

‘Resistance is life’: Protesters in Los Angeles commemorate Palestinian Land Day

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Los Angeles, March 29. SLL photo

On March 29, Los Angeles saw a significant gathering to commemorate Palestinian Land Day, as protesters rallied against the ongoing genocide in Gaza and escalating violence by U.S.-armed Zionist forces.

The march and demonstration channeled the growing global outrage over the U.S.-backed Zionist entity's systemic efforts to erase Palestinian sovereignty and identity.

Amid chants and banners, participants underscored the urgency of international solidarity.

Initiated by the Palestinian Youth Movement, and endorsed by Unmute Humanity, Unión del Barrio, ANSWER Coalition, Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, and other organizations, the demonstration saw more than a thousand Palestinians and supporters begin at LAPD headquarters and then take over two lanes of traffic winding through busy downtown streets to hold a closing rally in Pershing Square.

In their coverage of this important demonstration, corporate media marched in lockstep with the Trump administration's campaign to stamp out the U.S. Palestine solidarity movement. Fox-affiliated radio and TV stations in Los Angeles gave a crowd estimate of "dozens," while the Los Angeles Times did not report on the event.

From the back of the flatbed truck that led the march, Fatin of Unmute Humanity thanked PYM for "always being organized." She said that no one should think that protests don't matter, because "we are in constant contact with our people in Palestine and this means so much to them."

Fatin went on to list some examples of the circumstances around the deaths of many martyrs, with the crowd shouting "Shame!" after each case. She concluded, "This is the moment — we speak, we write, we fight ... Refusing extermination is resistance!"

We are living proof that resistance is life. Long live our martyrs! Long live our people! Free Palestine!”



Put People First campaign launched in Louisiana with ‘stop the cuts’ rally

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Join the Put the People First campaign, fight back against Trump, Musk, and Governor Landry’s war on the people

New Orleans, March 29 – Despite predicted storms, federal and postal workers, retirees, veterans, Medicaid and SNAP recipients, union members, employed and unemployed workers turned out for a strong rally at the corner of Elk and Canal St. to say “stop the billionaires’ war on the people.”

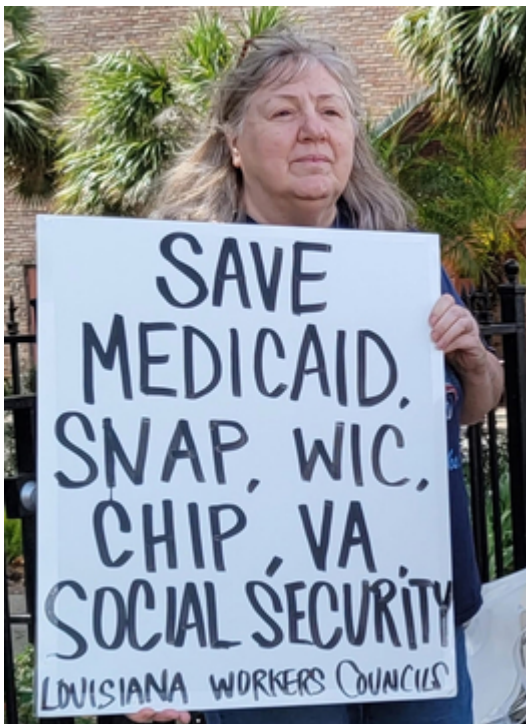
Members of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), National

Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), Teamsters, American Federation of Federal, State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the National Labor Relations Board Union (NLRBU) all pledged to fight back against Trump, Musk, and Landry's attempts to impoverish the working class through illegal union-busting, layoffs, and cuts to our survival programs like Medicaid, SNAP, VA benefits, WIC, CHIP, and Social Security.

Workers denounced Trump and Landry's attacks against and scapegoating of LGBT people and immigrants. The crowd chanted "feed the people, not the pentagon" and "the people united will never be defeated."

Across the country, the movement to defend our right to health care, food, housing, jobs, and income is growing. Join the "Put the People First" campaign to help build this movement here in Louisiana.

Follow Louisiana Workers Councils on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).





Struggle-La Lucha note: On the same day, voters in Louisiana came out and rejected four state constitutional amendments endorsed by Landry. Almost two-thirds of the votes were against, with a 21% voter turnout that far surpassed the projected turnout of 12%. Louisiana said “no!” to all.

