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www.socialistviewpoint.org

email: info@socialistviewpoint.org

(415) 824-8730

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Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?

By BONNIE WEINSTEIN

Four recent news stories leave no doubt that capitalism's criminal profit motive trumps basic human needs. From the obscene paychecks of hedge fund managers; to the huge profits of massive food corporations; the health-care industry and, even clothing manufacturers, capitalists can't continue to earn huge profits without risking the lives of millions of workers and consumers.

Hedge Fund managers

In an April 22, 2013 article titled, "Hedge Fund Manager 'Earns' \$1 Million an Hour," by Matt Bewig, that appeared at *AllGov.com*,

"Last year, even as 15 million Americans continued to look for work and the average wage barely kept up with the cost of living, the 25 best paid hedge fund managers raked in a total of \$14.14 billion, an average of \$565.6 million-per-year, according to an analysis published last week by *Institutional Investor Alpha*. The top ten took home \$10.1 billion, and top manager David Tepper—who did not even make the top 25 last year—made off with \$2.2 billion, equivalent to \$1,057,692 an hour, as much as the average American family makes in 21 years."¹

Clearly, there can be no justification for one individual to "earn" over a million dollars an hour. Especially when the overwhelming majority of working people are being forced to accept drastic austerity cutbacks across the board. And especially since hedge fund managers do no work. They neither manufacture nor produce anything. Their massive wealth is the result of simple computer-generated, mathematical manipulation of the stock market!

The Food Industry

A February 20, 2013 article by Michael Mosstitled, "The Extraordinary

Science of Addictive Junk Food"² read like a futuristic science fiction story where fiendish businessmen spend billions of dollars to hire Harvard graduates to devise the most addictive, cheaply produced, least nutritious foods designed to cause people to eat more and more and still not be satiated. The only problem is, it's not fiction, nor futuristic. It's real and it's happening right now!

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The article exposes how major American food producers such as Pillsbury, Nestlé, Kraft, Nabisco, General Mills, Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola, Mars and many others routinely fight for what they call "'stomach share'—the amount of digestive space that any one company's brand can grab from the competition" by producing foods high in sugar, salt and a myriad of food additives that are known to be addictive and dangerous to our health. And that, in fact, there is "a conscious effort—taking place in labs and marketing meetings and grocery-store aisles—to get people hooked on foods that are convenient and inexpensive."

For example, according to the article, "General Mills had overtaken not just the cereal aisle but other sections of the grocery store. The company's Yoplait brand had transformed traditional unsweetened breakfast yogurt into a veritable dessert. It now had twice as much sugar per serving as General Mills' marshmallow cereal Lucky Charms. And yet, because of yogurt's well-tended image as a wholesome snack, sales of Yoplait were soaring, with annual revenue topping \$500 million. Emboldened by the success, the company's development wing pushed even harder, inventing a Yoplait variation that came in a squeezable tube—perfect for kids. They called it Go-Gurt..." and that, "By year's end, it would hit \$100 million in sales."

Furthermore, as a result of these practices, "More than half of American adults were now considered overweight, with nearly one-quarter of the adult population—40 million people—clinically defined as obese. Among children, the rates had more than doubled since 1980, and the number of kids considered obese had shot past 12 million. (This was still only 1999; the nation's obesity rates would climb much higher.)"

Again, the primary concern of these corporations is to increase their rate of profit by any means necessary—the health of consumers, both adult and children, be damned.

The "healthcare" industry

In an April 16, 2013 *New York Times* article by Denise Grady titled, "Hospitals Profit From Surgical Errors, Study Finds,"³ "Hospitals make money from their own mistakes because insurers pay them for the longer stays and extra care that patients need to treat surgical complications that could have been prevented. ...If the system does

not change, hospitals have little incentive to improve: in fact, some will wind up losing money if they take better care of patients.”

The article was based upon a study and editorial published April 9, 2013 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study authors are from the Boston Consulting Group, Harvard’s schools of medicine and public health, and Texas Health Resources, a large nonprofit hospital system. According to the article, “The study is based on a detailed analysis of the records of 34,256 people who had surgery in 2010 at one of 12 hospitals run by Texas Health Resources. Of those patients, 1,820 had one or more complications that could have been prevented, like blood clots, pneumonia or infected incisions. The median length of stay for those patients quadrupled to 14 days, and hospital revenue averaged \$30,500 more than for patients without complications (\$49,400 versus \$18,900). Private insurers paid far more for complications than did Medicare or Medicaid, or patients who paid out of pocket.” Further, David Sadoff, a managing director of the Boston Consulting Group said, “the current payment system makes it difficult for hospitals to perform better because improvements can wind up costing them money.”

The irrationality of our capitalist healthcare system boggles the mind! Only under a profit-driven healthcare system could hospital mistakes—mistakes that injure or even kill patients—result in *more* profits for hospitals than from well-cared-for patients.

Clothing manufacturing

On April 24, 2013, Rana Plaza, a building in Savar, an industrial suburb of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh collapsed with thousands of garment workers inside. The factories catered to Western clothing retailers. According to an April 28, 2013 *New York Times* article by Jim Yardley titled, “Tears and

Rage as Hope Fades in Bangladesh,”⁴ “The collapse of the building, the Rana Plaza, is considered the deadliest accident in the history of the garment industry.” The death toll goes up every day. So far it has claimed over 600 lives, and hundreds—perhaps as many as a thousand more workers are thought to be missing—buried in the rubble.

And, according to an article dated April 26, 2013, by Julfikar Ali Manik, Jim Yardley and Steven Greenhouse titled, “Bangladeshis Burn Factories to Protest Unsafe Conditions,”⁵ also from the *Times*, “Cracks had been discovered in the structure a day earlier (before the collapse), and police officials and industry leaders say they had asked the factory bosses to stop work until the building had been inspected.” They didn’t. They forced workers to keep working in spite of the warning placing *their* profits before the very lives of their workers.

The terrorism and irrationality of capitalism

As these stories expose, such obscene greed is tantamount to economic terrorism and results in life-threatening poverty and strife—and often death—for masses of working people the world over. Capitalism can’t put human needs before profits. Its entire mechanism is driven by the quest for profits above all else.

The capitalists rationalize that the competition for profits is endemic to human nature and that a socialist society based upon production to satisfy human needs instead of profits is a utopian notion—an unattainable fantasy.

Human nature, they claim, is based upon the struggle for the survival of the fittest—the competition between all living beings for the means of survival. Capitalism, they argue, is the natural extension of this basic struggle, *i.e.*, that the private accumulation of vast amounts of capital and the military might to guard that wealth in the hands of a tiny few of the “fittest”

humans is just basic human nature and, therefore, capitalism is the “natural” social and economic structure. This argument is sophism and is carefully promoted in every aspect of social interaction, education and mass media propaganda throughout the capitalist world, whether ruled by kings, parliaments or congresses.

In nature, survival of the fittest refers to the successful survival of entire species—not the few “best of the best” from each species. In nature, endangered species are those whose population has been decimated, and there are only a few survivors left—and, most importantly—their numbers could be too few for the species to survive! In other words, it is necessary for massive numbers of a species to be able to thrive—to live healthy enough lives to reproduce healthy offspring—for the species as a whole to survive! Life depends upon the success of the entire specie’s ability to survive and thrive. Not on the survival of a few of the “most fit!”

The fact is, it’s utopian to think that capitalism can do anything but continue on the destructive path of survival of the most wealthy at the expense of all life on Earth.

Socialism is the only alternative to the destruction inherent in capitalist production-for-profit and it’s our only hope for all of life’s species and the Earth itself to survive and thrive.

1 <http://www.allgov.com/news/where-is-the-money-going/hedge-fund-manager-earns-1-million-dollars-an-hour-130422?news=849813>

2 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/magazine/the-extraordinary-science-of-junk-food.html?pagewanted=all>

3 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/17/health/hospitals-profit-from-surgical-errors-study-finds.html?ref=us>

4 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/world/asia/after-building-collapse-tears-and-rage-as-hope-fades-in-bangladesh.html?ref=world>

5 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/world/asia/bangladesh-building-collapse.html?hp>

Today's Situation and What Is To Be Done Next

BY JOE JOHNSON

Today we are in a situation similar to that of just before the 1934 strikes. These similarities are such as to make it vital for us to understand those strikes and the truths they demonstrated.

We have an accurate, detailed, historical record of the Minneapolis Teamster strikes and this writer spent months speaking with its leaders before they died. In particular, I talked with Vincent Ray Dunn when Ray had full recall and knowledge of all the strikes' major developments. Ray was the major organizer and leader of the Teamster strikes.

The two innovations that the Teamster strikes produced of most importance to us now are: The uniting of larger and larger sections of the working class, and taking the attack to the capitalists and not simply reacting to their attacks. There are many more important lessons to be learned, but these two are necessary for us to learn now.

Before the 1934 strikes the workers were divided by craft, and this division with others so weakened them that they were defeated time after time. It was only when under revolutionary leadership that they were able to unite and win.

We are in a similar situation now. The unions are separated from the working class as a whole, so when they do struggle against the bosses they do it in a divided, weakened condition.

A good example today of uniting is the recent big Chicago teacher's strike. It succeeded because the striking teachers spent considerable time, energy and thought into uniting with the larger community, so that when they had their mass demonstrations and their strike, they had the active support from the community. They were only able to get their support by enfolded within

their union demands the needs of the community. Simple trade union action is no longer sufficient.

But it is not only communities that need to be enfolded within the strike, but other organizations as well, for example, the environmental movement. With the capitalists' massive destruction of the Earth there has developed an ever enlarging grouping of people, workers, small capitalists, and even a few large capitalists who wish the destruction of the earth to stop. Without the leadership of the working class, these people, who have massive resources of money and members, can do little but beg the capitalists to do better. Or act like little children and smash windows and other ultra-left actions that may be more or less violent, but which lead only to defeat.

The two innovations that the Teamster strikes produced of most importance to us now are: The uniting of larger and larger sections of the working class, and taking the attack to the capitalists and not simply reacting to their attacks.

In the teamsters strike in Minneapolis it was necessary for the strikers to enfold the small merchants into support. This was done as a conscious decision of the leadership. Much energy was devoted to this before and during the strike.

Ray Dunne told me how the strike leadership understood the needs and problems of the small merchants; knew of their strengths and their serious weaknesses. They did similar work with the other elements of society, working quite successfully organizing and getting the active support of the unemployed.

Acceleration in the class struggle

A second way the period we are in is similar to the time just before the 1934 strikes is that there is acceleration in the class struggle. The working class in the United States has been on the defensive and in retreat for so long that it is hard for even the best revolutionary to understand that now it is both possible and necessary in select areas to be on the attack. This does not mean that defensive struggles are not important; they remain of great importance.

We can see this in the fast food strike in New York where the main demand is for higher wages. Now defense will be a part of attack; see for example the Chicago teachers' defense against closing schools as well as calling for better schools and more teachers at higher wages.

There is a subjective problem that needs to be considered. The best, most politically advanced, self-sacrificing of the working class have been deeply submerged in the retreats and defeats. It is difficult for them to see that "the times, they are a changin'." They can see a fighting retreat, a defensive struggle, but not an attack. This needs to change. To point out the errors and crimes of the union leadership, to call for solidarity in defensive struggle is no longer sufficient. What is now necessary is bold leadership by the vanguard in attacking the capitalists where they are the weakest. We can see those weak areas of capitalism; so let us in an organized and intelligent way attack them.



An area has opened before our eyes. Congress has lost the support of over 90 percent of the population. A large majority of the U.S. population, of all classes, understands that Congress is made up of the servants of the very rich capitalists. People do not have faith or support for Congress. This is where we need to attack. As revolutionaries we do not wish to reform Congress, but to destroy it. This needs to be done not with words of criticism but action.

A congress of the 99 percent

Now, we are not ultra-left; we do not want to throw stones at Congress, and we are not sufficiently united and militarily strong enough to be able to physically attack Congress. What we need to do is to develop a congress of our own. An assembly of the 99 percent where what is to be done can be debated and deliberated on. Just as Congress is the assembly of the ruling class, this new congress would be an assembly of, and for, the working class and its many allies.

However, given the size of the United States and that given areas are

developing at much different speeds, these assemblies will just be on a state, region or city level. Think of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies as a Russian example of what we should do.

Detroit, for example, is ready for such an assembly. There are now, in Detroit, many sizable militant community groups, civil rights groups, *etc.* Plus, there are sizable environmental groups in and around Detroit. These should not be minimized because of their small size and minimal militancy in the past. With global warming and the advanced nature of the capitalist destruction of the air, water, animal and plant life, these groups are fast becoming stronger and more anti-capitalist. Witness the 50,000 strong March on Washington by these groups recently. True, they need to have the leadership that can come out of these assemblies, but they are on the correct side of the barricades and that is what is important now.

All these groups, and let me stress there are many, many of them and they have sizable numbers and power on their side, should be part of the Detroit assembly. This assembly, which together can deliberate, discuss and debate their common problems, and what is of great importance, can decide what common action to take. It could, with

the leadership that is available in Detroit now, be an assembly that would out-perform the Legislature in Lansing, Michigan of the capitalist parties. It would not at this early stage have the body of armed men that the Petrograd Soviet had; that will come later.

A general strike?

Should we not first have a general strike, then form the assembly? It is the assemblies that will make possible the general strike. As of now there is not likely to be a general strike of any meaning. The calls that have gone out for a general strike in Wisconsin, and now in Michigan, have little or no preparation, and without deep, thorough preparation, the call for a general strike is likely to produce a dud. But the assembly would be capable of giving real meaning to such a call.

Does the development of these assemblies mean the socialist revolutionary party with a correct program is no longer necessary? Absolutely not. The formation of the Petrograd Soviet did not mean the Bolshevik Party was unnecessary. In the assemblies is where the Socialist revolutionary party with its correct program will win over the masses to itself. It will be the forging of the U.S. revolution.

We shall win.

Phi Burger Kappa



The 30-Hour Workweek

When America came “this close” to establishing it

BY JOHN DE GRAAF

Saturday, April 6, 2013, marked the 80th anniversary of a long-forgotten event in American history that bears remembering, especially by progressives.

The April 15, 1933 issue of *Newsweek*, one of the first in the magazine’s history, contains a remarkable cover headline: “Bill cutting work week to 30 hours startles the nation.” Indeed only nine days earlier, on April 6th, the Black-Connery Bill had passed in the United States Senate by a wide margin. The bill fixed the official American work week at five days and 30 hours, with severe penalties for overtime work.

In his new book, *Free Time*, labor historian, Benjamin Hunnicutt of the University of Iowa, explains that the bill originally had broad support as a means of increasing employment during the recession and maintaining full employment in the future.

“We stand unflinchingly for the six-hour day and the five-day week in industry,” thundered AFL president William Green to a labor meeting in San Francisco that spring. Franklin

Roosevelt and Labor Secretary Frances Perkins also initially endorsed the idea, but the president buckled under opposition from the National Association of Manufacturers and dropped his support for the bill, which was then defeated in the House of Representatives.

In its place, Roosevelt advocated job-creating New Deal spending and a forty-hour workweek limit, passed into law on October 24, 1938, as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

But we came that close to an official thirty-hour workweek in America. Close, but no cigar...

Kellogg’s Six-Hour Day

Nonetheless, many American companies did go to a 30-hour workweek during the depression, most prominently, the Kellogg Cereal Company, which established five-day, six-hour, shifts in December 1930. Kellogg’s and the workers split the pay loss resulting from the cut in hours; Kellogg’s initially paid his workers for seven hours-a-day, but upped that to the amount they had previously received for eight-hours work two years later, when he

saw that hourly productivity had soared.

In his earlier books, and *Kellogg’s Six-Hour Day*, Hunnicutt reports that the measure added 400 new jobs to Kellogg’s Battle Creek, Michigan, work force, while improving family and community life dramatically. After World War II, Kellogg’s began abandoning the six-hour shifts in favor of eight hours, largely because increasing benefit packages made it cheaper to hire few workers and keep them on the job longer. But the end of the six-hour shifts didn’t come until 1985, when the last six-hour workers were told that if they didn’t accept the longer work days, Kellogg’s would leave Battle Creek.

The six-hours workers were angry but there was little they could do to prevent the change. They held a “funeral,” complete with a mock coffin, for the six-hour day at Stan’s Place, a local Battle Creek pub, and Ina Sides, an African-American woman who had worked most of her life at the plant, wrote a eulogy:

Farewell, good friend, oh six hours!
Tis sad, but true,

Now you’re gone and we’re all so blue!

Get out your vitamins, give the doctor a call,

Cause old eight hours has got us all.

In 1992, I traveled with Hunnicutt to interview former thirty-hour week workers in Battle Creek. They spoke movingly of the free time they had when they worked shorter hours—“you weren’t all wore out when you got home,” one man told me. One couple, Chuck and Joy Blanchard, who had both worked at the plant, claimed that the six-hour day made Chuck a “feminist” long before the women’s movement. He and his wife shared the

In 1968 the U.S. minimum wage was \$1.60. If it had kept up with income growth & distribution overall, it would now be \$21.16 per hour. Instead it’s \$7.25. The kitten is only here to get your attention.



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housework and he was a “room parent” at his children’s school.

The Blanchards spoke to us about how crime had gone up and volunteering down in Battle Creek after the six-hour day ended, as people had less time to look out for their neighborhoods. The Blanchards said they had little materially, but their lives, blessed with abundant leisure, were happier than those of young families today, who seem to have so much more stuff, but never enough time.

No vacation nation

If the idea that the thirty-hour work week almost became the law of the land EIGHTY years ago comes as a shock, consider a *New York Times* headline on July 31, 1910:

“HOW LONG SHOULD A MAN’S VACATION BE? PRESIDENT TAFT SAYS EVERY ONE SHOULD HAVE THREE MONTHS”

At a time when workers produced a tenth of what they do today, William Howard Taft, a conservative Republican, argued that all workers needed two or three months of holiday time each year to improve health, family connections and productivity. Yet, more than a hundred years later, Americans average two weeks of paid vacation and a quarter of us get none at all.

When the organization I represent, Take Back Your Time, worked with Florida Congressman Alan Grayson to propose a very modest paid vacation law in 2009, we were practically accused of plotting the end of western civilization as we know it, and of “trying to turn our America into a 21st Century France,” as if we were going to force everyone to appreciate good food and wine. All this, when the evidence shows that stress from overwork plays a role in five of the six leading causes of death in the U.S. and that workers who don’t take vacations are twice as likely to have heart attacks as those who do.

How is it that the world’s richest country is one of only a handful (the

other five are tiny and poor) of countries with no law requiring paid vacations (although residents of Puerto Rico are guaranteed 15 days off each year)?

How is it that we understood the need for shorter hours of work in 1910 and 1933 but have forgotten it today?

Rememberance as a call to action

Progressives who want to end unemployment in a way that improves health and limits unsustainable economic growth should be advocating that America provide real vacation time and shorter working hours. Although workers often say they’d prefer more money to more time, the evidence shows they appreciate the time off when they get it.

A recent experiment with a compressed four-day workweek (albeit with ten-hour days) was extremely popular in Utah.

More importantly, in Amador County, California, workers voted 71 to 29 percent to retain a reduced workweek of four nine-hour days rather than return to a five-day, forty-hour week with higher pay. See “Life Away From the Rat-Race: Why One Group of Workers Decided to Cut Their Own Hours and Pay” (AlterNet, July 2, 2012).

Undoubtedly, for poor workers,

shortened hours would need to be combined with a higher living wage minimum, as they would otherwise take on extra jobs to make up for reductions in pay that usually accompany shorter work-time. But in fact, there is no reason why a nation (the U.S.) where the median worker has seen almost no pay increases since the 1970s despite a doubling of worker productivity, should not reduce working hours without a pay cut, at least for the middle-class and the poor.

Eighty years ago, the American Federation of Labor and the United States Senate understood that the healthiest and most sustainable way to reduce unemployment was to sharply reduce working hours. The anniversary of the Black-Connery’s bill passage in the Senate marks a time to pause and ask why progressives aren’t raising this issue again.

John de Graaf is a filmmaker and co-author of Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic and What’s The Economy For Anyway?

—AlterNet.org, April 2, 2013

<http://www.alternet.org/labor/when-america-came-close-establishing-30-hour-workweek?akid=10283.229473.sGGxQh&rd=1&src=newsletter819416&t=14>



Circa 1930s lapel button. Curl reads “Issued By Local No.3 - I.B.E.W”. International Brotherhood Of Electrical Workers Union.

Chicago's Fast Food Walk Out

The “Fight for 15” (dollars per hour, a.k.a., a living wage) hits the windy city.

BY JOSH EIDELSON

Demanding a hefty raise and a fair chance to form a union, workers in Chicago's growing fast food and retail sectors are walking off the job this morning (April 24, 2013). The one-day walkout began at 5:30 A.M. Central Time, and organizers expect 500 workers from a dozen chains to participate. The work stoppage follows similar strikes by New York City fast food workers and by Wal-Mart retail employees across the country, and marks the latest escalation in the struggle between an embattled labor movement and two industries that increasingly dominate and define the new economy.

“At the end of the day,” Macy's employee Krystal Maxie-Collins told *Salon*, “it feels like I've done all of this to help everyone else, to help the store, help the managers, help the customers, but it doesn't feel like anyone is looking out for me.” Maxie-Collins, a mother of four who works part-time for the state minimum wage of \$8.25 plus a commission, said she had initially been hesitant about the strike because of the risk of retaliation. But “what we are fighting for, the reason for doing it, kind of overrode the fear of doing it.” “Usually the things that are worth it,” she added, “you have to sacrifice for.”

Katelyn Johnson, the executive director of the community organizing group Action Now, said she expects a strike that “really shakes up business as usual for downtown.” Organizers expect the strikers to include employees of McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts, Subway, Sears, Macy's and Victoria's Secret. The Chicago strike is spearheaded by Fight for 15, a campaign backed by organizations including Action Now and the Service Employees International Union. SEIU also pro-

vides funding for the New York City group Fast Food Forward, which brought 400 fast food workers out on strike three weeks ago. Both Fast Food Forward and Fight for 15 are collaborations between unions and community organizing groups.

A Macy's official declined a request for comment on the Fight for 15 campaign Tuesday morning (April 23, 2013). A McDonald's spokesperson referred *Salon* to a previous statement saying, “We value and respect all the employees who work at McDonald's restaurants” and touting “competitive wages, flexible schedules and quality, affordable benefits,” and “professional development opportunities” for employees.

Whether or not these long-squeezed workers can force their bosses to concede some money, and some measure of democracy, will help shape the future of work in the United States.

Johnson said that Action Now took a leadership role in organizing fast food workers after discovering on door-to-door canvasses about fare hikes that “people were more concerned with their jobs,” and that once fast food workers started holding meetings, “retail workers heard about it and wanted to join the effort.” Like their New York counterparts, the Chicago workers are demanding raises to \$15 an hour, and the chance to form a union without intimidation.

That's a very heavy lift, and the campaign faces what may be impossibly long odds. But the stakes are high, because the future of fast food and retail jobs has far-reaching implications for the U.S. economy. Both industries are among the highest-grossing, fastest-growing and lowest-paying in Chicago, and in the United States. Retail is largely non-union; fast food is almost entirely so. Whether or not these long-squeezed workers can force their bosses to concede some money, and some measure of democracy, will help shape the future of work in the United States.

That's especially true now. Drawing on federal statistics, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) last year found that lower-wage occupations made up just 21 percent of the jobs lost in the Great Recession, but 58 percent of the job growth in the recovery; the same study found that food service, retail and employment services together represented 43 percent of employment growth in the previous two years. U.S. employment increasingly looks more like fast food and retail: service sector work heavy on emotional labor—the constant requirement to perform a certain personality for customers—and light on job security, benefits or predictable scheduling.

NELP researcher and attorney Tsedeye Gebreselassie noted that the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data listed the nation's top three occupations as retail salespersons, cashiers and “food preparation and serving workers, including fast food.” “Because these are the jobs that are dominant, in our economy,” she told *Salon*, “the fact that they are very low-wage jobs” is “setting the standards for how some businesses think they can treat their workers.”

And while politicians from both parties tout training and education as a ladder to opportunity, “higher-skilled” jobs’ labor standards are actually on the same downward trajectory as others’. In a 2012 report, the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that from 1979 to 2010, while the number of U.S. workers with advanced degrees nearly doubled, the percentage of workers whose jobs provide decent wages, health insurance, and retirement benefits declined. That was true for workers with college degrees as well as for those without them. The cause, argued authors John Schmitt and Janelle Jones, wasn’t “workers’ skills,” but rather “the loss of bargaining power” at work.

In other words—like the garment sweatshops of a century ago—what makes McDonald’s or Wal-Mart jobs bad isn’t that employees lack degrees. It’s that they lack leverage. The same problem faces workers doing comparatively glamorous work—from fashion models faced with wage theft, to Apple store specialists without health insurance.

In recent months, non-union employees in fast food and retail have mounted unprecedented challenges to their bosses’ business model. First, building from a year of store-by-store organizing, Wal-Mart store workers staged their first-ever coordinated strikes in October and November. Then, a week after Wal-Mart workers’ Black Friday walkout, New York City fast food workers staged a strike of their own; this month, they did again, with twice as many people. (Wal-Mart is not among the companies where Chicago retail workers will be striking Wednesday, but — as I reported for the *Nation* — Wal-Mart workers in a hundred-some stores plan to go in groups Wednesday to confront managers about scheduling issues.)

Maxie-Collins said that changing her industry would also change her community: “I work downtown in a beautiful community, but then I come home to a neighborhood where I can’t even take my kids to the park without worrying about a dangerous situation.” She said poverty is to blame for the crime rate that makes her keep her kids inside, because “everyone’s trying to get over on the next person because of what they don’t have, and what they can’t afford and what they can’t do.” NELP’s Gebreselassie argued that poverty wages are also crippling the recovery: “We cannot build a recovery on very low-wage jobs. We have tried it for the last three years, and the recovery has stalled, because people don’t have enough money to spend.”

At a moment when some major unions have virtually stopped striking, these low-wage, non-union workers have taken up strikes, despite a battery of legal, political and economic changes that have increased their risk while reducing their impact. As I’ve explained, these recent work stoppages share a set of tactics designed to reduce—but not remove—the risk that strikers lose their jobs.

The strike wave’s spread to Chicago offers a hopeful sign for the New York City fast food campaign. While individual fast food stores are managed by franchisees, national CEOs are the real decision-makers in both fast food and retail. Given the financial cost and, more important, the risk of setting a precedent and emboldening a wider workforce, it’s hard to imagine executives for McDonald’s or Macy’s making any significant concessions to workers in any city unless faced with a *bona fide* national uprising. For that to happen, the strikes would have to go viral, big-time.

The strikes aren’t spreading by accident. November New York fast food

strikers told *Salon* that they drew inspiration from workers who walked out of Wal-Mart stores, who in turn cited the example of their Wal-Mart warehouse counterparts. Interviewed while on strike April 4, New York fast food workers said that November’s smaller walkout had made that day’s work stoppage possible. “I was waiting” during the first strike, said Brooklyn Burger King worker Christelle Lumen. “I wanted to know, would they be OK with it? Would they fire the people that went on strike?” (Organizers say almost all of the November fast food strikers returned to work without incident; a termination at one Wendy’s was reversed within an hour after local politicians and activists occupied and picketed the store.)

Though New York and Chicago have the only campaigns of their kind to go public so far, fast food organizing efforts are also underway elsewhere. Could they ever build the clout to bring service sector giants to the table? Maxie-Collins said that seeing fast food workers strike this month gave her hope: “That proved to me that if I stand up, and voice our opinion, and show everyone what’s going on, a change can happen. It might not be immediate, but the groundwork will be laid for our children and grandchildren ... Change is going to start from this.”

Josh Eidelson (josheidelson.com) is a *Nation* contributor and was a union organizer for five years. He covers labor as a contributing writer at *Salon* and *In These Times*.

