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SocialistViewpoint

★ The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it. —Karl Marx ★

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Mumia Abu-Jamal's Life is in Danger

Dear Readers,

This letter is an appeal for your help to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal. *Socialist Viewpoint* readers know that this magazine publishes many of Mumia's radio commentaries from Prison Radio as well as information articles about his case. The editors of *Socialist Viewpoint* consider Mumia an important, leading voice of resistance to the horrors of American imperialism and injustices perpetrated by the ruling class everywhere they occur. We are firmly convinced that Mumia was framed in 1981 for the murder of police officer Daniel Faulkner—a crime committed and admitted to by others! Despite his innocence, the state of Pennsylvania sentenced him to die and he was on death row for almost 30 years, now on "slow death row," with a sentence of life without parole. Everything wrong with the so-called U.S. "justice" system from violent killer cops, to lying prosecutors, corrupt judges, and brutal conditions of con-

finement, is present in the frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Now, Mumia Abu-Jamal is very ill. Please read about his desperate situation in this issue¹. His wife, Wadiya Jamal, has called for his immediate release from prison as the only road to the recovery of his health, and we agree.



At a time when the Black Lives Matter movement has swept the country to protest and resist the violent

police killings of Black people, we need to make sure that Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has written about and recorded radio essays about all of these killings, is not added to the list of the dead.

These are the actions you can take to help save Mumia's life. Demand Mumia's freedom; demand that doctors of his choosing be allowed to treat him now. Call, fax, email and/or write to:

John Kerestes, Superintendent,
State Correctional Institution
Mahanoy

570-773-2158 x8102, 570-783-2008
(Fax)

301 Morea Road, Frackville, PA
17932

Tom Wolf, Pennsylvania Governor,
717-787-2500

governor@PA.gov

508 Main Capitol Building,
Harrisburg, PA 17120

John Wetzel, Pennsylvania
Department of Corrections:

717-728-4109; 717-728-4178 (Fax)

ra-contactdoc@doc.gov

1920 Technology Parkway,
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Susan McNaughton, Pennsylvania
Department Of Corrections Press secretary,
717-728-4025

smcnaughton@pa.gov

Sign the on-line petition:

<http://diy.rootsaction.org/petitions/stop-the-medical-execution-of-mumia-abu-jamal-by-neglect-and-malpractice>

Free Mumia!

Carole Seligman and Bonnie
Weinstein

Editors, *Socialist Viewpoint*

¹ "Mumia's Specialized Mistreatment" By
Linn Washington



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The Power of Logistics Workers

As the economy develops around a sprawling logistics industry, organizing workers in these sectors will be vital

BY JOE ALLEN

“Amateurs study strategy, professionals study logistics,” U.S. Army General Omar Bradley famously said. Bradley’s declaration was of course an overstatement, but it was also a necessary correction. Logistics—the mobilization of vast resources and, most importantly, people—was the lifeblood of a winning military strategy. Without full and competent logistical support, any strategy, no matter how brilliant, will fail. It is a point worth remembering when discussing the importance of the logistics industry to the U.S. economy.

Most people know the word logistics from UPS’s ubiquitous advertising campaign, “We [Heart] Logistics.” It is sometimes seen as a fancy word for old-fashioned warehousing and distribution, an advertising makeover for the twenty-first century. “For many [others],” Marxist geographer Deborah Cowen writes, “logistics may only register as a word on the side of the trucks that magically bring online orders only hours after purchase or that circulate incessantly to and from big-box stores at local power centers.” On still other occasions, it is more glibly understood as the “supply chain.”

The U.S. economy revolves around the sprawling logistics industry, and the potential power of these workers is enormous. Socialists should always seek a political relationship with those sections of the working class that have the potential power to elevate the organization and politics of the entire class. Without a strong left wing based in the most powerful workplaces, both the working-class movement and the socialist left will continue to be of marginal influence.

After three decades of gut-wrenching changes to the industrial economy,

I believe that socialists can, once again, have an industrial strategy in the United States.

The “old” supply chain

The production of capital goods (machines and tools for manufacturing) and consumer goods (for personal consumption) has been and will be central to the capitalist system. Every generation or so, however, capital reorganizes its methods of production and circulation (what bourgeois economists call distribution) and in the process remakes the composition of the industrial working class.

These changes can be painful and disorienting, and it can take a significant amount of time for socialists and other working-class activists to reorient themselves. This remaking includes modernization of production techniques (the means of production), the organization of production and labor management, the methods of transporting goods to the market, and how goods are actually sold to the consumer.

Getting capital and consumer goods to the paying customer or the consumer market has been, at times, surprisingly fraught with difficulties. The reorganization of capital is rarely as smooth or as modernized as thought, and parts of the system can advance quite quickly while others lag behind. The rise of large-scale, modern manufacturing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not accompanied by a revolution in retail, although this era saw the invention of the department store.

In 1910, for example, inventor and capitalist Thomas Edison complained:

“Selling and distribution are simply machines for getting products to

consumers. And like all machines, they can be improved with great resulting economy. But it is the plain truth that these machines for distribution have made the least progress of all machines. They are the same in many instances that they were forty or fifty years ago.”

Let’s be clear about Edison’s complaint. He was saying that the retail industry of 1910 was essentially the same as it was in 1870 or 1860: it was still largely the province of local and very small businesses.

The rise of the railroads in the nineteenth century was the most visible and revolutionary development for the delivery of capital and consumer goods. Such innovations as the refrigerated boxcar enabled packinghouse giants like Swift, Armour, and Hormel to send meat products across the country.

Rail transport, manufacturing, and warehousing became (and still is) concentrated around the greater Chicago area. Railroad workers were the most militant, even insurrectionary, of U.S. workers, clearly demonstrated by the 1877 railroad strikes and the 1894 Pullman strike. Despite the revolution in rail transport, however, the horse and wagon remained primarily responsible for the delivery of goods from the railroads to the consumer market.

The development of motorized trucking—exploding in size and scope in the decades following World War I—significantly changed the delivery of capital and consumer goods. Long-haul and local freight drivers picked up from the manufacturers or warehouses—including the waterfront—an increasingly larger share of the market.

These groups of workers played key roles in the emergence of the CIO and the Teamsters, affiliated with the AFL, in the 1930s. In the years following World War II, the development of containerization and air cargo literally revolutionized the transport of goods around the world.

The container was a transport development of historic importance. Mind-boggling in design, the container led to a massive restructuring of ocean transport, ports around the globe, the trucking industry, and the railroads. This restructuring made transport cheaper and faster, and allowed a sizable chunk of industrial production to be moved to the Far East.

The North American continent, especially the U.S. half, became a gigantic “land-bridge,” where shippers—avoiding the expensive Panama Canal—dropped their cargo at West Coast ports and had them loaded onto rail cars and transported to ports along the East and Gulf Coasts, and finally loaded back onto ships bound for Europe.

This is a quick sketch of the old supply chain and how it began to morph into the beginnings of the supply chain we know today. Where does the development of logistics fit into this, and how has it transformed contemporary industrial production and circulation?

The logistics revolution

The transportation landscape and economic organization of the U.S. on the eve of the post-World War II logistics revolution would be unrecognizable to most of us. There was no federally funded interstate highway system, many of the ports were relics of the nineteenth century, trucking companies were tiny and local, retailers were also small and local, UPS specialized in department store deliveries, there was no FedEx or Walmart, international shipping wasn’t done by containerization, computers were in their experimental infancy, there was no satellite communication, no GPS, no universal

bar code, and economic life was highly regulated by the federal government. To name just a few things.

For many people, logistics was perceived to be a military art or skill. “For most of its martial history logistics played a subservient role,” according to Cowen, “enabling rather than defining military strategy.”

This military art was raised to a much higher level of importance with the introduction of modern industrialized warfare brought about by the First and Second World Wars. Global imperialist wars required a mobilization of industry, resources, and troops on an unprecedented scale. Not only did the successful implementation of a war strategy require a different level of logistical thinking and support, it actually impacted strategic thinking itself.

“The logistical complexity of mobilization in this context meant that the success or failure of campaigns came to rely on logistics,” Cowen argues. “Over the course of the twentieth century, a reversal of sorts took place, and logistics began to lead strategy rather than serve it.”

The close relationship between industry and the military that created the U.S. war machine also meant that logistics was soon “adopted into the corporate world of management.” Long before the ubiquitous advertising campaigns of UPS and others, a logistical revolution took place in management.

Sociologists Edna Bonacich and Khaleelah Hardie argue that logistics has two interrelated meanings. The first is the “nuts-and-bolts distribution function” that we generally associate with the word. But the other refers to “the management of the supply chain, including the relations between retailers, their producers/suppliers, and their carrier/transportation providers.”

For our purposes we can define modern logistics in Bonacich and Hardie’s latter meaning of the word, as the management of supply chains.

How is that different from older methods of organizing manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution?

For the bulk of the previous two centuries, manufacturers dominated the retailers that sold their goods, especially consumer products that expanded massively following World War II. The retail industry was dominated by the seasonal production schedules of the manufacturers. For the most part manufacturers told the retailers what would be sold, and at what prices, while massive warehouses stockpiled huge amounts of goods. This imbalance between manufacturers and retailers continued well into the later part of the twentieth century.

Retail was also considered a backwater of American capitalism, despite the emergence of the big downtown department stores in the late nineteenth century, and the creation of popular chains stores that dotted the landscape beginning in the twentieth century, such as Woolworth and Sears. Fifty years after Edison complained of the sad state of American retail, management guru Peter Drucker made a similar observation but with a positive spin. “Distribution,” he wrote, “is one of the most sadly neglected, most promising areas of American business.”

The new retail giants filled this “promising area.” Starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the relationship between the retailers and manufacturers began to shift. That change has had profound consequences for the organization of capitalist production, and the composition and power of the industrial working class.

“The revolution in logistics also marks the rise of corporate retail and logistics giants with aggressive and punitive approaches to labor management,” Cowen writes. “Wal-Mart may be widely known as a mammoth retailer, but in the world of business management it is known as a logistics company.”

Wal-Mart, from its world headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, “cut out a raft of salesmen, jobbers, and other supply chain middlemen, squeezed the manufacturers by shifting every imaginable cost, risk, and penalty onto their books [and has] taught the entire retail world,” according to historian Nelson Lichtenstein, “how the barcode and date warehouse could finally put real money on the bottom line.”

The logistics corporation is not only a new stage in the evolution of the modern corporation but has significant implications for our understanding of the historic distinction between manufacturing, transportation, and retail.

Lichtenstein argues, “Their connections with a global manufacturing network were practically incestuous. They might not own the Asian or Central American factories from which they sourced all those big-box consumables but their ‘vendors’ were linked to them by a ‘supply chain’ that evoked the iron shackles subordinating slave to master.”

The modern logistics corporation—with significant help from the capitalist states—has massively reorganized the global manufacturing network, the shipping and transportation systems, and the final delivery of goods. This reorganization has changed not just the delivery of the finished products, but the manufacturing of the goods themselves.

As Cowen writes, “It is misleading to think about a singular site of production. Commodities today are manufactured across logistics space rather than in a singular place.”

If we see transportation as a key element of modern production, then the new distribution centers developed by the logistics giants are also an important historic development. Lichtenstein highlights this point in his book *The Retail Revolution*:

“Unlike the great icons of the twentieth-century industrial age . . . They are neither inspiring nor grim,

merely a functional set of docks and locks from one place and are destined for sale and consumption somewhere else, hundreds of miles downstream. Yet these Distribution Centers and similar facilities operated by Home Depot, Target, UPS, and Federal Express, stand at the center of the production and consumption network that girdles the planet.”

“Stand[ing] at the center of the production and consumption network,” these new logistical workers—who are also employed at Amazon’s distribution centers—have the potential power to regain the workplace muscle lost by a generation of industrial workers in this country. These are the “choke-points” in the modern industrial system that run backward to the manufacturer and forward to the customer.

What makes this system even more vulnerable to the potential power of the workers in these new distribution centers is the “just-in-time” or “lean production” methods that have come to dominate the global manufacturing system since the early 1980s.

Nearly two decades ago, Kim Moody made this point in his book *Workers in a Lean World*, though he was primarily focused on developments in the auto industry. Citing MIT’s longstanding International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP), the program’s researchers feared the lean production system was “fragile.” It had to be a “humane” system or, as Moody saw it, “the fragility of the system becomes a weapon of resistance.” We can now extend Moody’s analysis and the potential for resistance to the entire logistics industry.

While there are many distribution centers throughout the U.S., there are three cities and related industrial complexes that are especially important for socialists to understand. These are Fedex’s “SuperHub” in Memphis; UPS’s “Worldport” in Louisville; and Chicago’s vast assortment of warehousing complexes and rail and trucking links, starting with UPS’s Chicago

Area Consolidated Hub (“CACH”) and extending forty miles southwest to the area surrounding the old Joliet Arsenal, a region that is the logistics hub of the U.S.

“Cargo Alley”

The deregulation of the trucking and airlines industries in the late 1970s and early 1980s had a transformative impact on the logistics industry. Major sections of the freight industry that had been bastions of union power collapsed within a few years, or were reorganized on a non-union basis.

The evolution of logistics in the delivery business was intimately tied up with the neoliberal *era*, and in some ways pioneered distinctive neoliberal economic policies. For example, trucking on the waterfront became the province of “independent contracts,” and UPS pioneered part-time wages and work.

The Big Three U.S.-based international delivery companies that emerged out of this transformative *era* were Fedex, UPS, and DHL. All three corporations operate globally with enormous workforces that rival or exceed the size of some of the world’s largest standing armies.

UPS, for example, has a worldwide workforce of 395,000 employees, making it nearly the same size as the 400,000-strong U.S. army. Fedex follows with a worldwide workforce of 300,000 employees, and DHL with 275,000. The combined standing and reserve force of the British army is 80,000.

The size of these workforces testifies to the importance of these specific corporations in national and international trade. Deutsche Post owns DHL but it started out as a U.S. corporation, and remains the major competitor to UPS and Fedex on the international level. Its spectacular failure in ground delivery forced it to withdraw from the U.S. ground delivery market in the 2000s.

UPS and Fedex air operations based in Memphis and Louisville are the pumping hearts of both companies. Why Memphis and Louisville? Both air hubs are located in a geographic region nicknamed “Cargo Alley.”

“If you want a system that connects every point in the U.S. to every other point,” FedEx founder Fred Smith told business writers John Kasarda and Greg Lindsay, “the hub has to sit somewhere in a trapezoid between Memphis in the Southwest, to Champaign, Illinois, in the Northwest, over to Dayton, Ohio, and down to Chattanooga. It has to sit in that footprint.”

From Memphis and Louisville, FedEx and UPS cargo planes can reach nearly 80 percent of the continental U.S. in two hours.

“Louisville and Memphis both languished until they deliberately embraced the overnight carriers calling each one home,” Kasarda and Lindsay write in their fascinating book *Aerotropolis: The Way We’ll Live Next*. “Two cities rooted in the steamboat era have been refashioned into the most important hubs of our era.”

The FedEx “SuperHub”

Frederick W. Smith founded FedEx in 1971. Then known as Federal Express, the company pioneered the overnight delivery business. Smith claimed to have first put forward the idea for such a business while at Yale in 1966. Later, after he was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, and served as a forward air controller during the Vietnam War, Smith got an inside look at the U.S. military’s global supply network. He chose Memphis for the location of FedEx’s central air hub because it was on the western fringe of “Cargo Alley.”

By the time FedEx set up shop in Memphis, the city was known to most people for killing Martin Luther King and had seen much of its industry

move out. In the nineteenth century, Memphis’s economy was infamously based on the selling of slaves and the cotton trade. The Memphis Cotton Exchange was the center of business. In the 1970s, business began moving to East Memphis, “where the airport, highways, and rail yards had given birth to an entire forest of white, multi-story warehouses adorned with the stubs of truck-loading docks.”

For Kasarda and Lindsay, Memphis is the “embodiment of an evolution from warehousing to distribution to logistics that took less than twenty years and saw it rise from a necessary evil to the front lines in an eternal war on costs and the competition.”

From modest beginnings FedEx has evolved into one of the most important logistics corporations in the world. Its first sort took place on the night of April 17, 1973, when six French-built Falcon jets brought back a total of 185 packages and envelopes.

“Now three hundred planes nose up to its gates nightly, and 3.3 million packages pass through its labyrinth of belts on any given day. Memphis International has been the busiest cargo airport in the world for eighteen years running—since the rankings began—and 95 percent of its title is due to FedEx,” say Kasarda and Lindsay. Memphis International held that title until 2009 when it fell to number two behind Hong Kong International, where it has remained since.

FedEx also expanded into other areas of transportation. As Jeffrey F. Rayport explains in the *MIT Technology Review*:

“The result is the largest air-cargo company in the world: it employs 290,000 people, maintains a fleet of 75,000 trucks, and owns and operates 684 jets. It has more wide-body jets than any airline, including Boeing 777s that can fly from Shanghai to Memphis nonstop. The SuperHub, the heart of FedEx’s operations, measures four by four

miles. Some 30,000 people are needed to run it.”

The SuperHub is an amazing feat of engineering. “Every weekday night at the SuperHub, FedEx lands, unloads (in just half-an-hour, even for a super-jumbo 777), reloads, and flies out 150 to 200 jets,” Rayport notes. “Its aircraft take off and land every 90 seconds. This all happens between 11:00 P.M. and 4:00 A.M. Central Time. The SuperHub processes between 1.2 million and 1.6 million packages a night.”

It is also a virtual company town with “a hospital, a fire station, a meteorology unit, and a private security force; it has branches of U.S. Customs and Homeland Security, plus anti-terror operations no one will talk about. It has 20 electric power generators as backup to keep it running if the power grid goes down.”

FedEx’s impact on Memphis has been revolutionary. “Not only is it the largest private employer in a metropolitan area of the region of more than a million people,” Kasarda and Lindsay note, “it sits at the center of an ecosystem of warehouses, trucking firms, factories, and office parks.” This “ecosystem” includes “more than a hundred foreign companies [that] have set up shop around the hub.”

Outside of FedEx’s pilots, who are unionized, the SuperHub is one of the great non-union industrial complexes in the U.S. It took sixteen years for FedEx to become a \$4.6 billion company; last year its revenues were \$45 billion. Its wealth has largely been built on the same basis as that of its chief rival UPS, namely part-time wages and work.

Here’s how Kevin Coyne described “The Sort” at the SuperHub in his superb 1993 book *A Day in the Night of America*:

“The roads leading to the airport filled with the commuting cars and the crosswalks streamed with brigades of workers, almost 4,500

strong, in blue uniforms and steel-toed boots, marching out of the night and into Federal Express complex, through the long, wide, sci-fi-white corridor and toward their stage-marks for the nightly one-act drama called *The Sort*—three-hours-or-so sprint wherein the delivery cycle reached its busiest peak.

“More than three-quarters of them college students, the moonlighting, part-time backbone of the sorting process. For a few hours, at an average wage of nine dollars an hour, they would work at a pace few could sustain over a full eight-hour shift, human cogs in the din of a vast Letter Sorting Machine.”

Today far more people work at the SuperHub, and the proportion of college students as short-term workers has drastically declined because the falling wages of American workers have forced many to either seek an additional part-time job or work two (and sometimes three) part-time jobs to make a living.

The potential power that these SuperHub workers have is vast and untapped. Unionization would be a huge battle, but winning it would have a transformative impact on the working class as a whole because of the SuperHub workers’ central importance to the U.S. economy.

UPS’s “Worldport”

Worldport, UPS’s Star Trek-sounding mammoth air hub in Louisville, Kentucky, is another engineering marvel. At 5.2 million square feet (or the size of ninety football fields), with 115 miles of conveyor belts capable of sorting 416,000 packages-per-hour, it is the largest UPS facility in the country. It employs more than 20,000 workers, most of whom are members of Teamsters Local 89.

It has seventy aircraft docks and delivers daily to more than 220 countries and territories around the world. UPS’s pilots are members of the Independent Pilots Association. Over

the last two decades, the company has spent billions of dollars to turn the Louisville air hub into its showcase facility.

While FedEx pioneered the overnight package delivery business, UPS was founded in 1907 as a messenger service. It went through many transformations in the decades before air delivery became so central to its operations. It did some air service in its early decades of business but focused primarily on small package delivery, making it the king of the small parcel industry. UPS planned very methodically before it decided to take on FedEx in the overnight delivery business.

“Nine years after the first FedEx sort, UPS landed in the opposite corner of the trapezoid with its own hub at Louisville,” according to Kasarda and Lindsay. “In the intervening years, [the U.S. government] had deregulated American aviation, allowing any airline (passenger and cargo alike) to fly wherever it wanted whenever it wanted, using whatever aircraft it liked.”

UPS initiated Next Day Air service in September 1982, seventy-five years after the founding of the company.

After initially outsourcing its early air transport operation, UPS went on a spending spree, acquiring several hundred planes, including a dozen of its very own 747s. By the 1990s, UPS put the “International” in Louisville International Airport with its nightly sorties to Europe. Even more than Memphis revolves around FedEx, Louisville and its airport depend on UPS. So does Kentucky—UPS is the state’s largest private employer, with more than twenty thousand workers.

UPS owns 237 jet aircraft and charters 388 to deliver packages to 940 U.S. destinations and 1,015 around the globe on a daily basis. It is one of the largest private airlines in the world.

The packages are transported in U-Haul-truck-size aluminum containers cut to fit the interior of the air-

planes. Nicknamed “cans” they can weigh up to two tons, and they are moved about thanks “to miles of inverted casters and ball bearings studded in the Worldport’s floor and at gates. The cans need only a solid push to glide across them into the hub or onto the caravans of waiting tugs.”

Workers unload the cans and sort the individual packages. Only two sets of hands are supposed to touch the packages, while the rest of the time they are transported and guided across the miles of conveyor belts by smart labels that contain zip codes and tracking numbers.

UPS has spent hundreds-of-millions of dollars in advanced computer software to make Worldport work. “The majority of this software resides at Worldport itself,” according to Kasarda and Lindsay, “making twice as many calculations in an hour as the New York Stock Exchange does in a heavy day of trading.”

Worldport may be highly automated—and rely on the most advanced computer technology and engineering—but human beings still make it run. Twenty thousand part-time workers (union and non-union) work during the crucial hours of 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Teamsters Local 89 in Louisville has more than 16,000 members—the overwhelming number of which are UPS workers—and, because of the continued expansion of Worldport, will likely be North America’s largest Teamsters local in the near future. Like many UPS hubs across the country, Worldport is plagued by a shortage of part-time workers because of its notoriously low wages and miserable work conditions.

Attempting to stabilize its workforce at Worldport, UPS leaned on the local and state governments to allow students to take courses at Metropolitan College, a special program created by a joint venture of the University of Louisville and the Jefferson Community

and Technical College. Metro College has several locations throughout Louisville including at Worldport.

The college was designed “to fit the needs of UPS,” *Time* reported in 1998. The student-workers “will experience a daily schedule that will essentially reverse their internal clocks. Class schedules, social activities and sleep patterns will revolve around the hours of the night shift at UPS.” UPS has also recruited large groups of refugees to meet its needs.

The real power of the Worldport workers and pilots was demonstrated vividly during the 1997 national strike against UPS. Planes didn’t fly, and packages weren’t sorted. The Worldport became a ghost town.

Since then the power of these workers has been continually muted or undermined, though there is clearly a growing restlessness among them: last March 2014, Local 89 members rejected the local agreement with UPS with a 90 percent “no” vote.

Chicago: The great inland port

Chicago has been at the heart of the U.S. transportation, manufacturing, and warehousing network since the Civil War. The logistics revolution, however, has raised Chicago’s historic place in the U.S. economy to Olympian heights.

With the construction over the last twenty-five years of UPS’s gigantic Chicago Area Consolidated Hub (“CACH”) and several “logistics parks” on the grounds of the former Joliet Arsenal, the Chicago-area has been transformed into the world’s third largest container port.

Chicago’s geographic location and transportation infrastructure has inherent advantages that can’t be reproduced on the same scale anywhere in the U.S., or even in the Western hemisphere. The six largest North American railroads meet in Chicago, and over 219 million people are a two-day truck drive from the city. UPS decided to

build the CACH in the Chicago area precisely because it is at the nexus of major transportation lines.

The CACH is the largest ground package facility in the world, and one of the U.S. economy’s most important distribution centers. During peak season (the two months running up to Christmas), the CACH employs up to 8,000 people, who load and unload trailers, and as many as three million packages are moved through the facility. Unlike the SuperHub or Worldport, the CACH has its feet firmly on the ground.

The U.S. economy revolves around the sprawling logistics industry, and the potential power of these workers is enormous.

There are two “Feeder Boards”—seniority lists for the drivers of tractor-trailers—that connect the hundreds of Chicago-area and Midwest UPS hubs, and many rail lines around the Chicago and Joliet region. Teamsters Local 705 and Local 710 have about 380 drivers on their respective lists. The BSNF rail yard located adjacent to the CACH is one of the busiest rail yards in North America, “where every 80 seconds a trailer is lifted on or off a flatcar,” and moved to one of CACH’s 170 bays to be unloaded. “In 2005, Willow Springs was BNSF’s second-busiest intermodal yard, performing 770,000 lifts,” according to *Trains* magazine.

During the 1997 strike, the CACH, like Worldport, was completely shut down, and became a magnet for national media. Turnover among the part-time workforce remains high, and the power of these union workers has been dormant since the strike.

Looking back two decades now, it seems clear that UPS’s decision to build the CACH in the Chicago suburbs foreshadowed even greater logistics developments. Running southwest from the CACH on I-55 to the former grounds of the U.S. Army’s Joliet Arsenal and beyond to neighboring Elwood are massive intermodal facilities and warehouses that have been operating since 2002. The area has been designated a free trade zone, and the rail lines are owned by the BNSF and Union Pacific railroads.

Jacque Engle, a spokeswoman for CenterPoint properties, the logistic management company in Joliet-Elwood, recently told the *Chicago Tribune*, that CenterPoint has “spent nearly \$2 billion, building 12 million square feet of industrial warehouse space and 1,600 acres of other development in Joliet and Elwood. Nine million square feet of warehouse space was built in Elwood alone.” Will County, where Joliet and Elwood are located, is home to more than 300 warehouses. Walmart alone has 3.4 million square feet of warehousing space located there.

According to Warehouse Workers for Justice, “there are about 150,000 warehouse workers in the Chicago region.” These groups of warehouse workers, drivers, and crane operators are the single greatest concentration of potentially powerful workers in the United States.

Return of the repressed

Can socialists, once again, have an organizing strategy for the industrial working class in the U.S.? For nearly two generations, autoworkers and their union, the UAW, were at the core of that class. The auto industry still holds an important place in the U.S. economy but it no longer has the same political impact as it did in 1960, when one out of every six jobs was directly or indirectly related to it.

The past, however, looms large in this discussion. The previous genera-

tion of socialists saw their political perspectives shattered by the enormous changes in manufacturing from 1979 to 1982. The following decades only added to a sense of disorientation and defeat, as industrial unions virtually collapsed, and many of the great industrial cities of the Midwest became ghost towns. A connection was severed between the socialist left and the U.S.'s most powerful workers.

However, the emergence of the modern logistics corporation has created a new industrial working class with potentially enormous economic power. Organizing this workforce, which is mostly part-time and often short-term, is both essential and incredibly difficult. Luckily, some have already begun this work. But there is still a long way to go.

Warehouse Workers for Justice have been organizing warehouse workers in the new supply chain for several years. The Teamsters have made some efforts at organizing non-union freight drivers on the waterfront. Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the four-decade-old, rank-and-file organization, keep advancing their reform agenda. The 2016 Teamsters elections will likely see the biggest challenge to the disastrous leadership of James R. Hoffa. A revived Teamsters union will be essential to future organizing in the logistics industry.

The Left must put at the top of our agenda a strategy to bring together all of these efforts, and those yet to come, to create a new socialist and workers' movement for the twenty-first century.

—*Jacobin*, February 12, 2015

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/logistics-industry-organizing-labor/>

Manufacturing America's Dreams

By GREGG SHOTWELL

Auto companies shield their low-tech exploitation of workers behind high-tech displays of mechanical prowess. The less a consumer knows about the blood and guts of manufacturing, the easier it is to buy the dream. So how does America think all this crap gets built?

Last summer, in a desperate attempt to entice young viewers to buy grandpa's dream car, General Motors (GM) ran a TV ad that featured a chorus line of robot arms dancing to techno music around a series of Cadillacs strutting like runway models on chrome-plated wheels.

Fascination with robotic fabrication isn't new. Fiat glamorized the magic of manufacturing with a video of a Strada built entirely by robots in 1979. The only human touch was the baritone bellowing Rossini's "*Largo al factotum*," triumphantly in the background. Never mind the film crew had to cross a picket line to access the factory.

Advertisers can't hope to fulfill our dreams if we're troubled with the comfort of workers. Therefore, automation, not brawn and bravado, is the vaunted paramour.

Don't let yourself be seduced and deluded. The auto industry's master talent isn't robotics; it's the ability to automatize humans—including drivers.

GM teamed up with the space team at NASA to create the next generation of humanoid robots. Collaboration may assist astronauts, but more significantly it will enable the next generation of autos to relieve drivers of the task of attention. Travelers will be conveyed to their work and consumer stations in a bubble of uninterrupted complacency. Punch in your destination, sit back, and relax. Auto ambiance will massage both body and mind with a gravity-free

experience, which will tranquilize resistance and maximize pliability.

For the masters of neoliberalism, it's not just about the money, it's about control: a monopoly not only of the market—where consumers serve the investing class—but of the mind, where class is demolished by trivial choices under a blank mask of individuality.

Slaves didn't drive pickups to the pyramids, but the law of rulers hasn't changed: to maximize power, dehumanize labor. For the master class servants should be invisible and workers should be subhuman—or better yet, inhuman.

Behind every portrayal of vehicular luxury is a factory where profit is measured on a ticker tape of minutes, not stock prices. When engineers set a picnic table full of free snacks in a work area, it's not an amenity, it's a bait pile, a time study contrived to reveal how many extra minutes are available to cram with tasks. Every idle minute ticks a profit lost or a nick of time for the boss to wring another bead of sweat.

Fredrick Taylor, who invented time and motion studies in 1881, was a rube by current standards. He treated humans like machines without consideration for wear and tear, let alone the yoke of mental anguish wrought by automation. Taylor broke up the craft style of work—in which a skilled artisan fabricated a complete product independently at his own pace—into incremental functions, which dumb-downed the craft into simple, duplicable, mechanical motions.

Under Taylorism any worker could be replaced at a moment's notice with any available body. Leave your brain at the door wasn't a joke, it was a survival tactic. Work was monotonous, but mastery of the task allowed workers

time between strokes to smoke and sip and shoot the shit. Today's factories treat the brain like a muscle. Every worker is expected to be computer savvy and happily able to multi-task adroitly. New auto plants absorb fifty-seven seconds of every ambidextrous minute and the goal is sixty-one.

Back in the day, engineers hid behind pillars with clipboards and stopwatches striving to catch a worker with time on his hands. Today, they're slyer than a Dale Carnegie grad working on commission. They come bearing gifts and award-winning grins.

At the GM warehouse where I worked in 2008, management set up televisions in the break rooms with access to NBA playoffs. Young workers raced to get done in time to catch the last half. Engineers didn't sneak and snoop. They were patient as hunters hiding in deer blinds.

The conversion of humans into automatons demands absolute control, on the job and off. Henry Ford monitored workers' leisure as well as their labor. Random but regular inspections of workers' homes enforced Ford's moral authority: no drinking, no smoking, and church attendance, among other decrees.

Nowadays, all new hires undergo a drug test, which imposes the old autocrat's behavioral conditioning with lab coats rather than thugs with morals and matching suits. New controls in auto world—Alternative Work Schedules—are even more psychologically insidious. The company exerts dominance over sleep patterns through work schedules that subvert normal human behavior. Ten-hour shifts rotate between days and nights and alternate weekends. Workers subjected to shifts that oscillate from day to night never develop a regular sleep pattern and must warp their lives to orbit the job rather than the family.

The nineteenth-century movement for the eight-hour day—time “for rest”

and “what we will”—is a quaint relic of working-class aspirations. After ten or twelve hours of work, an unpaid lunch, and a long commute, all time off is dedicated to recovery and preparation for return to work. Compulsive consumption becomes the mandatory reward because leisure time is a luxury only the investing class can afford. Compelled to cram as much fun as they can into a short span, workers yearn to spend as fast as they earn which is a boon to capital and a bust “for rest” and “what we will.”

