

# THE MILITANT

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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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## Anti-Semitism spawns attacks in Argentina, Israel, France

BY SETH GALINSKY

A spate of attacks targeting Jews from Argentina to France and Israel demonstrates that as the world economic crisis unfolds with no end in sight, the poison of Jew-hatred will continue to surface from within capitalist class society. The attacks underscore why working people should support the right of return to Israel for Jews and why the fight against Jew-hatred is crucial to building a revolutionary working-class movement from the U.S. to Palestine.

The death of Alberto Nisman, a prosecutor investigating the 1994 bombing that killed 85 people at a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, has revived debate over anti-Semitism in Argentina. Two years earlier the Israeli Embassy was bombed, killing 29.

Argentina's Jewish community, some 250,000 strong, is the largest in Latin America.

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## DC socialist: 'Workers need to fight Jew-hatred!'

*The following is a statement released by Glova Scott, Socialist Workers Party candidate for City Council Ward 4 in Washington, D.C., Jan. 27, as she turned in 985 signatures to put her on the ballot, twice the requirement. Scott works at Walmart and is active in the fight for \$15 an hour, full-time work and a union.*

### SWP CAMPAIGN STATEMENT

Recent murderous attacks on Jews in Argentina, in a kosher grocery store in France and on the street in Israel are a blow and a challenge to all working people.

The attack on Jewish hikers in Argentina came on the heels of the death of Alberto Nisman, a state prosecutor who was to testify the next day on charges that Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner con-

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## Kurds drive Islamic State out of Kobani in Syria

Victory boosts fight for Kurdish homeland



Reuters/Sertac Kayar

Kurds take to streets Jan. 27 in Diyarbakir, Turkey, cheering ouster of reactionary Islamic State from Kobani following four-month battle. Similar celebrations took place in Syria and Iraq.

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

After more than four months of fierce street battles, Kurdish forces have driven Islamic State out of Kobani in northern Syria. At the same time, the "caliphate" set up by this reactionary group in Syria and Iraq has shown signs of coming apart.

This victory for the Kurdish resistance, against a force better armed and with more combatants, has helped boost the struggle of the Kurd-

ish people, an oppressed nationality separated for decades by the borders of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, and inspired working people throughout the region and beyond.

"The battle waged in Kobani wasn't just a fight between the YPG and ISIS [Islamic State]," said a statement issued by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) General Command Jan. 26. "This has been a battle be-

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## West Coast longshore workers protest boss attacks, layoffs



Militant

Thousands of dockworkers and supporters march Jan. 22 along waterfront in San Pedro, Calif.

BY BILL ARTH

SAN PEDRO, Calif. — Thousands of longshore workers, their families, people from the community and other trade unionists marched along the waterfront here Jan. 22 to demand that the Pacific Maritime Association reach a contract agreement with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. The agreement would cover 20,000 dockworkers at 29 ports along the West Coast, whose contract expired July 1. A similar protest took place in Tacoma, Washington.

In recent months the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents the port operators and shipping com-

panies, has accused the longshore union of obstructing work on the docks.

"Nearly three months ago, the ILWU began a coordinated series of slowdowns intended to pressure employers to make concessions at the bargaining table," the bosses association said in a statement issued the day of the march.

"The ILWU is not responsible for the current congestion crisis at West Coast ports," a Nov. 10 union press statement said. The real causes include "chassis shortage and dislocation; rail service delays, including a

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## Pro-Moscow separatists launch new assaults against Ukraine

BY NAOMI CRAINE

Separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, backed by Moscow's weaponry and troops, launched a major offensive in mid-January seeking to consolidate territory and advance their front lines. The renewed fighting

is exacerbating conditions workers face across the country, sharpening conflicts with bosses and the government over layoffs, cuts in social benefits and nonpayment of wages. In response, Washington and imperialist powers in Europe are threatening to increase sanctions against Russia.

At least 30 civilians were killed and more than 100 wounded Jan. 24 in the pro-Moscow separatist bombardment

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## Dairy farmers in Wisconsin feel impact of falling prices

BY ILONA GERSH

RICHLAND CENTER, Wisc. — Dairy farmers face real challenges in 2015, confronting tumbling prices for their milk, mounting debts and hard decisions about whether they can continue farming. As demand for milk jumped worldwide in the last few years, farmers boosted production. Earlier in 2014, when prices paid to dairy farmers reached \$25 per hundredweight (approximately 12 gallons), many increased their herds and

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LA port truckers win victory at Shippers Transport Express  
Florida bus drivers keep up pressure for yearly raises  
SF airport restaurant workers defeat concessions, forge unity



# National rally May 30 in NY to call for ‘Free Oscar López’

BY TOM LEWIS

NEW YORK — Supporters of the fight to win the release of Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar López Rivera have set May 30 for a national protest in New York to demand his freedom. López has been jailed in the U.S. for more than 33 years, 12 of them in solitary confinement.

“Oscar has been in federal prison since May 29, 1981,” Alejandro Molina, a leader of the National Boricua Human Rights Network and one of the organizers of the May 30 rally, told the *Militant*. “May 30 marks the start of his 34th year in prison. This is an opportunity to increase the pressure on Barack Obama to commute his sentence.

“In Puerto Rico, the three political parties, the governor, 15 mayors and 22 municipalities have called for Oscar’s release,” Molina said.

“The people of Puerto Rico, regardless of party lines, thought and politics, are all in agreement that Oscar López must be released,” Eduardo Bhatia, president of the Puerto Rican Senate, said in a January 2014 statement outside the Puerto Rican Capitol in San Juan.

López, 72, was born in Puerto Rico, a U.S. colony since it was invaded by the U.S. military in 1898. His family moved to Chicago when he was 14. He was drafted into the army in 1965 and served as an infantryman in the U.S. war against Vietnam.

“When he came home he recognized injustices and sought to change them,” Molina said. López became active in Chicago in struggles against discrimi-

nation against Puerto Ricans in hiring, for bilingual education and against police brutality. He was won to the position that the only way to end U.S. colonial oppression of Puerto Rico was to fight for independence. “He’s never backed down,” Molina said.

In a letter to his daughter Clarisa released Jan. 13, López said the ongoing support for his release has helped him continue to contribute to “the just and noble cause of the independence and sovereignty of our beloved Homeland.”

In the mid-1970s, following bombings at banks and businesses with investments in Puerto Rico that the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) took credit for, the U.S. government stepped up spying and harassment against Puerto Rican political activists. In 1980, 10 people were arrested and accused of belonging to the FALN. López, accused of being a leader of the group, was arrested the next year. They were framed up and railroaded to jail on charges including “seditious conspiracy.” Demanding to be recognized as prisoners of war, they refused to participate in the court proceedings and were given stiff sentences.

López was sentenced to 55 years in prison, and in 1988 he was framed up on charges of conspiracy to escape and sentenced to serve an additional 15 years.

The recent victory winning the release of the Cuban Five — Cuban revolutionaries framed up for coming to the United States to expose the ac-

## Texas rally: Defend women’s right to abortion!



Militant/Bernie Senter

AUSTIN, Texas — Some 300 people rallied at the state Capitol here Jan. 24 in defense of a woman’s right to choose on the anniversary of the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion. Young women carried signs saying, “We won’t go back!” referring to the days when women were forced to seek dangerous, illegal abortions. “My body, my choice” and “Legal abortion saves lives,” other signs said.

