

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Women trade unionists back fight to free Cuban Five
— PAGE 7

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 77/NO. 47 DECEMBER 30, 2013

Nearly 3,000 sign up for working-class newsweekly!

BY EMMA JOHNSON

“We’re going out tonight to get a couple more, we want to keep going to the end,” Maggie Trowe said over the phone from Des Moines, Iowa, five hours before the final midnight deadline in the international subscription and books campaign Dec. 17.

Supporters around the world are celebrating a resounding victory in the drive. Many areas did like Des Moines and kept going until the last hours taking us 475 subscriptions over our goal of 2,500.

“Andrew Pulley, a *Militant* supporter and cab driver, had a group of seven Angolan oil workers as passengers for four days last week,” Trowe said. “They are mechanics taking training classes at a local compression company here. Pulley brought them to the book center. One of them got a subscription and three bought *Cuba* and

Continued on page 3

Fall ‘Militant’ subscription campaign Oct. 12 - Dec. 17 (final)

Country	quota	sold	%	2,975 2,500 Goal
UNITED STATES				
Seattle	160	185	116%	
Atlanta	160	179	112%	
Miami	95	105	111%	
Lincoln	22	24	109%	
San Francisco	180	195	108%	
Philadelphia*	135	146	108%	
New York*	420	447	106%	
Los Angeles	160	170	106%	
Boston	65	68	105%	
Twin Cities*	145	151	104%	
Des Moines	160	166	104%	
Chicago	180	186	103%	
Washington	90	91	101%	
Houston	110	110	100%	
Omaha	220	150	68%	
Total U.S.	2302	2373	103%	
PRISONERS	15	25	167%	
UNITED KINGDOM				
London	150	161	107%	
Manchester	100	118	118%	
UK Total	250	279	112%	
CANADA	110	116	105%	
NEW ZEALAND	80	94	118%	
AUSTRALIA	75	88	117%	
Total	2832	2975	119%	
Should be	2500	2500	100%	
*Raised goal				

Ukraine crisis grows as Putin, imperialists vie for influence

Moscow tightens grip with carrot and stick



Reuters photos/Gleb Garanich

Divisions in Ukraine over whether country’s rulers will shift toward trade and political alliance with imperialist powers of Europe and U.S. or remain in clutches of rising capitalist layers in Russia were reflected in opposing demonstrations in Kiev over Dec. 14-15 weekend.

BY EMMA JOHNSON

Sustained demonstrations in the Ukraine against Kiev’s pro-Russia foreign policy are manifestations of a growing political crisis, marked by factional struggles between rival privileged social layers based in the eastern and western halves of the country. The catalyst is the contest for influence between the imperialist rulers of the U.S. and Europe on one hand and the secret-police regime representing the interests of a layer of rising capitalists in Russia.

Moscow won the last round when Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed a deal with Russia Dec. 17 lowering prices for gas imports from \$400 to \$268.50 per 1,000 cubic meters and a \$15-billion bailout to stave off a

government default. Tens of thousands gathered in Kiev, accusing Yanukovich of selling Ukraine out to the highest bidder.

Protests in Kiev’s Independence Square began in response to Yanukovich’s Nov. 21 announcement that he would not sign agreements to move toward integration into the European Union trade bloc and instead maintain

Continued on page 6

Does election of Seattle socialist, unionists in Ohio strengthen labor?

BY JOHN STUDER

A number of newspapers and on-line publications of various middle-class radicals and socialists on the U.S. left have extolled the recent electoral

COMMENTARY

wins by Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative candidate for Seattle City Council, and two dozen City Councilors in Lorain County, Ohio, who ran on a ticket under the auspices of the local union federation. For some, the election of left Democrat Bill de Blasio as mayor of New York is included.

The question is, do any of these electoral victories represent an advance for

Continued on page 7

Assad regime retakes parts of Syria in brutal war

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

As the nearly three-year civil war grinds on in Syria, the Bashar al-Assad regime has been consolidating its military control over key parts of the country. Millions have been driven from their homes. In recent months, conditions for working people in the country have worsened.

The relationship of forces shifted in favor of the Assad government after a deal was reached between Moscow and Washington to work with Damascus to dismantle its stockpile of chemical weapons, after the regime was accused of carrying out an Aug. 21 sarin gas attack that killed hundreds of civilians.

Since then, pro-Assad forces, including the recently formed paramilitary National Defense Force, Hezbollah soldiers sent from Lebanon, irregular fighters drawn from Shiite groups in Iraq and Revolutionary Guard troops from Iran, have made some significant gains.

Since mid-October these forces have captured Safira and Tel Aran, two towns southeast of Aleppo, and

Continued on page 6

Standing up has made us stronger, say workers locked out by Kellogg



Militant/Susan LaMont

Locked-out workers picket Kellogg plant in Memphis, Tenn., Dec. 13. From left, Scott Harmon, Sandra Henderson, Jeanette McGraw, Scott Cargile, Andre Matthews and Michael Plasky.

BY DAVE FERGUSON
AND SUSAN LAMONT

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — “The lockout has brought us closer as a body. It’s made us stronger,” Rob Eafen, 42, a mechanic at Kellogg Company’s cereal plant here, said during a Dec. 14 visit to the picket line. Eafen is one of 226 members of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union Local 252G who joined round-the-clock picketing at the plant after the company locked them out Oct. 22.

The central issue is Kellogg’s drive

Continued on page 4

Also Inside

- New Zealand taxi drivers’ strike makes gains at airport 2
- ‘Militant’ scores another win in prison censorship fight 4
- Striking SKorea rail workers win international solidarity 5
- Gerardo Hernández salutes Mandela, SAfrica revolution 7

New Zealand taxi drivers strike, make gains at Auckland airport

BY PATRICK BROWN

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — After one week striking, marching and picketing against the Auckland Airport Company here, some 180 taxi drivers won a “definite victory,” Manmohan Singh, spokesperson for the Auckland Taxi Association, told the *Militant* Dec. 13.

The agreement was concluded in talks the previous day between company officials and ATA representatives. Some 70 drivers waited outside on the spot where they had picketed all week. They held placards that described the airport company as “bloodsuckers” and explained, “We are working below \$4 an hour” (US\$3.32).

The airport is a publicly listed company nearly a quarter owned by the Auckland City Council.

Singh explained that the dispute stemmed from changes made by the airport in March — especially shifting the “designated rank” to a more visible spot. This area is used by drivers who work for three large companies. They get fares from business travelers and other frequent flyers that can be charged to their employers. In contrast, the striking drivers are restricted to the “main rank,” where they depend on casual fares from arriving travelers. Competition for those fares has increased since the designated rank moved much closer to the main rank.

Main rank drivers saw their fares drop by as much as 50 percent, Singh said. “You have to wait four to five

hours for a fare,” he explained. With a 70-hour workweek, drivers typically take home less than \$4 an hour, after forking out money for their license, airport tariffs, car payments, fuel costs and insurance.

Airport officials have agreed to post signs inside the terminal that direct people wanting taxis to a door that opens onto the main rank. “It’s a victory over a bully corporation,” said Singh.

The drivers had also demanded an end to “summary justice” from airport security. While on the main rank, Singh said, “You can’t eat in the cab; you can’t go to the toilet.”

The ATA was formed in October to discuss these grievances with the Auckland Airport Company, Singh said. After a one-day strike in November — triggered by the action of a security guard in sending home a driver who had used an airport toilet — the company agreed to provide drivers with more facilities. These points are included in the new agreement.

In addition to wide coverage in the media, the picketing drivers won backing from the First Union, and toots of approval from many travelers and workers in the area. Drivers for the three larger designated rank companies were guarded in their comments to the *Militant* during the stoppage.

One striker, who declined to be named, said several such drivers had told him they sympathized with the action.



Militant/Mike Tucker

Taxi drivers picket Auckland Airport Company Dec. 10. Some 180 workers struck for one week over rule changes by airport administration that resulted in decline of pay to \$4 an hour.