—*alternet.org*, April 24, 2013

<http://www.alternet.org/chicagos-fast-food-and-other-low-wage-workers-strike-one-day-walk-out?akid=10361.229473.FcCaRv&rd=1&src=newsletter830073&t=11>

Corporate Terrorism in West Texas

By RUSSELL MOKHIBER

In his first statement in response to the Boston bombings, President Obama said that “Michelle and I send our deepest thoughts and prayers to the families of the victims in the wake of this senseless loss.”

In the his first statement in response to the explosion outside Waco, Texas, President Obama said that “our prayers go out to the people of West, Texas in the aftermath of last night’s deadly explosion at a fertilizer plant.”

In his statement on Boston, President Obama said that “any responsible individuals, any responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice.”

But when it came to the explosion in Texas, President Obama said nothing about responsible individuals, responsible groups or the full weight of justice.

Why not?

Because when it comes to street crime, President Obama is the top cop.

When it comes to apparent corporate crime and violence, he’s the enabler in chief.

Make no mistake, if it becomes clear that the Texas explosion was triggered by a terrorist attack, *a la* the Oklahoma City bombing, then Obama will begin talking about “the full weight of justice.”

But if the focus is corporate crime and violence, corporate recklessness, workplace safety, “full weight of justice” rhetoric won’t see the light of day.

After all, it was Obama’s Justice Department that in December 2011

settled the case of the April 2010 Massey Energy Upper Big Branch explosion, which killed 29 miners, with a “non prosecution agreement.”

Outrageously, the Justice Department said it would not crimi-

**Because when it comes
to street crime,
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top cop.**



nally prosecute Massey even though the Labor Department concluded that Massey’s “unlawful policies and practices” were the “root cause of this tragedy.”

Massey had a track record of skirting the law and even kept two sets of books for at Upper Big Branch—one for internal use, which kept track of workplace hazards—and one for law enforcement, which did not.

David Uhlmann, the former head of the Department of Justice’s Environmental Crimes Section, and now a Professor at the University of Michigan Law School, says had he been in charge of the Massey Energy case, he would have criminally prosecuted Massey.

In his tenure at the Justice Department, he criminally prosecuted many major corporations for wrongdoing arguably less serious than one that results in the deaths of 29 workers.

And he says that the Massey non prosecution agreement is just part of a disturbing trend, one that has accelerated under the Obama administration, toward settling major corporate crime cases with deferred and non prosecution agreements.

Russell Mokhiber edits the Corporate Crime Reporter.

—*counterpunch.org*, Weekend Edition April 19-21, 2013 <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/04/19/corporate-violence-in-west-texas/>

U.S. 'Human Rights' Wars

Arms Control as a Weapon

BY GLEN FORD

The United Nations General Assembly vote on regulation of the international arms trade purports to be a modest step away from violence in the world, but is in fact the very opposite. The newly approved Arms Trade Treaty is conceived and designed as a facilitator of war by its main sponsor, the United States.

At the core of the treaty is a ban on arms exports to countries that are under UN embargoes, or that are accused of promoting genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. But such language is only a tool of war in the hands of the U.S. The cold fact is that, since the establishment of the United Nations to this very day, the United States and its allies, clients and proxies have been the worst perpetrators of crimes against humanity. From Vietnam to East Timor to Guatemala to Iraq to Somalia and to Congo, the U.S. has caused the deaths of well over ten million people over the past 60 years.

In the 21st century, in a cruel joke on humanity, the mass murderers in Washington put on their "human rights" hats and declared themselves to be the international community's protectors against so-called "rogue" nations. The doctrine of "humanitarian military intervention" was inflicted on the world. It was not coincidental that each of those nations designated as rogue violators of human rights were also at the top of Washington's hit list for regime change. Haiti was attacked and occupied, its sovereignty stolen under the auspices of the UN, for supposedly "humanitarian" reasons. Libya was bombed for seven months and plunged into a race war, under the "humanitarian" umbrella. The Democratic Republic of Congo has lost six million people at the hands of U.S. humanitarian policy. Let us one day be saved from the fatal

embrace of the humanitarian superpower, who has made human rights a weapon of mass destruction.

The newly minted international Arms Trade Treaty, like humanitarian warfare and that racist mockery of an

**The newly approved
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International Criminal Court, is simply another device to strip nations targeted for U.S. attack of the ability to defend themselves. The immediate targets are Syria, Iran, and North Korea, which is why they voted against the treaty. Twenty-three other countries abstained, including Russia, China and India. They understand that this treaty is not about limiting warfare, but about making nations into outlaws, to be more easily

subdued by the United States. In a stroke of supreme cynicism, America and its allies argued that non-state actors—like their jihadist proxies waging a war of terror against Syria—should not be subject to the treaty, because "national liberation movements" should be able to protect themselves. What shameless hypocrisy! The U.S. and Europe now sing the praises of national liberation movements, after having killed tens-of-millions to stifle the national aspirations of most of the world's people.

But, that is no more insane than Washington posing as a force for peace. Not only is the U.S. the top arms exporter in the world, but eight of the top ten war-profiteering corporations on the planet are American. On the lips of U.S. presidents, arms control is bogus, human rights is a sham, and words of peace are actually weapons of war.

—*Black Agenda Report*, April 4, 2013

<http://blackagendareport.com/content/us-%E2%80%99Chuman-rights%E2%80%9Dwars-arms-control-weapon>



Supreme Court Overturns Basic Democratic Rights

BY BARRY SHEPPARD

In a five-to-four split decision, the Supreme Court ruled that, in effect, no citizen may challenge the constitutionality of any of the executive orders, or laws passed by Congress, that violate democratic rights under the pretext of the “war on terrorism.”

The decision was in response to a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Amnesty International, Global Rights, Global Fund for Women, Human Rights Watch, PEN American Center, Service Employees International Union, journalists Naomi Klein and Chris Hedges, and several defense attorneys.

Their suit challenged a 2008 law that gave the National Security Agency (NSA) unchecked power to monitor all international telephone calls, emails, or any other electronic communications of all U.S. citizens with no warrants or stated reasons for surveillance needed.

The plaintiffs charged that these sweeping powers violated their First Amendment rights of free speech and association, and their Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable search and seizure.

In a ruling worthy of a Kafka novel, the majority of the court said the plaintiffs could not challenge the constitutionality of the law because they could not prove that they had been the targets of surveillance under the law.

Of course they couldn't, because the NSA keeps secret which citizens it is spying on.

Therefore, the court “reasoned” that the plaintiffs had no “standing” to even bring the matter up.

Thus the constitutionality of the law and similar laws will never be ruled on by the Supreme Court, or any other court.

In a February 26 *New York Times*

editorial, entitled “Unbridled secrecy,” the paper wrote that, “The Supreme Court severely damaged the rule of law” by its decision.

This editorial, as well as the split vote in the Supreme Court, reflects differences in the ruling class over how far to use the “war on terror” to violate the constitution.

This split has nothing to do with the squabbles between the Democrats and Republicans over how much to slash the social wage of working people, currently revolving around the federal budget.

The majority of the Supreme Court concurred in its ruling with the Obama administration's arguments, reflecting the views of a large majority of Democrat and Republican politicians.

Jameel Jaffer, who argued the case for the ACLU before the court, said after the ruling that the 2008 statute is “a very broad surveillance statute.” The statute itself grew out of an earlier ruling made by the Bush administration in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

Jaffer said: “The National Security Agency was told ‘You no longer have to seek warrants from federal judges in order to engage in surveillance of American's international communications. You can do this on your own...’ That was against the law.”

At the time, the ACLU challenged the ruling, which slowly wound its way through the courts. Finally, the Bush administration went to Congress to ask it to pass the statute, making legal what it had been doing illegally for years.

The 2008 law was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The Obama administration has been operating under it since. It said the courts had no rights to judge its actions or the

2008 law, a stance the Supreme Court has now upheld.

It should be noted that the NSA is much larger than the CIA. It operates a huge bank of supercomputers capable of listening in on all electronic communications, at least of U.S. citizens, and probably much of the world. Just what its capabilities are, of course, is a state secret.

It will have read and analyzed this “letter” as soon as I send it off, and placed it in their file about me before the *Green Left Weekly* editor will have read it.

But the spying goes well beyond the 2008 law. William Binney, who worked for the NSA for 40 years, retired from the agency a month after 9/11 due to concerns about unchecked domestic surveillance.

Last year, he appeared on *Democracy Now!*, where he said:

“After 9/11, all the wraps came off for NSA, and ... between the White House and NSA and CIA, they decided to eliminate protections on U.S. citizens and collect on domestically from [AT&T] ... probably on average, about 320 million records of communications of a U.S. citizen to a U.S. citizen inside this country ...

“At that point, I knew I could not stay, because it was a violation of the constitutional rights of everybody in the country. Plus it violated ... all the laws covering federal communications governing telecoms.”

Another former NSA official became a whistleblower. In a *Democracy now!* interview, Thomas Drake said:

“The critical thing that I discovered was not just the massive fraud, waste and abuse [he made public], but also the fact that the NSA had chosen to ignore ... the prime direc-

tive of the NSA. It was the first amendment at NSA, which is, you do not spy on Americans.”

After the Supreme Court decision closed the door to any legal challenge to all these executive orders and laws, Hedges, one of the plaintiffs, wrote that the decision is “one that has become routine in a court system that in [‘national security’ cases] writes lengthy opinions about why the courts cannot defend the rule of law.”

Jaffer concurred, saying:

“There is a broader pattern here in which the courts are abdicating their role under our constitutional system. They are supposed to be ensuring that the government’s national security policies are consistent with the Constitution.

“Instead what’s happening is many of these challenges are being thrown out at the threshold [before ruling on the constitutionality of them]. There are different reasons. Sometimes it’s standing. Sometimes it’s state secrets. Sometimes it’s immunity.

“But the common thread is that all of these cases are being thrown out even before the courts reach the merits.”

I would add, no matter what the courts rule, if the powers-that-be have the capability to spy on everyone, and they have those big banks of super-computers that can check on who knows how many millions of communications-per-second, they will do so, whether allowed by law or not.

Barry Sheppard was a long-time leader of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International. He recounts his experience in the SWP in a two-volume book, The Party—the Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988, available from Resistance Books.

—Green Left, March 4, 2013

<http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/53507>

Gun ‘Background Check’ on Pentagon

How to Curb Mass Gun Violence

BY NORMAN SOLOMON

Stringent “background checks” are central to many proposals for curbing gun violence. The following is a background check on the nation’s largest buyer of firearms:

The applicant, the U.S. Pentagon, seeks to purchase a wide variety of firearms in vast quantities. This background check has determined that the applicant has a long history of assisting individuals, organizations and governments prone to gun violence.

The Pentagon has often served as an active accomplice or direct perpetrator of killings on a mass scale. During the last 50 years, the applicant has directly inflicted large-scale death and injuries in numerous countries, among them the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Grenada, Panama, Kosovo, Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan (partial list). Resulting fatalities are estimated to have been more than five million people.

For purposes of this background check, special attention has been necessarily focused on the scope of firearms currently sought by the Pentagon. They include numerous types of semi-automatic and fully automatic rifles as well as many other assault weapons. Continuing purchases by the applicant include drones and cruise missiles along with the latest models of compatible projectiles and matching explosives.

Notable on Pentagon’s shopping list is the Massive Ordnance Penetrator. This “bunker buster” weapon—with a weight of 30,000 pounds, set for delivery by a B-2 stealth bomber—is for prospective use in Iran.

While considering the likely outcomes of authorizing Pentagon to purchase such large-scale assault weapons, past lethal recklessness should be

viewed in context of present-day mindset. A meaningful background check must include a current psychological profile.

Despite the abundant evidence of massive carnage made possible by past Pentagon acquisitions of firearms and other weapons, the applicant is unrepentant. This indicates that the applicant is sociopathic—unwilling to acknowledge, let alone express any semblance of remorse for pain and suffering inflicted on human beings.

The unrepentant character of Pentagon is reflected in continued use of the alias “Department of Defense.” This background check strongly indicates the prevalence of a highly functional yet psychically numbed institutional personality disorder, with reflexive denial and perennial insistence on claiming victim status even while victimizing others.

In addition, Pentagon has used guns of all types to fire on countless civilians including young people. The ongoing threat to children posed by weapons in the hands of the applicant, therefore, is grave.

Grim evidence emerged with the unauthorized release of the “Collateral Murder” video three years ago by *WikiLeaks*. That video, filmed in 2007 in the district of New Baghdad, showed a callous disregard for human life as 30 mm cannon fire from Apache helicopters caused the deaths of nearly a dozen Iraqi adults while wounding two children.

In a deeply sociopathic mode, Pentagon—rather than expressing remorse or taking action to prevent such tragedies in the future—has sought retribution against those shedding light on many of such terrible actions. Pentagon has subjected whis-

tleblower Bradley Manning to protracted inhumane treatment and relentless prosecution. By sharp contrast, in the last few days alone, tens of thousands of people have expressed their admiration, love and support by signing an online letter to thank Bradley Manning¹.

Meanwhile, Pentagon is seeking approvals for items ranging from new firearms to F-35 jet fighters, recently dubbed by *Time* magazine “the costliest weapons program in human history.”

Even a cursory background check on the applicant must conclude that augmenting Pentagon’s vast stockpile of guns and other weapons would be unconscionable.

If background checks are to be a meaningful tool for curbing gun violence, they must apply to individuals and institutions alike, without fear or favor.

Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. He writes the Political Culture 2013 column.

—counterpunch.org, March 7, 2013

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/03/07/gun-background-check-on-pentagon/>

¹ http://act.rootsaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=7433

The Corporate Takeover of Education

City College of San Francisco in the bull’s-eye

BY LUMA NICHOL

The assault on City College of San Francisco (CCSF) seemed to come out of the blue. Widely known for its innovative instruction, this community college had never received a sanction. Last July it was graded “F” by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and given until March 15 to correct supposed defects or face closure. With Board of Trustees approval, the Interim Chancellor took a wrecking ball to CCSF — in the name of “austerity.”

It turns out that destroying CCSF didn’t come out of the blue after all. It is a stunning example of a nationwide strategy to overthrow public education, conceived in the highest halls of private and public power.

The loss of CCSF would do great harm to the people of color, immigrants, and working-class students for whom it is a lifeline.

From boardrooms to classrooms

The U.S. community college system enrolls 6 million in public schools that have open admissions and affordable tuitions. In the past five years, mega-foundations of wealthy corporations have spent billions to privatize this system. Among the biggest spenders are Microsoft’s Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walmart’s Walton Family Foundation, and Lumina Foundation, formed from the student loan profits of Sallie Mae.

They want graduates with “labor market value” so that the U.S. can

“compete successfully in the global economy.”

They want schools to eliminate all but core classes, shorten the time to earn degrees, and boost technology for assessing performance. Part-time and non-degree students are becoming an endangered species. At CCSF class offerings are being limited, and wom-

en’s studies, ethnic studies, childcare centers, and art studios are on the chopping block.

Shrinking class offerings feed a rising industry of schools for profit, distance learning, and Mass Open Online Courses (MOOCS), which

are free web courses financed by entrepreneurs who decide the curriculum.

The profiteers intend to run schools like factories, super-sizing administration, and cutting workers’ benefits, pay and pension contributions. This can only be achieved by busting unions. At CCSF, the Special Trustee in charge of enforcing austerity acknowledged that union opposition is a significant barrier to management’s reform plan.

Profits from the poor

The foundations virtuously claim they care about low-income and minority students realizing “their full potential.” They lie. Unequal access to education because of mounting racism and poverty is a major social disease in this country. Foundations are using sham concern for students of color to mask their grab for profits. Like the predatory bankers who target lower income home-buyers, education foun-

It is a stunning example of a nationwide strategy to overthrow public education, conceived in the highest halls of private and public power.

dations take aim at the same strata, and turn a tidy profit by forever dashing hard-working people's hopes of advancing.

Huge profits come from student loans

Today, most CCSF students get grants, but these are becoming scarce. When forced to enroll fulltime because of degree time limits, many will have to take out a loan. Student debt is at epic proportions. A ball and chain for under-employed and jobless students, it means major money to the banks and the U.S. government.

Public education in cross-hairs

Business interests are hijacking higher-ed policy. And the government is in on it.

President Obama's 2009 American Graduation Initiative for community colleges is drawn directly from the corporate playbook. The plan includes such privatizing measures as partnering with industries and for-profit schools, transferring loans to private lenders, and funding based on student progress. So clearly, the Democrats don't plan to save public education.

The Gates Foundation's "Postsecondary Success Initiative" influenced the new "Student Success Initiative" developed last year by the California Board of Governors for Community Colleges and then adopted by the state Legislature. The attacks on CCSF by the ACCJC are lifted from this initiative.

Government and big business personnel collaborate in making and enforcing policy, as exemplified by the California accrediting commission. A private commission, ACCJC is autho-

rized by the U.S. Department of Education, and is under pressure from it, to impose stricter accreditation standards. Its parent organization, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, received \$1.5 million from Lumina in 2011.

This colossal, nationwide, corporate-designed shift in policy gets little public exposure. The media, for example, largely avoids the story. Except for one, belated article in February, the *San Francisco Chronicle* has issued a barrage of one-sided articles depicting CCSF as a basket case. Such major papers are the naked voice of corporate power masquerading as news. The *Chronicle* is owned by the Hearst Corporation, whose own foundation endows private colleges.

Coming soon to a college near you

This story of austerity-driven privatization is all too familiar. A fiscal crisis triggers investment. If no crisis exists, they create one. But despite \$53 mil-

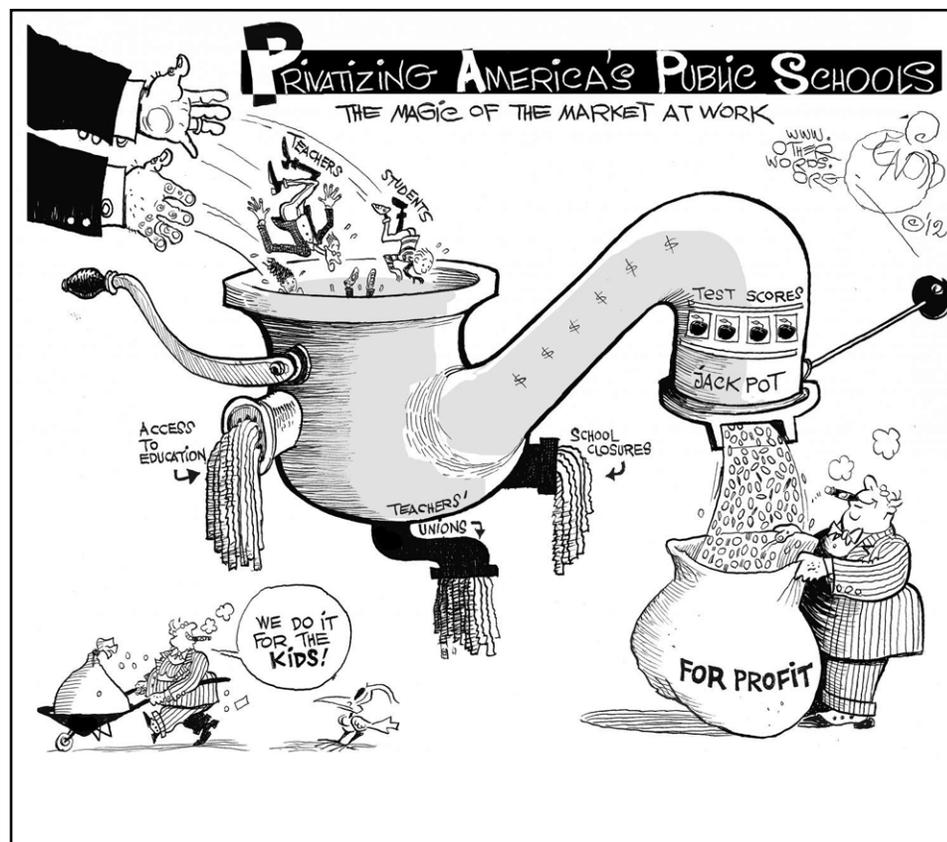
lion in cuts over three years, CCSF steadfastly stuck to its mission of life-long learning and reduced its financial reserves rather than services. So then, a sham accreditation scheme was concocted to pry open CCSF's doors to the looming entrepreneurs.

But, the students, faculty, staff and community supporters are fighting back. The Save City College Campus/Community Coalition's first meeting had over 350 attendees. Only a militant stance against privatization will rescue this vital public resource, and source of union jobs.

Success depends, in part, on allying with others battling privatization and in calling for taxation of the notorious one percent. The wealth exists. It's a question of priorities, as voiced in demands like, "No to wars and prisons! Money for education!"

—Freedom Socialist Party, April 2013

<http://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/2120>



Profiting From Human Misery

BY CHRIS HEDGES

Marela, an undocumented immigrant in her 40s, stood outside the Elizabeth Detention Center in Elizabeth, N.J., on a chilly afternoon last week. She was there with a group of protesters who appear at the facility's gates every year on Ash Wednesday to decry the nation's immigration policy and conditions inside the center. She was there, she said, because of her friend Evelyn Obey.

Obey, 40, a Guatemalan and the single mother of a 12-year-old and a 6-year-old, was picked up in an immigration raid as she and nine other undocumented workers walked out of an office building they cleaned in Newark, N.J. Her two children instantly lost their only parent. She languished in detention. Another family took in the children, who never saw their mother again. Obey died in jail in 2010 from, according to the sign Villar had hung on her neck, "pulmonary thromboembolism, chronic bronchiolitis and emphysema and remote cardiac Ischemic Damage."

"She called me two days after she was seized," Marela told me in Spanish. "She was hysterical. She was crying. She was worried about her children. We could not visit her because we do not have legal documents. We helped her get a lawyer. Then we heard she was sick. Then we heard she died. She was buried in an unmarked grave. We did not go to her burial. We were too scared of being seized and detained."

The rally—about four dozen people, most from immigrant rights groups and local churches—was a flicker of consciousness in a nation that has yet to fully confront the totalitarian corporate forces arrayed against it. Several protesters in orange jumpsuits like those worn by inmates held signs reading: "I Want My Family Together,"

"No Human Being is Illegal," and "Education not Deportation."

"The people who run that prison make money off of human misery," said Diana Mejia, 47, an immigrant from Colombia who now has legal status, gesturing toward the old warehouse that now serves as the detention facility. As she spoke, a Catholic Worker band called the Filthy Rotten System belted out a protest song. A low-flying passenger jet, its red, green and white underbelly lights blinking in the night sky, rumbled overhead. Clergy walking amid the crowd marked the foreheads of participants with ashes to commemorate Ash Wednesday.

**"The terrible secret is
that immigration
detention has become a
very profitable business
for companies and
county governments."**

"Repentance is more than merely being sorry," the Rev. Joyce Antila Phipps, the executive director of Casa de Esperanza, a community organization working with immigrants, told the gathering. "It is an act of turning around and then moving forward to make change."

The majority of those we incarcerate in this country—and we incarcerate a quarter of the world's prison population—have never committed a violent crime. Eleven million undocumented immigrants face the possibility of imprisonment and deportation.

President Barack Obama, outpacing George W. Bush, has deported more than 400,000 people since he took office. Families, once someone is seized, detained and deported, are thrown into crisis. Children come home from school and find they have lost their mothers or fathers. The small incomes that once sustained them are snuffed out. Those who remain behind often become destitute.

But human beings matter little in the corporate state. We myopically serve the rapacious appetites of those dedicated to exploitation and maximizing profit. And our corporate masters view prisons—as they do education, health care and war—as a business. The 320-bed Elizabeth Detention Center, which houses only men, is run by one of the largest operators and owners of for-profit prisons in the country, Corrections Corporation of America. CCA, traded on the New York Stock Exchange, has annual revenues in excess of \$1.7 billion. An average of 81,384 inmates are in its facilities on any one day. This is a greater number, the American Civil Liberties Union points out in a 2011 report, "Banking on Bondage: Private Prisons and Mass Incarceration," than that held by the states of New York and New Jersey combined.

The for-profit prisons and their lobbyists in Washington and state capitals have successfully blocked immigration reform, have prevented a challenge to our draconian drug laws and are pushing through tougher detention policies. Locking up more and more human beings is the bedrock of the industry's profits. These corporations are the engines behind the explosion of our prison system. They are the reason we have spent \$300 billion on new prisons since 1980. They are also the reason serious reform is impossible.

The United States, from 1970 to 2005, increased its prison population by about 700 percent, according to statistics gathered by the ACLU. The federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, the ACLU report notes, says that for-profit companies presently control about 18 percent of federal prisoners and 6.7 percent of all state prisoners. Private prisons account for nearly all of the new prisons built between 2000 and 2005. And nearly half of all immigrants detained by the federal government are shipped to for-profit prisons, according to Detention Watch Network.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which imprisons about 400,000 undocumented people a year, has an annual budget of more than \$5 billion. ICE is planning to expand its operations by establishing several mega-detention centers, most run by private corporations, in states such as New Jersey, Texas, Florida, California and Illinois. Many of these private contractors are, not surprisingly, large campaign donors to “law and order” politicians including New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.

In CCA’s annual report to the Securities and Exchange Commission for 2011, cited by the ACLU, the prison company bluntly states its opposition to prison reform. “The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices or through the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by criminal laws,” it declares. CCA goes on to warn that “any changes with respect to drugs and controlled substances or illegal immigration” could “potentially [reduce] demand for correctional facilities,” as would “mak[ing] more inmates eligible for early release based on good behavior,” the adoption of “sentencing alternatives [that] ... could put some offenders on probation” and “reductions in crime rates.”

CCA in 2011 gave \$710,300 in political contributions to candidates for federal or state office, political parties and 527 groups (PACs and super PACs), the ACLU reported. The corporation also spent \$1.07 million lobbying federal officials along with undisclosed funds to lobby state officials, according to the ACLU. CCA, through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), lobbies legislators to impose harsher detention laws at the state and federal levels. The ALEC helped draft Arizona’s draconian anti-immigrant law SB 1070.

A March 2012 CCA investor presentation prospectus, quoted by the ACLU, tells potential investors that incarceration “creates predictable revenue streams.” The document cites demographic trends that the company says will continue to expand profits. These positive investment trends include, the prospectus reads, “high recidivism”—“about 45 percent of individuals released from prison in 1999 and more than 43 percent released from prison in 2004 were returned to prison within three years.” The prospectus invites investments by noting that one in every 100 U.S. adults is currently in prison or jail. And because the U.S. population is projected to grow by approximately 18.6 million from 2012 to 2017, “prison populations would grow by about 80,400 between 2012 and 2017, or by more than 13,000 additional per year, on average,” the CCA document says.

The two largest private prison companies in 2010 received nearly \$3 billion in revenue. The senior executives, according to the ACLU report, each received annual compensation packages worth well over \$3 million. The for-profit prisons can charge the government up to \$200 a day to house an inmate; they pay detention officers as little as \$10 an hour.

“Within 30 miles of this place, there are at least four other facilities where

immigrants are detained: Essex, Monmouth, Delaney Hall and Hudson, which has the distinction of being named one of the 10 worst detention facilities in the country,” Phipps, who is an immigration attorney as well as a minister, told the gathering in front of the Elizabeth Detention Center. “The terrible secret is that immigration detention has become a very profitable business for companies and county governments.”

“More than two-thirds of immigrants are detained in so-called contract facilities owned by private companies, such as this one and Delaney Hall,” she went on. “The rise of the prison industrial complex has gone hand in hand with the aggrandizing forces of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, which, by the way, has filed suit against the very government it is supposed to be working for because they were told to exercise prosecutorial discretion in their detention practices.”

There is an immigration court inside the Elizabeth facility, although the roar of the planes lifting off from the nearby Newark Airport forces those in the court to remain silent every three or four minutes until the sound subsides. Most of those brought before the court have no legal representation and are railroaded through the system and deported. Detainees, although most have no criminal record beyond illegal entry into the United States, wear orange jumpsuits and frequently are handcuffed. They do not have adequate health care. There are now some 5,000 children in foster care because their parents have been detained or deported, according to the Applied Research Center’s report “Shattered Families.” The report estimates that this number will rise to 15,000 within five years.