A new state regulation that requires abortion clinics to have hospital-grade surgical facilities — currently stayed pending a decision by a federal appeals court — would force many clinics to close, leaving only eight still open. The law requires abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital, restricts the use of abortion-inducing pills and makes it illegal to perform an abortion after the 20th week of pregnancy.

“I should be able to decide what happens to my body,” Ezgi Irmakkesen, an Austin high school student, told the *Militant*.

Opponents of women’s right to abortion also marched at the Capitol, drawing 1,500, according to the Associated Press.

In McAllen, Texas, on the border with Mexico, dozens of supporters of women’s rights demonstrated in support of the Whole Woman’s Health Clinic, the only remaining abortion provider in the Rio Grande Valley.

— CINDY JAQUITH

tions of paramilitary forces organizing attacks against Cuba and supporters of the Cuban Revolution in the U.S. and Puerto Rico — strengthens the fight to free López. “It was an amazing thing,” Molina said. “We see the example of Cuba that has struggled against the blockade for over 50 years. And now, Latinos need to take up the case of winning Oscar’s release.”

Another important victory strengthening López’s fight was the Jan. 15 release on parole of Norberto González Claudio, a fellow fighter for Puerto Rican independence imprisoned on conspiracy charges in 2011.

López has kept his dignity and mo-

rale. He sent a message to supporters in Philadelphia Jan. 4. “The past year was amazing and extraordinary for the campaign in support of my release,” he wrote. “I’ve survived, and today I feel as much hope and spiritual strength as I did when I came to prison.”

A first run of 15,000 “save the date” flyers for the May 30 rally has been printed with initial sponsors and the facts on the fight to free López. A national planning meeting for the action will take place in New York Feb. 14.

Information on the march and rally is available online at [freeoscarnyc-may30.org](http://freeoscarnyc-may30.org), or email [nyc-free-olr@boricuahumanrights.org](mailto:nyc-free-olr@boricuahumanrights.org).

## THE MILITANT

### Fight for workers control on job

As the rail bosses push for one-person crews to boost profits at the cost of life and limb for rail workers and others, the ‘Militant’ covers the resistance to these attacks and points to the need to fight for workers control of safety on the job, enforced by union power.



July 31 protest in Seattle against rail bosses’ attempts to impose one-person crews.

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# Kurds liberate Kobani

Continued from front page

tween humanity and savagery, between freedom and cruelty.” The defeat of Islamic State “will not remain limited in Kobani alone,” the statement added, but “will be followed by further achievements.”

“People are dancing and singing, there are fireworks. Everyone feels a huge sense of relief,” Tevfik Kanat, a Turkish Kurd who rushed to the border with hundreds of others, including refugees from Kobani, told Reuters Jan. 26.

Kurdish combatants have been backed by some units of the Free Syrian Army, which has been fighting to overthrow the brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus; Peshmerga Kurdish forces from northern Iraq; and aerial bombings by the U.S. military.

YPG’s victory in Kobani and its re-taking of the strategic Mishtenur hilltop there puts Islamic State supply lines to Aleppo in the west and Raqqa in the east within Kurdish fighters’ line of fire.

Kurdish forces say they are now conducting operations against Islamic State control of surrounding villages.

The fighting began in mid-September when Islamic State forces surrounded Kobani on all sides and seized control of parts of the city and nearby villages. The big-business media and government officials of Washington and Ankara were predicting the city’s imminent fall. But the courageous men and women in Kobani made clear to the world that they would not give up.

Washington’s decision to lend air support reflected the fact that for now the U.S. rulers are more fearful of an Islamic State advance than the rising Kurdish fight for national rights and sovereignty.

The civil war in Syria, nearing the

beginning of its fifth year, began with mass popular protests demanding an end to Assad’s rule. Opposition forces took control of Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, and other parts of the country. But Assad’s war, backed by Moscow and Tehran, has dealt blows to the rebellion and devastated much of the population through starvation sieges and deadly barrel bombs that target civilians.

## U.S. shifts stance toward Assad

Secretary of State John Kerry Jan. 14 backed a proposal from Moscow to convene a “peace conference” there. This registers a shift by the White House and some of its coalition partners from demanding Assad’s ouster toward increasingly seeing the Syrian dictator as a negotiating partner to cooperate with.

The reason? Assad has “allowed ISIS to consolidate a rump caliphate in north-eastern Syria as a visible warning about what the alternative to his rule looks like,” the *Atlantic* magazine said.

More than 200,000 people have been killed since the civil war began. Before the war, Syria’s population was 22 million. At least 3.7 million people have fled the country and are registered as refugees, mainly in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Some 6.5 million are internally displaced — 50 percent more than in 2013, according to the United Nations. As living conditions for workers and farmers in Syria continue to deteriorate, growing numbers are seeking refuge. But surrounding governments are putting increased obstacles in their way.

In Lebanon, where 1.1 million registered refugees reside along with another 500,000 unregistered, Interior Ministry

## Protests denounce killing by New Jersey cops



AP Photo/The Press of Atlantic City, Edward Lea

BRIDGETON, N.J. — One hundred protesters marched in front of City Hall here Jan. 7 demanding charges be filed against two city cops, Brahme Days and Roger Worley, for the Dec. 30 killing of Jerame Reid. Reid was shot during a traffic stop as he exited a car with his hands raised. A video of the killing from the police dash cam was made public Jan. 20, after several media outlets forced its release under the state’s “open records” law. Protests are continuing. “We have to keep fighting for justice. There is no alternative,” Karen Peltway, president of the South Jersey Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and a leader of the protests, told the *Militant*.

— LESTER DOLPHY

officials said Jan. 5 “we have enough” and “will only allow refugees under very limited and exceptional cases.”

In Jordan, where there are currently 622,000 Syrian refugees, the government cut off free medical aid in December. Two-thirds of these migrants are living below the government’s official poverty line of \$96 per month. Among those living outside government refugee camps, almost half have no heating, and a quarter are without electricity.

Islamic State, which seized one-third of the territory of Iraq and Syria last year and declared itself a caliphate, is incapable of functioning as much of a

state. Living conditions are deteriorating, prices rising, government services are sparse, and Sharia law bars many normal aspects of life and brings severe punishment for those who violate the caliphate rulers’ edicts.

A decree issued by Islamic State in December ordered all schools closed, affecting some 670,000 children, until curriculum is made to conform with religious rules, reported Reuters.

IS rulers in Raqqa, the group’s self-proclaimed capital in Syria, have banned women under 45 from leaving the city.

“Shopkeepers shut their stores five times a day for prayer,” reports the *Washington Post*. “Smokers have quit for fear of the obligatory three-day jail sentence for the first offense — and a month for the second.”

Farmers in areas of Iraq controlled by Islamic State, who produce about 40 percent of that country’s wheat crop, have had to slash production “because they could not access their land, did not have the proper fertilizers or adequate fuel, or because they had no guarantees that Islamic State would buy their crop as Baghdad normally does,” Reuters reported Jan. 20.