‘Happy to give bosses’ holiday bribe to communist movement’

“Blood money” contributions to the Socialist Workers Party Capital Fund totaled \$917 in November. The ongoing fund helps finance the long-range work of the party.

“Workers have been complaining that the company does less for Thanksgiving,” Tom Baumann, who works in a warehouse in Miami, wrote with a note he sent with a \$20 contribution. “This year they excluded temporary workers, like myself, from participating in the hourly raffle, previously open to all workers. Most co-workers disagreed with this. ‘You guys do the same work as us. It’s not fair,’ one of them said to me.”

After workers protested, the temps were included in the \$20 turkey gift card “bonus” the same day.

“I was happy to get it so I could turn it over to put it to use building the communist movement,” Baumann wrote.

Blood money is a term used to describe bosses’ bribes intended to convince workers to accept speedup, wage cuts, concession contracts and dangerous working conditions. They take various forms: safety, attendance, production and “profit-sharing” bonuses; contract-signing incentives; and holiday “gifts.”

Maggie Trowe and Ellen Brickley also donated their Thanksgiving gifts of \$25 each from a plastics factory in Des Moines, Iowa.

“With the blood money gift we got a letter from the company president about how great ‘our team’ is and how she likes Thanksgiving because it is a ‘noncommercial’ holiday about family,” Trowe wrote. “With pleasure we put this blood money toward building the revolutionary party.”

Carole Lesnick and Eric Simpson contributed September and October “on-time” bonuses for the sum of \$240. They work at United Airlines in San Francisco.

“The company briefings motivate the bonus by saying that we contribute with hard work,” Simpson wrote. “Because of bad weather next month, there will be no bonus. But we’ll still work just as hard.”

To make a contribution to the Capital Fund, write or call a *Militant* distributor listed on page 8.

— EMMA JOHNSON

THE MILITANT

Back struggles by garment workers from Cambodia to US

The expansion of capitalist production in Asia has increased the size of the working class and the fights these workers are waging against the bosses from Cambodia to Bangladesh for unions, safety and a big raise in the minimum wage. The ‘Militant’ covers these struggles.



Phnom Penh Post/Hong Menea
Garment workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, celebrate winning back pay Dec. 3.

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306 W. 37TH ST., 10TH FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10018.

The Militant

Vol. 77/No. 47

Closing news date: December 18, 2013

Editor: Doug Nelson

Editorial volunteers: Tom Baumann, Róger Calero, Naomi Craine, Seth Galinsky, Eleanor García, Emma Johnson, Jacob Perasso, John Studer, Brian Williams, Rebecca Williamson.

Published weekly except for one week in January, one week in July, one week in August and two weeks in September.

Business manager: Lea Sherman
The Militant (ISSN 0026-3885), 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018. **Telephone:** (212) 244-4899 **Fax:** (212) 244-4947

E-mail: themilitant@mac.com

Website: www.themilitant.com

Correspondence concerning subscriptions or changes of address should be addressed to the Militant, 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Militant, 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: United States: For one year send \$35 to above address.

Latin America, Caribbean: For one year send \$85 drawn on a U.S. bank to above

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United Kingdom: Send £26 for one year by check or international money order made out to CL London, First Floor, 120 Bethnal Green Road (Entrance in Brick Lane), London, E2 6DG, England.

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Pacific Islands: Send NZ\$50 for one year to P.O. Box 3025, Auckland 1140, New Zealand.

Submissions to the *Militant* may be published in the newspaper in print and digital format. By submitting, authors represent that their submissions are original and consent to publication in this manner.

Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant*’s views. These are expressed in editorials.

Subscription campaign

Continued from front page

Angola: Fighting for Africa's Freedom and Our Own."

This book is one of nine on special offer with a subscription. Hundreds of the books have been sold since the beginning of the drive. (See ad below.)

"We were working right through Tuesday night. It was a big boost to have comrades join us from Twin Cities, Chicago and Des Moines on Saturday," reported Jacquie Henderson from Omaha, Neb. "We also had a great dinner and social that raised contributions for the SWP Party-Building Fund."

"Workers in the U.S. are so busy working, so they hardly have time to read and think. How can we help them understand what is happening in the world?" Antonio Jimenez in Columbus, Neb., asked Henderson when he renewed his subscription and contributed to the fund. "I am a welder and I work six days a week, every week. But I know I can't be without this paper."

Henderson invited him to join them in winning more readers. Jimenez took them to some apartment houses in this small industrial city surrounded by rich farmland and jumped into the discussions at workers' doors. One restaurant worker got excited about a *Militant* article on the victory of striking garment workers in Cambodia and signed up for a six-month subscription.

"There was slavery in the U.S.," Jimenez said. "It took the Civil War and more to get rid of it. But now we have a new kind of slavery, wage slavery. And it will take another revolution to end that. That is what we need."

Jimenez asked the *Militant* supporters to come back so they could knock

on some more doors together.

On Dec. 13 and 14, Susan LaMont and Dave Ferguson from Atlanta drove to Memphis, Tenn., to visit the picket line of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union Local 252G members locked out by Kellogg.

"Nine workers subscribed to the *Militant*," LaMont wrote. "This means 17 union members are now getting the paper."

"One worker, Marvin Rush, said he wants to buy *Teamster Rebellion*," LaMont said. "He was fascinated by the story of how members of Teamsters Local 574 organized the unemployed, a women's auxiliary and got help from farmers in their battle in the 1930s to make Minneapolis a union town."

Erendira Valadez renewed her subscription during the drive after several years of not getting the paper, Arlene Rubinstein wrote from Los Angeles. Since then, the garment worker has attended two *Militant* Labor Forums, including this past week on the political legacy of Nelson Mandela.

"I see the forums as a time and a place where I transform my understanding of politics, and where I can feel comfortable to discuss my situation as a worker," Valadez said. Supporters of the *Militant* there are meeting with a number of new readers to discuss their ideas on topics for upcoming forum programs.

Seth Galinsky reported that in New York door-to-door teams signed up eight new readers in the evening of Dec. 17, bringing the total to 447. *Militant* supporters there sold 69 over the final week.

Peter Thierjung and Deborah Lia-



Militant/Arlene Rubinstein

Public health worker Jennifer Ponce, right, signs up for *Militant* when Barbara Bowman and Kevin Cole visit her home in Long Beach, Calif., Dec. 14. Ponce also got *Women in Cuba: The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution*, *Cuba and Angola: Fighting for Africa's Freedom and Our Own* and two copies of *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power*.

tos met a postal worker going door to door two weeks ago. They pointed to the article about how Metro-North's disdain for safety in order to maximize profits had led to the commuter train derailment Dec. 1 that caused four deaths and over 60 injuries. "Come in here!" she said. "I'm getting that paper." She had been injured on the job and the company fought all the way against her disability claim. She lost and was forced into retirement.

"Then her niece walked in," Thierjung said. "She used to be a teacher. 'Tell them why you are not a teacher any more,' her aunt said. So the niece tells us she doesn't want to 'turn out any more worker-bees,' she's fed up with teaching. She grabbed *The Working Class and the Transformation of*

Learning booklet out of our hands."

"Come back next week. We'll do a coffee and sit down and talk," the postal worker said. "And be sure to bring the books."

Thierjung and Liatos went back last Sunday. After talking politics for an hour, she decided to get *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power* and *Women in Cuba: The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution* and asked them to come back with more books.

Supporters in New York have sold 166 books on special offer so far and are still counting. Topping the list are *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning* with 38 copies, *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power* with 34 and *The Cuban Five: Who They Are, Why They Were Framed, Why They Should Be Free* with 31.

"I enjoy receiving the paper," wrote a worker behind bars in Virginia with his renewal slip. "When I get my conviction overturned, I look forward to having my case on the front page."

