

# SOLIDARITY NOTES

*"I hope we shall crush... in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country."*

—Thomas Jefferson in a letter to George Logan, 1816

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE OF THE CAPITAL DISTRICT & NEW YORK SOLIDARITY

Solidarity Committee of the Capital District & New York Solidarity ■ 33 Central Avenue ■ Albany, New York 12210 ■ (518) 673-2602

## Solidarity Committee of the Capital District Meeting

The meetings of the Solidarity Committee are held at 7:30 pm on the second Thursday of each month at the Social Justice Center, 33 Central Avenue, Albany, N.Y. 12210.

MAY  
2021

## Albany's Racist Policing Practices Exposed

--By ANGELA KAUFMAN

On May 30, 2020, Albany Police at the South Station made history.

For the first time ever, they attacked peaceful protesters with tear gas, a chemical weapon banned in other countries. Almost a year later, in mid April 2021, the Albany Common Council planned a meeting to receive community feedback about a proposed ban on chemical weapons. But before the committee was able to even hear the overwhelming support for a ban on such weapons, South Station police had already used them a second time.

On April 14, 2021, in the midst of a peaceful protest in response to police murder of Daunte Wright in MN, officers physically assaulted and tear gassed a 14 year old child. Footage released in Mayor Sheehan's press conference conveniently edited this out, but numerous live streams of protesters clearly convey the event. The child sustained injuries.

To make matters worse, Mayor Sheehan compared the breaking of a window at South Station to the January 6th insurrection. This comparison is not only incredibly insensitive, it is the epitome of gaslighting as protesters in Albany were voicing objections to overwhelmingly white police forces using aggressive militarized tactics against communities of color, in contrast to the January insurrection which was spurred on by violent white supremacists.

Activists expressed outrage and betrayal as Sheehan has spent a year paying lip service to the concerns of the community and the demand for an end to violent and racist policing of largely Black neighborhoods. On April 17, activists from All of Us called for community solidarity and support of an occupation outside the South Station on Arch St. Their demands were simple. Fire the officer responsible for inflicting violence on a child, ban the police use of chemical weapons and have a dialog with community organizers.

For six days, a group ranging from roughly fifteen to thirty activists occupied the space, enduring unseasonably cold temperatures, rain and snow. One protester estimated about six thousand dollars worth of supplies being donated including tents, tarps, firewood, blankets, food and other necessities. Community members with mental health training volunteered their time to provide mental health counseling as the encampment attracted community members who came forward to tell their stories of being victimized by police.

--See *Albany Police* on Page 2

## May Is Dues Month For Solidarity

May is the month that the Solidarity Committee sends out the call for dues, to support all of the work the committee does throughout the year and this is the official call.

We could go through a lengthy list of the projects and efforts of Solidarity, but most readers and members know of them. Here are a few: Support for the New York State Nurses Association in their long fight for a first contract at Albany Medical Center Hospital, support for strikes that have occurred among the union in this region (strike support was the genesis of the committee, itself, back in 1983), support for immigrant rights, active support for human rights and the struggle to make Black Lives Matter, education about U.S. trade policies, decades-long support for single-payer universal health care (enhanced and improved

## Perspective On The Amazon Union Drive In Bessemer, Alabama

--By CHRIS TOWNSEND

April 14, 2021 —The loss of the April 2021 union drive at the Bessemer, Alabama, Amazon facility is a disappointment to all who cheered-on the union cause, and it is doubly so for militants and leftists. Of course, it is. Worldwide.

But, who among us believed that it could have succeeded in today's environment? Against all odds, with a threadbare union campaign, up against one of the biggest anti-union corporate fortresses of the modern era? If you thought that an election win for the RWDSU was actually in the cards then you are either brand new to the movement, have never been involved in a union organizing campaign, or you have resorted to wishful thinking and daydreaming as a substitute for cold logic.

And while the cold logic may dictate that the deck is stacked against the workers and unions at every turn, to abandon the battlefield to the employers is to accept defeat. The fact is, when you belong to the working class today, you must re-learn the old military stratagem, "When you are too weak to defend, you must attack." Once encircled, unless a breakout is attempted, then annihilation is inevitable. Can anyone objectively assessing the condition of the working class today question whether we are encircled? Or whether our unions are facing imminent annihilation?

The Amazon workplace—like the rest of the workplaces in this country—is a dictatorship. This may come as a startling news flash to some. Not to the thousands of worker-organizers now toughing it out in the Amazon shops all over the globe.

And it's no shock to me, either. I have spent the past 42 years in the union trench being harassed and attacked by virtually every employer that I have ever dealt with. I started as a rank-and-file organizer. I participated in two union elections as an employee, in a recognition strike, and I worked as a union salt in two different companies. The union was successful in only one out of five of those attempts to organize. All of them were against-all-odds. Me and my coworkers in each case had all sorts of reasons to wait, delay, or even give up. But we pushed ahead up the beach no matter the fire raining down on us. I didn't join the labor movement because I picked it as the winning team. I joined it because as a class-conscious worker I had no alternative, and in fact it was an obligation.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's I was a field organizer for the United Electrical Workers Union (UE), assigned to several simultaneous organizing drives we kept going at plants

--See *Amazon Union Drive* on Page 6

Medicare for All), the monthly newsletter that you're reading, the annual film series, the many issues involving protecting the environment, and so many other issues and projects.

Individual dues are \$20 per year, while union and other organization dues remain at \$150.

Checks should be made out and sent to: Solidarity Committee of the Capital District (c/o Treasurer Susan DuBois), 33 Central Ave., Albany, N.Y. 12210. Some pay more, some pay less, but any amount is acceptable and welcome. The Solidarity Committee thanks those who have contributed on a regular basis. For the annual amount in the committee's treasury, there is an amazing amount of work that is accomplished, year after year.

Thanks, one and all for your dues and support, but most of all, for your solidarity.

## 100 Nations Back Vaccine Waiver To Hasten Pandemic's End: CTC

April 23, 2021—The Biden administration must join 100 nations in supporting a temporary waiver of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules that now give a few corporations monopoly control over where and how much COVID-19 vaccines and treatments are made, said Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Chuy Garcia (D-Ill.) and Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), and leaders of labor, public health, faith and other civil society groups at a news conference today.