“I am in family court once every six to eight weeks representing some mother who is surrendering custody of

her child to somebody else because she does not want to take that child back to the poverty of Guatemala, Honduras or El Salvador,” Phipps said when we spoke after the rally. “She has no option. She does not want her child to live in the same poverty she grew up in. It is heartbreaking.”

We have abandoned the common good. We have been stripped of our rights and voice. Corporations write our laws and determine how we structure our society. We have all become victims. There are no politicians or institutions, no political parties or courts, that are independent enough or strong enough to resist the corporate onslaught. Greater and greater numbers of human beings will be consumed. The poor, the vulnerable, the undocumented, the weak, the elderly, the sick, the children will go first. And those of us watching helplessly outside the gates will go next.

—*Common Dreams*, February 18, 2013

<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/02/18>

21st-Century Slavery Widespread In America

The abuses of the H-2B visa program are mind-boggling.

BY STEVEN ROSENFELD

A 21st-century version of slavery—captive labor—is rampant at the bottom of the U.S. economy, and Washington politicians and business lobbies want to keep it that way, or even expand it as part of the immigration reform talks now in Congress.

Under a system of “legalized slavery,” foreign workers are routinely thrown in massive debt, cheated out of wages, housed in squalid shacks, held captive by brokers and businesses that seize passports, Social Security cards and return tickets, denied healthcare, rented to other employers (including the military), and sexually harassed and threatened with firing and deportation if they complain, according to two detailed reports by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the National Guestworker Alliance (NGA). The reports are based on sworn testimony gathered for lawsuits.

The H-2B visa program that brought 83,000 foreign guestworkers to the U.S. in 2011 for non-farm work has become a stalking ground for some of the worst abuses in American capitalism, according to recent reports by anti-poverty law groups. These reports describe in excruciating detail how predatory capitalists in many manual labor-based industries (supplying national brands like Walmart) lure and prey upon foreigners whose jobs average less than \$10 an hour with little regard for human rights, labor law or legal consequence.

“We called it modern-day slavery,” said Daniel Contreras, who borrowed \$3,000 to come from Peru and whose story is told in the Guestworker Alliance report. He was one of 300 foreigners brought to New Orleans by a hotel chain after Hurricane Katrina. “Instead of hiring workers from the

displaced and jobless African-American community, he sent recruiters to hire us. At around \$6 an hour, we were cheaper. As temporary workers, we were more exploitable. We were hostage to debt in our home countries. We were terrified of deportation. And we were bound to [owner Patrick] Quinn and could not work for anyone else. We were Patrick Quinn’s captive workforce.”

“I was so devastated by our situation. I wanted to go home but couldn’t because I had no money,” said Julia, who paid \$1,500 to come to the U.S. in 2009 from Jamacia to work as a housekeeper in Florida. “After nearly one month of working 40 hours or more a week cleaning hotel rooms, Julia and her coworkers had not received a single paycheck,” SPLC reported. Julia said, “I came to the United States to work and so I could help my family and save to go back to school. I had never been treated so badly before, and I felt like there was nothing I could do about it.”

Under the H-2B visa program, the foreigners are trapped. They’re not allowed to work for anyone else. “Unlike U.S. citizens, guestworkers do not enjoy the most fundamental protection of a competitive job market—the ability to change jobs if they are mistreated,” SPLC said. “They are bound to the employers who ‘import’ them. If guestworkers complain about abuses, they face deportation, blacklisting or other retaliation.”

“When the supervisor would see that a person was ready to leave the job because the pay was so bad, he would take our papers from us,” Otto Rafael Boton-Gonzalez, a forestry worker from Guatemala told the SPLC. “He would rip up our visa and say, ‘You don’t want to work? Get out of here

then. You don't want to work? Right now I will call immigration to take your papers and deport you.”

These experiences are the tip of an economic iceberg that exists in many states and industries. The abused H-2B guestworkers in the report include housekeepers and desk clerks in hotels along the Gulf of Mexico, welders and pipefitters in Gulf shipyards, strawberry and sugar cane harvesters, environmental cleanup workers, garden and forest workers and even carnival employees.

More traditional agricultural guestworkers, who come under H-2A visas, have far more legal protections and are better paid. They must be paid for at least 75 percent of their contracts, whereas non-farm H-2B workers have no such guarantee. In fact, some H-2B contracts are little more than fabrications to obtain the legally required paperwork. The foreigners are “rented” by their visa sponsors to other businesses, which in turn deny knowledge of abusive treatment.

“We heard stories—some much worse than our own—of other guestworkers who were being stripped of their dignity by employers,” Contreras said. “Employers were holding workers captive in labor camps, confiscating their passports, subjecting them to surveillance, leasing workers for a profit in violation of morality and the law, and trafficking workers into conditions of imprisonment.”

Underbelly of the American economy

These accounts are not isolated incidents. Last June, just weeks before Congress blocked the U.S. Department of Labor from implementing new H-2B rules that were designed to stop many of these abuses, the Worker's Rights Consortium issued a damning report about abuses by a Louisiana seafood processor that supplied Walmart. The National Guestworker Alliance then reported that 12 other firms supplying

Walmart with catfish, crawfish, sweet onions, flowers, herbs, vegetables, Cajun food, strawberries, rice and lettuce not only had more than 600 federal safety violations, but were abusing their guestworkers. That treatment included:

- Restriction of movement, such as: confiscating passports, visas, and/or ID documents; constantly accompanying the victim; insisting on answering questions on behalf of the victim, and/or translating all conversations; isolating the victim by not disclosing her or her location or address; requiring the victim to live and work in the same location.
- Harmful living conditions, such as: restricting access to food and appropriate clothing; forbidding access to medical care; not allowing time off or sufficient time to sleep.
- Harmful working conditions, such as: in exchange for work opportunity, charging a large fee that is difficult or impossible to pay off; requiring unusually long work hours with few or no breaks; restricting days off; providing little to no pay or irregular pay.

These Walmart suppliers were from mid-sized companies across America: Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, Utah, Florida, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, Arkansas, Alabama and South Carolina. When the abuses reached the *New York Times*, Walmart's spokesman blamed sub-contractors, saying the giant corporation bore no responsibility, and attacked guestworker advocates as pro-labor, union-funded groups that have “little to do with solving real issues.”

The multiple accounts by the guestworker advocates present a seemingly bottomless pit of bad behavior by businesses whose only priority seems to be making money—and not looking for American citizens to do the same work at a higher, living wage. Needless to

say, the circumstances that women guestworkers face can be even worse, due to sexual harassment and assaults. They are also often paid less than men for doing the same work.

Sexual harassment and violence is real, the advocates say. SPLC cites a California-based federal government attorney who said that a generation ago many women told him that they “had to have sex with their supervisors to get or keep jobs.” While there have been efforts by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and some employers to educate guestworkers about sexual harassment, a 2010 SPLC report said “many, however, were not even familiar with the concept... Indeed, many were not aware of their rights and seemed to regard incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence as yet another unpleasant aspect of their job that they had but no choice to endure.”

This litany of abuse is why guestworker advocates are saying the H-2 visa program should not become a model for anything if the Congress enacts immigration reform. “It is virtually impossible to create a guestworker program for low-wage workers that does not involve systemic abuse,” SPLC's report said. “The H-2 guestworker program should not be expanded in the name of immigration reform and should not be a model for the future flow of workers to this country... It should be completely overhauled.”

“Although bad bosses exist, guestworkers and advocates are very clear the problem is not a few bad apples—the problem is the entire orchard is rotten,” the Guestworker Alliance said. “The structure of the visa outlines the elements of worker exploitation, creating the structure and incentivizing exploitive behavior on the part of employers. Guestworkers are clear that recruiters, subcontractors, employers and even the local police have a stake in

the economic system which turns guestworkers into exploitable and disposable machines to be used, abused, and cast aside through deportation when no longer wanted or needed.”

However, the businesses whose profit margins rely on importing and abusing low-wage workers have powerful allies in Congress. After the Department of Labor spent a year on writing rules to stop some of the worst abuses, trade associations went to court last spring and temporarily blocked the new 2012 rules from taking effect. Then last July Congress stripped Department of Labor funds to implement the rules. Two Democratic senators, Maryland’s Barbara Mikulski and Louisiana’s Mary Landrieu, led that effort.

These industries and their congressional patrons want to “maintain the H-2B program as a source of cheap, unregulated labor,” the SPLC said. It noted that under the federal laws that remain in effect, the non-farmworker visa holders—unlike agricultural workers with H-2A visas—are barred from seeking help from government legal aid offices, and have no minimum wage guarantees. “Employers, in a series of lawsuits, have asserted that the DOL (Department of Labor) has no authority ‘to regulate employers’ use of the H-2B program at all,” SPLC said.

But what especially worries guestworker advocates now is that Congress is being lobbied by business interests to expand the H-2B program as part of any immigration reform.

“You have many businesses saying that an expansion of guestworker programs is a big deal—we don’t know what that will mean,” said Jennifer Rosenbaum, legal director of New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice. “Will it mean a raising of the cap with the number of H-2B visas? We know that is what businesses want. That’s what makes this very important to think about.”

“This is not a small business problem—despite what you hear from Senators Mikulski and Landrieu,” she continued. “There is a business model that is welcomed by multi-national corporations where the supply chain is dependent on captive labor.”

Why they come, why they can’t leave

The reason foreign workers come to the U.S. through the legal visa program, where their first interaction with the federal government is an interview at an American Embassy, is because they cannot get decent-paying work at home. The minimum wage in Mexico, for example, where most H-2B workers are from, is \$5 a day or less.

“The vast majority of H-2B guestworkers are basically good people who are in the United States to work and save money to improve the lives of their families at home,” wrote David Seminara, an ex-U.S. Foreign Service officer who opposes the H-2B program because he believes Americans would take these jobs if employers paid living wages. “An American in a lower-wage hourly job knows that his income puts him in the low end of the socio-economic status spectrum; whereas the wages many H-2B workers earn puts them near the top of the wage-earning spectrum in their home countries, and they can return home as conquering heroes, highly valued in their extended families and wider communities, and often prized as prime marriage candidates.”

Seminara’s contention may well be true, but the thousands of dollars many H-2B workers have to borrow at home at rapacious interest rates to cover their costs of coming here—to recruiters, for paperwork, for travel—puts almost unbearable pressure on them not to report employer abuses.

Most eyebrow-raising, according to the SPLC report, is that job seekers also have to put up collateral, such as the deed to their homes.

“This tactic is enormously effective at suppressing complaints about pay, working conditions or housing,” SPLC said. “U.S.-based companies deny knowledge of the abuse, but there is little doubt that they derive substantial benefit from their agents’ actions. It is almost inconceivable that a worker would complain in any substantive way while a company agent holds the deed to the home where his wife and children reside.”

“Guestworkers don’t report abuse because they are afraid that they will lose everything and be deported if they come forward,” Hemant Khuttan, a 26-year-old from India, told the Guestworker Alliance. “They have huge debts to get the visa. If they go back, they might have to work their whole life to pay off these debts.” Serman Morales, a 35-year-old from Bolivia, said, “Yes, we ought to report our problems to the U.S. government, but the fear of losing everything is greater than our rights.”

“The focus on retaliation is really critical,” said Rosenbaum. “They face retaliation from recruiters and employers. You can be blacklisted from ever coming back. You can be jailed and deported. You can have your family threatened in Mexico.”

Institutional exploitation

Capitalism has always had bosses and owners who exploit workers. But the H-2B program, which brought 83,152 foreigners to the U.S. in 2011, invites lies and abuse from the start of the visa application process. On one hand, there is an endless supply of foreign workers willing to leave their homes to try to earn more money for themselves or families. And on the other hand, there are many American businesses that don’t want to hire American citizens because they would have to pay them higher wages.

The federal government has many visa programs to help American businesses. The best-known is one that

brings in software engineers and computer scientists to the technology field. There also have been farmworker visa programs since the 1940s, which led to the farmworker rights movement of the 1960s led by Cesar Chavez.

The H-2B program is at the bottom of the guestworker spectrum. It was designed to help non-farm businesses find temporary workers for jobs that could not be filled locally. To apply, the businesses have to certify to the Department of Labor that they cannot fill the jobs with citizens. They must then clear a bureaucratic process where they are given permission to bring in a certain number of workers. Workers are supposed to be given contracts specifying the work and paid prevailing wages, but sponsors can also charge workers for housing and other work-related costs.

The Department of Labor reported in 2011, its most recent statistics, that the fields seeking the most H-2B visas were industrial and commercial groundskeepers, forest workers, landscape laborers, housekeepers and cleaners, amusement park workers, landscape gardeners and specialists, animal caretakers, production helpers and meat trimmers. The top ten states with the most H-2B visa workers were Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland, Virginia, Colorado, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Massachusetts and Mississippi.

The businesses that seek H-2B workers usually are not mom-and-pop operations trying to hire seasonal employees, because those businesses usually cannot afford to hire lawyers and recruiters, Seminara said. His scathing 2010 report for the Center for Immigration Studies said, “most of the businesses filing H-2B petitions for foreign workers are ‘body shops’ that have no actual ‘seasonal or temporary’ need for labor.” Instead, they are medium-size or bigger businesses that want labor for less than they’d pay Americans.

His list of H-2B visa applicants included high-end hotels, such as the Four Seasons in Jackson Hole, the Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina, the Ritz Carlton in New Orleans, and Nantucket Island Resorts.

The businesses seeking “temporary workers” must certify to the Department of Labor that they cannot find Americans for these jobs. Seminara said that many do that by placing ads in low-circulation publications where Americans looking for work won’t see them. Many businesses seeking hundreds of H-2B guestworkers were in regions with double-digit unemployment rates at the height of the recession, his report noted.

The workers are supposed to be paid the local prevailing wage and housed—although they can be charged for housing. What often ends up happening is a job is promised on a contract, but upon arrival that job does not exist. Instead, a lower-wage job is offered or sometimes the guestworker has to wait weeks for it to start. In the meantime, they are charged above-market rates for housing and other costs, such as work supplies. If they languish with no work and their visas expire, they can be charged more than \$1,000 by sponsors and job brokers for an extension. There also have been situations where they were not paid at all or were not paid for overtime. These variables collectively create a vicious cycle where guestworkers will almost never pay off their debt.

One of the most egregious examples concerned a Mississippi shipbuilding company, Signal International. The company saw a bonanza after Hurricane Katrina and hired job brokers in Mississippi and Mumbai, India, to provide 590 Indian welders. The Mumbai firm “collected between \$11,000 and \$18,000, and sometimes more, from each person recruited to work for Signal,” SPLC reported. These fees are equal to two to three year’s sal-

ary for welding in India. “The guestworkers were housed on Signal’s work site in guarded labor camps, housed in cramped 24-by-36 foot trailers, each holding 24 men who shared two toilets. Signal deducted \$1,050 per month from each worker’s paycheck for room and board, further heightening the workers’ stress over whether they could afford to service their debts. Worse yet, Signal eventually announced that it would not apply for the permanent residency visas the workers had been promised.”

The nightmare at Signal did not end there, SPLC said. Some workers spoke up and demanded better treatment. The company retaliated by pulling four of the most outspoken Indians out of line before work with the intention of setting an example by deporting them. Federal immigration officers told Signal how to do this, SPLC said. “Signal’s goal was to make an example of these workers so that guestworkers understood they were not to make trouble,” SPLC said. “The plan was disrupted only when one of the rounded-up workers attempted suicide, and the police responded to the ensuing uproar.”

But the Signal case was not unique. Moises Moreira Santos was a welder from Brazil who came on a H-2B visa to work for another Mississippi firm, Five Star Contractors LLC. “When I arrived, I was shocked. We were forced to live in storage containers on a concrete lot—and were charged \$75 a week for it. And there was no work,” he told the Guestworkers Alliance. “We learned that Five Star was a job contractor that rented workers out to shipyards in the area. I asked when would I start working, and the company said it would be soon. Every week they say, ‘You will start work soon,’ but we never did. What could we do? We just waited. Before I came to the United States, I had to borrow about \$7,000 from a loan office to pay all of the recruitment and travel costs. As time

passed, my debt grew to almost \$10,000.”

Another example concerned the Arkansas-based company, Candy Brand. SPLC reported that recruiters in Mexico had taken their workers’ passports and would not give them back unless they paid an additional \$1,000. Once in Arkansas, “their U.S. employer failed to reimburse the workers for their travel and visa expenses and did not pay them overtime or the applicable wage in accordance with the law.”

In some of these cases, lawsuits brought by SPLC and other civil rights groups won legal settlements exceeding \$1 million. But in the Candy Brand case, the company changed its name; the Department of Labor continued to certify the company’s visa requests, and “SLPC clients who still work at the farm report that the company continues to violate wage and hours laws.”

More at stake than guestworkers

The guestworker advocates say the

stakes are much greater than the appalling conditions faced by many foreigners in the underbelly of the U.S. economy. The way employees are treated at the bottom of the economic ladder affects citizens and non-citizens alike.

This month’s strike by foreign students working at McDonalds over pay, job conditions and housing underscores how many American businesses build up their balance sheets by treating employees poorly. Last year, foreign exchange students in a State Department exchange program walked off the job at a Hershey’s chocolate plant in Pennsylvania for much the same reasons. They were paid less than half of what was previously earned by Hershey’s unionized employees for the same work.

The Obama administration’s immigration reform blueprint issued last year is mostly a pro-business proposal, although it briefly mentions increasing guestworker “protections” and increasing “enforcement.” While Obama’s Labor Department has been stopped

from enacting new H-2B rules for employers, guestworker advocates say their best hope for reforming the system and minimizing future abuses might lie in reminding Congress that the 13th Amendment that ended slavery also included a ban on “involuntary servitude.”

Moreover, landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings, such as 1944’s *Pollack v. Williams*, held, “The undoubted aim of the Thirteenth Amendment, as implemented by the Anti-peonage Act, was not merely to end slavery, but to maintain a system of completely free and voluntary labor throughout the United States.”

“Is there a 13th Amendment problem?” asked Rosenbaum, legal director of New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice. “What kind of immigration reform do we need for captive workers?”

Steven Rosenfeld covers democracy issues for AlterNet and is the author of Count My Vote: A Citizen’s Guide to Voting (AlterNet Books, 2008).

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<http://www.alternet.org/immigration/21st-century-version-slavery-widespread-america?akid=10215.229473.qhTMzi&rd=1&src=newsletter812563&t=4>



GMOs Driving Monarch Butterfly Populations to the Brink

By LAUREN MCCAULEY



The migratory population of the monarch butterfly has reached an “ominous” low, researchers in Mexico announced Wednesday.

Scientists are attributing the decline of this essential pollinating population to the ongoing drought and the “explosive” increase in the use of genetically modified crops in the American corn belt.

Released by the Mexican government along with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a recent survey found a 59 percent decrease in the area occupied by monarch colonies wintering in the forests of central Mexico, the *Los Angeles Times* reports.

Because of the difficulty in counting butterflies, scientists rely on measurements of the area that butterflies occupy to estimate their numbers; one hectare may contain as many as 50 million butterflies.

“The report of the dwindling monarch butterfly winter residence in Mexico is ominous,” said leading entomologist Lincoln Brower.

According to Chip Taylor, director of the conservation group Monarch Watch at the University of Kansas, the decline was “hastened” by North America’s ongoing drought and record-breaking heat.

However, the more “alarming” source of decline, according to Taylor and Omar Vidal, head of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in Mexico, is the “explosive increase” in the use of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified soybean and corn crops across America’s farmland which, the *New York Times* reports, has “enabled farmers to wipe out the milkweed,” on which monarch larvae feed almost exclusively.

“The American Midwest’s corn belt is a critical feeding ground for monarchs, which once found a ready source of milkweed growing between the rows of millions of acres of soybean and corn,” they continue. However, as farmers have planted over 120 million acres of crops resistant to the milkweed-killing herbicide glyphosate, the monarchs’ essential food supply is all but destroyed.

“That habitat is virtually gone. We’ve lost well over 120 million acres, and probably closer to 150 million acres,” Mr. Taylor said.

Previously, environmental groups cited logging in Mexico’s forests, the butterfly’s winter habitat, as the primary threat to the population. Since the area was declared a nature reserve in 2000, that is now considered a lesser threat.

“The conservation of the monarch butterfly is a shared responsibility between Mexico, the United States and Canada,” said Vidal. “By protecting the reserves and having practically eliminated large-scale illegal logging, Mexico has done its part. It is now necessary for the United States and Canada to do their part and protect the butterflies’ habitat in their territories.”

Like bees, butterflies provide essential pollinating functions for entire ecosystems.” The fruits, nuts, seeds and foliage that everything else feeds on,” said Taylor. “If we pull the monarchs out of the system, we’re really pulling the rug out from under a whole lot of other species.”

According to *Nature World News*, the monarch butterflies begin life as an egg that hatch into larvae (which feed almost exclusively on the milkweed plant). These larvae become caterpillars and in the fourth stage they become butterflies. Only monarchs born between late summer and early fall make the migration. Even though it takes about four generations of the monarchs to make the incredible journey, each butterfly knows the way and at times, these butterflies have been found to come back to the same tree from where their great grandparents had begun the journey.

“This is one of the world’s great migrations,” said Chip Taylor. “It would be a shame to lose it.”

—*Common Dreams*, March 14, 2013

<http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2013/03/14-3>

Down Is a Dangerous Direction

How the 40-Year “Long Recession” Led to the Great Recession

BY BARBARA GARSON

If you had to date the Great Recession, you might say it started in September 2008 when Lehman Brothers vaporized over a weekend and a massive mortgage-based Ponzi scheme began to go down. By 2008, however, the majority of American workers had already endured a 40-year decline in wages, security, and hope—a Long Recession of their own.

In the 1960s, I met a young man about to be discharged from the Army and then, by happenstance, caught up with him again in each of the next two decades. Though he died two months before the Lehman Brothers collapse, those brief encounters taught me how the Long Recession led directly to our Great Recession.

In the late 1960s, I was working at an antiwar coffee house near an army base from which soldiers shipped out to Vietnam. One gangly young man, recently back from “the Nam,” was particularly handy and would fix our record player or make our old mimeograph machine run more smoothly. He rarely spoke about the war, except to say that his company had stayed stoned the whole time. “Our motto,” he once told me, “was ‘let’s not and say we did.’” Duane had no intention of becoming a professional Vietnam vet like John Kerry when discharged. His plan was to return home to Cleveland and make up for time missed in the civilian counterculture of that era.

I often sat with him during my breaks, enjoying his warmth and his self-aware sense of humor. But thousands of GIs passed through the coffee house and, to be honest, I didn’t really notice when he left.

In the early 1970s, General Motors set up the fastest auto assembly line in the world in Lordstown, Ohio, and

staffed it with workers whose average age was 24. GM’s management hoped that such healthy, inexperienced workers could handle 101 cars-an-hour without balking the way more established autoworkers might. What GM got instead of balkiness was a series of slowdowns and snafus that management labeled systematic “sabotage” until they realized that the word hurt car sales.

I visited Lordstown the week before a strike vote was to be taken, amid national speculation about whether a generation of “hippy autoworkers” could “humanize the assembly line” and so change forever the way America worked. On a guided tour of the plant, I was surprised to spot Duane shooting radios into cars with an air gun. He recognized me and slipped me a note with his phone number.

I called and, later that evening at his home, he offered me a quick summary of life since his discharge: “Remember, you guys gave me a giant banana split the day I ETSed (got out as scheduled.) Well, it’s been downhill since then. I came back to Cleveland, stayed with my dad who was unemployed. Man, was that ever a downer. But I figured things would pick up if I got wheels, so I got a car. But it turned out the car wasn’t human and that was a problem. So I figured, what I need is a girl. But it turned out the girl was human and that was a problem. So I wound up working at GM to pay off the car and the girl.”

And he introduced me to his pregnant wife, of whom he seemed much fonder than his story made it sound. The young couple had no complaints about the pay at GM. Still, Duane planned to move on after his wife had the baby. “I’m staying so we can use the hospital plan.”

And what did he think was next? “Maybe we’ll go live on the land,” he told me. If that didn’t pan out, he said that he’d look for a job someplace less regimented, someplace where he’d get to do something “worthwhile.” To Duane, worthwhile work didn’t necessarily mean launching a space shuttle or curing cancer. It meant getting to see what he’d actually accomplished—like those repairs on our mimeo machine back at the coffee house—instead of performing repetitive snaps, twists, and squirts on cars that moved past him every 36 seconds.

When Duane and his friends talked about quitting well-paying jobs, they weren’t just blowing off steam. In those years, there was enough work around that if a friend moved to Atlanta or there was a band you liked in Cincinnati, you could hitchhike there and find a job in a day or two that would cover your rent and food.

That, of course, made it harder to run a business. GM echoed many other U.S. employers in its complaints about absenteeism and high turnover among young workers. In retrospect, this was probably the moment when many U.S. manufacturers began looking around to see just what could be done about their labor problem. But neither Duane nor I had any premonition of the outsourcing and offshoring that would start the Great Recession decades early for so many working families. For us, it was still a time when jobs abounded and Americans talked not about finding work, but “humanizing” it.

In the mid-1980s, I spoke at a university in Michigan and once again spotted Duane—this time in the audience. After the talk, we chatted and I asked him to come out with the professors who’d sponsored my lecture, but

he had to collect his children from school and drop them off with the babysitter in time to get to his late afternoon shift. His wife, he told me, would pick them up when her day shift ended.

“Complicated logistics!” I said.

“It’s a tighter maneuver than my company in Nam ever pulled off,” he quipped.

In the brief moments we had, Duane filled me in on his work life. He hadn’t gone back to the land, but he no longer worked in the auto industry either. “Too many lay-offs” was his summary of the intervening years. In order to “keep ahead of it,” he’d upgraded and become a skilled machinist. He had, in fact, continued to upgrade his skills to the point where, as he explained, “I program the machines that program the other machinists.” Then he shrugged as if to say: What’re you gonna do?

At that time, computers were just being introduced into machine shops and had the effect of taking planning away from the operators at their benches and centralizing a lot of the thinking about production in a management office or planning department. Duane understood perfectly well that he was “keeping ahead of it” by using his own skills to de-skill others, hence that apologetic shrug.

His wife’s job was being similarly automated. She was a data processor at an insurance company and regularly came home with a headache from staring into the era’s immobile, blinking CRT screens. They had little choice, though. By then, two incomes were needed to maintain anything like a middle-class home.

In the summer of 2008, the phone rang and a man’s voice began to explain to me that he and his sisters were contacting people whose names they had found in their father’s address book to let them know that he had passed away. Duane had died suddenly in Arizona.

He’d moved there a few years earlier to work in a shop that, his son told me, had something to do with industrial lasers (“keeping ahead of it” to the end).

The funeral was scheduled for a weekend and because of Duane’s handiwork, there was plenty of room for out-of-town guests, so his son assured me. In his Arizona home, “Dad built these beautiful built-in sleeping spaces.” His sisters, he mentioned, were toying with the idea of moving to the house because they couldn’t imagine a stranger fully appreciating their father’s work. They were even exploring the employment situation out there. One was then a medical receptionist, the other a delivery truck driver.

**...the average worker’s
productivity rose 25
times more than his or
her pay.**

Two months later, the economy crashed. It wasn’t exactly the moment to give up steady jobs. By then, the Arizona real-estate bubble had fully burst, leaving the house, with all their father’s beautiful handiwork, “underwater.” Even if they could sell it at a reasonable post-crash price, they’d still owe the bank more than \$200,000.

As his inheritance, all Duane had left was that house, a \$15,000 death benefit, and \$6,000 in credit-card debt. His children had no way to keep paying the mortgage, and so, on the advice of a lawyer, they mailed the keys to the bank and walked away.

Of this situation, his son said, “Dad would have made some joke. ‘When I was alive I once stopped you from running away from home, but I taught you to walk away from a home after I was dead.’ Something like that. Only he’d make it come out funny.”