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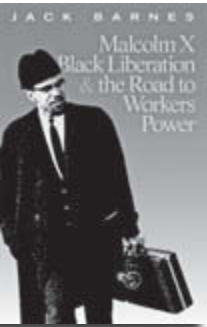
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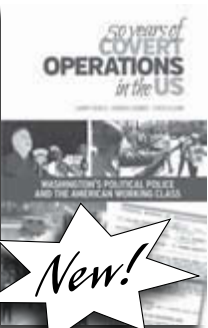
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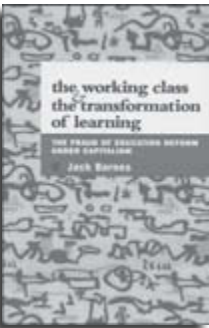
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# Fight Jew-hatred

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spired with Iranian authorities to cover up their involvement in a 1994 bombing at a Jewish community center that killed 85 people.

The Socialist Workers Party opposes Jew-hatred and joins in fighting it whenever it raises its head. We support the right of return for all Jews to move to Israel if they choose. And we demand Washington open its doors to all who seek refuge here.

The poison of anti-Semitism seeks to divide and weaken the working class, pointing away from the propertied rulers as the source of attacks on our wages, hours, working conditions and safety on the job. When Hamas hails the knife attack that wounded Israelis on a city bus Jan. 21 as a “bold, heroic act,” it is a blow to common struggle by working people in the Middle East.

Fighting all expressions of Jew-hatred is a precondition to advancing the struggles by the multinational working class in Israel and by the Palestinian people against national oppression.



# Dairy farmers feel squeeze

**Continued from front page**  
modernized equipment to produce more.

Conditions today are markedly different, farmers told *Militant* correspondents Ilona Gersh and Dan Fein, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Chicago, who visited this area Jan. 17-18 along with Randy Jasper, a grain farmer from Muscoda. The market is glutted and demand has nosedived. Some dairy farmers in the Northeast have begun to spill excess milk down the drain.

“I can’t stop farming because I have invested so much. I still have payments to make, I’m tied down,” said Steve Schmitz, 63, who has been dairying here since 1974 with a herd of 135 cows.

Schmitz invested in modern machinery and techniques. They milk 12 cows at a time by machine. He just started to experiment with how to produce better milk by cross-breeding Holsteins, the traditional milk cow in the area, with Montbeliarde cattle.

The cost of feed and machinery and the prices set by the milk-processing conglomerates squeeze dairy farmers from both ends. “Farmers are at the mercy of others who set the prices that I pay and receive,” Schmitz said. “The only reason to farm is for the love of the land.”

“I can do this because I’m young,” Tim Eness, 37, told the *Militant*. “Dairy farming is hard work. When I’m planting in the spring or harvesting in the fall, I put my boots on at 6 a.m. and don’t take them off until 10 p.m. In the win-

ter and summer it’s easier, but it’s been a few years since I had a day off.”

Eness began farming 20 years ago on land he rents from his father. He has a herd of 100 and some bulls he uses for breeding. He grows corn and hay for the cattle and soybeans for sale. He buys old tractors and equipment and maintains them himself.

Because he is more self-sufficient, he said, the cost of running his farm is lower than for many. But the cost of farming has skyrocketed for him too.

“The cost of low-end seed now is between \$170 and \$300 a bag. When I started farming, seed cost \$30 a bag. My fertilizer 15 years ago cost less than \$5,000. Now I pay \$20,000 and get less,” Eness said. “Three years ago beans sold for \$15 a bushel. I just sold my beans for \$9 a bushel.”

Eness and his wife have five young children. She helps him with the milking, he said, and also works at the local optometry shop. “That’s where we get our family health insurance. I make do. I like farming and I like working outdoors.”

## Farmers pushed out of dairy

Kevin Jasper was a dairy farmer in Muscoda for 15 years, but decided to sell his cattle last year and rent out the dairy and his house. “I was going broke, and the kids moved out,” he said. Jasper now works part-time for the county plowing snow and removing brush. He also does some bartending. He rents almost 1,000 acres of land to farm with his



Militant/Ilona Gersh

**Workers milking cows on Steve Schmitz’s farm in Richland Center, Wisconsin, Jan. 17.**

father Randy Jasper. They grow corn, soybeans, and hay. Randy Jasper has his own small farm nearby.

“The farmer who rents my land told me he got his check two days before Christmas. He said the price of milk per hundredweight dropped \$8,” Kevin Jasper said. “We have no say in the matter. I’m glad I got out when I did.”

Milk futures predict another drop by April, which would bring the price farmers get down 46 percent since September 2014.

“Twenty years ago there used to be dairy cows in almost every barn along this road,” Kevin Jasper said. “Now, there are three dairy farmers here. It’s hard for a small farmer, the banks and farm equipment dealers prefer to deal with big dairies.

Randy Heims, 61, gave up dairy 10 years ago and now grows corn, soybeans and alfalfa, and raises cattle for

beef.

“My body parts started giving out from all the stooping,” Heims said. “I had a knee replacement. Another one’s coming down the road.”

“My wife, Diane, works full-time on the farm,” he said, “so I have to take the first \$20,000 off the top and put it away for health care. That’s the cost of insurance, deductibles, and co-payments for one year. A lot of farmers’ wives work just to get health insurance.”

Heims tries to minimize the amount of land he tills each year to protect it from erosion. This part of Wisconsin is full of hills, he explained, and runoff from melting snow and rain can rob tilled soil of nutrients because there is nothing to hold it in place.

“We’re only here for a little while,” Heims said, “but we have to take care of the land for the next generation and the farmers 200 years from now.”

# Longshore workers protest

**Continued from front page**

shortage of rail cars nationwide; the exodus of truck drivers who cannot make a living wage; long truck turn times; record retail import volumes (increases of 5.3 percent over 2013); larger vessels discharging massive amounts of cargo; container terminals pushed to storage capacities; and the peak shipping season (i.e., the August through October pre-holiday surge).”

The port bosses have drastically cut night shift crews in the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Before the contract expired, some 2,000 workers were called for night work, Adan Ortega, spokesman for ILWU Local 13, told the *Militant*. Those numbers were cut by half in the final months of 2014. On Jan. 19 only 300 were called.

After several accidents, the union limited the number of untrained, non-certified operators running cranes, said Bobby Olvera, president of Local 13, at a rally after the march. The employers refuse to train enough operators, he said.

“The PMA thinks they’re going to break us,” Olvera said. “They thought we would crumble.”

A contingent of United Steelworkers, who are locked in negotiations with the big oil companies for a national agreement, joined the march, as did members of Teamsters Local 848, who are fighting to organize port truck drivers. The Pacific Maritime Association has sought to pit drivers, many of whom are misclassified as independent operators and paid by the load, against the ILWU by blaming the longshore workers for delays that cut into truckers’ income.

“We’re here to support the ILWU,”

Danny Lima, a driver at the Toll port trucking company, told the *Militant*. “Teamster port drivers want them to get the best contract they possibly can.”

## 500 march in Tacoma

Some 500 people rallied in Tacoma Jan. 22 to protest layoffs on the docks and demand a contract. ILWU Local 23 members there were joined by longshore workers from Portland, Oregon; Seattle and Longview, Washington; and Alaska.

“With all the bad press, it’s better to be out here reaching the public about what is going on,” Claude Lindsey, who works as a casual on the Tacoma docks, told the *Militant*. “I have a three-year-old and a one-year-old. Right now because of the PMA layoffs I’m only getting one or two days of work a week.”

