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# SocialistViewpoint

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

MARCH/APRIL 2014 VOL. 14 NO. 2



**Exploitation divides!**  
**Decent jobs unites!**  
**Smash capitalism!**

*A Cold Winter in Northern Wisconsin - Page 2*

*Workers' Power, Workers' Control - Page 3*

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*South Africa's NUMSA Solidarizes with Korean General Strike - Page 32*



# Write a Letter Supporting Pvt. Manning's Request for Clemency!

Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Convening Authorities are granted the power to reduce or eliminate a convicted soldier's sentence. They use this power when they feel the court martial failed to deliver justice. As Commanding General of the Military District of Washington, Major General Jeffrey S. Buchanan is the only other individual besides President Obama with the power to ameliorate *WikiLeaks* whistle-blower Pvt. Manning's sentence in the immediate future.

We are now requesting letters from professors, law experts, human rights advocates, politicians, artists, veterans, and concerned citizens urging Major General Buchanan to reduce Pvt. Manning's sentence. These letters will be submitted as part of an application for clemency from Pvt. Manning's legal defense. These letters, once completed, should be sent to [emma@privatemanning.org](mailto:emma@privatemanning.org)

There are some important guidelines you should follow to ensure we're able to use your letter:

- Your letter should be approximately one page long.
- It should be composed on personalized letterhead.
- The letters must be printed, signed, then scanned (so that they have the signature) in PDF format.
- Pvt. Manning's recently announced that her preferred name is Chelsea, and that folks should use female pronouns. However, she also understands that for efforts such as these, it is most effective for supporters to use her legal name and military rank, "Pvt. Bradley E. Manning," along with male pronouns.
- The letter should focus on your support for Pvt. Manning, and especially why you believe justice will be served if Pvt. Manning's

sentence is reduced. The letter should NOT be anti-military and/or anti-Buchanan, as this will be unlikely to help.

- A suggested message: "Pvt. Manning has been punished enough for violating military regulations in the course of being true to his conscience. I urge you to use your authority as Convening Authority to reduce Pvt. Manning's sentence to time served." Beyond that general message, feel free to personalize the details as to why you believe Pvt. Manning deserves clemency.
- Here is an example letter, written by Jeff Paterson of Courage to Resist and the Pvt. Manning Support Network (yes, you can plagiarize).<sup>1</sup>
- These letters will be formally submitted to General Buchanan by Pvt. Manning's attorney David Coombs as part of a larger clemency packet.
- Please send your letter to [emma@privatemanning.org](mailto:emma@privatemanning.org) as soon as possible. We will review these letters prior to forwarding them to Pvt. Manning's legal defense, and may request that you make changes if necessary.

Courage to Resist, the organization sponsoring the Private Manning Support Network, has successfully convinced Convening Authorities to reduce the sentences of conscientious objectors in the past (see the cases of Travis Bishop and Cliff Cornell). Pvt. Manning is unjustly imprisoned because the things she witnessed in the Iraq War compelled her to follow her conscience. Now, through creating compelling and personal letters, it is time to call upon Major General Buchanan to honor his conscience in turn.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Paterson  
Project Director, Courage to Resist  
484 Lake Park Ave. #41

Oakland, CA 94610 USA

Major General Jeffrey S. Buchanan  
Commanding General, U.S. Army Military District  
of Washington

September 12, 2013

Dear Maj. Gen. Buchanan, I write to urge you to use your authority as the Convening Authority in the case of *U.S. v. Bradley E. Manning* to reduce Pvt. Manning's 35-year confinement sentence to time served, and upgrade his "Dis-honorable Discharge."

As a former enlisted U.S. Marine Artilleryman, I understand the military's desire for good order and discipline. However, this is not an average case of misconduct. Instead, Pvt. Manning's actions were motivated purely by conscience.

Pvt. Manning took responsibility for violating miscellaneous regulations covering the use of classified information. For those actions, he has already been punished having spent every day since May 29 2010 in military confinement.

Pvt. Manning was subjected to approximately nine months of illegal pre-trial punishment at the hands of the Marine command at Quantico, Virginia. Military judge Colonel Denise Lind granted Pvt. Manning 112 days confinement credit for this abuse; however, that is clearly inadequate given the lengthy sentence he was given.

Justice was not served when prosecutors were allowed to trample on Pvt. Manning's rights to a speedy trial. Additionally, prosecutors were allowed to change the Charge Sheet to match the evidence presented—after both the prosecution and defense rested their cases!

Sincerely,  
Jeff Paterson

## Sign the petition to pardon Pvt. Manning:

<http://www.privatemanning.org/pardonpetition>

Help us continue to cover 100 percent  
of Pvt. Manning's legal fees:

<https://co.clickandpledge.com/sp/d1/default.aspx?wid=38591>

### COURAGE TO RESIST

<http://couragetoresist.org>

484 Lake Park Ave #41

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## A Cold Winter in Northern Wisconsin

AN EDITORIAL COMMENTARY BY JOE JOHNSON

It is winter and is cold here in northern Wisconsin; twenty degrees below freezing, bone cracking, killing cold. Lake Wissota, a large man made lake is frozen solid; a pick-up truck can be driven out on it. But I feel spring and a hot summer coming, and soon, I feel it in my old bones. The sun is coming up earlier every day, and every day its rays are hotter. Soon the ice will thin and crack, the heavy snow will melt and there will come destructive and unstoppable floods. The people native to this region are preparing, as they do every year for the floods of spring. There is much to be done, now before they come, for the floods, to some extent, can be controlled and directed so that they will help the land and the people who live on it.

I can remember the early spring of 1934 in Minneapolis. One of the big songs was "Brother can you spare a dime?" another was "I don't want your millions mister, all I want is my old job back." Demoralization, cynicism, depression was the mood of the nation. There were some protests, a few small strikes, but the strikes were quickly defeated. But Marxists' red mole was working underground and the ice cracked, the snow melted and the floods came.

Now the earth has turned and spring comes once again. Spring on a scale never seen before, worldwide in scope. The question is what ditches in the good earth shall we dig to control and direct the floods so that they will help this land and the people who live on it.

We do not start nor can we stop the flood of revolt, but what we can do is direct it. Directed correctly, it can stop the earth from becoming unbearably hot

and give time to rebuild a far better society than what we have now, but we need to dig our ditches now and correctly.

We look closely and see the natural lay of the land. Where are the very low areas and how are they likely to channel the movement of the floods? And on a bright sunny day in late winter we can see a small trickle of water moving down one of the natural channels. The occupy movement was one such trickle. It lasted a short while and showed us the lay of the land; gave us very important information before it was frozen with the force and violence of the capitalist state.

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**...low wageworkers don't  
want their old jobs back;  
they want new jobs at a  
living wage.**

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Now there is a little stream of water starting to move. It's the \$15 dollar-an-hour minimum wage for all, now. It unites the very small trickles of water into a small stream. It unites and gives direction. But, as all small streams must, it follows the contours of the land and can be blocked by very small rocks. Our job is to smooth its path, to help it move past and through the rocks to give it space and time to grow.

The 1934 strikes won major victories against the big bosses. The strikers built a fighting union movement in the C.I.O.; but they had to stop short of a victory and the bosses were able to regroup and build giant dams to hold back the flood of revolution. Then came WWII that saved the American

ruling class. The American ruling class went on to use the workers to become the strongest imperialist nation that the world has ever seen. Then the deep-freeze of the American Century. Its expansion into "the far East" was stopped with the Korean War. Now new revolutionary floods are coming that are world wide in nature.

The American working people have found a banner that they can unite around. It is "\$15 dollar minimum wage." This gives people a living wage, and given the high level of labor productivity it can be given to all. This is what they voted for in Seattle, what they will fight the bosses for all across the nation.

This is the slogan of "Bread" for the U.S. today, as "Bread" was the slogan for the Russian revolution of 1917. All who struggle to save the earth from destruction, all who want a new world in birth today will unite around the new banner.

How is this to be done? The workers in unorganized low paying jobs are cutting edge; truly these people have nothing to lose but their chains and a world to win. They now have the support of the majority of the people. They need now to break their chains and move their banner forward into the ranks of the capitalists and their supporters.

The capitalists could pass a law giving a \$15 dollar per hour minimum wage. They can do it, but they will not; to do so would show weakness. Also, they are arrogant and feel all-powerful; having defeated the unions time after time, they are sure they can defeat this new union-like development of the lowest of their wage slaves. Given their many victories, they do not rethink the

situation, but rather simply repeat the actions that gave them victory before.

They will, I believe, act much like they did with the Occupy movement. First, black out as much as possible. When they can't do that any longer they lead it down paths they control, get it into giant cement dams and into artificial lakes. Control is what they want to do; but if they can't control they use the full force of their state terrorism to kill and destroy. They need to get their slaves to sing, to sing, "All I want is to get my old job back." They have been successful in getting the very strong union at Boeing to accept a union-destroying, five-year contract on the promise that they will be able to keep their old jobs.

However, their victory is very thin; 51 percent to 49 percent and the fight is not over. The low waged workers don't want their old jobs back; they want new jobs at a living wage. They have nothing to lose but their chains.

It is the unorganized, weak, low paid worker that can come to the aid of the powerful Boeing union. The low paid workers are not tied into the Democratic Party, that is a party of the capitalist class, and they are not tied into a corrupt international union. But most importantly, they are not forced to keep the struggle inside the iron box of capitalist rulers, but can make their own rules. They can shut down the industry for a little while, they can use just a little of their potential power.

One thing the low paid worker can do right now is to go to their brothers and sisters at Boeing and ask for solidarity, ask to work together for unity in struggle. They will get it if they ask!

There is work to be done in smoothing the way for the coming socialist revolution.

With warmest comradely greetings; in the spirit of Crazy Horse,

Joe

## Workers' Power, Workers' Control

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

Electoral campaigns are an important component to raising the consciousness of workers about the real power we have to improve our lives. Independent, working class campaigns are important vehicles for raising demands to increase the minimum wage; free childcare, education and healthcare for all from cradle to grave; or to register our opposition to war, racism or sexism, *etc.*

Winning an election campaign is a good measure of the level of consciousness and acceptance of the demands raised in the campaign. The drawback of such campaigns alone is that winning is no guarantee that the demands voted for will be fulfilled.

Time and again voters have elected candidates and have passed resolutions only to find out after the elections that nothing would be done to actually fulfill the demands we voted for.

To see that demands won in an electoral campaign are actually brought to fruition takes an ongoing, organized fight that can continue to mount mass pressure for these demands. It's also important to educate the ranks that do the day-to-day work and the masses of workers that we seek to reach about just who is keeping us from gaining these demands.

This takes a conscious leadership that understands the inherent nature of capitalism to squeeze as much as they can from the working class in order to increase profits.

As socialists, we understand that the struggle to make the lives of workers better is a never-ending, contentious battle as long as capitalism exists. But, capitalism is in its death agony. The capitalists will stop at nothing to preserve their power and increase their wealth no matter how difficult the lives of working people become.

We also understand that working people have tremendous power if it can be organized. That has been shown over and over again.

The whole history of labor struggles is the history of labor solidarity and the power that comes from it. From the fight for the 40-hour workweek, to the establishment of unions, pensions, public education and health benefits, these battles have been won only through the united, mass actions of workers organized independently of the capitalist class.

In our strongest periods we built our own, democratically-controlled, industry-based organizations—industrial unions—in our own common interests and in opposition to the capitalist bosses and their political parties. That was at the foundation of the gains of organized labor in the U.S.

In the process of each mass workers' struggle an effective leadership—a vanguard—emerges from the ranks because they have proven, through the struggle, to have the most effective strategy that leads to victory. Many socialists have been in the vanguard of these struggles.

### A workers vanguard

But at the moment, socialist organizations across the globe are fragmented and most often, in competition with each other for "hegemony"—to become "the vanguard" that will lead masses of workers to victory over capitalism by "beating out" the other socialist organizations. This is the antithesis of a workers' vanguard.

Theoretically speaking, a socialist party or group participates in the class struggle (including electoral politics) to help workers win.

A natural outcome of participating and, in fact, leading an independent,

democratically-principled united struggle for worker's needs and rights that is victorious is that it's bound to build the ranks of those socialist parties and organizations in the process. Effective performance in the class struggle is what creates the vanguard leadership and builds a vanguard party.

But such a dynamic only works during an actual class struggle of workers—when workers are in motion and organizing in our own defense and in solidarity with each other and with our own, democratically agreed-upon demands such as the current fight for an increase in the minimum wage.

The exact figure suggested for the minimum wage ranges anywhere from a meager ten to fifteen dollars-an-hour (not a living wage in cities like New York, San Francisco or Boston) to thirty or thirty-five-dollars-an-hour—a much more realistic figure for a half-way decent life. Every worker realizes this.

What we don't realize is that we have the right to determine the minimum wage we need to get by on, since it's we who do the work and produce the profits the capitalist class steals from us.

### **An attack against one is an attack against all! Solidarity forever!**

A real vanguard party comes out of the active class struggle of workers. There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it. A real vanguard party understands that working class unity and solidarity is our power.

A real vanguard party sets an example of how best to organize that vitally needed unity and solidarity—putting aside our differences—in order to build an independent force that can actually succeed in winning our demands.

### **The Sawant victory**

The victory of the Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant for Seattle City Council is an opportunity to build a united front to continue the fight for the demands the campaign raised, and that got her elected in her openly socialist campaign.<sup>1</sup> Those demands obviously resonated with workers in Seattle; and in Minneapolis where Socialist Alternative candidate Ty Moore ran for City Council, Ward 9, and lost by only 229 votes.

And certainly that means that the same conditions exist in many differ-

ent places in the country and around the world to organize a real working class resistance to the increased austerity, war, oppression, incarceration and environmental catastrophe the capitalists inflict on us.

The Sawant campaign and Socialist Alternative is in a good position to organize an independent, ongoing struggle, not just because they won, but because their openly socialist victory shows that there are real possibilities out there to build independent, working class struggles and win.

### **The road to socialism**

The goal of a socialist society is to end the wars, violence, poverty, and brutality dictated by the capitalist class.

Socialism is a society where humans can share the wealth of the world equally and create a world in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all; a world where we can all benefit from each according to our individual and multiple abilities and talents; and provide to each according to our individual needs and wants while pristinely preserving our planet and all the life on it.

We who consider ourselves part of a revolutionary socialist vanguard are obligated to set the most exemplary example of workers democracy and cooperation, put aside our differences, and build an independent, democratic united front of the working class and our allies that can win, and get down to the business of saving the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Campaign Platform, *VoteSawant.org*, click on "Issues"

<http://www.votesawant.org/issues>



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# Inequality of Wealth and the Role of Unions

By JACK HEYMAN

I headed home for the holidays to Lakewood, New Jersey, once a beautiful resort renowned for its lake, pine forests and clean air. At the turn of the last century, it was home for some of the wealthiest in this country. Railroad magnate George J. Gould, then the seventh richest man in America, built a palatial estate with Italian gardens by the town's lake. His financier father, railroad mogul, Jay Gould, once infamously proclaimed, "I can hire half of the working class to kill the other half."

John D. Rockefeller, the richest capitalist in the world at the time, built a 30-room summer residence with a golf course and stables on 300 acres. Lakewood is only a short train ride from New York City. So, these social elites would pack up their entourage—ladies' maids, cooks, stable hands, chambermaids, governesses, china, linens, jewelry and clothing—and take the train to Lakewood.

When I was growing up in the '50s Lakewood was a small, ethnically-mixed, working class community of some 15,000 people. The Gould and Rockefeller estates had been turned into a college and county park, respectively. Skating on Lake Carasaljo was a favorite winter activity of the townsfolk and we prided ourselves in our local sports heroes who made it to the pros, Jack Arden in basketball and my friend, Dickie Estelle, pitcher for the San Francisco Giants. Lakewood, like Petaluma, California, was the center of a community of Jewish chicken farmers, which during the McCarthy period was riven with anti-communist Zionists on one side, leftists on the other. The chicken farmers are long gone.

Nowadays, Lakewood is a city of nearly 100,000 people, looking more like a Williamsburg, Brooklyn ghetto of 30 years ago than a small, central

Jersey town. Its predominantly Hasidic Jewish community runs the local public school board, not without controversy. Their kids go to private religious schools yet they receive public largesse in the form of transportation and educational programs, provoking the ire of townsfolk including secular Jews.

Yet, the most glaring change in Lakewood is its Tent City for the homeless, situated in the Pine Barrens for the last couple of years. While I was there a man died at Tent City the day before Thanksgiving, freezing to death outside his tent. A week later four homeless men died during a cold snap back in Santa Clara County, California. Homelessness is not confined to Lakewood, New Jersey or San Jose, California. Appallingly, it's a national problem with homeless encampments in every state.

The September 11, 2013, *Los Angeles Times* article ("Income Gap Between Rich and Poor is Biggest in a Century") reads: "The wealth gap between the top one percent and the bottom 99 percent in the U.S. is as wide as it's been in nearly 100 years, a new study finds." In other words it's worse now than since the Great Depression and even back to the time of the robber barons, Gould and Rockefeller.

## **For trade unions: class struggle or capitulation**

The U.S. is the most unequal of all advanced industrialized countries because the political system here has shaped the economy in ways that have led to powerlessness of the working class. In short, both political parties, Democrats and Republicans, represent the same capitalist class interests. There is no mass party that represents the working class. Unions have the power to reshape the wealth gap between rich and poor to some extent by negotiating

decent contracts and striking to achieve that, if necessary. But they're not doing that. In countries like Spain, France, Greece and South Korea, unions have been fighting back and even organizing general strikes. But in the U.S., the trade union bureaucracy has cowered in the face of attacks against workers and, indeed, continues to support the twin party system.

In New Jersey, Republican Governor Christie relished bullying teachers in front of cameras at town hall meetings, as he pushed to cut benefits of public workers. He demagogically blames schoolteachers and other public workers not the bankers for the economic crisis. Unions in New Jersey have done little to challenge Christie by withholding labor power, *i.e.*, striking.

In Wisconsin unionized state workers tried to maintain their standard of living by courageously fighting to defend collective bargaining rights against attacks from Republican Governor Scott Walker by occupying the state capitol. They inspired workers, many of whom were calling for a general strike, but union leaders derailed that struggle into Democrat Party electoral campaigns to recall Walker and elect Democrats. It failed miserably. Now union officials have turned to the courts, the other part of the political system which is tilted heavily toward the wealthy, the capitalist class.

Democrat pundits like Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor under Clinton, and economist Paul Krugman rail against the ever-increasing disparity in wealth, blaming the Republicans. The fact of the matter is the Democrats have been playing a concomitant role in holding down workers. Just recently they agreed to a federal budget that eliminates 1.3 million workers from

receiving extended unemployment benefits in the midst of this crisis. Hypocritically, Obama calls income disparity the greatest challenge of our time. To garner workers' votes in the coming election they'll call for raising the minimum wage minimumly for the working poor. The Democrats in New Jersey are calling for a measly increase of \$1 an-hour to the minimum wage of \$7.25 tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Christie also supports raising the minimum wage \$1 but over three years. And both parties in a bipartisan effort cut food stamps for the poor. Still, Obama wants to lower social security benefits by using a "chained CPI" which does not reflect real inflation and could reduce seniors' income by some \$20,000 in ten years. Elephants or Asses: a choice of worst or worse for workers trying to level the playing field.

In California this summer when Bay Area transit workers were striking, Democrat Governor Brown appealed to the union officials to call off an effective strike on its fourth day. They readily complied and without a membership vote called the strike off. After further delays, Brown then imposed the state's version of Taft-Hartley, forcing transit workers to work while negotiations were supposed to have continued but didn't. When Taft-Hartley Act, tagged the "slave labor" bill, first passed, organized labor was outraged and protested. Now BART union officials actually pleaded for Brown to use his "silver bullet," as they fondly referred to it.

Even after the 60-day "no strike" ban expired, union officials didn't resume the strike as threatened. A week later two strikebreakers repairing the track were killed by BART managers driving a scab train. Public anger which had been orchestrated by the media against the workers, quickly turned against the BART Board of Directors. But with union officials calling the strike on again and off again, the memberships of SEIU 1021 and ATU 1555

became demoralized. Few showed up for picket duty. Then a tentative agreement was signed, but before the ink was dry, BART Board of Directors stunningly announced that they'd "mistakenly" included the Family Medical Leave Act, a paid benefit. The *San Francisco Chronicle* (December 3, 2013) reported "After six months of contentious negotiations, two strikes and, finally, a hard-won labor agreement, BART's two largest unions are not about to give in." But that's exactly what they did and the membership, angry but demoralized by the unions' misleadership, ratified the contract. As Marx said, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." Since BART workers set the standard for transit and other public workers in northern California, much was at stake. Thus, the inequality of wealth in this country is magnified.

### **Democrats shackle labor**

Worse still, Jerry Brown's former advisor, Steve Glazer, running for State Assembly during BART negotiations, ran a despicable, high profile electoral campaign petitioning constituents to outlaw transit strikes. That was no fluke. Former Clinton NLRB chair Gould opined in the *Los Angeles Times* that banning strikes is insufficient. He says it'll require binding arbitration as well! (*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 15, 2013). This is on a par with Scott Walkers' move to ban collective bargaining. It's clear that the twin political parties—Democrat and Republican—work to advance capitalists' interests against labor thereby widening the gap of wealth. Is there any more proof necessary to show that American workers need their own working class party to defend their interests?

More? The repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act occurred under Clinton's administration. This act built a firewall between commercial and securities firms. According to many economists, its repeal precipitated the latest crisis.

Neo-liberal free trade agreements supported by both parties seal the capitalist's deal on a global level. Then, there are the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the longest lasting wars in U.S. history. And overt acts of government repression at home have occurred with both parties at the helm, sending a chilling message to organized labor—from Reagan's shackling and arresting of the leaders of the PATCO air traffic controllers' strike in 1980 to Obama's sending an armed Coast Guard cutter to protect a strikebreaking ship loading grain at the multi-national EGT dock being struck by the longshore union in Longview, Washington last year.

Historically, when workers' leaders have stood up to represent workers in opposing imperialist wars or organizing strikes, the might of the political cudgel has been wielded against them: imprisoning Socialist railroad union leader Eugene V. Debs and Black Wobbly Philadelphia longshore leader Ben Fletcher during World War I and Trotskyist James P. Cannon, leader of the organizers of the Minneapolis teamsters' strike just before World War II, or the move to deport West Coast longshore union president and self-proclaimed Marxist Harry Bridges and maritime labor's great orator, Jamaican-born Communist Ferdinand Smith, during the McCarthy witchhunt. All this was done by Democratic presidents.

### **Which way forward for the unions?**

In the midst of the repressive Reagan years, the longshore workers in San Francisco were able to organize an 11-day anti-apartheid cargo boycott on a ship from South Africa. After his release from prison, Mandela on his 1990 world tour acknowledged the role of the longshore union in helping to bring down the apartheid government.<sup>1</sup>

Black South African workers were able to bring down the apartheid regime but not its buttress, capitalism.

So capitalism's depredations have intensified wealth inequality. The median net worth for Black households in the U.S. is worse than for Blacks under apartheid according to Sampie Terreblanche, a professor emeritus of economics at Stellenbosch University, (*Worse Than Apartheid: Black in Obama's America*).

A few corrupt Blacks, like former NUM mineworkers' leader now billionaire mineowner, Cyril Ramaphosa, one of the richest men in all of Africa, join whites in extracting wealth while sitting atop the Black masses. Ramaphosa called on the government to repress the striking miners at Marikana last year. Thirty-four were massacred by police in an act that has been compared to some of the bloodiest during the apartheid regime.

In December, the world glimpsed as President Jacob Zuma was roundly booed by Blacks attending the Mandela memorial; a sign of the disenchantment with the ANC government's corruption and their impoverishment. NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa), the militant metalworkers' union, the largest union in South Africa, has just announced that they are forming a workers' socialist party committed to expropriating the mines to redistribute the wealth to the impoverished masses.

### **Challenge for the West Coast Longshore Union**

Today, the U.S. trade union bureaucracy, by and large, accepts the domination of the employers at the workplace and collaborates by negotiating concessionary contracts. Even in the once-militant ILWU, the West Coast longshore union, officials show little sign of being up for the fight with grain monopolies. They signed a hugely concessionary contract with multi-national grain monopoly, EGT terminal, two years ago, which whetted the appetites of the other grain monopolies. Now, the union is locked out of grain facili-

ties in Portland, Oregon and across the Columbia River in Vancouver, Washington, the homeport of ILWU President "Big Bob" McEllrath. In an unprecedented waterfront scene, scabs have been doing longshore work for months there. Longshoremen from those locals have been picketing those docks diligently in the face of police and scab harassment. What's needed is a mass mobilization of longshore workers in all West Coast ports in solidarity with the grain ports. In 1990, when strikebreakers in Stockton were doing longshore work, all ports in Northern California were shut down and longshore workers marched on Continental Grain to chase off the scabs and defend their jobs. That's what's needed now to win union jurisdiction.

Soon, the ILWU will be engaged in master contract negotiations for the coast. Before the last negotiations in 2008, longshore workers voted at the Coast Caucus to shutdown all West Coast ports to protest the imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Former ILWU President Dave Arian opposed it, arguing that it would be foolish for the union to organize such an illegal work stoppage, that it might undermine upcoming negotiations. The union could be fined. And President McEllrath wasn't happy with it but when Los Angeles longshore president Jo Jo Cortez balked at shutting down the largest port in the country with 60 percent of the ILWU longshore membership, it was questionable whether the antiwar action had enough wind in its sails. Maritime employers had banked on disunity of longshore workers on the Coast with some ports shutting down and others, like Los Angeles, working. To their surprise rank-and-file unity prevailed and the whole West Coast was shut down on May Day, international workers day, to protest the wars. If unity hadn't prevailed, there wouldn't have been any real contract negotiations and the ILWU would not have achieved its historic May Day

strike against imperialist war. When the employers' Pacific Maritime Association threatened to sue under Taft-Hartley, the union warned there'd be no negotiations under such coercion. PMA dropped the suit in short order.

Today, with grain monopolies pillorying ILWU in the Northwest ports, PMA is eager to jump in the ring for negotiations. Yet, another crack was spotted in the ILWU. In the port of Oakland, the most militant port, some longshoremen in violation of the union's long-standing principles, egged on by a few union officials, crossed a picket line of port truckers, mostly immigrant workers trying to organize. Unless ILWU shuts down all West Coast ports to stop the scabbing now in the Northwest grain ports, PMA will have their way. The present ILWU leadership won't do it. It'll take a fire from below, the rank and file, in the militant tradition of the ILWU, to do it and to win.

Another longshore action organized a few years ago shows the way forward. In response to AFL-CIO President Trumka's call for solidarity actions in support of the embattled Wisconsin workers, S.F. longshore Local 10, in defiance of the Taft-Hartley Act which bans sympathy strikes, shut down all ports in the Bay Area. Again, employers threatened a suit but dropped it. Shamefully, Trumka didn't even raise a finger to aid the only union to concretely respond to his call for solidarity actions. That was two years before the ILWU quit the AFL-CIO.

Apparently, Trumka, a former mineworkers' union leader like Ramaphosa, believes that capitalism is the only way society can be organized. But workers' leaders who led historic strikes—like Debs, Cannon and Bridges—believed, in their own way, that socialism is a better system for the working class because it eliminates the inequality of wealth by abolishing capitalism and establishing a system based

on human need, not profit. The phlegmatic U.S. labor movement, now 11 percent of the workforce, will continue to atrophy as the wealth disparity grows unless the class collaborationist trade union bureaucracy is replaced by a class struggle leadership. Developments in the South African metalworkers' union, NUMSA, offer a beacon of hope for the future. Will other trade unions, in South Africa and around the world, follow?

*Jack Heyman, a retired longshoreman, was one of the organizers in ILWU's 1984 anti-apartheid action, the May Day 2008 anti-war ports shutdown and the march on the Stockton docks to stop the scabbing.*

—Counterpunch, Weekend Edition, January 3-5, 2014

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/01/03/inequality-of-wealth-and-the-role-of-unions/>

(Endnotes)

1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtIlkA2oGD4&t=15m58s>

## Instant Injustice

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

In a February 11, 2014 *New York Times* article by Fernanda Santos titled “Detainees Sentenced in Seconds in ‘Streamline’ Justice on Border,” Magistrate Judge Bernardo P. Velasco of Federal District Court claimed, “My record is 30 minutes,” describing the time it took him to sentence 70 migrants caught crossing the U.S. border—that’s 25 seconds each to hear the charges against them, enter a plea and be sentenced.

According to the article,

“Men and women arrested along the border, the chains around their ankles and wrists jingling as they move, are gathered to answer to the same charges—illegal entry, a misdemeanor, and illegal re-entry, a felony. They have not had an opportunity to bathe since they set off to cross the desert; the courtroom has the smell of sweaty clothes left for days in a plastic bag. Side by side in groups of seven as they face the bench, they consistently plead guilty to a lesser charge, which spares them longer time behind bars. The immigration charge is often their only offense.”

Obama holds the presidential record with over 1.9 million deportations under his belt so far.

According to the article,

“Sentences range from 30 days to six months and are served in federal prisons, county jails and private detention centers that operate under contract with the government. Keeping the migrants from their families and the possibility of jobs to sustain them is one part penalty, one part incentive for them not to

try to come back. (An illegal re-entry conviction carries a maximum of two years in prison, but it can be up to 20 years if the migrant has been deported before and has an aggravated-felony conviction.)”

“Defense lawyers” (I put these words in quotes because 25 seconds of legal representation in court is not a defense) are paid \$110.00 per hour to represent migrant workers, seven at a time, in these “Streamline” mass trials. (The word “streamline” in the last sentence should really read, “Railroaded.”)

This is a classic example of, as Malcolm X put it, “turning the victim into the criminal and the criminal into the victim.” People driven by poverty looking for work where they can find it is not a crime.