I thought back to the G.I. coffee house and Duane’s quips about his hapless army unit. Yes, were he around, he might indeed have made a joke about a hapless American worker trudging steadily up an incline, who, like his mortgaged house, somehow wound up underwater anyway, and he probably would have made it come out funny, too—sort of.

This is not to say that Duane led either a deprived or a worthless life. His estate might have fallen victim to the economic meltdown of 2008, but he himself had worked steadily at increasingly skilled and perhaps even “worthwhile” jobs. He had raised three children who still admired their father. And he seems to have retained his self-aware but not self-deprecating humor to the end.

On the other hand, here was a workman, part of a two-income family, who had kept ahead of off-shoring, outsourcing, and automation by regularly retraining himself. He worked hard for four decades, yet died with no savings, negative equity in his house, and credit-card debt.

Despite his growing set of skills, Duane’s income seems not to have risen significantly over his lifetime. He was, it seems, always close to the edge. Of course, I can hardly claim to have known him well. Perhaps he squandered his money on secret vices, but the likelihood that his income simply stagnated over four decades certainly fit a national pattern.

Between 1971 and 2007, real hourly wages in the U.S. rose by only four percent. (That’s not four percent a year, but four percent over 36 years!) During those same decades, productivity essentially doubled, increasing by 99 percent. In other words, the average worker’s productivity rose 25 times more than his or her pay.

This was, of course, a bonanza for corporations and for the richest Americans. In 1976, the top one per-

cent of U.S. families held 19 percent of the country's wealth. By 2000, they held 40 percent of it. In those same years, 58 percent of every dollar of income growth went to the top one percent.

There was, however, one small problem: we Americans sell to one another more than 70 percent of what we produce. If the majority of American workers were producing more without earning more, who was going to buy all the stuff?

CEOs and financiers were desperate to answer that question, for during those years of high productivity and low wages, immense profits and "returns" kept accumulating in brokerage accounts and banks. But a bank can't keep its money in the bank. Under the pressure of those swelling piles of capital, the answer they offered to worker-consumers like Duane was: instead of paying you enough to buy what you produce, we'll lend you the money.

First, they loaned for big-ticket items: cars, homes, college educations; then, through credit-cards, for everyday household expenses. As we came to realize after the meltdown of 2008, the ultimate Ponzi scheme of the era would involve bundling and reselling mortgage loans made to people who couldn't afford houses in the first place.

The answer offered to those who had ever less money to spend was: take out more loans. The folly of lending money to people with stagnant or declining wages may seem obvious now, but like many houses of cards it must have looked solid enough to some back then. Still, let's not underestimate our major financiers. On a CNBC program, former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan was asked why no one had seen the mortgage crisis coming and told the bankers, "You know what? This is going to end badly."

Greenspan answered: "It's not that

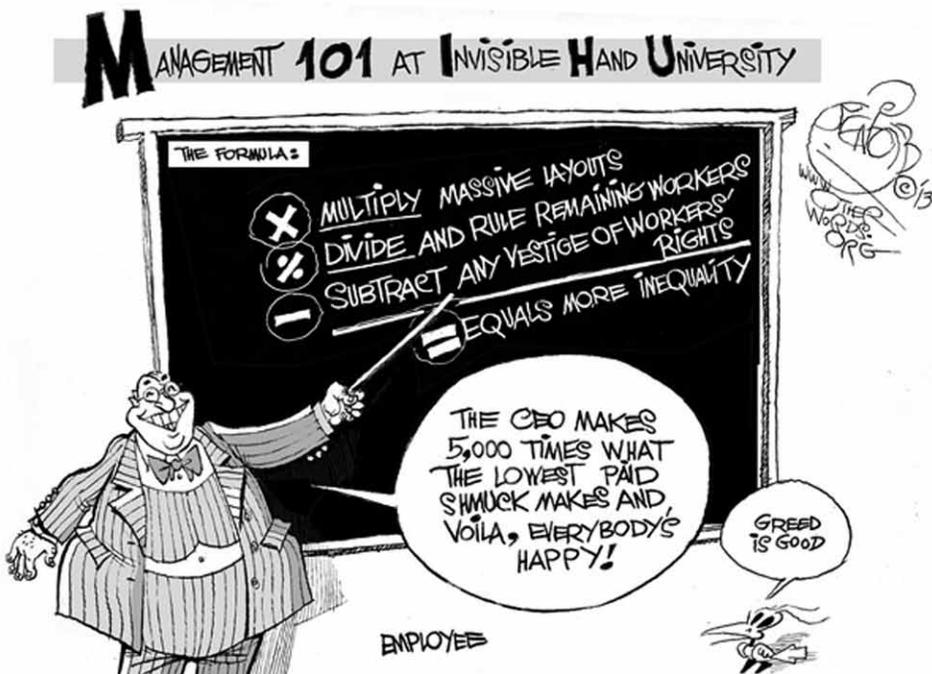
they weren't aware that the risks were there, I mean I spoke to them. It's not that the people were dumb. They knew precisely what was going on. The vast majority of them thought that they knew when to get out."

In fact, creative financial spinning had kept this unbalanced vehicle upright for a remarkably long time. Nonetheless, like any other Ponzi scheme it eventually collapsed, and that's when Duane's long recession turned into the world's Great Recession.

Barbara Garson is the author of a series of books describing American working lives at historical turning points, including All the Livelong Day (1975), The Electronic Sweatshop (1988), and Money Makes the World Go Around (2001). Her new book, just published, is Down the Up Escalator: How the 99 percent Live in the Great Recession (Doubleday).

—TomDispatch.com, April 9, 2013

http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175685/tomgram%3A_barbara_garson%2C_going_underwater_in_the_long_recession/#more



It Can Happen Here

The Confiscation Scheme Planned for U.S. and UK Depositors

BY ELLEN BROWN

Confiscating the customer deposits in Cyprus banks, it seems, was not a one-off, desperate idea of a few Eurozone “troika” officials scrambling to salvage their balance sheets. A joint paper by the U.S. Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Bank of England dated December 10, 2012, shows that these plans have been long in the making; that they originated with the G20 Financial Stability Board in Basel, Switzerland and the result will be to deliver clear title to the banks of depositor funds.

New Zealand has a similar directive, indicating that this isn’t just an emergency measure for troubled Eurozone countries. New Zealand’s Voxy reported on March 19th:

“The National Government [is] pushing a Cyprus-style solution to bank failure in New Zealand which will see small depositors lose some of their savings to fund big bank bailouts...

“Open Bank Resolution (OBR) is Finance Minister Bill English’s favored option dealing with a major bank failure. If a bank fails under OBR, all depositors will have their savings reduced overnight to fund the bank’s bail out.”

Can they do that?

Although few depositors realize it, legally, the bank owns the depositor’s funds as soon as they are put in the bank. Our money becomes the bank’s, and we become unsecured creditors holding IOUs or promises to pay. But until now the bank has been obligated to pay the money back on demand in the form of cash. Under the FDIC-BOE plan, our IOUs will be converted into “bank equity.” The bank will get the money and we will get stock in the bank. With any luck we may be able to

sell the stock to someone else, but when and at what price? Most people keep a deposit account so they can have ready cash to pay the bills.

The 15-page FDIC-BOE document is called “Resolving Globally Active, Systemically Important, Financial Institutions.” It begins by explaining that the 2008 banking crisis has made it clear that some other way besides taxpayer bailouts is needed to maintain “financial stability.” Evidently anticipating that the next financial collapse will be on a grander scale than either the taxpayers or Congress is willing to underwrite, the authors state:

“An efficient path for returning the sound operations of the G-SIFI to the private sector would be provided by exchanging or converting a sufficient amount of the unsecured debt from the original creditors of the failed company (meaning the depositors) into equity (or stock.) In the U.S., the new equity would become capital in one or more newly formed operating entities. In the U.K., the same approach could be used, or the equity could be used to recapitalize the failing financial company itself—thus, the highest layer of surviving bailed-in creditors would become the owners of the resolved firm. In either country, the new equity holders would take on the corresponding risk of being shareholders in a financial institution.”

No exception is indicated for “insured deposits” in the U.S., meaning those under \$250,000, the deposits we thought were protected by FDIC insurance. This can hardly be an oversight, since it is the FDIC that is issuing the directive. The FDIC is an insurance company funded by premiums paid by private banks. The directive is called a “resolution process,” defined elsewhere as a plan that “would be triggered in

the event of the failure of an insurer. ...” The only mention of “insured deposits” is in connection with existing UK legislation, which the FDIC-BOE directive goes on to say is inadequate, implying that it needs to be modified or overridden.

An imminent risk

If our IOUs are converted to bank stock, they will no longer be subject to insurance protection but will be “at risk” and vulnerable to being wiped out, just as the Lehman Brothers shareholders were in 2008. That this dire scenario could actually materialize was underscored by Yves Smith in a March 19th post titled “When You Weren’t Looking, Democrat Bank Stooges Launch Bills to Permit Bailouts, Deregulate Derivatives.” She writes:

“In the U.S., depositors have actually been put in a worse position than Cyprus deposit-holders, at least if they are at the big banks that play in the derivatives casino. The regulators have turned a blind eye as banks use their depositaries to fund derivatives exposures. And as bad as that is, the depositors, unlike their Cypriot confreres, aren’t even senior creditors. Remember Lehman? When the investment bank failed, unsecured creditors (and remember, depositors are unsecured creditors) got eight cents on the dollar. One big reason was that derivatives counterparties require collateral for any exposures, meaning they are secured creditors. The 2005 bankruptcy reforms made derivatives counterparties senior to unsecured lenders.”

One might wonder why the posting of collateral by a derivative counterparty, at some percentage of full exposure, makes the creditor “secured,” while the depositor who puts up 100 cents on the dollar is “unsecured.” But moving on—Smith writes:

“Lehman had only two itty-bitty banking subsidiaries, and to my knowledge, was not gathering retail deposits. But as readers may recall, Bank of America moved most of its derivatives from its Merrill Lynch operation [to] its depository in late 2011.”

Its “depository” is the arm of the bank that takes deposits; and at B of A, that means lots and lots of deposits. The deposits are now subject to being wiped out by a major derivatives loss. How bad could that be? Smith quotes Bloomberg:

“...Bank of America’s holding company...held almost \$75 trillion of derivatives at the end of June. ...

“That compares with JPMorgan’s deposit-taking entity, JPMorgan Chase Bank NA, which contained 99 percent of the New York-based firm’s \$79 trillion of notional derivatives, the OCC data show.”

Seventy-five trillion and \$79 trillion in derivatives! These two mega-banks alone hold more in notional derivatives each than the entire global GDP (at \$70 trillion). The “notional value” of derivatives is not the same as cash at risk, but according to a cross-post on Smith’s site:

By at least one estimate, in 2010 there was a total of \$12 trillion in cash tied up (at risk) in derivatives. ...

Twelve trillion is close to the U.S. GDP. Smith goes on:

“...Remember the effect of the 2005 bankruptcy law revisions: derivatives counterparties are first in line, they get to grab assets first and leave everyone else to scramble for crumbs. ...Lehman failed over a weekend after JP Morgan grabbed collateral.

“But it’s even worse than that. During the savings and loan crisis, the FDIC did not have enough in deposit insurance receipts to pay for the Resolution Trust Corporation wind-down vehicle. It had to get more funding from Congress. This

move paves the way for another TARP-style shakedown of taxpayers, this time to save depositors.”

Perhaps, but Congress has already been burned and is liable to balk a second time. Section 716 of the Dodd-Frank Act specifically prohibits public support for speculative derivatives activities. And in the Eurozone, while the European Stability Mechanism committed Eurozone countries to bail out failed banks, they are apparently having second thoughts there as well. On March 25th, Dutch Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who played a leading role in imposing the deposit confiscation plan on Cyprus, told reporters that it would be the template for any future bank bailouts, and that “the aim is for the ESM never to have to be used.”

That explains the need for the FDIC-BOE resolution. If the anticipated enabling legislation is passed, the FDIC will no longer need to protect depositor funds; it can just confiscate them.

Worse than a tax

An FDIC confiscation of deposits to recapitalize the banks is far different from a simple tax on taxpayers to pay government expenses. The government’s debt is at least arguably the people’s debt, since the government is there to provide services for the people. But when the banks get into trouble with their derivative schemes, they are not serving depositors, who are not getting a cut of the profits. Taking depositor funds is simply theft.

What should be done is to raise FDIC insurance premiums and make the banks pay to keep their depositors whole, but premiums are already high; and the FDIC, like other government regulatory agencies, is subject to regulatory capture. Deposit insurance has failed, and so has the private banking system that has depended on it for the trust that makes banking work.

The Cyprus haircut on depositors was called a “wealth tax” and was writ-

ten off by commentators as “deserved,” because much of the money in Cypriot accounts belongs to foreign oligarchs, tax dodgers and money launderers. But if that template is applied in the U.S., it will be a tax on the poor and middle class. Wealthy Americans don’t keep most of their money in bank accounts. They keep it in the stock market, in real estate, in over-the-counter derivatives, in gold and silver, and so forth.

Are you safe, then, if your money is in gold and silver? Apparently not—if it’s stored in a safety deposit box in the bank. Homeland Security has reportedly told banks that it has authority to seize the contents of safety deposit boxes without a warrant when it’s a matter of “national security,” which a major bank crisis no doubt will be.

The Swedish Alternative: Nationalize the Banks

Another alternative was considered but rejected by President Obama in 2009: nationalize mega-banks that fail. In a February 2009 article titled “Are Uninsured Bank Depositors in Danger?” Felix Salmon discussed a newsletter by Asia-based investment strategist Christopher Wood, in which Wood wrote:

“It is...amazing that Obama does not understand the political appeal of the nationalization option. ...[D]espite this latest setback nationalization of the banks is coming sooner or later because the realities of the situation will demand it. The result will be shareholders wiped out and bondholders forced to take debt-for-equity swaps, if not hopefully depositors.”

On whether depositors could indeed be forced to become equity holders, Salmon commented:

“It’s worth remembering that depositors are unsecured creditors of any bank; usually, indeed, they’re by far the largest class of unsecured creditors.”

President Obama acknowledged that bank nationalization had worked

in Sweden, and that the course pursued by the U.S. Fed had not worked in Japan, which wound up instead in a “lost decade.” But Obama opted for the Japanese approach because, according to Ed Harrison, “Americans will not tolerate nationalization.”

But that was four years ago. When Americans realize that the alternative is to have their ready cash transformed into “bank stock” of questionable marketability, moving failed mega-banks into the public sector may start to have more appeal.

Ellen Brown is an attorney and president of the Public Banking Institute. In Web of Debt, her latest of eleven books, she shows how a private banking oligarchy has usurped the power to create money from the people themselves. Her websites are <http://WebofDebt.com>, <http://EllenBrown.com>, and <http://PublicBankingInstitute.org>.

—*GlobalResearch.org*, March 29, 2013

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/it-can-happen-here-the-bank-confiscation-scheme-for-us-and-uk-depositors/5328954>

Staring Armageddon In The Face

But Hiding It With Official Lies

BY PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the U.S. economy created 236,000 new jobs in February. If you believe that, I have a bridge in Brooklyn that I’ll let you have at a good price.

Where are these alleged jobs? The BLS says 48,000 were created in construction. That is possible, considering that revenue-starved real estate developers are misreading the housing situation.

Then there are 23,700 new jobs in retail trade, which is hard to believe considering the absence of consumer income growth and the empty parking lots at shopping malls.

The real puzzle is 20,800 jobs in motion picture and sound-recording industries. This is the first time in the years that I have been following the jobs reports that there has been enough employment for me to even notice this category.

The BLS lists 10,900 jobs in accounting and bookkeeping, which, as it is approaching income tax time, is probably correct; 21,000 jobs in temporary help and business support services; 39,000 jobs in health care and social assistance; and 18,800 jobs in the old standby—waitresses and bartenders.

That leaves about 50,000 jobs sprinkled around the various categories, but not in numbers large enough to notice.

The *prestigitute* media attributed the drop in the headline unemployment rate (U3) to 7.7 percent from 7.9 percent to the happy jobs report. But Rex Nutting at *Market Watch* says that the unemployment rate fell because 130,000 unemployed people who have been unable to find a job and became discouraged were dropped out of the U3 measure of unemployment. The

official U6 measure which counts some discouraged workers shows an unemployment rate of 14.3 percent. Statistician John Williams’ measure, which counts all discouraged workers (people who have ceased looking for a job), is 23 percent.

In other words, the real rate of unemployment is two to three times the reported rate.

Nutting believes that the U3 unemployment rate has become too politicized to have any meaning. He suggests using instead the work force participation rate. This rate is falling substantially, reflecting the discouragement that occurs from inability to find jobs.

John Williams (*shadowstats.com*) says that distortions in seasonal factor adjustments overstate monthly payroll employment by about 100,000 jobs. The jobs data that is not seasonally adjusted shows about 1.5 million fewer jobs in the economy.

In a recent communication, statistician John Williams reports that the rigged official annual rate of consumer inflation (CPI) of 1.6 percent is in fact, as measured by the official U.S. government methodology of 1990, 9.2 percent. In other words, the rate of inflation is 5.75 times greater than the reported rate. If Williams is correct, the interest rate on bonds is extremely negative.

Over the years the official measure of inflation has been altered in two ways. One is the introduction of substitution for what formerly was a constant weighted basket of goods. In the former measure, if a price of an item in the basket (index) rose, the CPI rose by the weight of that item in the basket.

In the substitution-based measure, if a price of an item in the basket goes

up, the item is removed from the basket, and a cheaper item is put in its place. For example, if the price of New York strip steak rises, the new CPI will substitute the price of a cheaper cut.

In this new measure, inflation is held down by measuring not a fixed standard of living but a declining standard of living.

The other adjustment used to restrain the measure of inflation is to re-classify many price rises as “quality improvements.” Price rises declared to be quality improvements do not translate into a higher measure of inflation. In other words, if a product rises in price, the price increase or some portion of it can be assigned to improved quality, not to a rise in component or energy costs. As the incentive is to hold down the inflation measure in order to save money for the government on Social Security cost-of-living-adjustments, quality improvements are over-estimated.

Consumers have to pay the higher prices, and as incomes, except for the one percent, are not growing, higher product prices, regardless of whether they are or are not quality improvements, mean a lower standard of living for the 99 percent.

The understated new measure of inflation allows the government to show real GDP growth and thus the end of the December 2007 recession, and it allows the government to show in the latest report real retail sales again matching the pre-recession level. However, when measured correctly, as by statistician John Williams, the true picture of retail sales shows a steep decline from 2007 through 2009 and bottom bouncing since.

The reason real retail sales cannot recover is that real average weekly earnings continues its downward path. Earlier in this new century, the lack of income growth for the bulk of the U.S.

population was masked by a rise in consumer debt. Americans borrowed to spend, and this kept the economy going until the point was reached that consumers had more debt than they could service.

John Williams’ report of real average weekly earnings shows that Americans are taking home less purchasing power than they did in the 1960s and 1970s.

**In other words,
the real rate of
unemployment is
two to three times
the reported rate.**

Reflecting the dollar’s loss of purchasing power, the price of gold and silver in dollars has risen dramatically during the Bush and Obama regimes.

For the last year or two the Federal Reserve and its dependent banks have operated to cap the price of gold at around \$1,750. They do this by selling naked shorts¹ in the paper speculative gold market.

There are two gold markets. One is a market for physical possession by individuals and central banks. The rising demand in the physical bullion market points to a rising price for gold.

The other market is the speculative paper market in which financial institutions bet on the future gold price. By placing large amounts of shorts, this market can be used to suppress price rises in the physical market. The Federal Reserve, which can print money without limit, can cover any losses on its agents’ paper contracts.

It is important to the Federal Reserve’s low interest rate policy to suppress the bullion price. If the prices of gold and silver continue to rise relative to the U.S. dollar, the Fed cannot keep the prices of bonds high and interest rates low. If the dollar is widely perceived to be declining in value in relation to gold, the price of dollar-denominated assets will also decline, including bonds. If the dollar loses value, the Fed loses control over interest rates, and the U.S. financial bubble pops, with hell to pay.

To forestall Armageddon, the Fed and its dependent banks cap the price of gold.

The Fed’s fix is temporary, and as the Fed continues to create ever more dollars, the price of gold will eventually escape the Fed’s control as will interest rates and inflation.

The Fed has produced a perfect storm that could consume the U.S. and perhaps the entire Western world.

Dr. Roberts was Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury for Economic Policy in the Reagan Administration. He was associate editor and columnist with the Wall Street Journal, columnist for Business Week and the Scripps Howard News Service. He is a contributing editor to Gerald Celente’s Trends Journal. He has had numerous university appointments. His latest book is, The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism and Economic Dissolution of the West.

—Paul Craig Roberts, March 10, 2013

<http://www.paulcraigroberts.org/>

1 The illegal practice of short selling shares that have not been affirmatively determined to exist.

<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/naked-shorting.asp#axzz2NL5cj6Up>

Attacks on the National Health Service

UK workers can defeat Thatcher's successors

By GRAHAM DURHAM

The death of Mrs. Thatcher, celebrated with street parties in Glasgow, Liverpool, London and northern Ireland, reminds workers in Britain that, despite her success in brutally defeating the National Union of Mineworkers' historic strike of 1984/85 and in fighting the colonial war in the Falkland Islands, she never dared to attack the National Health Service, probably the most popular socialized healthcare system in the world.

However the coalition government of Thatcher's Tory successor, David Cameron, and his coalition allies, the Liberal Democrats, have launched a two-pronged attack aimed at dismantling the NHS and succeeding where Thatcher did not dare to try. The first assault is an attempt to close and/or rationalize several major hospitals to achieve cuts demanded by the austerity program seeking to blame workers for the financial crisis.

In northern England the attempt to close the specialist children's heart unit in Leeds ended in farce. Initially the move was halted by a legal action by outraged parents but, having lost the case, the government got the NHS Director to close the unit a day later claiming initial medical data showed clinical practice was less successful at Leeds. Within a week government was forced by campaigners to change course again, and the Leeds unit reopened on April 7.

In this case and others the Tory government has tried to hide the financial reasons for these closures behind a screen of alleged best clinical practice and trying to use some Tory supporting doctors to justify hospital closures. Everywhere community campaigns have been established to defend local hospitals and prevent patients and their friends and relatives facing long

journeys to so-called centers of excellence. A 25,000-strong march in south London to defend the local Lewisham hospital has been the largest (see *www.SaveLewishamHospital*) and such was the strength of feeling that the local soccer club, Millwall FC, moved a game date to allow supporters to attend the march. This campaign has been matched across London and elsewhere by other hospital campaigns. In several cases plans for closures have been halted or are under review.

The second attack comes through the attempt by the Tory government to force privatization on the NHS commissioning groups of local community doctors (known as GPs—General Practitioners.) Using legislation, the government is seeking to impose a requirement that all commissioning GPs must ensure NHS services are offered to competitive tender, thus allowing private health providers to

“loss lead” by cherry-picking profitable NHS services leaving the publicly funded NHS to fund the most expensive treatments. Here NHS campaigners are being faced with some Tory GPs who are seeking to develop private provider companies to maximize their earnings. The existence of a private cohort of doctors seeking to exploit the health market goes back to the founding of the NHS in 1949 when doctors refused, until bribed, to join the service.

With popular opinion on our side and many doctors horrified at their colleagues' greed, NHS workers and patients must unite local campaigns against privatization and austerity-led closures. The fight to defend the NHS is occurring in every community and the May 18 Save our NHS demonstration in London will symbolize the determination to defeat the Tory attack again.

—April 9, 2013



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Tsipras Speaks in London

BY GEORGIOS DIAKOGEOGIU

The leader of Syriza (the coalition of the radical left in Greece), Alexis Tsipras, visited London. On March 14, 2013 he spoke at the London School of Economics and Political Science at an event of the Hellenic Observatory titled “Greece’s way out of the crisis” week. On March 15, he met with a member of Labor’s shadow cabinet and the Trade Union Congress and concluded his visit to London with a public lecture at the Friends Meeting House. This event was organized by the Syriza branch of London and attracted over 500 people that packed the venue. Comrade Tsipras started his speech by giving a grim description of the current situation of the Greek economy and society.

“The Greek austerity drives the economy downwards. This is not an estimate is a given fact,” said Tsipras, while stating he was convinced that

“austerity is not the means to overcome the crisis but the goal of those who impose it and those who put it in action.” According to Alexis Tsipras, the Greek and foreign troika seek to have cheap labor, which is achieved by blackmailing people with large debt created by their governments. He expressed the view that if there was no crisis they would have invented it in order to proceed with their plans.

The leader of the Greek opposition strongly criticized the governments of southern Europe by saying that so far there has not been one of them to say no to the austerity policies, but they accepted the absurd measures imposed on them. He also criticized the banking system, saying that it does not serve the interests of citizens, but of capital, and emphasized that the goal is to put banks “in public and social control,” when Syriza will be in government.

The first priority of a Syriza government is to abolish all the measures that reduce wages and pensions and gradually restore the minimum wage to pre-Memorandum levels and to “renegotiate” the Greek loans with the foreign lenders.

Secondly, the Syriza government will renegotiate the state loans with the Greek and foreign lenders. He also emphasized the importance of solidarity that workers around the world must show towards each other and towards a government of the Left. Lastly, he criticized the policy of the government saying that Samaras’ agenda has helped to strengthen the power of neo-Nazis because, according to him, “Samaras’ party has some hidden extreme-right supporters.”

In the question and answer session that followed, the questions focused around the issue of socialism under a left government and the rise of the neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn. Rob Sewell, editor of the *Socialist Appeal*, started the session by mentioning that during his visit in Greece back in 1974 as a member of the Labor Youth he saw the thirst of people for social change and how Andreas Papandreou captured their hearts and minds with the promise of socialism. After Papandreou’s win in the 1981 elections, instead of pressing with socialist policies, he tried just to manage the capitalist system with the well-known results, which is something Syriza must learn from.

Alan Woods, editor of *In Defense of Marxism* and founder of the Hands off Venezuela Campaign, pointed out that the late President Chavez was immediately confronted with the opposition of the bankers, landlords and capitalists when he tried to act on behalf of the workers and poor people. “I agree with

Back from Iraq, Back from Afghanistan...



your demands to improve living standards, but there is one problem: you cannot realize these objectives under capitalism. The only way forward is to fight for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.”

There were a lot of people who demanded a clearer vision from comrade Tsipras and put the question of socialism to him. His answer was that nobody can move towards Socialism with decrees and laws, but only with the active support of the majority of the people. He recognized that from the first day, a Syriza government is going to be faced by a difficult period. The threat of reaction from the ruling class will be overcome with the help of the Greek people.

Tsipras is trying to calm the nerves of the troika by visiting the USA, Germany and talking to a forum of the Karamanlis Foundation. On Friday, he said that he will postpone the socialist measures until the majority of the Greek people would support them. This was a really vague statement!

Comrade Tsipras promises to “renegotiate” the loans with the troika. The problem with this is that if the EU-IMF troika renegotiates the loans with him, this would send a clear message to the rest of the Southern Europeans that if they elect left governments, they can too get a more favorable treatment concerning their loans. This is not going to happen.

Comrade Tsipras promises to bring the level of the minimum wages and pensions up to the pre-crisis levels, a level which was under the poverty line to begin with. This is hardly something that will excite the workers! Moreover, he doesn't tell us where he will find these funds, since he won't nationalize the banks and the big corporations.

A left government which takes any serious measures in favor of the working class will face wholesale economic sabotage from the capitalists and provocations from the capitalist state appa-

ratus, which also includes paramilitary and neo-Nazi groups. A left government which doesn't have control over the economy will fail in any attempt to reverse the current situation in Greece.

Comrade Tsipras doesn't seem to understand that if he doesn't press forward with a socialist program, the only way of staying in power is by capitulation to the Troika. Any move to abolish the Memoranda without nationalization and workers' control of the banks and the big corporations will result in the collapse of his government. Tsipras's speech shows us the urgency of a clearly defined socialist program, something that our comrades in Syriza are fighting for.