Management's quest for absolute control respects no bounds. The peer pressure Toyota exacted to eliminate any movement that didn't add value to the product not only reduced bossing time, it pinched pee time. *The Barking Dog*, a collection of rank-and-file newsletters (1997–2006) from the GM-Toyota venture in Fremont, California, which introduced lean production to North America, describes how, by discouraging hydration, team leaders controlled how much workers urinated.

An urge spurned is a penny earned. Last summer, a Chicago company, unable to induce peer-pressure tactics, installed a badge swipe system that clocks bathroom breaks and penalizes workers who spend more than six minutes of work time in the washroom.

In the 1980s, my fellow workers and I gunned our engines and raced to the bar for a beer and a burger at lunch, but these days the cafeteria, let alone the tavern, is too far away. So cafeteria workers at the GM plant in Lansing, Michigan, deliver food direct to work stations. The Lean Production System, which strives to eliminate all unnecessary steps or expenditures of energy, has turned the social pleasure of lunch into a pit stop. Food is not only fast, it's past before the next task is ready.

In old photographs of factory life we see workers elbow-to-elbow, face-to-face, a hive of frenzied activity. The UAW was born in a mosh pit of mech-

anized emotion. Crowded conditions gave rise to collective action—slow downs, strikes, sabotage, sit-downs.

Today, masterminds of efficiency have atomized interpersonal communication. Auto parts manufacturing is organized into cells where a worker is surrounded by machines, not coworkers. The manual laborer pivots like a robot from one machine to the next in a clockwork of continuous motion without an idle second. But autoworkers aren't the only humans forced to behave like computer numerically controlled robots.

You know why the UPS guy runs to your porch and back? Because the computer at HQ tracks time lapsed between scanning a barcode and getting the truck rolling again. Airline maintenance and cleaning crews get half the time they need to turn a plane around, because the schedule is in the computer, not on the ground where the real world sweats and breathes and breaks down. Letter carriers are harassed by a GPS, which shaves seconds off seconds already sliced and diced into nano-fractions. Amazon prefers humans to robots because they are more flexible and when they break you don't have to fix them. Meat packers are deported when they can no longer feel their hands. Nurses skip lunch and run between patients they don't have time to know, let alone care for. Teachers who love their students get caught juking the stats on Race to the Top test scores. Social workers are presented with human needs they don't have the resources to meet, and at the end of the day they can't lift their heads off their hands until they shut off their emotions and drive home like automatons.

Televised images of automatic ease camouflage massive low-tech exploitation. Sometimes we can't see the river through the debris or perceive the allegory in the story for all the glitz and sparkle, but evidence hides, if we dispel our dreams, in plain sight.

It's a Crime to be Poor

New report details perverse policies that are driving more people into hopeless, inescapable poverty

BY TERRELL JERMAINE STARR

In 2007, GM produced a commercial for the Super Bowl that featured a cute yellow robot on the assembly line. The robot drops a screw and the line stops. Everyone turns and stares. The robot is shamed and ejected from the plant. He struggles to find new employment but fails at every menial venture. He has one skill and one purpose. He is unfit for life on the outside. He feels lonely and alienated. In despair he jumps off a bridge and commits suicide. Then, he awakens from his anxious dream relieved to be back on the line and lucky to have—not just a job—but a place in life.

In the ad GM humanized a robot to the schmaltzy tune of Eric Carmen crooning “All By Myself.” Like most commercials the video conveyed a text and a subtext. The stated message was: quality is built not only into the product, but also into the mind of the employee. The unstated message was: workers are inhuman and we can program them. The overt message of the ad was: autoworkers are incompetent, but they are dedicated to the perfection of a minute task and grateful to hold a trivial role in the corporation. The covert message was: GM sucks the blood out of autoworkers and reduces them to mindless mechanical factotums who feel “All By Myself.”

Auto moguls have an obsessive-compulsive drive to control markets by micromanaging the brains of consumers, as well as workers. Today’s scientists have invented drones that can replace bees, pollinate plants, and make honey, but long ago Henry Ford had “a better idea.” With the help of Frederick Taylor and a crew of violent gangsters, he manipulated humans to behave like drones, labor in mechanized hives, and create for his highness oodles of money.

Ford, the exalted hero of capitalists, was a ruthless, racist, fascist tyrant, but America has always felt enamored of a gentleman with the means to manufacture her dreams.

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The criminalization of America’s poor has been quietly gaining steam for years, but a recent study, “The Poor Get Prison,” co-authored by Karen Dolan and Jodi L. Carr, reveals the startling extent to which American municipalities are fining and jailing the country’s most vulnerable people, not just punishing them for being poor, but driving them deeper into poverty.

“In the last ten years,” Barbara Ehrenreich writes in the introduction, “it has become apparent that being poor is in itself a crime in many cities and counties, and that it is a crime punished by further impoverishment.”

A few months ago, the Department of Justice’s Ferguson report revealed how that city has disproportionately targeted its majority minority population with traffic and other minor infractions that heavily support the municipality’s coffers. But Ferguson is far from alone. Municipalities like New York City have greatly increased the number of minor offenses that are considered criminal (like putting your feet up in the subway) or sitting on the sidewalk. Wealthy white people in business attire are rarely targeted for such summonses, and if they are, they can quickly pay the fine or hire counsel to get out of it. The over-punishment of minor offenses is just another way the rich get richer, and as the report says, the “poor get prison.” They also get poorer and more numerous. In one striking statistic, the Southern Educational Foundation reports that 51 percent of America’s public school-children are living in poverty.

Perversely, it is the poor who, according to Dolan and Carr, are subsidizing municipalities’ budgets and becoming reliable sources of enrich-

ment for the private companies contracted by local governments to carry out what used to be government duties.

Here are five troubling trends from the report that show us how the government is financially abusing poor people.

1. Jailing probationers who can’t pay fees and fines. More than four million people are sentenced to probation in America, according to the report. Because state funding for probation services is on the decline, more private companies are taking over the responsibility of managing them. Private probation companies don’t charge local governments for their services, so there is no fee to the taxpayer. Probationers, however, are charged a supervision fee, and if they can’t afford to pay, they face jail time. Despite the fact that it is unconstitutional to jail people because they can’t pay fines, the reality is that many probationers are poor and unaware of their rights and they end up in modern-day debtors’ prisons.

“While indigent people have a right to free counsel in some cases, more municipalities are requiring an ‘application fee’ of at least \$50 to pay for a public defender,” Karen Dolan, a co-author of the study, told *AlterNet* via email. “Many poor people with misdemeanor charges end up before a judge without legal representation and do not understand their rights. Without legal representation, poor people often don’t understand that they ought not to be offered ‘jail or probation’ simply for debt, and they choose probation. They unwittingly enter into a potential dungeon of debt due to the huge fees charged by private probation companies and inability to pay those eventually—illegally—leads to jail anyway.”

At least 13 states allow localities to outsource probation supervision services. In 2012, these companies generated \$100 million in revenue.

2. Taking poor people's property through asset forfeit seizures. More than \$3 billion in cash and property has been seized by local and state police agencies through a Department of Justice asset seizure program. Eighty percent of the assets collected through this program stay with the law enforcement agencies that collect them, the *Washington Post* reported. Under asset forfeit seizure programs, cops can take someone's property simply under "reasonable suspicion" it was used to commit a crime; the burden of proof is on the property owner that the seizure was unjustified.

Dolan and Carr's report outlines how this program disproportionately impacts the poor, especially Black and Latino people. Given that Black and Latino working families are twice as likely as whites to be low-income, they are less likely to have the financial resources to reclaim property that was, in many cases, wrongfully taken from them.

3. School-to-prison pipeline. Black students make up just 16 percent of the population but represent 32-42 percent of students who are suspended or expelled, according to the "The Poor Get Prison" report. Many school districts around the country use local police to provide security, which further increases these students' chances of arrest.

"When you have zero tolerance policies, combined with law enforcement officers at the doors and in the hallways and you have a poor and Black student body—both demographics considered potential criminals from the time they board the bus in the morning—you have the makings of unnecessarily harsh and punitive actions against Black students," Dolan told *AlterNet*.

"Studies show that students with disabilities are also disproportionately

affected by overly harsh punishments at school," she continued. "The two overriding factors appear to be class and race. Poverty plays a big role, but overlaying that is what seems only explainable by a widespread cultural bias against Black youth, especially Black male youth, even small children who are Black and poor. The presumption that Black schoolchildren are potential criminals seems to play into the disparity in the levels and severity of discipline when you compare them with white schoolchildren."

As previous studies have shown, people with arrest records find it difficult to find employment. A 2013 National Institute of Justice report cited a study that was carried out in New York City that found people with a criminal record are 50 percent less likely to get a call back for a job interview; most of those affected are Black.

What this tells us is that the criminalization of poor Black and Latino children through hyper-disciplinary actions doesn't end at the schoolhouse door. It is a poverty-inducing policy that harms these kids' employability prospects later in life.

4. Hyper criminalization of petty infractions. The New York City Council is considering proposals to make petty crimes like peeing in public and drinking from an open container civil instead of criminal offenses. This follows years of hyper-policing and criminalizing an increasing list of tiny infractions.

Since 2001, 81 percent of the people fined and punished under these "broken windows" policing policies have been Latinos or Black Americans, many them from the city's poorest communities.

New York is not alone in its enforcement of petty violations. In Ferguson, for example, revenue from its police department enforcing municipal codes were expected to account for 23 percent of the city's budget or more than

\$3 million. In 2013, that figure was \$2.46 million.

Loistine Hoskin, a resident of Ferguson, told *CNN* that her car was towed in 2009 because it was missing a tire. She chose to pay a \$1,200 fine rather than try to fight the ticket in court and face the threat of jail, she said.

"It's definitely a vicious cycle," Hoskin, 64, a retired airline reservation agent, told *CNN*. "Unfortunately for most people who are in this cycle, they continue to be in a downward spiral because they can't get jobs, they can't do anything, they can't pay the fines."

5. Fining the homeless for being homeless. If you are homeless in America and have nowhere to go and are down on your luck, it is increasingly difficult to find a safe space in which to exist without being fined for loitering. According to the report, an estimated 600,000 people are homeless on any given night. Though nearly 13 percent of the nation's low-income housing has been lost since 2001, and many people simply cannot afford housing, 34 percent of cities ban public camping, 18 percent prohibit sleeping in public and 43 percent prevent people from sleeping in vehicles, according to a study the report cited.

Often, homeless people who are fined for violating these laws have no way to pay the fine. Jail time is on the table for many who can't pay up.

One example of how economically devastating these fines are comes out of Missouri. Edward Brown, 62 and homeless, has been jailed at least twice since 2009 for failing to pay fines, one of which stems from his failure to get a rabies vaccination for his dog, Matrix. He was ticketed \$464 and just barely paid it off. Brown's monthly Social Security check is \$484.

The report offers suggestions for addressing some of these issues. Whether those in power will listen to the solutions is another matter.

When asked whether race or poverty was the factor driving the criminalization of the poor, Dolan said the two are intertwined.

“I don’t think we can separate the two,” she said. “It’s not an either/or. It’s a both/and. There’s no question that poor people of all races are vastly more impacted by fines, fees, aggressive policing and more vulnerable in court than people with the ability to pay misdemeanor charges and afford legal representation. And there is no question that the mandate for police and court systems to fill in budget deficits by aggressive collection of these fines are more prevalent in lower-income areas, regardless of race.

“But there is equally no question that racial profiling has been ever-present in

our country despite civil rights laws designed to address such bias and discrimination. And Black people are disproportionately poor and disproportionately policed and incarcerated in this country. Police and courts in low-income/high poverty areas are increasingly in the service of aggressive money collection rather than public safety. When racist bias is added to this already fraught situation, the match is thrown on this tinderbox and consequences can be deadly.”

Terrell Jermaine Starr is a senior editor at AlterNet.

—AlterNet.org, April 22, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/economy/5-ways-its-become-crime-be-poor-america-punishable-further-impoverishment?akid=13038.229473.BCg7We&rd=1&src=newsletter1035406&t=3>

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Gregg Shotwell is a retired UAW member who frequently contributes poems to the Blue Collar Review, and is the author of Autoworkers Under the Gun (Haymarket Press, 2012).

—Monthly Review, May 1, 2015

<http://monthlyreview.org/2015/05/01/my-enemys-enemy-is-my-friend/>

Baltimore’s Disgrace

BY BELÉN FERNÁNDEZ

April 28, 2015—After Saturday’s full day of peaceful protests in Baltimore calling for justice for Freddie Gray—the 25-year-old who recently died of a spinal injury suffered while in police custody—some protesters opted Saturday evening and Sunday to pursue more hands-on expressions of frustration. On Monday, the day of Gray’s memorial service, public tensions led to rioting in West Baltimore that continued into the evening.

The media also ran riot. As of Saturday night, the protests were said to have turned “violent” and “destructive.” *ABC News* initially reported that protesters had simply “become rowdy” but quickly amended the headline to incorporate the V-word. Conservative news site *Breitbart.com* took full advantage of its lack of editorial constraints to proclaim, “War zone: Baltimore erupts into violence, chaos as #BlackLivesMatter riots rage.”

When crowds turned to rioting on Monday, *CNN* legal analyst and *New*

Yorker contributor Jeffrey Toobin took the opportunity on *Anderson Cooper 360* to denounce the city. “Protest is an honorable thing; looting and criminality are not,” he said. “Baltimore disgraced itself today.” For Toobin, it’s as if nothing disgraceful or criminal happened before Monday, as if the city’s long history of racist police violence weren’t disgrace enough to be worth comment. On the receiving end of that violence have been teenagers, pregnant women, and octogenarian grandmothers.

Finally, the media found, the protesters were behaving according to the script—the one that casts Black communities in America as powder kegs that can be contained only by the cops. Never mind that chucking hot dog buns and condiments at police and smashing up police vehicles and store windows is inherently less destructive, at least in terms of human life, than fatally severing a person’s spinal cord or shooting an unarmed man multiple

times in the back. The latter two operations were performed under the sanction of U.S. law enforcement, whose behavior, no matter how outrageous, is still defended from public outrage by media and politicians alike.

And the state-sponsored lexicon invites plenty of irony. When Baltimore’s police union last week used the term “lynch mob” to describe what it acknowledged were peaceful protests on behalf of Gray, Drexel University professor George Ciccariello-Maher urged the Twittersphere to “let that sink in for a second.”

The Gray family’s lawyer has described the motive for Gray’s arrest on April 12 as “running while Black.” According to reports, he ran from police unprovoked and was arrested and placed in a police van; somewhere along the way, his spine was compromised, and he ended up in a coma, dying a week later. A pocketknife of legal size was found on his person.

Although running from police hardly constitutes probable cause, the Supreme Court has ruled that such an act can nonetheless merit detention by cops when it takes place in a “high-crime area”—a conveniently ambiguous denomination.

I attended one of the protests for Gray this Saturday, which began in the same “high-crime area” where he was apprehended, at the intersection of Presbury and North Mount streets in West Baltimore. It then made its way to the Western District police station and on to City Hall downtown. At the starting point, Gray’s acquaintances were invited to the microphone to pay their respects. Among the speakers was a former neighbor with health problems who recalled Gray’s consistent concern for his well-being. Just recently, he said, he told Gray that he would go far in life because he “respect[ed] people.”

Baltimore-born pastor the Reverend Graylan Hagler also spoke about law enforcement’s long tradition of dehumanizing Blacks and cited ongoing advancements in the oppressive arts, thanks to training sessions in Israel for U.S. cops. Israel’s vast experience in the curtailment of civil liberties and human rights means it’s an ideal accomplice in the increasing militarization of police, one effect of which is that sections of the domestic population end up being seen as enemy combatants.

While much of the police’s racist violence is waged out of sight—such as when a mentally ill Black female prison inmate was shocked to death with a Taser in February while shackled—the landscape is sufficiently militarized to remind us we’re living in a war zone (albeit not of the variety envisioned by *Breitbart.com*). All day Saturday, police helicopters and drones circled overhead, giving the impression that “protesting while Black” might also be some sort of punishable offense.

And on Monday, when tensions boiled over and young Baltimoreans repeatedly

threw rocks at police tanks and cruisers, the scene was eerily reminiscent of the Occupied Territories, which should surprise no one who has followed U.S. police militarization in accordance with the Israel Defense Forces model.

In his speech, Hagler urged the audience to forget the issue of Black versus white; the real problem, he said,

Finally, the media found, the protesters were behaving according to the script—the one that casts Black communities in America as powder kegs that can be contained only by the cops.

is blue—the color of the police uniform. He’s right. Contemporary police behavior constitutes an affront to justice, enforcing a system of race- and class-based oppression in which Blacks disproportionately occupy the lower rungs of society.

Five days before Gray passed away, Dennis Parker, the director of the racial

justice program at the American Civil Liberties Union, decried the “culture of police violence” in the U.S., as evidenced by the recent slew of slayings of unarmed Black men.

According to Parker, the situation is “perpetuated by the too common failure to hold accountable police who use excessive force against people of color.” A failure to “eliminate that culture,” he warned, will ensure that the “stories of police violence now filling the media will continue on a loop without end,” tearing apart families and communities.

We might be forgiven, then, for failing to see the supreme tragedy in tearing apart police vehicles and other emblems of state violence. The media’s hysteria over this just serves to distract from the real crime: maintaining the *status quo*.

Belén Fernández is the author of The Imperial Messenger: Thomas Friedman at Work, released by Verso in 2011. She is a member of the Jacobin Magazine editorial board, and her articles have appeared in the London Review of Books blog, Al Akhbar English and many other publications.

—Common Dreams, April 28, 2015

<http://commondreams.org/views/2015/04/28/baltimores-disgrace-history-police-violence>



Going to Court in Ferguson, Missouri

BY ADAM SERWER

Ferguson draws a significant amount of revenue from fines and fees for municipal violations, the Department of Justice (DOJ) reported.

“Of the \$11.07 million in general fund revenue the City collected in fiscal year 2010, \$1.38 million came from fines and fees collected by the court; similarly, in fiscal year 2011, the City’s general fund revenue of \$11.44 million included \$1.41 million from fines and fees.”

So what kind of things do people get citations for?

Just about anything.

“[O]ur investigation found instances in which the court charged \$302 for a single Manner of Walking violation; \$427 for a single Peace Disturbance violation; \$531 for High Grass and Weeds; \$777 for Resisting Arrest; and \$792 for Failure to Obey, and \$527 for Failure to Comply, which officers appear to use interchangeably.”

Sounds like it’s really easy to get in trouble.

That’s the idea. The municipal judge in Ferguson, Ronald Brockmeyer, was praised by city officials for coming up with new ways to make money through fees.

“The Finance Director’s February 2011 report to the City Council notes that ‘Judge Brockmeyer was first appointed in 2003, and during this time has been successful in significantly increasing court collections over the years.’

“The report includes a list of ‘what he has done to help in the areas of court efficiency and revenue.’

“The list, drafted by Judge Brockmeyer, approvingly highlights the creation of additional fees, many of which are widely considered abusive and may be unlawful, including several that the City has repealed during the pendency of our investigation.”

Should a judge be doing that?

No, the Department of Justice concludes that “the influence of revenue on the court” may “be unlawful.” But the city officials thought he was good for the bottom line.

“In 2012, a Ferguson City Councilmember wrote to other City officials in opposition to Judge Brockmeyer’s reappointment, stating that ‘[the Judge] does not listen to the testimony, does not review the reports or the criminal history of defendants, and doesn’t let all the pertinent witnesses testify before rendering a verdict.’

“The Councilmember then addressed the concern that ‘switching judges would/could lead to loss of revenue,’ arguing that even if such a switch did ‘lead to a slight loss, I think it’s more important that cases are being handled properly and fairly.’

“The City Manager acknowledged mixed reviews of the Judge’s work but urged that the Judge be reappointed, noting that ‘[i]t goes without saying the City cannot afford to lose any efficiency in our Courts, nor experience any decrease in our Fines and Forfeitures.’”

OK, well I’ve got a citation. What do I do?

Are you friends with anyone who works for the municipal government? If so just tell your friend to hook you up.

“In November 2011, a court clerk received a request from a friend to ‘fix a parking ticket’ received by the friend’s coworker’s wife. After the ticket was faxed to the clerk, she replied: ‘It’s gone baby!’

“In August 2014, the Court Clerk emailed Municipal Judge Brockmeyer a copy of a Failure to Appear notice for a speeding violation issued by the City of Breckenridge, and asked: ‘[FPD patrol supervisor] came to me this morning, could you please take

[care] of this for him in Breckenridge?’

“The Judge replied: ‘Sure.’”

Judge Brockmeyer also serves as Municipal Judge in Breckenridge.

But I don’t have friends in the government.

OK, well then you’ll probably have to pay it. Are you Black or white?

Why does that matter?

Well if you’re Black, you’re more likely to get a citation, more likely to have that citation lead to an arrest, and more likely to end up with multiple citations for one municipal violation.

“Data collected by the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014 shows that African Americans account for 85 percent of vehicle stops, 90 percent of citations, and 93 percent of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67 percent of Ferguson’s population.

“African Americans are 68 percent less likely than others to have their cases dismissed by the court, and are more likely to have their cases last longer and result in more required court encounters. African Americans are at least 50 percent more likely to have their cases lead to an arrest warrant, and accounted for 92 percent of cases in which an arrest warrant was issued by the Ferguson Municipal Court in 2013.

“In 2013, for instance, more than 50 percent of all African Americans cited received multiple citations during a single encounter with FPD, whereas only 26 percent of non-African Americans did. Specifically, 26 percent of African Americans receiving a citation received two citations at once, whereas only 17 percent of white individuals received two citations at once.”

Ok so I’ve got a citation. What do I do?

Can’t help you.

“It is often difficult for an individual who receives a municipal citation or summons in Ferguson to know how much is owed, where and how to pay the ticket, what the options for payment are, what rights the individual has, and what the consequences are for various actions or oversights.”

They don't tell you how to pay the citation?

Sometimes they leave important stuff out.

“And many times, FPD officers omit critical information from the citation, which makes it impossible for a person to determine the specific nature of the offense charged, the amount of the fine owed, or whether a court appearance is required or some alternative method of payment is available.”

How much am I gonna owe?

Probably not what's on the ticket.

“Similarly, while the municipal court does not have any authority to impose a fine of over \$1,000 for any offense, it is not uncommon for individuals to pay more than this amount to the City of Ferguson—in forfeited bond payments, additional Failure to Appear charges, and added court fees—for what may have begun as a simple code violation.”

Well how do I pay for it?

You have to show up between 8:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. But people won't necessarily be there when you get there.

“Even when the court window is technically open, we have seen people standing at the window waiting for a response to their knocks for long periods of time, sometimes in inclement weather—even as court staff sat inside the police department tending to their normal duties.”

No big deal I'll just come back later.

Bad idea. Until recently, if you don't show up, you could be cited for “failure to appear” and end up with a warrant being issued for your arrest. And

not showing up was a big moneymaker for the town.

“Since at least 2010, the court has collected more revenue for Failure to Appear charges than for any other charge. This includes \$442,901 in fines for Failure to Appear violations in 2013, which comprised 24 percent of the total revenue the court collected that year...

“Once issued, arrest warrants can, and frequently do, lead to arrest and time in jail, despite the fact that the underlying offense did not result in a penalty of imprisonment.

“Ferguson recently stopped the practice, but surrounding municipalities still jail people for ‘failure to appear.’”

OK, but I may not be able to pay all that at once.

You don't necessarily have to, but don't miss a payment.

“Ferguson's practice of automatically treating a missed payment as a failure to appear—thus triggering an arrest warrant and possible incarceration—is directly at odds with well-established law that prohibits ‘punishing a person for his poverty.’”

Yikes. How do I know if I have an outstanding warrant?

You might not. They're supposed to send a letter, but you know, things happen.

“Even where a letter is sent, some are returned to court, and court staff told us that in those cases, they make no additional effort to notify the individual of the new court date or the consequences of nonappearance.”

I don't understand how they can do that.

Look, sending those letters costs money.

“In the past, when the court issued a warrant it would also send notice to the individual that a warrant was issued against them and telling them to appear at the police department to resolve the matter. This notice did not provide the basis

of the arrest warrant or describe how it might be resolved.

“In any case, Ferguson stopped providing even this incomplete notice in 2012. In explaining the decision to stop sending this warrant notice, the Court Clerk wrote in a June 2011 email to Chief Jackson that ‘this will save the cost of warrant cards and postage’ and ‘it is not necessary to send out these cards.’”

Oh man. If I have an outstanding warrant does that mean I'm getting arrested?

Depends. Are you “ignorant?”

“City officials have told us that the decision to arrest a person for an outstanding warrant is ‘highly discretionary’ and that officers will frequently not arrest unless the person is ‘ignorant.’”

Wait a second...

Yeaaaaaah I'm just gonna leave this here.

“Available data show that, of those actually arrested by FPD only because of an outstanding municipal warrant, 96 percent are African American.”

Wow.

Keep in mind Ferguson is only 67 percent Black.

I think I need a lawyer.

Good luck. Take this story relayed to federal investigators.

“The man retained counsel who, during trial, was repeatedly interrupted by the court during his cross-examination of the officer.

“When the attorney objected to the interruptions, the judge told him that, if he continued on this path, ‘I will hold you in contempt and I will incarcerate you,’ which, as discussed below, the court has done in the past to others appearing before it.

“The attorney told us that, believing no line of questioning would alter the outcome, he tempered his defense so as not to be jailed.”

That's nuts.

You think that's nuts? It turns out the cop in that case was lying.

"Notably, at that trial, even though the testifying officer had previously been found untruthful during an official FPD investigation, the prosecuting attorney presented his testimony without informing defendant of that fact, and the court credited that testimony."

What happens if I can't pay?

You're probably going to jail.

"As a result, there have been many cases in which a person has been arrested on a warrant, detained for 72 hours or more, and released owing the same amount as before the arrest was made. Court records do not even track the total amount of time a person has spent in jail as part of a case.

"When asked why this is not tracked, a member of court staff told us: 'It's only three days anyway.'"

Is it legal to lock people up for being broke?

Technically, no, in practice, yes.

If I have to go to jail, can someone post bond for me?

Yes, but they probably won't get that money back. And they won't apply it to the money you owe.

"In light of the fact that applicable law permits forfeited bonds to be applied to pending fines, Ferguson's longstanding practice of directing forfeited bond money to the City's general fund is troubling. In fiscal year 2013 alone, the City collected forfeited bond amounts of \$177,168, which could instead have been applied to the fines of those making the payments."

I can't imagine what it's like to get caught up in this.

Let me help. Here are a few examples, as told to investigators:

"One woman...received two parking tickets for a single violation

in 2007 that then totaled \$151 plus fees. Over seven years later, she still owed Ferguson \$541—after already paying \$550 in fines and fees, having multiple arrest warrants issued against her, and being arrested and jailed on several occasions."

According to the report, that woman "experienced financial difficulties and periods of homelessness over several years."

That's awful.

Wait, there's more.

"Another woman told us that when she went to court to try to pay \$100 on a \$600 outstanding balance, the Court Clerk refused to take the partial payment, even though the woman explained that she was a single mother and could not afford to pay more that month."

Then there's this one:

"A 90-year old man had a warrant issued for his arrest after he failed to timely pay the five citations FPD issued to him during a single traffic stop in 2013. An 83-year-old man had a warrant issued against him when he failed to timely resolve his Derelict Auto violation."

Ok I get it.

But do you?

"A 67-year-old woman told us she was stopped and arrested by a Ferguson police officer for an outstanding warrant for failure to pay a trash-removal citation. She did not know about the warrant until her arrest, and the court ultimately charged her \$1,000 in fines, which she continues to pay off in \$100 monthly increments despite being on a limited, fixed income."

This sounds more like a money-making scheme than a court system.

It's both, actually.

"City officials have consistently set maximizing revenue as the priority for Ferguson's law enforcement activity...City and police leadership pressure officers to write citations, inde-

pendent of any public safety need, and rely on citation productivity to fund the City budget...Court staff are keenly aware that the City considers revenue generation to be the municipal court's primary purpose."

That's terrible.

Yeah well, they're not alone. Attorney General Eric Holder said Wednesday that "surrounding municipalities" engage in similar practices.

Is anyone going to do anything about this?

Holder said that the Department of Justice would work with Ferguson and other communities in the area to "reform their law enforcement practices and establish a public safety effort that protects and serves all members of the community."

Will that...change anything?

Your guess is as good as mine.

Adam Serwer is the National Editor for BuzzFeed News and is based in Washington, D.C.

—*BuzzFeed News*, March 4, 2015

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/adamserwer/this-is-what-its-like-to-go-to-court-in-ferguson-missouri#.gt66dogQ>



Inhospitable to Human Life

Hostile architecture prevents society's unwanted from inhabiting public spaces

BY ALLEGRA KIRKLAND

It goes by many names: hostile, defensive, disciplinary. This style of architecture, which makes use of spikes, barricades, protrusions and checkpoints to prevent society's unwanted from inhabiting public spaces, is not new. But its forms are proliferating, and it can now be found in urban centers across the globe, from Tokyo to Copenhagen.

As Alex Andreou put it in a recent *Guardian* article, "Urban spaces are aggressively rejecting soft, human bodies." Andreou first noticed these examples of "anti-bum" architecture after a lost job and crumbling relationship left him out on the London streets, forced to seek shelter where he could find it. This proved more difficult than expected. From surveillance cameras that detect the presence of loiterers to window ledges ridged with spikes, Andreou encountered a built environment that was specifically designed to keep people like him out of public view. "It reveals how corporate hygiene has overridden human considerations, especially in retail districts," Andreou writes.

The ostensible purpose of defensive architecture is security, and in some areas, particularly around major government buildings or high-density shopping malls, this may well be appropriate. But this style of design cannot be untethered from broader anti-vagrancy efforts, particularly in the United States.

AlterNet's activism editor Alyssa Figueroa recently wrote about the many examples of municipal legislation used to restrict the movements and behaviors of the homeless; in California alone, there are 500 such laws on the books. They criminalize behaviors such as resting, begging, food-sharing or public urination, not taking into account how difficult it is

for homeless people to find open beds in shelters, afford access to public restrooms, or pay fines. Hostile architecture facilitates the work of law enforcement by making it physically impossible for the homeless to inhabit public spaces. Neither approach actually addresses the root causes of homelessness, but instead shoves it out of sight.

Though defensive architecture primarily targets the homeless, it has profound and far-reaching social consequences. Teenagers, skateboarders, the elderly, pregnant, and infirm are all affected by spiked benches that don't allow them a place to rest or by aggressive music designed to drive them away. "By making the city less accepting of the human frame," Andreou writes, "we make it less welcoming to all humans. By making our environment more hostile, we become more hostile within it."

Here are five examples of how disciplinary architecture is transforming the built environment of our cities.

1. Spikes, cones and pig's ears

These are one of the most ubiquitous examples of defensive architecture. Tiny metal spikes along fences, in doorways and on highway underpasses make it impossible for people to sleep or sit on these surfaces. Typically smooth surfaces like sidewalks become riddled with spikes, cement cones and protrusions. Pig's ears, or small metal flanges, are inserted along low dividing walls and benches to deter skateboarders from riding on them. In Barcelona, a city with an enduring history of street prostitution, corrugated metal strips are attached to pull-down security grates in order to prevent prostitutes from congregating in shop doorways. And in China's Shangdong province, city officials have installed coin-oper-

ated park benches that briefly retract their metal spikes only after the sitter feeds the meter.

2. Pavement sprinklers

The convenient thing about defensive architecture is that it's easy to come up with alternate explanations for its existence. Instead of admitting it's a punitive measure, city officials and storeowners can explain it away as a means of shooing away pigeons, protecting sensitive locations like banks, or in this example, cleaning the streets.

In 2013, the Strand Bookstore in lower Manhattan, long a landmark for book-loving bargain hunters—and a refuge for the local homeless population—took a drastic measure. Managers noticed that people would camp out overnight under the store's famous wide red awning, making it difficult for employees to set up the outdoor book carts in the morning and deterring potential customers. In response, they installed overnight pavement sprinklers that doused the sleepers and their possessions with periodic blasts of water.

The store manager insisted the sprinklers' sole purpose was to keep the sidewalks clean and free of refuse. This would be much easier to believe or to write off as a coincidence if similar measures hadn't been implemented in other cities, such as Hamburg and Guangzhou.