- Amendment 1 would have created special courts not accountable to local voters.
- Amendment 2 would have further cut taxes for the rich (Landry’s far-right legislature has already done this through special legislative sessions) while selling off education investments.
- Amendment 3 would have allowed Louisiana legislators to pass laws charging kids of any age as adults for any felony.
- Amendment 4 would have set judicial elections to the earliest dates possible, further limiting voter turnout.



Baltimore's Urban Reads Bookstore, activist owner face white supremacist attacks over prison justice work

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[Urban Reads Bookstore](#) is a Black-owned shop in the heart of Baltimore. Recently, the store and its owner, Tia Hamilton, have been facing harassment and attacks by white supremacists and fascists. These attacks are due to Hamilton's involvement in the struggle for prisoner justice and liberation.

She is engaged at all levels: advocating for better conditions inside the prisons, fighting to get people released early, and supporting them once they are out. Hamilton is marching side by side with the people enslaved and entrapped by the state every day. It is this Black power that scares the racist core of this country, and the reactionaries come out in droves to suppress it.

When met with these vulgar attacks, the store did not back down. Hamilton took to the internet to expose the racists who were harassing her privately. They were sending her photos of lynchings and previous martyrs of police brutality, along with hate-filled messages and slurs. Not only did she bring their actions out into the open, but she also went on the attack.

The bookstore turned to the community for help, and the community responded immediately in lockstep. People were able to help pull the IP addresses of the attackers, and other information regarding where they worked and what groups they were affiliated with.

Community defense was set up around the store, with participation from members of the Tendea Family, UNIA-ACL, the Nation of Islam, the Struggle for Socialism Party, and others who were not affiliated with any group. Online campaigns to raise awareness of what was going on in Baltimore led to the connection of this struggle to similar attacks happening all across the country, from California and Washington state to New York and Washington, D.C.

On March 13, Urban Reads Bookstore opened its doors for a community meeting. At the meeting, people and organizations came together. They exchanged ideas on next steps, not just to protect Urban Reads but on how to create a support network across the country, protecting Black educational centers.

A representative of the Baltimore City Council and her Baltimore City Police escort also attended the meeting. Other than explaining how the city was absolutely unable to protect the community from racism, she also ironically claimed that no one in the city, not even she, could get security from the city.

Needless to say, the room rejected the pitying words from the councilmember and refocused the conversation on action and results.

These fascist assaults on the Black community will not succeed, but they will bring out an even stronger unity, bringing communities together to act swiftly and decisively, using every means necessary to protect and defend one another.



Trump's tax breaks vs. public health: HHS layoffs could deepen opioid crisis

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These cuts kill

On March 27, Trump's billionaire-controlled administration announced the firing of another 10,000 full-time workers at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). That brings the total to 20,000 people forced out of HHS so far - almost 25% of the agency's workforce.

Imagine eating at a restaurant that just fired 25% of its staff (or better yet, *working*

at one). The experience would likely be unpleasant. But when cuts are made to medical care and research, people die. In recent years, hundreds of thousands have died from drug overdoses in the U.S. annually. The workers at HHS and affiliated programs have helped reduce those numbers with evidence-based treatment and prevention programs.

The HHS umbrella includes the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and more. Some [67.3 million](#) people are enrolled in Medicare, and almost 90% are older than 65. More than [37.6 million](#) U.S. children are enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provides health coverage for children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private insurance. Trump's policies show he doesn't care about older people or kids.

In 2022, the NIH launched the [Harm Reduction Research Network](#), a national initiative to lower opioid overdose deaths. Its research addresses the many disparities affecting communities due to class, race, and even geographic factors. A Dec. 16, 2022, news release said:

"Novel forms of harm reduction services may prove helpful in rural areas of the country, where people may need to travel long distances to receive care and services. According to 2020 CDC data, rural counties experienced 26.2 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, which was only slightly lower than the rates in urban counties (28.6 deaths per 100,000 people); overdose deaths involving psychostimulants were higher in rural counties than in urban counties from 2012 to 2020. Additionally, several projects will be aimed at populations disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of drug use, including Black and Latino/Latina communities, and women."

This is the type of research that helped drive down opioid deaths by 24% between

September 2023 and September 2024. The fate of such research – and medical care for those suffering with addiction – is now in jeopardy, while Trump promises more tax breaks for billionaires.

To shed light on the real lives of people struggling with opioid addiction, Struggle-La Lucha has begun a series on the epidemic. The following is an interview with Moon Soselo, a young woman who is currently taking naltrexone to treat opioid addiction.