How hypocritical is this president and this government? The long-term unemployed mired in poverty in this country are accused of being lazy and not looking for work hard enough, while those desperately risking their lives, crossing the border in rugged and dangerous terrain to work at the most difficult and lowest paying jobs, are also called criminals. Damned if you do and damned if you don’t!

The demand for unconditional amnesty for all and an increase in the minimum wage to at least \$15.00-per-hour starting immediately go hand in hand and should be a rallying cry of the entire labor movement.

Poverty is a crime of capitalism not of the poverty-stricken!

# Imagine: If Mayor DeBlasio Really Were a Socialist

BY CLIFF CONNER AND MICHAEL STEVEN SMITH

For a lot of people lately, “socialism” is not a dirty word. Trying to smear Bill DeBlasio by falsely calling him a socialist seems not to have hurt his campaign at all. In fact, his support continued to grow and he won by a landslide.

Proving that socialists can be elected in America, a young woman named Kshama Sawant recently ran a bold socialist campaign for City Council in Seattle and, with a great deal of union and community support, defeated a long-tenured Democrat. A 2012 national Pew poll discovered that 49 percent of people under the age of 29 had a favorable reaction to the word “socialism,” and the two most looked-up words in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary last year were “socialism” and “capitalism.” Pope Francis recently described capitalism as a “new tyranny” that has created a “throwaway culture that discards young people as well as its older people.” None of this should be surprising, given the failure of real wages to rise over the past 40 years and the quantum leap in economic hopelessness brought about by the 2008 crash and the current great recession.

Imagine if Bill DeBlasio were really a socialist and came into office with socialist goals. What might he do as Mayor of New York City? He would have one potent weapon to wield: the “bully pulpit” of which Theodore Roosevelt spoke. He could mount that pulpit to rally public support to fight for socially progressive measures.

Socialist Mayor DeBlasio could continue to emphasize that he is telling a tale of two cities, one of the 99 percent versus the ruling one percent. (The disparity is actually much more stark; more like 99.99 percent against .01 percent.) The latter are the finance, real estate, and insurance interests that really run our city, where, in New York

City, 50,000 individuals make more than \$500,000 a year and 60,000 persons, mostly children, are homeless on any given night.

A socialist mayor could be a tribune of and for the people. What agenda might he advance? Here are some possibilities:

- Launch a mass action campaign for single-payer healthcare, “Medicare for All,” free for everyone, recognizing health as a human right.
- Put the city’s resources on the side of the poorest workers, like those in the food chains and gar-

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**in New York City, 50,000 individuals make more than \$500,000 a year and 60,000 persons, mostly children, are homeless on any given night.**

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ment shops, and demand a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, sick days, pensions, and vacations with pay.

- Find or build housing for every homeless person.
- Support tenants defending rent controls and extend rent control to small businesses as well.
- End the illegal stop-and-frisk practice of the Police Department by withdrawing Bloomberg’s appeal and abiding by Judge Scheindlin’s decision that 600,000-persons-a-year, mostly young people of color, had their 4th and 14th amendment rights violated.

- Dismantle the police state surveillance of New Yorkers. Take the street cameras down. Get the police spies out of the mosques and Muslim communities. Stop police collaboration and office-sharing with Wall Street bankers. Get the police out of our grassroots political organizations.
- Allow for street protests without pens and nets and videotaping of activists. Apologize for collaboration with the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security in raiding and breaking up the Occupy Wall Street encampment. Restore the Handschu consent decree<sup>1</sup> limiting how police can spy on New Yorkers.
- Prosecute the banksters who crashed the economy in 2008 and then got bailed out with our money.
- Work to implement a municipal tax code that eliminates all regressive taxes like the sales tax. Replace them with taxes on Wall Street financial transactions and support higher corporate taxes.
- March on picket lines with teachers and students to roll back cuts in education financing and tuition.
- Declare New York City a “Demilitarized Zone” within the USA where the peace movement is encouraged in its opposition to our country’s illegal, immoral, obscenely expensive, and seemingly endless wars abroad.
- Make education and actions about human-caused climate change the number one priority which, if not controlled, will doom us.

Michael Moore, echoing FDR, proposed a second Bill of Rights in our visionary new book *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA*. Moore wrote of the goals

that might guide a socialist mayor: “That every American has a human right to employment, to healthcare, and a free and full education; to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and eat safe food; and to be cared for with dignity and respect in their old age.”

Socialism has a tradition in America. Our most famous thinker, Albert Einstein, was a socialist. Martin Luther King said, “If we are going to achieve real equality, the United States will have to adopt a modified form of socialism.” Mayor DeBlasio, as you take office, we remind you of the song of another socialist, John Lennon, who wrote in “Imagine” that “You may say I’m a dreamer / But I’m not the only one / I hope someday you’ll join us / And the world will live as one.”

Mr. Mayor, this expresses the desires of humanity since the days of the prophets. The majority of the people who elected you would be for it. Do you dare?

*Cliff Conner is on the faculty of the School of Professional Studies of the City University of New York Graduate Center, where he teaches history. Michael Steven Smith is the co-host of the radio show Law and Disorder and on the Board of the Center for Constitutional Rights. Both contributed to and Smith co-edited with Frances Goldin and Debby Smith the book, Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA, published by HarperCollins.*

—Black Agenda Report, January 7, 2013

<http://blackagendareport.com/content/imagine-if-mayor-deblasio-really-were-socialist>

1 “Originally proposed in December 1980 as part of the settlement of a May 1971 lawsuit brought against the New York Police Department’s Bureau of Strategic Services (the infamous “Red Squad”) by Barbara Handschu, Abbie Hoffman and 14 other people, the Handschu Consent Decree (“HCD”) created the Handschu Authority, which was supposed to make sure that the NYPD abided by a set of guidelines that regulated the police’s use of photographs and videotapes to surveil the political activities of people who were not suspected of engaging in any criminal activity.”

<http://www.notbored.org/handschu.html>

## Now is the Moment to Save Our Postal Commons

BY MATT STANNARD

*In 21st century late capitalism, defending the commons means defending public spaces and public services that are irreducible to mere profit-value. There are few better examples of common spaces than conduits of public and private communication. A conscious, directed effort to save postal services in the United States and Canada should be a priority of the movement for economic democracy.*

For some, the postal service has become an ideological punching bag, proof that “government programs” don’t work and that the state inevitably bureaucratizes services better left to the private sector. In the case of the postal service, this narrative lacks a critical element: fidelity to truth.

As an independent agency under the umbrella of the federal government, the United States Postal Service receives little-to-no government funding; it pays for itself through sales of its stamps and services, and is only in financial trouble because of a vindictive, unfair law that forces it to fund its pensions seventy-five years into the future. As Jim Hightower points out, the postal service hasn’t taken a penny from taxpayers since 1971.

Whatever the reasons for the public’s conception of the postal service as an institution weighted down by socialistic bureaucracy, current events suggest otherwise. Over the 2013 holiday season, it was a private carrier, United Parcel Service, which collapsed under the weight of demand and inefficiency. When it happened, UPS’s spokespersons and the usual gang of bourgeois media shifted into high gear in defense of the corporatist paradigm. At least one retail spokesperson said consumers shared the blame; other fluffy critics pinned the debacle on consumerism itself.

But compared to private carrier UPS, the U.S. Postal Service performed just fine over the holidays. By itself, it’s a win for the Post Office and an anecdote refuting the dominant privatization narrative. Government-run services often outperform private ones, and citing that evidence is important.

Yet something even bigger is at stake in the discussion about post offices. Because postal services owned by the people are part of the commons, rather than simply an effort to increase efficiency and prosperity, the attack on public postal utilities amounts to an attack on the commons itself—part of the ruling classes’ ongoing effort to privatize and profitize every sphere of social life.

### The Postal Commons

For a long time, postal services in the United States and Canada epitomized the commons. They provided a center for neighborhoods and communities. They facilitated short- and long-distance communication. And people even banked there. From 1910 to 1967, the U.S. Postal Savings System served millions of customers, peaking in 1947 at nearly \$3.4 billion in deposits.

And it wasn’t only America. Ethan Cox reports that “Canada had a postal bank for over 100 years, which was scrapped under pressure from the [private] banking lobby in 1968.” The systems largely paid for themselves, and postal carriers were both highly-respected public servants and members of powerful labor unions.

During the Great Depression, beautiful post offices were constructed in the United States featuring splendid architecture and fine art. Post offices were markers of community.

Corporate capitalism, however, cannot tolerate examples of public suc-

cess. Alongside attacks on other public institutions, lobbyists began attacking the postal service, incredulous that their overlords weren't making a profit from people's correspondence. Pushed by the administration of George W. Bush in 2006, Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, a law with no antecedent reason and no empirical justification, which required the USPS to pre-pay the healthcare benefits of all current employees and employees who will retire in the next 75 years.

As Jim Hightower notes, "no other agency and no corporation has to do this." The absurd mandate costs USPS \$5.5 billion-per-year. That, and not some imagined socialist inefficiency, is the true source of economic woes at the post office, and both conservative and liberal pundits will use those woes to justify shutting the service down—even though, as evidenced last Christmas, the USPS routinely outperforms private services and receives no taxpayer money to do so.

Again, this is not a crisis limited to the U.S. The Canadian postal system has also come under attack. Canada Post is ending home delivery in urban areas and laying off employees. The move comes as a result of questionable allegations of declining letter volume.

### **Playing postal politics**

But adding to the USPS's woes is a graft scheme being engineered by the spouse of one of America's most powerful senators. Richard Blum, the husband of Democratic California Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairs Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis, or CBRE, a company that brokers the sale of USPS facilities. Through CBRE—a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Los Angeles that bills itself as "the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm"—Blum and his senator wife along with their business friends have benefited directly from legislation undermining the viability of the post office.

Senator Feinstein has lobbied both the FDIC and the Postal Service on behalf of her husband's company. The senator has repeatedly obtained updates on which facilities were slated to be sold by her husband's company—even as those sites were under review by her husband's company. The deal between the post office and Blum's company is exclusive.

Gray Brechin, founder and project scholar of the Living New Deal Project at UC Berkeley, says of the ransacking of postal property: "Towns and cities throughout our entire country are losing their historic post offices and often the New Deal artworks designed for them. The giant real estate company CBRE advises the USPS on what post offices to sell and then profits by representing both the seller and buyer."

A June audit by the Office of Inspector General raised conflict of interest concerns and noted "poor oversight" of the CBRE contract. CBRE represents both buyers of postal properties (including Goldman Sachs) and the seller: the post office itself. In a recent conversation I had with Brechin, he called the selling off of postal property the "Teapot Dome scandal of our time."

In that scandal, President Warren Harding's Secretary of the Interior was convicted of accepting bribes from powerful people to whom he had leased valuable public lands. "Of course," Brechin pointed out to me, "the U.S. at that time had an active and competitive press willing to cover the investigation into the scandal."

Ralph Nader recently wrote to Feinstein concerning CBRE-brokered sales, citing journalist Richard Byrne's investigation into the sales, and pointing out that 20 percent of the postal real estate has been sold to CBRE's own clients and business partners. The Berkeley-based group National Post Office Collaborate is one of many groups "fighting the sale of our property and the dismantling of the USPS," according to Brechin.

But such private groups need the help of elected officials to stop the pillaging. What is at stake, beyond the value of public postal services, is the preservation of the commons and its protection from "enclosure" by private interests. In "The Parallel Economy of the Commons," Jonathan Rowe writes:

"Enclosure is the process by which a commons is taken for private use and gain. It has a long history. War and conquest excepted, the original enclosures in Anglo-American history largely were the work of the British Parliament, which parceled out the common lands to private owners, often with inadequate compensation—if any—for the commoners whose rights and subsistence were taken in the process."

Rowe lists as examples of enclosure the "parceling out of the broadcast airwaves to private corporations." Just as the sky belongs to everyone, he argues, public communication also belongs to everyone—which is why post offices have come to epitomize communities in such a powerful way.

The stakes are not merely philosophical. The postal service has databases for disaster relief and civil emergency purposes, making it a designated deliverer of medicines in public health emergencies. Privatizing postal delivery means privatizing or, if corporate capitalism deems them unprofitable, completely eliminating such services.

Jim Hightower calls the USPS "an unmatched bargain, a civic treasure, a genuine public good that links all people and communities into one nation. Myriad studies have produced conclusions suggesting that post offices, and a government-mediated postal system, establish a "commons," a system of community spaces that provide for the public good and are irreducible to private profits. These spaces include an infrastructure to respond to national emergencies and re-establish communications when disasters strike; money transfer services for those without

access to banks; low-cost delivery of goods to rural areas (something private carriers refuse to provide at reasonable cost); and possibly even increased public safety and community security.

In April 2012, a report estimated that the closing of rural post offices would result in economic losses five times greater than any money saved by the closings, and incur environmental damage as a result of people having to drive to post offices far away. Not only that, “post offices are often the social hubs of smaller communities and shuttering them has strong negative implications for social capital (chances for neighbors to see one another, renew ties, share stories, and help each other out).”

So what solutions should we demand? First, in the United States, the Postal Accountability Act should be repealed and benefit-funding requirements restored to standards comparable to other public utilities. American Postal Workers Union spokesperson Sally Davidow says eliminating the funding requirement would eliminate the USPS financial crisis altogether. She also says package volume is up at the post office, which will surprise critics who are stuck in the privatization narrative.

Peter DeFazio and Bernie Sanders have sponsored bills to prevent closures or curtailment of postal services, and facilitate new opportunities for the post office. Along with making funding requirements fair for the Postal Service, the practice of auctioning off postal buildings and art should end immediately. The public is not benefiting from these sales; instead, private interests, connected to elected officials, are grabbing up valuable pieces of the public good.

Beyond that, both Canada and the United States can restore postal banking as a means of increasing services to constituent communities, and providing a valuable mechanism to fully fund all postal endeavors. As Ethan Cox points out, postal banks, wherever they have been, have made “huge profits,

charge low fees and improve accessibility . . . The largest bank in the world is Japan’s Post Bank.”

Public banking advocate Ellen Brown has also called for a postal savings bank, pointing out that, like the postal service itself, such a bank wouldn’t cost taxpayers a dime. The APWU’s Davidow also lists banking as a way to increase postal revenue. The National Association of Letter Carriers

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**“Towns and cities throughout our entire country are losing their historic post offices and often the New Deal artworks designed for them. The giant real estate company CBRE advises the USPS on what post offices to sell and then profits by representing both the seller and buyer.”**

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reports that one out of four people don’t have access to a bank and are forced to use pre-paid debit cards, check cashing services and payday loans—all sapping their money away from basic services that could be provided by publicly-owned banks, facilitated by post offices.

The solution would also work in Canada. As David Bush recently wrote: “The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has long advocated for the expansion of postal services into areas such as banking. This is what happened in countries such as Italy, France and New Zealand. Offering banking services would allow people in smaller communities to access banking services in otherwise unserved communi-

ties. Also, it could create more jobs.” And finally, a postal bank needn’t confine itself to consumer banking. The National Association of Letter Carriers also suggests a national infrastructure bank—a development bank run through the postal service, issuing bonds, backing public-private partnerships, and guaranteeing “long-term low-interest loans to states and investment groups willing to rebuild.”

We may never convince privatizers and corporatists that public services are desirable. But for those sitting on the fence, it’s important to provide the facts about postal services: they are self-funded, they provide more consistent and less expensive services than private carriers, and above all they belong to us.

The answer to inefficiency, heavy-handedness and abuse of power is more democracy, transparency and accountability—not less of it. Those who claim private corporations are more accountable than public entities ignore the ways private corporations abuse the democratic process with impunity. Checks and balances over public entities do not have analogies in the private sector, whose patrons fight every proposed regulation tooth and nail.

In 21st century late capitalism, defending the commons means defending public spaces and public services that are irreducible to mere profit-value. There are few better examples of common spaces than conduits of public and private communication. A conscious, directed effort to save postal services in the United States and Canada should be a priority of the movement for economic democracy. After all, “communication” and “commons” have a common origin expressed in the Latin word *comm\_nic\_re*, meaning “to share.”

—Portside, January 20, 2014

<https://portside.org/2014-01-20/now-moment-save-our-postal-commons>

# A Festival of Lies

BY GLEN FORD

“Believe it,” said the current Prevaricator-in-Chief, in the conclusion to his annual litany lies. President Obama’s specialty, honed to theatrical near-perfection over five disastrous years, is in crafting the sympathetic lie, designed to suspend disbelief among those targeted for oblivion, through displays of empathy for the victims. In contrast to the aggressive insults and bluster employed by Republican political actors, whose goal is to incite racist passions against the Other, the sympathetic Democratic liar disarms those who are about to be sacrificed by pretending to feel their pain.

Barack Obama, who has presided over the sharpest increases in economic inequality in U.S. history, adopts the persona of public advocate, reciting wrongs inflicted by unseen and unknown forces that have “deepened” the gap between the rich and the rest of us and “stalled” upward mobility. Having spent half-a-decade stuffing tens-of-trillions of dollars into the accounts of an ever shrinking gaggle of financial capitalists, Obama declares this to be “a year of action” in the opposite direction. “Believe it.” And if you do believe it, then crown him the Most Effective Liar of the young century.

Lies of omission are even more despicable than the overt variety, because they hide. The potentially most devastating Obama contribution to economic inequality is being crafted in secret by hundreds of corporate lobbyists and lawyers and their revolving-door counterparts in government. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, described as “NAFTA on steroids,” would accelerate the global Race to the Bottom that has made a wasteland of American manufacturing, plunging the working class into levels of poverty and insecurity without parallel in most people’s lifetimes, and

totally eviscerating the meager gains of three generations of African Americans. Yet, the closest Obama came to even an oblique allusion to his great crime-in-the-making, was to announce that “new trade partnerships with Europe and the Asia-Pacific will help [small businesses] create even more jobs. We need to work together on tools like bipartisan trade promotion authority to protect our workers, protect our environment and open new markets to new goods stamped ‘Made in the USA.’” Like NAFTA twenty years ago—only far bigger and more diabolically destructive—TPP will have the opposite effect, destroying millions more jobs and further deepening worker insecurity. The Trans Pacific Partnership expands the legal basis for global economic inequalities—which is why the negotiations are secret, and why the treaty’s name could not be spoken in the State of the Union address. It is a lie of omission of global proportions. Give Obama his crown.

The president who promised in his 2008 campaign to support a hike in the minimum wage to \$9.50 by 2011, and then did nothing at all to make it happen, says this is the “year of action” when he’ll move heaven and earth to get a \$10.10 minimum. He will start, Obama told the Congress and the nation, by issuing “an executive order requiring federal contractors to pay their federally-funded employees a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour because if you cook our troops’ meals or wash their dishes, you should not have to live in poverty.” Obama neglected to mention that only new hires—a small fraction, beginning with zero, of the two million federal contract workers—will get the wage boost; a huge and conscious lie of omission. The fact that the president does not even propose a gradual, mandated increase for the rest

of the two million shows he has no intention of using his full powers to ameliorate taxpayer-financed poverty. We can also expect Obama to issue waivers to every firm that claims a hardship, as is always his practice.

What is Obama’s jobs program? It is the same as laid out at last year’s State of the Union, and elaborated on last summer: lower business taxes and higher business subsidies. When you say “jobs,” he says tax cuts—just like the Republicans, only Obama first cites the pain of the unemployed, so that you know he cares. “Both Democrats and Republicans have argued that our tax code is riddled with wasteful, complicated loopholes that punish businesses investing here, and reward companies that keep profits abroad. Let’s flip that equation. Let’s work together to close those loopholes, end those incentives to ship jobs overseas, and lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs right here at home.” Actually, Obama wants to lower tax rates for all corporations to 28 percent, from 35 percent, as part of his ongoing quest for a Grand Bargain with Republicans. For Obama, the way to bring jobs back to the U.S. is to make American taxes and wages more “competitive” in the “global marketplace”—the Race to the Bottom.

In the final analysis, the sympathetic corporate Democrat and the arrogant corporate Republican offer only small variations on the same menu: ever increasing austerity. Obama bragged about reducing the deficit, never acknowledging that this has been accomplished on the backs of the poor, contributing mightily to economic inequality and social insecurity.

Obama offers nothing of substance, because he is not authorized by his corporate masters to do so. He takes his general orders from the same peo-

ple as do the Republicans. That's why Obama only speaks of minimum wage hikes while Republicans are in power, rather than when his own party controlled both houses of Congress. Grand Bargains are preferred, because they are the result of consensus between the two corporate parties. In effect, the Grand Bargain is the distilled political will of Wall Street, which feeds the donkey and the elephant. Wall Street—the one percent—believes the world is theirs for the taking, and they want all of it. Given this overarching truth, Obama has no choice but to stage a festival of lies.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 29, 2014

<http://blackagenda.com/content/american-state-union-festival-lies>

## Black Madness Under Obama

### African Americans More Pro-NSA, Anti-Snowden Than Whites and Hispanics

BY GLEN FORD

In yet another example of African American moral and political deterioration in the Age of Obama, a new Pew Research poll shows Blacks are more in favor of NSA spying on Americans than are whites or Hispanics. Moreover, the data indicate that Blacks are probably more likely to favor prosecution of Edward Snowden for his NSA spying revelations, than are other ethnic groups.

Back in September, polling history was made when Black Americans were more in favor of air strikes against Syria than whites and Hispanics—the first time, ever, that African Americans were ranked as the most bellicose major ethnicity in the United States.

Something ugly has happened to Black America since 2008, eroding—if not reversing—the progressive Black historical consensus on issues of peace, civil liberties and social justice that has prevailed since pollsters began soliciting Black opinion. One must conclude that, either Black progressivism was a much shallower political current than previously believed, or that the presence of a Black president has been such a shock to Black consciousness, so profoundly disorienting, that it has grievously distorted collective Black perceptions of reality. The African American worldview has been mangled beyond imagining.

Back in June of last year, when *MSNBC's* Black plantation hands Melissa Harris-Perry and Joy-Ann Reid were calling for Edward Snowden's head on a platter, and Black South Carolina congressman James Clyburn was telling people that Snowden's NSA revelations were nothing more than "an effort to embarrass the president," 60 percent of Blacks and an equal proportion of Hispanics approved of "the government's collection of telephone and Internet data as part of anti-terrorism efforts." Only 44 percent of whites wanted the NSA's metadata collections to continue. Pew Research pollsters asked the same questions after President Obama's speech on NSA spying, last Friday. The survey showed that NSA's stock had fallen considerably over the past six months, but Blacks remain more NSA spy-friendly than whites and Hispanics. Forty-three percent of African Americans still approve of the agency's telephone and Internet data collection, compared to 39 percent of whites and 40 percent of Hispanics, while majorities of whites (55 percent) and Hispanics (52 per-



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cent) opposed Obama on spying. Only 49 percent of Blacks would break with administration policy. In conventional political terms, African Americans—who are subjected to hyper-surveillance like no other group in the U.S.—are most heavily represented on the far Right on this issue, steadfast with “their” president.

Democrats are substantially more likely than Republicans to favor criminal prosecution of Edward Snowden, according to the Pew poll. Sixty-two percent of Democrats, versus 54 percent of Republicans, want to throw the book at Snowden. African Americans make up one quarter of the Democratic Party. The data indicate that Black zeal to protect Obama contributed significantly to the Democrats’ lynch-mob mentality.

The polls show that the “Obscene 14” Black lawmakers that voted to shield the NSA’s meta-data trolling from congressional defunding, in July, represented the majority of Black opinion at the time (60 percent). Put another way, Black majorities appear prepared to take even the most right-wing positions if they perceive it to be in defense of the First Black President. (The House effort to curtail the NSA’s

telephone and internet data-gathering failed by only seven votes.)

Forty percent of Blacks told a *Washington Post/ABC* poll, in late August and early September, that they supported President Obama’s threatened airstrikes on Syria. Although majorities of Blacks (56 percent), whites (58 percent) and Hispanics (63 percent) opposed Obama’s air war, African Americans were the most supportive of war—the first time that has ever happened. Given that Blacks were far more pro-peace than either whites or Hispanics in the pre-Obama era, the conclusion is inescapable: substantial proportions of Black Americans are now more concerned with defending Obama than with preventing the death of thousands of innocents abroad, at U.S. hands. In siding with the NSA’s spies, Blacks have shown they are prepared to sacrifice their own civil liberties in order to safeguard the prestige of the icon in the White House.

If an individual exhibited such lifelong personality and values reversals,

her relatives and friends would immediately suspect an emotional breakdown, and seek professional help. Caregivers would try to identify the cause of the mental collapse, and find ways to avoid further harm.

Actually, a diagnosis of collective African American mental illness, brought on by the sudden and unexpected advent of a nominally Black president, is the kindest analysis available. The alternative diagnosis is that Black folks were always closet reactionaries, who were just waiting for the emergence of a Black chief executive to show their true colors.

I’ll go with sudden onslaught of collective mental illness. The second theory is even crazier than the first.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 22, 2014

<http://blackagenda.com/content/black-madness-under-obama-african-americans-more-pro-nsa-anti-snowden-whites-and-hispanics>



# Victory in Seattle Inspires Chicago Socialist Campaign

BY ANDREW MORTAZAVI

If a socialist can win an election in Seattle, why not Chicago? That was the spirit at the University of Illinois-Chicago's Jane Addams Hull House Museum on Wednesday night, where close to 100 Chicagoans gathered for the founding meeting of the Chicago Socialist Campaign.

Drawing on the example of Seattle's Kshama Sawant—who in November became the first socialist in recent memory elected to a city council—the campaign seeks to run a socialist candidate for alderman in Chicago's 2015 city council race. Activists also plan to use the electoral effort to amplify the demands of popular movements in Chicago, such as the call for a \$15 minimum wage.

The January 22 meeting drew members of several socialist organizations—including Solidarity, Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization—as well as members of community organizations and unions, such as Chicago Teachers Union, AFSCME and Service Employees International Union. Overall, the mood was hopeful. Shaun Harkin, a member of ISO, called the campaign “an exciting opportunity,” and his sentiment appeared to be shared by an ebullient crowd.

Inspired by Sawant's victory, Chicago organizers first held an impromptu meeting last month to gauge interest in a similar effort in the Windy City. They emerged with a vision statement that calls for building a “people-centered” movement to “make real and lasting change” to the system.

On Wednesday, they turned to fine-tuning that vision statement and discussing organizing and campaigning plans. The biggest question, of course, is who to choose as a candidate. The campaign plans to begin by deciding

where to run a candidate, as aldermen must reside in their own ward. By February, the research committee plans to have identified four wards conducive to electing a socialist candidate based on community support and incumbent vulnerability. One ward will be ratified by vote in a February open meeting.

Attendees expressed belief that a suitable candidate would arise organically from grassroots organizing. But organizers did identify the type of candidate they hope for—a socialist who would represent a multitude of community voices.

Ervin Lopez, a local teacher and community organizer, noted that the movement was seeking to represent a population that wasn't necessarily in the room. “Right away my first observation was that it seems like another predominately white-Left socialist group,” Lopez said of the event, adding that local labor and activist leaders from the South and West Sides of the city weren't present.

The Chicago campaign is also seeking an independent socialist candidate—someone without a socialist party affiliation. In doing so, it is making an important departure from the Seattle model, where Sawant ran as a member of the Socialist Alternative party. Chicago is home to many existing socialist organizations and independent socialists who, organizer Isaac Silver believes, must be brought together to achieve operational unity.

Organizers hope to have a candidate by late spring, but the deadline is August 26, 2014, when the campaign can officially begin collecting signatures for the ballot. A minimum of 473 valid signatures is needed to gain ballot access. Campaign organizers aim to secure at least four times that many,

while also registering new voters, whom they see as key to the movement because many potential supporters do not vote for either major party.

The sense that the major political parties had failed to represent the masses pervaded the room on Wednesday. Organizer Eugene Lim said the campaign was not just about winning office, but reclaiming the word “socialist” to mean those who fight for the proletariat and the disenfranchised. “If we go forward in those arenas,” he says, “We have won.”

*Andrew Mortazavi is a Spring 2014 editorial intern for In These Times.*

*—In These Times, January 24, 2014*

*[http://inthesetimes.com/ittlist/entry/16171/victory\\_in\\_seattle\\_inspires\\_chicago\\_socialist\\_campaign/](http://inthesetimes.com/ittlist/entry/16171/victory_in_seattle_inspires_chicago_socialist_campaign/)*

# Seattle Community College Teacher Elected to City Council

## Socialist Kshama Sawant's Win Signals New Openings for Political Change

By MARK T. HARRIS

The city of Seattle has long benefited from the fresh ocean breezes that flow in from Puget Sound. Now, a different kind of breeze is sweeping through the state of Washington's largest city. It's the air of political change represented in economist Kshama Sawant's new position as the first elected socialist to the Seattle City Council.

Sawant, a member of AFT Local 1789, is a part-time economics instructor at Seattle Central Community College. In a dramatic upset, the independent candidate garnered some 93,000 votes last November to defeat long-time Democratic councilman Richard Conlin.

What's remarkable about Sawant's victory is that her campaign did not downplay her openly socialist politics. Just the opposite. As a socialist, she championed raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and implementing a new "Millionaire's Tax" on the very wealthy to expand funding for public services, including mass transit and education. In media interviews and elsewhere, she also made clear her support for unionizing low-paid service workers, rent control, support for women's and minority rights, and other progressive causes.

### A grassroots campaign

Significantly, the newly elected city council member, who began to make a name for herself locally during the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011, had the backing of a majority of unions in the M.L. King County Labor Council. This included her own AFT local, as well as CWA Local 37083, AFSCME Local 1488, IBEW Local 46, and the American Postal Workers Union-Greater Seattle Local. (A two-thirds "super-majority" vote would have been required to earn the Labor Council's official endorsement.)

It's a sign of a changing political climate that an avowed socialist, a member of the Socialist Alternative organization, could win election to citywide office in a major American city. In fact, Sawant is the first socialist elected to city office in Seattle since Anna Louise Strong, who later earned fame as a writer, won election to the school board in 1916.