3. Unpleasant noises

Not all aspects of defensive architectural are structural. Some rely on aural and visual cues to disperse unwanted individuals. In 2012, managers at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in downtown San Francisco resorted to unusual extremes to prevent people from sleeping on the auditorium steps. Using large

outdoor speakers, management blasted the iTunes “industrial” soundtrack, a cacophony of motorcycle, jackhammer and chainsaw noises, from 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. The Vice President of Another Planet Entertainment, the company that manages the auditorium, called the soundtrack a “tremendously effective deterrent.”

Similar techniques have been used to target teenagers and prevent them from congregating in public parks and major downtown areas. So-called “mosquito” devices emit high-pitched tones that are only audible to young people—the human equivalent of a dog whistle.

4. Checkpoints and privatized public space

By claiming sidewalks, public parks and city squares as private space, architects and store chains radically decrease the number of areas where the homeless can rest or sit. These areas are delineated with signs, barricades and in some downtown areas, militaristic checkpoints.

Artist Nils Norman has spent the last two decades documenting examples of disciplinary architecture from around the world. He has found count-

less incidents of the private reclamation of areas that were once communal, from checkpoints that block off streets in Manhattan’s Financial District to signs warning passers-by that London’s Paternoster Square is private land and cannot be entered without permission. As proof of how access to communal spaces is selectively enforced, these signs were only erected after Occupy London protesters attempted to camp out in the square.

5. Benches and seating

In California, legislators recently introduced the Right to Rest Act, a law that would protect all citizens’ right to occupy public spaces without fear of harassment or arrest. This legislation seems particularly critical given that cities are intentionally designing benches, seating and public squares to



be off limits for homeless people looking for a place to sit or sleep. Nils Norman has chronicled hundreds such examples, from curved subway station perches that are fit only for leaning against to bus stop seats separated by dividers, preventing people from lying down. The curved design of benches in public parks also renders them unfit for sleeping.

These design tweaks are so subtle ordinary people probably wouldn’t notice them, but to homeless people, they speak volumes. Ocean Howell, a University of Oregon professor quoted in Andreou’s *Guardian* article, says, “When you’re designed against, you know it.... The message is clear: you are not a member of the public, at least not of the public that is welcome here.”

—AlterNet, March 6, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/5-ways-we-design-our-cities-make-them-inhospitable-human-life-photos?akid=12865.229473.GGH-MX&rd=1&src=newsletter1032964&t=1>



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We Charge Genocide

1.5 million Black men “missing”

BY GLEN FORD

A new analysis of population data confirms what has long been obvious to every minimally conscious Black person in the United States: a huge proportion of the Black male population is missing, physically absent from the daily life of the community. Many are prematurely dead, but the largest group has been consigned to the social death of incarceration. According to a study by the Upshot unit of the *New York Times*, when prison inmates of both sexes are taken out of the equation, there are now 1.5 million more Black women in the country, age 25 to 54, than there are Black men. In some locations—for example, Ferguson, Missouri—there are only six Black men physically present in the community for every ten Black women.

In white America, there is almost no imbalance in gender among the 25 to 54 age group. For every 100 white women, there are 99 white men.

There are more Black men missing from their communities than the combined Black male populations of Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Houston, Washington and Boston. Six hundred thousand of them are in prison, and that’s not counting Black male prison inmates that are younger than 25 and older than 54. The analysts estimate that roughly half, and maybe as many as three-quarters, of the other 900,000 missing Black men have died before their time from diseases and accidents, and that 200,000 are no longer here due to homicide.

“The war of attrition is a race war.”

Black life in America does not start out with these bizarre imbalances between the sexes. There is no gender gap among Blacks in childhood. Roughly the same number of boys and girls are born, and the ratio stays stable until the teenage years, when the war of attrition begins mercilessly grinding down the numbers of Black males. How else is this phenomenon to be described except as a war, in which 600,000 are held captive during their most productive years, 200,000 are killed by violence, and most of the rest go to early graves from accidents and diseases that cause far lower casualties among whites.

The data show that U.S. society has become much more toxic for Black men during the very period in which Blacks were supposedly making such fantastic “progress.” The numbers show that the missing-Black-men phenomenon began growing in the middle decades of the 20th century. The increasing ratio of Black women to men is primarily a product of the age of

mass Black incarceration. The war of attrition is a race war deliberately and methodically initiated by the U.S. government, the effects of which have been devastating to Black society on the most fundamental level: stunting the formation of Black families and the Black American group as a whole by physically removing and eliminating the men.

The data support a totally plausible, factually grounded charge of genocide, based on international law. The U.S. government, through its mass Black incarceration policies of the last half century, has been guilty of, a) “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part,” as well as, b) “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.”

The facts bear witness to the indictment. So do 1.5 million missing Black men.

—*Black Agenda Report*, April 22, 2015

<http://blackagendareport.com/those-missing-black-men>

1.5 Million Missing Black Men

By JUSTIN WOLFERS, DAVID LEONHARDT and KEVIN QUEALY APRIL 20, 2015

For every 100 black women not in jail, there are only 83 black men. The remaining men – 1.5 million of them – are, in a sense, **missing**.



Among cities with sizable black populations, the largest single gap is in **Ferguson, Mo.**



North Charleston, S.C., has a gap larger than 75 percent of cities.



This gap – driven mostly by incarceration and early deaths – **barely exists among whites**.



Figures are for non-incarcerated adults who are 25 to 54.

Killer Cops Boost Body Count

The war on Black America

BY GLEN FORD

“Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival...” —Frederick Douglass

The United States produced a bumper crop of what Billie Holiday would call “Strange Fruit,” in March: at least 111 bodies, the majority of them unarmed men of color, shot down by police in the blood-fertilized streets of American cities. If one just counts the unarmed victims, that’s a rate of about two extrajudicial executions per day, roughly twice the “one every 28 hours” cited by the Malcolm X Grassroots Network’s 2012 report, “Operation Ghetto Storm.”

Yet, in the same month, President Obama declared Venezuela a threat to the national security of the United States, based largely on the death of 14 “dissidents” during a period of anti-government disturbances back in 2014. Many of the dead were pro-government activists killed by “dissidents.” By contrast, Philadelphia police have been shooting an average of one person a week for the last eight years, the overwhelming majority of them Black and brown, according to a new U.S. Justice Department report. As Frederick Douglass said, “for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.”

All across the country, the granting of impunity for the perpetrators of summary execution of Black men, women and children is “everyday practice”—now certified as “best practice”

by Attorney General Eric Holder, who claims court precedents preclude prosecution of killer cops except under the most extreme conditions. (See “It’s Not the Law—but Prosecutors—That Give Immunity to Killer Cops,” December 10, 2014, *Black Agenda Report*.)

Given the odds against prosecution, officer Michael T. Slager probably counts himself the unluckiest white man in South Carolina. A neighborhood resident’s phone camera captured Slager firing repeatedly into the back of 50 year-old Walter L. Scott, a Black North Charleston father of four with no criminal record who had been stopped for a minor traffic violation, tussled with the officer, and tried to run away.

Despite his claims to have been in fear for his life, Slager was charged with murder—a fate he would surely have avoided had he been under the jurisdiction of St. Louis prosecutor Bob McCulloch. Last year, McCulloch’s team led grand jurors to believe that “the law” allowed police to use deadly force against unarmed persons fleeing a felony, as Ferguson officer Darren Wilson claimed was the case with Michael Brown. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled such shootings unconstitutional in 1985, as every public defender knows—and McCulloch surely knew, as well. The South Carolina cop also had the bad judgment to commit murder in clear view of a private citizen’s well-held camera.

Last weekend in the town of Zion, Illinois, about 30 miles north of Chicago, cops killed 17-year-old Justus Howell with two shots to the back while he was running away, according to the coroner’s office. Initially, the police reported no weapon on his

body, but later the cops claimed the teenager had stolen a gun from another man minutes earlier, leading them to give chase. In time, the cops produced a gun, which they will connect to the other Black man, who was held on \$15,000 bail, and thereby seek to justify the killing of the unarmed, fleeing teenager Justus Howell.

Cleveland cop Michael Brelo distinguished himself as the most murderous member of a mob of 104 cops on a chase-and-shoot spree in Cleveland, Ohio, back in November 2012. Mistaking a car engine backfire for a gunshot, the crazy cop caravan careened through Cleveland at speeds reaching 100 miles an hour, cornering Timothy Russell, 43, and Malissa Williams, 30, in a school parking lot. Russell and Williams, unarmed, died in a hail of 137 bullets—49 of them fired by Officer Brelo, now on trial for voluntary manslaughter. Brelo and his partner fired 15 bullets through their own windshield at the Black victims’ car. Then, at a point when, according to the prosecutor, no cop’s life was in danger (except from other officers), Brelo jumped on the hood of the victims’ car and fired 15 more shots at the mortally wounded man and woman. Today, the cop says he has no recollection of the entire episode.

In December, the U.S. Justice Department concluded that Cleveland cops routinely use excessive force and are unaccountable to the public. The month before, in November, a city cop killed 12 year-old Tamir Rice as he played with a toy gun at a park. The officer shot the child twice after observing him for a total of two seconds.

Officer Brelo’s blank memory on the shootings of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams, and officer Timothy



Loehmann's blink-of-an-eye deliberations on terminating Tamir Rice, point up the utter lack of value U.S. society places on Black lives. The high-profile killings this week, the obscene death toll last month, the unreported and delayed deaths, are a constant in the bloody history of America. When President Obama insists that racism is not, and has never been, "endemic" to this country, he is simply identifying himself as an active participant in the ongoing slaughter.

The police, as guardians of the State, believe they are simply doing their jobs. They must be right, since they continue to receive praise, protection and overwhelming white support for carrying out their mission as an army of occupation in Black America. The advent of the Internet and a heightened Black community awareness of police depredations, especially since the murder of Trayvon Martin, in February of 2012, has created the perception among many African Americans that police violence has dramatically increased in recent years. However, history and irrefutable statistics tell us that the "militarization" of the police and the criminalization of Black people as a group are fundamental aspects of a national mission begun in earnest in the late Sixties. Michelle Alexander calls it the "New Jim Crow." Some of us at BAR (*Black Agenda Report*) prefer the term Mass Black Incarceration

State, to describe the superstructure of Black control that has been erected over the past 45 years, a machinery that has so relentlessly criminalized the Black community that one out of every eight prison inmates on Earth is an African American. Any genuine movement for criminal justice "reform" must, therefore, aim to abolish the Mass Black Incarceration State, root and branch, by removing the "occupation" army from Black areas and replacing it with a force of Black people's own choosing.

The U.S. government set in motion the mass Black incarceration regime in the late Sixties for the purpose of counter-insurgency. The structures of Black containment, control and incarceration are now central to the workings of criminal justice in the United States—to the misfortune of lots of white youth who get sucked into the system as unintended "collateral damage." The logic of the project dictates that those who attempt to dismantle the Black counter-insurgency regime will be treated as insurgents, themselves—a central fact for the Black Lives Matter movement to grapple with.

The wave of state violence that smashed the Black Panther Party when it challenged the police "army of occu-

pation" in the late Sixties, never subsided, but was instead hard-wired into the criminal justice system, nationwide. That's why the system's operatives are still trying to kill Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther and probably the world's best-known political prisoner. That's why so many other Party comrades are still behind bars—because they are symbols and icons of insurgency, and U.S. police and prison structures have been on a counter-insurgency mission for nearly half-a-century. And, that's why the Black Is Back Coalition held a national conference on Black Community Control of Police, in St. Louis, April 18 and 19—because there will be no justice and no peace until the occupying army is gone from our streets.

Black people must decide how that can be accomplished—by any means necessary.

Glen Ford edits the Black Agenda Report, where this essay originally appeared. He is a contributor to Killing Trayvons: an Anthology of American Violence.

—Common Dreams, April 9, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/04/09/the-war-on-black-america/>

Chattanooga Times Free Press BENNETT



Black Economic Regression

BY GLEN FORD

March 18, 2015—President Obama almost always speaks well—but he hardly ever speaks the truth. Obama’s main theme at this month’s Selma commemoration was that you’d have to be crazy not to realize that conditions of life for Black folks are improving in America. In reality, however, Blacks have been losing ground compared to whites for at least three decades. In other words, Black economic progress is a myth.

A new study by Brandeis University and the Demos think tank shows that the typical Black household now possesses just six percent of the wealth of the median white household. The white household is worth a little over \$110,000, compared to a median Black household wealth of just over \$7,000. The racial wealth gap is virtually

unchanged from a similar Brandeis study conducted back in 2010, which showed the typical white household was twenty times richer than its Black counterpart.

The two studies, conducted five years apart, both conclude that the historical public policies of the United States created the wealth gap—beginning with slavery—and that only racially-targeted public policies can hope to overcome these disparities. But of course, President Obama said categorically, in his first 100 days in office, that he opposes racially targeted government programs. He said “a rising tide lifts all boats.” But Black boats have been sinking for the past 30 years. The 2010 Brandeis study showed Black households have been falling further and further behind whites since at least 1984, when Ronald Reagan was in office.

Reagan also liked to say that a rising tide lifts all boats.

There is another myth, that there exists a large and growing, upwardly mobile cohort of Black people who are rapidly closing the gap with their white peers. Such people do exist, but they are not statistically significant. The Brandeis 2010 report showed that upper income Blacks fell even farther behind their white peers than lower income Blacks during the Great Recession.

The latest Brandeis study also thoroughly undermines the long-held notion that education is the key to Black economic progress. The numbers show that Blacks and Latinos get much lower returns on their investments in education than whites do. For every \$1.00 of wealth that accrues to Black households because someone earned a college degree, the typical white household accrues \$11.49. That means white people are rewarded far more for their educational achievements. Therefore, even if Blacks caught up with whites in college graduation rates, they would continue to fall further and further behind, economically.

The 2015 report projects that, if Black home ownership could be made to rise to the same level as whites, the racial wealth gap would narrow somewhat. But of course, that can’t possibly happen unless the U.S. reverses 200 years of history by instituting racially-targeted, pro-Black policies at every level of society, and keeps those policies in effect for generations.

One more little detail: you’d have to get rid of capitalism, which is the Mother of All Economic Disparities.

—*Black Agenda Report*, March 18, 2015

<http://www.blackagendareport.com/node/14726>

“Did you hear about the black man killed by police this month?”

Walter Scott, shot 8 times in the back in Charleston?

“No, the other one.”

You mean 17-year-old Justus Howell who was shot twice in the back outside Chicago 3 hours after Walter Scott was murdered?

“No, the other one.”

Philip White in New Jersey whose face was chewed off by a K-9 dog and bled to death while officers tried to seize video evidence from witnesses?

“No, the other one.”

Eric Harris from Tulsa who was screamed, “Oh my God, I’m losing my breath” after being shot in the back, to which the commanding officer responded, “Fuck your breath”?

“No, the other one.”

Freddie Gray from Baltimore, who despite committing no crime, was taken into custody and savagely beaten by police until they severed his spine in three places and collapsed his voice box, only to die in agony seven days later?

“No, the other one.”

Demonizing Teachers, Privatizing Schools

The big lies and big plans behind the Atlanta school cheating scandal

BY BRUCE A. DIXON

When drama queen Fulton County judge Jerry Baxter demanded public post-conviction apologies from Atlanta teachers already convicted of racketeering lest he hand them double digit sentences, it struck raw nerves in parts of Black America. Black pastors and community leaders called press conferences. They held rallies and issued stern statements. They denounced the judge for making “common criminals” out of Black teachers. Inevitably, they wondered whether white teachers would have been prosecuted or subjected to post-conviction humiliation of this kind.

They’re asking the wrong question. What they ought to ask is why the teacher perp walk is being served up in the first place. They need to ask who profits from the continuing crisis in public education in Black and Brown communities? The answers are not hard to find.

The whole thing, from the indictment of Atlanta Public Schools superintendent Beverly Hall, who died before the trial was complete, to the posturing of public officials and corporate media about “cheating the children” is the latest act of a long, long fake crisis. Judge Baxter’s histrionics too, in which he called the cheating scandal “the sickest thing that’s ever happened to Atlanta,” were a great contribution to the story our billionaire-owned media wants to paint about public education.

The one-percenters need us to believe public education in our communities is some new kind of sewer infested with incompetent teachers who are cheating children and the public every week they draw paychecks. The long, long crisis of public education has been designed, engi-

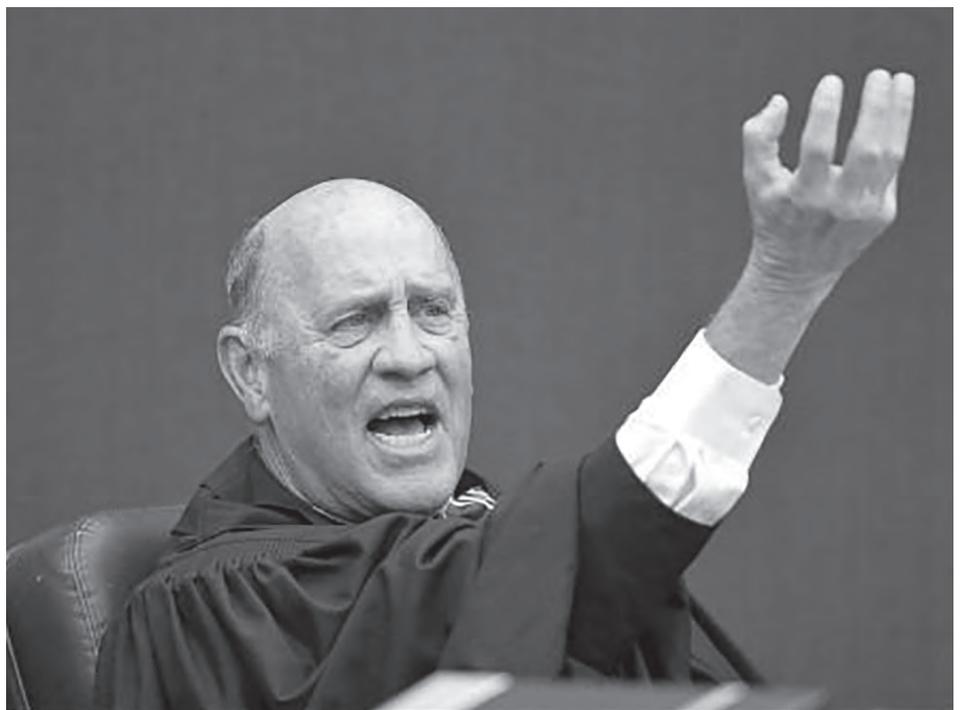
neered and provoked by powerful bipartisan forces to justify their long game, which is the privatization of public education. That’s the Big Plan.

Since at least 2001, when George W. Bush’s conservative Republicans teamed up with Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy’s liberal Democrats to pass and implement the No Child Left Behind Act, it’s been the policy of both capitalist parties implemented by the federal Department of Education to create, to provoke and to exacerbate a phony educational crisis. This program of crisis-creation has been backed by Wall Street, by banksters and hedge fund types, by giant corporations like Wal-Mart and powerful right wing interest groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as well as the so-called philanthropic tentacles of corporate America like the Gates, Broad, Heritage and Walton Family Foundations. The solution to the fake crisis has been the whole industry of testing experts, turn-around consultants, diploma mills for

fake principals, lucrative charter school companies and their contractors, and the private but government sanctioned agencies that rate school districts. Even the agencies that rate school districts are staffed by the same “run the school like a business” experts approved by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who were employed to write President Obama’s Race to the Top program, which punishes school districts that don’t privatize or implement “run the school like a business ‘reforms’” fast enough.

High stakes standardized testing, like the tests educators cheated on in Atlanta, is an essential tool in provoking the crisis, but it’s a big lie. These kinds of tests don’t reflect student progress or teacher competency. They track to family income, and family income in the U.S. correlates largely to race. So, as Glen Ford put it back in 2012,

“The standardized tests were bombs, designed to explode the





public schools and the teaching profession. Everyone involved knew that inner city kids would fail the tests in huge numbers, setting the infernal machine in motion for the closing of schools and the wholesale firing of teachers...”

The bombs were planted not just in Atlanta, but in thousands of school districts across the nation, with predictable results. A 2012 story in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* revealed that the same suspicious patterns of radical test score improvement seen in Atlanta could be found in more than 200 school districts across the country, from Philly to Portland, and from Alaska to Alabama. Clearly, cheating teachers and principals in Georgia were and likely still are doing the same things the same way as their colleagues across the country.

It’s also very true that Atlanta’s teachers were singled out. Other teachers in other states were merely stripped of their jobs and professional licenses. Teach For America alums Michelle Rhee and Kayla Henderson both headed Washington DC’s public schools when massive cheating scandals occurred, but unlike Atlanta’s Beverly Hall, neither they nor their subordinates are in any danger of prosecution.

Atlanta on the other hand, is closely associated with the notion of African Americans running big cities, so mak-

The long, long crisis of public education has been designed, engineered and provoked by powerful bipartisan forces to justify their long game, which is the privatization of public education. That’s the Big Plan.

ing the example of Black educators in Atlanta makes perfect political sense for those orchestrating the crisis. Still we shouldn’t feel too sorry for the Atlanta teachers. Beverly Hall turned big chunks of Atlanta’s public schools over to privatizers, and even helped divert \$140-million-a-year for more than 20 years away from Atlanta’s public school children to line the pockets

of developers and gentrifiers in a lucrative boondoggle Atlantans know as “the Beltline.”

If the Black political class and Black educators really stood for the interests of their students and communities they would be educating Black parents and students across the country about their right to opt out of tests that serve no legitimate educational purpose, as teachers in Chicago and Seattle are already doing.

But that’s problematic too. Opposing standardized testing would place the Black political class in conflict not with the slippery nebulous demons of institutional racism, but biting some of the very real and easy-to-find hands in corporate America that feed it. Taking issue with standardized testing, Common Core and the drive to privatize education would put Black educators in opposition to corporate America, to the Gates, Walton Family (Wal-Mart), Eli Broad and other foundations, and to Republicans and Democrats including President Obama and Arne Duncan, his Secretary of Education. This is not an easy thing to do when national Black “civil rights” organizations from the National Action Network and the National Urban League have eagerly accepted corporate-engineered school reform with corporate dollars, and President Obama is deeply beholden to the charter school sugar daddies.

So it looks like we can count on our Black political class to stick to the script on the Atlanta teachers cheating scandal. They’ll talk about whether the prosecution was racist, and they’ll wring self-righteous hands over teachers “cheating the children.” But they won’t question those who set up the rigged game of high stakes testing or why.

—*Black Agenda Report*, April 22, 2015

<http://Blackagendareport.com/big-lies-big-plans-behind-atlanta-cheating-scandal>

Untrue Confessions

Adult interrogation tactics in schools turn principals into police officers

BY ALEXA VAN BRUNT

Adult interrogation methods do not belong in the classroom, so why are school administrators throughout the United States being trained to use them on their students in order to extract confessions?

John E. Reid and Associates is the largest interrogation trainer in the world and teaches such methods to hundreds of school administrators each year. Last month, members of the Illinois Principals Association, for instance, could register for a “professional development” event on “Investigative Interviewing and Active Persuasion.” The School Administrators Association of New York State recently offered a workshop for administrators on this same topic, titled “Are you Sure They Are Telling the Truth?”

These administrators are learning the “Reid Technique,” which relies on “maximization” and “minimization” tactics in order to induce suspects to confess. Minimization focuses on reducing a suspect’s feelings of guilt, while maximization is designed to heighten suspect anxiety using confrontation. Both techniques are legal and both are incredibly coercive.

Controlled studies of Reid interrogation have documented that while such techniques may increase the likelihood that a guilty person will confess, they also increase the likelihood that an innocent person will as well. New research released in February found that the Reid technique causes witnesses to falsely implicate others.

Reid and Associates itself advises caution when using the technique on children, especially in schools. In addition to concerns about the efficacy of principal-administered interrogations are those involving basic fairness: school administrators are not required

to issue Miranda warnings to children they interrogate on their own (without law enforcement present,) so children are not advised of their rights to an attorney or to remain silent.

There is already a well-recognized trend of law enforcement coercing confessions from the young and vulnerable—siphoning them into the criminal justice system. One example is the Englewood Four in Chicago. Teenage boys were coerced into falsely confessing to a murder on the south side of the city, and spent more than 15 years in prison as a result. Terrill Swift, one of the Four, is my client in a civil suit against his police interrogators. There are many recent, less-trumpeted cases, where the coercion of youth seems less an outlier than a general police tactic.

Juvenile coerced confessions share certain hallmarks: use of intimidation, threats, promises of leniency, and outright lies, so that the youth feel their only way out is by confessing. Adult interrogators take advantage of the fact that children are less mature and more susceptible to pressure, and that they lack the experience to make decisions in their best interest. Youth in the criminal justice system are more likely to have diagnosable psychological disorders, and they often fall victim to the “status differential”—youth feel compelled to answer police questions because of the officers’ elevated position of power. All of this is why the young are much more likely than adults to give false confessions.

Subjecting children to coercive interrogations by school officials serves no other purpose than to escalate the flow of our nation’s youth into the school-to-prison pipeline, a phenomenon by which violations of school rules become criminalized and children—particularly poor, LGBTQ, Black and Hispanic children—are funneled out of schools and into jails and prisons. Not only does the pipeline lead to higher rates of incarceration but it also results in economic insecurity.

Rather than training principals to interrogate, schools should focus on non-punitive approaches like in-school behavior modification, mentorship, and diversion tactics. That is the more ethical and community-centered approach.

—*The Guardian*, March 19, 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/19/interrogation-schools-turns-principals-police-officers>



"Sorry I'm late — the Principal held me for questioning."

The Outrage Nobody's Talking About

The killing of unarmed Walter Scott has rightly captured our attention. But another aspect of the story remains unnoticed.

By HEATHER DIGBY PARTON

The horrific story of the unarmed Walter Scott's death at the hands of Officer Michael Slager continues to reverberate. Aside from the incontrovertible evidence on the tape that the accused officer shot him in the back as if he were doing target practice, there has since emerged more tape of the traffic stop itself and audio of the officer speaking with his superiors on the phone raising even more questions about his state of mind at the time of the shooting. But journalists have gone back and studied the officer's record and found that he was previously investigated for Taser abuse. And on even further investigation it was found that this jurisdiction is known as "Taser town:"

"Until the eight shots heard 'round the world, cops in North Charleston, South Carolina, were primarily distinguished by their zesty use of Tasers.

"As computed by a local newspaper in 2006, cops there used Tasers 201 times in an 18-month period,

averaging once every 40 hours in one six-month stretch and disproportionately upon African Americans.

"The *Charleston Post & Courier* did the tally after the death of a mentally ill man named Kip Black, who was Tasered six times on one occasion and nine times on another. Black died immediately after the second jolting, though the coroner set the cause of death as cocaine-fueled 'excited delirium syndrome.'"

It's important to note that Taser International has spent large sums convincing local coroners that this syndrome (which primarily seems to kill people in police custody) makes it the victim's responsibility if they have the bad luck to die from being shot full of electricity with a Taser. It's not just illegal drugs in the system, which can allegedly cause it. Adrenaline can as well. So if a person fails to remain calm in face of an arrest and finds the feeling of 50,000 volts going through their sys-

tem to be stressful they have no one to blame but themselves if they die.

Those who have been following the story of Walter Scott understand the significance of the Taser. It's not just that the officer evidently lied about Scott taking his Taser, thus somehow justifying his using lethal force, or the fact that he appears to have tried to plant the Taser next to the slain man's body to cover his tracks. The man who filmed the shooting said this:

"I remember the police had control of the situation. He had control of Scott, and Scott was trying just to get away from the Taser. You can hear the sound of the Taser...before I started recording. I believe he just wanted to get away from the Taser."

It's not unusual for people to try to escape from a Taser if they can. It is, quite literally, a torture device designed to force compliance with terrible pain. The people of Taser Town, particularly African American men, undoubtedly understand exactly what is going to happen if they find themselves in the custody of a police officer. Here's one example of how it would likely go down, as reported by *The Guardian*:

"Slager is among three patrolmen named in a lawsuit filed by Julius Wilson, who said he was arrested after being stopped in his car in August last year. Wilson is also suing the city of North Charleston, the city police department and police chief Eddie Driggers.

"Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Wilson described Slager and his colleagues as 'bad, corrupt cops.' He said: 'The use of excessive force or punishment to torture suspects is not something that should be tolerated by the North Charleston police department.' [...]



“Wilson, who has a criminal record, said he was stopped on August 25, 2014, because his vehicle had a broken tail light. Scott, 50, was stopped for the same reason on April 5, 2015, before fleeing and being shot dead by Slager.

“Wilson was stopped by an Officer Edwards, he said, who was joined ten minutes later by Slager and an officer Clemens despite Wilson calmly ‘making small talk and laughing.’

“After refusing to step out until he was told why he was being arrested, Wilson claimed, he was forcibly pulled out of his vehicle by Slager and the two other officers. The three then ‘forcibly restrained Wilson on his stomach on the pavement face down,’ the lawsuit stated.

“Despite Wilson ‘not moving, nor resisting’ and lying with his hands above his head, the lawsuit claimed, Slager broke a silence among the officers by shouting: ‘Watch out! I’m going to Tase!’ He then allegedly ‘shot his NCPD-issued Taser into Wilson’s back.’

“The lawsuit alleged Wilson ‘writhed in pain from the electric shock.’ It said when Slager warned his colleagues he was about to fire his Taser, ‘Wilson was cooperating fully’ and allowing the two other officers to place his hands behind his back.”

Tasers guidelines vary by department and jurisdiction, but generally their use is only considered reasonable when the subject poses a safety threat. Clearly, shooting an unarmed 50-year-old man when he runs from the Taser is not one of those cases. The video of the Scott incident shows that Officer Slager is confused on that issue, to say the least. And it’s just as clear, based on that same standard, that nobody could ever claim such force is justified when presented with an unarmed suspect facing down on the ground, with his hands behind his back. Using a Taser

in that situation is simply a form of unofficial street justice, a little torture at the hands of the authorities to make a point. Tasers are not simply used in place of lethal force, and they’re not always used to force compliance. They are very often used as on-the-spot punishment by police who want to teach citizens a lesson.

Take the now notorious California incident that happened to be filmed by a local news station, in which a man on horseback led police on a chase through the desert. When he fell from the horse, police swarmed and he very clearly laid down on his stomach and put his hands behind his back. Then the police beat the hell out of him and Tasered him repeatedly. This footage has garnered widespread criticism because of the beating, and for good reason. It’s brutal, primitive behavior.

But you won’t find many people expressing outrage about the electric shocks being administered to this man over and over again. Here’s a typical news report of the incident:

“In video captured by cameras aboard a helicopter for *KNBC*, deputies gather around the man after he falls from a horse he was riding to flee from them. The video shows deputies using a stun gun on him and then repeatedly kicking and hitting him.

“*KNBC* reported that the man—identified by authorities as Francis Pusok—appeared to be kicked 17 times, punched 37 times and hit with a baton four times.”

Again, if you look at the footage, Pusok was on the ground, face down with his hands behind his back before anyone Tasered him or physically assaulted him. And yet the Taser is apparently considered A-OK. At the very least, it isn’t mentioned as something that shocks the conscience the way the beating does. Perhaps this is because the searing pain of electro-

shock doesn’t leave much in the way of a mark. But hideously painful it is. Yet for some reason, delivering this particular agony to a suspect is not something people reject when there is no danger to police or bystanders, and the suspect is compliant. But police do it routinely, and are rarely sanctioned for it.

Some of this undoubtedly stems from the fact that popular culture has turned Taser into slapstick comedy. Movies and TV shows and countless Youtube videos portray it as a hilarious joke. “Don’t Tase me bro” became a national catch phrase. But it’s not funny. Tasers can kill people. And regardless of what level of respect and compliance one thinks police are entitled to get from the public, they are not entitled to torture and punish citizens to teach them a lesson.

Walter Scott ran from the pain of the Taser and he was shot in the back numerous times for doing it. Francis Pusok was compliant and was Tasered and beaten repeatedly anyway. It appears that such shootings and beatings, when captured on film anyway, are still considered beyond the pale in America these days. In both cases, officers will have to face some sanction for their behavior. Slager is facing a murder charge. It’s unknown what the California cops will face, but the FBI is investigating, so there may be some federal civil rights charges. It will be very interesting if any of the officers are charged with assault for using the Taser. Let’s just say it will be among the vast minority of cases ever brought if they are.

Heather Digby Parton, also known as “Digby,” is a contributing writer to Salon. She was the winner of the 2014 Hillman Prize for Opinion and Analysis Journalism.