Subscriptions to prisoners are at the very top of the scoreboard. Fourteen new inmates have subscribed and 11 have renewed. This is the highest number in years.

Special offers with 'Militant' subscription

The Cuban Five

Who They Are, Why They Were Framed, Why They Should Be Free
from pages of the 'Militant'
\$3 with subscription (regular \$5)

The Changing Face of U.S. Politics

Working-Class Politics and the Trade Unions
by Jack Barnes
\$10 with subscription (regular \$24)

The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning

The Fraud of Education Reform Under Capitalism
by Jack Barnes
\$2 with subscription (regular \$3)

We Are Heirs of the World's Revolutions

by Thomas Sankara
Speeches from the Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-87
\$5 with subscription (regular \$10)

Thomas Sankara Speaks

The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987
\$10 with subscription (regular \$24)

**See distributors
on page 8**

Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power

by Jack Barnes
\$10 with subscription
(regular \$20)

Cuba and Angola

Fighting for Africa's Freedom and Our Own
by Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro; Cuban generals and combatants; Gabriel García Márquez
\$6 with subscription
(regular \$12)

Women in Cuba

The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution
by Vilma Espín, Asela de los Santos, Yolanda Ferrer
\$10 with subscription
(regular \$20)

Women and Revolution

The Living Example of the Cuban Revolution
by Asela de los Santos, Mary-Alice Waters and others
\$3 with subscription
(regular \$7)

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

FLORIDA Miami

The Citizen's Revolution in Ecuador, Peace Talks in Colombia and Cuba's Proletarian Revolution: The Class Struggle in Latin America Today. Panel of participants in anti-imperialist youth festival. Sat., Dec. 28. Dinner 6 p.m., program 7 p.m. 7100 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 306A. Tel.: 305-757-8869.

NEW YORK Manhattan

Conflict in the Ukraine As Moscow Vies for Influence with U.S. and 'Europe.' Fri., Dec. 27, 7:30 p.m. 307 W. 36 St., 10th Floor (north set of elevators). Tel.: (212) 629-6649.

CANADA Montreal

United States, China, Japan Tensions Increase in the Pacific. Speaker: Joe Young, Communist League. Fri., Dec. 20, 7:30 p.m. 7107 St-Denis, Room 204. Tel.: (514) 272-5840.

‘Militant’ scores another win against censorship in prisons

BY JOHN STUDER

“Yes, I received copies of the *Militant* you sent fairly soon after you sent them,” Patrick Drum wrote to the paper Dec. 9. “Thank you.”

Drum, a prisoner being held in solitary confinement at Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, was one of a number of subscribers behind bars in three U.S. prisons who reported that prison officials withheld or confiscated their copies of the *Militant*. Some of the issues featured coverage of a hunger strike by inmates in California earlier this year to protest solitary confinement and other abusive treatment.

In its campaign for the right of prisoners to receive their subscriptions, the *Militant* got help from the American Civil Liberties Union. It also received support from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and a number of publications that report on struggles by workers behind bars, including the *San Francisco Bay View*, *Prison Legal News* and several websites. In face of growing publicity and support, authorities in two Florida prisons delivered issues they had withheld to subscribers there.

After Drum contacted the *Militant* to report his copies had been taken away by prison authorities, the Washington ACLU agreed to work with the *Militant* to press the state Attorney General’s Office to intervene.

“Publishers who wish to communicate with those who, through subscription, willingly seek their point of view have a legitimate First Amendment interest in access to prisoners,” Washington ACLU attorney La Rond Baker wrote to John Dittman, Assistant Attorney General in Washington state, Nov. 25, quoting from a 1989 Supreme Court decision.

The only grounds prison officials could have had for seizing the *Militant* issues, Baker wrote, would be objection to “*The Militant*’s socialist editorial policy.”

Five days before the letter to Dittman, the *Militant* sent Drum copies of the four issues that had been taken from him in September.

Baker spoke to Drum on the phone Dec. 13. Drum confirmed he had received the issues and has continued to receive his subscription since.

In the course of the campaign, the *Militant* learned about censorship imposed on other publications that report on conditions and struggles of prisoners. *Prison Focus*, a quarterly “that works with and on behalf of prisoners in California’s control units and other institutions,” has been censored at Pelican Bay State Prison, where prisoners have led the round of three hunger strikes over the past two years.

“The censorship lawsuit against Pelican Bay prison officials has been drafted, sent inside for corrections, and rewritten again,” editor Ed Mead wrote in the paper’s most recent issue. “Prisoner victims of the banning of last issue of *Prison Focus* at the PBSP SHU [Pelican Bay State Prison Security Housing Units] have filed their 602s, appealed them all the way to the third and final level, thus exhausting all available administrative remedies.”

“602s” are grievance forms inmates can file with California Department of Corrections against prison actions or policies.

Victory against the prison censors, Mead says, is not mainly a legal question. “The courts act as a sort of social pressure relief valve; when there is an active movement making demands on the state, rights are handed down by

Thousands attend World Youth Festival in Ecuador



Militant/Laura Anderson

QUITO, Ecuador — Delegates from 88 countries gathered here Dec. 7-13 to take part in the 18th World Festival of Youth and Students. The event, which brought together various political forces under the banner of the struggle against imperialism, had some 8,000 registered participants, 3,500 from the host country.

Some 800 delegates were from Colombia, where after five decades of guerrilla insurgency peace negotiations are taking place between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The negotiations, brokered by the Cuban government, were a topic of discussion and debate at the festival.

Shown above is the Cuban delegation marching in the opening ceremony Dec. 7. Among the 250 Cuban delegates were Irma González and Ailí Labañino, daughters of René González and Ramón Labañino, two of the Cuban Five. Ramón Labañino is among four of the framed-up revolutionaries who remain in U.S. prison. In May, René González returned to Cuba where he has been active in the political fight to free his comrades.

Some 250 came from Namibia. Sizable delegations also came from Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. The opening ceremony marked the passing of Nelson Mandela, who led the democratic revolution against white-supremacist rule in South Africa and was honored here for his contribution to the struggle against imperialism.

— ANNALUCIA VERMUNT

the courts in an effort to defuse the potential threat,” he writes. “When the movement dies down, however, the rights are then taken away.”

“It is only the existence of an ac-

tive movement for change that will ensure enforcement of the rights of prisoners,” Mead says. “Not the mere promises of prisoncrats nor the mood of the courts.”

Socialist Workers Party fund drive set to exceed \$100,000 in final week

BY TONY LANE

With one more week to go in the Socialist Workers Party \$100,000 Party-Building Fund, local areas are focused on getting the final payments

in. Just over \$17,100 came in this week, bringing the total to \$96,123.

Three areas, Lincoln, Philadelphia and Seattle, have already met their quotas for the fund, and many others areas are closing in fast.

As well as organizing to collect on pledges, many areas have been working to expand the number of contributors as they take steps to meet their goal.

Dean Hazlewood reports from Miami that “we got the pledges to make our quota of \$3,000 by reaching out broadly. We went over our goal of involving 15 first-time contributors. At least eight longshore workers made contributions when we set up tables with the *Militant* and Pathfinder books at roll call outside union halls in Fort Lauderdale and Miami. This brought in over \$200. We also gained another \$40 from workers who kicked in an extra dollar or two as we were selling the *Militant* door to door.”

A final chart will be run in the next issue. Send contributions to the fund to the SWP office nearest you (see directory on page 8) or directly to the SWP National Office at 306 W. 37th St., 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Workers locked out by Kellogg

Continued from front page
to hire temporary, part-time workers at the plant, at \$6 less per hour and with fewer benefits and rights than current workers.

“We’ve had many people from other unions, retirees from our local and others in the community bring food and fuel to show their support for us,” Local 252G member Jim Archie said. Passing motorists frequently waved and honked their horns in solidarity.