U.S. senators and representatives joined civil society leaders in delivering two million petitions to urge President Biden to support a Covid-19 WTO waiver to hasten the pandemic's end, secure the administration's domestic vaccination progress.

According to the Citizens Trade Campaign, momentum is growing for the waiver, and at today's press conference, U.S. civil society leaders announced that petitions calling for a waiver of WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) terms have been signed by two million people. The Trump administration recruited a few other WTO

### Albany Police... (Cont'd. from Page 1)

Those taking part in the occupation described it as a healing space where community was taking care of each other's needs and important discussions about the traumas community members experienced at the hands of police was taking place. When the rescue mission nearby turned people away, occupiers provided safe accommodations for the unhoused.

Thursday April 22 was the sixth day of protest and peaceful occupation. The media would have you believe this was a scene of vandalism and chaos. Those who visited and saw firsthand say otherwise. Signs and artwork expressed the feelings of the community, and this was a space where people were working together to meet each others' needs, at times more efficiently than the agencies charged by the City of Albany with doing so.

When police attempts to mischaracterize the events failed to sway public opinion and community support continued for the sixth day, police decided they had enough. Citing "safety concerns" from the surrounding area and "open fires" they gave the group of about fifteen protestors, many of whom don't have cars, 15 minutes to clear out the street of the entire encampment, including thousands of dollars of supplies donated and in the process of being distributed to help those in need.

Tasked with the impossible, protestors were not able to clear out the area and some questioned why they were being asked to leave when APD allowed the Occupy movement to remain in place for three months several years ago. Rather than coming out for a dialog with protestors, police walked away and returned minutes later in full riot gear, badges covered. They blocked media from entering, but activists' live streams and independent media from 518independent was able to capture horrific footage.

Police marched in formation, shields up, some with a "thin blue line" across them, and knocked peaceful protestors to the ground. They proceeded to hit a number of protestors with their clubs. In one live stream, a gas is visible. Police denied using gas but protestors insist they were bear maced. Police violently arrested a total of 10 people and 1 person was taken to the hospital in a stretcher. All have since been released. Charges included disorderly conduct and rioting. Police can be seen on independent media destroying the tents and then DGS workers cleared out the camp, throwing out all of the supplies including food and medicine.

Police then lied to media outlets claiming belongings hadn't been destroyed and were available for pick up. In the days that followed, peaceful protests continued and although Proud Boys were visible at the scene with tasers and other weapons, it was only peaceful protestors continued to be intimidated and per their account, sprayed with bear mace again. The fight isn't over. Get involved by following All of Us and other grassroots groups led by local Black activists.

Give to mutual aid emergency funds such as the Radical Black Safety Fund at: [https://www.paypal.com/pools/c/8pAK2AzvDg?fbclid=IwAR3F5MHowJvGIADFDW1IQveHoCDj52v2lDwlsEnkUcUoLN4\\_emsalqumu3Y](https://www.paypal.com/pools/c/8pAK2AzvDg?fbclid=IwAR3F5MHowJvGIADFDW1IQveHoCDj52v2lDwlsEnkUcUoLN4_emsalqumu3Y) and demand Albany end violent policing and the use of tear gas. ❖

### SOLIDARITY NOTES

John Funicello, *Editor*

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Thanks to the Mailing Committee for the April 2021 Issue

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Some 2,000 nurses at Maine Medical Center won the right to their own union, the Maine State Nurses Association (MSNA), at the end of April with a vote of 1,001-750, despite the center's hiring of a union-avoidance consultant.

The vote is being reviewed by the National Labor Relations Board, but the margin of victory is such that there is little doubt about the outcome. MSNA is an affiliate of National Nurses United, a union which represents 170,000 nurses across the U.S. ❖

## Fight Effects Of Voter Suppression Law In Georgia- "21st Century Jim Crow"

Mar. 29, 2021 - Dear friends and fellow activists: People all over the world have a chance to speak up against racism in the United States. The legislature in the state of Georgia has recently passed legislation that will suppress the Black vote in the state. It is blatantly racist and destructive of democracy.

President Joe Biden on Friday condemned the sweeping new voting restrictions in Georgia as "outrageous," "un-American" and "Jim Crow in the 21st Century." "This law, like so many others being pursued by Republicans in statehouses across the country is a blatant attack on the Constitution and good conscience."

U.S. Senator Cory Booker made a powerful statement about the legislation in an interview: <https://www.msnbc.com/the-reidout/watch/cory-booker-calls-new-voting-restrictions-in-georgia-a-step-towards-authoritarianism-109157957970>

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## A Typical Montana Worker Would Lose \$1,143 A YEAR, If RTW Law Passes

### The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) has found that in states that have adopted right-to-work laws, workers have lower wages and few, if any benefits. Such laws are rooted in the Jim Crow era.

Feb. 25, 2021—State legislators in Montana are considering enacting a "right-to-work" (RTW) law—a misleadingly named policy that is designed to make it more difficult for workers to come together in a union to negotiate for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. A new report by EPI senior economic analyst David Cooper and state economic analyst Julia Wolfe finds that RTW would have far-reaching harmful consequences for Montana workers—both those who are in unions and those who are not.

"Right-to-work laws do nothing to boost employment, raise wages, or help working people," said Cooper. "We know that states that have passed these anti-union laws have lower wages and benefits. In a time when our country is recovering from an extreme downturn, we should be protecting and empowering workers, not threatening their paychecks."

The median hourly wage of union workers in Montana is \$22.85, compared with \$16.95 for nonunion workers. The wage advantage for union workers persists even when adjusting for education and other characteristics related to union membership that affect earnings. Nationally, unionized workers are paid 11.2 percent higher wages, on average, than nonunionized workers in the same industry and occupation with similar education and experience.

The negative effects of RTW spillover into the nonunionized workforce as well. Both unionized and nonunionized workers in RTW states are paid 3.1 percent less, on average, than workers with similar characteristics in non-RTW states, according to previous EPI research. If this average pay penalty for being in an RTW state were applied to the typical full-time, full-year Montana worker, it would amount to a \$1,143 loss in annual earnings.