Not surprisingly, her election has generated quite the media buzz. Despite the local nature of the election, news reports of her victory went worldwide, including coverage in her native India. Even at the January 6, 2014 swearing-in ceremony for the new city government, which included inauguration of the city's first gay mayor, Ed Murray, much of the news coverage centered on Sawant. The swearing-in included a record crowd for such an event, most of them Sawant supporters with more than 1,000 in attendance.

Sawant is cut from a different political cloth in other ways, too. With a salary of \$120,000 a year, Seattle City Council members are among the highest paid elected city officials in the country. Sawant has pledged not to take more than the average Seattle income, donating the rest of her salary to social justice campaigns.

But beyond any demonstrative measures, Sawant's election appears poised to give a concrete boost to progressive activism in Seattle. Buoyed by a grassroots, volunteer base of hundreds of supporters, Sawant is pledged to build a new grassroots Fight for 15 campaign to raise the minimum wage in Seattle. It's a proposal that's already won voter approval in nearby SeaTac, where Seattle's international airport is located.

The new living wage campaign got underway at a packed January 12 organizing rally, where 300 plus supporters of the Fight for 15 initiative met at the

Seattle Labor Temple. There plans were unfurled to educate and train a small army of activists to begin organizing what is described as Neighborhood and Campus Action Groups to win support for the proposal throughout Seattle. The goal is to hold a week of political events, marches, and rallies from March 7 to 15th, with a large mass demonstration planned for May 1.

Of course, there's strong business opposition to this living wage proposal, and a fight ahead, but the fact that the new mayor has come out in favor of the raise (as well as three other council members) testifies to which way the winds of grassroots change are currently blowing in Seattle.

It's a refreshing turn of events to see a dedicated, pro-union activist elected to an important city position. In no small part Sawant's election is a reaction to the dismal reality of long declining real wages and benefits for many working Americans, with cutbacks in public services and education resources having devolved into a kind of default setting for bipartisan politics in the United States today.

As Sawant herself noted in her January 6 inauguration speech, "This city has made glittering fortunes for the super wealthy and for the major corporations that dominate Seattle's landscape. At the same time, the lives of working people, the unemployed and the poor grow more difficult by the day. The cost of housing skyrockets, and education and healthcare become inaccessible."

### Where is the economic recovery?

As a teacher, Sawant wants to increase corporate taxes to ensure schools and colleges get all the money and resources they need. With corporate profits at record levels, this should be an obvious solution. Instead, most

politicians talk as if austerity and cut-backs and “no new taxes” (by which is usually meant taxes on the super wealthy) are our only viable choices. Why? The economic “recovery” has benefited the very rich, but the rest of us—not. Sawant is reminding us that the country is not poor; it’s just that wealth is hoarded in fewer hands than ever before.

Will Sawant’s election prove to be the first sign of new opportunities for independent activist politics in other cities? That remains to be seen. For now, it is certainly a promising development. As Kraig Schwartz, membership chairman of AFT Local 1789, remarks in a recent *Seattle Times* op-ed, “Sawant is a smart, articulate, fresh voice for the 99 percent. Her campaign, and the activism it has brought to the fore, has already enlarged our political space, offering new ideas with hopes of bringing a more balanced power equation to our city and country.”

Indeed. The ground-level activism that swept Kshama Sawant into office reflects the desire by many to challenge the austerity mind-set that has come to narrowly define mainstream politics. Her campaign both as a candidate and now as an elected official instead puts its hopes in the twin forces of grassroots activism and independent political leadership to reshape the American political landscape. Most important, the political message of her election victory is that it is possible for ordinary working Americans to get organized and make this country a better, more prosperous place to live.

*Mark T. Harris is a political commentator reporting from Seattle for The Advocate.*

—*The Advocate*, February 5, 2014

<http://www.aft1493.org/component/content/article/23-advocate-e-mail-edition/236-february-2014-advocate-community-college-teacher-elected-to-seattle-city-council.html>

## Drop the Charges Against Snowden!

BY BARRY SHEPPARD

Division continues to deepen in U.S. and international ruling circles about what to do about the revelations of NSA spying.

The speech by President Obama, which was supposed to move the discussion forward, was a flop; polls indicate it didn’t change anyone’s mind. Obama gave his usual “on the one hand, and on the other” speech attempting to appease both sides, but came down in defense of the NSA program.

Where he did seem to offer changes, there were caveats. For example, he said the NSA’s bugging of foreign leaders would cease—except in cases of “national security.” But that is the justification for the whole NSA spying program.

The *New York Times* reports that in the case of Germany, attempts to come to an agreement on spying on each other’s leaders are “floundering.” The sticking point is, “American officials have refused to extend the ‘no spying’ guarantee beyond [Chancellor] Merkel, telling German officials in private sessions that if the White House agreed to forgo surveillance on German territory, other partners would insist on the same treatment.”

These discussions don’t even touch on the spying on hundreds-of-millions of citizens in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Reports of views of most Europeans are dismissive of Obama’s speech.

Another example: Obama promised to find a way to provide some kind of advocate for targets of NSA spying brought before the kangaroo Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA). But the targets themselves would not be present and would not even know of the secret FISA proceedings. Such “advocates” would be chosen from a government-appointed list, and be

present only when FISA decided to have them.

The word “foreign” in FISA’s name is misleading. FISA is the only court that oversees NSA’s operations, including the sweeping up of all “metadata” of every phone call, tweet, email or text of all U.S. citizens, which it has given *carte blanche* to.

### Scathing report

On January 23, six days after Obama’s speech, an independent federal privacy watchdog issued a 238-page report concluding that the NSA’s collection of bulk “metadata” of U.S. citizens provided only “minimal” benefits in counterterrorism efforts, is illegal and should be shut down.

This was the first major public statement by the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which Congress made an independent agency in 2007.

Commenting on the report, the *New York Times* says it “lays out what may be the most detailed critique of the government’s once-secret legal theory behind the program: that a law known as Section 215 of the Patriot Act, which allows the FBI to obtain business records deemed ‘relevant’ to an investigation, can be legally interpreted as authorizing the NSA to collect all calling records in the country.

“The program ‘lacks a viable legal foundation under Section 215, implicates constitutional concerns under the First and Fourth Amendments, raises serious threats to privacy and civil liberties as a policy matter, and has shown only limited value,’ the report said. ‘As a result, the board recommends that the government end the program.’”

The *Times* noted that the “report also scrutinizes in detail a handful of investigations in which the program

was used, finding ‘no instance in which the program directly contributed to the discovery of a previously unknown terrorist plot or the disruption of a terrorist attack.’”

Of course Section 215 and the whole Patriot Act are a violation of civil liberties. The “war on terrorism” is a bogus rationale for the wars the U.S. has waged since and the setting up of this vast spy operation.

### Growing divisions

Snowden’s revelations of the extent of international spying, including economic spying, have also caused concern. On January 23, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, set up a commission to “scrutinize the future of the web in the wake of the Edward Snowden revelations,” according to the *Financial Times*.

“Marissa Mayer, chief executive of Yahoo, said [in Davos] trust in her company and others had been damaged by the disclosures.” Her concerns were echoed by other company heads.

Microsoft has now said it will not store international users’ information in the U.S. The *Financial Times* reports: “Brad Smith, general counsel of Microsoft, said that ... it had become necessary after leaks showed the National Security Agency had been monitoring data of foreign citizens from Brazil to the EU.” Whether this move by Microsoft will calm concerns, given the worldwide reach of the NSA, remains to be seen.

Why is it important when such divisions occur in ruling class circles? Because it helps our side, the working class side, to expose ruling class attacks

on us. Polls now show that around 70 percent of U.S. citizens think NSA spying on them should be curtailed or eliminated, for example.

The division over the NSA program also extends to differences over how Edward Snowden should be treated.

Previously, the *New York Times* editors called for clemency for Snowden, given the great value of his revelations. Calls for clemency have increased in the last several months by other news organizations as well as civil liberties organizations. Attorney General Eric Holder rejected those appeals. He said that Snowden should return to face the charges against him, and then and only then the government would consider a plea deal.

A bipartisan attack on Snowden was launched by the heads of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees on the Sunday *Meet the Press* TV program on January 19.

Mike Rodgers, the Republican head of the House committee, was joined by Democrat Dianne Feinstein of the

Senate’s in accusing Snowden, without a shred of evidence, of working for Russian spy services.

Rodgers said that Snowden’s possession of a “go bag” to get out of Hawaii and his smooth entry into Hong Kong indicated preplanning beyond his individual capacity.

“I don’t think it was a gee-whizz luck event that he ended up in Moscow under the handling of the FSB [the Russian spy agency],” Rodgers said. “He may well have [been a Russian spy],” Feinstein chimed in.

Last month, Jesselyn Radak, a legal adviser to Snowden and a lawyer with the Government Accountability Project, already replied to this nonsense: “I absolutely think the tide has changed for Snowden. All these things taken together counsel in favor of some sort of amnesty or pardon.”

—Red Flag, January 25, 2014

<http://redflag.org.au/article/drop-charges-against-snowden>



**EXPOSING CRIMES IS NOT A CRIME**

# Medicare's Rollout vs. Obamacare's Glitches Brew

BY DAVID HIMMELSTEIN AND STEFFIE WOOLHANDER

The smooth and inexpensive rollout of Medicare on July 1, 1966 provides a sharp contrast to the costly chaos of Obamacare.

We won't rehearse the chaos part here, just the costs.

As of March 2013, federal grants for Obamacare's state exchanges totaled \$3.8 billion.<sup>1</sup> Spending for the federal exchange is harder to pin down because funding has come from multiple accounts, including: the \$1 billion Health Insurance Implementation Fund; Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) General Departmental Management Account and General Departmental Management Account; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Program Management Account and the Prevention and Public Health Fund. CMS estimates fiscal 2014 spending for the federally-operated exchanges at \$2 billion.<sup>2</sup> So it's safe to say that the costs of getting the exchanges up and running, and (hopefully) enrolling seven million people in the program's first year will exceed \$6 billion.

Bear in mind that the exchanges won't actually pay any medical bills, just sign people up for coverage. So billions more in overhead costs will show up on the books of the private insurers and state Medicaid programs that will actually process medical claims.

Back in 1966, Medicare started paying bills for 18.9 million seniors (99 percent of those eligible for coverage) just 11 months after Pres. Johnson signed it into law. Overhead costs for the first year totaled \$120 million<sup>3</sup> (equivalent to \$867 million in 2013—all subsequent figures are given in 2013 dollars). But that figure includes the cost of processing medical bills, not just the enrollment costs.

Moreover, Medicare and Medicaid (which was passed at the same time) displaced several smaller federal health assistance programs, saving about \$376 million on their overhead costs.

Signing up most of the elderly for Medicare was simple; they were already known to the Social Security Administration, which handled enrollment. To find the rest,<sup>4</sup> the feds sent out mailings to seniors, held local meetings, and asked postal workers, forest rangers and agricultural representatives to help contact people in

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**A single payer plan that excluded private insurers could save hundreds-of-billions in transaction costs.**

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remote areas. The Office for Economic Opportunity spent \$14.5 million to hire 5,000 low-income seniors who went door-to-door in their neighborhoods.

Despite predictions of chaos, and worries that the newly-insured seniors would flood the healthcare system, there were few bottlenecks. Hospitals continued to operate smoothly and no waiting lists materialized. The only real "glitch" was that many hospitals in the Deep South initially refused to integrate their facilities—which Medicare required for certification and payment. But by the end of the first month, 99.5 percent of hospitals had signed on.

Obamacare's start-up has been rocky because complexity is "baked in" to the design, just as simplicity was "baked in" to Medicare. Obamacare's exchanges must coordinate thousands

of different plans, with premiums, co-payments, deductibles and provider networks that vary county-by-county; Medicare offered a single, uniform plan. The exchanges must calculate subsidies for each applicant after first verifying income, family size and immigration status; Medicare offered free hospital coverage, with a minimal (\$22) uniform premium for doctor coverage. Instead of setting up a new bureaucracy to collect premiums from millions of enrollees and funnel them to private insurers, Medicare relied on the existing payroll and income tax system to garner funds.

Obamacare's byzantine complexity reflects the contortions required to simultaneously expand coverage and appease private insurers. And private insurers will exact a steep ongoing toll. Medicare's overhead is just two percent,<sup>5</sup> vs. an average of 13 percent for private plans (on top of the Exchanges' costs, roughly three percent of premiums). A single payer plan that excluded private insurers could save hundreds-of-billions in transaction costs.

Medical quality improvement experts often advise hospitals to "avoid workarounds;" fix system defects rather than force doctors and nurses to sidestep problems like faulty equipment, understaffing, or illegible handwritings. This advice is equally valid for health reform. To avoid glitches and wasteful expense, design the system right; eliminate private insurers and cover everyone under a single payer program.

*David Himmelstein is a professor of public health at the City University of New York, a visiting professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, and a cofounder of Physicians for a National Health Program with Woolhandler. He received a medical degree from Columbia*

University; completed a medical residency at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California, and a fellowship in general internal medicine at Harvard University; and has practiced primary care internal medicine for three decades in Cambridge and the South Bronx.

Dr. Steffie Woolhandler has earned degrees from Stanford University (BA Economics), LSU Medical Center (MD), and U.C. Berkeley (MPH) as well as an honorary degree from Harvard (MA). She has worked as a primary care internist for decades, has authored over a hundred scientific articles on health and health care policy, and is a well-known advocate for non-profit, single-payer national health insurance. She is currently a professor of public health at CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College.

—Health Affairs Blog, January 2, 2014

<http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2014/01/02/medicares-rollout-vs-obamacares-glitches-brew/>

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1 Federal grants for Obamacare’s state exchanges totaled \$3.8 billion: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/654994.pdf>

2 CMS estimates fiscal 2014 spending for the federally-operated exchanges at \$2 billion: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655291.pdf>

3 Overhead costs for the first year totaled \$120 million: <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/NationalHealthAccountsHistorical.html>

4 To find the rest: <http://www.ssa.gov/history/ssa/lbjmedicare3.html>

5 Medicare’s overhead is just two percent: <http://jhppl.dukejournals.org/content/early/2013/02/11/03616878-2079523.abstract>

## Your Mind, Privatized

BY STEVEN STRAUSS

I am a practicing neurologist. To me, the brain is the most fascinating entity in the universe. A physical structure which enables us to manipulate tools and communicate using language, it also allows us to rationally probe the unknown and progress in our ability to satisfy human and planetary needs. It is the most advanced achievement of evolution.

So I should have been overjoyed to learn last April that President Obama was proposing a \$100 million initial fund for advanced research to fully map out the human brain, to identify its numerous neural circuits, each one a complex interconnection of the living wires we call “nerves.” Finally we’ll be able to offer something meaningful to our patients with devastating diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s, for which there are currently no cures or satisfactory treatments. Even the project’s title is catchy—The BRAIN Initiative—for Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies.

But I was skeptical, not overjoyed, because I am not only a neurologist, but also a socialist. I have learned, using my brain, that no capitalist government invests \$100 million dollars for strictly humanitarian reasons. And whenever they employ a catchy title, there’s also a catch.

Obama earmarked three funding recipients—the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). But beware! The NIH, for example, does research for political agendas, as

it did for Bush’s unscientific, anti-education No Child Left Behind fiasco. And DARPA, established in 1958, is charged with protecting “U.S. national security” by “maintaining the technological superiority of the U.S. military.” U.S. “warfighters,” says DARPA, “perform under the most challenging operational condition,” so “harnessing the capabilities of neuroscience” may

help sustain mental alertness during prolonged missions.

*Scientific American* blogger and veteran journalist John Horgan rightly criticized BRAIN (May 22,

2013) for what he calls the “militarization of brain science.” This is nothing new. In the 1990s, the U.S. Army Research Institute studied neuroscience to help develop cognitive enhancement for the battlefield. It advocated exploiting neuroscience to aid both the military and private employers in “personnel selection and training” by identifying subtle mental traits.

Big business is drooling over BRAIN’s big dollar signs. The pharmaceutical industry, for example, will acquire publicly funded scientific information to help manufacture its expensive, privately-owned, neuropsychiatric drugs. And writing for the *Wall Street Journal* (April 15, 2013), Gregory Sorensen called for promoting BRAIN by eliminating corporate taxes on the medical-technology industry.

But corporate America is also worried. *Forbes Magazine* contributor David DiSalvo asked in an April 3, 2013 article, “Are we too late?” refer-

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**... no capitalist government invests \$100 million dollars for strictly humanitarian reasons**

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ring to the European Union's billion-euro Human Brain Project and China's Brainnetome. It's never too late to share knowledge, but DiSalvo is talking about being too late to cash in on the booty.

To understand BRAIN, we also need to consider capitalist patents, an exclusive ownership right to an invention. Helen Mayberg, a neurologist at Emory University, identified a neural circuit deep in the brain that influences major depression. Using an already available technology to stimulate nerves with electrical wires, she was able to provide dramatic relief to her patients. Now Mayberg holds a patent on this technique, whose only novel component is the circuit she identified. Researchers must pay to use such patents, which impedes medical investigations. Imagine how many patents BRAIN will generate!

If all of this sounds like one grand scheme to further enrich the one percent and sharpen the mental weapons of imperialist warfare, welcome to science under capitalism.

Science is a social enterprise, where individual researchers build on accumulated knowledge. But capitalism uses this knowledge for the benefit of the few. Searching for a solution to its latest crisis, this moribund economic system seeks to turn our brains into private property and weapons of mass destruction. We need a radical alternative—a sane, socialist world, where science serves the interests of humanity, minimizes suffering, and keeps our planet sustainable.

*Dr. Strauss is a neurologist in Baltimore, Maryland, author of The Linguistics, Neurology, and Politics of Phonics: Silent "E" Speaks Out (Erlbaum), and co-author of the forthcoming book, Reading: The Grand Illusion.*

—Freedom Socialist Party, December 2013

<http://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/2894>

## The Menace of the Military Mind

BY CHRIS HEDGES

February 3, 2014—I had my first experience with the U.S. military when I was a young reporter covering the civil war in El Salvador. We journalists were briefed at the American Embassy each week by a U.S. Army colonel who at the time headed the military group of U.S. advisers to the Salvadoran army. The reality of the war, which lasted from 1979 to 1992, bore little resemblance to the description regurgitated each week for consumption by the press. But what was most evident was not the blatant misinformation—this particular colonel had apparently learned to dissemble to the public during his multiple tours in Vietnam—but the hatred of the press by this man and most other senior officers in the U.S. military. When first told that he would have to meet the press once a week, the colonel reportedly protested against having to waste his time with those “limp-dicked communists.”

For the next 20 years I would go on from war zone to war zone as a foreign correspondent immersed in military culture. Repetitive rote learning and an insistence on blind obedience—similar to the approach used to train a dog—work on the battlefield. The military exerts nearly total control over the lives of its members. Its long-established hierarchy ensures that those who embrace the approved modes of behavior rise and those who do not are belittled, insulted and hazed. Many of the marks of civilian life are stripped away. Personal modes of dress, hairstyle, speech and behavior are heavily regulated. Individuality is physically and then psychologically crushed. Aggressiveness is rewarded. Compassion is demeaned. Violence is the favorite form of communication. These qualities are an asset in war; they are a disaster in civil society.

Homer in “The Iliad” showed his understanding of war. His heroes are

not pleasant men. They are vain, imperial, filled with rage and violence. And Homer's central character in “The Odyssey,” Odysseus, in his journey home from war must learn to shed his “hero's heart,” to strip from himself the military attributes that served him in war but threaten to doom him off the battlefield. The qualities that serve us in war defeat us in peace.

Most institutions have a propensity to promote mediocrities, those whose primary strengths are knowing where power lies, being subservient and obsequious to the centers of power and never letting morality get in the way of one's career. The military is the worst in this respect. In the military, whether at the Paris Island boot camp or West Point, you are trained not to think but to obey. What amazes me about the military is how stupid and bovine its senior officers are. Those with brains and the willingness to use them seem to be pushed out long before they can rise to the senior-officer ranks. The many Army generals I met over the years not only lacked the most rudimentary creativity and independence of thought but nearly always saw the press, as well as an informed public, as impinging on their love of order, regimentation, unwavering obedience to authority and single-minded use of force to solve complex problems.

So when I heard James R. Clapper Jr., a retired Air Force lieutenant general and currently the federal government's director of national intelligence, denounce Edward Snowden and his “accomplices”—meaning journalists such as Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras—before the Senate Intelligence Committee last week I was not surprised. Clapper charged, without offering any evidence, that the Snowden disclosures had caused “profound damage” and endangered American

lives. And all who have aided Snowden are, it appears, guilty of treason in Clapper's eyes.

Clapper and many others who have come out of the military discern no difference between terrorists and reporters, and by reporters I am not referring to the bootlicking courtiers on television and in Washington who masquerade as reporters. Carry out an interview with a member of al-Qaida, as I have, and you become in the eyes of generals like Clapper a member of al-Qaida. Most generals I know recognize no need for an independent press. The munchkins who dutifully sit through their press briefings or follow them around in preapproved press pools and publish their lies are the generals' idea of journalism.

When I was in Central America the U.S. officers who were providing support to the military of El Salvador or Guatemala, along with help to the Contra forces then fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, did not distinguish between us journalists and the rebel forces or the leftist Sandinista government. We were one and the same. The reporters and photographers, often after a day or two of hiking to reach small villages, would report on massacres by the Salvadoran army, the Guatemalan army or the Contras. When the stories appeared, the U.S. officers usually would go volcanic. But their rage would be directed not at those who pulled the triggers but at those who wrote about the mass killings or photographed the bodies.

This is why, after Barack Obama signed into law Section 1021 of the National Defense Authorization Act, which permits the U.S. military to seize U.S. citizens who "substantially support" al-Qaida, the Taliban or "associated forces," to strip them of due process and to hold them indefinitely in military detention centers, I sued the president. I and my fellow plaintiffs won in U.S. District Court. When Obama appealed the ruling it was over-

turned. We are now trying to go to the Supreme Court. Section 1021 is a chilling reminder of what people like Clapper could do to destroy constitutional rights. They see no useful role for a free press, one that questions and challenges power, and are deeply hostile to its existence. I expect Clapper, if he has a free hand, to lock us up, just as the Egyptian military has arrested a number of *Al-Jazeera* journalists, including some Westerners, on terrorism-related charges. The military mind is amazingly uniform.

The U.S. military has won the ideological war. The nation sees human and social problems as military problems. To fight terrorists Americans have become terrorists. Peace is for the weak. War is for the strong. Hypermasculinity has triumphed over empathy. We Americans speak to the world exclusively in the language of force. And those who oversee our massive security and surveillance state seek to speak to us in the same demented language. All other viewpoints are to be shut out. "In the absence of contrasting views, the very highest form of propaganda warfare can be fought: the propaganda for a definition of reality within which only certain limited viewpoints are possible," C. Wright Mills wrote. "What is

being promulgated and reinforced is the military metaphysics—the cast of mind that defines international reality as basically military."

This is why people like James Clapper and the bloated military and security and surveillance apparatus must not have unchecked power to conduct wholesale surveillance, to carry out extraordinary renditions and to imprison Americans indefinitely as terrorists. This is why the nation, as our political system remains mired in paralysis, must stop glorifying military values. In times of turmoil the military always seems to be a good alternative. It presents the facade of order. But order in the military, as the people of Egypt are now learning again, is akin to slavery. It is the order of a prison. And that is where Clapper and his fellow generals and intelligence chiefs would like to place any citizen who dares to question their unimpeded right to turn us all into mindless recruits. They have the power to make their demented dreams a reality. And it is our task to take this power from them.

—*truthdig.com*, February 3, 2014

[http://www.truthdig.com/report/print/the\\_menace\\_of\\_the\\_military\\_mind\\_20140203](http://www.truthdig.com/report/print/the_menace_of_the_military_mind_20140203)



# End Drone Killing, Drone Surveillance and Global Militarization

## United National Antiwar Coalition Call for Spring Days of Action 2014

Today we issue an international call for Spring Days of Action—2014, a coordinated campaign in April and May to end drone killings, drone surveillance and global militarization.

The campaign will focus on drone bases, drone research facilities and test sites and drone manufacturers.

The campaign will provide information on:

1. The suffering of tens-of-thousands of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Gaza who are under drone attack, documenting the killing, the wounding and the devastating impact of constant drone surveillance on community life.

2. How attack and surveillance drones have become a key element in a massive wave of surveillance, clandestine military attacks and militarization generated by the United States to protect a global system of manufacture and oil and mineral exploitation that is creating unemployment and poverty, accelerating the waste of nonrenewable resources and contributing to environmental destruction and global warming.

In addition to cases in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia, we will examine President Obama's "pivot" into the Asia-Pacific, where the United States has already sold and deployed drones in the vanguard of a shift of 60 percent of its military forces to try to control China and to enforce the planned Trans-Pacific Partnership. We will show, among other things, how this surge of "pivot" forces, greatly enabled by drones, and supported by the U.S. military-industrial complex, will hit every American community with even deeper cuts in the already fragile social programs on which people rely for survival. In short, we will connect drones and militarization with "austerity" in America.

3. How drone attacks have effectively destroyed international and domestic legal protection of the rights to life, privacy, freedom of assembly and free speech and have opened the way for new levels of surveillance and repression around the world, and how, in the United States, increasing drone surveillance, added to surveillance by the National Security Agency and police, provides a new weapon to repress black, Hispanic, immigrant and low-income communities and to intimidate Americans who are increasingly unsettled by lack of jobs, economic inequality, corporate control of politics and the prospect of endless war.

We will discuss how the United States government and corporations conspire secretly to monitor U.S. citizens and particularly how the Administration is accelerating drone surveillance operations and surveillance inside the United States with the same disregard for transparency and law that it applies to other countries, all with the cooperation of the Congress.

The campaign will encourage activists around the world to win passage of local laws that prohibit weaponized drones and drone surveillance from being used in their communities as well as seeking national laws to bar the use of weaponized drones and drone surveillance.

The campaign will draw attention to the call for a ban on weaponized drones by RootsAction.org that has generated a petition with over 80,000 signers:

[http://act.rootsaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=6180](http://act.rootsaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=6180)

And to efforts by the Granny Peace Brigade (New York City), *KnowDrones.org* and others to achieve an international ban on both weaponized drones and drone surveillance.

The campaign will also urge participation in the World Beyond War movement.

The following individuals and organizations endorse this Call:

Lyn Adamson, Co-chair, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace; Dennis Apel, Guadalupe Catholic Worker, California; Judy Bello, Upstate NY Coalition to Ground the Drones & End the Wars; Medea Benjamin, Code Pink; Leah Bolger, Former National President, Veterans for Peace; Canadian Voice of Women for Peace; Sung-Hee Choi, Gangjeong Village International Team, Jeju, Korea; Chelsea C. Faria, Graduate student, Yale Divinity School; Promoting Enduring Peace; Sandy Fessler, Rochester (NY) Against War; Joy First; Bruce K. Gagnon, Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space; Holly Gwinn Graham, Singer/songwriter, Olympia, WA; Regina Hagen, Darmstaedter Friedensforum, Germany; Kathy Kelly, Voices for Creative Nonviolence; Malachy Kilbride; Marilyn Levin and Joe Lombardo, Co-Coordinator, United National Antiwar Coalition; Tamara Lorincz, Halifax Peace Coalition, Canada; Nick Mottern, KnowDrones.org; Agneta Norberg, Swedish Peace Council; Pepperwolf, Director, Women Against Military Madness; Lindis Percy, Coordinator, Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases CAAB UK; Mathias Quackenbush, San Francisco, CA; Lisa Savage, Code Pink, State of Maine; Janice Sevre-Duszynska; Wolfgang Schlupp-Hauck, Friedenswerkstatt Mutlangen, Germany; Cindy Sheehan; Lucia Wilkes Smith, Convener, Women Against Military Madness (WAMM), Ground; Military Drones Committee; David Soumis, Veterans for Peace; No Drones Wisconsin; Debra Sweet, World Can't Wait; David Swanson, WarisACrime.org; Brian Terrell, Voices for Creative Nonviolence; United National Antiwar Coalition; Veterans for Peace; Dave Webb, Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (UK); Curt Wechsler, Fire John Paki Wieland, Northampton (MA) Committee to Stop War(s); Loring Wirbel, Citizens for Peace in Space (Colorado Springs, CO); Women Against Military Madness; Ann Wright, Retired U.S. Army colonel and former diplomat; Leila Zand, Fellowship of Reconciliation.

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# How Low Can Capitalism Sink?

## Look to Mandela's 'New' South Africa

BY TED NEWCOMEN

Readers of *Socialist Viewpoint* may be curious to know how low the capitalist system can sink? Well, the answer is pretty far if you look at the webpage for the Emoya Experience in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Now remember, this is the new "democratic" South Africa, not the old apartheid regime. This is the young nation, which recently celebrated the life of Nelson Mandela and is held up as a model of peace, reconciliation, and economic development, which only the capitalist system can provide

The webpage promises a unique tourist experience for visitors, revealing what it is like to actually live in a Third World Shantytown. Enough. Let the priceless advertising blurb speak for itself:

"Millions of people are living in informal settlements across South Africa. These settlements consist of thousands of houses also referred to as Shacks, Shantys or Makhukhus. A Shanty usually consists of old corrugated iron sheets or any other waterproof material, which is con-

structed in such a way to form a small 'house' or shelter where they make a normal living. A paraffin lamp, candles, a battery operated radio, an outside toilet (also referred to as a long-drop) and a drum where they make fire for cooking is normally part of this lifestyle. Now you can experience staying in a Shanty within the safe environment of a private game reserve. This is the only Shanty Town in the world equipped with under-floor heating and wireless Internet access!

"The Shanty Town is ideal for team building, braais [outdoor grills], fancy theme parties and an experience of a lifetime. Accommodates up to 52 guests. Our Shantys are completely safe and child friendly.

"This is an experience you will never forget!