—Salon, April 14, 2015

http://www.salon.com/2015/04/14/the_walter_scott_outrage_nobody_is_talking_about/?source=newsletter

Police Corruption in Oklahoma

Unjust police killing of Tulsa man, Eric Harris, reveals a deep and dangerous scandal in Oklahoma

BY SHAUN KING

On its face, the police murder of Eric Harris, a 44-year-old father in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was wrong. Surrounded by police, Harris had surrendered and was on the ground when Bob Bates, a deputy, claims to have accidentally shot him with a handgun instead of his Taser. For what was being called a mistake, Bates was charged with second-degree manslaughter.

All by itself, with no more details, that story was bad, but when the video was released showing Harris nervously gasping for air, screaming that he couldn't breathe, and asking why he was shot—only to have another officer, Joe Byars, tell him, “fuck your breath”—it became increasingly clear that what we had was not only a mistake, but something deeply inhumane and troubling on a scale that the country wasn't quite prepared for.

But, it turns out, the true story is more scandalous than any of us could've ever imagined.

Not only is Bates a fake volunteer police officer (Tulsa calls them “reserve

deputies”), it turns out Bates was lavishing the department with international cruises in the Bahamas and Mexico, took regular fishing trips with the lead sheriff, Sheriff Stanley Glanz, and also was the chairman of the sheriff's recent campaign.

“‘Bob Bates came on board because he had all this money,’ one former reserve deputy said, adding that the sheriff and other higher-ups would ‘go on these cruises in the Bahamas and in Mexico all the time.’”

“‘[Bates] foots the bill,’ the deputy added. ‘The sheriff just gave him free rein because he was treating him right. He bought his way into this position.’”

“Another former full-time deputy said Bates was ‘getting glad-handed’ around the office because of his wealth.

“‘This is your typical Southern good ol’ boys system,’ he said, adding that before the shooting Bates planned to take Glanz on a fishing trip to Florida.”

It gets deeper. Now, not wanting to go down with a sinking ship, people

inside of the department are talking, as you can read beneath the fold.

“Supervisors at the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office were ordered to falsify a reserve deputy's training records, giving him credit for field training he never took and firearms certifications he should not have received, sources told the *Tulsa World*. At least three of reserve deputy Robert Bates' supervisors were transferred after refusing to sign off on his state-required training, multiple sources speaking on condition of anonymity told the *World*.”

Now Sheriff Stanley Glanz, who went on fishing trips and international cruises paid for by Bates, is claiming he can't find the paperwork verifying the certification Bates was required to have to even be out with officers the day he killed Harris.

This isn't just disorganization.

This scandal cost Harris his life. It's increasingly clear that Bates, who also purchased police vehicles for the department, was given so much freedom because of the gifts he showered on the department, that he felt like he could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. Beyond being 73 years old, he had no business even attempting to Taser a subdued Harris—not to mention shoot and kill him.

Heads need to roll here. The Justice Department must intervene. This department absolutely cannot investigate itself.

—Daily Kos, April 16, 2015

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/04/16/1378190/-Unjust-police-killing-of-Tulsa-man-Eric-Harris-reveals-a-deep-and-dangerous-scandal-in-Oklahoma?detail=email#>



Chattanooga Times Free Press Bennett

Twenty-Years for a Miscarriage

The case of Purvi Patel, who was sentenced to twenty-years in prison for having a miscarriage, got less attention than Indiana Governor Mike Pence's controversial new law

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) has justifiably provoked outrage nationwide for its apparent intent to legalize anti-gay discrimination by private businesses.

But another controversial law that this week resulted in a draconian 20-year prison sentence for a woman named Purvi Patel has received far less attention. That law is a fetal homicide mandate under which Patel was charged and convicted earlier this year, alongside a charge of negligence. But Patel is being criminalized for likely having had a late-term miscarriage or stillbirth.

If this sounds utterly outrageous, it is exactly that. Some years ago I, like millions of women, suffered a miscarriage. Mine was an intentional pregnancy and the miscarriage occurred just a few weeks after conception. It was a bewildering and traumatic experience after which I wanted nothing more than to be left alone to recover.

In Patel's case, the pregnancy was unintended and the miscarriage is estimated to have occurred at about 22 to 24 weeks of gestation. (While exact definitions vary, some doctors consider a miscarriage at 20 or more weeks to be a stillbirth, while others use 24 or even 28 weeks as the cutoff between miscarriage and stillbirth.)

Patel arrived at the hospital bleeding heavily. She eventually revealed she had miscarried, was surprised to see a fetus as far along as it was, and she admitted that she disposed of it in a dumpster. She was interviewed by police without an attorney present and without having been read her rights while in her hospital bed. One can only imagine how shocked she was when she found out that prosecutors were

gathering evidence and statements to charge her and put her away for a very long time.

In fact, the charges themselves are contradictory and reveal the desperation of a state that is intent on criminalizing pregnant women. A jury deliberating for just five hours convicted her on two counts: feticide, for killing the fetus before it was born, and negligence, for killing it after it was born. Clearly it cannot be both—and yet Patel was convicted of both.

There were several other contradictions. First, during the trial, prosecutors attempted to make the case that Patel intended to terminate her pregnancy by taking abortion-inducing drugs. But a toxicology report found no evidence of such drugs in her bloodstream.

Second, when investigators found the fetus in the dumpster where Patel had disposed of it, it was pronounced dead, and yet a pathologist testified that the fetus took a breath after it emerged from the womb and thus was considered to be briefly alive. He based his finding on a test first developed in the 17th century called a “lung-float test” that has been widely discredited.

Third, fetuses can be viable outside a mother's body, but only after 24 weeks of gestational age and with immediate medical intervention. Viability is never guaranteed, but it is possible, depending on the health of the fetus and the technology available. Patel says her pregnancy was only 22 to 24 weeks along, and doctors could not come to an agreement on the exact gestational age of the fetus. So, other than the results of the “lung-float test,” there was no evidence that the fetus was born alive or, if it had been, wheth-

er it was even far enough developed to have been capable of life outside the womb.

If Patel's pregnancy had been intended, if she had obtained prenatal care, and (as is the case for one in every 160 pregnancies), if she had then suffered a stillbirth, she would likely not have been charged with anything. What the state of Indiana seems to really be punishing her for is wanting to control her own body, since text messages from her phone reveal she made an inquiry about abortion-inducing medication. Those messages were entered into the evidence. But Indiana has one of the most restrictive anti-abortion laws in the U.S., and there are only a dozen abortion clinics serving the entire state, leaving Patel with very few options to acquire a legal abortion, if indeed that was her intention.

Indiana's so-called feticide or “fetal homicide” law is not uncommon. A majority of states have such laws, and advocates claim that they are intended to criminalize abhorrent behavior like the horrifying recent case of a Colorado woman who lured a pregnant mother to her home using a Craigslist ad and then attacked her with a knife, cut out her 7-month-old fetus and drowned it.

But increasingly such laws are being used to criminalize pregnant women themselves. In Indiana, Patel is the second woman to be charged with feticide and the first to be convicted. The only other woman who was charged was a Chinese-American named Bei Bei Shuai whose attempted suicide was linked to the termination of her pregnancy. The fact that the only two women Indiana has targeted with this law are women of color of immigrant



“The anti-abortion movement’s goals are not to protect women but to **punish them.”**

—Lynn Paltrow, *National Advocates for Pregnant Women, on feticide laws and the prosecution of Purvi Patel*

backgrounds ought to be extremely troubling.

Fetal homicide laws are part of the same spectrum of antiabortion legislation around the country as the so-called fetal personhood laws. Under fetal personhood laws, fetuses are given the same rights as fully formed humans, and thus such laws can also be used to charge women with homicide for having abortions. Indeed, across the country, many pregnant women have been arrested and imprisoned in the last few years under the color of similar laws. A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* found that a majority of women who are criminalized under fetal personhood laws are women of color, and a majority are also poor women.

Women are also being judged severely in the court of public opinion. Media coverage of the Patel trial routinely referred to the fetus as a “new-born” or “baby boy.” One ABC affiliate used the phrase “death of her child” in its headline.

The media’s conflation of a stillborn fetus with a child feeds into the perception that Patel and other women like her have murdered their living, breathing children and therefore deserve harsh punishment. Even the judge in Patel’s sentencing hearing lectured her, using deeply patronizing and patriarchal language, saying she had “choices you could have made that you didn’t make”—but what choices could she

have made in a state like Indiana with its aforementioned strict abortion laws?

We need to begin seeing these fetal personhood and homicide laws as part of the spectrum of how women are targeted by the state in a variety of ways. As I have previously written about, women of color (particularly Black women) are often judged as promiscuous or oversexed, or are mistaken for prostitutes. They are especially vulnerable to the attacks on abortion and reproductive healthcare. And once they have babies, they are often criminalized as negligent parents even when there are no viable options for childcare.

While there has been stalwart solidarity with Patel inside the state from pro-abortion-rights groups like the Indiana Coalition for Reproductive Justice, very few national organizations or high-profile individuals have expressed outrage over the Indiana

conviction and sentencing. Interestingly, Indiana’s RFRA, which has turned the state into a national pariah over potential anti-LGBT discrimination, is being cited by anti-abortion activists as possibly affording them cover for their prejudices too. But that aspect of the RFRA has not provoked similar anger.

While Indiana Governor Mike Pence is being nationally shamed for signing the RFRA, we are collectively giving him a pass for overseeing a state where a woman can be thrown into prison for having a stillbirth. The many celebrities calling for a boycott of Indiana do not appear to be as appalled by Patel’s sentence as the passage of the RFRA. But if we agree that the rights of women are on par with the rights of the LGBT community, then Indiana’s pariah status needs to be based on solidarity with all those suffering the consequences of discriminatory laws.

Sonali Kolhatkar is co-director of the Afghan Women’s Mission. She is also the host and producer of Uprising Radio, a daily morning radio program at KPFK, Pacifica in Los Angeles.

—AlterNet.org, April 2, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/gender/20-years-prison-having-miscarriage-our-country-going-nuts?akid=12974.229473.gDhg6E&rd=1&src=newsletter1034305&t=11>



Student Debt Time Bomb

Indebted students are a force to be reckoned with

BY CHUCK COLLINS

There's a generational time-bomb ticking—and the student debt crisis is the trip wire.

Adults under 35 disproportionately bear the brunt of escalating inequality.

America's educated youth are graduating into an economy with stagnant wages and a torn safety net. Federal and state budget cuts, meanwhile, have spiked tuition costs and cut public services that aid young workers, such as transportation and affordable housing.

A rumble of legitimate discontent is mounting from the 40 million Americans saddled with student debt totaling \$1.16 trillion—a number expected to increase to \$2 trillion by 2022. College debt now touches one in five U.S. households and exceeds total credit card indebtedness.

The most frustrated students are blocking highways over tuition hikes. Others are launching “debt strikes” by refusing to pay the for-profit schools that bilked them.

Many more are defaulting after facing the stressful realization that they can't find a job that pays enough to repay their debt. Over half of outstanding student loans are presently in deferral, delinquency, or default.

The student debt debacle has huge implications for the future. The average college graduate is now almost \$30,000 underwater, with some on the hook for over \$100,000.



This debt keeps young people from starting families, buying houses, and taking risks on new businesses. It also exacerbates the growing problem of wealth inequality and declining social mobility, since it gives debt-free graduates from wealthier families an enormous head start over their peers.

Many baby boomers without kids in college don't fully appreciate how the economy is tilted against the rising generation—or how much higher edu-

College debt now touches one in five U.S. households and exceeds total credit card indebtedness.

cation financing has changed from previous generations.

Since the 1970s, tuition rates have risen over 1,000 percent, while state funding of universities has declined by 40 percent. And the proportion of young Americans with education debt more than quadrupled, from five percent to 22 percent.

The powerful student loan industry lobbied for—and got—draconian laws that penalize student debtors more than people holding mortgages, car loans, or credit cards. Servicers can garnish young graduates' wages and disability payments to get their due.

And not even bankruptcy can cancel out these loans.

In some states, student debtors who fall into default can lose

their professional certifications and even their driver's licenses. Imagine borrowing money to get a nursing or cosmetology degree, falling behind in your payments, and having your source of livelihood revoked.

It doesn't have to be this way. Other countries have offered free public higher education for decades.

In the 30 years after World War II, the government expanded access to debt-free college for millions of Americans. These included GI Bill recipients, but also millions of men and women without military service records who attended the great public universities of our land, paying a tuition bill they could afford with only a summer job.

Lawmakers should reverse the cycle of state budget cuts in higher education that shift tuition costs onto students and their cash-strapped families. Some states are considering creating “opportunity trust funds,” capitalized by state estate taxes on the richest one percent, to finance debt-free public education.

The national Strike Debt movement calls on Congress to spend an additional \$15 billion a year to make public education free. They could accomplish this by cutting out for-profit colleges and the parasitical college loan industry, and by simplifying the existing labyrinth of education subsidies.

The vast majority of college debtors still suffer in isolation, viewing their struggle as a personal problem, not a societal issue. But this is about to change. When college debt borrowers wake up and flex their political muscles, they'll be a force to be reckoned with.

—Common Dreams, March 11, 2014

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/03/11/student-debt-time-bomb>

Big Bank ‘Crime of the Century’

Despite severity of offenses, banksters get no jail time

BY DEIRDRE FULTON

While corporate watchdogs hailed the record \$2.5 billion settlement paid by Deutsche Bank to U.S. and U.K. authorities for its rate-rigging role in the massive LIBOR scandal, some noted that the fine—while large—suggests that some institutions are still considered “too big to jail.”

Authorities announced Thursday, April 23, 2015, that Germany’s biggest bank would pay \$2.5 billion in penalties, a record for cases involving interest rate fraud, which have already targeted banking behemoths like Barclays and UBS. Officials said the wrongdoing at Deutsche Bank lasted from 2005 to 2011 and touched employees in London, Frankfurt, New York, and Tokyo.

The *New York Times* reports that Deutsche Bank “also agreed to accept a criminal guilty plea for the British subsidiary at the center of the case. It is the most significant banking unit to accept a criminal plea in the long-running investigation into the manipulation of the London interbank offered rate, or LIBOR.”

The LIBOR rate is an average of what banks charge for lending to each other. In addition, it sets a benchmark for interest rates for trillions-of-dollars’ worth of loans around the world—from mortgages and student loans to credit cards and complex derivatives.

The penalty follows a seven-year investigation into how some of the world’s largest financial institutions secretly conspired to rig benchmark interest rates to their benefit.

But not everyone agrees that the punishment announced Thursday fits what has been called “the crime of the century.”

“Law enforcers found repeated examples of manipulation as they investigated the bank,” said Bartlett Naylor, financial policy advocate in

Public Citizen’s Congress Watch Division, on Thursday.

“For example, they discovered pervasive fraudulent practices where traders gave false information about rates at which they borrowed or loaned money with other banks,” he said. “That established false benchmarks on which other rates were based. That harms average Americans when they agree to mortgages. Law enforcers also found that Deutsche Bank withheld and even destroyed information about the investigation. Yet, surprisingly, despite the severity of these offenses, the government concluded that these crimes should be punished only through a financial penalty.”

Bartlett continued:

“This settlement, which involves no jail time for any traders, seems out of sync with the problems identified. To make matters worse, many of the traders responsible for the frauds remain employed at Deutsche Bank. The DOJ claims that it may still prosecute individuals, and we hope it will pursue such work. To date, some traders at other firms such as Rabobank have been convicted, but no senior officers of any of the banks involved in the LIBOR case have faced charges.”

Indeed, as journalist Valentin Schmid points out at *Epoch Times*, “Insider trading in individual stocks seems minute in comparison, yet many people have been jailed for ten years or more. Time criminals working for large international banks are given the same treatment.”

Writing for the *Daily Mail*, finance and economics columnist Alex Brummer wondered if the fines and criminal prosecutions, “coming so long after the event, may look like a case of shutting the door long after the horse has bolted.”

Brummer continued:

“There is no doubt wrongdoing is still going on and has probably moved from the now tightly regulated authorized banking sector to hedge funds, shadow banking organizations and the like.

“That is no excuse for cozy back-door deals with bank sinners. Until the public has seen justice being done, in the shape of the bankers and traders carted off to face trials and retribution, the appalling transgressions of the banking sector will remain an open wound.

“Not only should the bankers face long jail sentences, but the ill-gotten assets should be reclaimed by the state as would be the case were they common garden criminals. The bankers are every bit as culpable of stealing from us all as the much more intriguing Hatton Garden gang¹.”

Still, as the *Times* reports, “The case spotlighted the collusive elements of Wall Street trading desks, where rival banks have occasionally joined forces to manipulate financial benchmarks. It also foreshadows looming actions against banks suspected of teaming up to manipulate the price of foreign currencies, people briefed on the matter said, with the Justice Department planning to announce guilty pleas from at least four banks—Barclays, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup and the Royal Bank of Scotland—by next month.”

—*Common Dreams*, April 24, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/04/24/big-bank-crime-century-results-guess-what-no-jail-time-anyone>

1 Gang behind the £60m Hatton Garden gem heist.

'I Know We Will Win'

Largest ever low-wage worker protest sweeps United States and beyond

By SARAH LAZARE

In what is being called the largest low-wage worker protest the United States has ever seen, tens-of-thousands of fast food, laundry, homecare, childcare, retail, and education employees walked off the job or staged rallies on Wednesday, April 15, 2015, in more than 200 cities across the country.

They were joined by workers in 35 countries on six continents, from New Zealand to Brazil to Japan.

The mobilization was part of the movement for a \$15 dollar minimum wage in the U.S., which has touched off a nation-wide conversation about poverty and inequality since fast food workers began a series of rolling strikes and workplace actions more than three years ago.

"Fast-food workers are joining together and standing up for what's right, and with students, #BlackLivesMatter activists, adjunct professors, homecare, Walmart, childcare, and airport services workers standing with us, we are stronger than ever," said Terrence Wise, a father of three who works at McDonald's and Burger King restaurants in Kansas City, Missouri, in a press statement. "I know we will win."

Backed by the Service Employees International Union, Wednesday's rallies were timed to coincide with Tax Day in the U.S., in a bid to highlight the fact that low-wage workers are forced to rely on public assistance to get by.

Under the banner "We are worth more," protesters are calling for living wages, as well as the right to organize in their workplaces without intimidation and retaliation.

In the streets on Wednesday, protesters made connections between social and economic justice. From Charleston, South Carolina to

Ferguson, Missouri, protesters memorialized the lives of unarmed people of color killed by police and brought the message of the growing Black Lives Matter movement.

"We joined the Fight for \$15 because, for us, racial justice is economic justice. We believe that Black workers have paid undeserved debts to greedy corporations for far too long," said Charlene Carruthers, national director for the Black Youth Project 100.

A report released on Monday by the National Employment Law Project finds that women and people of color are dramatically overrepresented in the underpaid work-force, with over 50 percent of African-American workers, and nearly 60 percent of Latino workers, making less than \$15.

Wednesday's protests called for worker justice far beyond U.S. borders.

"The fast-food industry is dominated by a handful of multi-billion-dollar global companies, so we need to have a strong, global movement of workers pushing for better wages, better treat-

ment and better rights," said Massimo Frattini, international coordinator for the International Union of Food workers in a press statement.

Participants say that this movement is a matter of urgency, amid rising inequality and plummeting wages in the U.S. and world-wide.

As Andrew Olson, McDonald's worker in Los Angeles put it in an interview with *The LA Times*, "Just because I work in fast food does that mean I should have to just scrape by in life?"

Looking to the future, journalist Rana Foroohar argued in *Time* that the Fight for \$15 is proving a powerful force. "Politicians are going to have to grapple with this in the election cycle," wrote Foroohar, "because as the latest round of wage protests makes clear, the issue isn't going away anytime soon."

—*Common Dreams*, April 16, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/04/16/i-know-we-will-win-largest-ever-low-wage-worker-protest-sweeps-united-states>



Workers Pay for Billionaires Tax Breaks

America's billionaires minimize their tax burdens, making the rest of us pick up their tab

BY CHUCK COLLINS

This tax season, America's billionaires are toasting you, the ordinary taxpayer.

That's because you're the one picking up the tab for our nation's ailing infrastructure of roads, bridges, and rail transport. You're also footing the bill for military forces, disaster relief, veterans' health services, and national park protection.

The share of taxes paid by the one percent is declining, even as wealth flows upward to them at a dizzying pace.

Maybe you're not shocked to hear that the wealthy shift their tax obligations onto ordinary Americans. But perhaps you don't know all their tricks. Here are five tax secrets billionaires deploy to keep you paying more than your fair share.

1. Tax work more than wealth

The United States taxes income from investments more lightly than the money you earn by working.

For example, a teacher who earns \$40,000 from her job owes Uncle Sam 25 percent of her income. But a hedge fund billionaire raking in \$400 million from investments will only pay between 15 and 20 percent of that haul in taxes.

2. Hide money offshore

Senator Elizabeth Warren quipped that Boston's winter had been so harsh that Mitt Romney "left his money here and he went to the Cayman Islands."

But that's no joke. Congressional researchers estimate that people who use offshore tax havens cost the rest of us as much as \$70 billion a year. And that's just the tip of the tax-dodging iceberg.

Global Financial Integrity, a financial watchdog agency, estimates that global

corporations and wealthy individuals are hiding a total of over \$21 trillion.

3. Assemble tax-proof trusts

You can't hitch a U-Haul of money to your hearse, though some billionaires have found ways for their fortunes to live forever. They deploy tax planners who design trusts and other mechanisms to reduce or flat-out eliminate their estate taxes.

In 2013, casino mogul Sheldon Adelson used a complex trust mechanism to transfer \$8 billion to his heirs, shielding over \$2.8 billion in federal estate and gift taxes on the assets they'll inherit once he passes on.

Congress could close these billionaire loopholes tomorrow, if it weren't so busy cutting college Pell Grants for working-class college students.

4. Inherit fortunes

If I find \$100 on the street, that's taxable income. But if my grandfather gives me \$100 million, I don't pay any income tax on that jackpot. Inheritances are 100-percent exempt from the income tax.

While a tiny number of extremely rich families will pay taxes on estates before distributing funds, their relatives who inherit that money don't need to fork anything over to the IRS once they take possession of those assets.

Combine this arrangement with low-tax or no-tax trusts, and you can see why the living is easy for the children of billionaires.

5. Subsidize charity

When a billionaire donates money to a large hospital or university, we're encouraged to applaud their generosity. We seldom realize that we're actually

subsidizing those buildings adorned with the billionaire's name.

Since donations reduce taxes on a billionaire's income and estate, ordinary taxpayers chip in about 50 cents of every dollar they donate. And we're not even invited to the gala.

If billionaires aren't paying their fair share of federal taxes, who is?

You are—every time you pay higher state and local taxes as the federal government shifts responsibilities onto local jurisdictions, or when it imposes steeper fees for you to exercise your right to obtain a passport or enter a national park.

And that's why America's billionaires owe us all a thank you note this tax season.

—*Common Dreams*, April 10, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/04/10/why-americas-billionaires-owe-you-thank-you-note>



Low-Wage Workers' Struggles

About much more than wages

By ARUN GUPTA

When fast-food workers first took the streets in New York City in November 2012 to protest for higher wages and a union, no one could have imagined how successful the campaign would be. Since then the low-wage workers movement, known as Fight for 15, has helped spur eleven states and numerous cities to raise the minimum hourly wage. It's enabled campaigns in Seattle and the Bay Area to pass city-wide measures for \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Fight for 15 and a separate campaign called Organization United for Respect at Wal-Mart has also pushed companies like McDonald's, Target, and Wal-Mart to announce in early 2015 that they would raise the minimum wage for hundreds-of-thousands of employees.

The success of the organizing is due to everything from the abysmal recovery from the 2008 economic crisis to Occupy Wall Street's role in shifting the national dialogue from austerity to economic inequality. But Fight for 15 is due primarily to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which initiated the campaign in 2011 and has poured tens-of-millions of dollars into growing waves of protest that are battering the image of the fast-food giants.

As the protests have grown, the campaign has become both broad and narrow. SEIU has linked the plight of fast-food workers to that of retail and convenience-store workers, home healthcare aides, childcare workers, and adjunct professors. At the same time Fight for 15 is focusing its fire on McDonald's. One SEIU insider says the strategy is, "Pummel them until they come to the table." Another organizer outlined the thinking back in 2013: Fight for 15 was trying to cause enough

problems for McDonald's image and stock price that SEIU could say to the company, "We can make this all go away" if it agreed to a deal on wages and unionization.

Wage theft

Using the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), SEIU has filed charges of unfair labor practices (ULP) and wage theft against McDonald's franchises. The strategy paid off after the

The European Union is investigating McDonald's for allegedly dodging more than \$1-billion in taxes and labor federations in Brazil are suing McDonald's largest franchisee in Latin America for wage and workplace violations.

NLRB general counsel ruled in July 2014 that McDonald's has joint employer responsibility, opening space for SEIU to pressure the corporate parent, rather than dealing with 3,100 U.S. franchisees. SEIU is also raising the heat overseas. The European Union is investigating McDonald's for allegedly dodging more than \$1-billion in taxes and labor federations in Brazil are suing McDonald's largest franchisee in Latin America for wage and workplace violations. A participant in a recent

strategy session held with Scott Courtney, said to be SEIU's mastermind for Fight for 15, says the next step under consideration is to create trouble for McDonald's on the property front, which is as much a titan of real estate as it is of hamburgers.

McDonald's claims the campaign has had no effect on its operations and that it could not afford to raise wages. Over the last year its international sales have been flat and its profits have fallen sharply. So its announcement on April 1 that it would raise pay for workers at corporate-owned U.S. stores was widely viewed as a concession to Fight for 15. That move backfired, however, as the raise is only 89-cents-an-hour on average and affects just ten percent of its U.S. workforce. Plus, sources say McDonald's has quietly approached SEIU and is looking for a deal. For nearly two years there have been rumors that SEIU was considering some alternative to a union for the fast-food sector, such as a workers' association.

A workers' association, however, would mean fewer rights and protections for workers than a traditional union. This points to the question that's been hanging over the Fight for 15 since it caught fire. What is SEIU's end game? I asked one organizer if the campaign is building workers' power, and the response was blunt: "The goal is not workers' power. It's a contract."

Since a traditional union contract with McDonald's or any other fast-food company remains unlikely, the campaign goals need to be better aligned with reality. Fight for 15 has been remarkably successful on wages, but unless it is trying to increase workers' power on the job, any wage and benefit improvements won through

public pressure, negative publicity, and community-based protest activity will be hard to sustain in the absence of ongoing workplace organization or networks of some sort.

Now, many Fight for 15 organizers point out SEIU is the only big union gambling on trying to organize an industry with millions of unorganized workers, and it's putting thousands of workers in motion. Organizing low-wage workers is a long overdue response to the neoliberal turn that dealt a historic defeat to organized labor during the 1980s. Millions of new jobs are projected to be in occupations like food prep, retail, and healthcare aides that pay \$9 to \$12-an-hour. The jobs have few benefits, schedules and hours are erratic and there tends to be high turnover. This is the base for Fight for 15, OUR Wal-Mart and a broader campaign known as 15 Now, initiated by the Seattle-based Socialist Alternative.

Class-struggle unionism?

A fundamental goal of labor organizing is to take labor out of competition with itself. But that is nearly impossible when low-skilled, low-wage workers have few rights and number in the tens-of-millions. Fight for 15's approach is unorthodox, but it is con-

strained by organized labor's history. Class-struggle unionism has been abandoned by labor leaders who act as junior partners to corporations, like SEIU and Kaiser Permanente, the UAW and auto companies, the machinists union and Boeing, and the building trades and real-estate developers. Many union leaders are also in the pocket of the Democratic Party despite it being in the pocket of Wall Street.

Fight for 15 is trying to make trouble for global corporations, but it's not pursuing a working-class struggle. (Few unions are interested in that; that's the job of the organized left.) Fight for 15 is more of a legal and public relations campaign, as I explain, than an organizing campaign. It is bearing fruit, but mainly as a spillover rather than in the fast-food sector. This includes adjunct professor organizing, which with the assistance of unions, especially SEIU, have notched many victories since 2013. Thousands of healthcare workers, who make up about half of SEIU's membership, are agitating for \$15 an hour, which is also in response to the 2014 Supreme Court ruling that imposed limits on union membership for home-care aides. There are also linkages with the Black Lives Matter movement, which is sig-

nificant given Fight for 15 is the biggest mobilization of African-American workers since the 1960s. While these are inchoate forms of solidarity and social-justice unionism, they remain underdeveloped because of the top-down nature of Fight for 15.

The most intriguing outcomes of Fight for 15 are citywide campaigns for a raise in the minimum wage, which has opened up organizing space for the left. Fifteen-dollars-an-hour is now reality in Seattle, albeit with loopholes, with most low-wage workers expected to earn that by 2017. San Francisco's ballot measure for \$15 an hour was spearheaded by SEIU Local 1021, which one observer calls a model for a worker-run union. Fight for \$15 campaign helped legitimize the idea in Seattle. The local SEIU affiliate's biggest contribution was a \$15-an-hour ballot measure that won in the SeaTac suburb. But the heavy lifting was done by Socialist Alternative and its inside and outside political approach, aggressive reporting and support from *The Stranger*, a well-regarded newsweekly, and incoming Mayor Ed Murray's decision to back the measure and establish a committee to shape, for good and bad, the final bill. 15 Now is currently pushing \$15-an-hour statewide in Oregon and according to sources is encountering resistance from some unions that are reluctant to challenge Democratic politicians.

Organizing in a digital age

In terms of Fight for 15, its efforts have been more effective in the digital realm than in the real world when it comes to fast-food workers. One Fight for 15 organizer says, "SEIU would like the public to perceive this as a large and growing movement creating a crisis. They are creating the perception of a wave."

But the campaign is also hamstrung, and SEIU's media-centric strategy inhibits it from making hay from it. The organizer explains, "Workers are afraid to stand up. The number one



problem is fear. I would say less than four percent of the workers we contact stay on board. They jump on and jump off [Fight for 15] all the time.” Workers have every reason to be afraid. One study from 2005 estimated 23,000 workers-a-year are penalized or fired for legitimate union activity, making a mockery of laws meant to protect workplace organizing.

A rich account of the difficulty and potential of worker-run, shop-based organizing in the fast-food industry is provided by Erik Forman in *New Forms of Worker Organization*. He recounts an IWW campaign in Jimmy John’s sandwich shops in Minneapolis, which narrowly lost a union vote but gained many concessions, wage increases and most important, worker consciousness, solidarity and power. Provocations and illegal acts by the bosses were used to build organization and militancy, not shunted over to law firms and P.R. agencies as in Fight for 15. But the campaign was dealt a serious blow by the mass firing of six organizers. (Forman’s scathing critique of a complacent union bureaucracy as an outcome of labor law and how labor law proved to be a dead end is also important to consider.)

SEIU has far more resources to confront employer threats of firing and retaliation, but creating a shop-by-shop base of power would still be a monumental task. Fight for 15 could nurture worker power other ways, but it has forgone a bottom-up struggle. Its worker leaders serve to energize other workers, relate a compelling personal story and act as a media spokesperson. In other words, they provide the image of a leader rather than the substance of a leader who can organize the workplace, engage in shop-floor warfare against the boss, develop worker solidarity, and force concessions while building a militant rank and file.

The site of worker power in Fight for 15 is supposed to be the organizing

committees, but within the staff-driven campaign participants say workers have little power. Strike votes are usually not held unless the staff leadership is confident it will win. Meetings are for pumping up workers and feeding them information, not democratic debate and decision-making. The annual Fight for 15 conferences, with the next one reportedly set for this summer in Detroit, are described as heavily scripted. I asked one organizer if it was true that worker leaders made decisions during weekly national conference calls. The response was, “That’s bullshit, and I know because I participate in those calls.” Plus, one person says during a strategy session Scott Courtney was introduced to workers as “the reason you are all here.” Compare this SEIU’s claim in 2013 that it is following the lead of fast-food workers and “We don’t yet understand the scale of it” when in fact it gave birth to the fast-food workers’ campaign.

Where there is organizing in Fight for 15, it is more in the streets than in the workplace. The big days of action are vital for the sense of momentum. Allies from community groups, students and union staff swell numbers,

add to the festivity, make a more favorable media impression, sway public opinion, and make it look as if the campaign is growing.

One can make the case that SEIU made a sound decision in forgoing a worker-centric campaign for a P.R. and legal strategy. But then it can no longer be said to be a worker-driven movement. If SEIU admitted workers’ fear of being fired or disciplined by employers leads to high turnover in Fight for 15, it would undermine the perception that more and more fast-food workers are joining and staying with the campaign. A lack of power also means workers follow the dictates of paid organizers, who in turn say they get their marching orders from SEIU leaders.