‘Focus on harm-reduction based treatment’

Moon Soselo: I grew up in Seattle, Washington, and have moved around the country a lot, but always find myself back in Washington. I’ve mostly worked in the food service industry, though I have pipe dreams about finishing school and becoming a journalist. And I’m a big ‘ole lesbian.

Gregory E. Williams: God bless the lesbians who fight so we’re all free! So you were prescribed Suboxone? Are you still taking it?

MS: I’m not. I actually only took Suboxone for a few months. I’d moved and lost my Medicaid for a while, and of course, ended up relapsing in that period, but never fully fell back into addiction. Six months after I got my first Suboxone prescription, I used heroin for the last time.

Now I take naltrexone. It’s normally given as a monthly shot, but I take it orally once a day because no pharmacies here stock the shot. Anyway, it basically blocks opioids from sticking to your receptors. It’s really great for people who have gone through full detox and want to, like, “lock in” their sobriety. It’s not really right for people who are still in a chaotic use period, though, because it is theoretically possible to break through the block and get high, but you can die trying.

GEW: So you were getting Suboxone through Medicaid?

MS: Yup! I didn't have to pay a cent, which was a relief. I went to the Seattle STEP Clinic. They actually helped me get on Medicaid, too. I didn't have it before. I don't think I would have been able to achieve sobriety without Medicaid!

GEW: Have you ever used Narcan to reverse an overdose?

MS: I've never had it used on me. I have used it on others twice, both times were very scary situations. It worked both times, though! I definitely encourage people to carry it, and take a quick training course if they can.

GEW: Absolutely. I think they should be giving it out in schools, along with condoms and Plan B (which would be illegal where I am in Louisiana).

How do you access naltrexone?

MS: I have Medicaid again, and I see a psychiatric nurse practitioner at the local clinic who prescribes it in addition to my other psych meds. We only have one addiction program out here, and they focus on folks who have court orders, and the program uses an AA model, so it's not for me. I know the AA model has worked for people before, but both statistically and anecdotally, harm-reduction-focused treatment is more successful.

GEW: Do you have any thoughts on Trump's rhetoric around the opioid epidemic?

MS: He's basically been blaming it all on China and Mexico, right? My understanding is that curbing undocumented immigration won't change anything because it's mostly smuggled during legal crossings, and that India has also been a producer of precursor chemicals for fentanyl, so illicit drug manufacturers would probably just change suppliers.

I have major doubts that tariffs and border control will have any positive impact whatsoever. Further, it's pretty likely these policies are going to raise the prices of

regular goods people need, putting more people into poverty, and poverty is a major risk factor for addiction. I would not be surprised if these policies actually worsen the opioid epidemic. The best way to actually curb opiate addiction is to focus on harm-reduction-based treatment.

GEW: Do you feel like it's dehumanizing when these politicians talk about the opioid epidemic in order to get support for the policies they're pushing without actually talking to and meeting with people dealing with addiction? I mean, they could actually go to clinics and talk with people and learn what their actual needs and struggles are.

MS: Oh, absolutely. It feels like we're just a rhetorical tool, an excuse to implement policies that won't help us and don't actually have anything to do with us.

They don't really care if tariffs curb fentanyl manufacturing, but if it hurts China, great!

GEW: If anything, I would think that all this sensationalist talk about the opioid epidemic (as opposed to conversations about things that actually help) is further stigmatizing people affected by addiction. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you wish people knew about opioid addiction?

MS: Unless you have a lot of money and resources, there is a kind of catch-22 issue with opiate addiction. It gets expensive quick, so when you're deep in it you're usually walking a tightrope just keeping up with rent and feeding yourself. I was, on average, \$300 in debt to my dealers at any given time.

Opioid detox usually takes about one to two weeks to get out of the acute stage, depending on how much/long you were using and which opioid you were using. And working through it would be like trying to work through having the flu, food poisoning, a back injury, and Fight Club-level insomnia, all simultaneously.

But getting a full, straight week off can be tough to do even at decent jobs, let alone two weeks. And if you don't have paid sick leave or vacation, then you probably can't afford the paycheck hit. So, you try to maintain the balance of getting high to avoid withdrawal, so you can go to work, so you can eat and pay rent. It's an awful trap that just keeps getting worse and worse.

This is honestly where medications like methadone and Suboxone really, really can make a huge difference because you can be in treatment while maintaining your day-to-day life. With Suboxone, you only have to go through roughly 24 hours of withdrawal before it's safe to take, so it can be started on a weekend. And with methadone, you don't have to wait any time at all to start taking it, though there are usually pretty strict rules for methadone prescriptions, so you do have to work around a clinic schedule. Both medications really are game changers.