"Shanty Town offers the following: under floor heating; donkey geysers [water heaters]; electrical geysers [electric heaters]; long-drop effect toilets; electricity; bathroom with shower; braai facilities upon request.

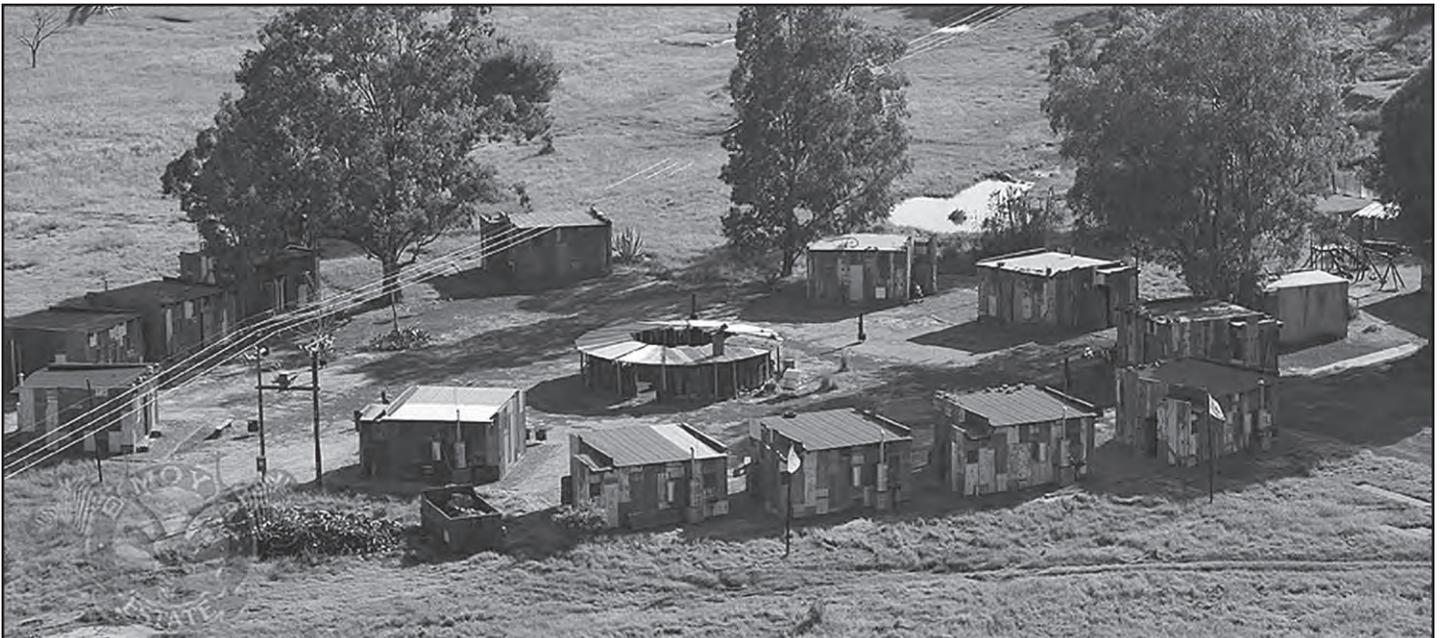
"Pricing (including value added tax) Sleeps four: R850; Breakfast optional: R110."<sup>1</sup>

If they awarded Oscars for sick advertising then this must be a winner. There is something seriously disturbing (not to say downright evil) about an economic system that makes money out of play acting disenfranchised slum dwellers. What's next? Slumdog sleepovers? Cookery lessons at Auschwitz? The Gulag Experience? Weekend slave camps in Georgia? At just over \$82 a night these shacks may be something of a bargain for rich bankers on a leadership course or a fun party for the privileged children of the one percent. The advertisement doesn't say if you have to pay a supplement to experience poverty, hunger, disease, and an optional dose of dysentery.

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1 Emoya Luxury Hotel and Spa

<http://www.emoya.co.za/p23/accommodation/shanty-town-for-a-unique-accommodation-experience-in-bloemfontein.html>



# South Africa: Forging a New Movement

## National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and the Shift in South Africa's Politics

BY LEONARD GENTLE

The decision of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) to cut ties with the African National Congress (ANC) has received poor analysis. Comment has tended to focus on the possibility of a new political party in 2019 or whether all this means that suspended general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Zwelinzima Vavi will get his job back. The greater significance of the biggest trade union in the country throwing in its lot with a growing movement in opposition to the neoliberal order, and thus to the left of the ANC, rather than the line up to the right, is being missed.

This very week NUMSA is holding a national political school, which culminates in an “expo” of forces of resistance, to which activists and communities that have been active in service delivery struggles have been invited. This is part of NUMSA’s declared commitment to what it calls a “united front” from below.

In discussing the events unleashed by the Marikana massacre, some of us have been declaring that the seeds of a new movement have been sown. But equipped only with the notions of political parties, trade unions and other such organizational forms, commentators have been ill equipped to grapple with the meaning of this notion of a movement.

### Movements in motion

We have lived for the past 20 odd-years with the marginalization of ordinary people from any power over their own lives. For at least half those years millions of people were not active in campaigns and in contesting the quality of their lives, as they gave the ANC (the party that had stood at the head of the liberation movement) a chance to

express in legislation and in practice what people had envisioned from that movement. In practice, the anti-apartheid movement was laid to rest. Politics therefore became the exclusive terrain of political parties, particularly those represented in parliament. And parliament replaced the streets, factories and communities where political parties were expected to earn their credibility.

The people, as political agents in a broad mass movement, were replaced by the individual voter participating in secret at the ballot box once every five years. Occasional flare-ups or disputes were settled through the courts. The press conference replaced the mass rally as the means whereby politicians talked to the people. Journalistic comment and media reports therefore only knew about political parties and their press conferences.

This is not a uniquely South African phenomenon. Globally this passive citizenry has, until now, been the stuff of the political terrain in all countries for nearly 30 years. The last three decades were also the years of the triumph of neoliberal capitalism and the biggest attacks on the living standards of ordinary people since World War I.

Neoliberalism relies on the passivity of ordinary people and the complicity of all political parties that have confined politics to the world of the ballot box and the press conference. But South Africa had an active mass movement until the 1980s, so our neoliberalism would have to await the triumph of an ANC de-linked from that mass movement—transformed in its own language from a “liberation movement to a political party.”

Our trade unions also evolved from a labor movement seeking broader social transformation to a set of trade

unions indulging in collective bargaining within the range prescribed by labor relations law. They too would have their parliamentary officers tracking new labor laws and the press conference replacing the factory general meetings and the mass rallies of their constituencies.

So the movement was replaced by a party and the party by its leadership and the leadership by a few individuals. And political comment has become obsessed with the cult of individuals. We have even lost the language to distinguish between a movement, parties, organizations and individuals.

For the past ten years we have had community protests in every township across the country. But because these did not fit the mold of political parties and press conferences, they did not make the media. And where commentators reflected on these it was only, until recently, as instances of “unrest” and criminality.

A movement is not the same as a party, although parties may seek hegemony within a movement. A movement is also not the same as an organization, although myriads of organizations, large and small, may make up a movement. Sometimes commentators failing to understand this notion of a movement call acts of popular resistance, which make up a movement, “spontaneous” because they cannot identify well-known leaders. Thereby denying the agency of ordinary people and their capacity for tactical and strategic acumen.

The movement that grew to a peak in the 1980s was one that had a number of features. First, there was a common enemy that unified the movement. That enemy was apartheid and all the associated 1970s reforms that

the government tried, which were seen as mere attempts at prolonging apartheid. Second, all localized struggles against this or that instance of injustice were seen as code for resisting apartheid. So local struggles fed into the national movement. All reforms were rejected and institutions boycotted. This was not because this or that organization issued such an instruction, but because the movement had established this as its prerogative. This sometimes meant that even a small organization could call for a march or a boycott way beyond its actual organizational capacity because such a call corresponded with the mood of the movement.

The ANC had sunk deep roots in the 1950s movement and its status was cemented after going into exile. But the ANC did not “organize” the movement, let alone prescribe what people should do. When the ANC contemplated some tactical turn, which went against the tenets of the movement, it had to tread warily and try very hard to persuade the movement, and the outcome wasn’t guaranteed.

### “Broad church?”

By definition a movement is heterogeneous, comprising such a range of experiences and organizational forms that no party or single organization can encompass that range. The mass movement of the 1980s recognized the ANC as having the leading role, but the ANC was by no means the only political force, and when people joined the ANC they brought all these different tendencies and experiences to the ANC and made it what ANC-apologists love to call today, a “broad church.”

Which is why the Marikana massacre was such a historic moment. It signaled that the ANC is no longer a “broad church” but a party of the very rich—those whose interests must be defended, violently, if necessary. In so doing, it freed activists from any further illusions of transforming the ANC

into the movement it was in the 1980s. It meant that all the local struggles in communities of the past 15 years and all the workplace struggles that broke out after Marikana no longer look to the ANC and its allies for strength. They look to themselves.

It now means that any development in the political or labor sphere will be measured against the rising tide of a movement, which no longer looks to the ANC or any of the parties in parliament, or any labor desk in the tripartite National Economic Development and Labor Council (NEDLAC) for any hope of a better future. Even Julius Malema [former leader of ANC-Youth] has recognized this—giving up his career as a chicken farmer to start a new party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which speaks, opportunistically, the language of this new movement. This is what the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) is discovering now. Workers swamped its ranks because it wasn’t the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Now workers want AMCU to be part of a new movement and to be a broad church. And AMCU is simply not equipped to be so.

The aftermath of Marikana also revealed that the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) stood outside and in opposition to this new movement. Such a position for a federation that once had deep roots in the working-class was surely going to precipitate tensions within its ranks.

### The anti-Mbeki forces unravel

So, to the NUMSA Special National Congress of December 2013 and its decisions.

Most comment has without fail reduced this to the decision not to back the ANC in the 2014 elections and largely to ascribe this to the suspension of Vavi. This makes for facile comment and for easy but false resolution. All COSATU needs to do is reinstate Vavi and the war will be over.

This may well be the position of those COSATU affiliates who have championed a special congress to review Vavi’s suspension. But, like Malema’s EFF, the background events to the NUMSA fight in COSATU can be traced to the make-up of disgruntled forces that overthrew Thabo Mbeki as ANC president. The South African Communist Party (SACP), COSATU and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) were a coterie of conspirators who made a pact with Jacob Zuma that in return for seats at the table of the state, they would champion a deeply flawed individual into the highest office.

Mbeki had had no truck with those for whom the state was merely a vehicle for private wealth projects and lost little time dealing with Zuma, his own deputy president, who was caught doing precisely this. But this opened the door for a layer of disgruntled elements—some with their own agendas of seeking a state for rentier capitalism and others with political axes to grind. These forces rallied together behind the SACP, COSATU and the ANCYL to drive Mbeki out after making a Faustian pact with Zuma.

And what did the Zuma project deliver? Cabinet positions for individual COSATU, SACP and ANCYL leaders and a veritable culture of cronyism and looting of the state. Then the ladder of advancement was whisked away and when Malema over-reached himself, he was expelled; and so the erstwhile-unified forces of disgruntlement unraveled.

Meanwhile throughout the Mbeki years the victims of his neoliberalism—the new working-class of urban and rural poor, the youth and the unemployed—have been in increasing revolt, a revolt of service delivery protests carried out beneath the radar of middle-class public opinion. The system of labor relations and compliant trade unions kept a lid on the rising dissatisfaction in the industrial sphere until

the revolts spilled over into the communities surrounding the platinum mines in the North West and found a disgraced National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) incapable of having any moral authority to police the dissent. And then came Marikana.

Of all the conspirators, the SACP is most distant from struggles and cannot fathom an independent existence outside the state. The SACP has nowhere else to go except to act as the Rottweiler of the Zuma regime, turning first on Malema and then on COSATU. Vavi's sexual power games may have provided the ammunition but it was the SACP that turned on its ex-ally. But instead of kowtowing to the SACP line, Marikana has also emboldened a NUMSA leadership to contemplate mutiny.

### Why NUMSA?

NUMSA has always been the left critic within COSATU. Its roots can be found in the traditions of the independent socialism of the Federation of South African Trade unions (FOSATU) and the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), which precede the formation of COSATU—a tradition to the left of the SACP and long castigated as “workerism” by the SACP and the ANC since the 1980s.

Not that NUMSA was ever politically monolithic. Its leadership cadre make up was always an *entente* between a political group located within the Eastern Cape SACP, an old independent socialist layer coming from the Witwatersrand region and a layer of syndicalist policy technocrats. This *entente* made NUMSA unique within COSATU and saw it campaign for a Workers' Charter in 1987 and for COSATU to break with the tripartite alliance in 1993. Already in the run-up to the ANC's 2009 Polokwane conference there were moves within COSATU to discipline NUMSA for not being enthusiastic enough backers of the Zuma project.

And unlike the public sector unions that dominate COSATU (from whence its Zuma-loyal president, Sdumo Dlamini, comes) and where the membership is a new middle class of white-collar workers, NUMSA still has the blue-collar workers of its militant days in the steel and engineering companies of the Witwatersrand, KwaZulu-Natal and the Vaal.

With the break-up of the old Zuma alliance, it is therefore not surprising that it is NUMSA that has responded in the way that it has. It is also significant that NUMSA members took their decisions at a special congress preceded by a process of political discussion and democratic debate from their locals and regions.

Obsessed by the forthcoming 2014 general elections and with only a short-term understanding of politics, the media have struggled to understand the NUMSA developments. So it's either about making up an alliance with EFF (you see they're all left wing, so they must be together) or it's all about personalities like Vavi (where NUMSA's initiative is viewed as little more than a ploy to save Vavi's career).

If we're only looking at the 2014 general elections or if we examine this situation only through the lens of trade unionism, then we miss the significance of the NUMSA split entirely.

All great parties in the world, conservative or progressive, came about as outcomes of long-gestating social movements. The U.S. Democrats can trace their roots to small farmers of the South resisting the freeing of slaves and the struggles of the Civil War, while the Republicans were the party of the northern industrialists. The British Labor Party has a social movement lineage going back to the Chartist movement of the 19th century and emerged out of struggles by trade unions to find an electoral voice. The ANC outgrew its elite roots amongst chiefs and “educated natives” to head

up a mass anti-apartheid movement since the 1950s.

For years many have bemoaned the fact that the quality of South Africa's democracy is hampered by the absence of a political alternative to the left of the ANC. All the political parties in parliament support the quest of South African corporations to be internationally competitive while endorsing the neoliberal GEAR (Gallatin Economic Development Agency) economic program and the privatization of public services. All base themselves on the flawed compromises that established the constitutional order at Kempton Park.

For long now that absence has been seen as rectifiable simply by conjuring up a left party to fill the gap.

After the Marikana massacre and its subsequent strike wave, there was much talk about the seeds of a new movement being sown. The significance of the NUMSA initiative is precisely that it takes forward this narrative. Why? Because it states unequivocally that the future of South Africa lies in a movement to the left of the ANC and, by seeking to find common cause with township activists and militant workers on the platinum belt who have been struggling for the past decade. It is an implicit acknowledgement that a new movement is already underway.

This does not mean that there will not be difficulties, as NUMSA seeks to find space within this new movement. For one, NUMSA has not yet begun to reflect politically on the sources of the ANC's shift to becoming a neoliberal party and even mistakenly takes the National Development Plan as that Rubicon-crossing moment, rather than the compromises at Kempton Park or GEAR. For another, it hasn't yet done an assessment of the appropriateness of the trade union form in the context of the changing working-class under neoliberalism. Rather, it seeks to keep the union form, but merely organize

workers within the “pipeline” of manufacture.

Nevertheless, NUMSA’s commitment to a movement for socialism is appropriate as is the idea of a “united front” from below, understood as a program of joint campaigns with other movements and community groups rather than a political party. It seeks to start the process by convening a political school, which creates spaces for social movements to participate. This may overcome a long-standing weakness whereby working-class communities have been struggling, while unionized workers have been dormant. In doing so, it offers the possibility that the nearly ten-year revolt of the poor may be complemented by an industrial partner and so help to forge such a national movement worthy of that cause.

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—*The Bullet*, February 5, 2014

<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/933.php#continue>

## Black South Africa Rediscovered Itself—Will Black America?

BY GLEN FORD

African Americans and Black South Africans have shared a special relationship within the larger African Diaspora. Both peoples struggled against entrenched white settler regimes obsessed with racial separation and European supremacy, societies that had grown fantastically rich on stolen land and labor. Gil Scott-Heron expressed the Black American-South African affinity in 1976 when he asked, lyrically, What’s the word in Johannesburg—Detroit’s like Johannesburg, New York’s like Johannesburg, where “freedom ain’t nothing but a word.”

Of course, Blacks have always been the great majority in South Africa, and a distinct minority in the United States. But there are many cities in the U.S. where Blacks are the majority, and yet rich white people still run the place. On both sides of the Atlantic, we have learned that there is no magic in numbers; that people still have to fight for power.

It is also true that long-suffering people who are hungry for recognition as human beings are often vulnerable to the seductions of symbolism. Having no memory of ever holding actual power, they take pride in beholding the trappings of power among notables of their own race—just as poor church congregations clothe their ministers in the finest garments and buy them expensive automobiles.

African Americans thought they’d won something when the corporate politician, Barack Obama, entered the White House five years ago. Vicariously, they were on top of the world, while in reality, Black America’s economic condition had become catastrophic. At the very historical moment when Blacks needed most desperately to defend themselves, they chose instead to defend Obama, the servant of Wall Street. Black America allowed itself to be utterly defeated by racial symbolism and self-delusion—at least for the time being.

In South Africa, in 1994, the Black majority did win the right to elect a government that looked like them, although—just like in majority Black American cities—whites still ran the show, economically. The leaders and media of the rich white world declared Nelson Mandela a saint for abandoning the Freedom Charter’s blueprint for nationalization of banking and industry and redistribution of land. Mandela’s party, the African National Congress, devolved into a fat and corrupt partner of white capital, and the security forces turned their guns on Black miners at Marikana, massacring 34 of them. Yet, while Mandela lived, his symbolic aura shielded the ANC. It was not until the first Black president of South Africa was buried that the country’s biggest union, the 338,000-member National Union of Metalworkers, could bring itself to break ties with the ANC. The metalworkers say they will fight to implement the Freedom Charter and work towards creation of a new, socialist party that will represent the interests of working people.

With the death of Mandela, the spell has been broken in South Africa. Symbolism will no longer substitute for real People’s Power. In the United States, three years from now, the big hangover will begin, as Black America is forced to ponder the damage that it has allowed Obama to get away with on the basis of shared complexion. Hopefully, we will begin the historic and necessary process of casting out the Black misleaders in New York and Detroit and Atlanta and Chicago—just like in Johannesburg.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 6, 2014

<http://blackagenda.com/content/black-south-africa-rediscovered-itself-%E2%80%93-will-black-america>

# Freedom Charter is Key to New Struggle for South Africa

BY GLEN FORD

Nelson Mandela's voice filled the hall at New York City's historic Riverside Church, last Saturday. A film showed Mandela's speech of July 26, 1991, in Matanzas, Cuba, the African National Congress deputy president's first trip abroad since his release from imprisonment, the year before. "Our goals remain achievement of the demands of the Freedom Charter, and we will settle for nothing less than that," said Mandela, with Fidel Castro standing nearby.

Mandela thanked the Cuban people for their heroic sacrifices in defeating the armed forces of the apartheid regime, at Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, in 1988. Twice more in the speech, Mandela mentioned the Freedom Charter, the ANC's 1955 promise to the people. He cited the Charter's rejection of "the racist state" that still ruled South Africa, and quoted the document's declaration that "The people shall govern." But the man who would assume the presidency of South Africa four years later made no mention of the Freedom Charter's core

economic demands: the redistribution of land and nationalization of the mines, heavy industry and banking—steps the Cubans had taken soon after the triumph of their revolution.

By the time he took the stage at Matanzas, Mandela and his African National Congress colleagues had already discarded the key elements of the Freedom Charter except those that called for a government elected by a common franchise. Ronnie Kasrils, a veteran of the ANC's armed wing who joined the cabinet of the new ANC government in 1994, described "How the ANC's Faustian pact sold out South Africa's poorest" in an article published in *The Guardian*, in June of 2013. "From 1991 to 1996," Kasrils wrote, "the battle for the ANC's soul got under way, and was eventually lost to corporate power: we were entrapped by the neoliberal economy—or, as some today cry out, we 'sold our people down the river.'"

While he still breathed, Mandela's

symbolic aura shielded the ANC from the harsh verdict of history. Then, in 2012, as "Madiba's" health began to fail, police massacred 34 workers demanding higher wages at a platinum mine in Marikana—the worst state violence since the white regime's slaughter of Black demonstrators at Sharpeville, in 1960. The ANC government was no less rabid than its white predecessor in denouncing the dead as the agents of their own destruction, for having broken away from the giant mineworkers union, a cornerstone of the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU), which is the third leg of the nation's ruling triumvirate, along with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Today, the once 300,000-strong mineworkers union has lost at least half its membership to more militant rivals. No wonder, since its founding secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, went on to become a fabulously wealthy (\$675 million, according to *Forbes*) member of the board of directors of the multinational corporation that the Marikana miners were striking against, and a high-ranking official in the ruling African National Congress. Emails sent by Ramaphosa during the Marikana crisis indicate he encouraged the government to make an example of the strikers.

The National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), now the biggest trade union, with 380,000 members, has announced it will not support the ANC in coming elections, and urges COSATU to leave the ruling alliance. Instead, NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim calls for formation of a genuine workers party that will fight to fulfill the demands of the Freedom Charter, and for "a new United Front that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities, in a way similar to United Democratic Front of the 1980s"—the



period when the ANC was banned and largely in exile.

The metalworkers, backed by eight of COSATU's 19 unions, are demanding a special congress to battle it out with ANC loyalists. NUMSA's Irvin Jim derided ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe, who pretended to act as a mediator in the COSATU dispute, as a man who "feigns ignorance of neoliberalism" and "talks about cushioning the working class, but he does not even mention what class force is responsible for the suffering of our class. This is because some of [his] colleagues in [the] top six of the ANC are capitalists."

Capitalists like Cyril Ramaphosa, are the most prominent beneficiary of BEE, Black Economic Empowerment, the ANC's alternative to the socialist path set forth in the Freedom Charter. Not only did the ANC and the South African Communist Party choose the neoliberal path, in the critical first half of the 90s, they set the stage for creation of a Black capitalist class to be grafted onto existing corporate structures. The economic ruling class was, to a degree, racially integrated, while the ruling party, the ANC, was converted to capitalism. The revolution was defeated—or, rather, never begun—and everybody knew it, but it took Marikana and Mandela's death to bring contradictions to a head.

In addition to the metalworkers, the nine dissident unions, who probably represent a majority of union members in South Africa, are: the Communication Workers' Union, Democratic Nurses Union of South Africa, the Food and Allied Workers' Union, Public and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa, South African Commercial and Catering Workers' Union, South African Football Players' Union, South African Municipal Workers' Union and the South African State and Allied Workers Union.

COSATU's current leadership,

which is all but inseparable from the ANC/SACP, refuses to call a special congress—despite the fact that COSATU's constitution requires such a congress if demanded by two-thirds of affiliated unions. Instead, they threaten to suspend the metalworkers, which would almost surely split COSATU right down the middle. ANC leadership has long treated COSATU as a mere appendage to its rule, and would prefer a paralyzed union confederation to a politically independent one.

However, the arrogance of the new Black capitalists may prove their undoing. For many millions of South Africans, the psychological break with the ANC has already happened. Marikana was the great shock to the national consciousness, and Mandela's death brought a final end to the pretense of social transformation. South Africa sees itself much more clearly: the most unequal country in the world, in which the struggling poor are said to stage more demonstrations than any other nation on earth—out-protesting the Chinese!—confronting a killer police force that was never weaned from its apartheid mission, to suppress the Black lower classes.

It is also the South Africa where the Freedom Charter is a living memory, the socialist document that legitimized

the ANC as the post-apartheid ruling party. Mandela was compelled to cite the Freedom Charter in Cuba, even as he and his colleagues were discarding it, at home.

The Freedom Charter is South Africa's unfinished business. The ANC, having repudiated it, in word and deed, must now be forced to run against the Freedom Charter, through the formation of a workers party opposition. We will then likely see a split in the ANC, itself—which is necessary to allow the honest elements within its ranks to escape the institutional grasp of Black capitalists and opportunists.

The Freedom Charter has been dormant for a quarter century, during which time multinational capital has been reinforced by a Black comprador class, headquartered in the African National Congress. It is now impossible to defeat multinational capital's grip on South Africa, without also confronting the party that claims to have "liberated" the country. Fortunately, the process well underway.

—*Black Agenda Report*, February 12, 2014

<http://blackagendareport.com/content/freedom-charter-key-new-struggle-south-africa>

## The Freedom Charter

The People Shall Govern!  
All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!  
The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!  
The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!  
All Shall be Equal Before the Law!  
All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!  
There Shall be Work and Security!  
The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!  
There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!  
There Shall be Peace and Friendship!

# South Africa's NUMSA Solidarizes with Korean General Strike

*On December 22, 2013, the right-wing government of Park Geun-hye illegally attacked the offices of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) with 5,000 police and military troops. Claiming the strike was illegal the government later arrested the leaders of the Korean Rail Workers Union (KRWU) for waging a rail strike, the longest in South Korea, to stop the privatization of the railways.*

*The South Korean Consulate in San Francisco organized conservative Koreans to disrupt a solidarity demonstration for the KRWU on January 17th, 2014 organized by the Transport Workers' Solidarity Committee in San Francisco, CA.*

*Another rally took place February 25th in front of the Consulate. Below is a solidarity statement sent to the Transport Workers' Solidarity Committee demonstration from the militant 350,000-strong National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa.*

—Socialist Viewpoint



National Union of Metalworkers of  
South Africa  
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Excom 2023  
Email: [irvinj@numsa.org.za](mailto:irvinj@numsa.org.za) or  
[ntokozom@numsa.org.za](mailto:ntokozom@numsa.org.za)  
Tel: 011-689-1700  
Fax: 011-834-4320; 011-833-6330  
Office of the General Secretary

The Chair  
Transport Workers' Solidarity Committee  
4001 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Oakland, California  
February 24, 2014

RE: Solidarity rally with the KCTU General Strike on February 25, 2014 and NUMSA protest action on the false solution on youth unemployment on February 26, 2014 and national strike on March 19, 2014.

Dear Comrades,

We send you warm and militant greetings from 350,000 metalworkers organized under NUMSA. We are very humbled by your solidarity rally at the time workers internationally are battling for organization and policies to take control of their lives.

Our hearts are with the Korean workers as they battle the Park Geun-hye regime against its campaign to annihilate unions in the railways in the preparation of the privatization of these assets. As NUMSA we expect less from our bourgeois state in South Africa as demonstrated during the Marikana massacre that it will stop at nothing to defend capital.

NUMSA Special Congress in December 2013 resolved that we should not be in bed with bourgeois parties or pseudo working class parties that implement neoliberal policies that continue to destroy workers' jobs, produce inequalities, and deepen poverty, even at the cost of openly murdering workers. We therefore resolve that the union must establish a UNITED FRONT and:

- That our members and shop stewards must be active on all fronts and in all struggles against neo-liberal policies, whether these policies are being implemented in the workplace or in communities.

- That in all our constitutional structures, there should be a standing agenda item on community struggles, their nature and NUMSA's attitude to these community struggles.
- Side by side with the establishment of the new UNITED FRONT, we in NUMSA must explore the establishment of a MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM as the working class needs a political organization committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa.

NUMSA will be embarking on protest action on February 26, 2014 and a general strike on the March 19, 2014 in protest against a law that enables the government to subsidize employers for employing young people. The law is similar to rescue packages offered to the banks for causing the 2008 crisis.

This is the first of series of general strikes we will embark upon this year against neoliberal policies enacted by the ANC government since 1994.

We are keenly aware of the pitfalls, difficulties and pains we will endure as we pursue our struggles against neoliberal policies in our country, but with your support and perseverance of our members in factories, mines, working class communities and social movements we are certain that we will turn the tide against the enemy.

It is better to die standing than kneeling down.

Yours sincerely,

National Union of Metalworkers of  
South Africa  
Jenny Grice  
pp Irvin Jim  
General Secretary

President, Cedric Gina; 1<sup>st</sup> Deputy President, Andrew Chirwa; 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy President, Christine Olivier; National Treasurer, Mphumzi Maqungo; General Secretary, Irvin Jim; Deputy General Secretary, Karl Cioete

# Half Of Global Wealth Owned By 85 People Oxfam Reports

BY ASA BENNETT

January 21, 2014—Half of all the world's wealth is owned by 85 people, who could all fit onto a single double-decker bus.

The shock finding from anti-poverty campaigners Oxfam came as world leaders, business chiefs and academics are set to gather this week in Davos for the World Economic Forum.

In their new report "Working for the Few," Oxfam have found citizens around the world strongly believe that the economy is "skewed" in favor of the rich.

According to polls carried out for the firm in the UK, Brazil, India, South Africa, Spain and the U.S., most people believe the laws are skewed in favor of the rich. Two-thirds of Brits polled thought "the rich had too much influence over the direction the country is headed," while just one-in-ten disagreed.

Oxfam executive director Winnie Byanyima said: "It is staggering that in the 21st Century, half of the world's population—that's three-and-a-half-billion people—own no more than a tiny elite whose numbers could all fit comfortably on a double-decker bus.

"We cannot hope to win the fight against poverty without tackling inequality. Widening inequality is creating a vicious circle where wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, leaving the rest of us to fight over crumbs from the top table.

"In developed and developing countries alike we are increasingly living in a world where the lowest tax rates, the best health and education and the opportunity to influence are being given not just to the rich but also to their children.

"Without a concerted effort to tackle inequality, the cascade of privilege

and of disadvantage will continue down the generations. We will soon live in a world where equality of opportunity is just a dream. In too many countries economic growth already amounts to little more than a 'winner takes all' windfall for the richest."