RTW laws undermine unions' ability to collect "fair share fees" from workers whose interests they represent. Fair share fees cover the costs of bargaining, contract administration, and grievance processes that unions are

required by law to undertake on behalf of all (union and nonunion) members of a collective bargaining unit. Without fair share fees, union power degrades quickly. Ultimately, RTW legislation is associated with lower overall unionization rates. In Montana, 6.5 percent of private-sector workers are represented by a union, compared with only 4.0 percent of private-sector workers in neighboring RTW states. Nationally, 8.5 percent of private-sector workers in non-RTW states are represented by a union, nearly double the average private-sector unionization rate in RTW states (5.2 percent).

"Unions raise industry standards for union and nonunion workers alike," said Wolfe. "A so-called 'right to work' law would have detrimental effects for Montana's workforce and fuel our country's growing economic inequality."

RTW laws originated in the Jim Crow South, by business interests who viewed the prospect of solidarity between Black workers and working-class white workers as a threat to the racist social hierarchy in the South, and the political dominance of wealthy white plantation owners and industrialists.

The racist implications of RTW laws ring true today: Nationwide, Black workers represented by unions are paid 13.7 percent more than their nonunionized Black peers, and Hispanic workers represented by unions are paid 20.1 percent more than their nonunionized Hispanic peers. (White workers represented by union are paid 8.7 percent more than their nonunionized white peers.)

To strengthen workers' rights to organize, Congress should pass the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, a comprehensive set of reforms that would close loopholes in our labor law-including requiring states to allow private employers and unions to enter into "fair share" agreements. ❖

- EPI

## Labor, Faith Activists Win Right To Recall For Cal. Hotel Workers

April 23, 2021—Some 700,000 Hospitality workers throughout the state of California have just won the right to return to work by seniority following massive pandemic layoffs!

"Right to Recall" is a simple concept implemented in many cities across the country, from Los Angeles to Washington DC. It says that hotel workers laid off in pandemic closures have a right to their jobs when the hotels reopen. But hotel owners in many communities across the country have fought against it, leaving open the possibility that they will replace these career employees with younger and cheaper workers during the economic recovery.

Without this promise of economic security, workers are losing hope in their future. The hotel workers' union UNITE HERE, and a coalition of faith leaders, has led the way in the campaign to secure Right to Recall in the Golden State.

With Gov. Newsom's signature on SB 93 (previously AB 3216), hospitality workers can now rest assured that owners won't be permitted to take advantage of the pandemic by replacing longtime loyal employees with newer, cheaper labor. While Right to Recall laws have passed in many cities, California is the first state to implement right to recall. This applies to ALL hospitality workers in the state, not just union workers!

Hospitality workers from UNITE HERE Local 11, along with many in the Jesuits West community, spent the last year inviting Jesuit-educated Gov. Newsom and the legislature to hear the cries of these incredible workers! He initially vetoed the bill last fall (when it was called AB 3216), but after continued pressure through the winter came around and signed the new form of the bill (SB 93) into law, effective immediately. ❖

(From *Catholic Labor Network*)

## Museum Staff Votes By Big Margin To Unionize

The staff at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, Mass, has voted overwhelmingly to unionize, after the vote count at the end of April.

Staff, by a vote of 53-15, joined the Technical, Office, and Professional Union Local 2110 of the United Auto Workers. ❖

## Mine Workers Union Could Support Alternative Energy, But Miners Must Be Supported, As Well

Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers union, has said that he and his union's leaders and members might support alternative energy development, but that the miners must be included in any programs or policies that phase out coal and develop wind and solar sources.

So far, he said in April, he has not seen any "just transition" from coal and gas to alternatives that included benefits to the miners, their families, and their communities.

He and Senator Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., spoke in April, to declare that the miners cannot be left behind as coal is phased out by President Biden's plans to tackle climate change, which are probably the most ambitious by a president in many years, possibly ever.

Roberts, like Manchin, is a native of West Virginia and its mine industry, was quoted in one press report: "People might say, well, the UMW is being awfully bold here proposing ideas to the president of the United States, but I don't think it's all that bold given the fact that there's a long record here of sacrifice from coal miners in this nation, whether it's the number of miners that've been killed, or the number of miners that have died from black lung, just to make this country great. There's just no other group of workers that have contributed that much to this nation's economy."

Historically, coal has been the major energy source for industrial, transportation, and power generation in the entire country and the cost to miners, their families, their communities and their regions has been great. Roberts obviously wants that recognized and the miners are going to demand that they and their communities be included in any alternative energy development programs and policies. And they want those jobs to be good, union jobs. ❖

## NOTICE: Solidarity Committee Virtual Meetings

The virtual meetings of the Solidarity Committee are being held at 7:00 PM on the second Thursday of each month.

During this COVID pandemic we are holding them as ZOOM meetings. To be included on the contact information numbers for meeting access, please email Doug Bullock at: [dbull4@verizon.net](mailto:dbull4@verizon.net).

## Conspiracy Theories Serve The Market, Not The Marginalized

--By ROBERT FAIVRE & JULIE TORRANT

April 6, 2021—Conspiracy theories are neither conspiratorial nor are they theory. Rather, they are narratives of intelligibility; they narrate the world in such a way that it becomes habitable by those who have been excluded from access to the necessities of life by the current economic system.

The fact that conspiracy theories do not explain the world, however, does not reduce their cognitive value—the way they make the world knowable and orient people in reality. The reality they map does not coincide with the historical, actual reality but questions it. The common reality, in other words, becomes a conspiracy against the excluded—people whom Hillary Clinton called "deplorables." The promise of conspiracy theories is that they will open the door to the real reality.

Conspiracy theories tell the stories of real reality in apocalyptic tones that assure people that the world in its present form is coming to an end and freedom from it is at hand. They are stories of the end of the world and liberation of the excluded, tales of freedom to come. Conspiracy theories, however, are not just cognitive mapping of the world; they are political instructions for making the world livable for the excluded. They are, in other words, plans for class insurgency: the mutiny of the excluded against the always-included ruling class.

However, what they mean by "class" is not social relations that have an economic base. Conspiracy theories strip class from all its material economic ground and remakes class as the "elite." In conspiracy theories, the oppressing class is not the 1 percent, the oligarchs, but the educated, the liberal, and the progressive whose ideas about transgender, abortion, health care, and taxes have upended the identities of the excluded.