Gregory E. Williams is a public health worker in New Orleans.



Honoring Remarkable Courageous Women

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Honoring Remarkable Courageous Women



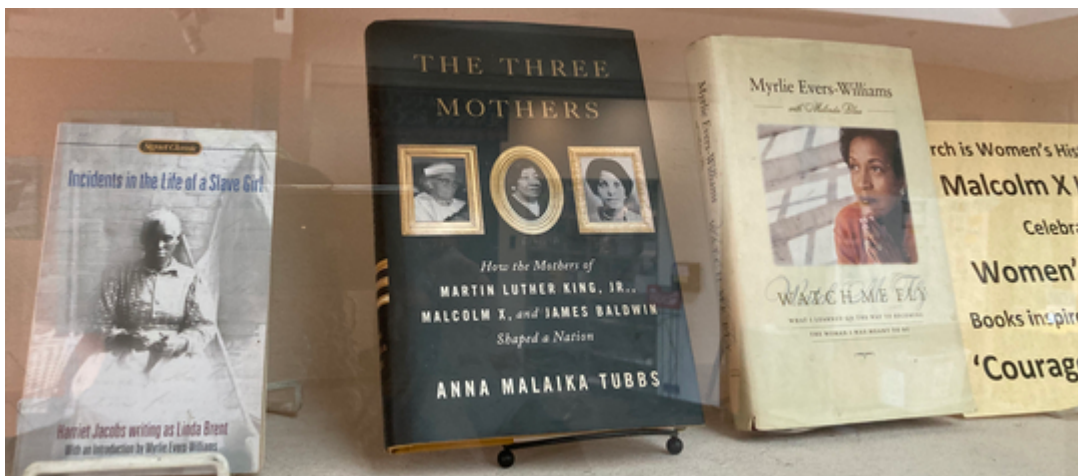
On March 15, African American Writers and Artists, San Diego (AAW&A) hosted a Women's History event at the Malcolm X Library honoring "Remarkable Courageous Women," whose shoulders we stand on. This was AAW&A's first event since the

hiatus that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program highlighted Harriet Ross Tubman, and began with brief histories of International Women's Day, Women's History Month, and Harriet Tubman Day. A slide presentation, posters of women, and books by and about women were displayed throughout the Performance room.

Many in attendance, including this writer, were not aware that March 10 is the official Harriet Tubman Day holiday. Approved as Public Law 101-252 by the 101st Congress in a joint resolution on March 13, 1990, and signed by President George H.W. Bush.

The documentary "Harriet Tubman: They Call Her Moses" was previewed. AAW&A members and supporters read selections from "Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman" by Sarah H. Bradford. Overall, this women's program armed people in attendance with knowledge of many remarkable women they didn't know.





Unity in resistance: LA activists rally for Palestine, trans rights, against ICE and fascism

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“Our Solidarity is Our Strength” was the theme of the March 16 meeting in Los Angeles, organized by Women in Struggle and the Struggle for Socialism Party. The program brought together leaders from communities besieged by the Trump pack: immigrant, oppressed genders, Black, Brown, and Palestinian communities.

Gloria Verdieu, from Women in Struggle-San Diego and the Coalition to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, introduced Lydia Ponce for an Indigenous land acknowledgment. Ponce recognized the nations that lived in the L.A. area.

“We recognize and give thanks for these lands, we thank the Tonga and all the relatives in the four directions,” Ponce said. “I’m going to close with a word for the future, rematriation!”

Verdieu gave a short history of the socialist origins of International Women's Day. Also, Harriet Tubman Day, March 10, which was recognized as a U.S. holiday by Congress on March 13, 1990.

The next speaker was Fatin, co-founder of Unmute Humanity, a collective that exposes and combats the establishment media's lies, distortions, and omissions. She spoke powerfully as a Palestinian, dedicated to a Free Palestine, from the river to the sea.

"I want to talk about this idea of 'normal' that we've been conditioned to accept — the notion of hypernormalization. This isn't something new; it's been the reality in Palestine for generations. It is what allows the genocide to continue. Genocide has become normalized, but it is not normal.

"This week alone, nine beautiful human beings were exterminated; they were aid workers, three were journalists. This is the world we live in, where nine lives ended in a split second, and it didn't make headlines. The only coverage was on CNN. They framed them as terrorists, legitimate targets. Zionism means systematic targeting of children — every single day, a child is killed. They are trying to normalize killing children by dehumanization and criminalization of the victims. This is since the ceasefire!