Our comrades of the Initiative for a Communist Tendency of Syriza are putting forward a clearly defined ten-point Socialist program for the party:

1. Debt cancellation and immediate abolition of the Memoranda and any measures imposed by them.
2. Heavy taxes on big business and the big wealth.
3. Establishment of workers' control in companies by elected committees of workers, which in turn, will elect a Nationwide Labor Audit Committee.
4. Nationalization of the banking system and creation of a single state bank, with its managing body composed of a 1/3 of employees in banks, 1/3 of representatives of trade unions and 1/3 of representatives of the government.
5. Nationalization and integration into single entities within each industry of all enterprises in which the state holds even one share of the large firms that are closing, the companies of transport (people or goods), water, energy, telecommunications, mineral wealth, infrastructure and construction, with their management consisting of 1/3 employees of the company,

1/3 consumers-workers (trade unions, etc.) and 1/3 representatives of the government. Creation of a Pan-Hellenic Nationalization and Planning Council of the economy with the participation of the Pan-Hellenic Labor Audit Committee of the working people's organizations (trade unions, professional associations, etc.) and representatives of the government, which will establish a firm basis for the socialization of all major companies in the industry.

6. Nationalization of large landed properties and incentives for the voluntary consolidation of smallholders into cooperatives under state control.
7. Implement in cooperation with the government and Pan-Hellenic Labor Audit Committee a project to ensure a job for every unemployed person, through a program of public infrastructure projects and nationalization and the reduction of working hours as much as it is required in order to share out all available jobs amongst all the workers.
8. Steeply progressive taxation of capital and wealth, direct cost savings from the “freezing” of military spending, the expropriation of church property, and above all, the nationalization program will provide the necessary revenue for an immediate increase in salaries, pensions and allowances within the context of a decent standard of living and the introduction of an automatic increase of wage and pensions in line with any increase in the cost of living. Adequate funding of Health, Education, Welfare, Social Security, Culture and Sports.
9. Eradication of the bureaucratic and repressive structures of the existing bourgeois government and the redesign of the state on a

socialist basis with the right to elect and recall all senior government officials and dignitaries who will be paid the same salary as a skilled worker; the exclusion of special repressive forces from labor disputes, putting the security forces and the army under the democratic control and management of the mass organizations of the workers and the youth; the election of judges by the people and the reform of law in accordance with the interests of working people. For an open discussion by the working people and society of the earliest possible adoption of a Constitution that enshrines the social ownership of the means of production and revolutionary changes in state power.

10. The faithful implementation of this program obviously entails departure from all reactionary, imperialist military alliances like NATO, a conflict with the capitalist European Union and its institutions and, inevitably, withdrawal from it. The example of a revolutionary Greece, and an open class appeal to the European workers for a common struggle against capitalism in Europe, for the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe will disarm imperialism. It would shield the country from external threats and will provide very soon a safe and equitable international position by opening the prospect of pan-European and global victory of socialism.

—*In Defense of Marxism*, March 19, 2013

<http://www.marxist.com/tsipras-speaks-in-london.htm>

Bulgarians Take to the Streets

BY KRISTEN GHODSEE

In the last two weeks [of February,] Bulgaria has seen tens-of-thousands of its citizens out on the streets. The sparks that lit the flame of dissent were inflated winter electricity bills, but the anger and frustration in Bulgaria has been growing for a long time. Electricity bills are a symptom. Crony capitalism is the disease.

Bulgaria has the lowest average wage in the European Union, at about \$500 a month. There is also a large elderly population. Most Bulgarian families are not only struggling to meet their own expenses, but are supporting parents whose pensions are miserably low. In the winter months, ordinary Bulgarians have often had to choose among heat, medicine and food since they were only able to afford two out of three. This winter, electricity bills alone exceeded the monthly amount of many pensions.

Yet if you go to the suburbs of Sofia, neighborhoods like Simeonovo, Bankya, and Dragalevtsi, you will see opulent mansions all built after 1989. When I was in Bulgaria in the summer of 2011, I saw a 1.5 million euro Bugatti Veyron with Sofia plates idling outside

of a pizza joint. Where did all this money come from? Much of it came from the fire sale of Bulgarian state assets that began in the late 1990s.

Bulgarians believe that their political elites, together with unscrupulous foreign “investors,” have spent the last 23 years dismantling Bulgaria’s state socialist economy for the sole purpose of enriching themselves.

The last time Bulgaria saw protesters in the street like this was 1997 when the Bulgarian economy was in free fall after a period of devastating hyperinflation. There was a socialist government in power at the time, the heirs of the old, Bulgarian Communist Party. These socialists had been slow to privatize state-owned enterprises. Experts in the US and the European Union blamed Bulgaria’s economic woes squarely on the government’s refusal to embrace the shock therapy of rapid market liberalization.

Tens of thousands jangled their keys in front of parliament in 1997, mocking the sound of a tolling bell. The socialists were forced to resign and a new pro-Western, center-right gov-



ernment was swept into power. This government embarked on a hasty program of privatization that promised to bring growth and prosperity to Bulgaria. Hopes were high.

I spent a lot of time in Bulgaria in the late 1990s. Thugs were everywhere. In almost every nice restaurant I visited, there were thick-necked former wrestlers with handguns shoved into the backs of their pants, bodyguards of the new superrich. Rapid economic liberalization created economic growth, but this wealth was concentrated in the hands of a new domestic pack of oligarchs. Western investors had no problem doing business with these robber barons, people who did not innovate or produce, but who bribed and stole their way to wealth. Government regulators were happy to sell off state assets at reduced prices as long as they were given their generous slice of the spoils.

Since 1997, Bulgarians have seen four different governments come and go. They have become members of NATO and joined the European Union. Yet nothing has changed. Today, most blame the system. They ask: what was the point of breaking up a state-owned electricity monopoly if you are going to replace it with a foreign-owned electricity monopoly? A monopoly by any other name still stinks.

Protestors have been calling for nationalization, hoping that their bills will go down if there are fewer middlemen passing the costs of their luxury sedans onto the end user.

Nationalization of electricity distribution will certainly fall afoul of the

European Union and jeopardize Bulgaria's position within the Community. It will also hurt the prospects of future foreign investment.

Faced with continued protests and growing popular demands for nationalization, the Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov, hastily resigned and called for early elections. Although the Socialist Party has hinted at nationalization, Bulgarians are skeptical that any elected government will be able to stand up to the European Union and deflect the claims that Bulgaria is heading back down a path toward totalitarianism.

Predictably, these calls for nationalization have been met with a chorus of condemnation by political and economic elites who fear that nationalization is the first step in a return to the gulag. Once again the specter of communism is used as a cover for the wholesale pillaging of consumers.

Even though the government has fallen, Bulgarians are still out in the streets calling for an end to all of the political parties tainted by corruption. The frustration is as much with the failed promise of democracy and free markets as it is with electricity bills. For more than two decades, Bulgarians have been told that things are on their way to getting better. They are tired of waiting.

Nobody wants a return to the gulag, but the knee-jerk fear of communism has become an excuse for a system in which all but a few rival clans of oligarchs and their entourages are worse off.

But if Bulgaria is truly a democracy, shouldn't citizens have a say in how their utilities are supplied? What is the point of democracy if the people have no power to affect the government policies that impact their lives?

The European Union should allow the Bulgarian people to decide their own future. If voters support nationalization of utility companies or demand other economic changes through the ballot box, these demands must be respected. Otherwise, people will continue to lose faith in the democratic process. Instead, they will make their demands, with raised fists, in the streets.

Kristen Ghodsee is contributing editor of the Soyuz column in Anthropology News.

—*Anthropology News*, February 25, 2013

<http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2013/02/25/bulgarians-take-to-the-streets/>



Slovenia Hit by ‘Zombie Uprising’

BY BRIGITA GRACNER

The central European nation of Slovenia is being shaken by the first huge uprising since it became an independent country in 1991. The protests are directed against all political elites, austerity measures, and the capitalist system as a whole.

Since November, there have been 42 protests in all major Slovenian cities, with more than 110,000 participants altogether. The protests are mostly peaceful and decentralized, but a few hundred people have been arrested and many injured.

The protests started in November in Maribor as a response to corrupt actions of Maribor Mayor Franc Kangler in a dispute over the placement of new traffic enforcement cameras. The cameras were cited by the Municipality of Maribor, Slovenia’s second-largest local authority, as a public-private partnership with a Slovenian firm.

The project was believed to be corrupt and lacking transparency after Kangler had allowed a private company to set up cameras all over the city and collect money from speeding tickets instead of directing it to the city budget.

The protests started with small demonstrations in front of Maribor’s city hall in October, and escalated on November 21 into the first big protest. The protesters demanded Kangler’s resignation, chanting, “He’s finished!” in the Slovenian Styrian dialect (“*Gotof je!*”).

This would become the most popular slogan for all the protests. Kangler was accused of corruption by the official Commission for the Prevention of Corruption of the Republic of Slovenia and eventually resigned at the end of last year.

The protests spread throughout the country during November. On December 21, the first “All Slovenian People’s Uprising” took place in the capital, Ljubljana. This was followed by another on January 11.

One of the most important reasons the protests spread to other cities was a report by the anti-corruption commission that accused Prime Minister Janez Jansa and leader of the largest opposition party, Zoran Jankovic, of corruption.

Neither could explain the source of some of their income in recent years. Jansa is also suspected of being involved in a corruption scandal involving the supply of Finnish armored vehicles.

On February 8, two rallies took place in Ljubljana. The pro-government “Assembly for the Republic” organized a protest in support of Jansa, at which about 5000 people gathered. In the afternoon, however, more than 20,000 people took part, in the same place, in the third All-Slovenian People’s Uprising to protest against the ruling political elite.

This was the biggest anti-government gathering since the protests began.

Protest organization

From the outset, the protests were organized with the help of social networks—mostly through *Facebook*. Later, a coordination committee was formed, but did not act as an organizer. None of the protests had been reported to the police in advance, as is legally required.

Apart from All-Slovenian People’s Uprisings, the Coordination Committee of Culture of Slovenia, which combines the organizations of Slovenian cultural workers, also orga-

nized “Protestivals” with a cultural program in protest against government cuts in the funding of culture.

The movement is very diverse and consists of many social groups and initiatives: there are students and lecturers, trade unions, precarious workers, pensioners, anarchists, ecologists, socialists, and others, all demanding deep social changes.

Among the new groups the most prominent are the General Assembly of the All-Slovenian People’s Uprising, the Committee for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Coordination Committee of Slovenian Culture, the Committee for Direct Democracy, the Movement of the Responsible, and Today is a New Day.

There are also groups and parties that were active before the protest wave, such as the Federation for Anarchist Organization, the Workers and Punks’ University, the student association Iskra, the Invisible Workers of the World, The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia, the Pirate Party, and the Party for Sustainable Development.

Among these groups, the Workers and Punks’ University has been prominent: it is a collective of students and activists who organize an annual series of public lectures and regularly intervene in the social struggles with their theoretical analyses and political statements.

Austerity and severe recession

Although the protests started as a response to local problems, the protesters soon started demanding the resignation of all political and economic elites regardless of their political affiliations.

But the protesters are also targeting the austerity measures, and some the

capitalist system as a whole. Slovenia is experiencing the second-sharpest drop in GDP of any European Union member as a result of the economic crisis.

Jansa and Slovenian President Borut Pahor have meticulously followed the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They have imposed harsh reforms, which cost many jobs and social rights, leaving people (especially the young) with no hope for a secure future.

The government has already imposed a reform that raises the retirement age, and wants to reform the labor market with the intention of reducing protections against layoffs. Public sector wage cuts are also being planned.

Moreover, the Constitutional Court found a potential referendum on a law setting up a so-called “bad bank” and a sovereign holding company to be unconstitutional. In effect, the Court banned a popular vote on the matter.

The government also proposed a constitutional amendment that would reduce the chances of submitting a request for a referendum and reduce the potential to resort to this instrument of direct democracy.

The official response

The government, particularly Jansa’s leading party, and their media supporters failed in criminalizing the movement by describing the protesters as “communist zombies” led by “the uncles in the background.”

This evoked creative reactions at the second uprising, at which many of the protesters wore zombie masks.

During the protests, however, the word “communist” grew from a defi-

nition of former officials and the presumed “uncles” to a label for any opponent to the austerity measures.

Moreover, at the protest of the pro-government Assembly for the Republic, a speech by Jansa recorded in Brussels was broadcast in which the prime minister drew an analogy between the methods of his opponents and those of Nazis at the beginning of the Holocaust. Jansa called the protesters “left fascists.”

Regardless of Jansa’s abuse of historical events and misuse of terms, it is the first time in 25 years that some of the media and groups taking part in the movement have spoken of socialism in a positive way.

Jansa’s attempts to criminalize and discredit the movement are logical, since his two junior coalition partners left the government because of the corruption scandals. This deprived Jansa of a majority and may bring about early elections.

On February 22, the pensioners’ party quit the government, reducing Jansa’s coalition to just 36 of 90 parliamentary seats. The opposition is now trying to agree on a new prime minister, but no official candidate has been proposed so far.

Despite the fact that the situation will probably lead to a provisional government, or to early elections, which would postpone some reforms, the protests in Slovenia will continue.

The fourth All-Slovenian People’s Uprising took place on March 9 in Ljubljana.

Challenges

In a way, the situation is reminiscent of the one in 2011, when the so-called 15 October movement (15O) organized similar protests as a response to austerity measures. The movement

occupied the platform in front of the Slovenian stock exchange for a few months as a sign of protest against the worldwide financial crisis.

The government had fallen a few months before, and the public looked to the 15O protesters to produce an alternative.

However, it failed in the end to offer any concrete solutions, and at the same time refused any kind of institutionalization in more formal political structures. Hence, although 15O gained great support from the public at the start, it was overshadowed by elections held in December 2011.

Despite the new government, the political elite continued austerity measures, with the only party that opposed the neoliberal reforms in its program completely defeated in the elections.

As there will probably be early elections this year, it will be essential to consider new forms of organization. Although the movement seems stronger than the one in 2011, there lies a heavy task in front of it.

It appears that some parts of the movement will attempt to form parties, but since the movement consists of many groups with different positions, it will be essential for the socialist left to argue for its positions within this process.

This will give Slovenia the chance to prevent a forming of a government that would continue with the planned reforms.

Reprinted from Counter Fire. Brigita Gracner is from the Workers’ and Punks’ University, Ljubljana.

— *greenleft.org*, March 13, 2013

<http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/53603>

Israel's Segregated Buses

BY OFRA YESHUA-LYTH

Note: The following report is from February 28, 2013. Although it was reported that Israel would begin segregating bus service in the West Bank starting March 4, the practice has been in effect for much longer. Yeshua-Lyth explained in an email: "the practice of banning Palestinians from public buses has been in evidence for months. News of plans for "Palestinian only" buses were in the Israeli press already in November. It seems that the coercing and harassment have the purpose of "educating" Palestinians about the way to choose public transport. The announcement yesterday coincided with my Thursday report by coincidence, or perhaps it was rushed following the considerable uproar this report has managed to create. I have been listening to blatant lies on Israeli radio about the new buses being a "helpful measure" for the workers all day yesterday. The fact remains that public transport is a system based on a grid serving people who should be able to choose their own routes. If you live in London you do not wish to be allowed on buses from Paddington to Oxford only.

March 1, 2013. I arrived at 4:00 P.M. at the bus terminal (near what is called the "Shomron Gate Junction.") Until five o'clock it looked like nothing was going to happen. Blessed boredom. Travellers get on and get off, including some who look like Palestinians. A military vehicle behind the bus honked with pointless violence and suddenly activated a siren, surely that was nothing more than the simple boorishness of the soldiers who are the lords of the land.

At five o'clock sharp the action begins: a policeman, First Sergeant Shai Zecharia, portentously boards Bus 286, which is stopped at the station. Soldiers order all the Palestinians to get off. Right away they collect their ID cards upon their exit from the bus.

That way they can't go anywhere until they get permission. Nearly thirty workers, ages 30-50, obediently file out. The soldier/officer roars: "*Udrub!*" (Move!) And then: "Sit on your butts! On your butts!" They are then marched to the terminal fence and made to stand along it in a line, then to sit on the cold ground and wait. The soldiers check the green IDs (Arabic: *hawwiye*) and demand to see their "*tasrih*" (work permits). A lucky few get their IDs back and board another bus—complaining only about having to pay twice for the same trip. But our forces immediately block this channel: one by one the workers are told to leave the terminal and walk to the Azoun-Atme checkpoint, 2.5 kilometres from the Shomron Gate junction. By now it's cold; the sun has set. Most of them got up at three in the morning for the trip to work. Their homes are only a few kilometers from nearby Ariel. All they ask is to be allowed to ride the bus for another two or three stops. They paid for the trip. And by the way, a "*tasrih*" costs 8,000 shekels. You have to work hard to cover that sum before you earn your first shekel.

The soldiers nabbed four workers who had dared to work without a "*tasrih*." The short one venomously says, "They can spend some time in the Yoav fortress." Then the next consignment arrives, about another 25 workers. The armed and heroic little guy is soon shoving them with both hands. The procedure is repeated: "*Udrub,*" on your butts, *hawiiyye, tasrih*. Now move it to Azoun-Atme. Within half-an-hour about eighty men have been subjected to this humiliation by a few armed soldiers and one policeman. They all responded with restraint and dismay, at most asking the obvious questions and now and then getting enlightening replies, such as:

"You're not allowed to be on Highway 5." At long last: official confirmation that there are apartheid highways in Israel, despite all the denials.

"You're not allowed to use public transportation at all."

First Sergeant Zecharia provided the following crucial information to one of the older Palestinians: It's better to travel in the special vans and not in Israeli buses. Palestinians claim that there has been an unwritten commercial alliance between some in the security forces and the Bedouins who operate the vans, which cost five times as much as the buses for short trips. For a trip of a few minutes, each one of them pays one or two hour's wages.

I should note that the First Sergeant answered my questions as the law requires when I asked his name and rank, but he immediately declared that my questions were "causing agitation" and that "pretty soon" I too would find myself spending a few hours in the nearby police station.

On the way back, *via* the Ayalon Highway, my heart goes out to the thousands of Israelis who are delayed on the way home in Thursday evening traffic jams.

Questions and thoughts:

How many hundreds of Palestinians have gone through this permanent institutionalized harassment this evening, at the end of a workweek during which they cleaned, built, plastered and paved our Homeland?

What is the idea behind this harassment? How is it that workers represent no "security risk" in Tel Aviv and Rishon LeZion from morning to evening, but their presence on a bus on the way home is a matter that requires the armed intervention of the soldiers of the "Israel Defense Force?"

Should not those who are constantly warning us that the Third Intifada will break out any moment have an interest in obedient and industrious workers being allowed to get home in peace? (Incidentally, I have heard this observation from the workers, who may be poor but are by no means stupid.)

And furthermore: when a woman is told to “sit in the back” of a bus full of Haredim¹, Israeli society responds with anger and revulsion and we demand that the instigators of this obscurantist discrimination be stopped. But Palestinian workers are forbidden to travel in “our” buses—even in the back, and standing. And that is quite all right legally—unless something is very, very wrong with the law.

How fitting it is this evening to excoriate the unknown judge who beat his unfortunate children, and the judicial system that did not deal with him severely. Because, as everybody knows, civilization, progress, human rights, the rights of the child and equality before the law are our guiding principles.

This post originally appeared on Facebook. It has been translated from Hebrew by Mark Marshall

—Mondoweiss, March 5, 2013

<http://mondoweiss.net/2013/03/allowed-transportation-segregated.html>

¹ The most conservative form of Orthodox Judaism

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haredi_Judaism

Free All Irish Republican Political Prisoners

BY GRAHAM DURHAM

An important anti-imperialist political rally in London heard from Diarmuid Dubhglais of Republican Sinn Fein.

Diarmuid pointed out that none of the remaining political prisoners would be incarcerated if it were not for the ongoing partition of Ireland, which has continued after the Good Friday agreement.

Diarmuid drew attention to specific cases including:

Martin Corey who served 19 years of a life sentence for taking part in the armed struggle against British occupation. Released in 2002, Martin was re-arrested in April 2010 and told his “license” was revoked. There were no new allegations of any crimes and the decision was made by the British government.

In July 2010 a judge ruled that the lack of evidence made the continued incarceration a breach of Martin’s human rights and ordered his release. As Martin sat awaiting release he was told the British Secretary of State had ordered his continued internment. Now 62, Martin is awaiting a further Supreme Court hearing having spent a further three years in Maghaberry Prison without any additional charges.

Marion Price who is seriously ill and continues to be held as a political prisoner. For refusing to accept the status of a criminal, Marion is held in solitary confinement in Hydebank prison. Undergoing medical treatment Marion is handcuffed to a hospital bed and accompanied by prison guards during treatment.

Marion Price had her license invoked and was returned to prison for

an alleged offence at the Derry Easter Rising commemoration in 2011 when she held a piece of paper from which a commemoration was read. Marion was arrested and has been held in solitary confinement. She is suffering from ill health arising from the 167 days force-feeding she endured in 1973/74 whilst campaigning to be imprisoned in Ireland and not England.

Diarmuid drew attention to the plight of Republican POWs who should have been granted political status—as they were after the deaths of Bobby Sands and nine other hunger strikers in 1981. However, following the release of the last Provisional Sinn Fein prisoner, Gerry Adams and the PSF leadership abandoned remaining Republican prisoners.

The Republican POWs demand:

- An end to brutal and degrading strip-searching
- Free association
- An end to controlled movement
- A right to education

At the end of the meeting, which also heard contributions of support from the Frontline Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, The Counihan-Sanchez Housing campaign and the Labor Representation Committee, Michael Holden, Chair of the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group, stated that the continued brutal treatment and arbitrary arrests by the British government could not occur without the collaboration of Sinn Fein leaders, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

Contact the IRSPG on *Facebook*

—April 18, 2013

A Visit with Lynne Stewart

BY CAROLE SELIGMAN



Lynne Stewart

I had the honor of visiting with Lynne Stewart, in Federal Medical Center (federal prison), Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas over the weekend of February 22-24.

Lynne explained her petition to the U.S. Supreme Court for *certiorari*, which is not an appeal, but an attempt to convince the Supremes that the issues raised in the extension of Lynne's sentence from 28 months to ten years

are issues that will have broad effects on others. This certainly is true. All the issues in Lynne's case go to the basic democratic rights to have legal representation when charged with a crime. (You can read the *certiorari* petition on the website: www.lynnestewart.org)

Lynne also reviewed her medical situation. For the first time I learned that she now has stage 4 lung cancer (which is what the breast cancer has metastasized into). She had just had a port inserted into her chest when I saw her. She was sore and she was taking care not to hug too hard. Tuesday, she started the chemo therapy, where the drugs are administered to her through the port. This is instead of through an IV.

Lynne explained that she is getting treatment, and she thinks highly of the oncologist who is treating her. What is very, very wrong about the treatment of serious medical issues at Carswell is the lack of any kind of collaboration between the outside doctors with each other and the prison medical staff. They are not in touch with each other, do not

collaborate, and therefore critical follow-up and treatment management are not being adequately done. This is particularly serious given Lynne's condition and this is why Lynne needs to be returned to New York where she can receive treatment that is overseen by doctors who can collaborate and coordinate with each other.

Soon we will all be asked to participate in a campaign to win compassionate release for our dear sister. (See petition in this issue.) She has already completed more than the original sentence, before it was lengthened to ten years!

I'm making this report short, but personally, I was the lucky recipient of many stories of Lynne's legal career, her school librarian experiences, her family history, Ralph and Lynne's participation in the community control of schools in Harlem, N.Y. actions, her opinions about all kinds of issues, support of political prisoners, support for her sister-inmates at Carswell, and more. Lynne was very pleased to get word of the beautiful message about her that Mumia Abu-Jamal recorded at Prison Radio, February 22. (This is also posted on the Lynne Stewart website.)

She is very pleased with the river of letters and cards she gets; too many for her to respond to. Please keep them coming. They make a real difference in her treatment.

Write to Lynne Stewart at:
Lynne Stewart #53504-054
Unit 2N, Federal Medical Center, Carswell
P.O. Box 27137
Fort Worth, TX 76127

Write to Lynne Stewart Defense Committee at:

Lynne Stewart Defense Committee
1070 Dean Street
Brooklyn, New York 11216

For further information: 718-789-0558 or 917-853-9759

Chattanooga Times Free Press Bennett



The Persecution of Lynne Stewart

BY CHRIS HEDGES

Lynne Stewart, in the vindictive and hysterical world of the war on terror, is one of its martyrs. A 73-year-old lawyer who spent her life defending the poor, the marginalized and the despised, including blind cleric Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, she fell afoul of the state apparatus because she dared to demand justice rather than acquiesce to state sponsored witch hunts. And now, with stage 4 cancer that has metastasized, spreading to her lymph nodes, shoulder, bones and lungs, cre-

ating a grave threat to her life, she sits in a prison cell at the Federal Medical Center Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas, where she is serving a 10-year sentence.

Stewart's family is pleading with the state for "compassionate release" and numerous international human rights campaigners, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, have signed a petition calling for her to be freed on medical grounds. It is not only a crime in the U.S. to be poor, to be a Muslim, to openly condemn the crimes commit-

ted in our name in the Muslim world, but to defend those who do. And the near total collapse of our judicial system, wrecked in the name of national security and "the war on terror," is encapsulated in the saga of this courageous attorney—now disbarred because of her conviction.

"I hope that my imprisonment sends the wake up call that the government is prepared to imprison lawyers who do not conduct legal representation in a manner the government has ordained," she told me when I reached her through email in prison. "My career of 30-plus years has always been client centered. My clients and I decided on the best legal course, without the interference of the government. Ethics require that the defense lawyer DEFEND, get the client off. We have no obligation to obey [the] 'rules' government lays down.

"I believe that since 9/11 the government has pursued Muslims with an ever heavier hand," she wrote, all messages to her and from her being vetted by prison authorities. "However, cases such as the Sheikh's in 1995 amply demonstrate that Muslims had been targeted even earlier as the new ENEMY—always suspect, always guilty. After 9/11, we discovered that the government prosecutors were ordered to try and get Osama Bin Laden into EVERY Muslim prosecution inducing in American Juries a Pavlovian response. Is it as bad as lynching and the Scottsboro Boys and the Pursuit of Black Panthers? Not as of yet, but getting close and of course the incipient racism that that colors—pun?—every action in the U.S. is ever present in these prosecutions."

Stewart, as a young librarian in Harlem, got an early taste of the insidious forms of overt and covert racism

Warden Recommends Compassionate Release for Lynne Stewart

A message to supporters from Lynne Stewart
April 28, 2014, Carswell Federal Medical Center

A worldwide embrace to all of the thousands of People who helped me! As my hero said, we are motivated by great feelings of love and compassion and I am fortunate to be the beneficiary, this time around.

To savor this victory, you all should know that the Carswell Prison authorities kept telling me "It can't be done. You don't qualify. Why bother? Wait till you are closer to death!" To all of them I replied that I have been fighting battles like this all my life and I would never quit. Then I had this white blood cell setback, making me super-vulnerable and was quarantined for a week. I was released on Friday to learn that indeed "the children had shouted" and the walls "Did come a-tumblin' down." I must say that I was in a state of bliss. Not just to win but to accomplish it in the time honored method—we will organize the People and you dare not ignore us!

I owe an enormous debt to so many. This is the one we had to win where the medical decision was made that compassionate release was warranted. That cannot be trifled with BUT... we who have been out here struggling from the fifties onward know that the Government is masterful at Co-optation at snatching victory and making it defeat. Please do not think that my struggle is won. We have this fabulous win but we still have the DC National Bureau of Prisons (if there ever was a time to hold Obama's feet to the fire, this is it) and then their forwarding of the case to the Judge in New York for a final decision (Yes, the same one that increased my original sentence from 28 months to ten years!) So please, please, please do not let us rest on our laurels. Until my feet are planted like the tree that grows in Brooklyn, and I am among my family, friends, and comrades and plunged back into the struggle once more, we must continue. Fight On!

that work to keep most people of color impoverished and trapped in their internal colonies or our prison complex. She went on to get her law degree and begin battling in the courts on behalf of those around her for whom justice was usually denied. By 1995, along with former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and Abdeen Jabara, she was the lead trial counsel for the sheik, who was convicted in September of that year. He received life in prison plus 65 years, a sentence Stewart called “outlandish.” The cleric, in poor health, is serving a life sentence in the medical wing of the Butner Federal Correctional Complex in North Carolina. Stewart continued to see the sheik in jail after the sentence. Three years later the government severely curtailed his ability to communicate with the outside world, even through his lawyers, under special administrative measures or SAMs.