Conspiracy theories are believed by the excluded. They are the map of their identities; they assure the "deplorables" that they matter, that they may be excluded by the elite but are included in another, more desirable community.

The real beneficiaries of conspiracy theories, however, are the very people who exclude the excluded: the ruling class that

## It Might Be Plausibly Argued...

--By BLAISE FARINA

In *Solidarity Notes'* February 2021 issue, Mr. Cunningham-Cook laments that the U.S. labor movement is bedeviled by a membership crisis. He asserts that if today's labor organizers and members read Boyer and Morais' *Labor's Untold Story* (as "the true history of the people that built [the U.S.]"), labor activists might muster enough inspiration to help surmount the "apathy" hindering the U.S. labor movement, and spark its revival. His assertion is attention worthy.

*Labor's Untold Story* recaptures U.S. workers' agonies and heroisms in the ninety or so years after the U.S. Civil War. But does its conceptual frame uncover what power and privilege wants to remain opaque? Labor's Untold Story leaves us in no doubt about the timeless significance of wage labor's solidarity, collective resistance and pro-action. But is it apathy among workers that has stymied a more robust labor movement the last six or so decades?

Workers and labor movements can still muster the sort of collective class consciousness and struggle to remake a troubled world where some serious consequences of our socially and historically constructed actions weigh heavily upon all of us, but how can we empower ourselves (locally and broadly) to create socio-politically just and ecologically sensitive alternative worlds? These questions deserve at least cursory scrutiny here and perhaps debate elsewhere.

As dramatic and inspirational as *Labor's Untold Story* is, Boyer and Morais present a choreography of events within a static, myopic framework. One may argue that their pages resound with the struggles between U.S. workers and capitalists, from coal mine to free speech fights to steel mill, and echo with the troubles of wartime tensions.

But upon closer inspection, we can see capital-wage relations appear as empirically distinct, mutually exclusive local and national arrangements floating independently of abstract and partial categories of cosmopolitan powers of domination rather than as the constitutive, socio-ecological processes of the historical geography of capital accumulation and inter-imperialist rivalry and war. It is difficult to comprehend local and regional labor struggles outside the capitalist interrelations and socio-ecological processes through which they were produced and reproduced, and of which they formed constituent parts. To ignore these interrelations and processes, and their political mediations, as Boyer and Morais do (probably unwittingly), is to shirk the responsibility for comprehending how they shape landscapes and alter human

dominates the current economic order. Conspiracy theories divert class anger away from the ruling class and redirect it toward an elusive elite. The universities—not GM, banks, or hedge funds—are the real oppressors.

In place of exploitation (economic) of workers that is the source of profit for capitalism, conspiracy theories put domination (power). The economic dictatorship of capital is displaced by the cultural power of the elite. The economic relations are replaced by power relations because it is much easier for the excluded to imagine a world in which power can be changed, or at least challenged, by people's counter-power than to conceive of the world without capitalism, which provides jobs, and in which they know they are exploited through their wages, which they need to subsist. Conspiracy theories are lessons by which people learn how to live with economic exploitation and rebel against cultural oppression—to live with dignity but without health care.

In the current pandemic, when conspiracy theories have found a fertile ground, it is the "mask," for instance, that is seen as the sign of domination. Unmasking is a class insurgency against the power of the elite—what we call maskarchy. Resisting masks is an instrument not of liberation but of rebellion against government regulation. It is a struggle by the excluded but arranged by the 1 percent. Investigative reporting by *The Wall Street Journal* found the insurrection of January 6 was paid for by capitalists.

The ostensible goal of conspiracy theories is cultural freedom of the individual. This is what is the true believers believe. The actual function, however, is an economic one: to use the disaster to free capitalism from regulations. Anti-mask rebellion is not about masks, pandemic, or health; it is a lesson of rebellion against state power as regulator of the market.

Similarly, conspiracy theories are not about the individual liberty of the common citizen. They are cultural instruments for the economic freedom of the market from the regulatory power of the state. ❖

*Robert Faivre, of Saratoga Springs, is an English Professor at SUNY Adirondack Community College. Julie Torrant, of Saratoga Springs, is an independent scholar.*

lives, much less for considering how we can remake them.

Turning to the apathy question, I shall not consider it unproblematic, but let us not fiddle too much with it at the expense of overlooking more profound, tangled difficulties. You can imagine the paroxysms of anxiety and alienation experienced by successive generations of working class activists, from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn to Eugene Debs to Dorothy Ray Healy, that have been inflicted upon today's workers who also detest the dreadful implications of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, a virulent tool in the repertoire of labor control.

Consider, too, that U.S. labor's woes since about 1970, its diminished membership and weak bargaining power, recurred within the U.S. regime of capital accumulation. As it happened, post World War II surges of productivity (U.S., Western Europe, Japan) morphed into stagflation (unemployment and inflation) and overaccumulation crises (fewer profitable opportunities) as well as widespread labor unrest amid financial deregulation and heightened intercapitalist competition between productive centers and lower labor-cost landscapes (notably peripheral countries).

I cannot convince anyone that a non-exploitative socially just and ecologically sensitive capitalism is a delusion. But repudiating capitalism is simple: Accepting it is tantamount to refusing consideration of more promising alternatives. Of course, the answer to the hoary, thorny question "What to do?" remains uncertain. Boyer and Morais' argument that "labor has never [progressed] in isolation or ... without allies" is certain.

It might be plausibly argued that the people of the world now need a progressive labor movement, together with a revived socialist avant-garde, that can collectively confront capital not just in the workplace and in the nation state but more sensibly throughout all the relevant terrains of human action across the globe.

It might be plausibly argued, too, that this insurgent labor movement should embrace the twofold task: (1) eradicate capitalist relations and decommodify labor power in order to engender popular, associated producers who decide democratically the logistics of fulfilling common social needs as well as (2) forge the sort of processes of production and distribution of goods and services that eliminate the capacity of private individuals to accumulate money and appropriate social wealth as a form of socio-political power. The labor movement, and its allies, can remake the world more humane, even if it must proceed under geographical and historical constraints. ❖

## U.S. Don't Fund The Honduran Jilamito River Dam!: SOA Watch

April 15, 2021—This week, SOA Watch, the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice in Honduras (MADJ) and 60 other U.S. and Honduran organizations are sending a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen urging the U.S. to oppose financing for the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project in Honduras.