—*The Huffington Post UK*, January 21, 2014

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/01/17/oxfam-bus-wealth\\_n\\_4616103.html?ncid=edlinkusaolp00000003](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/01/17/oxfam-bus-wealth_n_4616103.html?ncid=edlinkusaolp00000003)

## Injustice, Resistance Rising in India

BY JOHN PILGER

In five-star hotels on Mumbai's seafront, children of the rich squeal joyfully as they play hide and seek.

Nearby, at the National Theatre for the Performing Arts, people arrive for the Mumbai Literary Festival: famous authors and notables drawn from India's Raj class. They step deftly over a woman lying across the pavement; her birch brooms laid out for sale, her two children silhouettes in a banyan tree that is their home.

It is Children's Day in India. On page nine of the *Times* of India a study reports that every second child is malnourished. Nearly two million children under the age of five die every year from preventable illness as common as diarrhea. Of those who survive, half are stunted due to a lack of nutrients.

The national school dropout rate is 40 percent. Statistics like these flow like a river permanently in flood. No other country comes close. The small thin legs dangling in a banyan tree are poignant evidence.

The leviathan once known as Bombay is the center for most of India's foreign trade, global financial dealing and personal wealth. Yet at low tide on the Mithi River, in ditches, at the roadside, people are forced to defecate.

Half the city's population is without sanitation and lives in slums without basic services. This has doubled since

the 1990s when "Shining India" was invented by a United States advertising firm as part of the Hindu nationalist BJP party's propaganda that it was "liberating" India's economy and "way of life."

Barriers protecting industry, manufacturing and agriculture were demolished. Coke, Pizza Hut, Microsoft, Monsanto and Rupert Murdoch entered what had been forbidden territory.

Limitless "growth" was now the measure of human progress, consuming both the BJP and Congress, the party of independence. Shining India would catch up China and become a superpower, a "tiger," and the middle classes would get their proper entitlement in a society where there was no middle.

As for the majority in the "world's largest democracy," they would vote and remain invisible.

There was no tiger economy for them. The hype about a high-tech India storming the barricades of the first world was largely a myth.

This is not to deny India's rise in pre-eminence in computer technology and engineering, but the new urban technocratic class is relatively tiny and the impact of its gains on the fortunes of the majority is negligible.

When the national grid collapsed in 2012, leaving 700 million people powerless, almost half had so little electric-

ity, they “barely noticed,” wrote one observer.

On my last two visits, the front pages boasted that India had “gate-crashed the super-exclusive ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) club” and launched its “largest ever” aircraft carrier and sent a rocket to Mars: the latter lauded by the government as “a historic moment for all of us to cheer.”

The cheering was inaudible in the rows of tarpaper shacks you see as you land at Mumbai international airport and in myriad villages denied basic technology, such as light and safe water. Here, land is life and the enemy is a rampant “free market.”

Foreign multinationals’ dominance of food grains, genetically modified seed, fertilizers and pesticides has sucked small farmers into a ruthless global market and led to debt and destitution. More than 250,000 farmers have killed themselves since the mid-1990s—a figure that may be a fraction of the truth as local authorities willfully misreport “accidental” deaths.

“Across the length and breadth of India,” says the acclaimed environmentalist Vandana Shiva, “the government has declared war on its own people.”

Using colonial-era laws, fertile land has been taken from poor farmers for as little as 300 rupees a square meter; developers have sold it for up to 600,000 rupees a square meter.

In Uttar Pradesh, a new expressway serves “luxury” townships with sporting facilities and a Formula One race-track, having eliminated 1225 villages. The farmers and their communities have fought back, as they do all over India; in 2011, four were killed and many injured in clashes with police.

For Britain, India is now a “priority market”—to quote the government’s arms sales unit. In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron took the heads of the major British arms companies to Delhi

and signed a U.S.\$700 million contract to supply Hawk fighter-bombers.

Disguised as “trainers,” these lethal aircraft were used against the villages of East Timor. They may well be the Cameron government’s biggest single “contribution” to Shining India.

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**It is Children’s Day in India. On page nine of the *Times of India* a study reports that every second child is malnourished. Nearly two million children under the age of five die every year from preventable illness as common as diarrhea. Of those who survive, half are stunted due to a lack of nutrients.**

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The opportunism is understandable. India has become a model of the imperial cult of “neoliberalism”—almost everything must be privatized, sold off.

The worldwide assault on social democracy and the collusion of major parliamentary parties—begun in the U.S. and Britain in the 1980s—has produced in India a dystopia of extremes and a specter for us all.

Whereas the democracy of India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru succeeded in granting the vote—today, there are 3.2 million elected representatives—it failed to build a semblance of social and economic justice. Widespread violence against women is only now precariously on a political agenda.

Secularism may have been Nehru’s grand vision, but Muslims in India remain among the poorest, most discriminated against and brutalized minority on earth.

The 2006 Sachar Commission found that in the elite institutes of technology, only four out of 100 students are Muslim, and in the cities Muslims have fewer chances of regular employment than the “untouchable” Dalits and indigenous Adivasis.

“It is ironic,” wrote Khushwant Singh, “that the highest incidence of violence against Muslims and Christians has taken place in Gujarat, the home state of Bapu Gandhi.”

Gujarat is also the home state of Narendra Modi, winner of three consecutive victories as BJP chief minister and the favorite to see off the diffident Rahul Gandhi in national elections in May. With his xenophobic Hindutva ideology, Modi appeals directly to dispossessed Hindus who believe Muslims are “privileged.”

Soon after he came to power in 2002, mobs slaughtered hundreds of Muslims. An investigating commission heard that Modi had ordered officials not to stop the rioters—which he denies. Admired by powerful industrialists, he boasts the highest “growth” in India.

In the face of these dangers, the great popular resistance that gave India its independence is stirring. The gang rape of a Delhi student in 2012 has brought vast numbers into the streets, reflecting disillusionment with the political elite and anger at its acceptance of injustice and a modernized feudalism.

The popular movements are often led or inspired by extraordinary women—the likes of Medha Patkar, Binalakshmi Nepram, Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy—and they demonstrate that the poor and vulnerable need not be weak. This is India’s enduring gift to the world, and those with corrupted power ignore it at their peril.

—*Green Left Weekly*, January 22, 2014

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/55643>

# Mass Murderer Ariel Sharon is Dead

By STEVEN KATSINERIS

War criminal and former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has died.

In the 1950's Sharon was a major and led an infamous Israeli army terror group called Unit 101, nicknamed the "avengers" that operated without uniforms. The unit countered Palestinian resistance with terror attacks.

It carried out many outrages inside Israel and across its borders.

In August 1953, unit 101 attacked the refugee camp of El-Bureig, in Gaza, where fifty refugees were massacred.

In October 1953, Sharon's unit attacked the Jordanian village of Qibya.

Israeli historian Avi Shlaim wrote, "Sharon's orders were to penetrate Qibya, blow up houses and inflict heavy casualties on its inhabitants. The village had been reduced to rubble: forty-five houses had been blown up and sixty-nine civilians, two thirds of them women and children, had been killed." Sharon later claimed he did not know the buildings were occupied. Israel's then foreign minister, Moshe Sharett said, "this stain (Qibya) will stick to us and will not be washed away for many years to come."

Between February 1955 and October 1956, Sharon led a paratroop brigade in similar cross-border raids in Gaza and the West Bank. In the West Bank village of Qalqilya, Sharon's squad killed 83 people.

In 1967, Sharon was given the task of pacifying the Palestinian resistance in the Israeli occupied Gaza Strip. He undertook a policy of brutal repression, blowing up houses, bulldozing large tracts of refugee camps, imposing severe collective punishments and imprisoning hundreds of young Palestinians suspected of being fighters. Many Palestinians were killed and due to his oppressive tactics resistance activity decreased dramatically.

In August 1971 Sharon again commanded troops in repressive operations to control the restive Gaza Strip. Some 2,000 houses were destroyed, leaving over 16,000 people homeless. Hundreds of young Palestinian men were arrested and many deported to Lebanon and Jordan. And 104 Palestinians were also killed.

Like so many Israeli military men Sharon entered politics and was elected to parliament as a M.P. for Likud. He was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Settlements. Sharon applied the same Zionist fanaticism and many of the strategies he had used in the Gaza Strip. He became the champion and architect for expanded Jewish colonies on the West Bank, creating an Israeli settlement boom.

To increase the numbers of Zionist settlers Sharon transferred much of Israel's industrial complex to seized Palestinian land and provided government grants to contractors to build private housing for settlers.

Sharon was credited with the Israeli demographic transformation of the West Bank and entrenching an enduring Israeli presence.

In 1981, Sharon was appointed Defense Minister. Sharon sought to crush the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon, believing it would demoralize the Palestinian people and pave the way for Israel to impose a settlement advantageous to Israeli aims. Israel also wanted the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon scattered among other more distant Arab countries as a part of a solution to the "Palestinian problem."

Israel had for a long time supported, trained and supplied the Phalange Party, a Lebanese fascist militia group founded in 1936 and modeled on the Nazi Party of Germany. In early 1982, Sharon visited them to coordinate plans for an Israeli invasion.

The Israeli invasion began in early June and despite stiff resistance the heavy Israeli air, sea and land bombardment demonstrated the overwhelming military superiority of the Israeli army. There was massive destruction and nearly half-a-million people were made homeless. Within a week the Israeli army had laid siege to Beirut, but could not break its defenses. The siege was to continue for months and casualties mounted. By the end of July, the Lebanese government, church and aid agencies stated that at least 14,000 people had been killed and twice that number seriously wounded. Over 90 percent of those killed were civilians.

After three months of warfare an agreement was reached to end the fighting. The terms of the agreement were that the Palestinian forces would withdraw from Beirut, the USA promised the safety and security of the Palestinian and Lebanese civilian population and Israel would not enter Beirut.

The last contingent of Palestinian defenders left the city on September 1, 1982. On September 15, the Israeli army entered the city and the USA did nothing. After surrounding the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila the Israeli army allowed a force of 150 Phalangists into the camps. This Phalange militia group was not a serious fighting force, but it was the intelligence unit headed by Eli Habeika, a unit famous in Lebanon for the massacres it had previously committed. So began the massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, many tortured and raped before being murdered. It is estimated that at least 2,000 people were killed during the two days of mass killings. Almost all those killed were elderly, women or children.

After publicity of the massacre and an international outcry, Israel held an inquiry. Despite its shortcomings, with some parts of the commission's report kept secret, it was still a damning indictment of Ariel Sharon. Sharon was found guilty of indirect responsibility for the massacre, rather than direct responsibility based on the premise that he was not present during the killings.

The commission's report said that Sharon had received Israeli intelligence warnings that there were no armed Palestinian fighters in the camps and that the Phalange might go on a rampage if allowed in the camps. In part the report stated, "In our view, even without such a warning, it is impossible to justify the Minister of Defense's (Sharon) disregard of the danger of the massacre." (The Kahan Report.) In 1983, Sharon resigned as Defense Minister and retired to his farm.

In 1996, he returned to politics and re-entered the Israeli government as Minister of National Infrastructure. Later he became the Prime Minister of Israel. Sharon's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 cost over 20,000 Palestinian and Lebanese lives. At the massacres in the refugee camps of Beirut he was responsible for the deaths of 2,000 people. Reading the record of Sharon's life shows he is a terrorist leader and war criminal. Israel accuses others of terrorism, yet not only does it not bring its own terrorist leaders to justice, it elects them to run the country.

—Via Email, January 24, 2014

## The Legacy of Ariel 'The Bulldozer' Sharon

BY JONATHAN COOK

It is easy to forget, with eulogies casting him as the unexpected "peacemaker," that for most of his long military and political career Ariel Sharon was known simply as The Bulldozer. That is certainly how he will be remembered by Palestinians.

His death was announced on Israeli army radio on Saturday, January 10. He was 85 years old and had been comatose since 2006.

Mikhael Warschawski, a founder of the joint Israeli-Palestinian advocacy group the Alternative Information Centre, describes Sharon as one of only two "political visionaries" in Israel's history, along with the country's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion.

"Yes, he was brutal, but he was more than that," Warschawski said. "Like Ben Gurion, and unlike modern politicians such as current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he was uninterested in petty party politics. He had a project he would not be distracted from—a view of what Israel is and what it should be."

That vision was ultimately forged by Sharon's military and political experiences.

### Military philosophy

According to Menachem Klein, a politics professor at Bar Ilan University, near Tel Aviv, Sharon created Israel's modern "military norms" through his founding of a secretive "retribution squad," named Unit 101, that operated through the 1950s and 1960s.

In Israel's early years, Unit 101 carried out reprisals against Palestinian fighters across the armistice lines, in an attempt to deter future enemy raids into Israeli territory. In practice, however, the price was paid as much by civilians as fighters.

Later, as defense minister, Sharon would be the moving force behind the decision to invade Lebanon in 1982, as a bloody way to expel the Palestinians from their strongholds there and destabilize a northern neighbor.

Along the way, and in the spirit of Unit 101, his commanders oversaw the horrific massacre of hundreds, and more likely thousands, of Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camps by Israel's Phalangist allies—an event for which an Israeli inquiry found him "personally responsible."

Today, Sharon's military philosophy is reflected in the Israeli army's Dahiya doctrine—its policy in recent confrontations to send Israel's neighbors in Gaza and Lebanon "into the dark ages" through massive destruction of their physical infrastructure.

But his military thinking chiefly served political ends.

According to Warschawski, Sharon explicitly refused to accept that the 1948 war that established Israel was over. As a result, he rejected efforts to define the extent of Israel's territorial ambitions.

Instead, says Warschawski, Sharon upheld a view that "the borders are wherever Israelis plant the last tree, or plough the last furrow." It was a philosophy of creating change and new realities through bold action; in practice it involved taking as much as land from the Palestinians as possible.

The late Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling famously coined a term for Sharon's policy: politicicide. In this view, Sharon's goal was to create conditions that "lower Palestinian expectations, crush their resistance, isolate them, make them submit to any arrangement suggested by the Israelis, and eventually cause their 'voluntary' mass emigration."

But Sharon saw this as a long-term process. “He wanted to delay an agreement for at least 50 years,” says Warschawski. “In his view, Israel needed as much time as possible, time to implement his vision.”

### “Father of settlements”

As U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry recently headed back to the region to re-energize peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, Israeli columnist Chemi Shalev observed that “Sharon’s spirit hovers” over the proceedings:

“Sharon, the ‘father of settlements’ had probably done more than anyone—certainly more than Netanyahu—to erase the 1967 borders, separating Israel and the occupied territories, from the map and to undermine the establishment of a Palestinian state.”

In his early political career, Sharon used various lowly government positions to work out his grand vision. In the early 1980s he established exclusive Jewish communities, known as the star points, along the Green Line to erase for Israelis the physical distinction between Israel and the West Bank and bring the settlements “back into Israel.”

At the same time, inside Israel, he devised ever-more inventive land-grabbing schemes to ensure Israel’s own large Palestinian minority was barred from living in most areas of the country. Exclusive Jews-only communities became part of a renewed “Judaization” program in the Galilee and Negev, symbolized by the vast private ranch he built for himself in the Negev.

A proposal revealed by Sharon in 2003 to dispossess the Bedouin of their ancestral lands in the Negev was the genesis of the Prawer plan, adopted by Netanyahu—if, for now, temporarily on hold—to force tens-of-thousands of Bedouins from their homes.

After years of helping to establish settlements in the occupied territories, Sharon vigorously opposed the signing of the Oslo peace accords in 1993.

Five years later, as the final-status talks neared, he urged young settlers to “run and grab as many hilltops as they can” in an attempt to foil any hope of a Palestinian state being conceded.

His injunction spawned more than 100 so-called “outposts,” whose fanatical inhabitants—known in his honor as the hilltop youth—are today respon-

sible for the campaign of terror, the so-called “price-tag attacks,” that are slowly driving Palestinians out of most of the West Bank, concentrating them into the cities.

### Operation defensive shield

Later, as prime minister, Sharon more directly reversed Oslo by launching Operation Defensive Shield, a re-invasion of areas that were supposed to have been passed to the control of a Palestinian government-in-waiting, the Palestinian Authority.

He would finally pen the Palestinians into a series of enclaves by approving and starting construction of a 700 kilometer steel-and-concrete “separation barrier” across the West Bank.

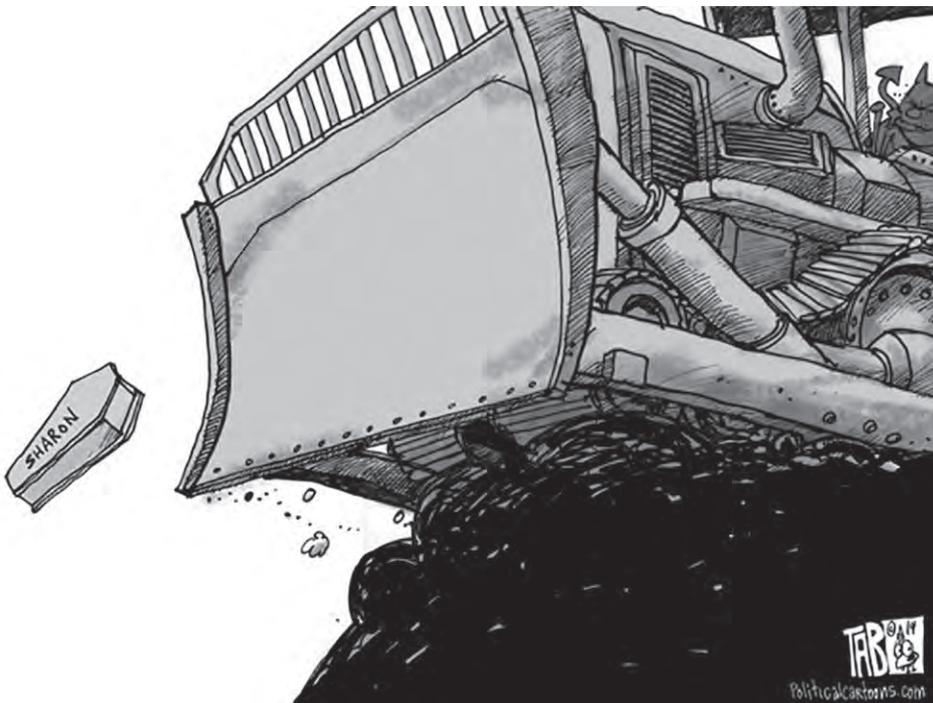
The wall he began has dramatically expanded in subsequent years to become a series of fortifications—from new wall-building ventures such as the recent bid to separate Israel from Egypt to missile defense systems like Iron Dome—designed to turn Israel into an invulnerable “Jewish fortress.”

Yet, in the months before he fell into a long-term vegetative state in early 2006, many analysts were all too ready to revise their assessments of Sharon. In death, he is again being feted as the military hawk who ended his days a “man of peace.”

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth, according to Klein and Warschawski.

The reason cited for reassessing Sharon’s legacy is his decision to withdraw some 7,000 Jewish settlers, as well as the soldiers protecting them, from the Gaza Strip, in the so-called “disengagement” of 2005.

This move was widely interpreted as Sharon’s first brave step in a process intended to end the occupation so that a Palestinian state could be born. In reality, however, it represented something equally dramatic but far more cynical.



Warschawski says the disengagement marked a strategic shift in Sharon's thinking, one still influencing Israel's approach to the occupied territories.

"Sharon finally accepted that the Palestinians could not be made to disappear. He wanted a Greater Israel but understood that he could not expel the Palestinians to achieve it."

He also understood, adds Klein, that Israel could not afford to maintain, long term, a direct reoccupation of the West Bank—either in terms of the financial cost or the expected price in soldiers' lives.

Instead, Sharon devised what Warschawski calls the "Swiss cheese model." "He treated the region like a big block of Swiss cheese, with Israel as the cheese and the Palestinians as the holes. Any bits he did not care about could belong to the Palestinians. It was about creating cantons, and the largest was Gaza."

Sharon appreciated, says Klein, that the disengagement was a boon to Israel's image, looking, as it did to many outsiders, like an end to the occupation of Gaza and a prelude to similar moves in the West Bank.

Instead, the occupation of Gaza continued, but from arm's length.

### "Sharon's real enemy"

The reality, adds Klein, was that the disengagement set in motion two achievements that severely harmed Palestinian interests.

First, it helped to undermine Palestinian nationalism—the real enemy for Sharon.

By withdrawing from Gaza, observes Klein, Sharon entrenched its physical separation from the West Bank. Parallel moves, banning the Palestinian

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**Sharon upheld a view that "the borders are wherever Israelis plant the last tree, or plough the last furrow."**

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Authority and the Islamic movement Hamas from East Jerusalem, would further isolate the Palestinians into three disconnected territories.

Today, Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are increasingly losing a sense of an overarching national project, and are instead developing along different political trajectories.

The physical separation has usefully divided the Palestinian national movement, with the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority nominally in charge of the West Bank, Gaza run by Hamas, and an orphaned East Jerusalem struggling under hostile Israeli rule.

Second, Sharon was able to focus on the West Bank—the real prize—and his efforts to turn the Palestinian Authority from a government-in-waiting into a "sub-contractor" of the occupation. The key to this was manipulating the succession so that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would be followed by the weak Mahmoud Abbas.

"After he disengaged from Gaza, Sharon preferred that a strong group—Hamas—take control internally to prevent chaos," says Klein. "But in the West Bank he did not want a strong leader. That was why he was so against Arafat, who he saw as a demon.

"Operation Defensive Shield [in 2002] was about crushing the Palestinian Authority. When he later succeeded in bringing Abbas to power, he knew he would co-operate on security matters, that he would serve as a sub-contractor. In that way, Israel got to control all of the West Bank."

Warschawski, however, points out that Sharon fell into a coma too early to have foreseen many of the events that now overshadow current peace efforts.

"The world has changed since then, as has this region. There has been the decline of U.S. hegemony, and the return of Russia as a regional power. China and India are also waiting in the wings. And then the Arab revolts have to be accounted for. Sharon saw none of that coming."

—Jonathan Cook: *the View from Nazareth*, January 11, 2013

<http://www.jonathan-cook.net/2014-01-11/the-legacy-of-ariel-the-bulldozer-sharon/>



## Fracking is Depleting Water Supplies in America's Driest Areas

From Texas to California, drilling for oil and gas is using billions of gallons of water in the country's most drought-prone areas

By SUZANNE GOLDENBERG

America's oil and gas rush is depleting water supplies in the driest and most drought-prone areas of the country, from Texas to California, new research has found.

Of the nearly 40,000 oil and gas wells drilled since 2011, three-quarters were located in areas where water is scarce, and 55 percent were in areas experiencing drought, the report by the Ceres investor network found.

Fracking those wells used 97 billion gallons of water, raising new concerns about unforeseen costs of America's energy rush.

"Hydraulic fracturing is increasing competitive pressures for water in some of the country's most water-stressed and drought-ridden regions," said Mindy Lubber, president of the Ceres green investors' network.

Without new tougher regulations on water use, she warned industry could be on a collision course" with other water users.

"It's a wake-up call," said Prof James Famiglietti, a hydrologist at the University of California, Irvine. "We understand as a country that we need more energy but it is time to have a conversation about what impacts there are, and do our best to try to minimize any damage."

It can take millions of gallons of fresh water to frack a single well, and much of the drilling is tightly concentrated in areas where water is in chronically short supply, or where there have been multi-year droughts.

Half of the 97 billion gallons of water was used to frack wells in Texas, which has experienced severe drought for

years—and where production is expected to double over the next five years.

Farming and cities are still the biggest users of water, the report found. But it warned the added demand for fracking in the Eagle Ford, at the heart of the Texas oil and gas rush, was hitting small, rural communities hard.

"Shale producers are having significant impacts at the county level, especially in smaller rural counties with limited water infrastructure capacity," the report said. "With water use requirements for shale producers in the Eagle Ford already high and expected to double in the coming ten years, these rural counties can expect severe water stress challenges in the years ahead."

Local aquifer levels in the Eagle Ford formation have dropped by up to 300 feet over the last few years.

A number of small communities in Texas oil and gas country have already run out of water or are in danger of running out of water in days, pushed to the brink by a combination of drought and high demand for water for fracking.

Twenty-nine communities across Texas could run out of water in 90 days, according to the Texas commission on environmental quality. Many reservoirs in west Texas are at only 25 percent capacity.

Nearly all of the wells in Colorado (97 percent) were located in areas where most of the

ground and surface water is already stretched between farming and cities, the report said. It said water demand for fracking in the state was expected to double to 6 billion gallons by 2015—or about twice as much as the entire city of Boulder uses in a year.

In California, where a drought emergency was declared last month, 96 percent of new oil and gas wells were located in areas where there was already fierce competition for water.

The pattern holds for other regions caught up in the oil and gas rush. Most of the wells in New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming were also located in areas of high water stress, the report said.

Some oil and gas producers were beginning to recycle water, especially in the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania, the report said. But it said those savings were too little to offset the huge demand for water for fracking in the coming years.

—*theguardian.com*, February 5, 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/feb/05/fracking-water-america-drought-oil-gas>



## Mentally Ill in South Carolina's Prisons Suffer Decades of Abuse and Neglect

BY JEAN CASELLA AND JAMES RIDGEWAY

A court ruling out of South Carolina this week deserves the attention of anyone concerned with the use of solitary confinement and other brutal conditions and practices on the hundreds-of-thousands of people with mental illness who are held in our nation's prisons. The best reporting on the ruling comes from *The Atlantic's* Andrew Cohen, in a lengthy piece titled "When Good People Do Nothing: The Appalling Story of South Carolina's Prisons."

"On Wednesday, in one of the most wrenching opinions you will ever read, a state judge in Columbia ruled that South Carolina prison officials were culpable of pervasive, systemic, unremitting violations of the state's constitution by abusing and neglecting mentally ill inmates. The judge, Michael Baxley, a decorated former legislator, called it the "most troubling" case he ever had seen and I cannot disagree. Read the ruling.<sup>1</sup> It's heartbreaking.

"The evidence is now sadly familiar to anyone who follows these

cases: South Carolina today mistreats these ill people without any evident traces of remorse. Even though there are few disputed material issues of law or fact in the case, even though the judge implored the state to take responsibility for its conduct, South Carolina declared before the sun had set Wednesday that it would appeal the ruling—and thus likely doom the inmates to years more abuse and neglect. That's not just "deliberate indifference," the applicable legal standard in these prison abuse cases. That is immoral.

"But what makes this ruling different from all the rest—and why it deserves to become a topic of national conversation—is the emphasis Judge Baxley placed upon the failure of the good people of South Carolina to remedy what they have known was terribly wrong since at least 2000. Where was the state's medical community while the reports piled up chronicling the mistreatment of these prisoners? Where was the state's legal community as government lawyers walked into court year

after year with frivolous defenses for prison policies? Where were the religious leaders, the ones who preach peace and goodwill?

"No one in power came forward. Even as the evidence became more clear and compelling that something horrible was happening inside those prisons."

Cohen delves into the history of the problem, from the early 1990s, when "South Carolina did reasonably good job of caring for its mentally ill prisoners," through decades of growing prison populations and decreasing budgets for prison healthcare. He traces more than a decade of scathing reports, lawsuits, and whistleblower efforts that clearly documented what was going on in South Carolina's prisons.

Judge Baxley wrote in his opinion: "The evidence in this case has proved that inmates have died in the South Carolina Department of Corrections for lack of basic mental healthcare, and hundreds more remain substantially at risk for serious physical injury, mental decomposition, and profound, permanent mental illness." Cohen provides more detail as to "what these words mean:"

"They mean that one mentally ill inmate, James Wilson, was kept in solitary confinement for at least 2,491 consecutive days. It means that an intellectually disabled (and schizophrenic) man named Jerome Laudman was abused and neglected, and then left to rot in his own feces and vomit, until he died of a heart attack. It means that force was used 81 times on a severely mentally ill inmate named James Howard. It means that some mentally ill inmates were restrained at length in what they called a 'crucifix position.'



“It means some mentally ill prisoners were ‘routinely placed’ naked ‘in shower stalls, rec cages, interview booths, and holding cells for hours and even days at a time.’ It means that suicidal prisoners who were supposed to be receiving anti-psychotic medication were not receiving them. No surprise, the judge wrote, since SCDC’s ‘computer system cannot retrieve the names or numbers of all inmates referred’ for mental health treatment, ‘the number of inmates who have made serious suicide attempts; or the number of inmates whose psychotropic medications have expired without being timely renewed.’

“It means that mentally ill inmates are routinely caged for days in their own feces and urine, having to eat literally where they shit. It means, Judge Baxley wrote that ‘the deposition testimony of some psychiatrists reveals an alarming lack of knowledge about the policies and procedures at SCDC.’ One such psychiatrist did not know ‘what mental health counselors do, and had no idea who drafted treatment plans’ for inmates. And even if the mental health professionals knew what they were doing, they wouldn’t have been able to do much. The ratio of inmates needing treatment to professionals able to provide it was astronomically high.”

The article, which combines solid facts with appropriate outrage, can be read in full here<sup>2</sup>. Cohen concludes: “This epic ruling forces South Carolina, and the rest of us, to make a choice about what we want our prisons to say about who we are as a people and what we represent as a civilized society.”

—*Solitary Watch*, January 11, 2014

<http://solitarywatch.com/2014/01/11/mentally-ill-south-carolinas-prisons-suffer-decades-abuse/>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mentalhealth4inmates.org/docudpot/T%20R%20et%20al%20v%20SCDC%20final%20order%20and%20judgment%20for%20Plaintiffs%2028Richard%29%2001-08-14.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/01/when-good-people-do-nothing-the-appalling-story-of-south-carolinas-prisons/282938/>

## Women In Solitary Confinement

### Buried Inside the Federal Prison System

BY VICTORIA LAW

This past September, in response to continued criticism around its use of solitary confinement, the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) began an internal audit of its “restricted housing operations.” As noted earlier by *Solitary Watch*, no women’s prisons are listed in the Scope of Work provided by the team hired to conduct the Special Housing Unit Review and Assessment. The BOP’s Public Information Office was unable to comment on this apparent omission.