In 2000, during a visit with the sheik, he asked Stewart to release a statement from him to the press. The Clinton administration did not prosecute her for the press release, but the Bush administration in April 2002, the mood of the country altered by the attacks of 9/11, decided to go after her. Attorney General John Ashcroft came to New York in April 2002 to announce that the Justice Department had indicted Stewart, a paralegal and the interpreter on grounds of materially aiding a terrorist organization. That night he went on “Late Show with David Letterman” to tell the nation of the indictment and the Bush administration’s vaunted “war on terror.”

“Rev up the military industrial complex,” Stewart wrote when I asked her what purpose the “war on terror” served. “Keep the populace terrorized so that they look to Big Brother Government for protection. Cannon Fodder for the ‘throwaways’ in our society—young, poor, uneducated, persons of color.”

Stewart’s 2005 trial was a Punch-and-Judy show. The state demanded an outrageous 30-year prison sentence. It showed the jurors lurid videos of Osama bin Laden and images of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center towers, and spun a fantastic web of Islamic, terrorist intrigue. To those of us who covered groups such as al-Qaida and the armed Islamic groups in Egypt—I was based in Cairo at the time

“I fear we are headed into a period of ever increasing cruelty to those who can least stand it,” she wrote. “As corporate agendas become national agendas there is a profound disrespect for all those who are not able to even get to the starting line. We do not love the children except when they are massacred—the daily mental, emotional deaths in the public schools are ignored.”

as the Middle East bureau chief for *The New York Times*—the government scenarios were utterly devoid of fact or credibility. The government prosecutors, for example, blamed numerous terrorist attacks, including the killing of 62 people in 1997 in Luxor, Egypt, on the sheik, although he publicly denounced the attack and had no connection with the radical Islamic group in Egypt that carried it out. And even Manhattan District Judge John Koeltl instructed the jury more than 750 times that the photos of Osama bin Laden

and the 2001 World Trade Center attacks were not relevant to the case. Stewart was sentenced to 28 months. The Obama administration appealed the ruling. The appeals court ruled that the sentence was too light. Koeltl gave her ten years. She has served three.

Her family’s appeal for a “compassionate release” must defy the odds. Human Rights Watch and Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) noted in a 2012 report, “The Answer is No: Too Little Compassionate Release in U.S. Federal Prisons,” that the Federal Bureau of Prisons rarely even bothers to submit compassionate release requests to the courts. Since 1992, the bureau has averaged two dozen motions a year to the courts for compassionate release. The bureau does not provide figures for the number of prisoners who seek compassionate release.

“No messy side effects—vomiting, diarrhea—thank goodness,” Stewart wrote to me about her cancer care. “I have one more treatment and then they have used all the poison it’s safe to use. I am bald but the hardest for me to endure, who has always relied on her memory and quick wit, is the chemo brain that slows and sometimes stops me.

“I am up at 4:30 [A.M.] and wait till the ‘Count’ is over and have a shower etc.,” she noted of her daily routine. “I get dressed and take a short rest (feet up) until breakfast at 6:00 A.M. I am in a room with six other women—the unusual mix of inmates and I rely on them to help me with just about everything—getting to the clinics, picking up meds, filling my ice bucket, helping with my laundry, etc. At 9:00 A.M. every day, they laughingly say, I go to the ‘office.’ That means email or the law library where I correspond and meet with women who need my help. I go back up by 10:30 A.M. and take a short nap till lunch. Meals here are meager and not well prepared. Of course, I have favorites—the hamburgers (beef THIN patty) served every Wednesday in every

federal prison for lunch. Some of the women count their time in terms of how many hamburger days they have left! We are served cut up iceberg lettuce with a little red cabbage and carrots with meals and I have used my commissary purchases to concoct some more exotic dressings than those offered here.

“After lunch I go back to bed for a longer nap and then up for mail call—lots of letters, newspapers, magazines, etc.” she wrote, “a time of the day I sometimes shed a few tears at the love and intensity of those who have written to state their support. Then supper and back to bed and reading—pure pleasure—much fiction (mysteries, Scottish, etc. and authors I love Morrison, Sarmargo). [There is] some conversing with my roommates and then after the 9:00 P.M. count I am off to sleep. I have a hospital bed that is next to large windows—no bars. I can see the Trinity River, barely. Trees. This view of nature is responsible for keeping me alive in the real sense.

“I hoped that there would be common cause among the women here because we are all confronted by totally arbitrary authority every minute of every day,” she went on. “Prison is a perverse place of selfishness and sometimes generosity but not much unity. There are a few and we recognize each other but by and large the harsh realities of people’s origins and the system have ruined most of us. It is particularly horrendous to realize the number of children that the prison system rips from their mothers’ arms, thus creating yet another generation to feed the beast of prison industrial complex.

“I fear we are headed into a period of ever increasing cruelty to those who can least stand it,” she wrote. “As corporate agendas become national agendas there is a profound disrespect for all those who are not able to even get to the starting line. We do not love the children except when they are massacred—the daily mental, emotional

deaths in the public schools are ignored. We are now a nation of Us and Them. I would HOPE that the people would recognize what is happening and make a move. After all, who in the fifties could have predicted the uprisings of the sixties? There must be a distaste and willful opposition to what is happening and a push to take it back—local movements scaring the HELL out of the Haves.”

In a 2003 speech at a National Lawyers Guild convention in Minneapolis, Stewart eloquently laid out her mission as an advocate, and more important as a mother and a member of the human race.

“For we have formidable enemies not unlike those in the tales of ancient days,” she told the gathering. “There is a consummate evil that unleashes its dogs of war on the helpless; an enemy motivated only by insatiable greed—the Miller’s daughter made to spin gold—the fisherman’s wife: Midas, all with no thought of consequences. In this enemy there is no love of the land or the creatures that live there, no compassion for the people. This enemy will destroy the air we breathe and the water we drink as long as the dollars keep filling up their money boxes.

“We now resume our everyday lives but we have been charged once again, with, and for, our quests, and like Hippolyta and her Amazons; like David going forth to meet Goliath, like Beowulf the dragon slayer, like Queen Zenobia, who made war on the Romans, like Sir Galahad seeking the holy grail,” she said. “And modern heroes, dare I mention? Ho and Mao and Lenin, Fidel and Nelson Mandela and John Brown, Che Guevara who reminds us ‘At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.’ Our quests like theirs are to shake the very foundations of the continents. We go out to stop police brutality—to rescue the imprisoned—to change the rules for those who have

never ever been able to get to the starting line much less run the race, because of color, physical condition, gender, mental impairment,” she said. “We go forth to preserve the air and land and water and sky and all the beasts that crawl and fly. We go forth to safeguard the right to speak and write, to join; to learn, to rest safe at home, to be secure, fed, healthy, sheltered, loved and loving, to be at peace with ones identity.”

From prison Stewart wrote to me in closing, “I have been fortunate to live a charmed life—parents who loved me without qualification (yes, we fought about Vietnam and my African American husband but I never doubted that they would always be there for me). I had children when I was young enough to grow with them. Today they are the backbone of my support and love. I came to politics in the early sixties and was part of a vibrant movement that tried to empower local control of public schools to make the ultimate changes for children and break the back of racism in minority communities. My partner/husband Ralph Poynter was always—60 years and counting—in my corner and when at a less than opportune moment I announced my desire to go to law school, he made sure it happened. I had a fabulous legal career in a fabulous city—championing the political rights of the comrades of the ’60s and ’70s and also representing many who had no hope of a lawyer who would fight for them against the system. I have enjoyed good friends, loved cooking, had poetry and theater for a joy. I could go on and on BUT all of this good fortune has always meant only one thing to me—that I have to fight, struggle to make sure EVERYONE can have a life like mine. That belief is what will always sustain me.”

—*Truthdig*, April 21, 2013

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_persecution_of_lynne_stewart_20130421/

“It is devastating, totally unbelievable. Is this in a democracy, the only superpower? I am sad. I will sign. Praying God’s blessings on your efforts.”

Desmond Tutu
Pete Seeger

PETITION TO FREE LYNNE STEWART: SAVE HER LIFE — RELEASE HER NOW!



© PAUL CHAN

Lynne Stewart has devoted her life to the oppressed — a constant advocate for the countless many deprived in the United States of their freedom and their rights.

Unjustly charged and convicted for the “crime” of providing her client with a fearless defense, the prosecution of Lynne Stewart is an assault upon the basic freedoms of us all.

After years of post-conviction freedom, her bail was revoked arbitrarily and her imprisonment ordered, precluding surgery she had scheduled in a major New York hospital.

The sinister meaning of the relentless persecution of Lynne Stewart is unmistakably clear. Given her age and precarious health, the ten-year sentence she is serving is a virtual death sentence.

Since her imprisonment in the Federal Prison in Carswell, Texas her urgent need for surgery was delayed 18 months — so long, that the operating physician pronounced the condition as “the worst he had seen.”

Now, breast cancer, which had been in remission prior to her imprisonment, has reached Stage Four. It has appeared in her lymph nodes, on her shoulder, in her bones and her lungs.

Her daughter, a physician, has sounded the alarm: “Under the best of circumstances, Lynne would be in a battle of the most serious consequences with dangerous odds. With cancer and cancer treatment, the complications can be as debilitating and as dangerous as the cancer itself.”

In her current setting, where trips to physicians involve attempting to walk with 10 pounds of shackles on her wrists and ankles, with connecting chains, Lynne Stewart has lacked ready access to physicians and specialists under conditions compatible with medical success.

It can take weeks to see a medical provider in prison conditions. It can take weeks to report physical changes and learn the results of treatment; and when held in the hospital, Lynne has been shackled wrist and ankle to the bed. This medieval “shackling” has little to do with any appropriate prison control. She is obviously not an escape risk.

We demand abolition of this practice for all prisoners, let alone those facing surgery and the urgent necessity of care and recovery.

It amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, in violation of human rights.



Lynne Stewart and her husband Ralph Poynter

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www.lynnestewart.org

© PRISON RADIO



There is immediate remedy available for Lynne Stewart. Under the 1984 Sentencing Act, after a prisoner request, the Bureau of Prisons can file a motion with the Court to reduce sentences “for extraordinary and compelling reasons.” Life threatening illness is foremost among these and Lynne Stewart meets every rational and humane criterion for compassionate release.

To misconstrue the gravamen of this compassionate release by conditioning such upon being at death’s door — released, if at all, solely to die — is a cruel mockery converting a prison sentence, wholly undeserved, into a death sentence.

The New York Times, in an editorial (2/12), has excoriated the Bureau of Prisons for their restrictive crippling of this program. In a 20-year period, the

Bureau released a scant 492 persons — an average of 24 a year out of a population that exceeds 220,000.

We cry out against the bureaucratic murder of Lynne Stewart.

We demand Lynne Stewart’s immediate release to receive urgent medical care in a supportive environment indispensable to the prospect of her survival and call upon the Bureau of Prisons to act immediately.

If Lynne’s original sentence of 28 months had not been unreasonably, punitively increased to 10 years, she would be home now — where her medical care would be by her choice and where those who love her best would care for her. Her isolation from this loving care would end.

Prevent this cruelty to Lynne Stewart whose lifelong commitment to justice is now a struggle for her life.

Free Lynne Stewart Now!

Ralph Poynter and Family

To FMC Carswell Warden Joe Keffer and Bureau of Prisons Director Charles E. Samuels, Jr.: I support Lynne Stewart’s application for compassionate release and urge you to file the appropriate motion with the Court.

NAME (BOTH PRINT & SIGN)

CITY

STATE

EMAIL OR ADDRESS

Sign online at:

www.change.org/petitions/petition-to-free-lynnestewart-save-her-life-release-her-now-2 or

The mailing address to make a donation and to return your signed petition is:

Lynne Stewart Organization
1070 Dean Street, Brooklyn, NY 11216

ralph.poynter@yahoo.com

To send Lynne a letter, write:

Lynne Stewart #53504-054
Federal Medical Center, Carswell
PO Box 27137, Ft. Worth, TX 76127



www.lynnestewart.org

Distributed by Prison Radio, www.prisonradio.org

Bradley Manning is Off Limits at San Francisco Gay Pride Parade

But Corporate Sleaze is Embraced

By GLENN GREENWALD

News reports April 26, 2013 indicated that Bradley Manning, widely known to be gay, had been selected to be one of the Grand Marshals of the annual San Francisco gay pride parade, named by the LGBT Pride Celebration Committee. When the predictable backlash instantly ensued, the president of the Board of San Francisco Pride, Lisa L Williams, quickly capitulated, issuing a cowardly, imperious statement that has to be read to be believed.

Williams proclaimed that “Manning will not be a grand marshal in this year’s San Francisco Pride celebration” and termed his selection “a mistake.” She blamed it all on a “staff person” who prematurely made the announcement based on a preliminary vote, and she assures us all that the culprit “has been disciplined.” She then accuses Manning of “actions which placed in harms way the lives of our men and women in uniform,” a substance-free falsehood originally spread by top U.S. military officials which has since been decisively and extensively debunked, even by some government officials (indeed, it’s the U.S. government itself, not Manning, that is guilty of “actions which placed in harms way the lives of our men and women in uniform.”) And then, in my favorite part of her statement, Williams decreed to all organization members that “even the hint of support” for Manning’s action—even the hint—“will not be tolerated by the leadership of San Francisco Pride.” Will not be tolerated!

I originally had no intention of writing about this episode, but the more I discovered about it, the more revealing it became. So let’s just consider a few of the points raised by all of this.

First, while even a hint of support for Manning will not be tolerated, there is a long roster of large corpora-

tions serving as the event’s sponsors who are welcomed with open arms. The list includes AT&T and Verizon, the telecom giants that enabled the illegal warrantless eavesdropping on U.S. citizens by the Bush administration and its NSA (National Security Agency), only to get retroactively immunized from Congress and thus shielded from all criminal and civil liability (including a lawsuit brought in San Francisco against those corporations by their customers who were illegally spied on). Last month, AT&T was fined by OSHA for failing to protect one of its employees who was attacked, was found by the FCC (Federal Communications Center) last year to have overcharged customers by secretly switching them to plans they didn’t want, and is now being sued by the U.S. government for “allegedly bill[ing] the government improperly for services designed for the deaf and hard-of-hearing who place calls by typing messages over the web.”

The list of SF Pride sponsors also includes Bank of America, now being sued for \$1 billion by the U.S. government for allegedly engaging in a systematic scheme of mortgage fraud which the U.S. Attorney called “spectacularly brazen in scope.” Just last month, the same SF Pride sponsor received a record fine for ignoring a court order and instead trying to collect mortgage payments from bankrupt homeowners to which it was not entitled. Earlier this month, SF-Pride-sponsoring Bank of America paid \$2.4 billion to settle shareholder allegations that Bank executives “failed to disclose information about losses at Merrill Lynch and bonuses paid to Merrill Lynch employees before the brokerage was acquired by Bank of America in January 2009 for \$18.5 billion.”

Another beloved SF Pride sponsor, Wells Fargo, is also being “sued by the U.S. for hundreds-of-millions of dollars in damages over claims the bank made reckless mortgage loans that caused losses for a federal insurance program when they defaulted.” Last year, Wells Fargo was fined \$3.1 million by a federal judge for engaging in conduct that court called “highly reprehensible” relating to its persecution of a struggling homeowner. In 2011, the bank was fined by the U.S. government “for allegedly pushing borrowers with good credit into expensive mortgages and falsifying loan applications.”

Also in Good Standing with the SF Pride board: Clear Channel, the media outlet owned by Bain Capital that broadcasts the radio programs of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck; a pension fund is suing this SF Pride sponsor for making cheap, below-market loans to its struggling parent company. The healthcare giant Kaiser Permanente, another proud SF Pride sponsor, is currently under investigation by California officials for alleged massive privacy violations in the form of recklessly disclosing 300,000 patient records.

So apparently, the very high-minded ethical standards of Lisa L Williams and the SF Pride Board apply only to young and powerless Army Privates who engage in an act of conscience against the U.S. war machine, but instantly disappear for large corporations and banks that hand over cash. What we really see here is how the largest and most corrupt corporations own not just the government but also the culture. Even at the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade, once an iconic symbol of cultural dissent and disregard for stifling pieties, nothing can happen that might offend AT&T and the Bank of America.

The minute something even a bit deviant takes place (as defined by standards imposed by America’s political and corporate class,) even the SF Gay Pride Parade must scamper, capitulate, apologize, and take an oath of fealty to their orthodoxies (we adore the military, the state, and your laws). And, as usual, the largest corporate factions are completely exempt from the strictures and standards applied to the marginalized and powerless. Thus, while Bradley Manning is *persona non grata* at SF Pride, illegal eavesdropping telecoms, scheming banks, and hedge-fund purveyors of the nation’s worst right-wing agitprop are more than welcome.

Second, the authoritarian, state-and-military-revering mentality pervading Williams’ statement is striking. It isn’t just the imperious decree that “even a hint of support” for Manning “will not be tolerated,” though that is certainly creepy. Nor is it the weird announcement that the wrongdoer “has been disciplined.” Even worse is the mindless embrace of the baseless claims of U.S. military officials (that Manning “placed in harms way the lives of our men and women in uniform”) along with the supremely authoritarian view that any actions barred by the state are, *ipso facto*, ignoble and wrong. Conduct can be illegal and yet still be noble and commendable: see, for instance, Daniel Ellsberg, or most of the leaders of the civil rights movement in the U.S. Indeed, acts of civil disobedience and conscience by people who risk their own interests to battle injustices are often the most commendable acts. Equating illegal behavior with ignominious behavior is the defining mentality of an authoritarian—and is particularly notable coming from what was once viewed as a bastion of liberal dissent.

But the more one learns about the parties involved here, the less surprising it becomes. According to her biography, Williams “organized satellite offices for the Obama campaign” and

also works for various Democratic politicians. It was President Obama, of course, who so notoriously decreed Bradley Manning guilty in public before his trial by military officers serving under Obama even began, and whose administration was found by the UN’s top torture investigator to have abused him and is now so harshly prosecuting him. It’s anything but surprising that a person who was a loyal Obama campaign aide finds Bradley Manning anathema while adoring big corporations and banks (which funded the Obama campaign and who, in the case of telecoms, Obama voted to immunize).

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What we see here is how even many of the most liberal precincts in America are now the leading spokespeople for and loyalists to state power as a result of their loyalty to President Obama. Thus do we have the President of the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade sounding exactly like the Chairman of the Joints Chief, or Sarah Palin, or gay war-loving neocons, in depicting any meaningful opposition to the National Security State as the supreme sin. I’d be willing to bet large amounts of money that Williams has never condemned the Obama administration’s abuse of

Manning in detention or its dangerously radical prosecution of him for “aiding the enemy.” I have no doubt that the people who did all of that would be showered with gratitude by Parade officials if they attended. In so many liberal precincts in the Age of Obama—even now including the SF Gay Pride parade—the federal government, its military, and its federal prosecutors are to be revered and celebrated but not criticized; only those who oppose them are villains.

Third, when I wrote several weeks ago about the remarkable shift in public opinion on gay equality, I noted that this development is less significant than it seems because the cause of gay equality poses no real threat to elite factions or to how political and economic power in the U.S. are distributed. If anything, it bolsters those power structures because it completely and harmlessly assimilates a previously excluded group into existing institutions and thus incentivizes them to accommodate those institutions and adopt their mindset. This event illustrates exactly what I meant.

While some of the nation’s most corrupt corporations are welcome to fly their flag over the parade, consider what Manning—for whom “even a hint of support will not be tolerated”—actually did. His leak revealed all sorts of corruption, deceit and illegality on the part of the world’s most powerful corporations. They led to numerous journalism awards for *WikiLeaks*. Even Bill Keller, the former Executive Editor of the *New York Times* who is a harsh *WikiLeaks* critic, credited those leaks with helping to spark the Arab Spring, the greatest democratic revolution the world has seen in decades. Multiple media accounts describe how the cables documenting atrocities committed by U.S. troops in Iraq prevented the Malaki government from allowing U.S. troops to stay beyond the agreed-to deadline: *i.e.*, helped end the Iraq war by thwarting Obama’s attempts to pro-

long it. For all of that, Manning was selected by *Guardian* readers as the 2012 Person of the Year, while former Army Lt. Dan Choi said yesterday:

“As we move forward as a country, we need truth in order to gain justice, you can’t have justice without the whole truth . . . So what Manning did as a gay American, as a gay soldier, he stood for integrity, I am proud of him.”

But none of those vital benefits matter to authoritarians. That’s because authoritarians, by definition, believe in the overarching Goodness of institutions of power, and believe the only bad acts come from those who challenge or subvert that power. Bad acts aren’t committed by the National Security State or Surveillance State; they are only committed by those who oppose them. If a person’s actions threaten power factions or are deemed prohibited by them, then Good Authoritarians will reflexively view the person as evil and will be eager to publicly disassociate themselves from such individuals. Or,

as Williams put it, “even the hint of support” for Manning “will not be tolerated,” and those who deviate from this decree will be “disciplined.”

Even the SF Gay Pride Parade is now owned by and beholden to the nation’s largest corporations, subject to their dictates. Those who run the event are functionaries of, loyalists to, the nation’s most powerful political officials. That’s how this parade was so seamlessly transformed from orthodox-challenging, individualistic and creative cultural icon into yet another pile of obedient apparatchiks that spout banal slogans doled out by the state while viciously scorning those who challenge them. Yes, there will undoubtedly still be exotically-dressed drag queens, lesbian motorcycle clubs, and groups proudly defined by their unusual sexual proclivities participating in the parade, but they’ll be marching under a Bank of America banner and behind flag-waving fans of the National Security State, the U.S. President, and the political party that dominates

American politics and its political and military institutions. Yet another edgy, interesting, creative, independent event has been degraded and neutered into a meek and subservient ritual that must pay homage to the nation’s most powerful entities and at all costs avoid offending them in any way.

It’s hardly surprising that someone who so boldly and courageously opposes the U.S. war machine is demonized and scorned this way. Daniel Ellsberg was subjected to the same attacks before he was transformed many years later into a liberal hero (though Ellsberg had the good fortune to be persecuted by a Republican rather than Democratic President and thus, even back then, had some substantial support; come to think of it, Ellsberg lives in San Francisco: would expressions of support for him be tolerated?) But the fact that such lock-step, heel-clicking, military-mimicking behavior is now coming from the SF Gay Pride Parade of all places is indeed noteworthy: it reflects just how pervasive this authoritarian rot has become.

Glenn Greenwald is a columnist on civil liberties and US national security issues for the Guardian.

—*The Guardian*, April 27, 2013

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/27/bradley-manning-sf-gay-pride>



The Shame of America's Gulag

BY CHRIS HEDGES

If, as Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, “the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons” then we are a nation of barbarians. Our vast network of federal and state prisons, with some 2.3 million inmates, rivals the gulags of totalitarian states. Once you disappear behind prison walls you become prey. Rape. Torture. Beatings. Prolonged isolation. Sensory deprivation. Racial profiling. Chain gangs. Forced labor. Rancid food. Children imprisoned as adults. Prisoners forced to take medications to induce lethargy. Inadequate heating and ventilation. Poor health care. Draconian sentences for nonviolent crimes. Endemic violence.

Bonnie Kerness and Ojore Lutalo, both of whom I met in Newark, New Jersey, a few days ago at the office of American Friends Service Committee Prison Watch, have fought longer and harder than perhaps any others in the country against the expanding abuse of prisoners, especially the use of solitary confinement. Lutalo, once a member of the Black Liberation Army, an offshoot of the Black Panthers, first wrote Kerness in 1986 while he was a prisoner at Trenton State Prison, now called New Jersey State Prison. He described to her the bleak and degrading world of solitary confinement, the world of the prisoners like him held in the so-called management control unit, which he called “a prison within a prison.” Before being released in 2009, Lutalo was in the management control unit for 22 of the 28 years he served for the second of two convictions—the first for a bank robbery and the second for a gun battle with a drug dealer. He kept his sanity, he told me, by following a strict regime of exercising in his tiny cell, writing, meditating and tearing up newspapers to make collages that portrayed his prison conditions.

“The guards in riot gear would suddenly wake you up at 1:00 A.M., force you to strip and make you grab all your things and move you to another cell just to harass you,” he said when we spoke in Newark. “They had attack dogs with them that were trained to go for your genitals. You spent 24 hours alone one day in your cell and 22 the next. If you do not have a strong sense of purpose you don’t survive psychologically. Isolation is designed to defeat prisoners mentally, and I saw a lot of prisoners defeated.”

Lutalo’s letter was Kerness’ first indication that the U.S. prison system was creating something new—special detention facilities that under international law are a form of torture. He wrote to her: “How does one go about articulating desperation to another who is not desperate? How does one go about articulating the psychological stress of knowing that people are waiting for me to self-destruct?”

The techniques of sensory deprivation and prolonged isolation were pioneered by the Central Intelligence Agency to break prisoners during the Cold War. Alfred McCoy, the author of *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, wrote in his book that “interrogators had found that mere physical pain, no matter how extreme, often produced heightened resistance.” So the intelligence agency turned to the more effective mechanisms of “sensory disorientation” and “self-inflicted pain,” McCoy noted. (One example of causing self-inflicted pain is to force a prisoner to stand without moving or to hold some other stressful bodily position for a long period.) The combination, government psychologists argued, would cause victims to feel responsible for their own suffering and accelerate psychological disintegration. Sensory

disorientation combines extreme sensory overload with extreme sensory deprivation. Prolonged isolation is followed by intense interrogation. Extreme heat is followed by extreme cold. Glaring light is followed by total darkness. Loud and sustained noise is followed by silence. “The fusion of these two techniques, sensory disorientation and self-inflicted pain, creates a synergy of physical and psychological trauma whose sum is a hammer-blow to the existential platforms of personal identity,” McCoy wrote.

After hearing from Lutalo, Kerness became a fierce advocate for him and other prisoners held in isolation units. She published through her office a survivor’s manual for those held in isolation as well as a booklet titled *Torture in United States Prisons*. And she began to collect the stories of prisoners held in isolation.

“My food trays have been sprayed with mace or cleaning agents, ... human feces and urine put into them by guards who deliver trays to my breakfast, lunch, and dinner...,” a prisoner in isolation in the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility at Carlisle, Indiana, was quoted as saying in *Torture in United States Prisons*. “I have witnessed sane men of character become self-mutilators, suffer paranoia, panic attacks, hostile fantasies about revenge. One prisoner would swallow packs of AA batteries, and stick a pencil in his penis. They would cut on themselves to gain contact with staff nurses or just to draw attention to themselves. These men made slinging human feces ‘body waste’ daily like it was a recognized sport. Some would eat it or rub it all over themselves as if it was body lotion. ... Prisoncrats use a form of restraint, a bed crafted to strap men in four point Velcro straps. Both hands to the wrist and both feet to the

ankles and secured. Prisoners have been kept like this for 3-6 hours at a time. Most times they would remove all their clothes. The Special Confinement Unit used [water hoses] on these men also. ... When prisons become overcrowded, prisonrats will do forced double bunking. Overcrowding issues present an assortment of problems many of which results in violence. ... Prisonrats will purposely house a 'sex offender' in a cell with prisoners with sole intentions of having him beaten up or even killed."

