first quarter this year dropped 17 percent compared to the previous quarter. But it's not true that coal is on the verge of extinction.

Over the last 10 years coal output in the U.S. has leveled off, even as the capitalist bosses closed mines and slashed the workforce by about 50 percent over the past six years. In the early 1980s, "our normal workweek was basically 40 hours," miner Howard Cook, 54, told WBUR radio in March. But in the last 10 years "it was more like a 60-hour week." At the same time the mine bosses used more and more high-powered machinery that pulverizes rocks and increases silica dust in the air.

Through union battles, miners won and enforced safety and health on the job, including the right to withdraw from dangerous conditions. This virtually eliminated black lung disease. But as a result of the bosses' offensive and attacks on the union, today it's at the highest level since the early '70s. We need to fight for workers control and the right of the union to shut down any mine that is unsafe.

As part of our campaign, we have been going door to door in West Virginia, Utah, Kentucky, Alabama and Illinois — and in towns small and large from coast to coast — talking to working peo-

ple about the capitalist economic crisis. Working people face the same problems around the world and need solidarity.

Over the last several decades, unions won pensions and health care tied to the profits of their individual companies. The latest wave of mining bankruptcies underscores why we need to fight for something different — government-funded guaranteed health care and pensions for all, regardless of where you work.

The capitalist candidates and parties have no solution.

Hillary Clinton showed her scorn for working people, proclaiming, "We're going to put a lot of coal miners" out of work.

Donald Trump claims he will bring back coal jobs. But when he visits coal country he holds closed-door meetings with the same mine bosses who are closing mines, scuttling safety, pushing forced overtime, and using the bankruptcy scam to tear up union contracts.

It's true that generating energy from fossil fuels in pursuit of profit is detrimental to both the health of the workers involved and to the natural environment in which we live and labor.

Today one-third of the world does not have electricity, a basic requirement for reading, culture and political struggle. Miners will lead the fight for safe energy that is cleaner to meet the needs of workers around the world, while assuring jobs for all that are productive and socially worthwhile.

Actions like the Sept. 8 rally are an example of the solidarity the labor movement needs to organize, fight and push back the bosses' unrelenting offensive. As working people organize to stand up to defend our interests, we learn that we are capable of countering the dog-eat-dog system of capitalism. That we can build a powerful movement of workers and farmers to take political power out of the hands of the propertied rulers and open the road to organizing a society based on human needs, not profits.

Voting rights battle

Continued from front page

lenges followed.

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals July 29 struck down as unconstitutional the state's 2013 voting law, one of the strictest in the nation, saying it violates the right to equal protection guaranteed by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and its provisions "target African-Americans." Government officials are fighting to undermine the decision.

The new state law imposed a strict photo ID requirement to vote, eliminated same-day voter registration, shortened the state's early voting period from 17 to 10 days, cut Sunday voting days, prohibited extending voting hours, prevented your vote from being counted if you went to the wrong precinct, and allowed any voter to challenge ballots of other voters.

The law's restrictions are aimed at "impeding rights," Donald Matthews, president of the NAACP in Randolph County, North Carolina, told the *Militant* by phone Aug. 26. "People of color given the opportunity will vote in greater numbers on Sunday than other days, and they also tend to vote early."

On Aug. 15 the state of North Carolina filed an emergency appeal asking the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the circuit court's ruling. It argued that making these "eleventh-hour alterations" to the rules officials have been implementing would "put state and local election officials in an exceedingly difficult position" and could create "voter confusion."

At the same time North Carolina Republican Party Executive Director Dallas Woodhouse sent a memo to the majority-Republican county election boards urging them to continue limiting voting access. Among his plans: eliminate Sunday voting. "There is no requirement to be open on the weekends except for the last Saturday (until noon)," his memo stated. "Six days of voting in one week is enough." The memo also calls for keeping just one site "at the county board of elections office" open for 17 days, instead of implementing the federal court-mandated seven-day extension to all voting locations, and removal of college campus polling sites.

County officials seek ways to maintain restrictions

County election officials have responded with zeal, plowing ahead with new schemes to keep in place the very same limitations the court overturned that deny African-Americans the right to vote.

In 2012, "more than 2.5 million voted early" in North Carolina, writes Ari Berman in *Give Us the Ballot*, "nearly 100,000 used same-day registration" and "300,000 registered voters didn't have government-issued IDs."

"The Supreme Court ruling and ensuing North Carolina law has affected people deeply and across the board," said the NAACP's Matthews. Among those who contacted the NAACP was a woman "on assisted living with cerebral palsy who couldn't vote because she didn't have an ID and lacked the ability to get one," he said. "She finally succeeded in getting an absentee ballot."

Now, officials in Mecklenburg County, the largest in the state, have promptly cut 238 hours of early voting.

"The right to vote is a fundamental issue for African-Americans throughout the history of this country," said Matthews, who emphasized the importance of standing up to "fear tactics that prevent people from exercising their constitutional right to vote. Numbers of African-Americans have given their lives for this right."

The Supreme Court struck down the Voting Rights Act's provisions establishing a requirement for "preclearance" by federal authorities before states and local jurisdictions with a proven history of racist discrimination in voting rights could adopt new voting laws. Nine states, including North Carolina, others in the South, and in Arizona, along with sections of New York, Michigan and California, were covered.

Black rights fighters and other working people have been fighting against its effects ever since.

In a related development, a federal district court Aug. 11 struck down North Carolina's gerrymandered voting districts that keep Blacks from voting. "Race was the predominant factor motivating the drawing of all challenged districts," the court ruled.

Oct. 9 rally to demand 'Free Oscar López'

Continued from page 4

up and imprisoned in the U.S. for some 15 years, have repeatedly called for López's freedom. Fernando González, one of the Five, shared a cell with him for four years in a federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

The fight is also strengthened by growing recognition — despite Washington's claims to the contrary — that Puerto Rico is a U.S. colony.

Born in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, López moved to Chicago when he was 14. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to Vietnam. Upon returning to Chicago he joined fights against discrimination in housing and jobs, against police brutality, for bilingual education and for freeing Puerto Rican political prisoners.

López was arrested in 1981, accused by U.S. prosecutors of being a leader of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), which claimed responsibility for bombing banks and corporations in the U.S. with ties to Puerto Rico. Having no physical evidence linking him to any violent crime, the U.S. government charged López with "seditious conspiracy" and railroaded him to prison.

U.S. officials have tried with no success to break López's spirit, throwing him in solitary confinement his first 12 years in prison.

López continues to speak out for independence for Puerto Rico from his prison cell today. Villanueva, who talks frequently with him, said that López "has a lot of respect from his fellow prisoners."

"He doesn't try to impose his views on anybody, he respects everybody's space," Villanueva said. Many prisoners have asked for his help in studying English, art — López learned how to paint in prison — and history, Villanueva said.

López has extended support to struggles of others, including the fight for Black rights in the U.S. He gave a speech to a Juneteenth celebration, organized by African-American prisoners. "He spoke on the history of Puerto Rico and its relation to the African-American freedom struggle," Alejandro Molina, spokesperson for the U.S.-based Boricua Human Rights Network, told the *Militant*.

The unfolding crisis in Puerto Rico presents an opportunity to increase the pressure on the U.S. government to release López, Molina said. "We want as many people to turn out for the rally and concert as possible."

For more information on the Oct. 9 action and how you can get involved, visit: freeoscarlopeznow.com or boricuahumanrights.org.

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