“I am the daughter of an ILWU member who died too young due to the conditions of work on the docks,” Meghan Mason, 25, a heavy equipment operator, told the rally. “What do we want? It isn’t a massive raise or change in benefits. We want continually improving safety standards” and for dockworkers’ widows like her mother “to live without fear of losing pensions or health care.”

Mason told the *Militant* that in November she had joined the Walmart Black Friday picket line in Tacoma to stand with workers fighting for \$15 an hour.

“Our brothers and sisters fought to get what we have now and we have to fight to keep it,” ILWU Local 23 President Dean McGrath told the crowd.

*Mae McCloud contributed to this article from Tacoma, Washington.*

## Socialist candidate backs alliance of workers, farmers



Militant/Ilona Gersh

“You might be asking why a candidate for mayor of Chicago is interested in farmers’ problems,” Dan Fein, left, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Chicago in the Feb. 24 elections, told Randy Heims, a grain farmer in central Wisconsin. “There aren’t many farmers in Chicago.”

“No question, the Democrats and Republicans are no good for us,” Heims responded.

“Workers and working farmers are natural allies,” Fein said. “The capitalist government defends agribusiness at the expense of working farmers just like it defends big business against workers. The effects of the worldwide capitalist crisis in production and trade squeeze you as a farmer and me as a factory worker. We need to build a revolutionary movement to lead the workers and farmers to take political power from the propertied rulers.

“The ruling class tells farmers the reason for the high cost for their machinery is overpaid union workers in the factories,” said Fein. “They tell workers the reason for high prices in the grocery store is that farmers get too much for what they produce.

“Our struggles are international. Our interests lie with workers and farmers worldwide — from Ukraine to revolutionary Cuba — not with our own country’s bankers and bosses.

“The labor movement needs to fight for a government guarantee to working farmers of their cost of production, including adequate living expenses,” the socialist candidate said.

— ILONA GERSH



# —ON THE PICKET LINE—

MAGGIE TROWE, EDITOR

## Help make this column a voice of workers' resistance!

This column is dedicated to spreading the truth about the labor resistance that is unfolding today. It seeks to give voice to those engaged in battle and help build solidarity. Its success depends on input from readers. If you are involved in a labor struggle or have information on one, please contact me at 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018; or (212) 244-4899; or themilitant@mac.com. We'll work together to ensure your story is told.

—Maggie Trowe

### LA port truckers win victory at Shippers Transport Express

LOS ANGELES — Port truckers at Shippers Transport Express scored a victory Jan. 9 when the company agreed to recognize Teamsters Local 848.

Following discussions with the union, Shippers Transport reclassified its drivers as employees effective Jan. 1, 2015, and agreed to recognize the Teamsters as the drivers' official bargaining agent contingent on verification by an agreed upon third party that a majority of the drivers had signed valid union authorization cards. Out of 111 employees, 88 signed.

"As Teamsters, Shippers drivers will now begin the hard work of negotiating a first contract," said Fred Potter, director of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Port Division, in a Jan. 9 press statement.

The victory followed five strikes by port truck drivers against eight trucking companies over the last 18 months. Drayage, or short haul, drivers have been fighting to join the Teamsters and have a steady paycheck. They demand an end to the bosses' scheme to keep them di-

vided and more exploitable as so-called independent contractors. Under this setup they get paid by the load with no compensation for waiting time and are responsible for costs of fuel, parking, insurance and maintenance, which sometimes results in negative "pay."

"There are over 10,000 drivers misclassified as independent contractors at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach," Barb Maynard, a spokesperson for Justice for Port Truckers/Teamsters, told the *Militant*.

Shippers Transport Express was not one of the companies struck because it was in discussions with the Teamsters. The eight companies where strikes took place are now in talks with the union.

—Bill Arth

### Florida bus drivers keep up pressure for yearly raises

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Some 300 Palm Tran bus drivers and maintenance workers, members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1577, hit the streets with informational pickets three times in December to keep the fire under the feet of Palm Tran management and county commissioners, who have refused to implement "step pay raises" — annual increases promised in the contract to new hires that total nearly \$10 over five years. Starting pay for drivers is \$13.70 per hour.

When about 30 drivers showed up Dec. 23 at the Palm Tran administration building and central bus barn to hear management's response to the union's proposal for step raises, it took the bosses just 15 minutes with no discussion to reject the proposal. They then abruptly ended the meeting and left.

"Palm Tran management set the Jan. 14 negotiations at the worst time for drivers on both shifts to attend," Igor Ruptash, a Palm Tran driver, told the



Militant/Betsey Stone

**Airport restaurant workers picket at San Francisco International Airport Dec. 12, during two-day strike that pushed back bosses' concession demands, won contract and built unity.**

*Militant*, "and they stalled on publicizing the location."

Nevertheless, about two dozen drivers picketed outside, waving handmade signs that read "Palm Tran lied" and "We want step raises," and chanting, "No raise, no peace!"

During the public negotiations, with a number of unionists present, Palm Tran boss Shannon LaRocque at first seemed to accept the union's proposal to pay step increases this year, but then backtracked, referring the question to future talks.

"LaRocque is doing what all public employers do," Local 1577 President Dwight Mattingly, a driver, said in a phone interview. "You have a three-year contract, but nothing binding on wages over the life of it. I want other workers to see what we are fighting for, and to not allow the bosses to play with the contract language and use it against you."

—Anthony Dutrow

### SF airport restaurant workers defeat concessions, forge unity

SAN FRANCISCO — After staging a two-day strike Dec. 11-12 that shut down many airport eateries here and forced bosses to drop a number of concession demands, restaurant workers, members of UNITE HERE Local 2, approved a six-year agreement Dec. 23 with the San Francisco Airport Restaurant Employer Council. The previous contract, covering about

1,000 workers in 55 different establishments — 80 percent of food and beverage sales at the airport — expired in September 2013.

"Ninety-nine percent voted yes," union member Jesse Johnson, a bartender for 34 years, told the *Militant*. Official vote totals haven't been released.

Tipped workers won an initial 50 cents per hour pay increase with back pay to September 2013, and others won \$1.

"We won job security," Johnson said. "If you work for a unit that shuts down, you get first shot at a job in another unit at the airport, with no loss of seniority."

In another gain, the owners withdrew their threat to stop contributing to the union health insurance fund, which would have cost workers, whose average annual pay is \$24,124, more than \$4,200 per year.

"The companies did us a good deed by forcing us to strike," said Johnson. "We all work in separate units. Getting out there together gave us a level of unity we haven't seen. Right now when I walk through the airport there is a new level of confidence from the membership. It's through the roof. They would strike again at the drop of a hat. I don't think the restaurant owners will challenge us again anytime soon."

—Eric Simpson and  
Carole Lesnick



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## —MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

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**Faced with Ongoing Capitalist Crisis: Workers Need to Wage Fight for Political Power.** Speaker: Beverly Bernardo, Communist League candidate for parliament in the Papineau riding in Montreal. Fri., Feb. 6, 7:30 p.m. 7107 St-Denis, Room 204. Tel: (514) 272-5840.