Kellogg, a food-processing giant with operations in 18 countries, announced in November that it plans to cut its global workforce by 7 percent. On Dec. 10 it said it will close its cereal plant in London, Ontario, laying off 500 workers by the end of 2014.

“The Ontario shutdown is aimed at getting rid of the union,” Michael Plasky said on the picket line. “Kellogg opened a non-union plant in 2008 not far from the union plant they are shutting down.”

Kellogg is using scabs to run the Memphis plant.

“I never thought this would happen. And I sure didn’t think it would last this long,” said Tim Riggs, who has worked at the plant for 12 years. “I’ve got a lot of new friends now, co-workers I didn’t really know before. And we’ve gotten closer to the other Kellogg locals and to other union members in Memphis.”

Kellogg spokesperson Kris Charles told the *Militant* that the company will

end the lockout when “we agree to a fair and competitive contract.”

“This is the same thing the company has been saying all along,” Local 252G President Kevin Bradshaw said by phone Dec. 17. “The company wants to create a two-tier setup, with new hires getting lower wages and less benefits.”

Contributions to a fund for the locked-out unionists can be made payable to “Local 252G Hardship” at BCTGM Local 252G, 3035 Directors Row, Building A #1310, Memphis, TN 38131-0417.

Party-Building Fund Week 8 of 9			
Area	Quota	Collected	%
Seattle	\$8,800	\$9,220	105%
Lincoln	\$200	\$209	105%
Philadelphia	\$4,200	\$4,301	102%
Twin Cities	\$5,750	\$5,657	98%
San Francisco*	\$14,000	\$13,764	98%
Atlanta	\$8,800	\$8,591	98%
Chicago*	\$10,400	\$10,074	97%
Washington, DC	\$7,500	\$6,910	92%
New York	\$20,000	\$17,664	88%
Boston	\$3,500	\$3,000	86%
Des Moines*	\$3,000	\$2,411	80%
Los Angeles	\$8,200	\$6,573	80%
Houston	\$3,000	\$2,365	79%
Miami	\$3,000	\$2,319	77%
Omaha	\$2,500	\$1,715	69%
Other		\$1,350	
Total	\$102,850	\$96,123	96%
Should Be	\$100,000	\$88,888	89%
* Raised goal			

Teamster Rebellion by Farrell Dobbs

The 1934 strikes that built the industrial union movement in Minneapolis and helped pave the way for the CIO, as recounted by a central leader of that battle.

First in a four-volume series. The other books are:

Teamster Power, *Teamster Politics*, and *Teamster Bureaucracy*.

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ON THE PICKET LINE

SKorea rail workers strike, win international solidarity

The South Korean government is trying to break a strike by workers at the state-owned rail company.

Some 150 cops raided the offices of the Korean Railway Workers' Union in Seoul Dec. 17, seizing computers and documents. The government has issued arrest warrants for 10 union officials, on the grounds that the strike is illegal. And the company has suspended more than 7,600 workers.

The strike began Dec. 9 after KORAIL refused to negotiate over plans to set up a subsidiary to run a planned high-speed passenger train between Seoul and Busan. The Railway Workers' Union sees this as a step toward privatization, cutting jobs and wages.

KORAIL denies this is privatization, stating that shares in the new company would be government owned. The *Korea Herald* — which says the government “is right to play hardball with the union” — reports that the move is designed “to make the rail operator more efficient through competition ... and reduce KORAIL's snowballing debt, which reached 17.6 trillion won [\$952 million] in June.”

“In most countries rail privatization begins this same way,” Wol-san Liem, international affairs director for the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Union, said by phone from Seoul Dec. 17. “Then they will slash costs wherever they can and this will have an impact on safety, on repairs and maintenance.”

By the third day of the strike almost two-thirds of freight train traffic was shut down as well as many passenger and subway lines.

“KORAIL has brought in students, retired workers, managers and some soldiers to work as scabs,” Liem said. “Many are not adequately trained.”

On Dec. 15 an 84-year-old subway passenger died after she was caught in subway doors, operated by a strike-breaker.

The attack on rail workers is one of a series of attacks on unions and political rights since President Park Geun-hye

was elected last year.

Four Unified Progressive Party officials were charged in recent months with violating the National Security Law, for supposedly acting as agents of North Korea.

“They’ve made similar charges against some rail workers who are accused of being members of a secret organization,” Liem said.

Rail unions affiliated with the International Transport Workers' Federation in at least 15 countries, from Australia to Bulgaria, protested at South Korean embassies Dec. 9 and 10 in solidarity with the strike.

More than 10,000 rail workers and supporters protested in Seoul Dec. 14.

“Privatization is going on around the world, especially in Europe where workers are trying to protect public rail,” Liem said. “We hope our struggle will contribute to building the global effort.”

Information on the strike and how to send messages of solidarity is available at http://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=2072.

— Seth Galinsky

Greece: Workers in Athens strike university over job cuts

ATHENS, Greece — Clerical, administrative and technical support workers at the University of Athens have entered their 15th week on strike against layoffs that are part of government plans to cut some 25,000 public employees.

The layoffs are part of conditions for loans to the indebted Greek government Athens agreed to with the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission.

Workers at the National Technical University here ended a 13-week strike over the same issue Dec. 6.

“Out of 1,300 employees at these two campuses in Athens, 500 are to be laid off by decision of the ministry of education. Similar cuts are planned at the other six campuses in the national public university system,” said Christina Demiri, a member of the strike committee.

“The government wants to eliminate job security in the public sector and promote private contractors,” said Demiri.



Mac Urata

South Korean rail workers rally in Seoul Dec. 14 against government-owned KORAIL's moves to privatize company. Workers have been on strike against rail bosses since Dec. 9.

“It also aims to introduce tuition for undergraduates.”

“Preventing public higher education from being dismantled is one of the main aims of the strike,” said Stavroula Vezirtzoglou, an official of the Federation of Higher Education Administrative Personnel.

“With the government proposal, nearly half the personnel would get 350-400 euros (\$480-\$550) a month for eight months and then be fired,” said Vezirtzoglou. “With unemployment over 27 percent, being fired can mean you’ll never work again.”

“The strike committee has organized regular picketing and assemblies to speak with students and win their support,” said Demiri. The strike suspended classes for some 100,000 students.

“The government tried hard to get students and parents to oppose the strike,” Vezirtzoglou said. But many support the fight “because everyone is faced with the same difficulties to get by.”

In response to government pressure, union officials from the Association of Administrative Employees of the University of Athens declared the strike over Dec. 12. But strikers did not abide by the announcement, which was made after the membership general assembly voted to continue the strike.

On Dec. 13 union members voted again to continue the strike, but to remove picket lines and allow students to

resume class. On Dec. 16 “the university will open its doors, but our strike continues,” says Dimitris Antoniou, another strike committee member. “We have not stopped the government’s course, but we have shaken them up.”

— Georges Mehrabian
and Natasha Terlexis

Amazon workers in Germany strike for higher pay, respect

Workers at three Amazon distribution centers in Germany began a three-day strike Dec. 16. Germany is Amazon's second-largest market after the U.S.

More than 1,500 workers joined the strike in three cities the first day, Heiner Reimann, a spokesperson for the Verdi union, which is leading the organizing drive among Amazon's 9,000 warehouse workers, said in a phone interview from Bad Hersfeld, Germany.

The union is demanding that Amazon, the largest Internet-only retailer in the world, classify its workers as retail employees instead of logistics employees. The latter get paid about 10 euros an hour (\$13.80), Reimann said, while those classified as retail get 12 euros (\$16.50).

“We have to react to Amazon now,” he added, “because we don’t want the future for workers here to be like in America where everybody has to fight the bosses every day.”

In Germany about 60 percent of workers are covered by union contracts, down from 70 percent 10 years ago, compared to less than 12 percent in the U.S. Both temporary work and so-called minijobs — tax-free part-time jobs with relatively low pay — have been rapidly growing in Germany over the last decade. Today these minijobs account for more than 20 percent of employment.