Although they are absent from the audit, each women’s prison has its own Special Housing Unit (SHU) where people are locked into their cell 23 ½ to 24 hours each day. In some cases, women are confined because of behavioral problems or rules violations. But the BOP also has a recent history of isolating people based solely on their political beliefs.

In 1986, the BOP opened a segregated unit specifically for women political prisoners. It was built in the basement of the federal prison at Lexington, Kentucky. “I looked around and was overcome by the sheer whiteness of the space,” recalled former political prisoner Susan Rosenberg in her memoir *An American Radical*. “It was a bright, gleaming artificial white, the kind of white that with any lengthy exposure could almost sear your eyeballs. It was the kind of white that can make you go mad.” Rosenberg and Alejandrina Torres, a member of the Puerto Rican independence movement who had been sentenced to 35 years for plotting the bombings of U.S. military bases, were the first two women transferred to the unit. They were later joined by political prisoner Silvia Baraldini and two women not convicted of political actions, Debra Brown and Sylvia Brown. They had no

contact with the rest of the prison population.

Prison officials labeled this a High Security Unit. Rosenberg described conditions in the High Security Unit:

“Every day was filled with confrontations between us and the COs [correctional officers] over every human need: getting hot water for a cup of instant coffee, taking a shower, going outside, getting medical attention, getting a book. We were allowed to come out of our cells and talk with each other but stayed locked on the tier, not allowed beyond the gates. There was a camera at each end of the tier and three gates between the end of the tier and a hall that led to the rest of the unit. Our cells had windows we could see out of only by standing on tiptoe on the bed; the view was of shrubs at ground level in the main inner courtyard of the prison.”

Human rights advocates, attorneys, family members and outside supporters launched a campaign to shut the unit down while the women filed suit. In 1988, following Rosenberg’s testimony in court, a judge ordered the unit closed immediately. The women were transferred to other federal prisons.

While the High Security Unit was shut down, the practice of solitary confinement continues inside every women’s prison. The Federal Medical Center at Carswell, Texas, opened in July 1994 with an Administrative Maximum Unit for women who are labeled “special management concerns” because of escape attempts, violence or other behavioral problems. But, as in the High Security Unit, women imprisoned for their political actions, such as war resister Helen Woodson, eco-activist Chelsea Gerlach and Pakistani national Dr. Aafiyah Siddiqui, have also been confined there. Not much is

known about the unit other than that the women are entirely separated from the larger prison population and are often subject to lockdowns.

Other federal women's prisons have Special Housing Units where people cycle in and out. However, as the BOP's Special Housing Unit Review and Assessment indicates, these units have garnered much less attention and outrage than SHUs in men's prisons.

Lashonia Etheridge-Bey has had repeated experiences with the SHU at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut (the prison made famous by the *Netflix* series *Orange is the New Black*). Etheridge-Bey recalls that the SHU was always overcrowded, forcing prison staff to place two people in each cell. "At some points, they were so overcrowded that we'd be triple bunked with one woman sleeping on the floor," she recalled. The women stayed in their cells nearly twenty-four hours a day. Women did their best to get along under such cramped conditions. "You couldn't just move to a different cell unless there was a physical fight," Etheridge remembered. "You were just stuck."

Staff shortages prevented the women from being taken outside to the yard during the scant hours they were allotted for out-of-cell recreation. Instead, they were taken from their cell to another cell. "It was just an empty cell. There was nothing in it," she stated. Women were not allowed to bring

any of their personal property with them. Women passed the time by talking to each other or by reading the books from the cart brought around by staff members on a weekly basis.

The overcrowding too led to longer stays in the SHU. Etheridge-Bey recalled being written up and sent to the SHU for smoking a cigarette. (The federal Bureau of Prisons banned smoking in 2004.) Although her sentence was twenty days, she spent another 22 days in the SHU waiting for a bed to open up in general population.

In Florida, Yraida Guanipa experienced being locked in two separate SHUs. In 1996, shortly after her trial, she was sent to the SHU at the federal prison in Miami. Guanipa recalls that, even before her arrest, she had experienced years of problems with her menstrual periods. During her trial, her bleeding was so heavy that her trial had to be put on hold. Nevertheless, while incarcerated in Miami, she was told that the Bureau of Prisons would not provide medical services unless there was an emergency. "I told people I was bleeding too much, but no one listened," she recalled.

At the time, Guanipa worked in the prison kitchen. "I spent ten to fourteen hours a day standing on my feet and doing dishes," she said. One Sunday, she informed her supervisor that she had been heavily bleeding for a week and requested medical attention. He refused. Guanipa then told him that, if she could not receive medical care, she

wanted to go to mass. "My supervisor told me that I could not go to mass and that I could not go to medical, so I refused to do the dishes," she stated. Guanipa was sent to the SHU for "disobeying a direct order."

The SHU in Miami took up one floor inside the prison

building, Guanipa remembers. "There was a small window in the wall at the top so at least you could see the light. And you can hear noise." Oftentimes, that noise was the sound of other people screaming. "Many had mental health issues. There would be someone screaming all day or pounding her head against the wall." When the women screamed, the officer on duty would simply tell them to shut up. Only when medication was dispensed would the screaming stop—but only temporarily.

After being transferred to the Federal Correctional Camp in Coleman, Florida, Guanipa submitted requests for more programs for moms to be able to spend time with their children. She received no response. "The Bureau of Prisons rules state that when a prisoner goes on hunger strike, she is supposed to be placed in a medical institution, not solitary confinement," she recalled. "So, being the trusting person that I am, I believed them." Fed up with the lack of programs and lack of response, Guanipa went on hunger strike in 1999. In response, BOP officials transferred her to the federal prison in Tallahassee where she was placed in the SHU. "It was solitary confinement inside solitary confinement," she remembered. "Those cells are just for one person. Other SHU cells [such as the ones in Miami] are for two people, so at least you can talk to someone. It was the worst inside the worst."

Inside the one person cell was a sink and a toilet. Guanipa remembered that prison staff did not provide her with water. "The only water you could get is the water from the sink, which is next to the toilet. It smelled awful."

After 16 days on hunger strike inside Tallahassee's SHU, Guanipa passed out. She was taken to the hospital inside the prison where a nurse told her that her kidneys were failing and administered an IV. Less than a week later, Guanipa was returned to the



SHU where she remained for another two weeks.

“The SHU was separated from the rest of the prison in its own building. Within that building, there’s the ‘solitary confinement inside the solitary confinement,’” she described. Unlike the SHU in Miami there were no windows. “You don’t hear anything, you don’t see anything. I was afraid I was going to lose my mind.”

Twice a day, the prison psychologist walked past the SHU cells. “But in the SHU, if you tell a doctor you’re feeling suicidal, they put you in a worse situation—in the hole without your clothes on, so you don’t say anything,” she said.

When she was finally released from the SHU, the experience had shaken her to the core. “I was so scared after that that I vowed never to do another hunger strike again,” she said.

As in state prisons, women who report sexual assault by staff are punished with solitary confinement. Guanipa recalled a woman whom she met at FCI Tallahassee who had been sexually abused by an officer. After the officer ejaculated on her, she took the evidence to the investigative unit. The prison responded by placing her in the SHU, then transferring her to a different prison. Guanipa never saw her again, although she did see the officer regularly. Nothing happened to him.

When asked about the practice of solitary confinement, Guanipa, who has been out of prison since 2007, declared, “It doesn’t serve any purpose. It’s derogatory. It scars you for the rest of your life. You lose the capacity to communicate. I would not recommend this type of treatment for any human beings or for animals. It’s torture.”

—*Solitary Watch*, January 24, 2014

<http://solitarywatch.com/2014/01/24/women-solitary-confinement-buried-inside-federal-prison-system/#more-11918>

## Why American Courtrooms Are Dangerous Places for Young Blacks

Going to trial can be a dangerous gamble, as the harrowing tale of Travion Blount shows

BY CHARLOTTE SILVER

January 20, 2014—Before leaving office last week, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell commuted Travion Blount’s sentence of six life terms plus 118 years, to 40 years. Blount had been convicted of taking part in an armed robbery that resulted in no serious injuries and netted him \$60 and a few joints.

Blount was 15 years old when the original sentence was handed down to him after a two-day trial in 2007. The sentence survived two appeals: first in Virginia’s Court of Appeals, and then in the Virginia Supreme Court. According to a statement by his secretary to the *Virginian Pilot*, McDonnell considered the 40-year sentence a “just punishment.” But for Blount, his family, and his lawyer, John Coggeshall, the commutation that was announced is not a victory for justice.

“On any measure, it’s a positive step. But that’s all it is, a first step,” Coggeshall told *AlterNet*. According to McDonnell’s “conditional pardon,” Blount will live the next four decades in a maximum-security prison, nearly ten hours away from his family. But Coggeshall says his fight for a fairer sentence for his client is not over.

How did a Virginia courtroom place a young teenager in a maximum-security prison with no chance of making it out alive? Like most other states in the 1990s, Virginia made it much easier to try a juvenile as an adult. Furthermore, the harsh sentence reflects mandatory sentencing laws that helped bloat Virginia’s—and the nation’s—prison population over the last 30 years, as well as the pernicious degradation of the right to trial throughout the country.

Virginia’s incarceration rate is one of the highest in the country. Mirroring the rest of the country, those behind bars are disproportionately Black: Virginia’s African-American population is just 20 percent of the state’s total, but they represent around 60 percent of state prison inmates and 47 percent of all arrests, according to the Justice Policy Institute. Similar overrepresentation of African Americans occurs among youth arrests and incarceration rates.

In 2006, 15-year-old Travion Blount decided to join two 18-year-old friends who were planning to rob a local drug dealer’s home in Norfolk, Virginia. A few days later, all three youths were apprehended. Blount was eventually convicted of 49 criminal offenses, sufficient to lock him up for the rest of his life.

An interactive breakdown of the 20-minute robbery demonstrates how each of Blount’s movements—as recounted by the victims—translates to distinct crimes, each contributing to his outsized sentence. As he moved through rooms in the house, waving his alleged gun at 12 individuals at the party, the count-ticker was running: for each person, he got one count for abduction, one for attempted robbery, one for use of firearm, and so on. Of note, according to Coggeshall, the guns alleged to have been at the crime have yet to be recovered, and in any case were likely to have been fake.

The interactive map does not, however, show the fatal mistake Blount made eight years ago: he did not accept the plea bargain offered to him.

Coggeshall says Blount believed that because he was a juvenile, he could not be locked away past the age of 21. This

belief was wholly based on a fiction called “juvenile life,” that is commonly bandied about among detainees and others in juvenile facilities.

Prosecutors placed a “bargain” on the table of 18 years, but “I’m sure I could have negotiated it down, if I’d been given the chance,” Coggeshall told *AlterNet*.

The two other teens who planned the robbery, who were older than Blount by three years, escaped the hammer of Virginia’s judicial system by dutifully accepting the plea bargain offered to them; both will be released from their prison terms within the next five years.

At the time Coggeshall pleaded with Blount to accept the deal, and according to reports, so did the judge: “This is an incredible gamble, this trial is,” Judge Charles Griffith told Coggeshall and prosecutor Amy Cross before the trial began 2007.

Approximately 95 percent of cases in the United States are resolved with plea bargains. “Criminal justice today is for the most part a system of pleas, not a system of trials,” wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy in the majority opinion of *Lafler v. Cooper* in 2012. The ubiquity of plea bargains has effectively done away with our entitlement

to the Sixth Amendment by penalizing those individuals who go to trial: even the judge knew that a plea bargain would be the only means of delivering anything resembling a fair sentence.

John Coggeshall knew a trial would result in calamity for Blount—a poor black youth affiliated with a violent gang, with 12 witnesses ready to testify against him. “He was just a kid.”

Coggeshall first met Blount at Virginia’s Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. “It was my duty day. I was appointed his attorney. That’s where the case started.”

But the case was quickly transferred to criminal court, where all juveniles accused of anything “heavy duty,” Coggeshall explains, “including robbery, murder, malicious wounding, get sent.”

“Years ago you could appeal to a judge to convince him to keep a case in the juvenile jurisdiction, but the ways the laws are written now, it’s out of the judge’s hands.”

According to a report commissioned by the Department of Justice in 1997, between 1992 and 2000, 45 states passed or amended legislation to make it easier to prosecute juveniles as adults. Today, 2,500 to 3000 juveniles in America have been sentenced to life imprisonment

without the possibility of parole. A large portion of these sentences occurred between 1993 and 1998, when juvenile transfers to adult courts surged.

According to the Sentencing Project, prosecutors’ aggressive trying of juveniles as adults has waned since 2000. But there is still a long way to go, as the case of Blount demonstrates. While the Supreme Court ruled in *Graham v. Florida* in 2010 that juveniles could not be sentenced to life without parole in non-homicidal cases, some states, like Virginia, have found a way around implementing the ruling.

“Virginia has refused to recognize that they have life without parole sentences,” Steven Chu, a lawyer with the Equal Justice Initiative, told *AlterNet*.

“They rely on their geriatric release provision, which was passed around the same time as their ‘truth in sentencing’ laws. In theory, a juvenile sentenced to life has the possibility of being released on geriatric parole when he turns 60. This provision allows the state to say they are in compliance with the *Graham* decision while still sentencing children with life sentences.”

Travion Blount is one of at least 22 people in Virginia serving life without parole for crimes they committed as juveniles that did not involve homicide. According to the Campaign for Youth Justice, children as young as seven can be tried in adult court in 23 states, making them subject to harsh adult sanctions.

During the mitigation phase of Blount’s sentencing, Coggeshall says he provided copious amounts of evidence that should have led the judge to lessen the sentence, including evidence indicating Blount was merely following the orders of his older, influential friends, and psychologists’ opinions that 15- and 18-year-olds have a significant neurological difference in maturity and rationality.

“Because there’s no legislation that says juveniles sentenced to lengthy sentences should get a review,” Coggeshall



said, “there’s nothing in the Commonwealth of Virginia preventing this from happening again.”

Senator Dave Marsden has introduced legislation that would give individuals who were sentenced to life sentences when they were under 18 a chance to stand before a panel of four, after serving at least 20 years of their life sentence.

“This panel would have the authority to reduce the sentence. A law like this could prevent instances like Travion’s from happening again,” Coggeshall said.

Coggeshall told *AlterNet* he hopes to further reduce the time Blount spends in prison, but the first order of business is to get him transferred out of Wallens Ridge, the maximum-security facility he’s been held in for the last five years, which is a prohibitively long distance away from his family and his lawyers.

Earlier this year, after Coggeshall and Norfolk NAACP petitioned the departing governor of Virginia for a conditional pardon, Blount expressed his remorse. In an interview with a local TV station, Blount said in a prison interview, “It feels bad. Not because I got all this time, but now I know it’s not right.”

If the salient facts of this case teach us anything, it’s that a courtroom might be the most dangerous place in the U.S. for a young Black male.

*Charlotte Silver is an independent journalist based in San Francisco. She writes for Al Jazeera English, Inter Press Service, Truthout, the Electronic Intifada and other publications.*

—*AlterNet*, January 20, 2014

[http://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/how-going-trial-can-be-dangerous-gamble-juveniles?akid=11421.229473.PCILr\\_&rd=1&src=newsletter949443&t=4](http://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/how-going-trial-can-be-dangerous-gamble-juveniles?akid=11421.229473.PCILr_&rd=1&src=newsletter949443&t=4)

## Private Probation Companies Extort Payments from Poor Defendants

**Human Rights Watch finds more than 1,000 courts across the south delegate huge coercive power to private, unregulated companies**

BY AARON CANTÚ

Private probation companies and local courts are colluding to hustle low-income misdemeanants across the South out of tens-of-millions of dollars in legal fees and fines, and jailing those who cannot pay, says a new report today released by Human Rights Watch.

HRW found that in some states, especially Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, probation has been repurposed to resemble a debt-collection service, in which poor defendants who cannot pay their court fines are placed on probation with private companies that aggressively try to extract payment regardless of defendants’ abilities to meet financial obligations. While on probation with a private company, a defendant must pay court fines in addition to company supervision fees.

If probationers fail to make payments on time, companies prepare arrest warrants that must be signed by a judge. HRW revealed that many local judges approve such warrants without scrutiny or even with complicity, despite a legal obligation to consider defendants’ financial standing.

Once misdemeanants are jailed, they are often pummeled with even more fines and fees by the court, and their probation sentences are extended in order to lengthen collection time. The Brennan Center for Justice previously compared the entrapment of poor probationers in this cycle of debt to the system of debtor’s prisons in the 19th century.

*AlterNet* previously reported on the legal scandals incited by some of the

larger companies within the private probation industry.

HRW issued a number of recommendations for state governments to reassess how probation companies are regulated. Overall, the advocacy group suggests that courts be prohibited from imposing supervision fees on probationers when they cannot pay court fines upfront, that a public entity assess probationers’ abilities to pay (rather than a probation company), and that the state conduct more frequent audits of the industry’s collection practices. HRW also implores probation companies to publish data on how much money they collect from the defendants they supervise, the number of warrants they issue, and the number of probation sentences they revoke every year.

The report comes at a time when the state legislature in Georgia—ground-zero for the expanding industry—is debating whether to give even more legal authority to probation companies. A bill in the Georgia House of Representatives “would allow companies to request that a judge reinstate supervision, along with fees, even if the original term of probation had run out,” says *NBC*. The bill would also increase companies’ immunity from liability in the event of legal challenges.

—*AlterNet*, February 5, 2014

<http://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/scandal-courts-allow-private-probation-companies-extort-payments-poor-defendants?akid=11479.229473.zelU4i&rd=1&src=newsletter955161&t=8>

# Prosecuting Black Victims

BY MARGARET KIMBERLEY

The United States is a country which openly and unashamedly targets Black people for police surveillance, prosecution, incarceration and death. Racism is the fuel which feeds the monster of criminal injustice, making a mockery of any claims of democracy and equal treatment under the law.

Those words are backed up by cold, hard facts. The United States has the dubious distinction of putting both a greater percentage of its population and the largest number of people overall in jail and prison than any other country in the world. The country with five percent of the world's population has 25 percent of all prisoners. Black Americans, who make up roughly 13 percent of the population are 38 percent of all those behind bars.

The situation has always been an ugly one for Black people when faced with the wickedness of the law enforcement system. Many people have been brutalized by police only to have insult added to injury and been charged with resisting arrest or assaulting an officer. While the tactic isn't new, the punishments are becoming more cruel and indefensible.

On September 14, 2013 in New York City, a mentally ill man, Glenn Broadnax, walked into vehicular traffic in Times Square. There are laws against this behavior and rightly so. Unfortunately officers of the New York City police department, trained to be trigger happy, fired at Broadnax, claiming that they thought he had a gun. Broadnax was brought down with a police Taser but New York's so-called finest also shot and injured two innocent bystanders in their efforts to subdue him.

Now Manhattan's district attorney, Cyrus Vance Jr., has chosen to prosecute Broadnax for assaulting the two victims who were in fact shot by the police. Broadnax has a history of mental illness and put himself in danger

more than he did anyone else. He was originally charged with menacing, drug possession and resisting arrest. Prosecuting him lets the police off the hook and aids the city of New York in defense against law suits, but a man guilty of not taking his prescribed medication is facing the possibility of up to 25 years in prison because of an act carried out by other people.

The Broadnax story isn't even the worst case of police abuse turned against a victim. On January 10, 2010, 18-year-old Kwadir Felton was shot in the head by a Jersey City, New Jersey police man and blinded as a result. He was recently tried and convicted of assaulting the officer and faces a possible penalty of 35 years in prison.

The case against Felton is an outrage and should be well known around the country. It ought to be a rallying cry for anyone who wants justice and equal treatment for all citizens. Instead his story is just a blurb on the police blotter in the local paper.

The district attorney of New York County is an elected official and the Hudson County, New Jersey, prosecutor is appointed by the governor. As such they ought to be accountable to the people on whose behalf they file charges. Unfortunately there is no organized citizen constituency that keeps them from committing prosecutorial abuse. There should be groups of Black elected officials, attorneys, and activist citizens prepared to voice disapproval when prosecutors run amok in their quest to find more Black lives to destroy. If this were so, these egregious cases would not see the light of day.

Prosecutors are rewarded for misconduct and overreach in part because the Black misleadership class is unconcerned with the plight of the people who are targeted by the system. Mentally ill men and teenagers shot by

the police don't rank on their list of priorities. If district attorneys knew that they would face opposition at the ballot box or an outcry from the public and prominent people, Felton and Broadnax would not be facing jail time now.

The state of New Jersey has a NAACP and Black office holders and groups of attorneys but none of these organizations or individuals took action to make Kwadir Felton's name a household word and his cause a rallying cry. Protest and publicity could not only have stopped this gruesome punishment from being carried out but might also have forced the police officer who blinded Felton to face justice himself.

As for the Manhattan district attorney, he should have feared that prosecuting Broadnax would endanger his chances of successfully running for reelection later this year. The harsh prosecution facing Mr. Broadnax should have been unthinkable, but there is no one to speak up for him. New York City is full of the high and mighty and famous but if they don't raise their voices to speak up for those on the lowest rungs of society, their prominence is worthless.

How many more Feltons are serving hard time because they were victimized? The American gulag has a voracious appetite indeed. If all the victims of brutality were to be heard, the protest would be endless.

Kwadir Felton is scheduled to be sentenced on January 14, 2014. It is late in the process to stage protest or advocate for lenience but it would be even worse if he were imprisoned amidst silence. Endless protest should be the order of the day.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 6, 2014

<http://www.Blackagendareport.com/content/freedom-rider-prosecuting-Black-victims>

# Obama, the State of the Union and the Prison State

BY BRUCE A. DIXON

January 29, 2014—In the days before this year’s State of the Union address, we heard a lot about how Barack Obama was finally about to unleash the mighty executive powers of his office to accomplish some of the many great things he’s always wanted to accomplish, those mostly unspecified things which evil and immoral Republicans have prevented him from doing. From long experience dating back at least to the Clinton era, the White House and Democratic party know this is an attractive picture to many, one that conveniently excuses Democrats in office from even trying to accomplish the real demands of the millions who vote them into office.

Barack Obama campaigned in 2007 and 2008 saying he would pass legislation raising the minimum wage and making it easier to organize unions so people could stand up for their own rights in the workplace. The president apparently lied. Once in office with a thumping majority in both houses of Congress the president promptly froze the wages of federal workers, and made no move to protect union organizing or to raise the minimum wage. Four and five years later, with the House of Representatives safely under Republican control, the president has begun to make noises about how “America deserves a raise” and has finally declared that federal contract workers will soon have to be paid a minimum of \$10.10 per hour.

Although Barack Obama’s career, and those of the entire Black political class are founded on the notion that they and the Democratic party somehow “represent” the aspirations and political power of African Americans, the policy concerns of Black America were nowhere to be found in last night’s [January 28, 2014] state of the union. The speech contained no men-

tion of the persistent gap between Black and white unemployment, or the widening gaps between Black and white wealth, and reaffirmed his commitment to “Race To The Top,” an initiative to privatize public education in poorer communities across the country.

And of course, no cluster of issues impact Black America more savagely and disproportionately than police practices, the drug war and the prison state. African Americans are one-eighth the U.S. population, but more than 40 percent of its prisons and jails. Together with Latinos, who are another eighth and make up nearly 30 percent of U.S. prisoners, people of color are a quarter of the U.S. population and more than 70 percent of the locked down. No cluster of issues would benefit more from a few presidential initiatives and well placed strokes of the pen than police practices, the drug war and the prison state.

Here are just a handful of things President Obama and his party could and would do, things that Republicans are powerless to prevent, which would make a large and lasting impact upon the communities they purportedly represent.

With the stroke of a presidential pen, Barack Obama could halt the construction and opening of the new federal supermax prison at ADX Thomson in Illinois, also called “Gitmo North.” Citizen activists in the president’s home state last year managed to close down the state’s brutal supermax prison at Tamms because they know that supermax prisons do not rehabilitate, they are instruments of torture pure and simple. Ordinary citizens know that torture should not be a career, or a business governments engage in. Even Obama’s own Bureau of Prisons is on record as wanting to examine whether

the regimes in supermax prisons across the country constitute torture. It’s time to look for that presidential pen.

The president could take public notice of the alarming militarization of police forces across the country and the wave of police shootings of civilians. Far more persons die in the U.S. of police gunfire than of terrorist incidents and school shootings. The feds play an enormous role in the funding, training and arming of thousands of local police departments across the country, through its grants to the state-level training and certification agencies, and its authorization of the sale of military equipment to police departments. The result is that every county and town in the U.S. now has a SWAT team, employing shoot-first-question-later tactics, and although African Americans are far from the only victims of unchecked police violence, a Black person is killed by police, security officers or vigilantes once every 28 hours. Again, this is a case for a presidential statement, a few orders to underlings and that mighty executive pen.

The president could order his Justice Department to reconsider its objections to the retroactive reduction of unfair and disproportionate sentences to crack cocaine defendants. When the president signed the so-called Fair Sentencing Act reducing the crack to powder cocaine penalty ratio from 100 to 1 to 18 to 1 thousands of defendants should have been eligible for immediate release. But Obama’s and Eric Holder’s Justice Departments have gone to court repeatedly to keep them behind bars. Our civil rights establishment from the Mark Morials and Al Sharptons down, seem more invested in the prestige of the president than doing justice to prisoners, and so have politely refused to call Obama and Holder on this glaring disconnect

between their public pronouncements and their actual policies. The mighty presidential pen in the hands of Barack Obama could have made a big difference here any time in the last several years, and still can, if only he will.

The president could use his mighty executive powers to release some long-time political prisoners. There's Iman Jamil Al-Amin, the former H. Rap Brown who distinguished himself laying the foundations for what passes for Black political empowerment, risking his life registering voters and conducting Freedom Schools in rural Alabama with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the mid and early 1960s. After repeated attempts by Georgia officials in the 1990s to frame Al-Amin for shootings, one of these stuck long enough to get a shaky conviction in 1999. As pressure for a retrial from local community activists built up and even in the face of protests from establishment figures like former Atlanta mayor, congressman and ambassador Andy Young, Georgia officials transferred Al-Amin into federal custody in the dead of night, and the feds spirited him away to the hellhole at ADX Florence in Colorado where he has been for more than a decade. With a stroke of that mighty executive pen, President Obama could send Al-Amin back to Georgia where his family and attorneys could visit him, and pressure would mount on Georgia authorities to give

him a new trial, in which he might well prove his innocence.

The president could pardon or grant clemency to Leonard Peltier, a Native American leader who has served a decade longer in prison than Nelson Mandela did for an offense that nobody at his trial even alleged he actually committed. Peltier is recognized around the world as a political prisoner. His continued imprisonment shows that many wounds from the 60s and 70s were never healed, and his release would demonstrate that this president acknowledges the need for this healing. After almost 40 years, Leonard Peltier surely deserves to come home.

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**...people of color  
are a quarter of the U.S.  
population and more  
than 70 percent of the  
locked down**

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President Obama could acknowledge the wave of hunger strikes and protests in prisons across the country, and name a commission to investigate how we can reverse the expansion of prisons, guarantee the re-absorption of former prisoners into society, and reverse the culture and law which discriminate against and punish former prisoners and their families for the rest

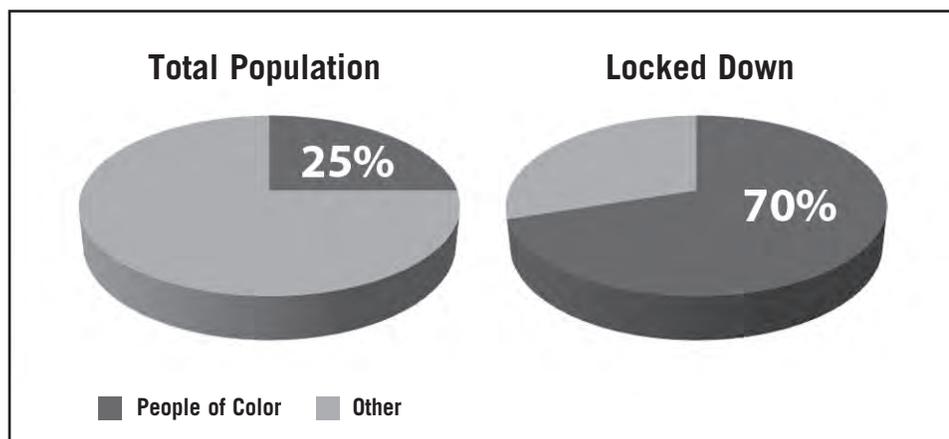
of their lives. Right now a number of prisoners at Menard Penitentiary in the president's home state of Illinois are waging a hunger strike, with demands that differ little from those raised by prisoners in California's Pelican Bay last year, and those in Virginia, Georgia, Ohio and elsewhere.

We must not imagine that rolling back the carceral state is something no government on earth has ever done. Right now in Venezuela, that nation is confronting a crisis of crime, the practical limits of prison expansion, and of what kind of society they want to build. They're taking a different path than so-called "progressives" here, who seem upset only about prisoners who are factually "innocent" and only about prisons if they're privatized. Venezuela is frankly committed to shrinking its prison population and exploring models of restorative rather than punitive justice. There really are other ways to go, if we have the will and the vision our Democrats and Republicans lack.