## —CALENDAR—

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**Guest Gallery Exhibition: "I Will Die the Way I've Lived."** Paintings by Antonio Guerrero for the 16th anniversary of the imprisonment of the Cuban Five. Jan. 14 – Feb. 22. *Columbia City Gallery*, 4864 Rainier Ave. S. Tel.: (206) 760-9483.

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# ‘A program born out of the values of the Cuban Revolution’

Interview with Dr. Julio Medina, director of center in Tarará, Cuba, that treated 25,000 children after Chernobyl nuclear disaster

BY FRANK FORRESTAL,  
RÓGER CALERO  
AND MARY-ALICE WATERS

The April 26, 1986, nuclear meltdown in Chernobyl, Ukraine, remains the greatest nuclear disaster to have occurred in the post-World War II world. The response of the Cuban government and medical personnel to that disaster, like their response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa today, provides striking confirmation of the proletarian internationalism of Cuba's socialist revolution.

Dr. Julio Medina, the pediatrician who was in charge of Cuba's program for treating children who were victims of that disaster, sat down with *Militant* reporters Róger Calero and Mary-Alice Waters in Havana on Sept. 10 to talk about Cuba's response and the effort he directed for more than 20 years.

The program came out of the values of the Cuban Revolution, Medina began by explaining. “The values that are part of the revolution in Cuba — humanity, friendship and solidarity.

“We couldn't sit with arms folded and watch a people with whom we had relations of friendship face by themselves a problem like Chernobyl,” Medina said. “This was a catastrophe whose ecological, social and medical dimensions are still difficult to fully grasp.”

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster unfolded during a test of the control system of one of four units that were being shut down for routine maintenance. Design flaws — including no containment structure — and the fact that the reactor's emergency safety system had been turned off led to a power surge causing explosions that blew apart the top of the reactor. The reactor core melted down and an intense 10-day fire broke out that released large amounts of radiation.

More than 2,000 square miles of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia were contaminated; clouds of radioactive dust reached other nearby countries, including Sweden, 700 miles away. Chernobyl workers and firemen who tried to cope with the catastrophe were unprepared



Fidel Castro, left, welcomes first group of nearly 140 children arriving in Cuba March 29, 1990, for treatment of diseases from Chernobyl nuclear disaster. When Castro learned thousands more needed care, Cuba expanded program at Tarará children's hospital. About 25,000, mostly children from Ukraine, were treated there over some 20 years. Upper right, Vilma Espín, president of Federation of Cuban Women.

and largely unprotected.

More than 130 workers at the plant were sickened by high doses of radiation; 28 were dead within a few weeks. And more than 6,000 children and adolescents from Ukraine and Belarus contracted thyroid cancer, probably from iodine 131, which was inhaled or ingested, mostly from contaminated milk and vegetables.

Pripyat, a town of 50,000 built one mile from Chernobyl's reactors to house the facilities' workers and their families, was not evacuated until 36 hours after the explosion. Residents were told they only needed clothing for three days and then they could return. They never went back and the town remains off limits.

About 115,000 were evacuated from the surrounding area. Another 220,000

were eventually forced to leave their homes in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. An official exclusion zone around the explosion site extends 18 miles in all directions to this day.

At the time of the disaster, Ukraine was a republic of the Soviet Union, only gaining independence in 1991, as the USSR blew apart.

Following the Chernobyl explosion “the authorities didn't tell anyone the extent of what was taking place,” Liliya Pilyay, a leader of the Komsomol (Communist Youth) in Ukraine who helped organize children and others in need of medical attention to travel to Cuba for care, said in a June 2014 interview with *Militant* reporters in Kiev. And until 1989 “spreading information about the true extent of the radiation and number of those affected was prohibited.”

Those most affected by radiation poisoning were young children, pregnant women, and the hundreds of thousands of workers known as liquidators, who came to help in the evacuation and clean up the contaminated debris.

As knowledge of the scope of the medical crisis spread, the leadership of Komsomol asked newly arrived Cuban Consul Sergio López Briel for help publicizing the situation and mobilizing an international response. “I said that the job of informing the world was their responsibility, but Cuba would certainly help,” López told reporters for a 2006 Cuban television documentary, “Cuba and Chernobyl.”

“This was a Thursday, and on Saturday we already had the response from our country's top leadership,” López said. “The three best specialists in common childhood diseases were ready and would be traveling immediately to Ukraine.”

During their first trip the Cuban specialists visited more than 15 towns, small and large. “The inhabitants were under tremendous stress, worried about the



nuclear disaster,” Manuel Ballester, director of the Institute of Hematology and Immunology and one of those who went to Ukraine, told the program.

Cuban doctors visited the affected regions of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia five or six times. “We were very well received by the population, though not as well by some of the functionaries back then,” Ballester said. “In the places closest to the disaster area, there were no doctors. They had left the area to avoid the possible radiation that was being released.”

Getting sick children and some of their parents to Cuba proved to be a challenge because the Soviet Union would not provide planes. In response, the Cuban government scrambled to get them. “One Cuban plane had just come off repairs at a factory in Tashkent [capital of Uzbekistan] and wasn't finished being painted,” Olexander Bozhko, president of the Ukrainian Chernobyl Youth Fund, told reporters for the Cuban TV program. “The other one had its usual Rome-Havana route changed so it could be sent to Kiev.”

The two planes with nearly 140 children arrived in Cuba on March 29, 1990, marking the beginning of the Chernobyl

children's medical treatment program. Several leaders of the Cuban Revolution, including Fidel Castro and Vilma Espín, president of the Federation of Cuban Women, met the first group at the Havana airport. Castro asked one of the women who accompanied them how many people had been affected. She said there were as many as 100,000.

“He went into a huddle with other government representatives right there,” Pilyay said, “and by the time the second plane arrived three hours later, he announced that Cuba would take 10,000 children from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

“I couldn't believe it,” she said. “I asked the translator whether he had made a mistake. But he hadn't. The Cubans did that, and more.”

The policy of the Cuban government was to minimize publicity surrounding the program. In the TV documentary Cuban Ambassador López comments that Castro told him, “I do not want you going to the press, or the press going to the consulate. We are carrying out a basic duty to the Soviet people, to a sister nation. We are not doing it to get publicity.”

Castro asked López, who had just arrived from Ukraine, to go back immediately rather than take a few days with family in Cuba. Castro was “already thinking about the concern of the parents, the relatives of the children who were in Cuba,” López said. “Go and speak to those parents about their children and whose hands they are in, what we are doing for them, the conditions they have here in Cuba. And that we will make every effort in the world to save them, for them to live with a safe and dignified future.”

The medical program took shape in the opening years of the Special Period in Cuba. This was the name given to the economic and political consequences of the abrupt loss of 85 percent of Cuba's foreign trade following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Imports evaporated and agricultural and industrial production collapsed in Cuba. At the time, Castro said it was “as if one day the sun didn't rise.”

And during this time, the health care system in the countries of the former Soviet Union began to disintegrate. Life expectancy, including in Ukraine, plummeted over the next 10 years. In Cuba, by contrast, despite the economic hardships, life expectancy increased from 74 years to 77 in the same period.

“It has already been some time since the USSR and the socialist bloc disappeared, yet we continue providing care for the Chernobyl children, despite the embargo and despite the Special Period that we are experiencing,” Castro told a group from Pastors for Peace in 1992. “We are doing this for ethical reasons, for moral reasons.”