In 1913 Eastern State Penitentiary, in Philadelphia, discontinued its isolation cages. Prisoners within the U.S. prison system would not be held in isolation again in large numbers until the turmoil of the 1960s and the rise of the anti-war and civil rights movements along with the emergence of radical groups such as the Black Panthers. Trenton State Prison established a management control unit, or isolation unit, in 1975 for political prisoners, mostly Black radicals such as Lutalo whom the state wanted to segregate from the wider prison population. Those held in the isolation unit were rarely there because they had violated prison rules; they were there because of their revolutionary beliefs—beliefs the prison authorities feared might resonate with other prisoners. In 1983 the federal prison in Marion, Illinois, instituted a permanent lockdown, creating, in essence, a prison-wide "control unit." By 1994 the Federal Bureau of Prisons, using the Marion model, built its maximum-security prison in Florence, Colorado. The use of prolonged isolation and sensory deprivation exploded. "Special housing units" were formed for the mentally ill. "Security threat group management units" were formed for those accused of gang activity. "Communications management units" were formed to isolate Muslims labeled as terrorists. Voluntary and involuntary protective custody units were formed.

Administrative segregation punishment units were formed to isolate prisoners said to be psychologically troubled. All were established in open violation of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, the U.N.'s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Kerness calls it "the war at home." And she says it is only the latest variation of the long assault on the poor, especially people of color.

"There are no former Jim Crow systems," Kerness said. "The transition from slavery to Black Codes to convict leasing to the Jim Crow laws to the wars on poverty, veterans, youth and political activism in the 1960s has been a seamless evolution of political and social incapacitation of poor people of color. The sophisticated fascism of the practices of stop and frisk, charging people in inner cities with 'wandering,' driving and walking while black, ZIP code racism—these and many other *de facto* practices all serve to keep our prisons full. In a system where 60 percent of those who are imprisoned are people of color, where students of color face harsher punishments in school than their white peers, where 58 percent of African [American] youth ... are sent to adult prisons, where women of color are 69 percent more likely to be imprisoned and where offenders of color receive longer sentences, the concept of colorblindness doesn't exist. The racism around me is palpable."

"The 1960s, when the last of the Jim Crow laws were reversed, this whole new set of practices accepted by law enforcement was designed to continue to feed the money-generating prison system, which has neo-slavery at its core," she said. "Until we deeply recognize that the system's bottom line is social control and creating a business from bodies of color and the poor, nothing can change." She noted that more than half of those in the prison

system have never physically harmed another person but that "just about all of these people have been harmed themselves." And not only does the criminal justice sweep up the poor and people of color, but slavery within the prison system is permitted by the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which reads: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States. ..."

This, Kerness said, "is at the core how the labor of slaves was transformed into what people in prison call neo-slavery." Neo-slavery is an integral part of the prison industrial complex, in which hundreds-of-thousands of the nation's prisoners, primarily people of color, are forced to work at involuntary labor for a dollar or less an hour. "If you call the New Jersey Bureau of Tourism you are most likely talking to a prisoner at the Edna Mahan Correctional Institution for Women who is earning 23 cents an hour who has no ability to negotiate working hours or working conditions," she said.

The bodies of poor, unemployed youths are worth little on the streets but become valuable commodities once they are behind bars.

"People have said to me that the criminal justice system doesn't work," Kerness said. "I've come to believe exactly the opposite—that it works perfectly, just as slavery did, as a matter of economic and political policy. How is it that a 15-year-old in Newark who the country labels worthless to the economy, who has no hope of getting a job or affording college, can suddenly generate 20,000 to 30,000 dollars a year once trapped in the criminal justice system? The expansion of prisons, parole, probation, the court and police systems has resulted in an enormous bureaucracy which has been a boon to everyone from architects to food vendors—all with one thing in common, a

paycheck earned by keeping human beings in cages. The criminalization of poverty is a lucrative business, and we have replaced the social safety net with a dragnet.”

Prisons are at once hugely expensive—the country has spent some \$300 billion on them since 1980—and, as Kerness pointed out, hugely profitable. Prisons function in the same way the military-industrial complex functions. The money is public and the profits are private. “Privatization in the prison industrial complex includes companies, which run prisons for profit while at the same time gleaning profits from forced labor,” she said. “In the state of New Jersey, food and medical services are provided by corporations, which have a profit motive. One recent explosion of private industry is the partnering of Corrections Corporation of America with the federal government to detain close to one million undocumented people. Using public monies to enrich private citizens is the history of capitalism at its most exploitive.”

Those released from prison are woefully unprepared for re-entry. They carry with them the years of trauma they endured. They often suffer from the endemic health problems that come with long incarceration, including hepatitis C, tuberculosis and HIV. They often do not have access to medications upon release to treat their physical and mental illnesses. Finding work is difficult. They feel alienated and are often estranged from friends and family. More than 60 percent end up back in prison.

“How do you teach someone to rid themselves of degradation?” Kerness asked. “How long does it take to teach people to feel safe, a sense of empowerment in a world where they often come home emotionally and physically damaged and unemployable? There are many reasons that ex-prisoners do not make it—paramount among them is that they are not supposed to succeed.”

Kerness has long been a crusader. In 1961 at the age of 19 she left New York to work for a decade in Tennessee in the civil rights struggle, including a year at Tennessee’s Highlander Research and Education Center, where Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. trained. By the 1970s she was involved in housing campaigns for the poor in New Jersey. She kept running into families that included incarcerated members. This led her to found Prison Watch.

The letters that pour into her office are disturbing. Female prisoners routinely complain of being sexually abused by guards. One prisoner wrote to her office: “That was not part of my sentence to perform oral sex with officers.” Other prisoners write on behalf of the mentally ill who have been left to deteriorate in the prison system. One California prisoner told of a mentally ill man spreading feces over himself and the guards then dumping him into a scalding bath that took skin off 30 percent of his body.

Kerness said the letters she receives from prisoners collectively present a litany of “inhumane conditions including cold, filth, callous medical care, extended isolation often lasting years, use of devices of torture, harassment, brutality and racism.” Prisoners send her drawings of “four- and five-point restraints, restraint hoods, restraint belts, restraint beds, stun grenades, stun guns, stun belts, spit hoods, tethers, and waist and leg chains.” But the worst torment, prisoners tell her, is the psychological pain caused by “no touch torture” that included “humiliation, sleep deprivation, sensory disorientation, extreme light or dark, extreme cold or heat” and “extended solitary confinement.” These techniques, she said, are consciously designed to carry out “a systematic attack on all human stimuli.”

The use of sensory deprivation was applied by the government to impris-

oned radicals in the 1960s including members of the Black Panthers, the Black Liberation Army, the Puerto Rican independence movement and the American Indian Movement, along with environmentalists, anti-imperialists and civil rights activists. It is now used extensively against Islamic militants, jailhouse lawyers and political prisoners. Many of those political prisoners were part of radical Black underground movements in the 1960s that advocated violence. A few, such as Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal, are well known, but most have little public visibility—among them Sundiata Acoli, Mutulu Shakur, Imam Jamil Al-Amin (known as H. Rap Brown when in the 1960s he was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), Jalil Bottom, Sekou Odinga, Abdul Majid, Tom Manning and Bill Dunne.

Those within the system who attempt to resist the abuse and mistreatment are dealt with severely. Prisoners in the overcrowded Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison in Lucasville, Ohio, staged a revolt in 1993 after years of routine beatings, degrading rituals of public humiliation and the alleged murders of prisoners by guards. The some 450 prisoners, who were able to unite antagonistic prison factions including the Aryan Brotherhood and the Black Gangster Disciples, held out for 11 days. It was one of the longest prison rebellions in U.S. history. Nine prisoners and a guard were killed by the prisoners during the revolt. The state responded with characteristic fury. It singled out some 40 prisoners and eventually shipped them to Ohio State Penitentiary (OSP), a supermax facility outside Youngstown that was constructed in 1998. There prisoners are held in solitary confinement 23 hours a day in 7-by-11-foot cells. Prisoners at OSP almost never see the sun or have human contact. Those charged with participating in the upris-

ing have, in some cases, been held in these punitive conditions at OSP or other facilities since the 1993 revolt. Five prisoners—Bomani Shakur, Siddique Abdullah Hasan, Jason Robb, George Skatzes and Namir Abdul Mateen—involved in the uprising were charged with murder. They are being held in isolation on death row.

Kerness says the for-profit prison companies have created an entrepreneurial class like that of the Southern slaveholders, one “dependent on the poor, and on bodies of color as a source for income,” and she describes federal and state departments of corrections as “a state of mind.” This state of mind, she said in the interview, “led to Abu Ghraib, Bagram and Guantanamo and what is going on in U.S. prisons right this moment.”

As long as profit remains an incentive to incarcerate human beings and our corporate state abounds in surplus, redundant labor, there is little chance that the prison system will be reformed. It is making our corporate overlords wealthy. Our prisons serve the engine of corporate capitalism, transferring state money to private corporations. These corporations will continue to stymie rational prison reform because the system, however inhumane and unjust, feeds corporate bank accounts. At its bottom the problem is not race—although race plays a huge part in incarceration rates—nor is it finally poverty; it is the predatory nature of corporate capitalism itself. And until we slay the beast of corporate capitalism, until we wrest power back from corporations, until we build social institutions and a system of governance designed not to profit the few but foster the common good, our prison industry and the horror it perpetuates will only expand.

—*trugthdig.com*, March 17, 2013

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_shame_of_americas_gulag_20130317/

Oregon Prisoners Driven to Suicide

Torture in Solitary Confinement Units

By KEVIN “RASHID” JOHNSON



Introduction

I am not one prone to fits of temper. But a few days ago I almost lost it. My outrage was prompted by witnessing the steady deterioration of another prisoner, resulting from particularly acute mental torture inflicted in Oregon’s Disciplinary Segregation Units (DSU), which duplicate almost exactly conditions of torture practiced at Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary, that were outlawed by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1800s.¹

The prisoner, who’d been housed in a suicide precaution cell next to me in the DSU of Oregon’s Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI), went into an immediate depressed state upon being put into the DSU. Initially, he talked a little. Then abruptly withdrew. He stopped eating, to which the guards were unanimously indifferent. Several taunted him, “if you don’t eat it I will.” He then stuffed toilet paper and the cell’s mattress into the cracks around the edges of the door, apparently to seal off all outside sound and “barricade” himself in.

He blacked out the camera in the cell, and began talking to himself. He sat catatonic in the corner of the cell and naked for days on end. He was

confronted only twice by mental health staff who indifferently left his cell when he wasn’t responsive to their half-hearted attempts to talk.

Only after I verbally protested the blatant apathy of mental health and medical staff to his condition, which was obviously due to their collaborating in his mental torture, was a nurse brought to the cell to physically examine him. Whereupon his blood pressure was found extremely low and both the nurse and accompanying guard expressed that his mouth and skin showed obvious symptoms of severe dehydration. In addition to not eating, he’d also apparently not been drinking water for several days although he was supposedly in a “monitored” cell.

The nurse had him immediately taken out of the unit, likely to the medical department since he didn’t return. The next day I was moved to another unit as well. That was on November 14th.

A high tide of suicide

I never learned his full name. The guards and other officials called him only “Acosta” (presumably his last name). In the DSU where we were confined together, there are six suicide precaution cells. I was housed next to one of them.

These precaution cells have in-cell video cameras and prisoners confined to them are generally given only a blue nylon smock-like garment to wear, a nylon blanket, and a mattress. Throughout my DSU assignment at SRCI these cells were always occupied and a constantly changing rotation of prisoners were kept on watch as a result of suicide attempts and ideations. In 22 years of imprisonment, I have never seen such a consistently high and continuous series of suicide

cases, which I immediately recognized to result from the extreme sensory deprivation of DSU housing.

Compelling idle minds

Prior to my Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) assignment in February 2012, I'd spent 17 years in solitary confinement, enduring various extremes of sensory deprivation. During that time I witnessed numerous prisoners deteriorate mentally under the conditions of solitary. But in most cases, it took months to years because there was a limited amount of access to in-cell property and one could use the telephone periodically. However, in Oregon's DSU no personal property is allowed, beyond a pen, writing paper, and, if one can afford it and has anyone to regularly correspond with, a few mailing envelopes. One cannot use the telephone to communicate with loved ones at all. One can't have personal books even. Not even law books.

In DSU a prisoner may only receive up to three novels from a small rolling book cart kept in the unit, many of which are missing bindings and pages. Such reading *per se* does little to stimulate the mind and denies one the opportunity and right to select his own subjects and fields of research and study.² The three novels may only be exchanged from the cart once per week.

DSU prisoners are heard frequently complaining that having nothing else to do, they complete novels in two to three days, and are otherwise left completely idle and "bored out of their minds." Meantime the deterioration sets in: the constant cell-pacing or catatonic states, incessantly talking to oneself, depression, irrational searches for stimulation, and of course, self mutilation and suicide attempts.

Torture by design

And ODOC officials know what they're doing. They consciously use acute sensory deprivation (psychologi-

cal torture) as a behavior modification technique, with the assistance of mental health staff whose professional role and concern are supposed to be maintaining prisoners in healthy mental states, not aiding in inflicting mental pain and injury on them. This is no different from the doctors and nurses who aided the gruesome medical experiments and tortures of concentration camp prisoners in Nazi Germany.

Indeed, I was moved from the DSU with the suicide precaution cells, when I spoke out in protest to and against one of the DSU staff, D. Jennings, as she indifferently left Acosta's cell, asking why she was condoning his and all our mental torture under DSU conditions, referring to the high frequency of suicide attempts in the unit, and citing numerous studies of psychiatric and torture experts on sensory deprivation and its being a known form of psychological torture and one of the most hurtful and damaging forms at that. Her response was to walk away with guards laughing. She then gave me a scornful stare as she left the unit.

I've learned from ODOC prisoners, officials and ODOC's own publicly accessible policies—the Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs)³—that ODOC officials very deliberately use psychological torture as a behavior modification technique, which is one reason the DSU is designed as it is. Those found in violation of minor or major prison rules are invariably sentenced to months of mental torture in DSU: typically four to six months at a time, which amounts to prolonged torture as a deterrent to rules violations.

Worse still is the ODOC's Intensive Management Unit (IMU) where I am now confined. A housing status that lasts from seven months to indefinitely, during which a prisoner must pass through four levels—which requires that he reveal his every thought to his torturers.

Those housed in IMU who receive rules infractions are automatically

placed on level one for a month, which is even more restrictive and extreme in sensory deprivation than DSU housing. And for every infraction he then receives, his level one assignment is extended. Such conditions often put prisoners struggling to maintain their sanity in a catch-22, where coping prompts resisting their torturing confinement, and that very resistance prompts infractions which intensify and prolong that confinement.⁴

On the level one IMU status, the prisoner may have only one novel per week, and cannot even come out of the cell for fresh air inside the walled-in enclosure, with only a small patch of the sky visible, that passes for an exercise yard.

Then, too, as a Security Threat Management (STM) lieutenant, Schultz, here at SRCI, boasted in my presence on September 18, 2012, he personally imposes indefinite statuses on select IMU prisoners where they are left in completely empty cells all day, given bedding and linen from 10:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. daily, and are allowed writing supplies for no more than four hours per day. He actually admitted to me this was torture and violated the prisoners' constitutional rights, but proclaimed himself immune from all liability (i.e. above the law), because ODOC policy empowered him to do pretty much as he pleases to prisoners as an STM official.⁵

I, in turn, sent Schultz a written request that same day pointing out that he was not in fact immune for violating the law because he believes his policy-making superiors gave him authority to do so. I then pointed out the sort of character he and his colleagues are, who presume to punish others by imprisonment for breaking laws, when they in fact have no respect for the very same laws themselves—and the highest law of the land that they are under oath to uphold at that, namely the U.S. Constitution. And although ODOC rules

required that Schultz respond to my request within seven days, he never replied.⁶ Yet, he sees to prisoners being tortured for them violating ODOC rules.

One prisoner who's been confined in the ODOC for some time—Damascus Menefee—informed me of an ODOC scandal a few years back, where it was exposed in the media that several DSU and IMU prisoners had committed suicide, but were not discovered by officials for hours, because guards weren't tending their posts and refused to make required security rounds in the housing units. As a result, the ODOC installed electronic devices in the DSUs and IMU that monitor and record the guards' rounds in the units. What was also exposed during this scandal was that the conditions of the DSUs and IMU were causing an extremely high incidence of suicides and suicide attempts in the ODOC. However, nothing was done to change these conditions that still exist, and, as I have observed, continue to drive prisoners at an extraordinary rate into suicidal ideations and actions.

History repeats itself

As pointed out, the DSU and IMU conditions replicate abuses outlawed over a century ago at the Eastern State Penitentiary, where solitary confinement was first tried as a method of “reforming” criminals, but only proved to drive them insane.

Whereas DSU and IMU level one prisoners are locked in solitary cells with only novels, at Eastern State they were confined in solitary with only a bible to read, where they were expected to ponder and make penance (hence the name “Penitentiary”) for their wrongs. The actual effects of such confinement, as the Supreme Court found, were quite different:

“A considerable number of prisoners fell, after even a short confinement, into a semi-fatuous condition, from which it was next to impossible to arouse them, and others became vio-

lently insane; others still, committed suicide; while those who stood the ordeal were not reformed, and in most cases did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of subsequent service to the community.”⁷

Unite to fight prison torture

Today, as the world joins U.S. prisoners in protest against ongoing solitary confinement in prisons across the country—from the United Nations denouncing the practice of torture⁸ to mass demonstrations in support of hunger striking prisoners protesting solitary⁹—the ODOC has managed somehow to remain under the radar, where the most intense sensory deprivation is being inflicted on prisoners, and prisoners are literally dying to escape it.¹⁰

And it's known torture; of the same sort inflicted in U.S. torture research labs like at Guantanamo Bay, where U.S. military personnel in collaboration with psychiatrists and psychologists, inflicted, studied and refined various methods and effects of psychological torture on detainees (especially sensory deprivation), which came out in the U.S. military torture scandals of 2004 and led to ongoing mass protests to close down Guantanamo. Professor Alfred McCoy also wrote an extensive historical study and exposure of U.S. military and CIA involvement in refining techniques of mental torture for decades.¹¹

Experts in the field know very well that sensory deprivation causes suffering and injury at least as extensive and often more severe than physical torture and injury. As psychiatrist and torture expert Dr. Albert Biderman observed:

“The effect of isolation on the brain function of the prisoner is much like that which occurs if he is beaten, starved or deprived of sleep.”¹² Furthermore, studies find that sensory deprivation inflicted in solitary confinement even briefly actually causes physical brain damage.

“EEG studies going back to the nineteen-sixties have shown diffuse slowing of brain waves in prisoners after a week or more of solitary confinement. In 1992, fifty-seven prisoners of war, released after an average of six months in detention camps in the former Yugoslavia, were examined using EEG-like-tests. The recordings revealed brain abnormalities months afterward: the most severe were found in prisoners who had endured either head trauma sufficient to render them unconscious or, yes, solitary confinement: without sustained social interaction, the human brain may become as impaired as one that has incurred a traumatic injury.”¹³

As said, these hypocrites running the DOC are fully aware of what they're doing. They know they're engaged in torture of prisoners as lawless as if they were water boarding and electrocuting us. That they pretend to have a moral authority to punish others for breaking laws they don't respect themselves is what fueled my outrage, as I watched others around me retreat into insanity, mentally deteriorate and literally resort to self-destruction in efforts to stop their suffering.

Here on the inside, the hypocrisy of those in power is blatant. Because we “in here” so long disconnected from those “out there” are powerless in the face of our armed captors, our torturers feel little need to sugar coat reality and hide their true face as they do with the outside masses.

Here in Oregon the public seems oblivious to the abuses carried out in their names within its prisons; abuses that also unbeknownst to them they stand to suffer from, because these tortured souls around me will be returned back to those communities from whence they left. So for the sake of all concerned, it's in these communities' interests to end this prison torture and hold those responsible to account.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!

All Power to the People

Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

#19370490

Snake River Correctional Institution

777 Stanton Blvd.

Ontario, OR 97914

1 In re Medley, 134 U.S. 160 (1890).

2 As the courts have held: "Freedom of speech is not merely freedom to speak; it is often freedom to read. . . . Forbid a person to read and you shut him out of the marketplace of ideas and opinions that it is the free-speech clause to protect." *King v. Federal Bureau of Prisons*, 415 F. 3d 634, 638 (2005).

3 All of the ODOC's Oregon Administrative Rules can be read at: www.arcweb.sos.state.or.us. The OARs relevant to this article are OAR 291-011 (Disciplinary Segregation), OAR 291-055 (Intensive Management Unit), and OAR 291-069 (Security Threat Management).

4 On this phenomenon see, Dr. Atul Gawadne; "Hellhole: the United States holds thousands of inmates in long-term solitary confinement. Is this torture?" *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2009.

5 See OAR on STM, op cit. note 3.

6 Per OAR 291-109-1020 (4) ODOC staff are to reply to prisoners' written requests ("Kytes") within seven days.

7 See, op cit. note 1 on page 168.

8 On October 18, 2011 UN torture expert, Juan Méndez, denounced U.S. solitary confinement practices as torture and called on all countries to ban its practice except in extremely exceptional circumstances and for as short a time as possible. See "UN News: Solitary Confinement Should be Banned in Most Cases, UN Expert Says," October 18, 2011.

9 On July 1 and September 29, 2011 six thousand and 12,000 prisoners respectively in California prisons went on hunger strikes lasting three weeks both times, protesting, among other things, long-term solitary confinement in Security Housing Units. Mass support for these hunger strikes spanned the country.

10 A prisoner confined next to me, as I write this, witnessed two suicides occurring during or about May and July 2012 at Oregon State Correctional Institutions, Segregation Units, in Salem Oregon. This witness being Zachary Dickson.

11 Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

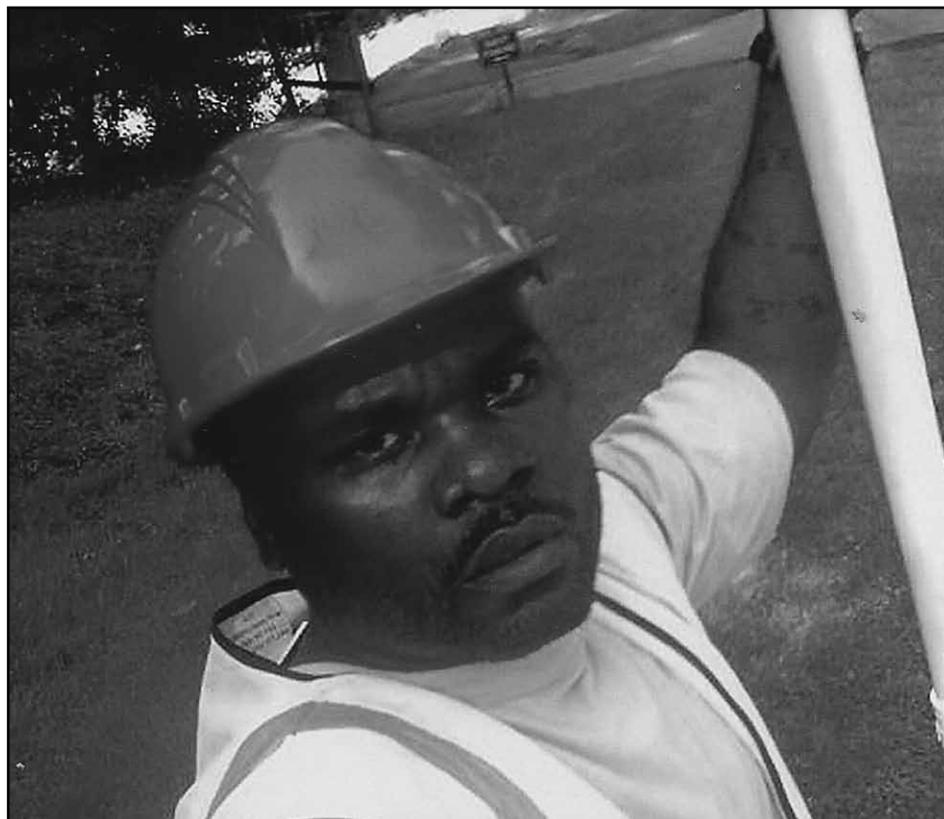
12 Albert Biderman, et al, *The Manipulation of Human Behavior* (New York, 1961) p. 29.

13 Op cit. note 4.

Lorenzo Johnson—An Innocent Man Freed from Prison, Only to Be Re-incarcerated!

In the course of little more than a year, Lorenzo Johnson, an innocent man falsely convicted of murder who won his freedom last January after 16 years in prison, has suffered two nightmarish turns of events. Four months after Johnson's release from prison, the U.S. Supreme Court summarily reversed the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, which had overturned his conviction on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Johnson voluntarily returned to prison to continue his legal fight. Then on April 17, 2013 the very same judges of the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals who had previously freed him formally vacated their ruling and refused to even hear his motion for a hearing on additional grounds that his conviction was obtained by police misconduct in violation of due process. Lorenzo Johnson now faces starting over with his legal fight for his innocence and freedom.

Lorenzo Johnson was arrested and charged with being an accomplice to the murder of a Harrisburg man, Taraja Williams, in 1996, some three months after the murder outside a bar. Johnson was charged after turning down a plea of 5-10 years and refusing to finger an acquaintance, Corey Walker, for the murder and a drug dealing charge. There was no eyewitness to the murder and no ballistics evidence tying him to the shooting. The photographs of the scene show that the shooting could not have happened as the prosecution said. Johnson also had alibi witnesses—he was in New York City at the time of the shooting. At the trial, the main prosecution witness testified that Johnson was present in the bar during arguments between his co-defendant and the deceased. But initially she told detectives she knew nothing about the shooting and hadn't seen Johnson. The bar owner and bouncer testified that



Johnson was not in the bar that night. Another prosecution witness said on the witness stand that he had been threatened by the police to say he saw Johnson on the street near the shooting.

Johnson challenged his conviction on several grounds. One was that the evidence, even as presented by the prosecution, did not make out a case that he was an accomplice in, or in agreement with, the murder of the deceased. In his direct appeal to the Pennsylvania Superior Court, one judge dissented stating, “I believe there is no direct evidence, nor can any be inferred, linking defendant Johnson to the death of Taraja William nor any agreement with defendant Walker which resulted in William’s death.”

Lorenzo Johnson continued to fight his frame-up conviction and filed a state post-conviction relief petition and a federal petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* reasserting the fact that there was no legal evidence against him and that his conviction was the result of police coercion or favors to witnesses. In particular, the prosecution swore that a witness against Johnson had not been given any deals to say Johnson was present during an argument between co-defendant Walker and the deceased. Just days after Johnson’s conviction, witness Victoria Doubs was sentenced on an unrelated robbery charge and the prosecution put on the record her cooperation in testifying against Johnson. On the prosecution’s recommendation she was immediately released from prison.

In October 2011, Johnson’s conviction was overturned by the federal Third Circuit Court of Appeals, agreeing that the evidence used to convict him was insufficient. That was a decision that Lorenzo Johnson was legally innocent and could not be retried. The PA state Attorney General was left with only one possible challenge to the ruling of the federal appeals court—a

petition for *certiorari* (review) to the U.S. Supreme Court. This was statistically and legally unlikely. The district court judge who had initially denied his petition held a bond hearing since retrial was barred given a dismissal on grounds of insufficient evidence. Johnson’s family and friends as well as four PA corrections officers testified on his behalf. Over the objection of the PA Attorney General he was released on January 18, 2012.

He reunited with his family—mother, brother, sister, children. He had a new wife, a job as a construction worker and was active fighting for the release of others who were wrongly convicted. Johnson thought the agony of life imprisonment without parole—slow death row—was over.

However, the state’s petition for review was accepted by Supreme Court Judge Scalia although it was filed late by the PA Attorney General. In a unanimous decision, on May 29, 2012, the United States Supreme Court summarily reversed the Third Circuit Court of Appeals’ grant of *habeas corpus* relief. Lorenzo Johnson was forced to return to prison on June 14, 2012 with only a few days’ notice. On April 17, 2013 the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals denied a new hearing on the basis of his claims of police and prosecutorial misconduct in obtaining witness testimony against him.