A few organizers have mentioned SEIU’s P.R. firm, BerlinRosen Public Affairs, is involved in the strategy. In fact, a 25-page document entitled “Strike in a Box,” which bears BerlinRosen’s logo, is presented as a how-to-guide for building a successful strike. This and other documents provide more evidence for the top-down management of Fight for 15, which is logical given the enormous effort devoted to organizing just one protest



in one city. The fact that Fight for 15 staged more than 200 protests in U.S. cities on April 15 indicates how many resources SEIU has committed.

“Strike in a Box”

For example, one fast-food protest in 2013 was run like a military campaign. The staffing plan included the local organizing leadership, four different media workers, half-a-dozen “dif-fusers” to soothe any trouble, a photographer, videographer, police liaison, chant leader and energizer, a supply team, drivers, onsite legal, a criminal lawyer on standby, breakfast and lunch coordinators, and people designated to hand out signs, flags, t-shirts, and water. A spreadsheet mapped out protests by the minute, noting times and location for loading vans, picking up workers, talking points for press conferences, skits, prayers, dancing in the streets, and “walk backs” of workers the next day to minimize retaliation. Insiders say to maximize turnout, Fight for 15 will sometimes rent hotel rooms for workers the night before a protest, rent vans to drive them to the start point, and provide meals.

Strike in a Box appears to be from an earlier stage of Fight for 15, but it is insightful. It starts with a “Legal FAQ” that describes different types of strikes under labor law. It cautions against any conduct that can be classified as picketing because “picketing is considered coercive and incurs more liability for the union,” such as forcing a union election. Instead it says to focus on unfair labor practices, as “ULP strikes are the legal crown jewel of strikes.”

The document gives tips for discovering, recording and tracking unfair labor practices. Workers in various Fight for 15 chapters say uncovering ULPs became a priority nearly two years ago, with organizers regularly asking for incidences of employer retaliation or discrimination.

The link between the legal and media strategy is in the section on “Site

Assessments,” which begins by asking how many active and strong ULP’s there are at a particular establishment. The section also asks if it’s a good site to focus on, the existence of strong leaders, and then shifts to questions about messaging:

“Is it an iconic brand? Does the brand help tell a story, locally and/or nationally? Do we have spokespeople? Trained? Reliable? Experienced? Do we have stories? Compelling worker stories? Horror stories about site practices; (wage theft, sexual harassment, *etc.*)? Connection to broader themes (cutting hours because of Obamacare, *etc.*)?”

Much of the remainder of Strike in a Box is devoted to recruiting workers with strong stories, organizing the strike vote, how to build a “pull plan” to maximize strike-day turnout, shoring up workers confidence, carrying out the actual strike, and the need for compelling visuals, stories and a narrative. Little is said about workplace organizing. This matches the experiences of many workers in the campaign who say they are not provided with any training on how to build shop-floor organization.

Questions for the left

None of this is meant to dismiss Fight for 15. It is having a more profound effect than anyone could have hoped for when it began. But politics don’t just happen. By denying a central role SEIU leaders can deflect questions about controversial strategies and on-the-ground organizing. Likewise, analyzing strategy and tactics years from now is little use in books few people will read. There are many more questions that can and should be asked about Fight for 15.

For example, the campaign is focused primarily on wages and then on scheduling. But once they clock out, fast-food workers confront the dilemmas of childcare, healthcare, transportation, and rent. Fight for 15 talks about the difficulty of living on a pov-

erty wage, but does so in moralistic terms: “fairness.” It avoids a deeper critique because “the goal is a contract.” As much as workers need a pay raise, \$15 an hour is of little help in many cities where the average rent on a one-bedroom apartment would eat up the entire income of a full-time worker on this wage. In Seattle, Socialist Alternative has pivoted to organizing around runaway rents, but it’s rare for big unions to seriously organize around rent control or tenants’ rights despite the fact that escalating housing costs are one of the biggest burdens that workers shoulder.

Beyond issues of daily life is workers’ role in the labor process. Building worker power would stop promotional campaigns like McDonald’s embarrassing “Pay with Love” or Starbucks clumsy “Race Together” before they happen. This is not all the responsibility of one organizing campaign but without a serious debate about the strategy Fight for 15 is pursuing and shifting to worker-oriented strategies, it’s hard to see how wage gains will translate into a gain of power for workers.

The campaign has raised hopes on the left of a revival of class-consciousness and a working-class movement, but will it come to fruition under SEIU? If history and current events are any guide, the missing ingredient is the organized left. It’s anarchists who made Occupy Wall Street happen, socialists who have revitalized many teachers unions, and socialists and the left who have turned \$15 an hour into reality. Without a similar effort, Fight for 15 may give fast-food workers more change in their pockets, but not the power to change their lives.

Arun Gupta is a co-founder of The Independent and the Occupied Wall Street Journal.

—*The Bullet*, April 21, 2015

<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1107.php>

Reflection of Barbarity

Jailing immigrant mothers and babies

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

Hundreds of undocumented families who have fled from poverty, violence and organized crime in Central American countries including Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador are locked up in “residential centers” in Karnes County and Dilley, Texas; Berks County, Pennsylvania; and, until recently, New Mexico. The families are imprisoned while awaiting their immigration hearings.

The fact that we have “family detention” centers in the U.S. to imprison whole families, including newborns, ought to frighten the hell out of us. How we treat the most vulnerable among us is a measure of our humanity. By the yardstick that these centers offer us, we are downright barbaric.

When President Obama took office in 2009, he rightly ended the practice of family detention, which began under President George W. Bush. Hundreds of families were being held at the notorious T. Don Hutto Residential Center, a former state prison in Taylor, Texas. Inside the center, which was privately run by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), conditions were appalling—particularly for children, who made up half the population. The *New York Times* described the policy change to end family detention as “the Obama administration’s clearest departure from its predecessor’s immigration enforcement policies.”

Families apprehended at the border were once more allowed to stay with relatives in the U.S. while awaiting their court hearings for asylum and other immigration-related requests. Then, five years later, President Obama abruptly decided to resume family detention, a decision made public in an ill-timed announcement by the Department of Homeland Security

(DHS)—on World Refugee Day in 2014. The change in policy was likely a response to the influx of unaccompanied Central American minors arriving in the U.S. last summer, which caused great controversy in Congress. Now, reported *The Times*, “Since June of last year, the Obama administration has upended that tradition (of allowing asylum applicants to live with family and friends.) Rather than release the families on bond to await a hearing, officials place virtually all women with children into the new detention facilities.” That includes a baby as young as 14-days-old.

Like much of what the Democrats do in comparison to Republicans, brutality has a veneer of humanity. Originally called the Karnes County Civil Detention Center, the Texas prison where hundreds of women and children are locked up was recently euphemistically renamed Karnes County Residential Center. The center is run by the GEO Group, the second-largest private company after CCA operating prisons in the United States. It received a makeover to transform it from a prison into nothing more than a nicer-looking prison. Furniture is colorful and kid-friendly. A large, painted sign reading “Bienvenidos Welcome” greets people at the door. But the soft facade obscures the fact that it incarcerates mothers and babies.

Sameera Hafiz, a legislative and policy consultant with the group “We Belong Together,” has been working closely with the immigrants detained at Karnes. She explained in an interview on “Uprising” that most of the women involved in a hunger strike at Karnes in early April had “passed their credible fear interviews, so they had made an initial showing that they are eligible for asylum because they faced persecution

if they are returned to their home countries.” These mothers were attempting to go through the legal process of applying for immigration status. It was only after they remained imprisoned for months under unbearable conditions that they began fasting to draw public attention.

Jonathan Ryan, executive director of the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) in Texas, told me that the hunger strikers faced retaliation so severe that they were placed in solitary confinement along with their children. “Several women were rounded up as the supposed ringleaders of the fast,” Ryan said, “and they were brought into isolation rooms which were dark, in which they were kept with their children.”

Rather than serving as some sort of humane alternative to separating families by imprisoning just the adults, family detention is a traumatic experience—especially for children. It can result in serious psychological scars for life. Delmi Cruz and her 11-year-old son, Alexis, have been held at Karnes for seven months and continue to remain locked up despite being eligible for parole. After participating in the hunger strike, they were among those placed in solitary confinement. Alexis is reportedly suffering from deep depression. Ryan related that those who have visited the mother and son recently found that:

“... Alexis’ entire demeanor and mental health deteriorated rapidly during that time and that he really has not recovered. He is in a constant state of crying and depression, and is failing to make eye contact. It has been a really brutal, brutal experience, not just for the mothers but of course for these children.”

Another mother, Kenia Galeano, who also participated in the hunger strike, was allowed to post bond and was finally released a week later. As a second hunger strike began in mid-April, Galeano gave interviews to the press about her friends inside Karnes who remain imprisoned and the conditions she and others faced. Guards reportedly threatened to separate her from her two-year-old child if she continued her hunger strike. Like Cruz, she, too, was placed in a dark isolation room with her baby.

But why was Galeano released whereas Cruz and others remain locked up? The answer is shocking. Galeano's \$7,500 bond was paid by a staffer at RAICES, which also has a campaign to free Delmi Cruz. The reason both women were locked up in the first place was, as Hafiz revealed, because the Obama administration "has been using family detention as a deterrent against immigration."

In February, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ordered a preliminary injunction halting the practice of family detention as a deterrent. Boasberg wrote, "Such detention ... is particularly harmful to minor children." DHS seems to have responded, not by freeing families, but by simply increasing the bonds so much (\$7,500 to \$10,000) that most of the mothers, like Cruz and Galeano, who are poor to begin with cannot afford them on their own.

Officials have made no secret of using detention as a deterrent. At an opening ceremony of the nation's largest family detention center in Dilley, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson declared, "I believe this is an effective deterrent. ... Frankly, we want

to send a message that our border is not open to illegal migration, and if you come here, you should not expect to simply be released." Unless you can muster the thousands-of-dollars to post bond, he should have added.

Despite Boasberg's injunction, Congress passed a spending bill a month later that included hundreds-of-millions in taxpayer dollars to continue and even expand the use of family detention centers.

As a nation, we are locking up babies and their mothers in order to discourage other babies and mothers from crossing the border as they flee violence and poverty looking for a better life. Setting aside the cruelty of such a policy, studies such as this one have shown that detention has no deterrent effect on would-be immigrants. Moreover, the issue itself is being wrongly framed. Ryan clarified that "This is not about the enforcement of our immigration laws. This is about refugee resettlement and how our country treats *bona fide* refugees who seek protection."

So then why are we continuing these horrific policies that are scarring children—the most innocent and vulnerable among us? One possible reason is simply that there is a great hunger for our tax dollars from private corporations like GEO and CCA that have crafted a business model based on incarceration. Ryan revealed that "today if a woman and child arrive at the border and there is no room at the for-profit, private detention center, then that woman and child is apparently not a threat to our nation's security and they are released." This means that those families unlucky enough to arrive at the border when beds are available will be locked up. Ryan added that the "government's quota ... was established to keep those companies profitable by maintaining 34,000 people in detention every night." Every mother and child incarcerated at facili-

ties like Karnes is simply a conduit for funneling \$350.00-a-day into corporate coffers.

Detainees at Karnes earn a paltry \$3 a day to clean the premises. Incidentally, a single bottle of water costs \$2.50 at the commissary, and many mothers work all day to purchase water for their children, worried about the strong-smelling tap water available at the detention center. Karnes County is, according to *RT*, "in the middle of one of the most active fracking and drilling areas in the nation, with nearly 9,000 sunken wells and another 5,500 approved since 2008." Fracking operations are notorious for contaminating drinking water. Ryan also recounted that mothers who might try to smuggle a box of milk or an orange from the cafeteria to give their children later in the day have had the food confiscated as "contraband" and been told to purchase the same items from the commissary of the for-profit prison. Children, who are not used to the food being served, have lost weight, and mothers are literally watching their babies waste away in front of their eyes.

It is under these circumstances that the mothers at Karnes have launched the second hunger strike to call attention to their plight and that of their children. Hafiz said "it is inhumane and un-American to hold children and mothers in jail facilities."

She is right. Family detention is antithetical to the ideals of freedom, family values and human rights often touted by leaders. The mothers of Karnes County Residential Center are fighting to be heard. Will we listen?

Sonali Kolhatkar is the host and executive producer of Uprising, a daily radio program at KPFK Pacifica Radio.

—Common Dreams, April 24, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/04/24/reflection-our-barbarity-jailing-immigrant-mothers-and-babies>



Obama Threatens Venezuela

Already at war on three continents

By GLEN FORD

President Obama, who is currently engaged in multiple wars on both the African and Asian continents and is hell-bent on provoking a war in Europe with Russia, is now stepping to the very brink of war in South America, against Venezuela. On Monday, March 9, 2015, Obama declared a state of national emergency to justify freezing the assets of seven Venezuelan officials that the U.S. claims are involved in human rights violations. In order to comply with U.S. law, Obama asserted that Venezuela represents a threat to the national security of the United States. The White House pretended that the scary language was just a legal technicality, and does not mean that the president actually believes Venezuela is about to do harm to the United States. However, Obama is invoking the same language and law against Venezuela that was used against Syria and Iran, leading to Syria's near destruction by the U.S. and its allies and proxies, and to vicious sanctions and a state of near-war with Iran. Venezuela has every reason to fear that Obama's executive order might be a prelude to military attack.

Washington has been trying to topple the socialist government in Venezuela since at least 2002, when George Bush backed an unsuccessful *coup* against the late President Hugo Chavez. Since then, Venezuela has conducted more elections than any other nation in the hemisphere, all of them vouched for as free and fair by international observers. Unable to prevail at the polls, the right-wing, racist opposition hopes to come to power through another *coup* or direct military intervention by the United States. In that context, Obama's assertion that Venezuela is a danger to U.S. national security ranks just short of a declaration of war.

Yankee, stay home

Venezuelan President Maduro has thrown a few of the most brazen *coup* plotters in jail, which Obama ridiculously describes as a massive violation of human rights. However, the worst human rights violators in the hemisphere are Washington's allies. Almost six million people, most of them Black and indigenous, have been displaced from their homes by political violence in Colombia, a U.S. client state. Mexico is a narco-state, as violent as Colombia. And Honduras, where the U.S. backed a military *coup* against the democratically elected government in 2009, is a place of lawlessness and state terror.

Luckily, the United States only has a few remaining allies left in Latin America. What unifies the southern

part of the hemisphere is the common experience of the U.S. boot on one's neck. CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which includes all of the nations of the western hemisphere except Canada and the U.S., has warned Washington to stop interfering in Venezuela's internal affairs.

So, if Obama thinks that he can get away with waging a phony "humanitarian" interventionist war against Venezuelan President Maduro, as he did against Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, he will find himself opposed by an entire continent.

—*Black Agenda Report*, March 11, 2015

<http://blackagendareport.com/node/14713>

**America has been at war
222 out of 239 years
since 1776. Let that
sink in for a moment.**



Corporate Heist For Pacific Rim

By Linda J. Nordquist

For the past six years the Obama Administration has been secretly developing a “trade” agreement (the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement: TPPA) to be signed by eleven Pacific-rim countries: United States, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam which will encompass 40 percent of world trade. No one knew about it until *WikiLeaks* began publishing pertinent sections, subjecting them to the light of day. Now we know why secrecy (excepting the 600 corporate advisors who wrote it) was so important.

The TPPA is touted as an extension and strengthening of NAFTA, Bill Clinton’s brainchild and dagger in the heart of U.S. jobs. By offering special privileges and protections it will make it easier than NAFTA for corporations to offshore jobs to places like Vietnam (wages: 60 cents an hour), allowing corporations to profit off of cheap labor while driving down wages everywhere. These profits contribute mightily to the enormous gulf between the elites and rest of us.

Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the TPPA “America’s Pacific Century.” New Zealand law professor/author, Jane Kelsey, calls it the “unmistakable end game to counteract China’s ascendancy through U.S. economic and military statecraft.” *350.org* writes: “It’s an enormous corporate power grab, at the expense of our democracy and our climate.”

The TPPA is an odd “trade” agreement: only five of 29 sections deal with trade. The remainder includes curtailing governments’ regulation of certain activities (e.g., environmental policies), establishing intellectual property standards (e.g., harnessing internet freedom, extending copyrights and patents,) and strengthening the political power of cor-

porations. The TPPA will increase medicine prices (lining the pockets of Big-Pharma,) weaken financial regulations (think “Too big to fail,”) outlaw “Buy Local” campaigns, and weaken energy regulation. Further, nations implementing strong public policy initiatives regarding climate change could be sued by foreign fossil fuel corporations for huge sums (see below).

Included in the TPPA is a direct challenge to national sovereignty: the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) section, operating in NAFTA and other bilateral trade agreements. Foreign corporations can haul national governments before extra-judicial three-member international arbitration tribunals composed of corporate attorneys rotating as judges and corporate advocates. (Conflict of interest? Who cares.) They issue non-appealable judgments on claims against domestic laws that corporation-claimants believe violate their right to do business. If corporations win, they are entitled to financial rewards based upon their projected future profits, payable in taxpayer’s money.

“It’s not about trade at all, it’s about investor rights,” says Noam Chomsky. Here are some examples:

- 2012 *Chevron v. Ecuador* (Amazonian oil pollution): Chevron seeks to evade payment of a multi-billion dollar court ruling against the company for widespread pollution of the Amazon rainforest. Ecuadorian courts found that Chevron dumped billions of gallons of toxic water and dug hundreds of open-air oil sludge pits in Ecuador’s Amazon, poisoning the communities of some 30,000 Amazon residents, including the entire populations of six indigenous groups

(one of which is now extinct.) \$9.5 billion desperately needed to provide cleanup and health-care to afflicted indigenous communities. The tribunal in this case ordered Ecuador’s government to violate its own Constitution and block enforcement of a ruling upheld on appeal in its independent court system. Pending. To date, several issues decided in Chevron’s favor.

- 2013 *Lone Pine Resources v. Canada*: U.S.-based oil/gas exploration and production company, launched a \$241 million NAFTA claim against Canada challenging Quebec’s suspension of permits for exploring deposits under the St. Lawrence River (part of a wider moratorium on hydraulic fracking.) Pending.
- 2015 *Bilcon v. Canada* (environmental protection:) investor win (seeking \$300 million.) Corporation sought to expand basalt quarry in Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia. Government rejected on basis of environmental impact report stating blasting and increased shipping would be hazardous to endangered whales and salmon; negative effects on tourism and community values. Dissent by third lawyer-judge criticized the decision as challenging the right of government to implement environmental safeguards reflecting community concerns. Further it would have a “chilling effect on future environmental policies as governments face possible punishing financial awards.” He noted, the ruling was a “significant intrusion into domestic jurisdiction,” giving more power to NAFTA than the Canadian legal system.

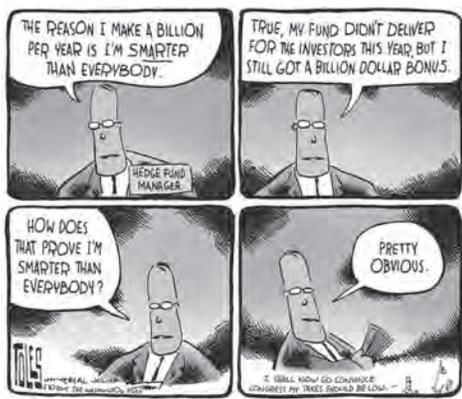
Obama's TPPA elevates corporations from personhood to nationhood, tramples democratic rights, endangers the health and welfare of citizens and ignores the dangers of climate change. He wants Fast Track authority to negotiate, leaving Congress with nothing other than a vote up or down, no discussion; no amendments. Most of the Democratic Party decries the secrecy and being left out of the process, but little else. The Senate and House are to vote on Fast Track in May. Obama wants a vote on TPPA by end of summer.

There is no organized opposition to the substance of the TPPA from the political parties of the one percent.

We need our own political party—a party of workers, farmers and others, completely independent from the parties of the oligarchs. We need to build mass movements to insure our party institutes policies that benefit our quality of life and the survival of our planet. We need to expand our democracy and democratize our economy.

—*New People*, Newsletter of the Thomas Merton Center, Pittsburg's peace and social justice center, June 2015

<http://thomasmertoncenter.org/newpeople/>



Chelsea Manning and the Deepwater Horizon Killings

BY GREG PALAST

The military whistleblower's 2010 *WikiLeaks* dump included information that could have saved the 11 BP workers who died that spring in the Gulf of Mexico oilrig disaster.

Five years ago Monday, April 20, 2015, 11 men died on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig—despite Chelsea Manning's effort to save their lives.

Let me explain.

The BP drilling rig blew itself to Kingdom Come after the “mud”—the cement used to cap the well—blew out.

The oil company, the federal government and the industry were shocked—shocked!—at this supposedly unexpected explosion in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

But BP knew, and Exxon and Chevron knew, and the U.S. State Department knew, that just 17 months earlier another BP offshore rig had suffered an identical, disastrous blowout halfway across the planet in the Caspian Sea.

In both the Gulf and Caspian blowouts, the immediate culprit was the failure of the cement, in both cases caused by the use—misuse—of nitrogen in the cement mix, a money-saving but ultimately deadly measure intended to speed the cement's drying.

The cover-up meant that U.S. regulators, the U.S. Congress and the public had no inkling that the cost-saving “quick-dry” cement process had failed on an offshore rig only a year before the Deepwater Horizon blew.

But Private Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning tried to warn us. The details of the Caspian Sea blowout off the coast of Baku, Azerbaijan, were revealed in the secret State Department cables Manning released in December 2010 through *WikiLeaks*. Cables from the U.S. ambassador relayed a sum-

mary of confidential meetings in which BP's top Azeri executive confided that their big Caspian offshore rig suffered a “blowout” in September 2008 leading to the “largest such emergency evacuation in BP's history”—its likely cause “a bad cement job.”

The message was relayed to Washington after BP's American partners in the Caspian, Exxon and Chevron, asked the State Department to find out why BP had ceased to drill in the Caspian, costing them all millions. State, then headed by former Chevron board member Condoleezza Rice, got the oil chiefs their answer—then joined them in keeping it secret.

(Not knowing about the Manning cables, I had to find out about the Caspian blowout the hard way. Just days after the Deepwater Horizon blowout, I received a tip from an eyewitness to the Caspian disaster. To check out the facts, I flew to Baku, where my British TV crew and I found ourselves placed under arrest by a team of goons from the Azerbaijan secret police, the military and some of BP's oil-well-insignia-sporting private security clowns. As a reporter for *British Television*, I was quickly released—with the film of the bust captured on my little pen camera. But, terribly, two of my rig-worker witnesses disappeared.)

Had BP or the State Department 'fessed up to the prior blowout—a disclosure required by U.S. and British regulations—it is exceptionally unlikely that BP would have been allowed to use the quick-dry cement method in the deep Gulf of Mexico.

Indeed, there may have been a complete prohibition on the drilling, because Department of Interior experts had opposed deep drilling in that part

of the Gulf. To lobby the government to allow drilling there, just six months before the Deepwater Horizon blew, BP executive David Rainey and the presidents of Exxon USA and Chevron testified before Congress that offshore drilling had been conducted for 50 years “in a manner both safe and protective of the environment.”

It is hard to imagine the oil companies defeating the Interior experts had the executives admitted to the recent blowout in the Caspian Sea.

Ultimately, Rainey was indicted for the crime of making false statements to Congress on a lesser matter. However, indicting the executives for concealing the earlier blowout was not possible because our own State Department participated in the cover-up.

And that’s what Manning exposed—though not quickly enough to save those 11 lives.

Private Manning may not have known about the specific memo of the

secret meeting of State and BP. It was one in an ocean of cables she released.

But Manning knew this: The truth can save lives. Or, as Manning was brought up to believe: The truth shall set us free.

And if truth sets us free, then official secrets enslave us.

Barack Obama and John Boehner and Mitch McConnell know this. So do Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and the other candidates for Secret-Keeper-in-Chief.

Years ago, Daniel Ellsberg told me that he was surprised when Judge Stanley Sporkin dismissed all charges against him although Ellsberg had revealed top-secret military intelligence, the Pentagon Papers. The judge noted that the U.S. was unique among nations in having no “official secrets act,” no law against telling the truth to the public.

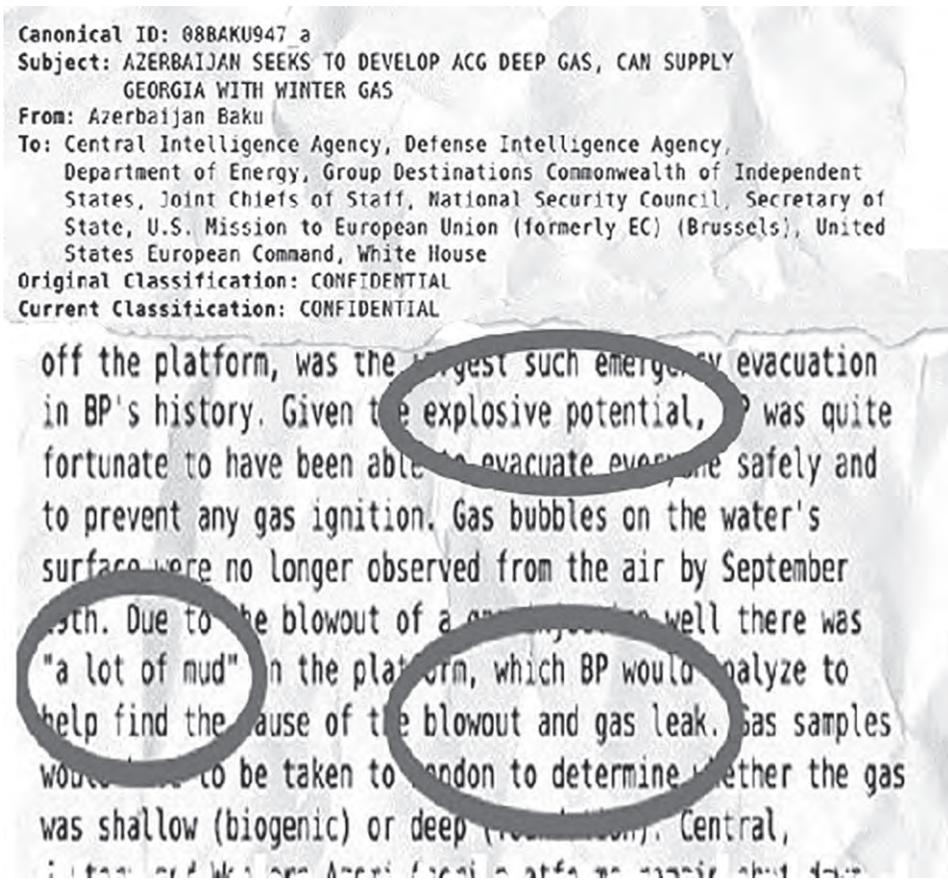
No more. The brutal 35-year prison sentence for Manning on espionage

charges and the continuing manhunt for Edward Snowden makes it clear that the Obama administration considers truth-telling a crime.

As I see it, the State Department officials who withheld BP’s blowout secret are as culpable as the oil company in the deaths of those 11 workers on the Deepwater Horizon. You can say that the men who died on the rig were victims of the corporate-government enslavement of information, martyrs to official secrecy.

—OpEd News, April 19, 2015

http://www.opednews.com/articles/Chelsea-Manning-and-the-De-by-Greg-Palast-Chelsea-Formerly-Bradley-Manning_Chelsea-Manning_Chelsea-Manning_Environment-150419-645.html



The brutal 35-year prison sentence for Manning on espionage charges and the continuing manhunt for Edward Snowden makes it clear that the Obama administration considers truth telling a crime.

Splitting the Atlantic Alliance

NATO lies and provocations

BY MIKE WHITNEY

“The war has been provoked to destroy the Russian World, to draw Europe into it, and to surround Russia with hostile countries. Unleashing this world war, America is trying to deal with its own internal problems.” — Sergei Glazyev, Advisor to Russian President Vladimir Putin

The fabrications of NATO’s top commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, have driven a wedge between Germany and the United States that could lead to a collapse of the Atlantic Alliance. According to the German news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, Breedlove has repeatedly sabotaged Chancellor Angela Merkel’s attempts to find a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine by spreading “dangerous propaganda” that is misleading the public about Russian “troop advances on the border, (and) the amassing of munitions and alleged columns of Russian tanks.” But while the unusually critical article singles out Breedlove for his hyperbolic exaggerations of so-called Russian aggression, the real purpose of the *Spiegel* piece is to warn Washington that EU leaders will not support a policy of military confrontation with Moscow.

Before we explain what’s going on, we need to look at an excerpt from the article. According to *Spiegel*:

“...for months now, many in the Chancellery simply shake their heads each time NATO, under Breedlove’s leadership, goes public with striking announcements about Russian troop or tank movements ... it is the tone of Breedlove’s announcements that makes Berlin uneasy. False claims and exaggerated accounts, warned a top German official during a recent meeting on

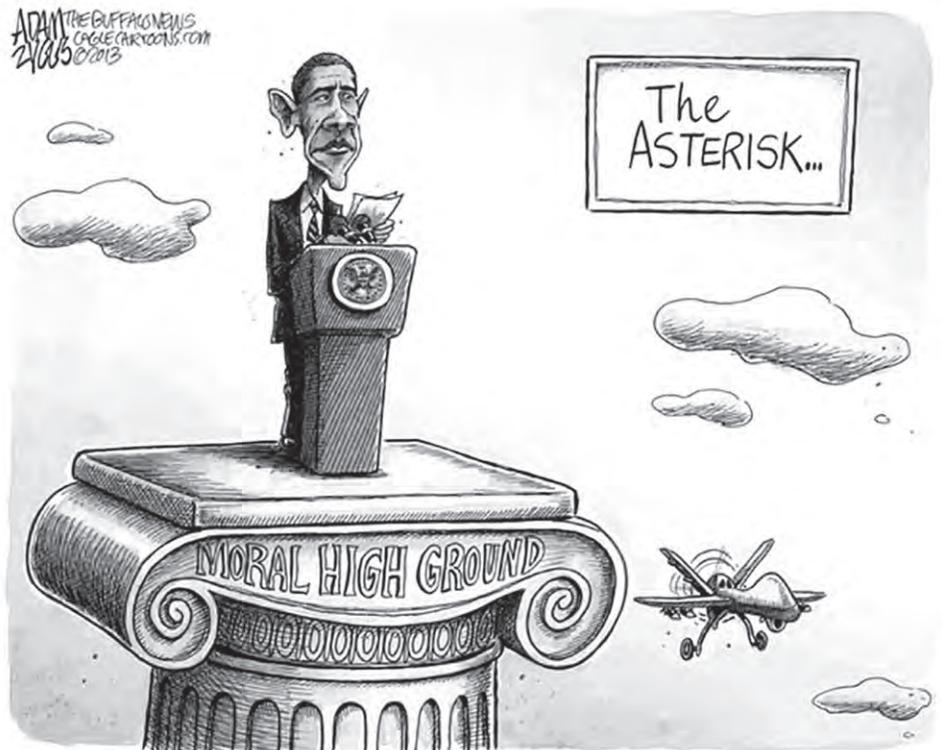
Ukraine, have put NATO—and by extension, the entire West—in danger of losing its credibility.

“There are plenty of examples.... At the beginning of the crisis, General Breedlove announced that the Russians had assembled 40,000 troops on the Ukrainian border and warned that an invasion could take place at any moment. The situation, he said, was ‘incredibly concerning.’ But intelligence officials from NATO member states had already excluded the possibility of a Russian invasion. They believed that neither the composition nor the equipment of the troops was consistent with an imminent invasion.

“The experts contradicted Breedlove’s view in almost every respect. There weren’t 40,000 soldiers on the border, they believed, rather there were much less than

30,000 and perhaps even fewer than 20,000. Furthermore, most of the military equipment had not been brought to the border for a possible invasion, but had already been there prior to the beginning of the conflict. Furthermore, there was no evidence of logistical preparation for an invasion, such as a field headquarters. Breedlove, though, repeatedly made inexact, contradictory or even flat-out inaccurate statements....

“On November 12, during a visit to Sofia, Bulgaria, Breedlove reported that ‘we have seen columns of Russian equipment—primarily Russian tanks, Russian artillery, Russian air defense systems and Russian combat troops—entering into Ukraine.’ It was, he noted, ‘the same thing that OSCE is reporting.’ But the OSCE had only observed military convoys within eastern



Ukraine. OSCE observers had said nothing about troops marching in from Russia.