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## Cuba's medical assistance program

Julio Medina, today the director of the Pediatric Hospital in Tarará, Cuba, picked up the story from there. Medina, a young doctor in his 20s at the time, became the director of the Cuban medical program that between 1990 and 2011 treated more than 25,000 people affected by the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown.

“In 1990, when the scope of the health crisis began to emerge, the Soviet Union was disintegrating,” Medina said. “Cuba and Ukraine didn't yet have embassies in each other's country.”

The Cuban people and their government responded in a way that was different from all other countries, he said. Only Cuba offered a medical assistance program completely free of charge. At its high point, the Cubans were treating up to 3,000 patients a year, overwhelmingly children.

The Cuban program only began four years after the nuclear disaster took place, Medina explained, in part because some effects of radiation poisoning develop slowly. But “there had been no real plan to minimize the consequences of an accident,” he said.

“I think they never believed an accident would occur. Evacuation programs weren't in place. People had to leave by their own means,” he said. “In some cases they were sent to areas contaminated by the radioactive cloud that had passed.”

“The press didn't adequately inform people about what could happen and what was going on,” Medina said. “Another problem was the delay before the Ukrainian government requested international assistance.”

Cuba's solidarity began before 1990. “The first act of solidarity,” Medina said, came from Cuban students studying in Ukraine who donated blood. One donated bone marrow.

What was decisive in getting the program started, was “the political will in our country to carry it out. I am speaking here especially of Fidel, our commander-in-chief,” Medina told the *Militant*.

The team of specialists sent to Ukraine “had a huge impact. People were clamoring to see the Cuban doctors,” who selected the sickest children for treatment in Cuba, he said. “The first flights to Cuba brought nearly 140 children with serious cancer and/or blood diseases.”

The Tarará medical center wasn't yet up and running, so the first two plane-loads of children went to two Havana hospitals — the Juan Manuel Márquez and the William Soler.

“The need for help continued to grow,” said Medina, “and Cuba responded. The collaboration was extended and that's

where Tarará came in.”

In 1976, Tarará, renowned for its healthful and beautiful seaside location not far from Havana, had been turned into a camp for Cuban elementary school children who belonged to the Pioneers youth group. In the 1980s, when the country was hit by a dengue fever epidemic, the polyclinic there grew into a pediatric hospital. Part of the internationalist response of the leadership of the Cuban youth organization was the decision to turn over the Tarará Pioneer City to the Ukrainian children.

## Transformation of Tarará

“We converted the Tarará facilities into a 350-bed hospital and created housing with a capacity for 4,000 people,” Medina said. “As you can imagine, in the midst of the Special Period this was no easy thing.”

The transformation of Tarará was carried out primarily by volunteer work brigades. These brigades were created throughout the country in the late 1980s as part of what was called the rectification process.

“Truckloads of workers, young people, men and women, came straight to Tarará from different towns. It was a massive job,” said Medina. “Ordinary people joined the brigades to paint and make repairs. There were several thousand people whose work had to be coordinated and organized every day — plumbers, carpenters, masons, landscapers.”

When the job was completed in July 1990, Fidel spoke to the brigades there to thank them.

While the Tarará center was transformed, Medina and the rest of the staff of doctors, nurses and technicians were in Havana preparing for the medical challenge ahead of them.

“I was working in a hospital in another part of Havana, as were many who became part of the project,” Medina said. “The doctors and nurses were the last to arrive. We had to study first. We had no specialists in nuclear medicine. We had no experience treating people who had been exposed to radiation in a

Continued on page 8

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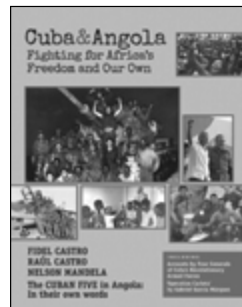
Cuba's Rectification Process

Two speeches by Fidel Castro in New International No. 6 \$16

## Cuba and the Coming American Revolution

by Jack Barnes

As the struggle for Black rights advanced in the US in the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution set an example that socialist revolution is not only necessary — it can be made and defended. \$10



Mary-Alice Waters, left, with Dr. Julio Medina, director of Cuba's program in Tarará that treated children suffering diseases from Chernobyl nuclear disaster, during Sept. 10 interview with *Militant*.



# Cuba's Chernobyl program

Continued from page 7

nuclear accident. We had to prepare ourselves — and we had to keep studying practically on a permanent basis in order to provide the best care for the patients.”

## Personal, human care

The Cubans took special measures for children who came alone, many from orphanages or boarding schools. “Nurses and doctors kept them company. We took on an incredible responsibility from the social and human point of view,” Medina told the *Militant*. “We understood that a child who comes alone isn’t in the same situation as a child who is accompanied by his or her mother. At that time, in those conditions, our program was quite bold. And that’s what made it so valuable.”

“The families of workers there and the workers themselves made sweets for the children when they were sick and made cakes for their birthdays,” he said. “These were little things they loved to do.”

Many of the children were very sick. They underwent surgery and received extensive chemotherapy. “Some died but others recovered — a process that was sometimes very long. And during all these procedures, if they were alone a Cuban stayed with them at the hospital.

“This kind of social support came from the people, from individuals,” Medina said. “Nobody can be ordered to do what they did. No government or policy can guide it. They are values. Of course those values are the product of the revolution and its policies, our way of life. But the way people expressed those values was spontaneous.”

“In Ukraine the children would hide their skin lesions or a missing ear. They would comb their hair a certain way or wear long sleeves to cover up signs of their sickness,” Medina said. “But in Cuba, within days after they arrived, that self-consciousness began to disappear. They were all equal and the Cubans surrounding them paid no attention to these things.”

“In addition to the difficult moments of surgery and chemotherapy, they needed psychological support in order to go out and get on with their lives, which was not so easy,” he said. “Someone from almost every medical specialty was involved in setting up the program.

“There were professional psychologists in white coats,” said Medina. “But there were also ordinary people who through their affection and love gave these children support they needed to help minimize the impact of the accident.”

“We asked the Ministry of Health in Ukraine to send Ukrainian doctors with each group of children — doctors who could work together with us and tell us their opinions, their views. This played

an important role,” he said. “Having Ukrainian and Russian speaking doctors — including psychologists who could help address the trauma from the nuclear accident — made it easier to communicate with the children.

“We organized many excursions for the children because the psychological rehabilitation program also included cultural activities,” he said.

“Can you imagine what it takes to get 10 buses full of children from Havana to Trinidad? Part of the highway is fine, but another section is dangerously twisting and narrow,” Medina said. “Ten buses full of children, with ambulances, doctors, nurses and food, because we had to take our own food. And on these trips every child would go, whether he could walk or was in a wheelchair.”

## Target of political attacks

The medical program was the target of political attack mainly from opponents of the revolution outside Cuba. “Those who had done nothing like our program, who hadn’t created the conditions necessary to care for the children and give them medical treatment, criticized those who did,” Medina said.

Most of the criticism came from the United States. “There were articles in the press there saying that scarcity and hunger in Cuba were so widespread that there was no way to feed these children,” said Medina. “They said we were using them as guinea pigs for medical experiments and so forth. They even said the sun in Cuba was harmful for them!”