For years, members of local communities, organized in MADJ, have maintained an encampment defending the Jilamito River from this project. They have faced death threats, violence, and criminalization. The local mayor and other local leaders face criminal charges for defending the river. One month after they were indicted, Carlos Hernandez, the mayor's defense lawyer, was murdered.

The U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has publicly stated it will finance the project as part of the investing \$1 billion in the private sector in Honduras. Last year, Rep. Ilhan Omar led over 25 other Congresspeople in a public letter opposing this funding. MADJ has repeatedly denounced threats, human rights violations, and allegations of corruption related to the project. Despite all of this, IDB Invest, the private sector arm of the Inter-American Development Bank, has approved a \$20.25 million loan for the project. The U.S. is by far the largest shareholder of the IDB.

You can join us in calling on the U.S. Treasury to use its voice to ensure the immediate suspension and definitive cancelation of the loans to the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project. Share the letter ( <http://bit.ly/JilamitoLetter> ) on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Be sure to tag @USTreasuryDept on Facebook and @USTreasury and @SecYellen on Twitter. Find

sample graphics here.

The letter notes the numerous parallels between the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project and the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project, which Berta Cáceres was murdered for opposing. In addition to the violence, criminalization, and threats faced by project opponents, both projects were approved in the period after the 2009 military coup in Honduras when natural resources were rapidly handed over to Honduras' elite. MADJ has denounced corruption and irregularities related to the concession process, as well as environmental damages, but unsurprisingly the Honduran judicial system has yet to resolve their complaints.

The U.S. justifies support for projects such as the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project—via so-called "development" banks—by claiming such "development" will prevent migration. To the contrary, the violent, militarized imposition of the US neoliberal economic model—which includes the privatization of natural resources—is itself a root cause of migration from Central America. This is not "development"—it serves to privatize and concentrate natural resources in the hands of the elite, and is frequently imposed through U.S.—backed militarization and repression of the communities and organizations who defend their water, land, and rights.

Join us in sending a message to the U.S. Treasury via their Facebook (@USTreasuryDept) and Twitter (@USTreasury) pages to urge Treasury to oppose financing of the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project. Share our posts on Facebook or Twitter or make your own!

*(From School Of The Americas Watch)*

## Amid Widespread Disease, Death, And Poverty, The Major Powers Increased Military Spending

--By LARRY WITTNER

Last year was a terrible time for vast numbers of people around the globe, who experienced not only a terrible disease pandemic, accompanied by widespread sickness and death, but severe economic hardship.

Even so, the disasters of 2020 were not shocking enough to jolt the world's most powerful nations out of their traditional preoccupation with enhancing their armed might, for once again they raised their military spending to new heights.

During 2020, world military expenditures increased to \$1,981,000,000,000—or nearly \$2 trillion—with the outlays of the three leading military powers playing a major part in the growth. The U.S. government increased its military spending from \$732 billion in 2019 to \$778 billion in 2020, thus retaining its top spot among the biggest funders of war preparations. Meanwhile, the Chinese government hiked its military spending to \$252 billion, while the Russian government raised its military outlay to \$61.7 billion.

As a result, the U.S. government remained by far the most lavish spender on the military in the world, accounting for 39 percent of the global total. For its part, the Chinese government continued its steady role in the worldwide military buildup, with its military disbursements rising for the 26th consecutive year. Indeed, China's 76 percent increase in military spending between 2011 and 2020 was the largest among the world's top 15 big spenders. When added together, the 2020 military expenditures of the United States, China, and Russia accounted for 55 percent of the global total.

This upward spiral in military spending coincided with a sharp rise in the number of the world's people living in poverty, which soared by an estimated 131 million to 803 million by the end of the year.

In the United States, the richest nation in the world, 2020 produced the largest increase in poverty since the U.S. government began tracking it in 1960. By the end of the year, an estimated 50 million people were struggling with hunger, including 17 million children. Plunged into severe privation, vast numbers of Americans lined up, sometimes in caravans that stretched for miles, to obtain free food at private and public food pantries and other distribution centers. Ignoring the terrible human costs of the economic crisis plaguing the nation during his re-election campaign, President Donald Trump boasted instead of his administration's "colossal" increase in military spending.

In Russia, where real incomes fell for five of the previous seven years, they dropped still further in 2020. In that year, the average Russian had 11 percent less to spend than in 2013. Indeed, during the first nine months of 2020, as poverty grew, an estimated 19.6 million Russians reportedly lived below the

poverty line, equivalent to 13.3 percent of the population. According to a leading economist at Russia's Institute of International Finance, the authorities "were so concerned about their external threats that they completely forgot about the domestic population."

The situation was not much different in China. Despite its Communist pretensions, China had one of the largest gaps between rich and poor throughout the world. By October, its number of billionaires had soared to 878, the highest total of any nation. In contrast, as a New York Times article reported that month, "millions of people on low incomes are working fewer hours at lower pay, depleting savings, and taking out loans to survive." Moreover, although the government claimed that it had eradicated the most severe poverty, poverty remained common. "Even if you aren't out of poverty, the country will say you're out of poverty," remarked a bitter Chinese farmer. "That's the way it is."

The existence of widespread poverty in the world's mightiest military powers raises the question of what could have been done to alleviate or eliminate it if, during 2020, had they not poured nearly \$1.1 trillion into preparations for war.

Also, of course, the vast resources used for the military buildup could have bankrolled other programs that would have substantially improved the lives of their citizens. In the United States, as the National Priorities Project noted, the military budget could have funded healthcare for 208 million adults, or 21 million scholarships for university students, or 84 million public housing units, or the employment of 9.2 million elementary school teachers, or 10 million clean energy jobs, or VA medical care for 72 million veterans.

But, sadly, building the mightiest military forces in world history had greater appeal to the governments of the United States, China, and Russia. Perhaps, someday, people will ask whether increasing preparations for war by these nations—mostly designed to destroy one another—was the best these governments could do as their populations sank into widespread disease, death, and poverty. ❖

## Union's Defeat... (Cont'd. from Page 7)

sharp changes at the NLRB, Trump-era rules paved the way for workers to oust their union less than four years after voting it in.