“The most important issue has to do with dignity,” Amazon worker Christian Kraehling said by phone. “We didn’t have any raises from 2005 to 2011. There was no air conditioning in the warehouses and it got so hot in the summer that a lot of people passed out. The company keeps raising the bar for how much we have to do, and there are problems with the behavior of many managers.”

Once workers started organizing the union, Amazon installed air conditioning, he said, and raised wages a little. But the company still refuses to negotiate with the union.

Some 60 people demonstrated outside Amazon's Seattle headquarters Dec. 16 to back the strike in Germany. AFL-CIO Field Representative Marcus Courtney told the *Militant*. “This is about international solidarity,” he said. “This is a fight we have in common.”

— Seth Galinsky

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



December 30, 1988

NEW YORK — Thousands of marchers took to the streets here to demand decent housing for all New Yorkers, braving a bitter cold that earlier in the day claimed its sixth homeless victim in a week.

The December 19 “March and Rally for Housing Justice,” organized by a coalition of 175 organizations throughout the city, capped a week of meetings, picket lines, and educational events that highlighted the plight of nearly 100,000 New Yorkers — including 5,000 children under five — who are homeless.

The crowd of some 10,000 was overwhelmingly young, drawing thousands of high school and college students and Central America solidarity, peace, disarmament, and women's rights activists.

Scores of churches endorsed the event along with Teamster, city employee, hospital, telephone, United Auto Worker locals as well as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.



December 30, 1963

Recent reports from northern Angola describe the increasing influx of arms and trained men across the border from the Congo as part of the first major drive against the Portuguese colonialists by the Angolan Liberation Army. The build-up is supported by war materiel mostly from Algeria, which is carried into Angola on the heads of bearers over narrow paths and is manned by 7,500 disciplined troops.

The Angolan liberation fight has been going on for over two and a half years now. Flaring into the open with a mass uprising in Luanda, the capital, in February 1961, the pent-up wrath of the Angolan people was countered by wholesale slaughter.

The Liberation Forces live off the land and thus subsist mainly on their dedication to their cause. Officers and men dress alike and call each other “comrade,” a designation borrowed from the Algerians.



December 31, 1938

That the Jews, if they are to survive, can do so only by linking their fate to that of the labor movement, is the inescapable logical conclusion to which all our analysis points. This conclusion has driven itself home to the minds and hearts of many a leader of the Jewish community. The debacle of assimilationism, the blind alley into which Zionism has led, the sharp fact that only where the labor movement still stands strong can Jews lift their heads — all this leads them to agree that Jewry must cast in its lot with the working class and with labor's allies, the colonial peoples oppressed by the great powers.

Time presses upon all of us the *real*, inescapable alternatives: either down in the dark with fascism or up into the kingdom of freedom with the socialist revolution. For the Jews the question is posed even more sharply; either *physical extermination* or a new social order.

Assad gains ground in Syria

Continued from front page

retaken a military base near Aleppo's airport. In the suburbs south of Damascus, the capital city, another five towns are back under government control.

Government forces continue to bombard towns under siege, targeting civilian areas sympathetic to the opposition. Syrian government aircraft pounded areas near the southern border with Jordan and in Aleppo Dec. 16. Barrel bombs — steel barrels packed with explosives — dropped on several Aleppo neighborhoods killed at least 76, including 28 children, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. A similar attack in the northern town of Al-Bab Nov. 31-Dec. 1 killed 46 people.

In face of these gains, Syrian government officials have made clear that Assad has no intention of surrendering power as part of any deals reached at a Jan. 22 "peace" conference set for Geneva, Switzerland, and that he may run again in elections scheduled for mid-2014.

"Assad's survival may not be the worst scenario for Syria," is how a Nov. 19 *Wall Street Journal* editorial described the view of the Barack Obama administration.

"Washington and Russia appeared to be working in tandem on a transitional framework," Reuters reported Dec. 17, in which Assad's military and intelligence apparatus would "rally a united fight against al-Qaeda with moderate rebel brigades, who would be invited to join a restructured military."

War grew out of protest movement

The struggle began in 2011, with large protests demanding political rights and an end to dictatorial rule. Assad replied with bombings, arrests and killings.

Opposition forces rallied under the banner of the Free Syrian Army, which took control of parts of northern Syria, including areas around Aleppo, the country's largest city, and some suburbs of Damascus.

Well-armed groups allied with al-Qaeda have entered the country, seeking to wrest territory amid the fighting. They have increasingly clashed with the Free Syrian Army.

The Syrian Observatory puts the total death toll in the war at almost 126,000. On average more than 5,000 have been killed per month since July 2012. Nearly 7 million people — one-third of the country's population — are in urgent need of food and medical assistance. Parts of the country have recently been hit by a polio outbreak.

The U.N. estimates there are 6.5 million people in the country who have been driven from their homes. Another

2.3 million Syrian refugees have fled to nearby countries — 131,000 to Egypt, 207,000 to Iraq, 540,000 to Turkey, 567,000 to Jordan and 842,000 to Lebanon. They face limited resources, stiff competition for jobs and are often scapegoated for deteriorating economic and social conditions in those countries.

In Lebanon, Syrians now comprise 20 percent or more of the country's population, and the government in Beirut is seeking to halt any further immigration. It has decided not to house refugees in formal camps, fearing they will stay, and tented settlements, like those in Bekaa Valley, are being pressured to close.

Nearly 6,500 refugees have crossed over the Turkish border to Bulgaria, the poorest nation in the European Union, mostly hoping to make it to Germany or Sweden. In Bulgaria, one of the entry points to Europe, they have been targeted by the ultrarightist Ataka party, which seeks to grow by demanding the Syrians be driven out, saying "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians."

Splintering of opposition forces

Free Syrian Army forces have suffered setbacks while Islamist rebel groups have been gaining strength. In November a coalition of seven Islamist groups, whose fighters are estimated to number 45,000, according to the *Economist*, split from the FSA and formed the Islamic Front. The front excludes the main al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria — the Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

The one exception to this overall trend is in the northeast, where Kurdish militias have pushed both Assad and the al-Qaedaists out, extending their control over most of Hasakah province. These gains are part of a broader rise in the struggle of the Kurdish people, an oppressed nationality of some 30 million concentrated in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Over the Dec. 7-8 weekend the Islamist Front took over key Free Syrian Army warehouses, near the Turkish border. Among the items seized were aircraft and anti-tank weapons, 50,000 military rations, pickup trucks and communications equipment, according to a U.S. State Department official and the Syrian Observatory.

Conflicting accounts about the incident were reported in the media, but each pointed to the declining power and influence of the FSA. One said FSA Gen. Salim Idris was forced to flee the site. Another that the FSA had asked the Islamic Front to defend the premises against fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

In response, Washington and London suspended delivery of nonlethal aid to



Top: Reuters/Saad AboBrahim. Bottom: AP/Shibli Abi-Assi

The Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad targets civilian areas sympathetic to the opposition with military sieges and aerial bombardments. Top, residents view damage from barrel bombs dropped on areas of Aleppo Dec. 17, killing at least 76 people. Bottom, tent encampment in Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, where 842,000 Syrian refugees have fled.

north Syria and have opened talks with the Islamic Front.

"The shift in Western priorities, particularly the United States and Britain, from removing Assad toward combating Islamist militants is causing divisions within international powers," Reuters reported Dec. 17.

The strengthening of the Assad government has been a gain for Moscow, which along with the Iranian government has been the main ally of the Syrian regime. The same development has angered Washington's allies in the region, particularly the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, which has supplied the FSA with \$400 million in arms and equipment. The Saudi kingdom has

also expressed outrage at the Barack Obama administration's recent overtures toward negotiations with Tehran, which has helped stabilize the regime there.

"We've seen several red lines put forward by the president, which went along and became pinkish as time grew, and eventually ended up completely white," Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, the country's former intelligence chief, said Dec. 15, speaking at a World Policy Conference.