Despite the enormous economic pressures of the Special Period, the Cuban government maintained the Chernobyl program. “Fidel didn’t think twice about offering our assistance even in difficult moments,” Medina said. “Because in Cuba — I’m talking about the years from 1990 on — those were the most difficult years Cubans can remember.”

At every turn, the government “tried to assure the program’s success,” he said. “Under the direction of the Ministry of Health, several hospitals and clinics in Havana worked together to make sure that the children got everything they needed. No request was ever denied because it cost too much. That was a political decision. We did it without tallying the expense.”

The children also benefited from Cuba’s advances in research. “With the development of the Cuban biotechnology industry we were able to provide Ukrainian children with the same vaccines and medicine Cuban children received. That, too, was a political decision, with social costs,” he said.

When it became clear that many of the children would be getting treatment for long periods, the government decided to establish a school for the children, staffed by Ukrainian teachers. “We couldn’t let children who’d be here eight months or a year fall behind in their education,” said Medina.

There were long lines of people in Ukraine who wanted to see Cuban doctors, Medina said, and close collaboration with the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and medical personnel was important. “We kept a medical brigade in Kiev to continue treating children there. In 1998 we sent another medical brigade to open



Granma/Fernando Lezcano

Ukrainian child sickened by Chernobyl disaster, being treated in Cuba, March 31, 1990.

a sanitarium in Crimea that had been used as a rehabilitation center for workers from a missile factory in Dnepropetrovsk, an industrial city in southern Ukraine.

“The new facility was called Druzhba, which means ‘friendship.’ We organized a program there similar to the one at Tatará so that children could be treated in Ukraine,” he said. “Until the program was closed in 2011, Druzhba treated liquidators as well as children — more than 10,000 in all.”

Even though there is still a need for its services and Cuba remains willing to continue, the program at Tatará was suspended in 2011 when the Ukrainian government stopped paying transportation costs for the children. “There is no lack of people, including many doctors with a will to help. But today those with capital, those with money, don’t want to spend it for such purposes,” Medina said. “It’s a political question — a matter of social policy.

“People are still suffering from illnesses related to Chernobyl,” Medina said. “Some because of the impact of a radioactive substance on their immune system and gene structure, making them ill and producing genetic effects that can be passed on to descendants. And some because they are exposed to an area that may still be contaminated.”

“In the current situation of war and instability, life is more expensive. Everything is more difficult, including keeping track of an individual’s health” in Ukraine today, he said. “People today have to depend on their own resources rather than state institutions for health care.”

## It changed us, too

The Chernobyl children’s medical program transformed Cubans who were part of it too. “When I arrived at Tatará in 1990 I was 20-something,” said Medina. “I was a child, a boy. I’m 52 now. I grew up with the program.

“It became a part of our lives. We could say that living more than 20 years with Ukrainians almost made us feel Ukrainian, think like Ukrainians. It’s

part of our lifestyle, our foods, our likes, and customs,” he said. “Likewise, they took our food and customs home with them. They loved to dance to Cuban music.

“The program lasted for nearly 23 years. Just think, 23 years of your life without sleeping peacefully, because when you are dealing with kids, you never know what they are going to be up to,” Medina said.

“We had a great responsibility to the Ukrainian families, the Ukrainian government and our own government,” he said. “The parents had trusted us with their children. And the country trusted us.

“We can discuss these things calmly now because time has passed and I feel I can exhale. Now I can go to the beach on a Sunday and not worry about it. I can even have a drink,” he said. “But back then I was saying to myself, ‘What if I have to respond quickly to something?’ Those were very difficult times. Our staff — Cubans and others — had to be dedicated.”

“And the leaders of our country were dedicated as well,” Medina added. “Fidel visited Tatará many times. Every time a hurricane swept through Cuba, a special advance team would come to make sure the facilities were in good shape to protect the children. When you see things like that happening, you feel you should redouble your own efforts, you recognize the depth of the responsibility you are carrying.”

Medina remains hopeful a way will be found for Cuba to continue to provide care for those in Ukraine who need treatment.

In Kiev a few months earlier *Militant* reporters talked with a number of young women who had been treated at Tatará. Inna Molodchenko is first on the waiting list to go back to Cuba if money for transportation can be raised. “It’s better for her to be in Cuba,” her mother Tatiana said, speaking for Inna, who has had six surgeries on her throat. “Cuban doctors have saved her life and the people of Cuba are very kind, full of warmth. Cuba’s our second homeland.”

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# Anti-Semitic attacks spur debate

Continued from front page

Nisman was appointed by then-President Néstor Kirchner in 2004 to head the investigation. Argentine officials had accused the government of Iran of planning the attack and the Lebanese Hezbollah of carrying it out, but no one has ever been prosecuted.

In 2013 the government of Argentina’s current president, Cristina Fernández, Kirchner’s widow, set up a joint “truth commission” with Tehran, allegedly to investigate who was behind the bombing. Jewish leaders in Argentina were outraged by the move, which they saw as a cover-up.

Nisman said he had proof that it was part of a secret deal to let Tehran off the hook in exchange for a favorable trade deal, including Iranian oil. He was found dead from a gun shot to the head Jan. 18, the day before he was to testify before the Argentine Congress. His death, including debate over whether he committed suicide, has brought renewed attention to the 1994 attack and anti-Semitism in Argentina.

The Argentine government gave refuge to thousands of Nazi officials after World War II — as did the governments of Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, though in lesser numbers.

On Jan. 19, 10 Israeli tourists were injured when they were attacked at a hostel for backpackers in Argentina’s Patagonia region. The attackers, armed with broken bottles, sticks and a shotgun, yelled, “You shit Jews, you are trying to take over Patagonia,” the Onda Azul hostel’s owner, Yoav Pollac, told the press.

The attack in Argentina takes place at the same time as anti-Jewish assaults in Europe and Israel. The Jan. 9 murder of four shoppers at the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket in Paris by Amedey Coulibaly, a follower of Islamic State, is one of many carried out by Islamists.

The killings at Hyper Cacher also show the possibility of solidarity between Jewish and Muslim workers. Lassan Bathily, a Mali-born Muslim worker at the grocery, helped customers hide in the freezers and encouraged them to stay calm after Coulibaly attacked.

Another former worker at the market, Mohammed Amine, an immigrant from Morocco who was a friend of Yohan Cohen, one of those killed, told the Associated Press, “I’m Muslim and he’s Jewish. But there’s such respect between us. We’re like brothers. They took my best friend.”

Many anti-Semitic attacks have been carried out under the guise of supporting the Palestinian struggle. During the Israeli assault on Gaza last summer, some demonstrators in France and Germany chanted “Death to the Jews” and attacked Jewish stores and synagogues. There have been similar attacks in Belgium and Denmark. Fascist groups and other ultrarightists have also peddled the anti-Semitic poison.

Anti-Jewish attacks have caused a spike in the number of Jews, especially from France, moving to Israel.

On Jan. 21, Hamza Matrouk, a Palestinian worker from the West Bank, boarded a bus in Tel Aviv, Israel, and stabbed the driver and nearly a dozen passengers. While much of the media said Matrouk was just a “lone wolf,” this was the latest attack in Israel and the Palestinian territories aimed at Jews. Among them: the Nov. 18 murder of four congregants at the B’nei Torah Synagogue in West Jerusalem and the June 12 killing of three Jewish teenagers in the West Bank.