It's the latest challenge for a once-powerful union that advocated a different approach to labor organizing, challenging the dominance of California's agribusiness and the stark absence of labor law protections—and it's a defeat in a part of California where migration, work, and the struggle for power in the food industry have a long history.

To read the original report, visit [www.strikewave.com](http://www.strikewave.com). ❖

## Public Power Means Worker Power

--By *REBECCA ORRISON & DAN CUATT*

April 22, 2021—We need to confront climate change—and quickly. Politics and policymaking might require negotiations and timelines, but the Earth does not have time for us to mess around. Every action that reaffirms status quo environmental exploitation and continues to warm our planet is a missed opportunity for building a new society that prioritizes quality of life and worker dignity over profits. While confronting the climate crisis is a big challenge for us all, it's an equally big opportunity.

As democratic socialists we believe that a better world is possible. We must build a society where workers are guaranteed the security of well paying jobs and assure all workers dignified retirement. We must build a society that answers to people who have been oppressed and is accountable for past injustices.

The solution is public power. Public ownership and control over the power systems that keep the lights on is also power that wins at the bargaining table. Expanding union density in the process of building renewable energy infrastructure controlled by and accountable to people is the only path forward.

The Public Power NY Campaign has put forward the New York Build Public Renewables Act (NYBPRA), A.1466A (Carroll) and the New York Utility Democracy Act (NYUDA) to build power for workers and the public, while building up the renewable energy sector. With less than 6 percent of wind and solar workers currently unionized, a shift from private to public sector jobs would make the path towards unionization much easier. Wind and solar makes up only 5 percent of New York's electricity generation, so we must scale up renewable generation alongside union density.

The NYBPRA not only helps us rapidly meet our climate

goals, but does it in a way that guarantees a just transition for all current private sector workers and opens pathways for green unionized jobs from construction to energy system maintenance to customer service positions. The NYUDA puts control directly in the hands of workers and community members to not only seize the means of production, but establish their own labor provisions.

Call your representatives today and ask them to support public power and to become a cosponsor! Support A.1466A! To learn more about the Public Power NY campaign, visit [publicpower.ny.org](http://publicpower.ny.org) or call Rebecca Orrison at 612-581-0290 or contact [publicpower@capitaldistrictsda.org](mailto:publicpower@capitaldistrictsda.org). ❖

*The writers are members of Capital District Democratic Socialists of America.*

## Bake Shop Threatens Deportation, If Workers Vote To Join The Union

Tate's Bake Shop, a Long Island-based bakery reportedly threatened its approximately 500 workers, many of whom are undocumented, with deportation if they voted to join Amalgamated Local 298, AFL-CIO.

For all of the workers, organizing has been a struggle, fighting a giant corporation, Mondelez, which bought Tate in 2018 for a reported \$500 million. Although it was explained to the workers that they are protected by the National Labor Relations Act in their organizing activity, they still feared the possibility of being reported by the company to immigration authorities.

Workers had until late April to send in their mail ballots, so at press time, we did not know the outcome of the election. ❖

## Amazon Union Drive... (Cont'd. from Page 1)

of the gigantic General Electric Company (GE). In its heyday—before the company collapsed owing to its own endemic dishonesty and hubris—GE was an anti-union monster like no other. I saw GE break every labor law in the book, and commit anti-union acts too numerous to describe. The company employed more "Union Avoidance" operatives than we had organizers on the UE payroll. Every campaign was the union organizing equivalent of scaling Mt. Everest. Only occasionally did we succeed. Most of the time we lost, frequently very badly.

What then? Did we give up and back away from further election showdowns with the company? Did we pine away for some perfect moment when we would charge the drawbridge? Did we sit back and enjoy life until the opportune moment to organize arrived? Did we convene the piss-and-moan club to proclaim our lack of all the advantageous situations that we wanted? Did we set ourselves up on high as self-assured gurus who sat in judgement of everything that other unions did, or tried to do? No. Never. We collected ourselves, dusted ourselves off, kept our union together, and we went back to the front, again and again.

When we lost - as we did more often than I care to admit - we were at least spared being subjected to the current torrent of second guessing and criticism now being heaped on the RWDSU for having the ambition - and yes, probably the poor judgement - to launch the recent drive.

Most of it being shoveled out by progressives and leftists, so far as I can tell.

You can pick apart the union campaign in Bessemer all you want. And keep your laptops and wine goblets at the ready. You will have many, many, more opportunities to complain about what went wrong in the future failed organizing drives yet to come. Bessemer is merely a milepost on what will be a long and arduous road to organize this piece of the commanding economic heights. Many more losses lie ahead. Strikes and other uprisings are ahead. The union organization of corporate America will be a messy affair. There will be many casualties. It will not be done according to a script penned in a university or NGO someplace.

A brief study of our own U.S. labor history reveals clearly and starkly that Amazon and the other major employers today will not be organized until the left wing does the hard, hankless, exhausting organizing work of patiently building real union structures and real organizational muscle. Random angry workers will not do it. Mainstream Democrats will not do that work. Sideline kibitzers will not do the organizing. Well intended critics will not do it.

Instead, plain and simple worker-militants, socialists, communists, anarchists, disaffected young workers, and every other sort of radical will do the work. It will require the same effort and ideological zeal that organized the early unions, the

infant AF of L, the IWW, the TUEL, and the CIO. And while it's apparent to everyone that today's business unions are not up to the task, what is the antidote to that? Should we take the business union leadership off the hook by never pushing them to put the considerable resources of the unions to work on the hard and difficult organizing front? Do we see our role as reinvigorating our otherwise moribund unions? Or, do we just see our role as diagnosing the business union malaise, detailing its inadequate failures, publicizing them far and wide via the internet, and demoralizing everyone in the process? I choose instead to think about the 738 workers in the Bessemer facility who withstood an avalanche of Amazon company lies and pressure and voted "yes." To them all, I tip my hat, extend my thanks, and only wish that I could have been there with them right up until the end, even if it was a bitter ending. I know what it is to be forced to drink from the bitter cup.