“Breedlove sees no reason to revise his approach. ‘I stand by all the public statements I have made during the Ukraine crisis,’ he wrote to *Spiegel* in response to a request for a statement accompanied by a list of his controversial claims.’ (“Breedlove’s Bellicosity: Berlin Alarmed by Aggressive NATO Stance on Ukraine,” *Der Spiegel*)

While it’s easy to get swept up in the *Spiegel*’s narrative of a rabid militarist dragging Europe closer to World War 3, the storyline is intentionally misleading. As anyone who’s been following the Ukraine fiasco for the last year knows, there’s nothing particularly unusual about Breedlove’s distortions. Secretary of State John Kerry has made similar claims numerous times as have many others in the major media. The lies about “Russian aggression” are the rule, not the exception. So why has the *Spiegel* decided to selectively target Breedlove who is no more deceitful than anyone else? What’s really going on here?

Clearly, the *Spiegel* is doing Merkel’s work, that is, undermining the credibility of Washington’s chief commander in Europe in order to discourage further escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. But while Merkel wants to humiliate Breedlove to show that Germany will not sit on its hands while Washington plunges the region into the abyss; she has also shown considerable restraint in limiting her attack to the General while sparing Kerry and Obama any embarrassment. This is quite an accomplishment given that—as we said earlier—virtually everyone in the political establishment and the media have been lying nonstop about every aspect of the conflict. Merkel doesn’t want to discredit these others just yet, although the *Spiegel* piece infers that she has the power to do so if the “bad behavior” persists.

The *Spiegel* article is part of a one-two punch designed to force Washington to change its confrontational approach. The second jab appeared late Sunday afternoon, March 8, 2015, when EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announced that Europe needed to field its own army. Here’s the story from *Reuters*:

How can the U.S. possibly cast itself as “steward of the global security system,” when its interventions have left a trail of decimated failed states from the southernmost border of Somalia to the northern tip of Ukraine, a chaotic swathe of smoldering ruin and agonizing human suffering that rivals the depredations of the Third Reich.

“The European Union needs its own army to face up to Russia and other threats as well as restore the bloc’s foreign policy standing around the world, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told a German newspaper on Sunday...

“With its own army, Europe could react more credibly to the threat to peace in a member state or in a neighboring state.

“One wouldn’t have a European army to deploy it immediately. But a common European army would convey a clear message to Russia that we are serious about defending our European values.” (“Juncker calls for EU army, says would deter Russia,” *Reuters*)

Can you see what’s going on? On the one hand, the *Spiegel* delivers a hammer-blow to the credibility of NATO’s top officer and on the other, the President of the EU Commission blindsides U.S. powerbrokers by announcing a plan to create an independent EU fighting force that will render NATO redundant. These are big developments that have undoubtedly left the Obama troupe reeling. This is a full-blown assault on NATO’s role as the primary guarantor of EU regional security. Maybe the European people are gullible enough to accept Juncker’s absurd claim that an EU army will “send an important message to the world,” but you can be damn sure that no one at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue believes that nonsense. The move is clearly designed to send a message to Washington that Europe is fed up with NATO and wants a change. That means it’s “shape up or ship out time” for Breedlove and his ilk.

Ironically, these developments align Merkel with Putin’s view of things as stated in his famous Munich speech in 2007 when he said:

“I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue...The United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way...And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasize this—no one feels safe.” (Russian President Vladimir Putin, 43rd Munich Security Conference, 2007)

How can the U.S. possibly cast itself as “steward of the global security system,” when its interventions have left a trail of decimated failed states from the southernmost border of Somalia to the northern tip of Ukraine, a chaotic swathe of smoldering ruin and agonizing human suffering that rivals the

depredations of the Third Reich.

Europe's security requirements cannot be met by a belligerent, warmongering U.S.-controlled entity that acts solely in Washington's interests. At present, NATO gets 75 percent of its funding from the U.S., which is why the alliance is less interested in peace-making and security than it is in internationalizing its imperial war of aggression across the planet. Prior to the crisis in Ukraine, European leaders didn't see the danger of this idiotic arrangement (even though interventions in Serbia, Libya and Afghanistan should have brought them to their senses.) But now that NATO's recklessness could vaporize Europe in a nuclear firestorm, leaders like Merkel and Hollande are starting to change their tune. Keep in mind, the ideal scenario for the U.S. would be a limited war that levels large parts of the European and Asian continents, thus restoring the U.S. to its post WWII heyday when the "rubblized" world was Washington's oyster. That would be just fine for genocidal maniacs and armchair warriors who rule the globe from the safety of their well-stocked DC bunkers. But for Europe, this is definitely not a winning strategy. Europe doesn't want a war, and it certainly doesn't want to be used as cannon fodder for the greater glory of the dystopian New World Order.

Putin advisor, Sergei Glazyev, figured out what Washington was up to long before Kiev launched its wretched "anti terrorism" campaign against federalist rebels in the East. Here's how he summed it up:

"The main task the American puppet masters have set for the (Kiev) junta is to draw Russia into a full-scale war with Ukraine. It is for this purpose that all of these heinous crimes are committed—to force Russia to send troops to Ukraine to protect the civilian population...

"The bankruptcy of the U.S. financial system, which is unable to service its foreign debt, the lack of

investments to finance a breakthrough to a new technological order and to maintain America's competitiveness, and the potential defeat in the geopolitical competition with China. To resolve these problems, Americans need a new world war." (Sergei Glazyev)

Bingo. The steadily-declining empire, whose share of global GDP continues to shrivel with every passing year, has wanted a war from the get go. That's the only way that the U.S. can reverse its precipitous economic slide and preserve its lofty spot as the world's only superpower. Fortunately, EU leaders are beginning to pull their heads out of the sand long enough to grasp what's going on and change their behavior accordingly.

It's worth noting, that no one in the Merkel administration or anyone else, for that matter, has publicly challenged the allegations in the *Spiegel* article. Why is that, do you think?

Doesn't their silence suggest that they knew all along that all the anti-Putin propaganda hullabaloo was pure bunkum; that "evil" Putin didn't send tanks and soldiers across the border into Ukraine, that Putin didn't shoot down Malaysian Airline 17, that Putin didn't have a political opponent gunned down gangland style just a few hundred yards from the Kremlin? Isn't that what their silence really says?

Of course, it does. The reason no one in power has spoken out is because—as the *Spiegel* cynically admits—"A mixture of political argumentation and military propaganda is necessary."

"Propaganda is necessary?"

Whoa. Now there's an admission you're not going to see in the media too often. But it's the truth, isn't it? The Euro-leaders have been going along with the lies to keep the public in line. In other words, it's a healthy dose of perception management for the sheeple, but the unvarnished truth for

our revered overlords. Sounds about right. Only now these lame elites have decided to share the facts with the lumpen masses. But why? Why this sudden willingness to share the truth?

It's because they no longer support Washington's policy, that's why. No one in Europe wants the U.S. to arm and train the Ukrainian army. No one wants them to deploy 600 paratroopers to Kiev and increase U.S. logistical support. No one wants further escalation, because no one wants a war with Russia. It's that simple.

For the first time, EU leaders, particularly Merkel, understand that the United States' strategic objectives (the pivot to Asia) do not align with those of the EU, in fact, Washington's geopolitical ambitions pose a serious threat to Europe's security. Regrettably, it's not enough for Merkel to simply understand what is going on. She needs to huddle with her EU colleagues and take positive steps to derail Washington's plan now, otherwise the U.S. will continue its incitements and false flags until Putin is forced to respond. Once that happens, a broader and, perhaps, catastrophic conflagration will be unavoidable.

Mike Whitney lives in Washington State. He is a contributor to *Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion* (AK Press).

—*Counterpunch*, March 10, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/03/10/nato-lies-and-provocations/>



Israel Against the Jews

BY PIERRE STAMBUL

Paris—It is a well-worn refrain. You criticize Israel and Zionism? You are an anti-Semite! A French Jew wants to be able to ‘live fully his Judaism’? He is invited to make ‘aliyah’ and to do his bit for the colonization of Palestine. It is hammered into us that the history of Jewry has been brought to an end and that Israel is its end point. Israel functions as an eraser of Jewish history, of memory, of languages, of traditions and of Jewish identities. Israeli politics is not only criminal against the Palestinian people. It claims to be the heir of Jewish history when it has misrepresented that history and betrayed it. Israel knowingly puts the Jews in danger wherever they find themselves. And it transforms them into robots summoned to justify the unjustifiable.

Revisiting the recent past

The history of French Jewry has strictly nothing to do with Israel. Perennially dispossessed, massacred or expelled by a variety of very Christian Kings, the Jews have acquired French citizenship not least thanks to the advocacy of a priest, Henri Grégoire, during the Revolution. The last two centuries have been marked by a quest for citizenship and for equal rights under the law.

The Dreyfus affair highlighted that, if one part of French society was anti-Semitic, another part, ultimately the majority, considered that the acquittal and rehabilitation of Dreyfus was the objective of all those who were enamored of liberty and rejected racism. The history of French Jewry has been distinguished by its significant involvement in the resistance against Nazism and the Vichy regime, then by the engagement of many amongst them in progressive and/or anti-colonialist struggles. Among the notable Jewish intellectuals of this era were Raymond Aubrac, Marc

Bloch, Laurent Schwartz, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Stéphane Hessel.

It was an *era* when many Jews thought that their own emancipation was part of a universal emancipation. It was an epoch when racism, fascism and the hatred of “the other” were considered as utterly unacceptable and had to be fought. Jewish children went to the public school system; the idea of separating themselves from others into faith-based schools would never have occurred to them.

In Israel today, there has been a concerted attempt to erase the history of Jews in the different countries where they lived. If Jews have for a long time been considered by anti-Semites in Europe as inassimilable pariahs and if they have been persecuted because they have constituted an obstacle to the mad nationalisms which dreamt of ethnically pure societies, they have never sought separation but, on the contrary, the integration into the societies in which they lived.

A call to desertion

One jumps forward to more recent times. At the head of a huge Parisian demonstration supposedly organized against terrorism, one finds three war criminals, Netanyahu, Lieberman and Bennett, who just made a name for themselves by massacring of more than 2000 Palestinians (mostly civilians) in Gaza during the summer of 2014. Profiting from the emotion generated by the anti-Semitic murders at the Porte de Vincennes, Netanyahu is empowered (by the French government)¹ to declare to French Jews that they live with insecurity in France and that they should move to their “true” country, Israel.

In fact, Zionism has never combated anti-Semitism. It has always end-

lessly fed on it with a single and unique objective: to entice as many Jews as possible to immigrate to Israel. As a result, Netanyahu has not hesitated to put French Jews in danger. He makes them into foreigners in their own country, “tourists” who have not understood that their “homeland” is down there. Jews are enjoined to become either “traitors” (to the single and unique cause, that of Greater Israel from the river to the sea) or accomplices. France has always been considered a failure for Israel: hardly 80,000 Jews have left since 1948 and half of them have returned to France. Then the propaganda becomes deafening. However, if there is clearly a country where Jews live in insecurity, it is Israel itself and it will be thus as long as Israel pursues the destruction of Palestine.

To the *aliyah* (“going up”) of the living towards Israel, is now added that of the dead. The Israeli authorities actively incite French Jews to bury their dead in Israel. Thus the victims of the killing at the Porte de Vincennes have been buried at the Givat Shaul cemetery. This district of Jerusalem is actually the former Deir Yassin, the village martyred in the 1948 war where the Irgun militias directed by Menachem Begin massacred the entire population so that the village, like so many others, could be erased from the map. How symbolic!

Israel in the avant-garde of Islamophobia

Jews have lived for centuries in the Islamic world. They have even been welcomed by the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Today, Israel participates in the demonization of Arabs and of Muslims by behaving as a model pupil in the “clash of civilizations” classroom. Some politicians having made it their

stock in trade, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia is openly displayed, and acting on them is not uncommon.

The mass crime in Gaza or the multiplication of racist statements (for Rabbi Rosen, the Palestinians are akin to Amelekites and the Torah dictates that we should kill them as well as their wives, their children, their flocks) will leave traces. How does one imagine that what is inflicted on the Palestinians will be without consequences?

In Israel, propagandists compete to explain that Jews have lived in hell in the Muslim world, concealing the fact that anti-Semitism has been above all of European and Christian origins. In Israel, Oriental Jews experience social discrimination and racist contempt. They have often been humiliated and discriminated against on their arrival. They are cut from their roots and urged to renounce their identity. The expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 is presented as an “exchange of populations” whereas Zionism is the principle cause, both of the Nakba and of the departure of Oriental Jews from their countries.

What does it mean to be Jewish in Israel?

Zionists have theorized the idea that Jews and non-Jews are not able to live together. This is totally contrary to all that has taken place for hundreds of years. It runs contrary to the aspiration of Jews to leave the ghettos, the *mellahs* and the *juderias* to become normal citizens.

Devout Jews who emigrate to Israel rarely encounter there the religion that they have practiced for centuries. The national-religious movement is dominant. This integrationist current has transformed the character of religion. A “chosen people” never meant one having more rights than others but, on the contrary, one having more obligations. Among the precepts, there is “do unto others as you would have them do

unto you” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” “Next year in Jerusalem” was never meant as the inspiration for the ethnic cleansing now taking place but was an expression of eagerly “anticipating the Messiah.”

Hebrew has always been a religious language whose profane usage is forbidden. The Jewish religion is a religion of “exile.” The settlement on this land (of Israel/Palestine) before the arrival of the Messiah and a *fortiori* the creation of a Jewish state was forbidden. Besides, the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 did not go to Jerusalem. Herzl met an almost unanimous hostility against the Zionist project from the rabbis when the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was proposed.

For secular Jews, the dominant values of Israel are the antithesis of their understanding of the values of Judaism. Where does one find in the Jewish tradition the racism, the chauvinism, the militarism, the negation of the existence and of the dignity of the other? What is there in common between what great Jewish intellectuals (Einstein, Freud, Arendt, Kafka, Benjamin...) represented and the war criminals who run Israel? What has Israel done with their memory and that of those who struggled against fascism and colonialism (Marek Edelman, Abraham Serfaty, Henri Curiel...)? From what Jewish heritage can the settlers and the military draw to justify in advance the violence and crimes committed against the Palestinians?

As the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand has written in a proposal for the book of Yakov Rabkin *Comprendre l'État d'Israël* [*Understanding Israel*],² “those who see in Zionism a continuation of Judaism would benefit from reading this book. But those who believe that the state of Israel is a Jewish state have an obligation to read it.”

Some Jews think that after the Nazi genocide, Israel is the ultimate refuge. On what grounds is the Israeli leader-

ship able to brandish everywhere anti-Semitism and the memory of the genocide? Zionists played only a marginal role in the struggle against anti-Semitism and the resistance to Nazism. Some Zionist leaders had themselves engaged in shameful behavior during the rise of fascism (Ben Gurion with the 1933 Haavara Agreement) and during the period of extermination (the Stern group murdering soldiers and British dignitaries).

How is it possible to not understand that the memory of the genocide signifies “never again” and not “never again TO US,” the latter denoting a tribal vision of humanity in total opposition to all forms of the Jewish heritage.

Refusing dictates and fear, refusing all forms of racism and of discrimination

There are confrontations, which make sense: struggles against oppression, domination, colonialism, for equality under the law. But we are being sold a war that is not ours: that of a world supposedly civilized against “Islamic terrorism.” In this war, Muslims are considered potential terrorists and are enjoined to “prove” that they are not accomplices of *Daesh* (Islamic State).

And Jews are commanded to support without reserve Israeli policies that are criminal against the Palestinians and suicidal for Jews. This headlong rush into criminality works on fear. This syndrome assures consensus to a point such that a Palestinian negotiator (Professor Albert Aghazarian) has claimed that the Israelis fear no longer living in fear. This irrational fear has infected many French Jews.

In the context of the “clash of civilizations,” pretext for the powerful to drench the world in blood, there is in France a general escalation of all forms of racism. Contrary to the image manufactured by the mainstream media, racism hits essentially those “dominat-

ed,” all the victims of social apartheid: Arabs, Blacks, Roms. The trend takes a new form by concealing itself behind Islamophobia. As it is no longer politically correct to say “dirty Arab,” one demonizes Islam. There is also an incontestable and detestable increase in anti-Semitism. But the different forms of racism are not treated in the same manner.

The Israeli leadership, and CRIF [Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives] in France, are actively involved in the stigmatization of Muslims. They assert, against all evidence, that there is only one racism to denounce (anti-Semitism) and that we are on the brink of a new *kristallnacht*. They identify Jews as those that the authorities protect; whereas the “law and order” ideology, the declarations of the political leadership and the nauseating work of *pseudo* intellectuals, are aimed solely at a population which has been declared dangerous.

Moreover, the anti-Semitic stereotypes are nourished by the complicity of CRIF with Israeli policies and of the

evident partiality of the French state. In this time of disarray, the legitimate indignation against Israeli crimes brings a rise in anti-Semitism and the few misfits attracted by the frightful violence of *Daesh* to commit criminal murders against Jews for being Jews.

**Zionists played only
a marginal role in
the struggle against
anti-Semitism and
the resistance to
Nazism.**

The struggle against racism can't be divided into isolated compartments. To choose certain “good” victims against others is the antithesis of the anti-racist struggle. Israeli policies and the total negation of the rights of the Palestinian people cannot protect the Jews. On the contrary, to create the new Israeli, it is necessary to “kill the Jew,” the one who

thought that his emancipation was dependent on the general emancipation of humanity. As the militant anti-colonialist Israeli Eitan Bronstein said: “we will never be free as long as Palestinians aren't free.” In rejecting tribalism, French Jews reaffirm a history for which they can be proud.

Everybody is required to combat all racisms, all stigmatization, all discrimination. It is necessary for everybody to defend justice, in Palestine as well as here in France.

This article was published on the site of the Union Juive Française pour la Paix. It has been translated by Evan Jones.

Pierre Stambul is co-President of the UJFP and the author of Israël/Palestine, du refus d'être complice à l'engagement, and Le sionisme en questions.

—Counterpunch, Weekend Edition, March 13-15, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/03/13/israel-against-the-jews/>

**COST TO THE AVERAGE
TAXPAYER PER YEAR**

FOOD STAMPS	OIL SUBSIDIES
 \$36	 \$5737

**IMAGINE IF WE SPENT AS
MUCH MONEY PROTECTING
LIFE AS WE DO DESTROYING IT**

1 [E:] True, President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls would have preferred that Netanyahu not turn up to the demonstration and objected to Netanyahu's invitation to French Jews to emigrate. However, the Hollande Presidency has reinforced France's *carte blanche* given to Israel's international impunity, leveraged further by Netanyahu himself. Netanyahu's official visit to France in October 2012 had Hollande cravenly kowtowing to the Israeli agenda. Netanyahu then urged French Jews to emigrate to Israel, and was subsequently allowed to insert himself (and the Israeli meme) into a memorial gathering commemorating the “Merah” Jewish school murders in Toulouse the previous March. At Netanyahu's invitation, Hollande travelled to Israel in November 2013, where his kowtowing was again manifest. The government repressed demonstrations against the Israeli massacres in Gaza in the summer of 2014, and ignores the recruiting of French Jews by the Israel Defense Forces. When Netanyahu again, on French soil, claims to French Jews that Israel is their real home, he knows that any criticism of his actions by French authorities carry no force.

2 [E:] A nominal English title has been foreshadowed, *What is Modern Israel?*, but the book has evidently not been translated into English.

Taxing Water

Tens-of-thousands flood Dublin demanding abolition of austerity tax on water

By SARAH LAZARE



Tens-of-thousands of people took to the streets of the Irish capital on Saturday, March 21, 2015, to demand the abolition of a controversial water tax—an austerity measure that protesters say violates the human right to this vital good.

The campaign Right2Water announced in a press statement on Saturday that over 80,000 people from across Ireland took part in the demonstration. The group, whose steering committee organized the rally, had insisted ahead of the event that a big turnout is vital to “send a clear message that we refuse to be bullied and intimidated into acquiescence.”

The Dublin rally was the latest mass mobilization in a protracted fight to head off a top-down push to directly charge residents for water use, to satisfy European Union and International Monetary Fund demands.

Beyond declaring that they “won’t pay,” protesters also seek to take proactive steps to prevent the government from privatizing Ireland’s water bureau, Irish Water.

Addressing the crowd, Communications Workers Union representative Steve Fitzpatrick called for water to be protected as a public good in the constitution. The union is proposing an amendment, which would read, “The Government shall be collectively responsible for the protection, management and maintenance of the public water system.”

Many emphasized that the fight to defend water rights—and public goods—spans the globe.

In fact, *Reuters* reports that many in the crowd carried Greek flags to show solidarity with that austerity-stricken nation.

Memet Uludag of People Before Profit and the Irish Anti-Racism Network, called attention to the fact that the protest coincided with the UN’s World Anti-Racism day.

“We say today water is a human right,” Uludag declared to demonstrators, according to *The Irish Times*. “Black and white, we will unite and we will fight. From Bolivia to Detroit to Greece, people have been fighting against cuts, against austerity.”

—*Common Dreams*, March 21, 2015

<http://commondreams.org/news/2015/03/21/tens-thousands-flood-dublin-demanding-abolition-austerity-tax-water>



Sorrow and Rage in Yemen

Saudi Arabia discusses deploying as many as 150,000 troops and 100 warplanes in operation receiving coordination from the Pentagon and supported by Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain

BY JON QUEALLY

Airstrikes led by Saudi Arabia, and supported by other members of Gulf Cooperating Council and the U.S. government, continued to hit Yemen on Thursday, March 26, 2015, as the situation in one of the world's most impoverished, yet strategically important countries continues to unravel amid what can only be described now as all-out war.

Reports indicate that a first wave of bombings overnight which resulted in a number of civilian deaths—including entire families trapped in flattened houses—have spurred widespread anger in Sanaa and other targeted cities, even among members of the population opposed to the Houthi rebels who have now wrested control of much of the country from President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, whose whereabouts remain hard to establish.

The White House, reports *Reuters*, has said it is actively supporting the operation and President Obama has authorized U.S. “logistical and intelligence support” for the bombing campaign. However, according National Security Council spokeswoman, U.S. forces are not involved in direct military action in Yemen.

The Houthi-controlled ministry of health said that at least 18 civilians were killed and 24 were injured after airstrikes pummeled the capital city of Sanaa. According to *Al-Jazeera English*, strikes were also reported on targets in the Malaheez and Hafr Sufyan regions of Saada province, a main Houthi stronghold on the border with Saudi Arabia.

RT.com hosted footage from a rally by Houthi supporters that took place in the Sanaa on Thursday, showing thousands of Yemeni citizens angrily condemning Saudi Arabia, the U.S.,

and the other members of the GCC who are backing the military campaign dubbed “Operation Decisive Storm.”¹

Journalist Tom Finn, who is maintaining a live-blog for *Middle East Eye* on the ongoing situation in Yemen, provided this round-up of overnight developments:

- Global oil prices rise by six percent as Saudi Arabia and Gulf allies launch sweeping military operation
- Saudi officials considering deploying as many as 150,000 troops and 100 warplanes to operation that includes Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain
- U.S. providing “logistical and intelligence support” to the Saudi-led forces

The *Associated Press* reports:

“[Houthi leaders] were calling on their supporters to protest in the streets of Sanaa on Thursday afternoon, Yemen’s Houthi-controlled state news agency *SABA* reported. TV stations affiliated with the rebels and their ally, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, showed the aftermath of the strikes Thursday morning in what appeared to be a residential area.

“*Al-Masirah TV*, affiliated with the Houthis, quoted the ministry of health as saying that 18 civilians were killed and 24 were injured.

“*Yemen Today*, a TV station affiliated with Saleh, showed hundreds of residents congregating around a number of flattened houses, some chanting ‘Death to Al-Saud,’ in reference to the kingdom’s royal family. The civilians were sifting through

the rubble, pulling out mattresses, bricks and shrapnel.

“An *Associated Press* reporter on the scene in the Sanaa neighborhood near the international airport saw people searching for loved ones in the debris of flattened homes. Residents said at least three bodies were pulled from the rubble. There were traces of blood between the bricks.

“Ahmed al-Sumaini said an entire alley close to the airport was wiped out in the strikes overnight. He said people ran out from their homes in the middle of the night. ‘This was a surprise. I was asleep and I was jolted out of my bed,’ he said, waving a piece of shrapnel.”

Speaking to *Al Jazeera* from Sanaa, Houthi spokesman Mohammed Al Bukhaiti called the military action a declaration of war on Yemen, adding that reports alleging that Houthi leader Mohamed Ali Al Houthi had been injured were false.

Meanwhile, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif demanded an immediate halt to the airstrikes, which he called a form of “U.S.-backed aggression” which would only make matters worse in the region.

“Military action from outside of Yemen against its territorial integrity and its people will have no other result than more bloodshed and more deaths,” Zarif told the state-owned *Al-Alam* television station.

—*Common Dreams*, March 26, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/03/26/saudi-arabia-and-allies-continue-airstrikes-sorrow-and-rage-yemen>

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulRRbPjNnXg>

Deadliest Year for Palestinians

UN report finds 2014 deadliest year for Palestinians since 1967 driven by Israel's 50-day military assault on Gaza last summer

BY SARAH LAZARE

Palestinians suffered a dramatic increase in fatalities last year, with more killed by Israel in 2014 than any other annual period since the 1967 war nearly 50 years ago.

A new report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory found that, overall, Israel was responsible for 2,314 Palestinian deaths and 17,125 injuries last calendar year.

Entitled “Fragmented Lives,” the study concludes that Israel’s 50-day military assault on Gaza last summer was the most significant driver of casualties. Between July 7 and August 26, Israel killed at least 2,220 Palestinians and wounded 11,231 in the war. According to researchers, 1,492 of those killed were civilians, but the number could be far higher, as 123 are listed as unverified. At least 551 children are numbered among the dead.

When compared with Israeli deaths, the human toll is asymmetrical. The report notes that 71 Israelis, 66 of them soldiers, were killed, in addition to one foreign national.

But this high magnitude of human loss is not limited to Gaza.

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, “witnessed the highest number of Palestinian fatalities in incidents involving Israeli forces since 2007 and the highest number of Palestinian injuries since 2005, when OCHA began collecting data,” the report notes.

There was a drastic spike in child casualties specifically, as well as a dramatic rise in Palestinian injuries, driven by a “sharp increase in the Israeli forces’ use of live ammunition.”

This trend appears to be continuing into 2015.

Earlier this week, Defense for Children International-Palestine reported that, in the first three months of this year, at least 30 children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were shot with live ammunition by Israeli forces during protest, with several left in critical condition.

But the human toll was not limited to immediate deaths and wounds, the UN report notes.

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians endured a dramatic rise in incarceration for alleged security offenses, including a monthly average of 185 Palestinian children held in military detention. Defense for Children International-Palestine has documented abuse and torture that Palestinian children endure in Israeli prisons, where they are denied due process.

Furthermore, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, home demolitions, discriminatory planning, and settler violence led to high levels of displacement last year. More than 7,500 Palestinian Bedouins in 46 West Bank communities face the immediate threat of forcible transfer by Israeli authorities,

thanks to a controversial relocation plan, the report notes.

In Gaza, nearly half-a-million people—28 percent of the population—were internally displaced last year by the war, and as of the end of December, approximately 100,000 remain displaced.

The report was released just days after Israel and close ally and backer the United States boycotted a UN human rights session aimed, in part at addressing Israeli human rights violations.

Yousef Munayyer, executive director for the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, told *Common Dreams* that the UN report underscores the importance, right now, for the international community to exert pressure to enforce real change.

“Palestinians continue to pay highest price for the *status quo*,” said Munayyer. “The failure to do something to resolve this situation is a stain on the moral conscience of international community.”

—*Common Dreams*, March 27, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/03/27/2014-deadliest-year-palestinians-1967-un-report-finds>



Obama's Criminal War Against Yemen

BY BILL VAN AUKEN

April 10, 2015—As the bombing campaign against Yemen extends into its third week, the Obama administration has stepped up direct U.S. involvement in what constitutes an illegal war that threatens to precipitate a massive humanitarian catastrophe.

The nature of this war is indisputably defined by the character of its combatants. Backed by the U.S., the most powerful and aggressive imperialist country in the world, is a coalition of reactionary tyrants and royal parasites consisting of the monarchical dictatorships in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states together with the savagely repressive regime headed by General al-Sisi in Egypt.

Their target is Yemen, the poorest country of the Middle East. Even before Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states sent warplanes to drop tons of explosives on crowded urban neighborhoods and mobilized warships to block all food and fuel imports from entering its harbors, over half of the population lived in poverty and roughly half the country's children suffered from malnutrition.

Now, this desperate situation has grown immeasurably worse. Basic infrastructure is being bombed into rubble. Food supplies have grown critically short, while electricity, including power to pump water, has been cut off. Attempts by aid agencies to deliver relief have been thwarted repeatedly by the Saudi-led bombings.

While official UN estimates place the number killed at over 600, this includes only those reported by medical facilities, with the real death toll far higher. Thousands more have been maimed. The overwhelming majority of the casualties are civilians, with the bodies of entire families being pulled from the rubble of their homes.

This death toll may soon skyrocket. UNICEF has warned that if the bomb-

ing continues, more than a quarter-of-a-million children are at risk of starving to death.

U.S. officials acknowledged this week that the Pentagon is playing a decisive role in making these war crimes possible. It has accelerated the delivery of bombs, missiles and other weapons to Saudi Arabia for the purpose of killing more Yemenis and boosting the profits of the U.S. arms merchants. Just between 2010 and 2014, the Obama administration reached \$90 billion worth of arms deals with the Saudi monarchy, making it the top U.S. customer.

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On a trip to Riyadh, Antony Blinken, the deputy secretary of state, revealed that the U.S. has also stepped up its intelligence sharing and logistical support for the Saudi-led onslaught, establishing a "joint coordination planning cell" in the Saudi capital. *McClatchy News* cited unnamed Pentagon officials as saying that this operation is being headed by a two-star general from U.S. Central Command.

And on Wednesday, the Pentagon announced that U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotankers have begun daily aerial refueling of Saudi warplanes, to allow continuous airstrikes.

Thus, the U.S. military is not only shipping the bombs to drop on Yemen, but providing Saudi pilots with the targets to be struck and the fuel to reach them. The Obama administration's hands are covered in the blood of the thousands of civilian victims.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry delivered a bellicose defense of this intervention Wednesday, April 8, 2015, blaming Iran for the crisis in Yemen for allegedly providing aid to the Houthi rebel movement that has established control over much of the country.

"Iran needs to recognize that the United States is not going to stand by while the region is destabilized, or while people engage, you know, in overt warfare across ... international boundaries," he said in a *PBS News* interview. Kerry vowed that Washington "would stand up to interference that is inappropriate or against international law, or contrary to the region's stability."

One really has to go back to the 1930s to find such levels of lying to justify imperialist aggression. "Operation Himmler" comes to mind, when Germany's Nazi regime used propaganda about "Polish aggression" to justify its Blitzkrieg against Warsaw.

The Houthis have not crossed any "international boundaries" to wage war, and neither has Iran. The Houthis are an indigenous movement whose successes stem from the hatred among broad sections of the population for both the old regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi—the puppet installed by Riyadh and Washington—and Western intervention in Yemen. As for Iran, for all of the denunciations, neither the U.S. nor anyone else has produced a shred of evidence of its direct or even indirect involvement in the fighting. Those violating the sovereignty of



Yemen are the Saudi and Gulf State potentates backed by Washington.

As for the United States “standing up” for the “region’s stability,” who does Kerry think he’s kidding? The interventions of U.S. imperialism, with the direct collaboration of the Saudi monarchy, have plunged the entire Middle East into chaos and bloodshed—from the destruction of Iraq, to the transformation of Libya into a militia-ravaged “failed state,” to the ongoing carnage inflicted upon Syria in a U.S., Saudi-orchestrated war for regime change spearheaded by Islamist militias.

In Yemen itself, the U.S. destabilized the country through a protracted campaign of drone warfare that has claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people.

For the last several years, the Obama administration and the U.S. military and intelligence complex have painted Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as the premier terror threat to the U.S. “homeland” and the U.S. drone campaign as a model “success” in the “war on terror.”

Now, in the face of the Houthi rebellion, the campaign against AQAP is a dead letter. While elements of the Islamist group have overrun entire cities in the past week, no one even sug-

gests that the Saudi warplanes continuously bombing Yemen should take any action against them.

This is no accident. AQAP is the most militantly anti-Houthi force in the country and therefore a *de facto* ally in the U.S.-Saudi coalition. AQAP, like the Saudi regime itself, is viciously sectarian in its hatred of the Houthi movement, which is based among the Yemeni Zaydi population, a Shia-related religious group comprising up to 40 percent of the population.