Lorenzo Johnson issued the following statement:

“After spending 16-and-a-half years in prison for a crime I’m innocent of, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals granted my release and restored my broken faith that justice for the innocent does exist. The U.S. Supreme Court failed justice four months later by reversing the 3rd Circuit decision and reinstating my life sentence. Once again my fate rested in the hands of the judges from the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals. For ten months I hoped this panel of judges would grant my

release on my Brady violation claim—the suppression of material evidence favorable to the defense—that had merit. Not only did they deny my appeal, they would not even grant me a hearing to hear my claim. The same court that restored my faith in justice, destroyed it.

“How can the Appeals Court vacate a life sentence and deem it unconstitutional then turn around and won’t even hear my appeal? I am the same person the 3rd Circuit Court released due to insufficient evidence and barred a retrial.

“I’m one of MANY wrongful convictions. Whenever someone is wrongfully convicted of a crime, it affects the falsely accused, victims, families, taxpayers, and society as a whole.

“My family, friends and job are still waiting on me and I will take over where I left off. At the end of the day I’m still a son, father, brother and uncle. I will continue to speak out against wrongful convictions. One second is too long for an innocent person to spend in prison.”

For more information: www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org

Lorenzo Johnson’s family encourages everyone outraged by this injustice to write or call the PA Attorney General and Demand: Free Lorenzo Johnson, Now!

— April 23, 2013

Kathleen G. Kane, Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General, 16th Floor
Strawberry Square
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: 717-787-3391
Fax: 717-787-5211

Write to:
Lorenzo Johnson DF1036
SCI Mahanoy
301 Morea Road
Frackville, PA 17932

Innocent!

LORENZO JOHNSON INTERVIEWS JEFFREY DESKOVIC

In 2012 I was released from prison (only to be subsequently re-incarcerated). During my 4-1/2 months of freedom I became best friends with a fellow exonerate, Jeffrey Deskovic, who I was in touch with while I was in prison. I conducted this interview with Jeffrey through the mail. —Lorenzo Johnson

Lorenzo Johnson: What were you in prison for, and how much time did you do?

Jeffrey Deskovic: I was wrongfully imprisoned for 16 years, despite a negative DNA test, from age 17-33, wrongfully imprisoned for murder and rape. My wrongful conviction was based upon a coerced, false confession, extracted from me over more than seven hours, featuring a threat, false promise, withholding of food, all while being attached to a polygraph machine in a small room with a mountain of a polygraph technician towering over me, getting more and more ferocious as each hour passed; basically the third-degree, all of this happening in a different county than I live in, having been driven there by the police. By the officers' own testimony, by the end of the interrogation, I was on the floor, crying uncontrollably in a fetal position. Other factors include prosecutorial misconduct, fraud by the medical examiner, and an inept public defender.

Lorenzo Johnson: When was the evidence discovered that proved your innocence, and how long did it take to get you out of prison?

Jeffrey Deskovic: In September 2006, I finally was able to get more sophisticated DNA testing via the DNA Databank, which not only reaffirmed my innocence, but also identified the actual perpetrator, who, left free while I served time for his crime, struck again, killing another victim three-and-a-half years later. I was released the next day.

Lorenzo Johnson: How long did it take to find someone to believe in you and your innocence to help you fight for your freedom?

Jeffrey Deskovic: My appeals were exhausted in 2001, and almost nobody was answering my letters seeking assistance until 2005, when investigator Claudia Whitman answered a letter that I actually wrote to a book author. She encouraged me to write to The Innocence Project again, and she lobbied the organization to take my case. Once the further testing was completed, I was released the next day.

Lorenzo Johnson: What was your reaction when you found out that your nightmare was over and you were finally going home?

Jeffrey Deskovic: When Nina Morrison, my lawyer, told me that the DNA matched the real perpetrator and that I would be going home the next day, I went into a type of mental paralysis and couldn't accept it for three hours. Then, once she told me she needed my clothing and shoe sizes so other people from The Innocence Project could go shopping for me, and that there was other prep work to be done with the media, then it seemed real. Then I started worrying that something would happen between the rest of the day and the next day and the DA would change her mind. I was so used to the state doing what they always did—oppose me and win.

Lorenzo Johnson: You have officially committed your life to helping the wrongfully convicted by opening your own foundation, can you please let us know how your Foundation functions?

Jeffrey Deskovic: We only work on cases of actual innocence in which the defendant is not involved in any way, shape or fashion in the crime.

In our battle against wrongful convictions, we have four prongs:

1. Raising public awareness—this involves doing lectures across the country, TV and radio interviews, press conferences, sometimes marches, and posting wrongful conviction articles;
2. Seeking legislative changes—trying to get wrongful conviction prevention legislation passed;
3. Exonerating the innocent—when deciding which cases to work on, we ask ourselves two questions: does the applicant have at least a colorable claim of innocence based on something objective, and whether we see a path forward that we can go down which can theoretically lead us to uncover previously unknown evidence of innocence so we can make an actual innocence claim in court. We don't limit ourselves to DNA cases only like most organizations in the field do; we also take on non-DNA cases. Currently we can only handle non-DNA cases in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, while we handle DNA cases nationwide.
4. Re-integration—helping those who have been freed put their lives back together again.

Lorenzo Johnson: You have assembled a nice core of good people in Richard Blassberg, Rita Dave, Millie Gutierrez, and an investigator. How does it feel to oversee your own Foundation?

Jeffrey Deskovic: Surreal. It's hard to believe that I have people working for me. Yet, there's a lot of responsibility. It's primarily my job to raise funds by building a donor base of common people. Politics aside, the President

raised \$100 million dollars mostly on donations of \$10 to \$100, which shows that if we all do a little, we can accomplish a lot. We also need to land big donors, as well as build the visibility of the Foundation.

Lorenzo Johnson: Has your Foundation been involved in any cases yet?

Jeffrey Deskovic: Yes, we just played a role in helping William Lopez undo his wrongful conviction after he had been wrongfully imprisoned for twenty-three-and-a-half years. We currently have 12 cases that are under active investigation.

Lorenzo Johnson: What are your general observations about the massive scale of wrongfully convicted people in the U.S. prison system?

Jeffrey Deskovic: That although this can happen to anyone, wrongful convictions disproportionately affect minorities.

Lorenzo Johnson: What is your opinion about the shocking injustice

involving me, Lorenzo Johnson. Not only are you my friend but your Foundation also co-represents me?

I finally was able to get more sophisticated DNA testing via the DNA Databank, which not only reaffirmed my innocence, but also identified the actual perpetrator, who, left free while I served time for his crime, struck again, killing another victim three-and-a-half years later. I was released the next day.

Jeffrey Deskovic: The injustice in your case is clear: the finding by the federal judge that there was legally insufficient evidence is tantamount to a not-guilty verdict. You should not, therefore, be in prison. It's crazy that the U.S. Supreme Court granted the DAs *certiorari* and reinstated the conviction all at the same time, without allowing your lawyers to fully brief the issue. Had you lost at the Third Circuit and petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for *certiorari*, no doubt you would have been denied, as defendants are routinely denied everyday despite often having the facts and the law on one's side. The patent unfairness of everything is so blatant even Stevie Wonder could see it. Having to accompany you back to prison was one of the most traumatic events I have ever had to participate in. I still have a hard time dealing with it mentally and emotionally.

Lorenzo Johnson: Is there a way that people can help you help the innocent? If so, what is your contact information?

Jeffrey Deskovic: I need supporters to back my advocacy work with the power of the people. I am asking all those who are concerned with wrongful convictions and are willing to do something about it to text the word "Deskovic" to 50555. [SMS subscription service. Up to 4msg/mo. Msg&Data Rates May Apply. Text STOP to Deskovic to STOP. Full terms: mGive.com/E Privacy Policy: mGive.org/P]

By doing so, they will be opting to get text-message alerts about where I am speaking next, upcoming radio and television interviews, wrongful conviction events, rallies, marches, other grassroots activities, as well as other advocacy initiatives I and the Foundation are engaging in.

To contact the Foundation:

The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice
133 W 72nd Street
NY, NY 10023

Email address: JeffreyDeskovicFoundation@gmail.com



Jeffrey Deskovic and Lorenzo Johnson

Mumia is Innocent! Free Mumia Now!

Solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal—Sign Now

Life imprisonment is an outrage! Free Mumia Now!

For almost three decades he was held in solitary confinement under the threat of execution, until the courts finally ruled his death sentence was illegal. In December 2011, the Philadelphia DA Seth Williams, backed by the Fraternal Order of Police, and Edward Rendell, former Pennsylvania Governor, Philadelphia Mayor and the DA who prosecuted Mumia, conceded defeat in trying to legally lynch him for the shooting death of police officer Daniel Faulkner. Now, after a secret proceeding with no notice to Mumia, Mumia is sentenced to “slow death row,” life imprisonment without parole.

Mumia’s trial was a political and racist frame-up

Mumia was targeted by the FBI and Philadelphia police as a spokesman for the Black Panther Party; hated by the police and the notorious police commissioner and then mayor Frank Rizzo for exposing the murderous treatment of the MOVE organization. Mumia is an award winning journalist and a supporter of the MOVE organization. He continues to be the outspoken, truth-telling “voice of the voiceless.” The state wants to silence and entomb for life this man who is known as a “long distance revolutionary.”

The notorious trial judge, Albert Sabo, was a self-proclaimed racist and openly biased against Mumia

Sabo proclaimed months before the trial, “I’m going to help fry the n-----.” All elements of due process—the right to a fair trial—were violated. Every part of the prosecution’s case—witness testimony, Mumia’s supposed confession and ballistics—is a lie.

Witnesses to Mumia’s innocence, Veronica Jones and William Singletary were coerced from telling the truth at Mumia’s trial

The state and federal courts have refused to consider the mountains of evidence showing that Mumia’s guilt was fabricated and Mumia’s innocence was suppressed. The evidence of Mumia’s innocence includes: the sworn statements of Mumia’s brother, William Cook, that a passenger in his car, Ken Freeman, participated in the shooting and ran away; that a drivers license belonging to someone other than Cook or Mumia was found in Faulkner’s hand; and the confession of Arnold Beverly that he—not Mumia—shot and killed police officer Faulkner. Photographs from the crime scene prove the police fabricated the ballistics and the entire case against Mumia. Mumia had *nothing* to do with the shooting. His sworn statement of innocence was not allowed into the court record.

Inspector Alfonzo Giordano, one of the highest-ranking Philadelphia police officers, was the architect of the frame-up

He was the sidekick of Frank Rizzo and raided the Black Panther Party offices in 1968 and was in charge of the year-long blockade and 1978 assault on MOVE in their Powelton Village house. Giordano was also a corrupt cop and a target of FBI/Department of Justice investigation into police racketeering at the time police officer Faulkner was killed. He falsified witness identification, ballistics and a confession. The Department of Justice and then DA Edward Rendell covered this up during Mumia’s trial to convict Mumia for a crime he did not commit.

Mumia should have never spent one day in jail

Mumia’s case exposes the race and class bias of the entire capitalist judicial system. The state demands his slow death in prison as retaliation to his defiant resistance to state repression and racial oppression. But Mumia has not been silenced. We stand with Mumia. Mumia’s freedom is part of our own struggle for justice and human liberation.

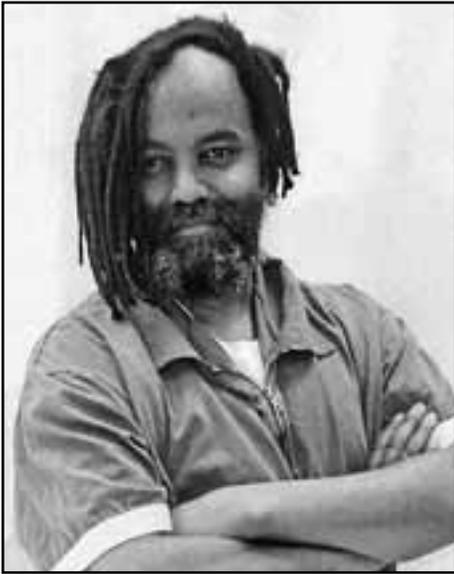
We demand: Free Mumia Now!

Release Mumia Immediately from the Hellhole of Prison!

Sign now at: www.laboractionmumia.org, Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal,
P.O. Box 16222, Oakland, CA 94610, (510) 763-2347, labor donated, March 2013.

What's a 'Jailhouse Environmentalist?'

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL



Mumia Abu-Jamal

Most of us have heard of jailhouse lawyers—guys and gals who battle in court for themselves or others.

But I'd wager few of us have ever heard of a "jailhouse environmentalist." Truth is I didn't think such a thing existed.

Well, it's real; and his name is Bryant Arroyo, a bilingual Puerto Rican who has spent a third of his life in prison, at SCI-Mahanoy in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Arroyo didn't plan on such an endeavor, as he is, already, a jailhouse lawyer. But, like much in life, it was forced on him.

In 1998 former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge invited an area businessman to join him on a trek to South Africa. He, John W. Rich, Jr., was a power plant operator and a major landowner in the Mahanoy Susquehanna County area, a distressed, impoverished region where coalmines have closed down decades ago. Rich

met and made deals with the South African SASOL Industry, and before long, he announced plans for a major coal-to-liquid gas project, literally right next door to the state prison in Mahanoy.

By every measure, this was a done deal, for Rich, his family and colleagues contributed to federal, state and local politicians who supported his plan without dissent, and he was even bipartisan in this effort, gaining the praise and support of Democratic Governor, Ed Rendell.

State permits were issued for the \$800 million plant, and state subsidies cut the costs by hundreds-of-millions of bucks.

But, Arroyo, a curious and inquisitive man, having read about the proposed plant in local papers, felt uneasy.

"What if this isn't safe?" he wondered.

He visited the prison library, asked for the environmental impact statement, a study required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He read it—read it again—and determined he would do everything in his power to stop it.

But what could one man—a prisoner at that—do?

He talked to everybody he could, gangbangers, guards—everybody.

Under prison rules, petitions are forbidden. So, he wrote a letter and made hundreds of copies to Mahanoy Township Supervisors—each mailed by one prisoner. Within weeks, the local Township Supervisors had received over 400 letters—and they appeared in a local paper looking disturbed.

When a local reporter tried to belittle him by referencing his criminal conviction, Arroyo simply went back to work, and before long over 900 letters flooded the offices of the Township Supervisors.

His activities even attracted the attention and support of CELDEF, the Community Environmental Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which crafted an ordinance for the Township barring any non-renewable energy projects, which threatened the area's health and safety.

Even prison guards, through their union local, opposed the project, with union secretary Timothy Teltow (a prison guard and resident of nearby Shenandoah), telling reporters, "I just can't see why this facility is being built right next to a state penitentiary."

Eventually, within a few years, the done deal was done. Over. Dead.

An \$800 million coal gasification plant, supported by powerful corporations (like Bechtel, and Texaco), and politicians like the late senator Arlen Specter, and ex-senator Rick Santorum, had to submit.

But it began when one man, a prisoner no less, Bryant Arroyo, became a "jailhouse environmentalist" and said no.

—*Dread Times*, February 17, 2013

<http://dreadtimes.com/blogs/entry/What-s-a-Jailhouse-Environmentalist>

Write to Mumia at:
Mumia Abu-Jamal AM-8335
SCI-Mahanoy
301 Morea Road
Frackville, PA 17932

The Last Day

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

One day, one day relatively quite soon, the administration under President Barack Hussein Obama will come to an end, and enter the realm of history.

Eight years will have passed, true. But it will pass with a swiftness that is difficult to articulate.

Barack Obama, son of a Kenyan goatherd and unsuccessful civil servant, this most unlikely of candidates, will yield his place to another.

And while history will have certainly been made, the stuff of books, museums and presidential trivia, another kind of history, a quieter kind, will also have been made.

The history of Black America, written more in song than on paper, will record not the best of times; but, far too often, the worst of times.

Unemployment, dropout rates, foreclosures, mass incarceration levels—each and all of these will show significant gains, and paradoxically,

the worsening state of the national Black community.

Eight years will have passed, and by every measure, Black life will have become more unsteady, more challenging, more raucous—and more brutal.

Some will say that the concerns of Black America shouldn't be his, for he is President of all America.

But, before all others, Black Americans have been his most loyal constituency—of all constituencies, why should those who are the most supportive get the least of everything else?

What kind of political logic is that?

Moreover, what other constituency would accept it?

“I'm voting for you, man—but I don't want nothing! No better schools! I want more police terrorism! I want judges to spit on me more! I don't want no jobs for nobody in the 'hood!?”

Africans in America have had a long and tortured history of loyalty to insti-

tutions that do not return those loyalties. Colonial governments. Political parties. The Army. State governments.

And yes, presidents—even Black ones.

Symbols are powerful things (and the essence of politics is symbol.) But when they are empty of substance, they become hollow.

—*PrisonRadio.org*, February 10, 2013

Supreme Justice?

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Did you hear the one about the Supreme Court Justice who got convicted of a slew of felonies?

If not, I don't blame you.

It may sound like a joke, but I assure you, it isn't.

And the reason it isn't better known is, well—it's Pennsylvania.

This is a state where a Supreme Court justice, Joan Orie-Melvin, is convicted of half-a-dozen corruption charges, just several months after her sister, Jane Orie, a state senator, no less, got convicted of several crimes related to her sister's election campaign to the state's highest court.

But, as I said, it's Pennsylvania. Here, judges run for elections just as do other politicians, and they need to raise vast sums of money for media buys.

Isn't that a legalized recipe for corruption?

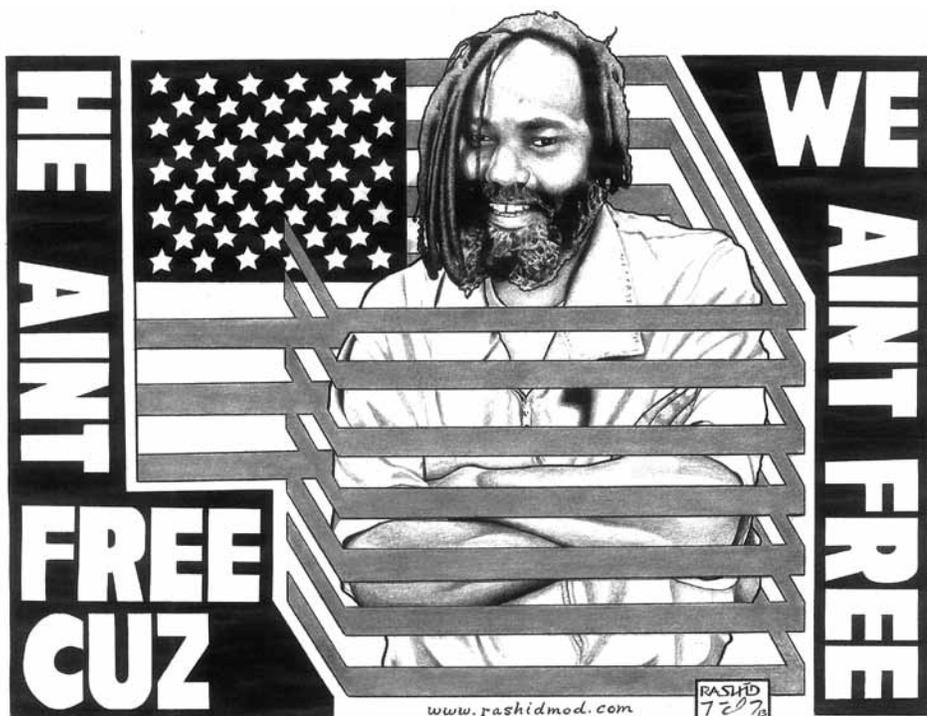
That's no joke.

And guess what? In Pennsylvania (and elsewhere it seems) it's not really news.

Why not?

Hmmmm....

—*PrisonRadio.org*, March 1, 2013



Vampire Holiday: The Passing of Chávez

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

The death of Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez has brought out the malicious and carnal glee of the corporate press, who report breathlessly, not only on his mortal passing, but an end to the Bolivarian Revolution.

They are the voices of their vampire, Wall Street bosses, who delight in owning more of the earth, no matter how much misery they may cause for millions.

In fact, Chávez was beloved by the vast majority of Venezuelans, poor, Indian, and African, who saw in him their rising in the world.

Upon his death, seven nations declared days of mourning in his honored memory; Cuba, Chile, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina and Iran. Ecuador's president, Rafael Correa, decreed three days of mourning, and called Chávez an inspiration of the revolutionary transformation sweeping through Latin America.

Argentina's president, Cristina Kirchner also ordered three days of mourning to mark the passing of Chávez.

For millions of Latin Americans, Chávez brought dignity to them, by refusing to play the puppet for El Norte—the U.S. Empire.

He helped found ALBA, the International Latin American Bank, and became, in Fidel Castro's retirement, a son of his spirit who learned from his mentor, how to resist the Empire.

According to virtually every newspaper in America, Chávez was “anti-American.”

Why? Because he refused to bow, scrape and kiss the boots of Empire?

Because he wanted the oil wealth of the nation to be used for Venezuelans, instead of investors on Wall Street?

How many of us know that CITGO provided low cost heating oil to over one-and-a-half million Americans, and

that CITGO—a wholly owned subsidiary of Venezuela oil did so with Chávez's blessings?

Would an “anti-American” make sure that over a million Americans are warm in winter, at reduced cost?

Chávez was anti-imperialist, and he opposed how the U.S. ran roughshod over Latin American countries and their independence, at will.

When he took to the rostrum of the UN and said, “The devil was here yesterday,” and that the place “smelled of sulfur,” he was a global hit—except for U.S. puppets.

The “devil” was U.S. imperialism still a dangerous drone-invading, bomb dropping threat to millions worldwide.

Chávez, on the other hand, was loved and admired by millions, both in and out of Venezuela.

¡Viva Hugo Chávez!

—*PrisonRadio.org*, March 8, 2013

BOOK REVIEW

Control Unit Prisons

A Microcosm of the Nation

BOOK REVIEW BY RON JACOBS

Out of Control: A Fifteen-Year Battle Against Control Unit Prisons, by Nancy Kurshan, A New Book from the Freedom Archives, http://freedomarchives.org/Out_of_Control/

In the late 1990s and early part of this century I worked as a researcher and writer for the journal *Southland Prison News*. This small journal usually ran about thirty pages and was sent out to prisoners incarcerated primarily in the U.S. South. Edited by an inmate in Virginia, each issue contained a digest of articles concerning prisoners and

prisons along with a feature or two, some book reviews, some prisoner poetry and art. I stopped working for the journal when the funding dried up. Before that work, I had never spent much time working on prison-related issues. Sure, I had attended forums and rallies supporting various political prisoners and prisoner rights ever since the uprising and massacre at Attica prison in 1971, but my political work usually did not involve prison issues. Perhaps this came from a distaste acquired through various brushes with

the law and the subsequent days spent in jail here and there.

The same cannot be said for Nancy Kurshan and the people whose work she so artfully chronicles in the recently released book *Out of Control: A Fifteen Year Battle Against Control Unit Prisons*. Kurshan, a lifelong political activist, (among other things, she is one of the founders of the Yippies) is an ardent opponent of the U.S. prison system, especially those prisons known as control unit prisons. Her book tells of the genesis and growth of these units



throughout the United States and of the battle to oppose them.

It is not a tale with a happy ending. According to the text's introduction, over 80,000 prisoners are currently locked away in control unit prisons in the United States. What this means is that over 80,000 prisoners exist in a world controlled almost completely by prison architecture and the guards those prisons employ. Living in cells smaller than many suburban bathrooms, the walls are painted white, lights are on most of the day, no windows or even bars, hardly any exercise, no reading materials and no visitors; that is the life of most prisoners in these units. Sometimes there are even further restrictions. Rarely are there fewer. These units are constantly watched by prison video feeds and prisoners are often beaten at will by the guards. If this doesn't bother you, then you probably shouldn't bother reading the rest of this review.

There are over 2,000,000 people locked up in the United States. That is more than any other nation in the world. Furthermore, the rate of incarceration in the United States is higher than that of any other nation. According to the NAACP, African American and Latinos comprised 58 percent of all prisoners in 2008, even though they make up approximately one quarter of the U.S. popula-

tion. This is not because Blacks and Latinos are more likely to be criminals. It is because U.S. laws and the police that enforce those laws target these demographic groups. This fact alone lends credence to the argument made by the activists in *Out of Control* that there is a calculated plan to imprison Black and Latino men in the U.S. The history of the U.S. is one that required control of its Black population, even after slavery. Indeed, even more so after slavery. Prisons are part of that plan. It is with this as a fundamental part of that understanding that Kurshan tells her story of a movement—Movement to End the Marion Lockdown—built to oppose that calculation.

...prisons are not so much about fighting crime as they are about controlling segments of the population.

The reader is presented with detailed descriptions of the meetings, protests, legal campaigns, and other work the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown undertook over the fifteen years of its existence. This group was composed of leftists, religious clergy and laity, families of prisoners and other concerned humans. There are small victories and many defeats, primarily because of the complete lack of regard for prisoners' humanity displayed by the Bureau of Prisons, most politicians and other officials. There are also the small victories. After years of demanding a new water source be built for the Marion prison, headway was finally made. Occasionally, even a prisoner gets freed. Throughout, the narrative is told with a warmth and humanity that exists in direct contrast to the tales being told. Her description of the development of a friendship between her family and the Reverend Bruce

Wright, whose book *Black Robes, White Justice* was one of the first books to discuss in plain terms the role the U.S. justice system plays in continuing the racism of U.S. society, is the story of a friendship between unsung warriors.

Many of the procedures used in control unit prisons began in the 1960s when the United States government started locking up leftist revolutionaries and others as part of its COINTELPRO program. This time period is also when leftists began to consciously focus on prisoner rights, in part because their leaders were being locked up. This work helped them to understand that prisons are the final point of confrontation between the state and those who act against it. Indeed, this is precisely why prisoner struggles for human rights are components of the greater struggle for those rights.

As pointed out before, there are now over 2,000,000 people incarcerated in the United States. Prison construction and maintenance is often one of the larger elements of government budgets. This is despite the fact that crime has consistently gone down in the past decade. These facts make it clear that prisons are not so much about fighting crime as they are about controlling segments of the population. As austerity takes a greater hold on the U.S. economy, one can be certain that more working and poor men and women will be sent to prison while the real thieves run the country further into the ground.

Besides being a detailed and inspiring account of a group of human rights activists, Nancy Kurshan's *Out of Control* is a useful resource for discussing the realities of prison in the twenty-first century United States. It is also the tale of a particular part of the movement opposed to that reality.

—*Counterpunch*, Weekend Edition
March 15-17, 2013

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/03/15/a-microcosm-of-the-nation-control-unit-prisons/>

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Where to find us:

www.socialistviewpoint.org

info@socialistviewpoint.org

(415) 824-8730

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Note to Readers:

Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by a group of revolutionaries who share a common political outlook stemming from the old Socialist Workers Party of James P. Cannon, and Socialist Action from 1984 through 1999.

After being expelled from Socialist Action in 1999, we formed Socialist Workers Organization in an attempt to carry on the project of building a nucleus of a revolutionary party true to the historic teachings and program of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

What we have found is that our numbers are insufficient for this crucial project of party building. This problem is not ours alone; it is a problem flowing from the division and fragmentation that has plagued the revolutionary movement in capitalist America and the world since the 1980s.

What we intend to do is to continue to promote the idea of building a revolutionary Marxist working class political party through the pages of *Socialist Viewpoint* magazine. We continue to have an optimistic outlook about the revolutionary potential of the world working class to rule society in its own name—socialism. We are optimistic that the working class, united across borders, and acting in its own class interests can solve the devastating crises of war, poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction that capitalism is responsible for.

We expect that revolutionaries from many different organizations, traditions, and backgrounds will respond to the opportunities that will arise, as workers resist the attacks of the capitalist system and government, to build a new revolutionary political party. Just as we join with others to build every response to war and oppression, we look forward to joining with others in the most important work of building a new mass revolutionary socialist workers' party as it becomes possible to do so.