Officials of Hamas, the reactionary Islamist group that runs Gaza, called Matrouk’s knifings “heroic and brave” and “the natural response to the crimes of the occupation and its terror against our people.” Mah-

moud Abbas, head of the Palestine Authority in the West Bank, has not said a word.

## Silence, rationalizations of the ‘left’

Virtually the entire “left” and other middle-class radicals have either justified the attacks, said they understood why they had been carried out, or been silent.

In a Jan. 26 feature article on the website of Workers World Party, a petty-bourgeois socialist group in the U.S., Fred Goldstein complains that “the term anti-Semitic is applied equally to, on the one hand, Greece’s pro-Nazi Golden Dawn, the undercover anti-Semites of the French National Front and Germany’s Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (PAGIDA) and, on the other hand, to Hamas, Hezbollah and Muslim individuals or groups that attack Jews in Europe and the U.S.”

Goldstein says that the killings of Jews by Palestinians and Muslims are justified because they “arise out of rage” against the crimes of the Israeli government, including the 2014 war on Gaza in which more than 2,000 Palestinians were killed.

In other words, when fascists kill Jews it’s anti-Semitism, but when Muslims or Palestinians kill Jews because they are Jewish, these are just “misguided but understandable acts,” Goldstein writes.

This cynical view sees Palestinian toilers as incapable of organizing mass struggles against national oppression and class exploitation, much less taking the moral high ground and forging a revolutionary party. They have to settle for brutal, but “understandable,” acts of Jew-hatred.

## Blow to Palestinian struggle

This is a dead-end for the struggles of Palestinians against the balkanization of Palestine, for jobs for the unemployed, for land and water rights, for the right to travel and for recognition of Palestine.

Goldstein goes on to say, “Islamophobia is being used as a tool by the ruling class now, just as they used anti-Semitism in the 1930s.”

Class-conscious workers reject all discrimination against Muslims and Arabs and oppose all attempts to clamp down on political space and workers’ rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

But Goldstein’s argument that anti-Muslim prejudice fostered by the rulers is “an updated version of anti-Semitism” misses the place of Jew-hatred in the arsenal of the propertied rulers for more than a century. Jews are presented as a small conspiratorial band of bankers and bloodsuckers responsible for the misery of the toilers, and violence against them is encouraged to divert workers from the struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish workers’ rule.

In a world of capitalist crisis, like the one that has begun to unfold today and that marked the lead-up to World War II, Jew-hatred will more and more raise its ugly head. A 1938 resolution by the Socialist Workers Party explains why. Jews, a tiny minority in the world, “constitute an easy scapegoat upon whom the big bourgeoisie can divert the pent-up, dangerous wrath of the backward elements among the masses, and particularly of the desperate middle classes.”

The recent attacks against Jews underscore the need for class-conscious and revolutionary minded workers, in the U.S., Palestine and around the world, to champion the right of return of Jews to Israel, and to fight to force their own governments to welcome them should they choose to take refuge there. The fight against Jew-hatred is a key battle for the working class worldwide.

# Assaults on Ukraine

Continued from front page

of Mariupol, an industrial city of half a million on the Sea of Azov, between the Russian border and Moscow-occupied Crimea. Two days earlier, separatist forces overran the Donetsk airport.

There has been heavy fighting near Debaltseve, a key rail junction and the one point still under Ukrainian government control along the road between the two so-called People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

More than 900,000 people who have fled the war zone since last spring have taken refuge elsewhere in Ukraine, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This includes nearly 48,000 who left in the third week of January alone. Another 600,000 Ukrainians have left the country, including more than 100,000 who have moved to Russia.

The government plans to conscript nearly 62,000 troops in coming weeks. “Two thousand young workers here just received draft notices,” Yuriy Samoilov, head of the Independent Trade Union of Miners in Kryvyi Rih, told the *Militant* by Skype Jan. 17. “While their jobs will be held for one year, it’s not clear what social benefits they will receive if they get injured.”

“We’re trying to survive here in a state of war, and at the same time fight the policies of the government toward working people,” Mykhailo Volynets, head of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, said in a Jan. 27 Skype interview. Many coal miners are owed months of back wages, while “the authorities plan to close more mines without any discussion with the unions and workers, and without a plan to provide jobs for miners who will lose theirs.” The union was planning a protest the next day in Kiev, he said.

The push to close older state-owned mines that are subsidized by the government is part of the “reforms” demanded by the International Monetary Fund as a condition for further loans to Kiev. Volynets said the recent budget adopted by parliament raises taxes on workers’ wages and pensions by 10 to 15 percent.

This is a course toward “a social revolt. This is dangerous in conditions of war,” he said in a Jan. 20 interview with the UkrLife Internet TV channel.

## Fight for Ukrainian sovereignty

Hundreds of thousands of working people all across Ukraine took part in protests that toppled the regime of Viktor Yanukovich last February. Central to the mobilizations was defense of Ukraine’s independence and outrage at Yanukovich’s subservience to Moscow. After he fled, Moscow’s troops occupied Crimea and organized a sham referendum to secede from Ukraine and unite with Russia.

In the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, where much of the country’s coal is mined, pro-Moscow separatists seized government buildings, seeking to emulate the Crimea occupation. They won backing from some workers in the area who don’t trust the capitalist politicians in Kiev. While providing arms and some fighters, the Russian government has used these groups to destabilize Ukraine, seeking to win concessions, while opposing a Crimea-style takeover.

President Barack Obama told reporters Jan. 25 that Washington will consider more economic sanctions against Russia in response to the escalation, but said, “It would not be effective for us to engage in a military conflict with Russia on this issue.”

The European Union is planning a meeting of foreign ministers Jan. 29 to discuss stepped-up sanctions.

Banking and trade sanctions imposed by the imperialist powers and the drop in world oil prices have pushed the Russian economy to the brink of recession, with working people hit hardest.

Russian officials have continuously denied that there are thousands of Russian soldiers fighting along with the separatists. But recent statements by Igor Girkin give the lie to Moscow’s credibility.

Girkin, a retired officer of the FSB, Russia’s secret police, led Russian military units in Crimea and later served as minister of defense in the self-proclaimed People’s Republic of Donetsk until August.

Girkin told NeuroMirTV that claims that the overwhelming majority in Crimea wanted to unite with Russia were not true. “I was there since Feb. 20. ... We had absolutely no support from the people,” he said. “The only thing that made what we have accomplished in Crimea possible was the presence of the Russian army.”

# LETTERS

## Unionists oppose charges

On Nov. 28 (so-called Black Friday) demonstrators chained themselves to a train at the West Oakland Bay Area Rapid Transit station — a dangerous tactic that stopped rail service for several hours — to protest the lack of indictments in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York in the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Fourteen people were charged with trespassing and BART management demanded the group pay restitution.

Some 200 people packed a BART Board of Directors meeting Jan. 22 demanding that all charges be dropped and no restitution paid. We spoke as train operators and members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1555, saying all union members, in particular BART workers, need to oppose restitution for lost revenues: should the Alameda County District Attorney agree with BART management’s demand, the door is wide open to go after the unions (and individual

workers) during any work stoppages or strikes.

*Bill Kalman  
Shirley Pena  
Richmond, California*

**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 prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.**