"My people are living under a complete siege, and two million people are literally starving to death. The Zionists cut off the electricity. The only two water purification plants are shut down. We live in a world where our people aren't entitled to clean water. We cannot normalize genocide; we must normalize the resistance."

Lupe Carrasco Cardona, a leader in Unión del Barrio and the Association of Raza Educators, talked about the two main grassroots campaigns she is involved with: the Community Self-Defense Coalition (CSDC) and Ethnic Studies. Unión del Barrio initiated the CSDC. The Coalition is composed of dozens of local organizations. Its

mission is to notify communities of possible ICE activity and empower communities to defend themselves from kidnapping and deportation.

“The Coalition has been really beautiful because it shows there is hope out there, and it moves people to act, not freeze in panic.

“As an educator I have been very active in fighting for Chicana/o studies, ethnic studies, Raza studies. There is a bill right now, drafted by the Jewish Legislative Caucus, AB1468. The bill essentially makes sure there is no classroom where you can mention Palestine. This is a so-called ethnic studies bill.” The ARE and other progressive educator organizations have been organizing opposition to the bill; the bill as a whole is a denial of the right of diverse ethnicities to determine their own curriculum.

Melinda Butterfield began:

“Wow, hypernormalization is a great word from Fatin, that is a word I’m going to keep in my mind for my community too, because there are parallels with what’s happening in the trans community now and what is happening in Palestine, including the determination of the powers that be to commit genocide.

“Besides pushing back against the anti-trans agenda, we need the left to think bigger. How to fight back against fascism. I hear many activists focusing on mutual aid and surviving. That is good, but if mutual aid work isn’t coupled with a larger fightback, one that sees mobilizing millions of people and building alternative forms of power, then all that amounts to is a slow death in the face of fascism.

“There is no more normal. What would it look like if we mobilized and occupied Washington, D.C.? We need people who are brave, our hope lies in the example of the Palestinian women and the Palestinian people in general. Like the people of Palestine, trans people will fight generation after generation until liberation. Trans

Women are women, trans men are men, non-binary people are who they say they are, intersex people exist. Transition rights, reproductive rights, our bodies our choice, death before detransition!”

Frances from PUSO-West LA, Philippine/US Solidarity Organization closed the day’s program with a beautiful song they wrote, “We will Win.” They introduced the song: “I just want to reemphasize the strength and power we have when we come together to defend our people and fight back.”

The March 16 “Solidarity is our Strength” program is watchable on IG @harriettubmancenter.



Melinda Butterfield links trans justice to global struggles

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The Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice in Los Angeles hosted national trans activist and leader Melinda Butterfield to mark International Women’s Day.

The whirlwind weekend began with the screening of “I Saw the TV Glow,” at the Harriet Tubman Center. The A24 film had an especially poignant impact among sectors of the trans community when it was released. “I Saw the TV Glow” (2024) is a psychological horror film that thoughtfully explores the transgender experience.

Then on March 15, Melinda Butterfield spoke at a rally in Long Beach, organized by Queer & Forever Here, SoCal Uprising & 50501.

“I’m here to talk to you about solidarity. As you know, trans people have been marked for extermination by this regime, and if they succeed, other LGBTQ siblings will be next. But we aren’t just part of the LGBTQIA community. We show up for the migrant community, we show up for Palestine. A few days ago in NYC I was in Federal Plaza, NYC, along with 10,000 other people — queer and straight — supporting Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University Palestinian student illegally being deported by the Trump regime.

“We are part of every community, we are Black, immigrants, we are union members, Amazon workers, baristas, sex workers. We walk through fire to be ourselves; that ferocity, that determination is something we will all need to survive what is coming. The word is solidarity, an injury to one is an injury to all!” Butterfield was interrupted multiple times by the hundreds at the rally with applause and shouts of Free Mahmoud!

On March 16, Melinda Butterfield participated in the Our Solidarity is Our Strength forum at the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice in Los Angeles.



Postal workers nationwide rally against privatization of USPS

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Postal workers across the United States held rallies on March 23 to speak out against ongoing proposals to privatize the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). Organized by branches of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), postal workers and their supporters protested the dismantling of postal services through privatization. “Hell No!” and “Fight Like Hell!” were the main slogans.