But it was those bitter sips that reminded me that I was right to commit my life to the overthrow and end of this rotten system, the Amazon system. The system of wage slavery where all of us are compelled to sell our labor by the slice, to bosses only too eager to work us to death and squeeze everything they can out of us. The system that creates and enriches a Bezos, while the workers are ground down, beat down, run ragged, and thrown away eventually like so much garbage. The same awful system that endangers the viability of the planet, and that impoverishes billions of wage slaves in every part of the world.

By the logic of some of the Bessemer critics there can be no election or showdown until the opportune or perfect moment arrives. I reject that completely. This is not to ignore reality, justify recklessness, or cast off good judgement, either. It is a realization of the validity of the observation by early U.S. labor organizer and leader William Z. Foster that, "No organizing effort is ever wasted." Foster observed correctly that, "The organization of the unorganized millions of workers is primarily the task of the left wing. There is no other section of the labor movement possessing the necessary courage, energy, and understanding to carry through this basic work."

I commend all of the Amazonians, union volunteers, and staff who threw themselves into the fight. You will be remembered as participants when the first real punch was thrown at the Amazon citadel. The critics, they will be forgotten. All Empires fall. Amazon will too.

Read William Z. Foster's collected works on his union organizing career; <https://www.intpubnyc.com/product/ameri-can-trade-unionism/> ❖

*Chris Townsend was a 25-year staff member of the United Electrical Workers Union (UE), and currently is the organizing director for the Amalgamated Transit Union, (ATU).*

## World's Richest Man Once Again Beats His Workers Into Submission

--By JOHN FUNICIELLO

It's not that he doesn't have enough money to provide affluent living for an entire city, but Jeff Bezos just made sure that he will continue to rake in the dollars by defeating his workers in Bessemer, Alabama, some of whom tried to join a union.

In defeating his workers and the small union that was organizing about 6,000 workers in one of his Amazon "fulfillment centers" (a very high-tech warehouse), he proved once again that corporate CEOs will go to any lengths and pay any price to defeat efforts to join a union, which is the only way that workers in the U.S. can have even minimal control over their working lives. His successful efforts to defeat his workers in Bessemer appeared to be a kind of contest with himself, to see how much it would take to bring his workers to heel and express their love for their work and all of the benefits that Amazon has provided for them in a right-to-work (for less) state. It was not so much a contest to see how high the wages could go or how many more benefits a union could win at the bargaining table as it was an expression of the power a company has over its workers.

Bezos doesn't need the money that he would "save" by defeating the union drive. It would be difficult to determine how much he spent in union-busting professionals who made themselves at home in his Alabama plant for the duration, but it could have been in the millions. That's money that could have been spent trying to make his workplace more humane. Forbes magazine says Bezos is the richest man in the world and [visualcapitalist.com](http://visualcapitalist.com) says that his net worth is some \$181.6 billion. It's not about the money.

With about 55 percent of eligible workers voting in the election that was conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, the vote was 1,798 against the union and 738 in favor of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. This time (and again), Bezos won and the workers lost, but however it turns out, since there are NLRB charges being brought by the RWDSU, the Bessemer vote will not be the last for Amazon workers across the country.

Bezos and his corporation boasted that, at \$15 per hour starting pay, he already paid more than most workers in Alabama are paid and, he said, their benefits are as good as they might expect if they had a union and a contract negotiated by their fellow workers. Pay and benefits are important, but that isn't the point. There are other issues that are addressed in a union contract and they don't all have to do with wages and money. Amazon is not the only corpora-

tion that sees a union around every corner and they fear the power of workers acting within a negotiated contract.

Even though they overwhelmingly wield more power than workers, most of Corporate America is a little on edge these days, because the imbalance of power between capital and labor today is similar to the imbalance that existed at the turn of the last century. It was then that the corporate owners and robber barons called out their private armies to deal with fed-up workers. At times, it was very bloody, and most of the blood spilled was that of the workers and their union leaders.

They realize that they are on a tightrope between continuing to control every move of every one of their workers and giving up some of that power by agreeing to negotiate how all workers will be treated while on the job. It is not the day when the bosses can throw workers out of company housing, but it comes close, when a company like Amazon is one of the few in town that provides a living wage.

A question that Bezos and his managers must pose to the company's hundreds of thousands of workers: "How much do I have to pay you, that you will suffer the indignities put upon you, before you will complain and take action?" For now, that question is answered by the lopsided vote for unionization: "We can take a lot and come back for more."

Working conditions at Amazon "fulfillment centers" are legend for their driving workers beyond the ordinary capacity of human beings to keep up with high-tech machinery and computers. It's no contest. While there may be some who have adapted to oppressive conditions and made it into management positions, where the pressure is not so great, but even then, the push to produce even more is constant.

During the union organizing effort in Bessemer, there were some workers who described urinating in a plastic bottle and that was only one aspect of workers being driven beyond capacity and the (mostly) unspoken order always is: Stay in the work line or be disciplined or fired. It calls to mind the line workers in chicken processing plants in the southeastern states, where so many workers reported going to work wearing diapers, so they wouldn't have to leave the line and be fired. In those plants, however, the pay is much less and the benefits are non-existent. But still, those are the few jobs available to them and they will go to any lengths to keep them.

Those working conditions are unsanitary, but they are also very dangerous and the companies are always

seeking to increase the speed of the line, making them very dangerous as well. When workers are injured, they are often treated at the plant and returned to the production line, so the injury does not have to be reported to a government agency. At Amazon, the abuse might not be as obvious, but the damage to the human psyche is just the same.

Working conditions are just as important to negotiate in a union contract as wages and benefits, but companies like Amazon do not want that foot in the door. A union brings with it accountability and no corporation wants to be accountable to anyone. It's the reason that companies will spend millions on "union avoidance" professionals to keep their workers from organizing. Bezos spends those millions, because, if they work (and they have every time, so far), Amazon will not be accountable to anyone.

Last December, Reuters ran a story about a former Amazon worker who quit because of the constant surveillance of cameras trained on the driver. The report noted: "Each time the camera's AI detected an anomaly in Vic's behavior, a yawn, a glance at his phone, it started recording, and saving the footage. Vic felt violated." At the end of the shift, his supervisor showed him his work footage and couldn't or wouldn't say with whom the footage is shared. After that, he gave notice.