Obama's Attorney General has learned how to let the words "mass incarceration" roll off his lips fluently, after his recent discovery that such a thing actually exists. The president opined that Trayvon Martin could have been his own son, minus the status, the privilege, the neighborhood and a few other things. But that mighty presidential pen that can call commissions, impose directives, re-set priorities and make all manner of changes by executive order, changes that no evil and immoral Republicans can block or reverse, at least until they re-take the oval office, is still in that desk drawer, or wherever Barack Obama keeps it. He hasn't found it the last five years in office. Maybe he will discover it in these last three.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 29, 2014

<http://BlackAgendaReport.com/content/barack-obama-state-union-and-prison-state>



# A Smoking Gun

## Online DEA Manuals Show How Feds Use NSA Spy Data, Train Local Cops to Construct False Chains of Evidence

BY BRUCE A. DIXON

One of the least remarked upon chunks of Edward Snowden's voluminous revelations about government spying on civilians has been the fact that the Drug Enforcement Administration, the federal police agency created to fight the war on drugs, has funneled illegal NSA surveillance to local police agencies around the country.

New disclosures now allow us to see online the DEA training manuals with which Drug Enforcement Administration agents are taught to coach local police departments across the country how to lie about their chains of evidence and sources, how to willfully violate the law and cover their tracks in thousands or tens-of-thousands of cases every year in order to fill the cells of the U.S. prison state with drug defendants.

This is not hype. This is not exaggeration. It's the literal truth. You can read the DEA's own manuals online at *MuckRock.Org*. *MuckRock.org* is a project funded by the Sunlight Foundation to assist journalists and citizens make and disseminate the results of Freedom of Information Act requests from federal, state and local agencies. Thanks to one such recent request, you can now go to the *MuckRock.Org* site and view copies of the DEA's own training materials. These materials depict an amoral, out of control police regime respecting no Constitution and no laws. DEA agents are told the evidence is unconstitutionally obtained, and that this has to be concealed from prosecutors, judges and above all from the public, some of which is still under the quaint notion that there are laws even cops and prosecutors must obey. The manuals cynically spell out how DEA agents should coach local police departments

to use what they know is illegally obtained information in order to construct false chains of evidence.

This is a literal smoking gun that depicts how the intelligence apparatus seamlessly blends with federal and local cops to prosecute the 40 years failed war on drugs, the greedy front end of the U.S. prison state. It's not "conspiracy theory." It's a fact.

There have been plenty of African American voices who have pooh-poohed the significance of Edward Snowden and his revelations. TV talking heads Joi Ann Reid and Melissa Harris-Perry have called him a traitor and said he ought to be locked up. Congressional buffoons like Representative Jim Clyburn say he only did it to embarrass the Black president, and others insist that his whistleblowing has nothing to do with Black life as we live it.

But chronic over-policing only happens to Black and brown people, and chiefly the poorest of those. Black and

brown people are the majority of drug defendants, charged with stiffer offenses and given longer sentences than white drug defendants. Illegal surveillance, turned into illegal evidence, backed up by an officially-condoned web of lies about how that evidence was obtained, have long been a crucial element in the unfolding of the prison state to enclose poor Black and brown communities.

If Edward Snowden hadn't told us the NSA was gathering this evidence, and the DEA was using it, we'd never have known. So if Snowden is indeed a traitor he betrayed the cops not us. If he's a spy, he's spying for the people, not for the prison state, which is a problem for some of our Black misleadership class.

—*Black Agenda Report*, February 5, 2014

<http://www.Blackagenda.com/content/smoking-gun-online-dea-manuals-show-how-feds-use-nsa-spy-data-train-local-cops-construct-fal>



# 12th Man

BY RAYMOND NAT TURNER

From “Yes, we can” to *The 12th Man*  
The one percent’s calling all the power  
plays—

Bootlegging, blitzing, sacking our  
daze...

Sunday we sat slurping beer,  
Gobbling pizza and buckets  
Of chicken like madmen, ‘til  
Heartburn and boredom set  
In, ‘til The Questions came  
Whizzing past like pockets full  
Of cherry red challenge flags:

Where was The 12th Man  
Shrieking, screaming, loud  
As an Aircraft carrier’s flight  
Deck for Marilyn Buck?

Where was The 12th Man  
Shouting full-throated,

## Loud as Apache and

Blackhawk Helicopters  
For Herman Wallace?

Where’s The 12th Man—  
All 137.6 decibels—  
For Mumia and Maroon?

Where’s The 12th Man—  
Bursting eardrums for  
Whistleblowers Manning,  
Snowden and Assange?

Where’s the quarterback,  
The field general, that  
Comes up to the line  
Barking: ANGOLA  
ATTICA #77A4283

## CUT-CUT-CUT?

Where’s the coach that  
Will argue over calls like  
Leonard Peltier? Or Hugo  
Pinell and Albert Woodfox—  
Four decades in bathroom-  
Sized, windowless, torture  
Chambers, cut off from fresh  
Air, sunlight, Vitamin D  
22-24 hours a day? Cruel,  
Slow deaths, strip sacking  
Spirits, bodies and minds of  
Political prisoners & prisoners  
Of war who, game faces on  
Against water hoses, cattle  
prods, German shepherds,

## Bullets and buckshot,

Took the field for us all  
Quadruple, triple, double  
Overtime, or sudden death,  
This game’s been going  
On too long—  
Where’s the Terrible  
Towels, the Lambeau Leap  
Where’s the raucous carrying  
On in the Dog Pound, boisterous  
Behavior in the Black Hole, where’s  
The Wall of Fame, Ring of Honor  
Where’s The 12th Man for our  
Political prisoners & prisoners of  
war?

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# Legalizing Oppression

## The Case of Lynne Stewart

BY CHRIS HEDGES

The lynching and disbaring of civil rights lawyer Lynne Stewart, who because she has terminal cancer was recently released from prison after serving four years of a 10-year sentence, is a window into the collapse of the American legal system. Stewart—who has stood up to state power for more than three decades in order to give a voice to those whom authorities seek to crush, who has spent her life defending the poor and the marginalized, who wept in court when one of her clients was barred from presenting a credible defense—is everything a lawyer should be in an open society. But we no longer live in an open society. The persecution of Stewart is the persecution of us all.

Stewart, 74, is living with her husband in her son's house in New York City after being released from a Texas prison a month ago. Because she is disbarred she cannot perform any legal work. "Can't even work in a law office," she said softly last week when I interviewed her at the Brooklyn home. "I miss it so terribly. I liked it. I liked the work."

Her career as one of the country's most renowned civil rights lawyers coincided with the fall of our legal system. She said that when she started practicing law in the 1970s it was a "golden era" in which a series of legal decisions—including rulings affecting police lineups and what information and evidence the government had to turn over to defendants on trial—created a chance for a fair defense. But these legal advances were reversed in a string of court decisions that, especially after 9/11, made the state omnipotent. As citizens were stripped of power, she said, "a death of the spirit of the bar" occurred. Lawyers gave up, she said. They no longer saw defending people accused of crime as "a calling, some-

thing that you did because you were answering a higher voice."

"I don't want to make anything a kind of religious thing, it wasn't that, but you know, you defended people because they were up against the mightiest organism in the universe: the government of United States, whether they were state or federal," she said Thursday evening [February 6, 2014] as we sat with her husband, Ralph Poynter, at her son's dining room table.

Stewart, working with former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and lawyer Abdeen Jabara in 1995, was the lead trial counsel for Omar Abdel Rahman, an Egyptian Muslim known as "the Blind Sheikh," who was convicted in October of that year for alleged involvement in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. He received life in prison plus 65 years, a sentence Stewart called "outlandish." She said Abdel Rahman was put on trial not for any crimes he committed but because the Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak, as well as Washington, was frightened of his influence over the Egyptian masses. The United States, along with Egypt, wanted to "take him off the scene" and "get him put away where he would no longer exert the influence he had." The cleric, now 75 and in poor health, is imprisoned in the medical wing of the Butner Federal Correctional Complex in North Carolina.

The court, through numerous rulings, refused to let Stewart mount her defense, ensuring that the government prosecutors would not be challenged. The proceedings were a tawdry show trial, a harbinger of the many judicial assaults against Muslims in the United States after the events of Sept. 11, 2001. I was based in Egypt at the time of the

trial as the Middle East bureau chief for *The New York Times*. I remember being stunned at the repeated mendacity of the government prosecutors, who blamed Abdel Rahman for terrorist attacks he had, in fact, publicly denounced. The prosecutors, for example, accused him of orchestrating the killing of 62 people in 1997 in Luxor, Egypt, although the sheikh at the time condemned the attack and had no connection with the Egyptian group that carried out the massacre. When the guilty verdict was read, Stewart burst into tears, "the only time I ever cried in the courtroom."

Stewart continued to visit the sheikh after the sentencing. Three years after the trial the government severely curtailed his ability to communicate with the outside world, even through his lawyers, under special administrative measures known as SAMs.

Abdel Rahman asked Stewart during a prison visit in 2000 to release a statement from him to the press concerning a negotiated cease-fire between the Egyptian government and militants. The Clinton administration did not prosecute Stewart for conveying the press release, although she was admonished and prohibited from seeing her client for several months. The Bush administration, however, in April 2002, with the country baying for blood after the attacks of 9/11, decided to prosecute her for the two-year-old press release. Stewart says she never expected to be charged for releasing the press statement.

Minutes before her arrest on April 9, 2002, her husband, who later would organize the successful fight to win her a compassionate release from prison after she was diagnosed with breast cancer, was outside on the stoop of

their house, which, she said, “in New York is where you go sit on the steps in the summertime when you can’t afford to go to East Hampton.” She heard him in a heated conversation.

“I go to the door and I hear him saying ‘I don’t see any badge, I don’t see any warrant, what are you doing here, anyway?’” she said.

Assuming Ralph was being arrested, she told him to take it easy, she would have him home by lunchtime.

“I come around the door and the guy looks and says—and he was clearly a cop, you know, the cheap shoes—and he says, ‘We’re not here for you. We’re here for her,’ pointing to me,” she said. “I was flabbergasted.”

FBI agents took her from her home, and she was released later on a \$500,000 bond signed by her three children.

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft came to New York in April 2002 to announce that the Justice Department had indicted Stewart, along with a paralegal and an interpreter, on grounds of materially aiding a terrorist organization. Ashcroft that night went on “Late Show With David Letterman” to tell the nation of the indictment as part of the Bush administration’s “war on terror.”

In Stewart’s trial the government again endlessly spewed myths about Islamic terrorism. It demanded a staggering 30-year sentence. U.S. District Judge John Koeltl instructed the jury more than 750 times that the photos of Osama bin Laden and the 2001 World Trade Center attacks shown to the jury by the government on a 10-by-12-foot screen were not relevant to the case. Stewart was sentenced, to most people’s astonishment, to 28 months.

After the sentencing, Stewart publicly declared that passing along the information from Abdel Rahman had been “based on my understanding of what the client needed, what a lawyer was expected to do” and “was neces-

sary” and that, in the same circumstances, she would “do it again.” Subsequently, a federal appeals court under the Barack Obama administration demanded that the district judge reconsider her sentence. She was handed a new sentence by Koeltl—10 years.

The federal government’s orchestration of fear, Stewart said, has made the country increasingly deferential to authority—especially white, male authority. In the Carswell maximum-security prison, the women’s facility where she was incarcerated, she heard numerous accounts of gross injustices endured by poor women. She frequently asked some of these women why they had not demanded a trial rather than submit to a plea deal, or why they had not stood up and proclaimed their innocence. The answer, she said, was always the same: “I was afraid. I was afraid.”

She blames the wrecking of the legal system, in part, on the skyrocketing costs of law school. Law graduates, she said, have to “mortgage their souls in order to go to law school.” When she applied to Rutgers Law School in 1971 the school’s commitment to making sure half the class was women allowed her to get a scholarship. The financial aid, along with the low state tuition, made it possible for her to attend.

In later years she operated a law practice in Greenwich Village for poor clients. Her office was above her husband’s motorcycle shop on the ground floor. “I could take whatever pay stub I wanted,” she said.

The rise of corporate-backed organizations and think tanks designed to veer every public institution away from traditional liberal democratic values has dismantled our civil society, she said. The right-wing Federalist Society, after its founding in 1982, mounted a frontal assault on the legal system. Stewart, after Stanford University asked her to speak there in 2002, arrived on campus to find that the

Federalist Society had pressured the university to rescind the invitation. Sympathetic students found her a place to talk, and Federalist Society members peppered her with hostile questions at the event. She was able to knock back their verbal harassment because, she said, she was “a trained trial attorney who had been in the business for almost 30 years” at that time.

The federal government by the 1980s, she said, was “mopping up” the remnants of radical activists, many of whom had been underground for years. She and other civil rights attorneys were able to battle on behalf of these political radicals, but by the end of the 1980s the state had finished its hunts for underground activists. And lawyers, Stewart said, “were no longer part of the game.”

Stewart, who spent a decade in the Harlem school system as a librarian before going to law school, said working with those considered by society to be “throwaway kids” meant that she knew the injustices of the system. The system, she said, has “failed them [poor children] from beginning to end.” This failure to provide elemental justice, spawned by the so-called war on drugs and massive rates of incarceration, especially for poor people of color, was soon replicated within the courts in the name of the war on terror. And this corrosion has spread. Basic legal protections, stripped first from the poor and then from Muslims, have been stripped from us all.

I asked Stewart if there had been a specific moment when she lost hope in the judicial system.

“I always believed, Chris, that I could do it,” she said. “You know, it’s like, you’re the last man. You’re like the kicker [when the opposing team is] running the ball back. You’re the only one between the goal post and everything. But I was there. They had to get by me. If they couldn’t get by me, then they couldn’t win. I have enough ego

and belief in myself to say I didn't believe they could do that every time, that I could win, that I could make a difference. I think I did make a difference for a lot of people, even people who got convicted."

The climate in the nation's courtrooms changed irrevocably after 9/11, she said. The occasional victories she and other civil rights lawyers were able to win before then became nearly impossible to replicate.

"The playing field suddenly changed and everything favored the prosecution, certainly in federal cases," she said. "There was no level playing field anymore. It was like if you were the last guy standing and you had to keep them from making the goal you were at the six-inch line trying to do it. It was impossible to stop them. They controlled it. They controlled what the charges were. They controlled whether an adjournment would be given. They determined whether the cooperation is worthy, and everybody must cooperate, and it changed into a very different system, certainly on the federal level."

In her own trial the government presented audio recordings of her meetings with Abdel Rahman in the prison in Rochester, Minnesota. The taping of her conversations, which before the federal Patriot Act would have violated attorney-client privilege, is now legal.

She said of the 9/11 attacks, "We've never explored why. Why does this happen? Why, what compelled 21 young men to give up their lives to do this thing? No, we've never, we don't want to look at that. We don't want to know why."

"We continue the *façade* that we are fair," she said, "that we have this Constitution we respect, and we can rely on, and that we can embrace. You can't do that, that's my constitutional rights, *etc.* When really they're [our constitutional rights] a puff of smoke. They don't really exist."

I asked her what she had learned from being incarcerated.

"I don't think I ever appreciated the unrelenting stress" of being in prison, she said. "That you're always waiting for something to come down. That there's such arbitrary authority. Guard A says, 'Go down those stairs, use the stairs.' Guard B says, 'You can't use the stairs, you're not permitted on the stairs.' And you say, 'But Guard A just said. ...' 'I don't care what he said, this is my rule!' That kind of arbitrary thing, you're always guessing. What does this guy, what does this woman, want me to do? Where am I? Where is this? And that's 24/7."

"You're always on the cusp of doing the wrong thing, or getting in trouble for something," she said. "I wrote a letter for a woman, and in order to make a copy I emailed it to Ralph." She went on: "It was basically asking a judge to stay any decision because they were going to take all of her pension as payment for what she had done. And she wanted to get this letter in right away. So I emailed it to [Ralph] and for that I lost, I think, about three months of commissary, and email."

She said, "It's almost impossible to organize prisoners in this day and age to stand up, to become a unit, to say no to certain things."

"I found it virtually impossible to convince the women at Carswell that they should not be always thinking that what happened to them was personal," she said. "They should be looking at political answers, that where they ended up was not because of some personal lack or weakness but because the political system has designated them to be there as one of the kick-arounds, as one of the not-for-consumption."

"Why do you think that is?" I asked.

"I think ... television has a lot to do with it," she said. "There's a certain idealized life. People that are in trouble get there because they have done it to themselves." She said that many of the

women incarcerated with her lacked self-esteem.

"The women I've left behind" are "the one real shadow on my tremendous joy at being home," she said. "I can no longer even communicate with [them] because the conditions of my probation are that I may not associate with any felons. So I can't even write to dear Mara, what happened with your case? Someone who got 20 years because she sold some heroin and then a guy died a week later, and they used that murder to enhance her sentence, completely contrary to everything we ever learned."

One of the saddest moments in prison, she said, was mail call. The names of those who had letters would be read. Some women "waited for their name to be called and it never happened." Those who did not get mail or visits, she said, "become more and more institutionalized."

"The world of the prison is the only world; the outside world does not exist for them anymore," she said.

"I'm not waiting for the working class to make the revolution," she said. "I think that's a day long gone by. That might have happened in the '30s. It didn't. We have to look at a new way, some new force."

She said that although she is disbarred she will continue to be a catalyst for change. She quoted Rosa Luxemburg, who said that radicals should at once alleviate human misery and do political work. Stewart said she will continue to fight for the some 150 political prisoners, mostly African-Americans, who have been in prison for decades because they belonged to radical groups such as the Black Panthers or the Black Liberation Army.

"My other goal is not to turn my back on the women in prison," she said.

She stressed the importance of community.

## Abandonment

BY TORREY REAL

“The most important thing is don’t let yourself get isolated,” she said. “Don’t feel that you’re the only one in the room that thinks this way and you must be crazy or something, and they’re going to get you because you’re the only one. Find the other people who think like you. They’re out there. There are people out there. There are groups. There’s everyone from the raging grannies right up to the very serious lefties, but there’s somebody out there, make sure you’re not all alone. That’s the worst part of what we face these days. As long as you’re with other people you have a fighting chance, and you can organize more people.”

“This is a pretty loveless world we live in,” she concluded. “We have lots of romantic love. We have lots of ‘Sex and the City.’ But real love, love that is the kind that saves people, and makes the world better, and makes you go to bed with a smile on your face, that love is lacking greatly. You have to search for that.”

—*truthdig.com*, February 9, 2014

[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/legalizing\\_oppression\\_201402091](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/legalizing_oppression_201402091)

*“The most devious and efficient murder weapon ever devised by man is a judge and prosecutor forged together in a mutually sought corrupt purpose... Legal researchers have already reported on Pennsylvania’s corrupt judiciary. It is usually discovered either by those willing to do tedious research, or by its victims serving decades in prison.” —Kevin Brian Dowling, “The Walls of Jericho,” GRATERFRIENDS, September 2013.*

I couldn’t have stated this better myself. What is the unique strength of this so-called power—the ability to destroy innocent people’s lives? That is the major question that everyone needs to look deeper into. For it is a complex mechanism of doubt. Doubt, that lies within the minds and hearts of everyone who has witnessed some part of this corrupt judiciary. It is amazing, how, there is such a thing that can make an innocent man appear guilty, then be treated as such; and in turn, allow a guilty man to get off with nothing more than a slap on the wrist, if that. Though, the defining aspect, is whether he’s privileged or unprivileged.

Some things, which play a part in being under-privileged are attributed to: poverty or class; race or ethnicity; lack of education; *etc.* However, this is not the point I want to touch on, for we all have a strong sense of how peo-

ple get discriminated against. It’s no mystery! The aspect that I want to talk about, is the test of time, perception, and acquiescence that people have gravitated towards over the past few decades—with a “little” help from media propaganda—to the state that we now have today. In summary, I like to call it abandonment: the second, and equally damning face, to this two-headed beast.

Sadly, the victims of this corrupt judiciary, more often than not, come face-to-face with the second half of this conjoined monster, at one stage or another. Some experience it very early, when they look for their support during preliminary or trial stages. Some, after serving a particular amount of time, when the label of confinement becomes more and more attached to them—the point where abandonment really takes a bite out of your ass. For if your support dwindles down to nil, how does one recover?

No one knows the orphan as, Joe Blow, the 17-year-old guy that got railroaded at trial, anymore. Once substantial time has passed, you “metaphysically” (in the minds of onlookers) are perceived as, Freddy Kruger, the 33-year-old felon, who’s preaching the same ol’ song, that no one wants to take a chance of getting to know.

The corrupt judiciary is the modern day sorcerer, masquerading as the proverbial Sultan’s good natured advisor, with the power to cast enduring spells—taking advantage of the land’s paupers, and condemning as many as possible to the “cave of wonders.” The only question left, is: Where are the genies?

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# Lorenzo Johnson's Case

AN INTERVIEW BY SHUJA MOORE

January 18, 2014—*After almost two decades behind bars, Lorenzo “Cat” Johnson won his freedom from a wrongful conviction. But a controversial decision by the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated it. Now, Cat is out to prove his innocence, expose police corruption and show that truth always prevails.*

**Shuja Moore:** For those people who don't know you, who are you? What's your story?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** I'm a New Yorker who was wrongfully convicted of a crime in Pennsylvania that I didn't commit and was sentenced to a life prison term. I spent sixteen-and-a-half years in prison before my conviction was vacated on October 3, 2011 by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. They held that there was an insufficient amount of evidence to find me guilty. I was released in January 2012 pending the Attorney General's appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. On May 29, 2012 the Supreme Court granted the Attorney General's appeal and reinstated my conviction without giving my legal team any chance to argue our position.

**Shuja Moore:** We were so happy to see you go and devastated to see you return, how's it been Big Homie?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** It's been a rough ride.

**Shuja Moore:** One thing I will say though, since you're back, your fight for justice is on another level.

**Lorenzo Johnson:** Fighting is all I know.

**Shuja Moore:** What are the lessons learned from spending so much time incarcerated?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** Education is everything.

**Shuja Moore:** So what's happening with your case right now?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** I have a Post Conviction Relief Act (PCRA) petition pending that includes stronger issues than the one that originally freed me. For 18 years the police and prosecutors have withheld evidence that would have cleared me at trial. The prosecution's main witness made a statement the day of the crime that if turned over to my lawyer would've cleared me at trial. One of the detectives involved in the investigation has signed an affidavit supporting this. I also have witnesses coming forward about how they saw other people commit this crime and that the prosecution's main witness was with them. But the police threatened them to not come forth and help me. And the prosecution's only witness has even admitted that she wasn't in the bar where she testified she saw me! This coupled with some other issues raises a solid actual innocence claim.

**Shuja Moore:** The question that is on every prisoner's mind is why did you turn yourself in?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** I'm surrounded by a unique support system. People who believe in me and my injustice and who are willing to do all that is necessary to see that I am freed. They are the people I'm dedicated to. I strive for peace, freedom and justice and I'm on my way to exactly that!

**Shuja Moore:** Courageous. Speaking of supporters, how were you able to get so many people on your side?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** I refuse to be silent and worry about everything but myself. Most of my funds are spent on postage and copies. I try to reach whoever is willing to listen to my story. When I was released I spoke on wrongful convictions. I spoke to troubled youth in different communities. I made allies with people who have been

through what I've been through and we share the same mission. My case has support from people in 31 states and 11 countries!

**Shuja Moore:** What is your strategy for fighting your case?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** Since I'm innocent, I stand on truth. I fight my case in the court and through social media. Like I said in one of my recent articles, “Social media is injustice's worst nightmare.”

**Shuja Moore:** What do you think of the criminal appeal process?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** Without question I feel that the bar of justice is warped! I'm one of many that the appeal process has failed.

**Shuja Moore:** Since coming back, how have inmates responded to you? Prison staff?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** Although nothing came directly to me, there has been a lot of gossiping behind my back. And that was disappointing because I'm fighting not only for myself but all of us. I could have been selfish and ran but my supporters mean everything to me. If I would have run not only would I have lost my appeal rights, I would've been labeled the new “Mud Man” because it would be that much harder for others to get bail while on appeal. Everybody has different concerns. Now that the juvenile lifer issue is on the forefront I hope my actions help them in their struggle because they can't make the excuse about them not being able to operate in society or return if they violate. Those who think strictly about themselves are normally the ones wondering why all their bridges are burned. As for the prison staff—some do their eight and roll, some have their preconceived notions of me whether good or bad. I don't get caught up in that.

**Shuja Moore:** What do you recommend for that 20-year-old kid with a life sentence and no clue who has just arrived upstate?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** If you do not have an education make that a priority. Never stop learning. Get in the law library and learn the basic procedures of law and continue learning from there. Do not take everything that your lawyer says at face value. Learn your case inside out because there's nobody who is going to fight for you better than you. Do not get caught up in prison politics. Surround yourself with people who share the same goal as you. It's about getting back to family as soon as possible. Don't view yourself as a lifer; always have the state of mind that you will return to your family.

**Shuja Moore:** I agree. I suggest to people to first learn how to learn. Then study the book the Rules of Court (sections: criminal procedure, rules of evidence, appellate procedure); the PCRA statute; and legal analysis, research, writing and how to craft a legal document. Well, any last words?

**Lorenzo Johnson:** All is well with me; and if we as a whole continue to fight against injustice and not ourselves we got something special coming. Rumble, young man, rumble!

Write to Lorenzo "Cat" Johnson at:  
[www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org](http://www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org)  
[www.facebook.com/LorenzoJohnson](http://www.facebook.com/LorenzoJohnson)  
Twitter: @FREERENZ  
Sign Lorenzo Johnson's Freedom Petition!  
<http://www.freelorenzojohnson.org/sign-the-petition.html>

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## Is the USA Above the Law?

By "SHAKABOONA"

CNN, Fox News, MSNBC and the other corporate-owned news networks of America have been asking the question, should former NSA contractor turned whistle-blower, Edward Snowden, be given amnesty? But the correct questions that should be posed are: Will the Attorney General criminally indict NSA officials for breaking federal law for spying on 250 million American citizens without probable cause? And, will the Obama administration let the NSA off the hook after committing criminal offenses, like they let the CEOs of big banks and corporations off the hook after the sub-prime mortgage scam?

The Obama administration has conceded the fact that the NSA committed a criminal offense of spying on American citizens by mining citizens' electronic communications for personal information, tracking citizens travels and creating behavioral profiles of citizens, all of which are collected and stored as meta-data at secret facilities, and used by God knows who—CIA, FBI, military intelligence, government contractors, private security corporations and Google. Such NSA spying on American citizens clearly violates our First Amendment right of privacy under the United States Constitution and violates Federal statute laws of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the U.S. Patriot Act.

It is the moral and legal duty of Edward Snowden, and all American citizens employed by the government, to blow the whistle on government agencies and officials that deliberately commit criminal acts as the NSA did. And once a citizen has blown the whistle on government agencies breaking the law, the whistle-blower must be protected by law from retaliatory criminal prosecution and threat of imprisonment, for such patriotic action keeps

the government honest.

It is utter hypocrisy to, in one breath, tell our society of people it is their moral and patriotic duty as law-abiding citizens to call government hotlines and report crimes they witness being committed in the streets, while in the next breath, tell people not to report crimes they witness being committed in the backrooms of government agencies. This double standard of crime doesn't fly here. Basically, the government is saying the law does not apply to them, and that they are above the law. Are they above the law?

As it stands, not a single NSA official has been criminally indicted for violating federal law and the civil rights of 250 million citizens when it spied on them. The NSA officials are the criminals here, not Edward Snowden. The NSA is the traitor of America, not Edward Snowden.

The major news corporations have repeatedly shown themselves to be another branch of government, and the protector buffers of government, as their interests are one and the same. Their cable news networks have purposely deflected the focus and anger of the people away from the criminal actions of the NSA, and in true partnership with the Obama administration, have placed the news spotlight on Edward Snowden, disingenuously claiming that Edward Snowden broke the law by whistle blowing on the NSA breaking the law. Incredible!

Let's make no mistake about it; Edward Snowden is the hero of this story and the Obama administration, corporate-owned news networks and the NSA are the villains.

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# Fighting the Oppressor

BY KEVIN COOPER

This essay speaks to one of the many forms of oppression.

As an African American who is committed to fighting, and ending oppression, no matter where it happens, or who it happens to, I have to speak the truth. And my truth is what I have witnessed and personally experienced here in San Quentin Prison on Death Row since 1985.

I find myself in a real life-and-death situation here on Death Row, where hate, and for certain people, self-hatred, is an ongoing situation. Of course, this is not true concerning all the death row inmates, and I would be lying if I said that it was.

But what I am writing about happens enough to deserve attention. Here, in this institution, as well as in all other modern day plantations there are only two types of people. They are the Oppressors and Oppressed! I am an oppressed person, and in truth, all the other inmates within these walls are oppressed, even if some of them don't think that they are, or aren't aware that they are.

There are certain inmates, who instead of uniting as one strong oppressed people in order to make all of our lives more peaceful and better, would rather (and in fact do) raise their fists in violence rather than raise their voices. They speak words of disrespect towards other oppressed inmates for whatever reason, (even if that reason is a made-up one), in order to hate and start trouble and keep madness going among us. Yet, these very same inmates refuse to raise their voice to the oppressor. They refuse to even raise an ink pen to write about the oppressor and this oppressive system of death

that has us all imprisoned, and is trying to execute us—this system that is made to destroy us mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and every other type of way that it can before it murders us physically. Whether these inmates do this consciously or unconsciously isn't known by me or other inmates who also see this and shake their heads in disbelief like I do. What we do know however is this truth: The oppressor and his supporters love for this to hap-

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**“The most powerful  
weapon of the oppressor  
is the minds of the  
oppressed!”**

---

pen, and they love to see it happen. They want and need to keep us oppressed people fighting each other. The good old game of divide and conquer is one of their most effective tools. These so called Brothers who are doing the oppressors' work for them claim to know all about this game of divide and conquer, yet they still keep participating in this game to the detriment of we who are oppressed!

In 1964, the late Malcolm X stated to a crowd of people in Harlem that, “If you aren't careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing!” He further stated, “The Oppressor is fighting you in the morning, fighting you at noon, fighting you at night, and fighting you all in between, and you still think it's wrong to fight them

back! Why?”