Washington has virtually ceased even attempting to invent new lies to justify such head-spinning realignments. The Obama administration has said next to nothing about this latest war being carried out behind the backs of the American people.

The “war on terror,” “human rights,” “democracy” and even “regional stability” are all equally fraudulent pretexts for naked aggression aimed at solidifying U.S. hegemony over the Middle East and its vast energy resources.

This predatory imperialist offensive threatens to ignite a region-wide conflagration, even as Washington deliberately ratchets up military tensions with both Russia and China. The threat of these separate conflicts coalescing into a third world war grows by the day.

—World Socialist Website, April 10, 2015

<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/04/10/pers-a10.html>



Who Says a Better World is Impossible?

BY DAVID SUZUKI WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION'S SENIOR EDITOR IAN HANINGTON

Cars, air travel, space exploration, television, nuclear power, high-speed computers, telephones, organ transplants, prosthetic body parts... At various times these were all deemed impossible. I've been around long enough to have witnessed many technological feats that were once unimaginable. Even ten or 20 years ago, I would never have guessed people would carry supercomputers in their pockets—your smart phone is more powerful than all the computers NASA used to put astronauts on the moon in 1969 combined!

Despite a long history of the impossible becoming possible, often very quickly, we hear the “can't be done” refrain repeated over and over—especially in the only debate over global warming that matters: What can we do about it? Climate change deniers and fossil fuel industry apologists often argue that replacing oil, coal and gas with clean energy is beyond our reach. The claim is both facile and false.

Facile because the issue is complicated. It's not simply a matter of substituting one for the other. To begin, conservation and efficiency are key. We must find ways to reduce the amount of energy we use—not a huge challenge considering how much people waste, especially in the developed world. False because rapid advances in clean energy and grid technologies continue to get us closer to necessary reductions in our use of polluting fossil fuels.

It's ironic that anti-environmentalists and renewable energy opponents often accuse those of us seeking solutions of wanting to go back to the past, to living in caves, scrounging for roots and berries. They're the ones intent on continuing to burn stuff to keep

warm—to the detriment of the natural world and all it provides.

People have used wind and solar power for thousands of years. But recent rapid advances in generation, storage and transmission technologies have led to a fast-developing industry that's outpacing fossil fuels in growth and job creation. Costs are coming down to the point where renewable energy is competitive with the heavily subsidized fossil fuel industry. According to the International Energy Agency, renewable energy for worldwide electricity generation grew to 22 percent in 2013, a five percent increase from 2012.

The problem is that much of the world still burns non-renewable resources for electricity and fuels, causing pollution and climate change and, subsequently, more human health problems, extreme weather events, water shortages and environmental devastation. In many cities in China, the air has become almost unbreathable, as seen in the shocking Chinese documentary film *Under the Dome*. In California, a prolonged drought is affecting food production. Extreme weather events are costing billions of dollars worldwide.

We simply must do more to shift away from fossil fuels and, despite what the naysayers claim, we can. We can even get partway there under our current systems. Market forces often lead to innovation in clean energy development. But in addressing the very serious long-term problems we've created, we may have to challenge another “impossibility:” changing our outmoded global economic system. As economist and Earth Institute director Jeffrey Sachs wrote in a recent *Guardian*

article, “At this advanced stage of environmental threats to the planet, and in an *era* of unprecedented inequality of income and power, it's no longer good enough to chase GDP. We need to keep our eye on three goals—prosperity, inclusion, and sustainability—not just on the money.”

Relying on market capitalism encourages hyper-consumption, planned obsolescence, wasteful production and endless growth. Cutting pollution and greenhouse gas emissions requires conserving energy as well as developing new energy technologies. Along with reducing our reliance on private automobiles and making buildings and homes more energy-efficient, that also means making goods that last longer and producing fewer disposable or useless items so less energy is consumed in production.

People have changed economic systems many times before, when they no longer suited shifting conditions or when they were found to be inhumane, as with slavery. And people continue to develop tools and technologies that were once thought impossible. Things are only impossible until they're not. We can't let those who are stuck in the past, unable to imagine a better future, hold us back from creating a safer, cleaner and more just world.

—David Suzuki Foundation, March 26, 2015

http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2015/03/who-says-a-better-world-is-impossible/?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRolsqzJZKXonjHpfsX66ukrXK%2B%2BlMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4ERcpqI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFS7jNMbZkz7gOXRE%3D

To Eat or Not to Eat

We cannot live by bread alone: Texas abuses prisoners with denied food and bread and water diets

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

Food is routinely used by U.S. prison officials to summarily punish, torture, abuse and retaliate against prisoners. This happens with especial frequency in administrative segregation (solitary confinement) where prisoners are confined inside locked cells all day every day, and must have all meals delivered by guards. Under such circumstances we remain at guards' total mercy "to eat or not to eat."

In the segregation unit of the Texas prison—Clements Unit—where I am confined, guards frequently refuse (or "jack") prisoners' meals, especially mentally ill prisoners, starving them for days to weeks on end, and longer.

No deterrence to guards abusing food

"Jacking" meals occurs so regularly that most segregated Texas prisoners have been, or expect to be, at some point denied meals. And whether the victimized prisoner is "respected" by his peers and guards afterward is determined by how he in turn reacts.

The expected reaction is for the "jacked" prisoner to "run the team," that is, at the first opportunity, to act out in some manner that will require a team of five or more guards to dress out in full body riot armor and forcibly invade his cell and restrain, and more often than not, beat him. The process is formally called a "cell extraction" or "cell entry." The teams of guards who perform the cell extractions are suited up in body armor, gas masks, *etc.*, exactly as police were seen dressed out in their militaristic occupation of Ferguson, Missouri to suppress public protest of the police murder of Michael Brown.

To "get his respect" the prisoner is expected to go through with the entire

cell extraction process, which consists of his being sprayed multiple times with gas, and the team of guards then opening the cell door and rushing in, tackling and/or beating him to the floor, handcuffing him from behind and then beating him further as he is held down defenseless, which entails sly or open punches, kicks, choking, slamming his head against the concrete floor or steel fixtures inside the cell, gouging his eyes, squeezing his testicles, bending his fingers backs, *etc.* Often guards conceal small weapons on their persons and use them to stab, cut or jab the prisoner.

The beatings are typically carried out under cover of a supervising ranking guard yelling repeatedly for the subdued prisoner to "stop resisting!" This is done for effect and to make it seem that the prisoner is being combative and the guards are struggling to control him.¹ This is a standard game which police also play as cover for beating, Tasering, and also shooting people. It is such common practice with so-called "law enforcement" officials, that I'm confident most every prisoner in Amerika who has witnessed or endured even a few cell extractions, and most civilians who've witnessed or suffered beatings at the hands of the police, will attest to it.

Most prisoners are intelligently unwilling to suffer the compounded abuse of "running the team" on top of having been jacked for their meal. However, if the jacked prisoner doesn't run the team he becomes the target of ridicule by others as being a "bitch," "ho," *etc.*, and is disparaged as weak, and is thus likely to be jacked yet again and ostracized to a greater or lesser

degree. It is largely to avoid ridicule and attendant victimization that many prisoners are induced to run the team, and thereby save face. This is all a cultural reaction that officials have conditioned prisoners to adopt to our own disadvantage, which I'll explain.

Officials have taught prisoners over the years to resort to "running teams" because, unless a prisoner employs uncommon tactical ingenuity, he can almost never come out on top of such odds, even if he be in the best physical shape. And because guards enjoy a complete tactical advantage and almost invariably subdue the isolated prisoner quickly and suffer no injuries in the process, cell extractions bolster their sense of invulnerability, and embolden them to abuse us in the absence of fear of harm to themselves or other consequences. So by racking up repeated "wins," the guards, while outnumbered by us at least ten-to-one, enjoy the highest morale; the overall segregated prisoner body, by resisting them in a manner that ensures and results in routine "losses," is left demoralized and submissive to mistreatment.²

Because of the relative advantage that segregated confinement presents to guards, one finds that it is those most inclined to sadism and cowardly abuse that choose to work in segregation units and super-maximum security prisons. Moreover, even the courts have long admitted that poor salaries and training render guards "more vulnerable to the corrupting influence of unchecked authority than most people."³

Also, prisoners are conditioned to fear injuring guards in turn, under administrative threat of criminal prosecution if they do, which means an

extended prison term, often an aggravated sentence, which might result in spending one's entire life in prison.

And in the final event, officials use instances of our running teams or responding to abuse with physical self-defense and deterrence to villainize us as being belligerent, assaultive, *etc.*, painting a completely one-sided picture of events and making their own abusive violence appear only a measured and professional response to dangerous and out-of-control criminals,⁴ rather than their acting under cover of absolute power to inflict compounded abuses on a completely disadvantaged, disempowered and isolated segment of the community.

Which brings me back to the issue of officials using their monopoly on our access to food as a form of abuse.

The legality of restricted prison diets

Texas prison officials subject prisoners to bread and water diets, even though by law and human necessity we cannot live by bread alone.⁵ Furthermore, the basis, upon which restricted diets are imposed, are also forbidden by law.

Prison officials may lawfully impose restricted diets on prisoners temporarily and only in response to, and to control, food-related misbehavior. Such restrictions may not be used as punishment.⁶ And even still, restricted diets must provide adequate nutrition, which a bread and water diet does not.

But here is a recent example of the abusive impunity of prison officials, in this case the wholesale use of illegal bread and water food restrictions as arbitrary punishment, even when prisoners have done nothing wrong.

Bread and water to deter prisoner witnesses

I've had several articles published about abuses at this Clements Unit, which quote or reference prisoner witnesses who communicated their

accounts to me *via* written notes, which I have quoted from. Numerous Clements Unit officials have stated to me that they've read my critical articles online. In response, administrators have tried to discourage our passing notes between ourselves and have explicitly threatened witnesses.

On February 19, 2015, Michael Gruver, the Clements Unit major who oversees the prison's segregation unit, claimed to have been monitoring surveillance cameras mounted in the pod I'm housed in, and allegedly observed numerous prisoners passing items between cells.

In turn Gruver ordered a guard, Joshua Brandl, who was then leaving to go home—it was shift change—to write disciplinary charges on several prisoners. Gruver specifically directed Brandl to fabricate the charges to say fourteen prisoners had manipulated the locking mechanisms on the handcuff ports on their cell doors and opened them. Brandl wrote the charges.

Additionally, Gruver had each of the fourteen prisoners put on food restriction, although none were alleged to have committed any food-related misconduct. All fourteen prisoners remained on food restrictions for seven days.

On food restriction a prisoner is given only a "food loaf" three times per day, delivered in a paper sack. At Clements Unit the food loaf is nothing but a greasy novel-sized block of cornbread with little else in it. The restricted prisoner must drink only water from the sink in his cell. Therefore, food restriction at this unit is literally a bread and water diet.

Almost none of the fourteen food-restricted prisoners were able to eat the food loaf for more than a day, and most went the entire five days refusing to eat it at all because it is so unappetizing and wreaks havoc on one's digestive system.

Actually the "food loaf" recipe is supposed to contain a variety of ingre-

dients from the regular menu, blended together and baked into a "loaf," which can be eaten without utensils, also an instant beverage is to accompany the loaf. This to "control" the misuse of food, utensils, *etc.*, although this is not how loaf meals are prepared at Clements Unit. When complaints are made officials simply lie and claim the proper ingredients are included.

Several days after Brandl wrote the false disciplinary charges, he apparently returned to work with a heavy conscience and admitted he was concerned that several of the prisoners he lied on might retaliate against him. He came to our pod, at which point I called him to my cell door and asked why he'd fabricated reports on the others. All fourteen prisoners were served with the disciplinary charges written by Brandl on February 25. Brandl replied that Gruver ordered him to do it, but that he would tell the truth at the disciplinary hearings, that he'd in fact never observed the prisoners open the cuff ports on their cell doors but was told by Gruver to fabricate the reports saying he had.

Brandl honored his word and all the disciplinary charges were withdrawn before any hearings were conducted, but not before all fourteen prisoners were made to suffer a bread and water diet for five days, all as part of an administrative backlash and group punishment for prisoners bearing witness to witnessed and suffered abuse.

Meal jacked as I wrote article

As an example of how regularly prisoners' meals are arbitrarily taken by guards, at the very time that I was writing this article, a guard, Abraham Dolleh, refused the prisoner housed in the cell directly across from me—Jeffrey Sylvan #1649281—his lunch meal, (this occurred on March 9, 2015).

Dolleh "jacked" Sylvan's lunch because as he was coming toward Sylvan's cell serving lunch, Dolleh called another prisoner several vulgar names. When he got to Sylvan's cell,

Sylvan, thinking the guard was cursing him because Sylvan had been talking loudly to another prisoner, asked Dolleh who he was talking to. Dolleh responded by then cursing Sylvan and then refused to give him his lunch tray although Dolleh had already unlocked and opened the cuff port on Sylvan's cell door in preparation for serving him his meal.

When Dolleh vulgarly told Sylvan he wasn't going to give him his lunch and to back away from the cell door so he could lock the port back without any danger of Sylvan making physical contact with him, Sylvan then stuck his arm out the slot to prevent its being closed and demanded his meal.

In turn Dolleh took out his portable canister of OC gas and stated to Sylvan to move back or he'd say Sylvan was attempting to cut himself with a razor blade and would thereupon empty the canister of gas on him⁷. Sylvan then backed away from the door and Dolleh closed the port cursing Sylvan and refusing his lunch.

Conclusion

Today the entire world is bearing witness to an ongoing pattern of exposures of, and mass protests against, murders by Amerikan police of unarmed people of color and militaristic occupation and terrorism of our communities, which has gone on for decades. This sudden visibility has occurred not because the government nor mainstream media exposed it. It came about because members of the victimized communities exposed it themselves using social media outlets to make an end run around the government and press, who otherwise whitewashed, denied, and concealed these realities, often behind perpetuating racist criminal stereotypes against these communities.

Recall also that just prior to the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri this past summer and the militaristic police response to

the community's righteous protests, which prompted this exposure, politicians and the media were loudly proclaiming that Amerika had finally risen above its racism and become a "post-racial society." The whole world now knows that was all a lie. But remember, we prisoners do not have access to video recording technologies nor social media. So our suffering goes largely unknown to not just the world, but even our own communities.

This is why we must devise ways to expose the darkest recesses of Amerika's lawless law-enforcement system, namely its prisons. And it must be realized that the prisons and the tortures, brutalities and abuses occurring within their hidden confines are an extension of, and organically linked to, the federal, state, and local police that are the very forces targeting the poor and people of color for selective mass imprisonment in Amerika.

Dare to struggle. Dare to win!

All power to the people!

Kevin Rashid Johnson's writings and artwork have been widely circulated. He is the author of Defying the Tomb: Selected Prison Writings and Art of Kevin Rashid Johnson, Featuring Exchanges with an Outlaw, (Kersplebedeb, 2010).

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1 Medical staff and guards tend to downplay any injuries suffered by the prisoner and dismiss them as the result of the prisoner himself being combative and/or falling and striking a hard surface inside the cell during the cell extraction.

2 This culture which plays on male prisoners' masculine sensitivities works to the guards' benefit and the prisoners' disadvantage by inducing prisoners to "fight" the guards from a position of pitting their weaknesses against the guards' strengths. I often point this out to my peers, and illustrate the point with a revelation I heard made by a U.S. military commander during 2003, as he boasted to the media how easily U.S. forces took Iraq's capitol city, Baghdad, during the illegal imperialist Iraq invasion that year. The

officer told how U.S. military intelligence forces had studied Iraqi culture and thereby developed a profile of its military-aged males. From this the U.S. learned that Iraqi males (like most males in patriarchal societies) are highly sensitive about their masculinity. This was turned to the Iraqi's disadvantage. At first, the commander said, U.S. attempts to enter Baghdad were quickly and soundly repelled by Iraqi defenders firing on them from concealed places and planting IEDs. Unless the hidden Iraqis could be induced to come out into the open and fight face-to-face, they would keep the advantage and the city could not be taken. So, what the U.S. did was make gradual incursions into the city in armored formations with a megaphone on top of the tanks. From the megaphones they blared over and over in Arabic that only women hide from their opponents, and that "real men" meet and fight their opponents face-to-face. The commander laughingly recounted how in response to such taunts, the hidden fighters gave up their advantage and rushed out of buildings and other hiding places in droves harmlessly firing at the tanks and armored vehicles, only to be mowed down in turn by the vehicles' heavy machine guns. The city's defenders were thereby eliminated and the U.S. and allied forces quickly took Baghdad.

3 *Landman v. Peyton*, 370 F. 2d 135, 140 (4th cir. 1966)

4 As I've demonstrated in numerous past articles on Amerika's abusive prisons, the guards and administrators are the ones who perpetuate all sorts of criminal acts in their abuses of prisoners, and indeed commit federal crimes every time they violate a prisoner's constitutional rights as their abuses described herein do. See 18 United States Code, Section 242. It is only, as with the murderous police in society they are afforded *de facto* immunity from prosecution by merit of being so-called law enforcement officers. The system protects and insulates its own.

5 A bread and water diet is unconstitutional. See, *Jenkins v. Werger*, 564 F. Supp. 806, 808-09 (1983); *Landman v. Royster*, 333 F Supp. 621, 647 (1971).

6 Food restrictions must be used only to control the behaviors for which they were designed. *LeMaire v. Maass*, 745 F. Supp. 623, 635-36 (1990), vacated and remanded on other grounds, 12 F. 3rd 1444, 1456 (1993).

7 I discuss the practice of guards at this unit using fabricated claims that prisoners have acted in self harm or suicide attempts, to speciously justify assaulting them with OC gas and taking all their property, usually against prisoners they dislike or who anger them. See Kevin "Rashid" Johnson. "Prison Assisted Suicide—The Texas Way." The full article can be read at rashidmod.com, also at *Socialist Viewpoint*, November/December 2014, Volume 14, Number 6, www.socialistviewpoint.org/novdec_14/novdec_14_28.html

The Black Ones Too

BY KEVIN COOPER



Kevin Cooper

During the recent events surrounding the murder of unarmed Black males by white police officers in this country, it has been pointed out, and correctly so, that America has a deep and tortured history concerning the murders of Blacks by whites—legally and illegally!

But what has, for the most part, been left out of this real life and death conversation is the fact that Black police officers have done, and are still doing, the same thing as their white police partners when it comes to shooting, murdering, or being an accessory before, during, or after the deadly incident.

There have always been, and will always be, Black people, who for one reason or another, find themselves working alongside the white people who are murdering us in one form or another each and every day of our lives.

This truth reminds me of 2004, when I came within three-hours and 42 minutes of being executed by the state of California at San Quentin prison. I had known for quite a long time that there was a Black man who was the spokesman to the media for this insti-

tution whenever it came to executions and other events. I honestly had no idea, however, that Black men were part of this prison's execution squad.

That's until I found myself inside the death chamber waiting room being sized up by about 12 members of that squad. I was sized up, questioned and then strip-searched. Ten members of this squad were white men, just as I had expected. That's because these typical people have a very real place in history as being paid, or in this case, volunteering, to be executioners. However, I must admit that I was a bit shocked to see two Black men volunteering to murder me. Why I was shocked I am not sure, but I was. Maybe it was because of all the history books that I have read about my ancestors and our fight for freedom within this country. In this reading and learning I found that the vast majority of murders, including lynchings and executions of Blacks in America have happened at the hands of whites.

While I had also learned in my reading that there were certain Africans who sold other Africans to slave catchers in Africa, and those slaves were sent throughout the world, including to America, I learned that certain slaves on certain plantations whipped their fellow slaves, injured their fellow slaves, and if told to, murdered their fellow slaves whenever the white man told them to do so. Some free Black people owned other Blacks as slaves too. (There are many different reasons for this historical fact, including protecting their family members.)

Even with all this knowledge, I still wasn't prepared to see two Black men as executioners when this state of California went about its task of trying to murder me. Most, not all, but most of the Black prison guards who worked

on death row told me and other Black males who are on death row that they were against the death penalty. They expressed that our history in this country, and their knowledge of it, made them against this type of punishment! (I guess this is why certain white district attorneys try so very hard to keep Black people off of death penalty juries.)

These two big burly Black men who were members of this particular execution squad had no rank. They were just plain old prison guards who were very, very large in size. In appearance, they looked like professional football players who made their living tackling people. For the purpose of being on the execution squad, they were the muscle. While I was standing in front of them all, butt naked, I was searched, examined, and inspected just like any slave on the auction block that I read about in the books on American history.

In my mind I was screaming at them both, asking them, "What the fuck are you doing helping them to murder me? Don't you know our history? Don't you know what you're doing?" Asking them in my mind how could they be part of any execution team, especially the one that was about to murder me.

I said all of that and more in my mind, heart, and spirit, but not a word came out of my mouth. That was the first and the last time I ever saw those two Black men. That's because at 8:17 P.M., the U.S. Supreme Court sent word that they would not lift the stay of execution that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals had granted me earlier that day. After that, everyone went their own separate ways. Me, I went back to a cell on death row, and them, wherever people like them go.

While many of us who are Black would like to think and/or believe that

all of our oppression, pain, death, and inhumanity comes from just white people, or white men, I want to remind everyone, including myself, that there are ‘The Black Ones Too’ who participate in these crimes against humanity as well.

While we Black people, or some of us, expect to receive ill treatment by the majority of white people. We are shocked, or some of us are shocked, to say the least, or hurt, and feel betrayed when we see or learn about one of our own doing to us what we are standing up against, fighting for and dying for to stop others from doing this to us.

Just as we are standing up and speaking out and telling the whole world that Black Lives Matter! Just as we are at war with the white oppressors and oppression. We must stand up and speak out against all oppression because if we don’t we are setting ourselves up to be oppressed by our own people too. This we cannot do!

In struggle and solidarity from Death Row at San Quentin Prison.

—May 2015

Kevin Cooper is an innocent man on San Quentin’s Death Row in California. He continues to struggle for exoneration and to abolish the death penalty in the whole U.S.

Write to Kevin Cooper at:

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Maggots for Breakfast?

Maggots and fly larvae on the meal line—dispatches from Michigan’s privatized prison food program

By CARIMAH TOWNES

Two weeks ago *Progress Michigan* uncovered emails revealing that a prison food provider served cakes nibbled on by rats to inmates. They’ve now discovered that employees from this same food vendor, Aramark, served inmates at another facility an equally unsavory meal: garbage.

In an email exchange between the company’s general manager, Sigfried Linder, and the state’s Department of Corrections, Linder admitted that prisoners at Saginaw Correctional Facility were served food that was previously thrown in the trash. “Mr. Chisolm discarded the left-overs from the line before the last half-unit was in the chow hall. He then realized that there were more inmates to serve so he rinsed them off, reheated them in the oven and instructed the inmates to serve them,” read one email. “They refused, so he and Miss Gibson proceeded to serve them to the remaining inmates.”

The privately contracted food vendor, which services “healthcare institutions, universities and school districts, stadiums and arenas, and businesses in 22 countries around the world,” has come under fire for serving contaminated food and engaging in gross misconduct in prison facilities statewide. After maggots and fly larvae were

found near a meal-serving line, at least 150 inmates were quarantined for symptoms characteristic of the flu. One inmate sued the company for serving spoiled meat and moldy bread. In other instances, the company breached contract by simply failing to provide enough food.

Detroit Free Press also discovered that one-fifth of Aramark employees were fired for unsanctioned sexual encounters with inmates, tried to sneak in drugs, and showed up to work inebriated.

“The fact that inmates refused to serve this food, and yet an Aramark employee felt comfortable doing so, speaks volumes about the company’s corporate culture,” *Progress Michigan’s* executive director, Lonnie Scott, explained. “This is just the latest—and one of the most disgusting—examples of Aramark’s incompetency in our state. The public has a right to know what is really going on with this contract and it shouldn’t take thousands of dollars and FOIA’ed (Freedom of Information Act) documents to get the truth.”

But the company, which has fed inmates dog food, worms, and scraps of food from old meals, maintains a stronghold on correctional food service in Michigan. Despite threats to terminate its contract, Governor Rick Snyder (R) won’t let go of the company, which claims it will save taxpayers \$12-16 million. Prior to hiring Aramark, Michigan refused to partner with private food vendors that could not realistically save the state money in the long-run.

—Reader Supported News, April 3, 2015

<http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/318-66/29419-maggots-and-fly-larvae-on-the-meal-line-dispatches-from-michigans-privatized-prison-food-program>



Pennsylvania Death Penalty Moratorium

Decision doesn't consider racism

BY KERRY "SHAKABOONA" MARSHALL

Governor Tom Wolf recently announced a moratorium on the death penalty in Pennsylvania. The moratorium will stay in effect until he receives and reviews an expected report from a state task force on capital punishment, and until all concerns raised in that report are addressed.

Governor Wolf said in a statement, "This decision is based on a flawed system that has proven to be an endless cycle of court proceedings as well as ineffective, unjust, and expensive."

According to Governor Wolf's February 13th memorandum explaining his decision, PA governors have signed 434 death warrants in 40 years, but only executed three people. Currently, there are 186 people on death row in PA.

The usual ultra right-wing political elements of the PA District Attorneys Association and the Fraternal Order of Police came out in full opposition to Governor Wolf's decision of a death penalty moratorium. Philly's D.A., Seth Williams, and Northampton County's D.A., John Morganelli, joined

in opposition to the moratorium, calling it "unlawful" and expressing that they may sue Governor Wolf to enforce the death penalty.

However, former D.A. for Lawrence County, Mathew T. Mangino, criminal defense attorney David Rudovsky, the PA Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers supported Governor Wolf's decision authorizing the moratorium stating, "This is another important step toward the eventual elimination of a barbaric practice that has no place in a modern criminal justice system."

Politicians list a number of concerns with the capital punishment system, namely the death penalty is a broken system, but none of them will address the elephant in the room of institutional racism within the legal system.

Racism on the courts is undeniable. In the past half-century there have been numerous government and private advocacy groups' studies and reports on race and class discrimina-

tion in the American legal system. All have concluded that there is systematic racism in the courts against poor African American and Latino peoples, especially in relation to the application of the death penalty.

Nonetheless, politicians would rather skirt around the main reason why a death penalty moratorium is needed and why the death penalty must be abolished in the United States. Politicians would rather say that the capital punishment system is flawed, broken, ineffective, unjust, and expensive, than say it's a barbaric punishment that doesn't deter crime, and that it continues to be applied in a racially discriminatory manner against African Americans and Latinos due to institutional racism within the legal system. I guess that's what happens when the white majority establishment continues to pretend that racism no longer exists in America while continuing to benefit from institutional white supremacy. Whatever happened to simply calling a spade, a spade?

The fact is: "justice" and "discrimination" are polar opposites and can't occupy the same space. Therefore, America can't have a criminal "Justice" system that practices race and class discrimination and call it "Justice." That would be tantamount to putting a wig and lipstick on a pig and calling it "Lady Justice!"

Kerry "Shakaboona" Marshall is co-founder and Editor of The Movement magazine, Prison Radio correspondent, and founding member of the Human Rights Coalition.

—PrisonRadio.org, February 25, 2015

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'Let's argue our case anyway.'

Innocent After 16 Years

Then sent back to prison

BY LORENZO JOHNSON

This case began with two lies: the one I refused to tell, and one a crack-cocaine abuser agreed to tell.

On December 15, 1995, while I was charged in an unrelated case, a detective from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania demanded that I become an informant and blame someone for a murder that I knew nothing about. I refused. Then I was threatened: if I didn't "cooperate" I would face trouble. On March 26, 1996, a crack abuser falsely implicated me, claiming I was present when that murder took place. I've been in trouble ever since.

There were no eyewitnesses in this case, no weapon, no blood evidence, nor any fingerprints on a piece of shotgun that was recovered. The police had statements from other witnesses identifying people other than my co-defendant Corey Walker and I, but they never followed up on them.

In March of 1997, my trial began. The prosecution's case was built on coerced witnesses who got deals for their pending cases in exchange for their false testimony. I was represented by an attorney who neither interviewed me nor called my crucial alibi witnesses who knew I was in New York when the crime, in Pennsylvania, happened. I was convicted and sentenced to life without parole—an innocent man. I felt like I was on another planet. Some "old timers" in prison convinced me to study for my GED, and when I graduated, they told me to study criminal law. When I did so, I quickly realized that my trial counsel had essentially been an ally to the prosecutor, and not to me, her client.

My direct appeal to the Pennsylvania Superior Court was denied in 1998, but a judge's dissenting opinion in the case said it all: "I believe that there is no

direct evidence, nor can any be inferred, linking defendant Johnson to the death of Taraja Williams nor any agreement with defendant Walker which resulted in Williams' death." If a judge writes these words, how can there be a case? But the other two judges rubber-stamped the original verdict, and it would be long years before any sanity returned to my case.

The Third Circuit Court of Appeals vacated my conviction on October 5, 2011 on grounds of insufficient evidence. At a bail hearing, where my family and even staff members from the prison testified on my behalf, the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office howled that I was a menace, but a federal judge ordered my release.

Finally, I was on my way home, thanks to hard years of *pro se* law work and the expert counsel of Michael Wiseman. But the Attorney General's Office would fight to reinstate the conviction. Wiseman told me not to worry, because the U.S. Supreme Court agrees to hear less than two percent of the cases petitioning it.

On January 18, 2012, after 16-and-a-half years, I walked out of prison to begin my life anew. Childhood friends got me a job working for a construction company. The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice, with whom I had corresponded with while incarcerated, also assisted me with some emergency funding; taking me clothes shopping, and staying in consistent contact with me, which I found to be a stabilizing factor in an otherwise largely unfamiliar world. I started doing speaking engagements about wrongful convictions at colleges and law schools. I also met a special woman, fell in love, and we became engaged. After almost two decades of hell, life was sweet.

That sweetness rather suddenly turned sour when I received a phone call from Wiseman informing me that the U.S. Supreme Court not only granted the Pennsylvania Attorney General *cert*, but also reinstated the conviction all at once, without my attorneys being allowed to fully brief the issues or make any oral argument. This decision meant that I would have to return to prison to resume a life-without-parole sentence for a crime I did not commit. Ironically, the court's decision came down the same day I was supposed to start a new job that The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice had obtained for me.

I called my fiancée, my mother, my family and friends, and Jeff. All around me were in tears.

What was I supposed to do? It was criminal for the government to imprison an innocent man for a crime they knew I didn't commit. How much more vile to re-imprison him? But I wasn't guilty, so why should I run? Besides, I wanted to clear my name, and that couldn't happen if I ran. On June 14, 2012, Jeff drove me from New York back to prison in Pennsylvania. He said it was the hardest thing he ever had to do other than when he served time himself for a crime he didn't commit prior to being cleared by DNA.

My legal team, led by Wiseman, starting digging. Our strategy was simple: turn up even more evidence of innocence. Investigators discovered a treasure trove of wrongdoing, hidden evidence, and prosecutorial misconduct. Meanwhile, The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation helped keep my case alive in the media, participated in rallies, even chartering buses several times so that my extended family and New York supporters could participate.

The lead detective on my case, Kevin Duffin, was a god-brother of the motive witness, but no one ever knew this at trial. The State's chief witness against me, the crack-cocaine abuser, had been named a suspect in the murder herself, just days after the killing. Someone else's fingerprints were on the murder weapon. I've been in prison for nineteen years with all this evidence having been withheld!

Wiseman met with a representative of Attorney General Kathleen Kane's office to show our findings. After promising a full and fair investigation of the evidence, they rejected my innocence claim, arguing that the evidence is not credible while other evidence, previously hidden for two decades, was discovered too late.

They are, however, conceding that I am entitled to a hearing on the alternative suspect issue along with her original statement, which differed from her trial testimony; and on the familial relationship issue. It's clear, though, that they will argue the conviction should be upheld anyway, despite these serious issues. But I won't stop fighting back.

Lorenzo Johnson served 16-and-a-half years of a life-without-parole sentence, from 1995 to 2012, when the Third Circuit Federal Court of Appeals ruled there was legally insufficient evidence for his conviction. He remained free for four months, after which the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously reinstated the conviction and ordered Lorenzo back to prison to resume the sentence. With the help of Michael Wiseman, Esq., The

Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice, The Campaign to Free Lorenzo Johnson, and others, he is continuing to fight for his freedom. Sign his petition and learn more at:

<http://www.freelorenzojohnson.org/sign-the-petition.html>

Follow Lorenzo Johnson on Twitter:

www.twitter.com/FreeRenz

—Huffington Post, February 12, 2015

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lorenzo-johnson/i-was-found-innocent-afte_b_6670426.html

Write to Lorenzo Johnson:

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Mumia's Specialized Mistreatment

Emergency illness exposes lies in Abu-Jamal case

BY LINN WASHINGTON, JR.