With the emergence of the Islamic Front, Saudi Arabia now seeks to arm one of its wings called Jaish al-Islam, or Army of Islam, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Crisis, divisions grow in Ukraine

Continued from front page

its close economic and political relationship with Russia. After a police attack on a small group of students Dec. 1, the anti-government rallies swelled to tens of thousands and over the weekends to hundreds of thousands. Participants are mainly young and come from the western part of the country.

Over the past few weeks, thousands have camped in the square, fortifying their positions with barricades and roadblocks. On Dec. 14, the government organized a one-time counterrally to support Yanukovich, numbering in the tens of thousands.

The unfolding events in Ukraine have historical roots in the anti-working-class course of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc governments following the usurpation of political power by privileged bureaucratic social layers in the 1920s — a course which led to their collapse in the early 1990s. Since then, the remnants of the ruling bureaucracies in Ukraine and the rest of the Soviet bloc have moved

to reimpose capitalist exploitation on the working class. The social crisis resulting from this course is today exacerbated by the deepening crisis of capitalism on a world scale.

With roots in different industries and other sources of capital, some emerging capitalists have gravitated toward traditional ties with Moscow, while others look to new opportunities in closer economic integration with western Europe.

Conflicts between different factions of the new capitalist layers exploded around the 2004 presidential election. Yanukovich, who emerged from the government-run eastern coal industry and had strong ties to Russia, claimed victory. His opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, came out of the state banking apparatus and oriented towards Washington and capitalist governments in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, backing Yushchenko and a break with Russia. But his rule ended six years later amid growing

Continued on page 9



"Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers."

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

Written in 1848, the Communist Manifesto explains why communism is the line of march of the working class toward power, "springing from an existing class struggle, a historical movement going on under our very eyes."

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Women trade unionists back fight to free the Cuban Five

BY SETH GALINSKY

The Coalition of Labor Union Women approved a resolution at its Nov. 13-16 convention backing the fight to free the Cuban Five.

“CLUW members join with our founding member Delores Huerta, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and eight Nobel Prize winners in calling for the Cuban 5 to be released and returned to their families,” the resolution states.

“We must do all we can to win the release of these five innocent men,” said Huerta, who is also a founding member of the United Farm Workers, in a YouTube video referred to in the resolution.

The resolution calls on “the U.S. State Department to grant a visa to Adriana Pérez in order that she may visit with her husband, Gerardo Hernández,” one of the Five. During 15 years of imprisonment, Washington has repeatedly denied visa requests for Pérez to come to the U.S. to see Hernández, who was sentenced to two life terms plus 15 years on trumped-up conspiracy charges. “According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, denial of the right of a spouse to visit their incarcerated husband or wife is a violation of human rights,” the resolution says.

While the case of the Five “has re-

ceived very little attention in the U.S. press,” the resolution states, “it is widely known around the world because the activities for which they were convicted posed no threat to the American people (they were monitoring the activities of anti-Cuba terrorist groups based in Miami which had planned and carried out deadly bombings in Cuba.)”

More than 400 delegates from 40 unions attended the CLUW convention in Reno, Nevada. The AFL-CIO-backed coalition, founded in 1974, has chapters around the country.

The resolution, which was approved unanimously, was submitted by Katie Jordan, president of the Chicago chapter of CLUW. She is a retired garment worker and leader of the Workers United labor union.

“This is a good time for us to be more vocal on this issue,” Jordan said in a phone interview Dec. 13. Jordan said she sees the fight to free the Five as part of the fights for justice in the U.S. “You can be doing something worthwhile here that someone else doesn’t like and wind up being detained.

“This resolution is part of the priorities of what we will be working on and we hope other unions will do the same,” she said.

Did elections strengthen labor?

Continued from front page

the working class and its allies? Do they strengthen workers capacity to fight the bosses? Do they further the self-confidence, class consciousness and organization of labor? Do they move toward independent working-class political action?

In the absence of working-class struggles strong enough to transform our labor unions and lay the basis for a social movement that can challenge the bosses political power, the answer is no. Without this, and lacking a revolutionary program, these elections only nurture workers’ illusions in democratic forms of capitalist rule and provide them with left cover.

Kshama Sawant, an economics professor, ran for the nonpartisan Seattle City Council position No. 2, winning with 50.67 percent in a two-candidate race, with no Republican running. With a “practical” focus on getting elected, she campaigned around three central demands: “\$15-an-hour minimum wage, a rent control ordinance to make housing affordable, and a tax on millionaires to fund transit, education and other public services.”

Sawant’s campaign flyers bore the headline “Make Seattle affordable for all” and featured an endorsement calling her a “rarity — a progressive candidate who is principled, articulate, competent, smart, and fearless.” She presented herself as an “activist,” highlighting her involvement in the Occupy Wall Street movement. She said she was speaking for the 99 percent against the 1 percent, running “so that working people finally have real representation.”

Constrained to the narrow boundaries that typify capitalist election contests for local offices, her literature avoided important political issues that affect all

workers, such as high unemployment and a woman’s right to choose abortion. It made no mention of key international issues, Syria, the place of the Cuban Revolution, the common interests of working people worldwide against the bosses or the global crisis of capitalism that is driving their attacks against us.

“Sawant pushed the discussion in all races to the left — just as the Tea Party has pushed rightward elsewhere,” noted the Freedom Socialist Party.

The observation is accurate. In a similar fashion, de Blasio’s campaign helped carve out space for a growing socialist wing of the Democratic Party.

But a shift in bourgeois electoral politics to the left does nothing to advance political action on the part of the working class — which takes place in the streets, not at the ballot box. Electoral politics is not the arena for the working class — it’s the arena for the bosses and the labor officialdom. Getting workers to orient in that direction is the employing classes’ strongest weapon.

A major aspect of liberal and bourgeois-socialist politics is geared toward promoting the notion that the capitalist government can play a benevolent role with the right people in office pushing the right policies — a perspective that fosters attitudes of dependency.

Some middle-class socialist groups have in recent years pulled back from running for office themselves, burned out from previous exertions that didn’t produce the quick gains they were looking for. In 2013, the Freedom Socialist Party did not run in Seattle, their base. The Party for Socialism and Liberation did not run for mayor in New York.

Today, a number of the same socialist groups are united in pointing to elections as a key arena where workers and

Continued on page 9

Who are the Cuban Five?



Fernando González, Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino and René González are Cuban revolutionaries who during the 1990s accepted assignments from the Cuban government to gather information on the operations and plans of Cuban-American paramilitary groups based in southern Florida. These rightist outfits, organizing on U.S. soil with virtual impunity, have a long record of carrying out bombings, assassinations and other deadly attacks, both against targets in Cuba and supporters of the Cuban Revolution in the United States, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

On Sept. 12, 1998, the five were arrested by the FBI. They were framed up and convicted on a variety of charges, which included acting as unregistered agents of the Cuban government and possession of false identity documents. Without a shred of evidence, three were charged with “conspiracy to gather and transmit national defense information.”

The frame-up and long sentences meted out to the Five is part of Washington’s decades-long campaign to overturn the political power held by the working class of Cuba and to punish the toilers of that nation for making and defending a socialist revolution 90 miles from U.S. shores.

All but René González, who returned to Cuba in May 2013, remain in prison.

Gerardo Hernández salutes Nelson Mandela, South African revolution

Below is a message sent by Gerardo Hernández, one of the Cuban Five, following the death of Nelson Mandela, leader of the democratic revolution in South Africa. Three of the Five — Hernández, René González and Fernando González — served as volunteer combatants in Angola. More than 375,000 Cubans volunteered between 1975 and 1991 to help defeat the invading armies of the white supremacist apartheid regime in South Africa.