This is exactly what is going on within this and other modern day plantations to one degree or another. I must also ask “Why?” As I and other inmates continue to do our part in this historical struggle for our collective human rights we do so consciously, and we refuse to do the oppressors' work for him!

Though I, and others, are forced to live in such a place against our will doesn't mean that we have given up or given in. It doesn't mean that we will let the oppressor make us turn on each other in a negative way. We will continue to work to end all of our collective oppression as best we can.

Those inmates who choose to work against us and for the oppressor either don't know, or don't care that they are being misused by the oppressor. As the late Bantu Steven Biko, who is the father of Black Consciousness in South Africa once said: “The most powerful weapon of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed!”

Many of us on these modern day plantations refuse to give our minds or our spirits to these wholesale oppressors. Those that do, “That's their bad.” Only in acknowledging what is going on, can some of us avoid this trap that is easy to fall into here behind enemy lines.

In *Struggle and Solidarity from Death Row at San Quentin Prison*, I'm Kevin Cooper

—February 2014

Write to Kevin Cooper at:  
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**FREE KEVIN COOPER**

# Razor Wire Plantations

Amerika's ongoing addiction to slavery, cruelty and genocide

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

## Brutality by design

As was the focus of a recent article<sup>1</sup>, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) has been recognized by the federal courts to be among Amerika's most abusive prison systems, where a "culture of sadistic and malicious violence" reigns, involving the seeming inability of correctional officers to keep their hands off prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

Though this is acknowledged, Texas officials have done nothing to rein these abuses in. And why? Because—like the inherently abusive and oppressive nature of the overall Amerikan criminal injustice system—it's all by design.

## Compelling submission to slavery

Government sanctioned brutality underlies the U.S. prison system; just as it did the U.S. chattel slave system of which the prison system is a continuation; and just as it did the German Nazi concentration camp system.

Under the old North Amerikan slave system it was openly admitted that people simply will not willingly submit to bondage and unremunerated forced labor. The human spirit naturally rebels against such a condition. Therefore the wealthy interests whose economic domination, power, prestige and wealth itself relied on slave labor, had to devise a system which would compel the submission of those to be kept in bondage.

So they dehumanized their victims to strip them of all claims of entitlement to human dignity, compassion and consideration. But this alone was not enough to force them to submit to slavery.

"This was to be done... by means of beatings, whippings, or any other similar form of violent and mutilative punishment or humiliation. Sociologically speaking, this then

illustrates clearly that the South had become a society that was compelled to resort to the use of coercive force because of the ultimate failure of law to support or enforce subservient behavior in slaves."<sup>3</sup>

And because slavery is the basis of the U.S. prison system, (as embodied in the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution), this same resort to brutality and violence to exert "control" pervades it.

So as was done with the slaves of yesterday, U.S. prisoners are projected to the broader public as objects of suspicion, fear, ridicule and hate. In this sense, we are the new "niggers." And when guards wish to demean us, we're often told that we're only "inmates," "offenders," *etc.*, which means, something less than human. Yet in reality, the only thing that differentiates us from the "public" (and who among them can honestly say they've never violated any of the innumerable laws of the oppressive state?), is we've suffered the formal indignity of having the government brand and stigmatize us "criminals."

But on the other hand, the same guards who run these prisons frequently admit to us the only difference between us and them is they've "never been caught," which makes them the worse sort of hypocrites, who devote their lives to punishing others (breaking up homes, families and communities, and subjecting us to all manner of abuses in the process) for violating laws that they don't respect themselves.

There's also the fact that in Amerika people of color and the poor (the traditional "niggers" and poor social "trash") are the primary targets of aggressive policing of their communities, criminal prosecution and mass imprisonment. Criminal injustice in Amerika is far from blind—and defi-

nately ain't colorblind.

Indeed the boon of mass imprisonment on the last several decades is aptly recognized as a "New Jim Crow" system for disparaging and disposing of marginalized racial and national minorities. But what accompanies this system, that many aren't aware of, is raw slavery, which could not exist without dehumanizing and brutalizing its victims.

Once U.S. prisons are recognized to be a system of enslavement, and the lie is exposed that slavery in Amerika was ever abolished, the abusive conditions that pervades them make perfect sense. Let's take the TDCJ where I'm presently imprisoned for example.

## Post-bellum slavery

With 109 prisons and over 152,000 prisoners, Texas operates Amerika's largest state prison system. And every prisoner confined in Texas is forced to work without pay. Only those very few with documented serious medical or mental health conditions, which impair work performance, and those held in the TDCJ's torturous segregation units, are not made to work. Often those with documented medical and mental health exemptions are still forced to work—their exemptions being simply ignored. Those who refuse to work are punished, thrown in segregated confinement, and their imprisonment is typically extended.

The entire Texas prison system is organized around its prisoner labor, with the prisoners literally performing every job short of running the cell-blocks. Actually, until the federal courts banned it in the 1980s, prisoners were doing this too, working as "building tenders" whom the guards armed with pipes, street knives and bats, and gave impunity to terrorize other prisoners

(through stabbings, beatings, rapes and extortion) to keep order for the TDCJ administrators.<sup>4</sup> The same sort of unholy and oft denied alliance that police have long maintained with “organized” criminal elements in poor urban communities, to supply, protect and secure graft from drug operations and other “crimes” and to remove competitors and compel residents’ submission. TDCJ prisoners also substituted for licensed medical staff.<sup>5</sup>

Otherwise today TDCJ prisoners still do everything from growing all the food we eat (and which the TDCJ also sells commercially for profit), raising livestock and crops on hundreds of thousands of acres of TDCJ-owned farmland (which are aptly called “colonies”), to building and maintaining the prisons that hold us. The prisoners plant, tend and harvest everything from cotton, beans, carrots and potatoes, to peanuts and more. This work is performed by “hoe squads” of prisoners using primitive manual labor methods like those of the field slaves of yesterday or Third World peasants, while armed guards on horseback “oversee” them. The prisoners, like the old slaves, refer to these overseers as “bossman.” To see them at work is to witness a scene like something ripped from an old slave movie.

The TDCJ also runs an in-house enterprise called Texas Correctional Industries, which uses prisoners’ slave labor to make everything from the clothes we and the guards wear (which are made from the prisoner-grown cotton) and also commercially sold garments, boots, state and U.S. flags, linen, *etc.*, to the steel cell doors, beds, lockers, sink/commode units, and even walls and other fixtures that go into the prisons’ constructions and cells. Texas prisoners literally forge the chains that bind them.

As a further abuse and insult, the TDCJ does not provide its prisoners with seasonal clothing for cold winters or Texas’s scorching summers, like long

underwear (thermals), gloves, hats, shorts, t-shirts, *etc.* Instead we must purchase such items from the prison commissaries (remember these are clothes the prisoners make themselves without payment), using whatever money we can manage to get friends and family to send us. Most prisoners have little to no outside support, and the TDCJ doesn’t encourage our developing or maintaining communication lines to the outside. Those of us who don’t receive money are allowed to mail only five one-ounce letters per month, the cost of which is set up as an outstanding debt that we must repay if and whenever we may receive any money. Prisoners are therefore forced to devise all sorts of hustles and schemes to generate means of acquiring clothes, hygiene supplies (which the TDCJ also does not give us), and even food (I will discuss the grossly inadequate nutrition we receive below).

Also, most TDCJ prisons lack air-conditioning, so this slave labor is performed in the sweltering Texas heat, which is of course worse for those who work inside unventilated buildings. Even the guards who serve as little more than overseers (armed watchers and disciplinarians,) protest the lack of climate-control in the prisons.<sup>6</sup> Indeed prisoners have been dropping dead from these conditions and have been forced to refuse life-sustaining medications to avoid the potentially fatal effects that these medicines can cause from extreme exertions in hot weather. And of course, TDCJ administrators, who ensure their own offices are air-conditioned, could care less.

Which brings us to the cruelest feature typical of such mean systems of enslavement. Namely the “owners” who live in luxury and comfort at the slaves’ expense, generally care nothing about the health of their workers, especially when, as here, the slaves are easily and readily replaced from a steady supply of surplus workers; as was also the case during the trans-Atlantic slave trade

and in the Nazi concentration camps. Which is why those slaves were starved, denied healthcare, and literally worked to death. But it was only called genocide when its focus was on “white” people.

### Real genocide

Many overlook or don’t realize that it was the exploitation of slave labor that helped drive the German Nazi’s genocidal program against Poles, Gypsies (Sintis and Romanis), Jews, Slavs, the mentally disturbed, and others. These people were swept up *en masse* into concentration camps where many were worked to death, performing forced labor to enrich and sustain German corporations and the Nazi state and military that served them.

Similarly TDCJ’s prisoner health care system has long been recognized to be unresponsive to the health needs of its prisoners. As said, but for federal court intervention in the 1980s, prisoners were made to rely on only their peers for healthcare.<sup>7</sup>

And just as the Nazis did to those they captured under their Aryanization programs, the property of U.S. prisoners is typically confiscated and kept by arresting police under “civil forfeiture” laws. We should remember that the Nazis, as did the slavers of yesterday’s North America, legitimized their inhumane practices by embedding them in law.

Then too there’s the high incidence of communicable deadly diseases like chronic hepatitis (HCV), HIV and AIDS, which commonly circulate in U.S. prisons at pandemic levels and go largely untreated. One documented example was found in the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC) where I was originally confined (for 21 years), and for whom Texas is presently holding me.

The situation was exposed by the ACLU in a 2003 report which found the VDOC was deliberately allowing such deadly diseases as HCV to circu-

late untreated among its prisoners, while in violation of Virginia's laws VDOC officials deliberately falsified reports on the levels of prisoner HCV infection and those dying from it.<sup>8</sup> The report, which was hushed up, revealed that the VDOC was outright refusing to treat over 10,000 known HCV cases (over a full third of its entire prison population). It stated:

"Although it is estimated that up to half of chronic HCV patients can be cured if treated early with an appropriate regimen of interferon and ribavirin, only 50 Virginia inmates out of an estimated 12,800 infected were receiving Hepatitis C treatment as of November 1, 2002, and only 320 have received the therapy since the treatment protocol was implemented. Liver biopsies—procedures performed to assess liver damage prior to initiating HCV treatment—have fallen considerably in recent years. Only 33 inmates were scheduled for biopsies as of November 1, and the number of liver biopsies dipped dramatically last year, from 204 in 2000 to 127 in 2011."<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that one of the practices for which the Nazis were found guilty of "crimes against humanity" during the Nuremberg Trials for war crimes, was their confining German citizens and others under conditions where epidemics ran rampant.<sup>10</sup>

If such acts were crimes for which German leaders were punished with executions, they are no less crimes when committed by U.S. officials. Indeed U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Nuremberg prosecutor Robert H. Jackson stated this as a basic principle:

"If certain acts and violations of treaties are crimes they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them. We are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us."<sup>11</sup>

But of course this is typical U.S. rhetoric, since as the present case among

many others demonstrates, as admitted in a *Washington Monthly* editorial:

"War crimes tribunals would be the worst thing that could happen, [because] they would amount to... a system of legal guilt for top [U.S.] officials."<sup>12</sup>

And just as the Nazi propaganda industry did, the Amerikan government and media join together in villainizing minority groups by perpetuating criminal images of them to the national "majority." And they selectively criminalize actions stereotyped as behaviors typical of these groups. Too, both these societies systematically used prisons to dispose of mentally disabled people, and angled to portray "criminal" inclinations as biologically innate to certain undesirable minority groups.

More telling is the fact that while New Afrikans/Blacks are only 13 percent of the U.S. social population, we are over half the prison population, a population that is forbidden to procreate. This *per se* has genocidal implications. While the Nazis were explicit in their eugenics policies, the U.S. objectively carries out similar practices in imprisoning Black males at their most fertile ages and thereby undermining births within this social group.<sup>13</sup>

Legal scholar Michelle Alexander revealed the economic incentive behind mass imprisonment/disappearances of New Afrikan/Black males, because we no longer have any economic worth to Amerika on the streets. She also observed that genocidal policies have been historically applied to those peoples who find themselves in this unfortunate position.

"The collapse of inner-city economies coincided with the conservative backlash against the Civil Rights Movement, resulting in the perfect storm. Almost overnight, Black men found themselves unnecessary to the American economy and demonized by mainstream society. No longer needed to pick cotton in the fields or

labor in factories, lower-class black men were hauled off to prison in droves. They were vilified in the media and condemned for their condition as part of a well-orchestrated political campaign to build a new white, Republican majority in the South. Decades later, curious onlookers in the grips of denial would wonder aloud, "where have all the Black men gone?"

"...The new system does not seek primarily to benefit unfairly from Black labor, as earlier caste systems have, but instead views African Americans as largely irrelevant and unnecessary to the newly structured economy—an economy that is no longer driven by unskilled labor.

"It is fair to say that we have witnessed an evolution in the U.S. from a racial caste system based entirely on exploitation (slavery), to one based largely on subordination (Jim Crow), to one defined by marginalization (mass incarceration). While marginalization may sound far preferable to exploitation, it may prove to be even more dangerous. Extreme marginalization, as we have seen throughout world history, poses the risk of extermination. Tragedies such as the Holocaust in Germany or the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia (or the genocide against Native peoples here in North Amerika) are traceable to extreme marginalization and stigmatization of racial and ethnic groups. As legal scholar John A. Powell once commented only half in jest, 'It's actually better to be exploited than marginalized in some respects, because if you're exploited presumably you're still needed.'

"Viewed in this light, the frantic accusations of genocide by poor Blacks in the early years of the War on Drugs seem less paranoid. The intuition of those residing in ghetto communities that they had suddenly become disposable was rooted in real changes in the economy—changes that have been devastating to poor Black communities as factories have closed, low-skilled jobs have disappeared, and all those who

had the means to flee the ghetto did. The sense among those left behind that society no longer has use for them, and that the government now aims to simply get rid of them, reflects a reality that many of us who claim to care prefer to avoid simply by changing channels.”<sup>14</sup>

### Slavery does not teach freedom

As one Texas prisoner recently pointed out to me, the TDCJ’s slave system teaches prisoners how to become thieves, swindlers and predators. As already noted, most prisoners have little or no outside financial support, and where the TDCJ doesn’t pay them any wages for work, they can only obtain things they need and want by stealing, conning or preying on others. In some cases they are driven by necessity.

Like in the Nazi ghettos and prison camps, TDCJ prisoners do not receive nutrition adequate to maintain good health under conditions of hard labor.

Per its own policy, the daily calorie intake of TDCJ prisoner diet plans does not exceed 2500 calories, which is the minimum daily calorie intake needed for a sedentary-to-only-moderately active adult to maintain good health. Remember, these prisoners are performing the same grueling labor as yesterday’s chattel slaves, and thus require at least the same level of daily nutrition. Yet TDCJ prisoners are provided less nutrition than were the slaves of yesterday. Chattel slaves were recognized as needing 4200 to 5400 calories-per-day to remain fit to perform their labor, particularly as field hands.<sup>15</sup>

The TDCJ also does not serve any fresh fruits to its prisoners, and serves desserts at only one meal per week. This denies basic nutrients and daily glucose needed for health and energy. Leaving prisoners hard pressed to find ways to supplement their diets and get sweets from the prison commissaries

which, as I’ve noted, calls for their engaging in side hustles, theft and preying on other prisoners—anti-social behaviors that will follow them back to society. This is what so-called rehabilitation boils down to.

Slavery doesn’t teach people how to be free. It only dehumanizes, which is why international law to which the U.S. is a signatory outlaws slavery in all its forms.

With the vast majority of Texas’s prison population being people of

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## Texas prisoners literally forge the chains that bind them.

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color and Texas being one of the country’s most notoriously racist states, and its prisons openly practicing old style slavery, it requires no major stretch of the imagination to recognize that a large percentage of its staff are the worst sort of racists. In fact in a recent *New York Times* article written by a TDCJ guard, it was admitted that in Texas, “Employment screening for correctional officers is inadequate.”<sup>16</sup> But prison systems don’t screen their employees to determine racial views. In Virginia I often heard racist white guards sarcastically confess, “it’s not against the law [or rules] to be racist.” Furthermore, TDCJ guards have the nation’s highest arrest rate for prison employees,<sup>17</sup> demonstrating that there’s indeed no difference between us and them, with quite a few of them even getting caught.

So when we hear tough-on-crime and prison industry financed politicians howling about the need for more prisons and to stay the course of mass incarceration we should remember (as hard

as it may be for some to accept) that what they’re really promoting is slavery, genocide, crimes against humanity and a system that only teaches and reinforces criminality, not rehabilitation.

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

---

1 Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, “U.S. Prison Practices would Disgrace A Nation of Savages Texas. A Case on Record” (2013)

2 *Ruiz v Johnson* 154 F. supp. 2d 925, 986 (S.D. Tex. 2001)

3 “Securing the Leg Irons: Restrictions of Legal Rights in Virginia and Maryland.”

4 See, *Ruiz vs Estelle*, 503 F supp. 1265 (1980)

5 *Ibid*.

6 Larie Lowry, “In Texas, Inmates and Officers Swelter.” *New York Times*, November 22, 2013

7 *Op cite*, note 4

8 Laura Lafay, *Accountable to No One: The Virginia Department of Corrections and Prisoner Medical Care* (ACLU, 2003)

9 *Ibid*, p. 9

10 See, “Four Power Agreement,” 59 Stat. 1544, 82 U.N.T.S. 279, September 10, 1945, in *Burns H. Weston. et al.*, eds., *Basic Documents in International Law and World Order* (St. Paul, MN West, 1990)

11 Richard A Falk, “The Circle of Responsibility,” *Nation*, January 20, 1970. p 27 (quoting Jackson).

12 Townsend Hoopes, “The Nuremberg Suggestion.” *Washington Monthly*, January 1970

13 The international Convention on Genocide defines the crime of genocide as “imposing measures intended to prevent births within” any national, or ethnic or racial group, such as destroy that group in part or whole.

14 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Color-blindness* (The New Press, N.Y. 2010) pp 207-08

15 Richard Sutch, “The Care and Feeding of Slaves,” in Paul A. David, *et al. Reckoning With Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (N.Y.), Oxford University Press 1976)

16 *Op cite* note 6

17 Matthew T. Clarke “Record Number of Texas Prison Guards Arrested,” *Prison Legal News* (May 2007), p. 26

# For the Rosa Luxemburg Conference

SPEECH BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL PRESENTED BY HIS SON AT THE CONFERENCE ON JANUARY 11, 2014

Friends, Brothers, Sisters, Comrades,  
I greet you all through my son, Jamal, and thank you for your work to free those in American dungeons, and to shut down the U.S. Death House.

We know that Red Rosa spent time in prison (in Breslau), but I doubt she dreamed of the size and scope of what the American system of mass incarceration has come to.

Because he is my son, he has felt that

sting, but he is free today—a survivor of that monster.

I thank you for receiving him.

You have asked about the rightist trend emerging in several states, and what that portends for the future.

History teaches us that rightist; xenophobic forces arise in nations where economic anxiety heightens. We can see this quite clearly in nations facing austerity measures, where social

services like education, housing and healthcare gets cut.

We are seeing it in Greece, with the emergence of Golden Dawn. We see it in England, in France, in the Nordic nations and yes—in Germany.

These forces draw people apart, and utilize fear and enmity to waken the working class.

That's why the rulers seek austerity. It serves their economic interests.

For when people are divided and fighting each other, they cannot fight the System.

For young people, it's especially important to build racial and resistance movements, for by so doing they deny that energy to reactionary movements, and they also give hope to other social movements and activists to stand their ground.

Young people must—*must*—resist the call of the austerity supporters to turn inward and ignore what's happening in those countries.

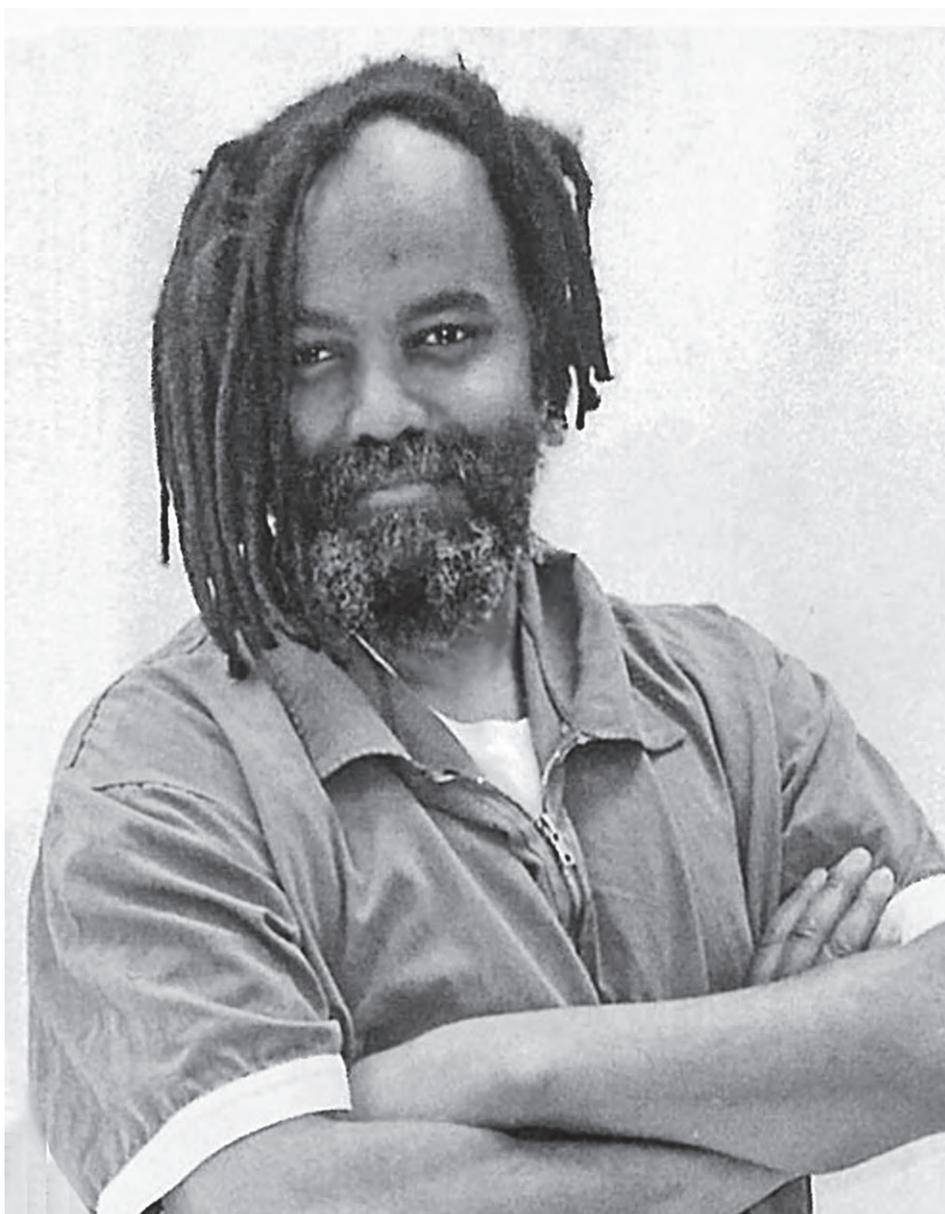
They must engage, build movements, and create greater social cohesion, to resist the ideology of austerity.

I thank you all for your work and your support!

Ona Move!

Mumia Abu-Jamal

© '13 maj



# SCI-Mahanoy Officers Trample First Amendment Rights

BY BRYANT ARROYO

On August 10 and September 13, 2012, my visiting friend, Shireen Parsons, and I posed for photos with our clenched fists raised in the universal hand-sign expressing solidarity in the visiting room at SCI-Mahanoy in Frackville, Pennsylvania. On both occasions we were told that our raised fists were in violation of Visiting Rule No. 5.

On the initial Grievance Review Response No. 427110, dated September 6, 2012, Lieutenant D. Malick responded, stating both Officers Cole and Martin were merely enforcing SCI-Mahanoy rules, adding that, "We offer the privilege of the opportunity to have photos taken in the visiting room for all inmates and visitors. With all privileges, rules are established to continue the privilege."

The salient point, however, is that the ambiguous Policy No. 5 clearly violates inmates' and visitors' right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The institution asserts that the opportunity for inmates and visitors to have photographs taken in the visiting room is a privilege. At issue, however, is that our freedom of speech is not confined to the spoken or written word, but includes symbolic expression as well.

Lt. Malick responded that both Officers Cole and Martin were simply enforcing rules, stating, "We offer the

privilege of the opportunity to have photos taken in the visiting room for all inmates and visitors. With all privileges, rules are established to continue the privilege." Such rules, however may not obviate our First Amendments rights under which speech includes symbolic, nonverbal expression, such as the clenched, raised fist, and Policy No. 5 carries a chilling effect, which, as described by constitutional law, discourages the exercise of a First Amendment right—in this case, the First Amendment right to freedom of expression.

As citizens—incarcerated or free—we must challenge any and all encroachments upon our civil rights. We must raise up our clenched fists in solidarity and outrage over the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' chilling effect on our First Amendment rights, and demand reform and justice.

Legal research references:

See *Hudson v. Buckson*, 310 F. Supp 528 (D. Del. 1970); *Pell v. Procunier*, (417 U.S. 817, 1974)(re: "any system of prior restraints of expression comes to this Court bearing a heavy presumption against its constitutional validity." (Citing): *New York Times v. U.S.*, 403 U.S. 713, 714 (1971).); *Turner v. Safely*, 482 U.S. 78, (1987)("...[W]e have found it important to inquire whether regulations restricting inmates' First Amendment rights operated in a neutral fashion, without regard to the content of expression." This amendment indeed guarantees the right to express such attitudes toward the government, and it is the strength of our democracy that they are tolerated in almost all their public manifestations. That tolerance (31 F. Supp. 535) is not only a benefit flowing from diligent protection of fundamental freedom; it is a *Sine Qua Non* of their continued enjoyment.

The Voice and Face Inside the Nation of Prisoners...

Write to:

Bryant Arroyo #CU-1126  
SCI-Mahanoy  
301 Morea Road  
Frackville, PA 17932



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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.

# Petition: Mumia Abu-Jamal is Innocent! Free Mumia, Now!

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an innocent man. For almost three decades he faced a “legal lynching.” In December 2011, the Philadelphia District Attorney (DA) and Fraternal Order of Police, backed by Edward Rendell, former Pennsylvania Governor, Philadelphia Mayor and the DA who prosecuted Mumia, conceded defeat in trying to execute him. Mumia is now sentenced to “slow death row,” life imprisonment without parole.

## Life imprisonment is an outrage! Free Mumia Now!

Mumia’s conviction for the shooting death of police officer Daniel Faulkner was a political and racist frame-up. Mumia was a spokesman for the Black Panther Party; exposed the murderous treatment of the MOVE organization; and was an award-winning journalist—the voice of the voiceless.

From moments after the shootings, the police and prosecution manufactured Mumia’s guilt and actively suppressed his innocence—evidence that someone else shot and killed officer Faulkner.

The notorious trial judge, Albert Sabo, a self-proclaimed racist and openly biased against Mumia declared before the trial, “I’m going to help fry the n-----.” All elements of due process—the right to a fair trial—were violated. Every part of the prosecution’s case—witness testimony, Mumia’s supposed confession and ballistics—is a lie.

The police, prosecution and Justice Department colluded to secure Mumia’s conviction and death sentence for a crime he did not commit, including hiding that the ranking officer on the scene, Inspector Alfonzo Giordano, was under federal investigation for police corruption.

Mumia continues to be outspoken and truth-telling, in defiant resistance to state repression and racial oppression. The state wants to silence and entomb for life this man who is known as a “long distance revolutionary.”

We stand with Mumia. Mumia’s freedom is part of our own struggle for justice and human liberation.

We demand: Free Mumia Now!  
Release Mumia Abu-Jamal Immediately from the Hellhole of Prison!

For more information: See, “Long Distance Revolutionary”<sup>1</sup> and “Manufacturing Guilt.”<sup>2</sup>

Demand Issued by Mumia’s Family,  
c/o Keith Cook, Mumia’s eldest brother.

P.O. Box 370, Hillsborough, NC  
27278

[www.Freedom4Mumia.org](http://www.Freedom4Mumia.org)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street, City, State, Zip Code)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1 <http://www.mumia-themovie.com/>

2 <http://www.freedom4mumia.org/ldr--mg.html>

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## An Urgent Fundraiser for Lynne Stewart’s Medical Needs

Because of a determined people’s movement, Lynne is finally home with her family. But she has urgent medical needs and costs. Lynne’s Stage 4 breast cancer spread a year ago to lungs, back, bones and lymph nodes. Now 74, she has lost weight and has trouble breathing; doctors estimate her lifespan at 12 months. Lynne will soon begin treatment requiring her to pay deductibles and co-payments. To boost the odds, she’ll use a special diet, vitamins, and other healing methods—some costly and none covered by insurance.

Lynne’s spirit is indomitable—help her fight to survive!

“I fought lions, I fought tigers, and I’m not going to let cancer get me,” Stewart said.

Lynne has always come to the aid of those who needed her. Now it’s our turn to stand by Lynne.

Send a donation to help cover Lynne’s healthcare costs:

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

<http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/lynne-stewart-s-medical-fund>





20 degrees below zero, can living wage jobs thaw the freeze? Read *A Cold Winter in Northern Wisconsin* on page 2.



From Texas to California, drilling for oil and gas is using billions of gallons of water in the country's most drought-prone areas. Read *Fracking is Depleting Water Supplies in America's Driest Areas* on page 39.



A conscious, directed effort to save postal services in the United States and Canada should be a priority of the movement for economic democracy. Read *Now is the Moment to Save Our Postal Commons* on page 10.

On the Front Cover: ►  
National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa.  
Read *South Africa: Forging a New Movement* page 26.



Write a Letter Supporting Pvt. Manning's Request for Clemency!  
Read how on the inside front cover.



Women buried in the Federal Prison System. Read *Women in Solitary Confinement* on page 41.