Too many complaints about working conditions could result in firing, since, without a union contract, a worker can be fired for any reason or no reason. It's called being an "at will" employee in the law. A union contract ensures that "at will" is erased and workers must be fired "for cause," and that takes it through a grievance procedure, which in general is called "due process." It's another major reason that workers want a union. Of course, it does take away some of the absolute power of the boss.

The unspoken power of the union is why Amazon pays \$15 an hour to start and that isn't going away and it's why Bezos fought so hard and threatened his workers so forcefully to defeat the organizing in Bessemer. The union isn't going away, there or in the rest of the country.

American workers were never going to acquiesce to becoming mere chattel. They never did and they never will, despite the power of Corporate America and its powerful politicians at every level of government. It might take a while, but ultimately, they will in solidarity stand up for their class. ❖

*This was first published in BlackCommentator.com in its April 15, 2021, issue.*

## Covid, Trump NLRB Lead To Union's Defeat In California's Central Valley

--By C.M. LEWIS, *Strikewave*

The Foster Poultry Farms facilities in Livingston, California—which have seen at least 12 worker deaths—have been the center of a fight over worker safety. Now, workers have decertified their union, the United Farm Workers, according to a vote tallied on Feb. 4.

NLRB records obtained by Strikewave in July through the Freedom of Information Act show that workers first submitted their petition for a decertification election at the Foster Poultry Farms poultry processing facility in Livingston in June of 2020. More than 1,800 workers were part of the bargaining unit; UFW has 6,240 active dues-paying members, according to their latest filings with the Department of Labor. The successful decertification vote—which saw low turnout,

with only 661 workers votes tallied and 188 voided ballots—presents a potential setback for the small, California-based union. Final results have not been certified.

Typically, union decertification elections can take a long time to occur, if they occur at all. Initially, the petition for decertification at the Livingston facility was blocked at the regional level because of numerous unfair labor practices: a long-standing rule enforced by the NLRB mandating that charges of unfair labor practices would block elections. However, a host of Trump-era NLRB decisions—including a rule removing "blocking charges" posted to the Federal Register by the NLRB in April, which came into effect July 31st—have made it easier to decertify unions. Even with recent

--See *Union's Defeat* on Page 5

## Hudson River Activists And Groups Plan To Join Together

--By TOM ELLIS

Clean air advocates along the Hudson River met March 27 to better coordinate our efforts to solve major air pollution problems in the region. Activists working to block tire burning at Lafarge in Ravenna, close the Dunn Waste Connections construction and demolition (C&D) dump in Rensselaer, end Norlite's hazardous waste incineration in Cohoes, block the siting of new C&D dumps in Greene County, prevent natural gas electricity generation at the Sheridan Hollow Station in Albany, and reduce and/or clean up pollution from closed or operating industrial facilities in the Glens Falls-Hudson Falls region, introduced themselves and laid the groundwork for enhanced cooperation.

Steve Peirce of The Sanctuary for Independent Media hosted the gathering. He said we are all dealing with clean air, fighting corporate polluters and unhelpful government, and we may need and benefit from a regional or statewide network, similar to the Citizens' Environmental Coalition of years ago. One person added that we all deal with wastes. I said we are in an adversarial relationship with state government, the state health department (DOH) is largely absent from these environmental health issues, the Department of Environmental

Conservation (DEC) assists the polluters, DEC conceals vast amounts of information, the governor appoints top agency staff who are answerable to him and not us, the state legislature usually defers to the governor, the state legislature is lazy when it comes to environmental health, and campaign contributions greatly influence policy.

Former EPA regional administrator and Poestenkill resident, Judith Enck, said we need greater organizational capacity, all of our communities lack power, the state health department's absence from these struggles is probably good because DOH activities are counterproductive to our goals, we are hampered by a skeletal news media compared to decades ago. DEC's chief of staff Sean Mahar increasingly speaks for the agency, sometimes as few as ten people can force change, and we should use the state legislature more and better.

Tracy Frisch, who, decades ago, founded and led the NY Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, said the Clean Air Action Network of Glens Falls (CAAN) desires to have contaminated industrial sites cleaned and wants the thirty-year-old Wheelabrator municipal solid waste incinerator in Hudson Falls shut down. She said CAAN has a Zero Waste campaign

--Continued Below

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**Your "Solidarity Notes"**

and we need a statewide Zero Waste network and legislation. Mark Dunlea said the Climate Action Council must find an effective way to fight back against Cuomo's domination, the state legislature is ineffective, and DEC has been pro-incineration for decades, long before Andrew Cuomo became governor.

Recommendations offered were to build a community among our technical allies and utilize online resources better. Steve Peirce said the regulatory agencies are unfair arenas, and we should establish a group consensus that these pollutions are obviously a bad idea in part because they are right next to schools and playgrounds.

Judith Enck offered suggestions on how to get good media coverage. She said do not ignore social media and make sure at least one person in each group does it. She urged each group to have a Twitter account because policy makers pay attention to it. She urged people to write letters to the editor, hold news

conferences but only if you have real news, and cultivate relationships with reporters and have them trust you as reliable sources of news.

Mark Dunlea said make sure news conferences are live-streamed. Steve Peirce urged a greater use of community radio. "You have a home at WOOC," he said, WOOC will do a ten-minute segment, and the station often delivers new news content.

Other suggestions were to build a mutual aid network project, sufficient regional power to scare DEC and Governor Cuomo, rent a school bus and organize a well publicized toxic tour between Coeymans and Hudson Falls, draft candidates for public office, try to work better to influence the state legislature with the big green groups many of whom do not work with grass roots groups, and tell our compelling stories more effectively. ❖

**Want To Kick-Start The Union Movement?  
RESCIND THE TAFT-HARTLEY ACT**

When it was enacted in 1947, over the veto of President Harry S. Truman, the Taft-Hartley Act was called by many observers to be a wage slavery act (or, at least return to indentured servitude), for it put a permanent obstruction to worker solidarity and union solidarity. Taft-Hartley gave much of the power in the workplace to capital and stabbed American workers in the back for more than half a century. Wonder why workers are on the short end of equality in the U.S. economy?

Research Taft-Hartley and let's start a movement to rescind the vicious Cold War law.