“I was in prison when I first heard of the massive assistance that the Cuban internationalist forces provided to the people of Angola, on such a scale that one hesitated to believe,” Nelson Mandela said in Matanzas, Cuba, on July 26, 1991. The military defeat of South African forces at Cuito Cuanavale in March 1988 “was a victory for the whole of Africa!” he said, led to the unbanning of the African National Congress, “and made it possible for me to be here today.” Mandela was released in February 1990 after more than 27 years in prison.

Governments around the world that backed the apartheid regime branded the African National Congress and Mandela as “terrorists.” Chief among them was Washington, which maintained that designation until 2008. Mandela visited eight U.S. cities on a 12-day tour in June 1990. In Miami, city officials refused to welcome him and denounced Mandela for his friendship with Cuba and the Cuban Revolution.



Those who dedicate unlimited resources to erase and rewrite the history of Nelson Mandela, and who had him on their list of “dangerous terrorists,” today will suffer from collective amnesia.

Those in the city of Miami who insulted him by denying him homage because he embraced Fidel and thanked Cuba for its aid to Africa, today will have to sit in embarrassed silence.

The Cuban Five will continue facing every day our unjust imprisonment, until the end, inspired by his example of unwavering loyalty and resistance.

Eternal Glory to the great Nelson Mandela!
Gerardo Hernández Nordelo
United States Penitentiary, Victorville, California
Dec. 5, 2013



Three of Cuban Five were among the more than 375,000 Cuban volunteer combatants who helped defeat invasion of Angola by South African apartheid army. Above, Lieutenant Gerardo Hernández, on tank at far right, with scouting platoon he led in Cabinda, Angola, in 1980s. Inset, Hernández in U.S. prison.

Revolutionary potential of working class in the US

Below is an excerpt from The Struggle for Socialism in the “American Century,” one of Pathfinder’s Books of the Month for December. The book contains writings and speeches, from 1945-47, of James P. Cannon, a founding leader of the communist movement in the U.S. and then national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party. The selection is from “Theses on the American revolution,” adopted by the 12th National Convention of the SWP in November 1946. Copyright © 1977 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The American workers are accustomed to the highest living and working standards. The widely held view that high wages are a conservatizing factor tending to make workers immune to revolutionary ideas and actions is one-sided and false. This holds true only under conditions of capitalist stability where the relatively high standard of living can be maintained and even improved. This is excluded for the future, as our whole analysis has shown. On the other hand, the workers react most sensitively and violently to any infringement upon their living standards. This has already been demonstrated by the strike waves in which great masses of “conservative” workers have resorted to the most militant and radical course of action. In the given situation, there-



Inset, Militant/Mary Martin

“The relatively high living standards of the American workers is a revolutionary and not, as is commonly believed, a conservatizing factor,” said 1946 Socialist Workers Party theses. Disinclination toward revolutionary ideas and action “holds true only under conditions of capitalist stability.” Above, strike by 120,000 East Coast shipyard workers, spring 1947. Inset, locked-out longshore workers, March 8, 2013, Vancouver, Wash.

fore, the relatively high living standard of the American workers is a revolutionary and not, as is commonly believed, a conservatizing factor.

The revolutionary potential of the class is further strengthened by their traditional militancy coupled with the ability to react almost spontaneously in defense of their vital interests, and their singular resourcefulness and ingenuity (the sit-down strikes!).

Another highly important factor in raising the revolutionary potential of the American working class is its greatly increased cohesiveness and homogeneity — a transformation accomplished in the last quarter of a century. Previously, large and decisive sections of the proletariat in the basic industries were recruited by immigration. These foreign-born workers were handicapped and divided by language barriers, treated as social pariahs, and deprived of citizenship and the most elementary civil rights. All these circumstances appeared to be insuperable barriers in the way of their organization and functioning as a united labor force. In the intervening years, however, these foreign-born workers have been assimilated and “Americanized.” They and their sons today constitute a powerful, militant, and articulate detachment of the organized labor movement.

An equally significant and profound development is represented by the transformation that has taken place in the position occupied by the Negroes. Formerly barred and deprived of the rights and benefits of organization by the dominant reactionary craft unions and, on the other hand, regarded and sometimes utilized by the employers as a reserve for strikebreaking purposes, masses of Negroes have since the twenties penetrated into the basic industries and into the unions. Not less than two million Negroes are members of the CIO, AFL, and independent unions. They have demonstrated in the great strike struggles that they stand in the front lines of progressiveness and militancy.

The American workers have the advantage of being comparatively free, especially among the younger and most militant layers, from reformist prejudices. The class as a whole has not been infected with the debilitating poison of reformism, either of the classic “Socialist” variety or the latter-day Stalinist brand. As a consequence, once they proceed to action, they more readily accept the most radical solutions. No important section of the class, let alone the class as a whole, has been demoralized by defeats. Finally, this young and mighty

power is being drawn into the decisive phases of the class struggle at a tempo that creates unparalleled premises for mass radicalization.

Much has been said about the “backwardness” of the American working class as a justification for a pessimistic outlook, the postponement of the socialist revolution to a remote future, and withdrawal from the struggle. This is a very superficial view of the American workers and their prospects.

It is true that this class, in many respects the most advanced and progressive in the world, has not yet taken the road of independent political action on a mass scale. But this weakness can be swiftly overcome. Under the compulsion of objective necessity not only backward peoples but backward classes in advanced countries find themselves driven to clear great distances in single leaps. As a matter of fact, the American working class has already made one such leap which has advanced it far ahead of its old positions. ...

[T]he 1929 crisis found the working class helpless and impotent. For three years the masses remained stunned and disoriented by the disaster. Their resistance was extremely limited and sporadic. But their anger and resentment accumulated. The next five years (1933–37), coincident with a partial revival of industry, witnessed a series of gigantic clashes, street fights, and sit-down strikes — an embryonic civil war — the end result of which was a leap, a giant leap, for millions of workers from nonexistence as an organized force to trade union consciousness and organization. ...

In one leap — in a brief decade — the American workers attained trade union consciousness on a higher plane and with mightier organizations than in any other advanced country. In the study and analysis of this great transformation, rather than in vapid ruminations over the “backwardness” of the American workers, one can find the key to prospective future developments. Under the impact of great events and pressing necessities the American workers will advance beyond the limits of trade unionism and acquire political class consciousness and organization in a similar sweeping movement.

December

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

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Did Seattle, Ohio elections strengthen labor?

Continued from page 7

“activists” should focus attention. “On election night Sawant’s supporters, including this writer, gathered to watch returns,” the FSP’s Linda Averill wrote. There were “socialists of all stripes: independents, the FSP, SA, and International Socialist Organization (ISO). In the electoral arena, such collaboration is historic in recent times.”

This attempt to reap gains through a “practical” electoral focus is an attempt to look to something other than real politics — the actions of the working class and the hard road of struggle ahead. These groups, with their attraction to Occupy, no longer look to the working class as the engine of revolutionary change. They lack confidence that through experiences in class combat working people will forge a leadership of their own, gain political clarity and transform themselves into the kind of men and women capable of fighting to end the dictatorship of capital and replace it, from the ground up, with the political power of the toiling majority.

The electoral farce, in contrast, drags workers deeper into the trap of seeing their involvement in politics as a matter of choosing among a list of candidates who they hope will make things better for them.

Much of the left acts on the conviction that the heterogeneous and diffuse Occupy protests, which began and peaked in 2011, represented the growth of a new social movement for progressive change. The idea led to disillusionment in face of Occupy’s inevitable evaporation and cooption by the left of the Democratic Party. But today such hopes have been rekindled in growing excitement about new possibilities in electoral politics.

“It has been said that what happened in Seattle was that Occupy went to the polls,” Jason Netek wrote in the ISO’s *Socialist Worker*.

“Working people and the poor and all those fighting oppression need to start running pro-worker, anti-corporate independent candidates as part of forming a new, genuine party of the left, which will represent the interests of the 99%,” Socialist Alternative wrote.