April 9, 2015—The recent emergency hospitalization¹ of Mumia Abu-Jamal arising from alarming failures to address his chronic illnesses has exposed the inaccuracy of an assertion long made by adversaries of this inmate whom many around the world consider a political prisoner.

His adversaries charge that Abu-Jamal receives special treatment in prison.

That's true, but not in the way Abu-Jamal adversaries mean it.

When an ambulance delivered Abu-Jamal to the intensive care unit of a hospital outside of the Pennsylvania State prison where he is serving a life sentence, he was on the doorstep of a diabetic coma—a condition that is often fatal. Abu-Jamal's blood sugar level was 779, which is just shy of the diabetic coma level of 800. Additionally, his sodium levels were also highly elevated, another condition with potentially dire medical results.

If Abu-Jamal is as pampered in prison as adversaries assert, his diabetic condition would not have festered as it did dangerously for several months necessitating his emergency hospitalization. In reality, the "special treatment" adversaries proclaim is actually specialized mistreatment.

Routine blood tests register blood sugar levels and Abu-Jamal had reportedly received multiple blood tests inside the prison infirmary during treatments this year for illnesses including a full-body outbreak of eczema that caused painful itching and burning.

Yet, no evidence has been released by state authorities to counter charges from Abu-Jamal's family and far-flung supporters that prison medical personnel did not aggressively address Abu-Jamal's elevated blood sugar levels which would have been recorded on those tests. Prison medical personnel did not address Abu-Jamal's diabetic

condition with medications or changes in the typical high-starch/high-sugar diet regularly served to prisoners, including prisoners with diabetes.

Further, Abu-Jamal's family and supporters, who, despite obstacles, visited with him before, during and after that emergency hospitalization, said he had suffered an adverse reaction to medication prison personnel prescribed for the eczema. That medication produced severe swelling in Abu-Jamal that caused his skin to rupture. The rupture produced open sores that required antibiotics.

"Mumia said he is burning inside from head to toe from that skin rash. He was still burning when he was sent back to the prison from the hospital for that diabetic shock," said Pam Africa, director of the Philadelphia-based International Friends and Family of Abu-Jamal, who saw the ailing Abu-Jamal after his return from the hospital. Africa said Abu-Jamal

has lost over 80-pounds since early January and is frail.

“Mumia said other inmates have the same skin rash. He said over 100 people inside that prison have diabetes.”

Far from the “special treatment” adversaries complain about, Abu-Jamal apparently received the same substandard medical care as all inmates in the Pennsylvania State prison system.

The Pennsylvania state prison system spends over \$217-million of its \$2-billion dollar budget on medical care, according to a report from the PEW Foundation. Medical personnel comprise over 970 of the nearly sixteen thousand persons working for the Pennsylvania State prison system according to a state Department of Corrections report.

Underscoring the fact that Abu-Jamal does not receive “special treatment,” prison authorities quickly removed Abu-Jamal from that hospital ICU, despite his grave diabetes and other conditions, returning him to the same prison infirmary where he had initially received medically deficient care—including the failure to properly diagnose and treat his diabetes for weeks.

Professor Cornell West, the activist academic, blasted the “chronic medical neglect and malpractice by prison staff” in a broadcast public service announcement supporting better medical treatment for Abu-Jamal and other inmates.

Abu-Jamal’s wife Wadiya was more blunt. She suggested that the medical neglect in her husband’s case could be deliberate.

“This is execution by medical neglect and mistreatment,” she said in a statement. (Abu-Jamal spent nearly thirty years on Death Row where he was subjected to intense campaigns for his execution from police unions and conservative politicians...campaigns that included illegal and unethical actions.)

“Mumia was sent back to the prison, without an expert medical diagno-

sis or a treatment plan or his sugar levels under control. He was transferred back to the prison infirmary with a temperature of 102 degrees, to the same people who knew for weeks and didn’t treat his [diabetes] before he collapsed and went into diabetic shock,” she stated.

Abu-Jamal was sentenced to death for the December 1981 fatal shooting of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. That death sentence came during a trial that was fundamentally unfair according to an extensive review by Amnesty International, plus examinations by many other legal experts.

Pennsylvania state courts have consistently rejected Abu-Jamal’s appeals, finding not a single flaw in his conviction despite those same courts overturning hundreds of death sentences due to errors by police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, jurors and even judges. In Abu-Jamal’s case, courts have rejected solid evidence that police and prosecutors illegally withheld evidence of innocence and coached prosecution witnesses to give false testimony. Those fair trial rights robbing violations in Abu-Jamal’s trial are the same violations that have led those same Pennsylvania state courts to grant appeal relief to other inmates—more evidence that Abu-Jamal has endured specialized mistreatment.

Federal courts, for their part, found just a single flaw in the death penalty deliberations by the trial jury, a determination that led to an upending of Abu-Jamal’s death sentence. Elimination of the death penalty produced his current sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole.

Life in prison without parole sentences, like Abu-Jamal’s, are considered a form of torture by many around the world.

In September 2014, PEN International, the association of writers, approved a resolution at its world congress, calling for a legal review of

Abu-Jamal’s life sentence. “International jurisprudence is moving towards recognition that a life sentence without parole...may amount to torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading punishment,” that PEN resolution noted. The German PEN branch proposed that resolution.

Abu-Jamal’s adversaries dismiss claims that he’s been subjected to constant mistreatment, including this latest medical episode. However, that stance is refuted by repeated examples of mistreatment that began at the scene of that 1981 crime.

During that incident leading to his arrest, Officer Faulkner shot Abu-Jamal in the chest, gravely wounding him in the lung and liver. Yet, police kept Abu-Jamal at the crime scene for nearly 30-minutes, as his lungs filled with blood, before transporting him to an emergency room just a few blocks away for treatment. Police immediately took Faulkner to that same hospital ER minutes away from the crime scene.

Police beat Abu-Jamal at the crime scene and in the emergency room, evidence shows. Police though have denied any crime scene beating but acknowledged “inadvertently” ramming Abu-Jamal’s head into a pole multiple times and dropping him while putting him into a police wagon.

Abu-Jamal, in an affidavit issued in 2001, stated that at the crime scene “I was pulled to my feet and then rammed into a telephone pole, beaten where I fell and thrown into a paddy wagon... Upon arrival [at the emergency room] I was thrown from the wagon to the ground and beaten.”

Police and prosecutors have maintained that Abu-Jamal’s confession, that helped seal his conviction, was made in that hospital ER. Suspiciously, existence of that alleged confession did not surface until weeks after the murder of Faulkner when police were investigating a complaint from Abu-Jamal about police beating him at the

crime scene and hospital. Abu-Jamal has steadfastly denied uttering any confession.

Supporters of Abu-Jamal have presented Pennsylvania prison authorities with a list of demands that includes initiation of an “independent investigation” of prison healthcare. “The state’s medical services have been so neglectful—even abusive—that its entire healthcare operations warrant review,” states one item on that list of demands.

This demand for an investigation of prison healthcare cites the “unexpected and unexplained sudden death” last year of Phil Africa, an inmate from Philadelphia who was a member of the MOVE organization.

While supporters of Abu-Jamal have renewed their demand for his release, a study of prison healthcare spending by PEW released last year called for consideration of releasing inmates over 55-years-old as a way of reducing soaring prison costs—particularly healthcare costs. On April 24th Abu-Jamal turns 61-years-old. Pennsylvania ranks among the top ten states holding the highest number of older inmates.

“Many states have adopted medical or geriatric parole policies that allow for release of older, terminally ill or incapacitated inmates,” that PEW report stated.

—*This Can’t Be Happening*, April 9, 2015

<http://thiscantbehappening.net/print/2716>

1 As of May 12, 2015 Mumia was returned to the hospital due to a worsening of his very serious condition.

Ferguson, USA

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

With breathless news reports, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Pattern and Practice Study paints a damning picture of a long, cruel and bitter train of maltreatment, mass profiling, police targeting and brutality against Black people in the Missouri town of Ferguson.

What may be even worse, however, is how the town’s police, judges and political leaders conspired to loot the community—by fining them into more poverty, fines which today account for some 25 percent of the county’s budget.

Correctly, cops have been criticized for their juvenile emails and texts of racism and contempt against the local Black community and even Black leaders in Washington, D.C.

There is largely silence, however, over the role of judges, who used their robes to squeeze money from the community, with unfair fines and fees—even using their jails as an illegal kind of debtor’s prison.

In 1869, during the reign of England’s Queen Victoria, a statute

known as the Debtors Act was passed, which forever abolished imprisonment as punishment for debt.

In today’s Missouri, it’s still used to punish and exploit the poor. But, truth be told, it ain’t just Missouri.

Famed *Rolling Stone* writer, Matt Taibbi, in his 2014 book, *The Divide*, tells a similar tale, but from points all across America—Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy, Gainesville, Georgia, Los Angeles, San Diego and beyond—[where] poor people are being squeezed and squeezed by cops, by judges, by local governments—to part with their last dime—to support a system corrupt to the core.

Taibbi’s full title might give us some insight: *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*.

It’s the system—one of exploitation or predation, ultimately of capitalism.

—*PrisonRadio.org*, March 5, 2015

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



Black Spring

By ERNEST TATE

Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary

By Ernest Harsch

Ohio University Press

2014, 163 pages, \$18.56.

A press report in 1983 that a popular uprising in Upper Volta, a small and poor land-locked country in Western Africa had led to an obscure, but charismatic army officer becoming head of state was truly inspiring news for all those looking for some kind of breakthrough against imperialism in that part of the world. It had come after the depressing news that Margaret Thatcher's Britain had defeated Argentina in the Malvinas and Ronald Reagan's America had crushed Grenada, a clear message to the world that, on a moment's notice, imperialism would brutally crush anything that threatened its power. But because the American empire had been taken by surprise by the Cuban revolution twenty-four years earlier, many of us were then hopeful that maybe we were witnessing such a possibility again, in Africa.

And indeed it looked like our hopes were being realized. In a few short dramatic years, we saw the setting up, in what would become Burkina Faso, of the first "workers and farmers' government" on that continent. (A political variant first envisioned by the early Communist Third International where the oppressed get governmental power but the state remains in the hands of the ruling classes, a highly unstable arrangement not envisaged to last very long.)

Ernest Harsch's short biography of Thomas Sankara (the first in English) who would become an icon of Africa's long struggle against neo-colonialism helps us to understand the revolution

that swept the small country of Upper Volta in the 1980s. It ended with Sankara's brutal assassination, along with six of his closest advisors and seven drivers and guards, in a counter-revolutionary *coup* from within the armed command and government, inspired by France's neo-colonialist Social Democratic President, François Mitterand and headed up by Blais Compaoré, one of the leaders of the 1983 revolution, who until last October, had been President of Burkina Faso.

Back in the news

Harsch's book couldn't have come at a better time. Burkina Faso (population 11 million) is in the news once more. Last October saw a country-wide uprising, with over one million Burkinabes surrounding their parliament, occupying the building and setting it ablaze, enraged that Blais Compaoré, Sankara's successor and in power for 27 years, had been attempting to change the constitution to again allow himself another term. Compaoré, "Sankara's best friend" who is commonly regarded as the chief architect of his murder, had led the roll-back that all but cancelled the revolution's gains. His swift departure last October led to a deep political crisis in his military-led regime, with an internal struggle about who would fill the resulting political vacuum. Mysteriously, in the midst of the crises, an Isaac Zida, a colonel, emerged from the army to declare himself head of state, but after intervention by the African Union, he was quickly replaced by a "transitional president," Michel Kafando, a prominent diplomat under Compaoré, who has promised elections "soon."

A research scholar at Columbia University, Harsch has for many years

worked on African issues at the United Nations and had the good fortune to visit Burkina Faso in the 1980s on behalf of the American socialist journals, *The Militant* and *Intercontinental Press*, when he interviewed President Sankara on at least six occasions then, two of them at length and one of them shortly before his death. One of his sources in preparing this work, one of Ohio University Press' *Short Histories of Africa*, was Paul Sankara, the President's ten years younger brother. Harsch is also author of the book, *South Africa: White Rule, Black Revolt*.

This biography provides valuable information about Sankara's early life as he grew up amidst the tumultuous events and intellectual climate of his times as the country emerged from French colonialism. Educated at a lycee (state secondary school)—a Muslim, and of the Mossi tribe, one of the four major ones in the country—he came from a small, but privileged strata that had helped administer the old colonial state. Upon graduation he entered military college, the country's first, that had been set up by the army after its overthrow of the first post-colonial regime in 1966.

Periodic crises and political instability followed by military *coups* seems to have been permanent features of the political life of the country after formal independence began in 1960. Still under the influence of Paris, the first post-colonial regime had been unwilling or unable to deal with the country's immense social and economic problems, leading to mass unrest, labor and student strikes and of course, a military *coup*.

As a result of the *coup*, Ernest Harsch writes, the army's popularity had increased and came to be seen by

many young intellectuals as a possible instrument for social change, a “potential modernizing institution that might help discipline the corrupt bureaucracy, counter-balance the inordinate influence of the traditional chiefs, and generally help modernize the county.”

It was in military college that Sankara came under the direct ideological influence of the college’s Director, the Marxist academic, Adam Toure, a clandestine member of the pro-Moscow African Independence Party, which was centered in Senegal with branches in other former French colonies. It would turn out to be an important step in the future president’s political evolution. Keeping his political affiliations hidden in those conservative circumstances, Toure quietly gathered together—outside the classroom—his brightest and most politically inclined students, among them Sankara, for informal discussions on topics such as, “imperialism and neo-colonialism, socialism and communism, the Soviet and Chinese revolutions, the liberation movements in Africa, and similar topics.” (Toure would later serve in Sankara’s government as Minister of Information, only to be jailed for two years in 1984 because of his oppositional activities. He was nearly shot, only saved because of Sankara’s personal intervention.)

In 1980, in another period of widespread unrest, the army again carried out a *coup*, its fourth—“because of the erosion of state authority”—but by this time Sankara, who had risen to a leadership position in the officer corps, opposed a strict military take-over. Deepening his links with students and labor organizations and encouraging the press to expose corruption, the young officer’s popularity dramatically increased. Taking his distance from the new regime as it became increasingly repressive, he used his appointment as Minister of Information in the new government to make a public declaration of his exit from it in a major

speech, live over radio at the closing session of a prestigious conference of African ministers responsible for cinema, issuing a strong plea for freedom of expression. “Woe to those who would gag their people,” he warned.

Revolutionary alliance of young radicals

Immediately arrested by the army, he found himself deported to a military camp, far from Ouagadougou, the capital. But maintaining his contacts with other oppositionists and activists throughout the country, by August 1983 he emerged at the head of a revolutionary alliance of young radicals, military officers and civilian activists, to take over the presidency, in a new government called, the National Council of the Revolution (CNR), an overturn that was greeted with a mass welcoming demonstration in the capital, that lasted for several days and that rapidly spread across the country.

Sankara, in his first major speech on coming to power, called for the implementation of sweeping measures to increase the economy’s productive capacity to reduce hunger and poverty, including the strengthening of a state that was extremely weak and that barely had a presence outside the major cities and towns. The previous regimes had governed through a system of chiefs and notables. Very quickly Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) sprung into existence in the poorest neighborhoods and spread throughout the country.

The problems facing the tiny country were numerous and enormous. Food production had not increased in twenty years. Hunger was common with life expectancy only 44 years. Women suffered deep oppression: “Our society—still too primitively agrarian, patriarchal and polygamous—turns the woman into an object of exploitation for her labor power and of consumption for her biological reproductive capacity,” Sankara

declared. And with an adult literacy rate of a miserable 11 percent, only three percent of school children made it to secondary school. Annual *per-capita* income in 1980 was a pitiful \$210. Less than one-in-ten lived in an urban area—the working class was tiny—and 90 percent of the population worked the land. Bordering the Sahara, desertification threatened to further reduce the country’s arable land: the need to extend the irrigation system was urgent: only six percent of the land was irrigated. Approximately ten percent of the farmers still used animals to work the land. Cotton, introduced by colonialism, created a gross distortion of the economy. Most of the fertilizer and agricultural inputs—often imported—went there.

Under Sankara’s revolutionary government, the population was soon mobilized to tackle the country’s problems within a framework of creating a national economy, “independent, self-sufficient, planned at the service of a democratic and popular society,” as Sankara stated in his first orientation speech. Education spending was increased. The CDRs enhanced tax collection and the colonial era “head tax” was abolished. From the beginning, an emphasis was placed on helping agriculture in a “Struggle for a Green Burkina,” making the country among the first to deal with environmental issues.

As Harsch notes, from early on, the government’s primary orientation was toward implementing “small tangible improvements,” such as the construction of small rural irrigation systems to increase the production of food and the planting of trees, and the restriction of cattle movement to protect them. New schools, health clinics and reservoirs were built. Campaigns were immediately undertaken to reduce illiteracy and a massive child vaccination program was rolled out to reduce disease. Land and mineral wealth was nationalized, with the farmers’ right to till the land guaranteed by law. And the

power of the chiefs was severely reduced—the old regime had partially ruled with their help. They were stripped of their state benefits.

Female circumcision was banned, along with forced marriages and polygamy, with the government making a strong commitment to the liberation of women from exploitation and oppression, leading to the setting up of a mass women's movement, the Women's Union of Burkina.

Measures were introduced to shake-up a lethargic state bureaucracy and severely reduce its privileges and remuneration. Official portraits were prohibited and the country's name changed to Burkina Faso. Setting a personal example, Sankara shunned luxury and imported goods, getting rid of the presidential Mercedes and Cadillac, instead using a budget-priced Renault and was often seen riding his bicycle to his office.

No longer continuing the old regime's policy of following the direction of France or the United States in foreign policy, the new government stated it would establish relations with whomever it wanted, declaring its solidarity with all oppressed people and liberation movements. Sankara, to Mitterrand's visible discomfort during a state visit to the country, publicly took him to task because of France's relations with the apartheid regime of South Africa which was, at the time, under international sanctions and he criticized France's attitude toward African immigrants.

"We Burkinabe have never understood," he told President Mitterrand in front of a large assembly of journalists who had accompanied him to Ouagadougou, "why criminals like Jonas Savimbi, the head of UNITA, and murderers like Pieter Botha, have the right to travel to France, which is so clean and beautiful. They stain the earth with their hands and their feet covered with blood," a confrontation

that caused an international sensation. Botha was President of South Africa.

Sankara did not confine himself to only opposing neo-colonialism in Africa. At the Non-Aligned Movement in New Delhi, he sought out revolutionary leaders such as Fidel Castro and Maurice Bishop and gave his support to Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government in Nicaragua and he backed the rebels in El Salvador who at the time were battling a U.S.-backed dictatorial regime.

Critical view

Ernest Harsch's book is no hagiography of Sankara nor is it a neutral account of the revolution that was an inspiration to many in those years. And although he admits to an admiration for Sankara and clearly states his partisanship with the revolution, he carefully notes some of its terrible mistakes, some of which may have eventually contributed to its defeat. Sankara increasingly, he writes, had to combat arbitrary oppressive powers against potential allies or even ordinary citizens, but with his approval, the government and the CNR sometimes reacted with a heavy hand against opposition currents. Relations with the unions soured when 1,300 teachers were dismissed and their leaders arrested.

"Despite the rhetoric of people's participation," Harsch says, "there were insufficient channels through which popular ideas and grievances could be transmitted upwards." In one horrific example he gives of the government's attempts to improve the rural economy, he describes how a few CDRs that had been set up to help improve agriculture, turned the prohibitions to prevent cattle wandering and destroying trees and crops, into "an unmitigated disaster. Some CDRs took to extremes Sankara's call to shoot roaming animals. Many were shot whether they were trampling vegetation or not, and ended up on spits for CDR feasts."

It wouldn't be long before the country came under direct imperialist pressure. Very early on, France halted all budgetary support as did the World Bank, and the new government was compelled to reject the IMF's "conditionality" for loans, an arrangement that would have meant an end to the revolution and the shifting of decisions over economic policy to an external entity. The United States immediately suspended its Peace Corps. As U.S. Ambassador, Leonardo Neher, would tell the *BBC's* Joan Baxter, "...we are not going to allow another Cuba in Africa."

The historic influence of Sankara after all these many years has not been wiped out, despite the strenuous efforts over the years of the Compaoré regime to do so. Harsch writes that youth in Burkina Faso and across the continent continue to see him as the embodiment of their hopes and dreams. And as Alexandra Reza notes (*London Review of Books*, 4th December, 2014) when writing about what has become known as last year's "Black Spring:" "One of the most interesting features of the insurrection was the re-emergence of Sankara. There were references to him everywhere, notably on street banners: 'Sankara, look at your sons. We continue your fight.' At the forefront were a number of Burkinabe musicians involved in the collective Balai Citoyen, or 'citizen's broom,' a movement intended to sweep away corruption and clean up public life."

Harsch's book helps us understand why his ideas are still very much alive. It's a good read and well worth the price.

Ernest Tate is a founding member of the Socialist Project. His memoir, Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and 1960s, recently published, is about the history of the left in Canada and Britain.

—*The Bullet*, February 9, 2015

<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1078.php>

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Editors,

My family and I have never been to Bali or the rest of Indonesia and don't intend to travel there until the country undergoes considerable real change. Despite the tentative moves towards a more democratic Indonesia, the same powerful, corrupt Javanese military and ex-military political/business elite controls and represses the country. The vast majority of people live in poverty and the small educated and privileged few exploit them and the nation. So essentially the mindset of the ruling elite is unchanged and the system that supports them remains intact.

Indonesia is supposed to have a new liberal leadership with the election of new president Joko Widodo, the first president to be elected from outside the Javanese military/political elite. But the Australian public in the furor over the fate of two the Australians and others facing execution are getting a glimpse of the stance of Widodo (and other influential Indonesian leaders) on human rights, justice and compassion.

Of all the areas of Indonesia, West Papua, the richest resource region is suffering the most, with the people there getting the least social and economic benefits and the native West Papuans living under a brutal Indonesian army occupation. West Papua has the world's largest copper and gold mines, but with corruption and injustice rife the West Papuans endure poverty and inequality while the wealthy Javanese elite and foreign companies are further enriched. The minerals, rainforests and other resources of West Papua are being exploited with negligible benefits to the local people and resulting in pollution, deforestation and destruction of wildlife and habitat. The main beneficiaries of the resources wealth are Indonesia, USA and Australia.

In 1961, West Papua was promised independence from their former Dutch (Netherlands) colonial rulers, but Indonesia wanted to take over the country to get access to the vast mineral and timber resources of West Papua. The USA forcibly pressured the Netherlands to give West Papua to Indonesia. Indonesia was eventually given interim control of the territory until West Papua's future was decided. West Papuans were not consulted about this. The United Nations did promise the West Papuans they would have a say in determining their own destiny. What actually happened in 1969 was not a free referendum, but a so-called Act of Free Choice and it was a farce. Indonesia specially selected 1,025 people and forced them at gunpoint to vote for incorporation with Indonesia.

Since the invasion and occupation of West Papua the Indonesian army and police have carried out a policy of slow systematic genocide against the indigenous West Papuans. Before the Indonesian invasion, the native West Papuans were 98 percent of the population; today they are only 48 percent. It is estimated that 500,000 West Papuans have been killed or have disappeared since the Indonesian invasion. Indonesian military and police carry out regular operations in the rural areas, which result in houses being burnt and civilian villagers being terrorized, beaten, tortured and killed. Many West Papuan leaders and activists are being held as political prisoners for engaging in peaceful protests or other acts of resistance and even for raising their voices against Indonesian oppression. Some are serving 15 years in prison for merely hoisting their people's flag, *The Morning Star*. While others have been shot and killed or cruelly tortured for this action.

Bali is the regional headquarters of the military operations for West Papua.

While oppression, gross human rights abuses and atrocities continue in West Papua people of conscience should not holiday in Bali or the rest of Indonesia or buy products made there. This may unfortunately affect some ordinary Balinese and other Indonesians, but it will mainly impact the privileged few of the Javanese political/military/business elite who (with the large foreign corporations) dominate business operations and who gain the most from exploiting the resources of West Papua and also own most of the hotels, airlines, travel agencies, other tourism ventures and commerce in Bali and elsewhere in Indonesia.

The Indonesian army also operates legal enterprises and illegal businesses, either by itself or through criminal gangs with military connections from timber logging and tourism, to alcohol, gambling, drugs, protection rackets and prostitution.

Behind the sham democracy the old Javanese fascistic and feudal military regime is still the real power in Indonesia. And as long as it's reactionary policies dominate the country nothing will really change in Indonesia. As was the case in South Africa, East Timor, Burma, *etc.*, pressure and actions from outside did play a role in supporting and encouraging fundamental change.

The West Papuan people continue to struggle against oppression and for freedom and independence and deserve support. Our actions in speaking up on this vital issue and exposing the oppressive situation that exists in West Papua can play a constructive part in helping to promote genuine change there.

—Steven Katsineris. March 2015 Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors,

There is nothing wrong with our public schools and the professional teachers who work there. Efforts to reform schools are a monumental waste of effort and a charade for enhancing private profit at the public's expense. To find a problem with student test performance we have to look deeper into a society whose values don't recognize the value of education.

While many view student test performance inadequate, teachers should not be blamed. To become a certified teacher, one must obtain a Bachelor's and Master's degree, pass numerous additional tests, get fingerprinted and background checked and undergo a three year period of probationary employment prior to being granted tenure. In addition, there are requirements for continuous education. To jeopardize the career of teachers at this point by tying their performance to test results would be a grave injustice. Those concerned about incompetent teachers can be relieved to know that they can still be removed much easier than incompetent politicians. The way to improve student test performance is through improving students' receptivity to the teaching process.

Students in today's schools are pawns in a corporate dominated culture that treats every student as a consumer and negates the benefit of good teaching and good parenting. As a result of corporate pressure, students become obsessed with materialism, and have increasing difficulty relating to the purpose of an education. Whether it's a cell phone, television, video game or movies, corporations target our students using intense psychological pressure to encourage consumption. Parents are frequently duped into believing that many of these objects are benign babysitters for their children allowing them some much needed time to relax. But these

products have an insidious way of countering any benefits of good parenting and can result in aberrant behavior, adversely affecting academic performance. Students become unwittingly caught in a maelstrom of corporate consumer culture and it is increasingly difficult to rescue them.

Corporate values are directed at children long before they enter school, usually through trips to supermarket or preschool television programs. When a child enters school, it becomes the job of the teacher to reverse the impact of these corporate messages and try to instill values that will actually benefit the student in the long run. For the teacher, this is akin to swimming upstream against a very strong current. As a result, student academic performance suffers not due to poor teaching but to the influence of corporate/consumer values, which many students find easy to embrace. Most alarmingly, it is this very corporate culture that wants us to hand over our students to a charter school model, which has absolutely no long-term demonstrated success.

If the goal is to improve student test performance, leave teachers and their unions alone and work to limit the power of corporations by overturning Citizens United to ensure our children are not hopelessly shackled to corporate consumer culture.

— George Damasevitz

Dear Editors,

My position on the election result is that all the Zionist parties have the same agenda, that is the same aims and policies of dispossessing, repressing and getting rid of the Palestinians and continuing to strengthen and build the Zionist state of Israel. The different Zionist factions—"right," "centralist" or "left"—just use different tactics to achieve that purpose.

So whatever Zionist party is in power the situation of the Palestinians will be unchanged, they will continue to suffer the same level of brutal oppression. It's just that some Zionist parties will be more subtle than others and pay lip service to "peace talks" and the "two-state solution" while continuing the occupation and building more settlements. Whereas, Netanyahu is more blatant and open about it and this will mean the world will see Israel more clearly, without the illusions of a peace partner it has tried to maintain over the years. This will accelerate the isolation of Israel and the eventual falling apart of the Zionist, colonial, settler-state project.

Netanyahu is just one leader of a bad bunch of Zionist fascists, but at least he is more honest about Israel's treatment and intentions towards the Palestinians. He is the most unashamed, and therefore best able to expose the real character of Israel to the world.

Jericho Shopkeeper Mahmoud Rweished, 28, said he wanted Netanyahu to win and explained his attitude stating, "You might find this strange, but actually Netanyahu is the ugly face of Israel, I want the world to see only this face of Israel. Any other face is fake and unreal," (*The Australian*, March 19, 2015.) I think this statement expresses well the true situation in Israel and the bearing Israeli elections have for the Palestinian people.

—Steven Katsineris, March 2015

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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.

Political Prisoners in the United States Support Aboriginal Communities

By U.S. POLITICAL PRISONER JAAN LAAMAN

Stop the forced closures of Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and all across Australia. Stop this racist, blatantly colonialist violation of international law and the Human Rights of Aboriginal people, who choose to live in small and remote communities, especially those in Western Australia. Stop the land seizures and the land theft from these Aboriginal communities.

This is Jaan Laaman. I am a long held political prisoner in the United States. I know I speak not just for myself, but for other revolutionary political prisoners across the USA, when I say, we stand in solidarity with the Aboriginal people who are being threatened with the closing of their towns and communities.

It was only in early May, that we heard a little information about the Western Australian government's

threats to stop all services to remote Aboriginal communities and towns. We think this is outrageous and most likely designed to drive people off their land. By emptying Aboriginal countries of their inhabitants, the land becomes available to the huge mining corporations that are closely linked with the Western Australian government.

The mainstream corporate media here in the United States, has not reported about this ongoing issue in Australia. The USA government, also being a settler state, has its own long ugly history of genocide and theft of Indigenous First Nations land here in the United States. Since the recent large and widespread rallies in cities and towns across Australia, there has been a little reporting about this situation in some U.S. media. I myself, and other progressive voices, will publicly share our knowledge about this Aboriginal peoples struggle for the sur-

vival of your communities and the protection of your land.

We know that the State and Federal governments shutting down of the power, water, schools and healthcare facilities in your communities will cause real suffering. That is why it is important and necessary, and very positive to see, that Australians of all backgrounds, have stepped forward in demonstrations against this government attack. We join with all of you in your continuing resistance to the Australian government's assault on Aboriginal people.

In Unity there is Strength! From Strength comes Victory!

—*PrisonRadio.org*

Write to:
Jaan Laaman #10372-016
U.S. Penitentiary Tucson
P.O. Box 24550
Tucson, AZ 85734

Open Letter to the Police

Officers,

You are at a tipping point. You need to decide quickly if you wish to stay with the police or quit while you can.

When you joined up, you were told a whole series of lies. You have learned the hard way, a little bit of the truth. The biggest lie was that your basic job would be to serve and protect the people.

But you started to wonder when you noticed that you had to put more and more people in steel boxes and to kill more and more people, rather than serve and protect them.

Sometimes you wondered about this, but accepted it when told that these people you were putting in steel boxes and killing were bad people. They told you that you were simply getting the bad people away from the good people.

You also noticed the people you were putting away and killing were get-

ting younger and younger; that in effect, you were starting to kill children. The club you used became bigger and bigger. The gun you used became more and more powerful. The police car became a tank. It all made you think and wonder, but you were told it was just that people were getting more and more bad and you needed to serve and protect the good people. Also, the pay was relatively good and your pension was a good one and coming soon.

You stayed and now you find that it is not just a few "bad people" who hate you, but tens-of-thousands, and soon, a whole generation of young people will hate you.

You know that this thin blue line is trying to act like a large occupying army. You know that no matter what superior weapons you have, there are just a few of you and there are fewer and fewer joining up. Just like the mili-

tary, the people are not joining up, but rather, leaving. They know—you know—that the police will be outnumbered. They will be defeated and run from the streets. You know you cannot control and occupy a large nation. So what should you do?

You should quit while you can. You are not in the Army. And you are not "protecting and serving" the people. You are in a disgusting, dangerous job that will quickly become the death of you. You *can* quit it—it is your choice. You can possibly even get that gold watch and golden parachute pension. Yes, yes, you have money saved from all that overtime. You have a car and a house in the suburbs.

Choose life, and not death. Stop killing other people and yourself. Many of your fellow officers are choosing life and leaving the police force. You can too.

Yours, Joe Johnson



More Police violence against Black youth. Read *We Charge Genocide* on page 19.



A worker sorts deliveries at a FedEx distribution center in Memphis' Cargo Alley. Read *The Power of Logistics Workers* on page 2.

On the Front Cover: ►
A young Black child against a backdrop of riot police.
Read *Baltimore's Disgrace* on page 12.



"Homeless Proof" Bench. Read *Inhospitable to Human Life* on page 17.