In some cases this perspective has been marked by critical attraction to the de Blasio campaign. “He talked explicitly about the vast inequality between rich and poor in the city,” Socialist Alternative said. “In a distorted way, he has articulated the anger of the working class against Bloomberg and the rich elite.”

Ohio labor ticket

“Union-dense Lorain County, Ohio, is now home to an independent labor slate of two dozen newly

elected city councilors recruited and run by the central labor council,” Bruce Bostick, a long-time leader of the Communist Party USA, wrote in the Dec. 4 *Labor Notes*.

The ticket was launched in response to an effort to break city unions by Democratic Mayor Chase Ritenauer and a number of incumbent Democrat city councilors. Its purpose was to mount left pressure on the Democratic Party. “Running independent wasn’t our first choice, but hopefully this can help bring the Democratic leaders to their senses,” Bostick quotes Machinist Art Thomas as saying. The meeting of the Lorain Central Labor Council after the election voted to buy a table at the upcoming Democratic Party dinner and to donate to the campaign of Matt Lundy, the party’s candidate for county commissioner.

What made possible the elections of Sawant and the Lorain labor ticket was a shift in workers’ thinking today under the impact of the bosses’ drive to foist the crisis of capitalism on our backs. What workers need is a clear class explanation of the roots of the crisis in the dictatorship of capital and a discussion on how to build a movement to overthrow it.

To advance this discussion, The Socialist Workers Party selectively runs candidates in U.S. elections today, with a focus on the highest offices to better engage in a discussion on the biggest political questions facing workers and their allies.

The party uses its election campaigns as a subordinate component of broader propaganda work, taking the *Militant* newspaper door to door in working-class neighborhoods in cities and rural areas. It uses them with a cold eye to the fact that the central political prop of the capitalist rulers is the idea that their ballot box gives us a choice in how we are ruled.

In a time of rising class struggle, one expression of independent labor action that could arise would be a labor party based in the street battles and combat organizations of the working class. Its purpose would be to mobilize the broadest involvement of workers and their allies in the struggles of the day, seeking to forge solidarity among combatants and advance the fight for workers’ power.

It would not be an electoral party whose goal was to hold posts in the capitalist government. History is full of such examples that in the end served to buttress capitalist rule.

The mighty revolutions of our epoch — in Russia in 1917 and Cuba in 1959 — weren’t won through elections, but by the actions of millions in the streets.

Divisions in Ukraine

Continued from page 6

disdain for the thievery and corruption of his government, laying the basis for Yanukovich and his clique to take the elections.

The forces leading the opposition are capitalist parties with seats in Ukraine’s parliament. One of the main groups organizing the protests is the Fatherland party of jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, prime minister in Yushchenko’s cabinet, representing oligarchs on the outs.

UDAR — punch in Ukrainian — is led by Vitali Klitschko, a former heavyweight world boxing champion who gained his wealth outside of any ties to Ukrainian politics and presents himself as a savior, a fighter against corruption.

The third party in Independence Square is Svoboda. The party was founded in the early 1990s, but traces its roots to the Ukrainian partisan army in World War II, which was loosely allied with Nazi Germany. Party leader Oleg Tyagnibok says “Nationalism is love of the land” and has come out against a supposed “Jewish-Russian mafia” running Ukraine. Members of Svoboda make up a large part of the muscle defending the square against the cops.

The oligarchs competing allegiances with either side are based on pragmatic interests, not ideological views on “democracy,” as is often presented in the big-business press of Europe and the U.S.

The Eastern Partnership, which Yanukovich said no to Nov. 21, was set up in 2007, aiming to integrate Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Ukraine into the EU with removal of tariffs on imports and exports.

Yanukovich said he couldn’t sign the deal because of steep cuts to government expenditures and state enterprises demanded by the International Monetary Fund to grant a loan on one hand and threats of trade sanctions from Moscow on the other. On Dec. 15, the European Union suspended talks with Ukraine, saying that Yanukovich’s words and deeds were increasingly diverging.

Ukraine, like many other countries in the region, is going through an acute economic and financial crisis. The government needs \$18 billion by March 2014 to roll over debt and pay Russia for outstanding bills of oil and gas. In addition to the bailout and lower gas prices, Moscow has also pledged to resume oil supplies to a refinery after a three-year break.

Ukraine relies on Russia for about 60 percent of its gas consumption and the Russian government has turned the gas off twice in the last seven years. Since July Moscow had imposed trade restrictions that cost Ukraine \$2 billion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said the deal “is not tied to any conditions” and the issue of Ukraine joining the 2010 customs and trade agreement between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan “was not discussed.”

Ukraine is Russia’s traditional breadbasket and a key source of steel, coal and access to warm-water ports on the Black Sea.

The entire eastern industrialized part of the country — Yanukovich’s traditional support base — has seen very little participation in the demonstrations. The eastern Donbass region accounts for one-fifth of Ukraine’s industrial production and export revenues. Russia imports machinery and manufactured goods. EU imports metals and light industrial products.

The cultural ties are also stronger. Speakers of the Russian language make up 17 percent of Ukraine’s population, in Donbass it’s nearly 40 percent.

Local industries are hugely dependent on Russian supplies and markets. The prospect of joining the EU is not very popular here. “Before joining any international organizations, Ukraine should first develop our own economy,” a housewife in Donetsk told BBC Dec. 3. “Look at our poor pensioners surviving on the breadline. I am against joining the EU.”

Correction

Last week’s article “What Apartheid Defeat Opened for Workers in SAfrica, World” implied that Nelson Mandela’s call for an intensification of the struggle against the apartheid regime was put forward contrary to proposals for negotiations by Communist Party leader Joe Slovo in 1992. While Mandela called for intensification of the struggle in 1990, he says in his autobiography that he agreed with Slovo’s 1992 stance on negotiations.

— LETTERS —

Prisoners strike in Canada

Readers of the *Militant*, in particular those behind bars, will be interested to know about a three-week strike by inmates in Canadian prisons in October. Inmates who work in federal prison factories in Ontario — making chairs, cabinets and other products or working as cooks and cleaners — went on strike against a 30 percent “cost-saving” wage cut. The strike quickly spread to federal prisons across the country.

The average wage for prisoners is \$3 a day, a rate the government set in 1981. Inmates now have to pay for necessities like shampoo, soap, deodorant, stamps and stationery, which used to be provided by the prison. Government officials condemned the strike as an “offensive to hard-working law-abiding Canadians.”

“We’re working citizens as well,” a prisoner at the Donnacona Penitentiary near Quebec City said in a radio interview. “We’re all human beings.”

Prisoners suspended the strike at the end of October as a gesture of good faith to encourage talks be-

tween their representatives and prison and government officials.

Like the 30,000 prisoners in California who carried out a hunger strike during the summer against the brutality of solitary confinement, the fighting workers behind bars in Canada deserve the support and solidarity of working people everywhere.

John Steele
Montreal, Quebec

Experiences on railroad

My dad was a railroad electrician. The railroads have had the alerter/acknowledgement system capability going back to the 1950s when he was working there. In fact, the railroads were allowed by the Federal

Railroad Administration to remove the system in some instances because the railroad companies argued it was needlessly slowing down operations.

Also, Metro-North is operated like other mass transportation systems, where tax dollars are funneled into the system because of the “inability” to make profits directly off the system. Officially the rolling stock belongs to the State of Connecticut.

However, just like hospitals and the National Collegiate Athletic Association, managers and professionals make big salaries so as to be competitive with the “private” sector and money is pumped into the “private” sector through lucrative contracts, rents and equipment purchases.

Kim O’Brien
Willimantic, Conn.

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you want your initials used rather than your full name.

‘Militant’ Prisoners’ Fund

The Prisoners’ Fund makes it possible to send prisoners reduced rate subscriptions. To donate, send a check or money order payable to the Militant and earmarked “Prisoners’ Fund” to 306 W. 37th St., 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018.