The protests were responding to the Trump administration’s threats to privatize the U.S. Postal Service when Postmaster General Louis DeJoy reached an agreement with Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency. The deal makes drastic cuts by weakening or even dismantling legal obligations regarding pension funding, service mandates, and other essential measures. At least 10,000 jobs are to be eliminated.



What actually reduced opioid deaths? Methadone, Naloxone, and Medicaid — not militarized borders

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Public health measures drive down opioid deaths

U.S. opioid deaths are finally going down. In January, a [CDC report](#) showed an almost 24% decrease in drug overdose deaths from September 2023 to September 2024. This was a drop from 114,000 deaths to 87,000. That's 27,000 fewer deaths.

Demonizing immigrants and militarization of the border had nothing to do with it. Tax cuts for billionaires didn't do it. Improved public health measures are what saved lives, even as systemic factors driving addiction continued to deepen: low wages, lack of opportunity for youth, unaffordable housing, capitalist-driven alienation, and despair.

The CDC report states:

“Multiple factors contribute to the drop in overdose deaths, including widespread, data-driven distribution of naloxone, which is a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose; better access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders; shifts in the illegal drug supply; a resumption of prevention and response after pandemic-related disruptions; and continued investments in prevention and response programs like CDC’s flagship Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) program.”

Trump and Musk’s cuts threaten all this progress. Trump talks a big game about stopping the opioid epidemic. But if he were serious – if he actually cared about saving lives – he would be pushing to *expand* public health institutions and advocate health care for all. Trump has never helped the communities devastated by the opioid epidemic and never will.

To shed light on the real lives of people struggling with opioid addiction, Struggle – La Lucha is beginning a series on the epidemic. First is an interview with Kaitlin R., a 29-year-old south Louisiana woman currently enrolled in methadone therapy.

Working-class mom opens up about opioid addiction

Kaitlin R.: I’ve been on 120 mg for 4 years now, but I just recently, within the last month, have begun to taper down. I’m at 118 mg and will go down by 2 mg every two weeks.

It honestly saved me. It truly has saved me. It has its side effects, but honestly, I’ll take craving sugar over craving dope any day.

Gregory E. Williams: Do you receive treatment through Medicaid?

KR: Yes, fully paid for by Medicaid. If you have to pay out of pocket, it’s 90 bucks a week. I know that seems like a lot, but it’s nothing compared to what you spend on

dope to not be sick. Some people have a habit of at least \$120 a day.

GEW: It sounds like Medicaid is a lifeline. Medicaid expansion probably saved a lot of lives, in terms of addiction treatment alone. Governor Landry tried to get thousands of Louisiana residents kicked off Medicaid when he was Attorney General. Now, Trump and Musk are working at the federal level to gut it. What do you think would happen if they go through with that?

KR: Oh man, if they go through with that, the addicts will be forced to go back to street drugs. Especially if they have to cold turkey methadone. That is literally harder and more painful to come off of than fentanyl.

GEW: That would be horrible. It would not only be cruel, but would reverse so much of the progress made. Overdose deaths are finally going down, and it's because of public health measures like methadone programs. Do you have any experience with Narcan?

KR: I have never been given Narcan. Thankfully, I've never overdosed, but I have had to administer some.

GEW: You have a young child with special needs, right? Can I ask about the importance of having support for recovery when it comes to parenting and employment?

KR: I think it's very important for parents - single parents especially - to have support during recovery. In my case, especially, if I didn't get clean, my son Nicky would have nobody. His dad damn sure wasn't gonna get clean for Nicky.

While methadone is very helpful, there is still a stigma surrounding it. Some employers will not even give you a second look if they find out you're on methadone.

GEW: Considering that stigma, is there anything you wish people knew about opioid

addiction?

KR: Yeah, I wish people knew that, yes, in the beginning of the addiction, it was a choice. But it very quickly can become no longer a choice. You need it to not be sick. Hell, you need it to be normal. It's the only thing you can think about if you withdraw. It very quickly stops being fun and starts being absolute hell on earth. You get stuck in a constant cycle of being sick, getting money, getting well, to then need more money to do it all over again. I wish people would realize that no addict wakes up every day wanting to be an addict. Nobody wants to be an addict, I promise.

I can't tell you how many times I've told myself I'm gonna get clean, just to wake up the next morning being sick and just wanting to die. Literally wanting to stay away from this drug but then being so sick you have to do it, then you hate yourself even more because you failed again. And it just happens over and over.

At least until the addict is ready to get clean, and it took me a long time to realize that, just because I need help getting clean doesn't take away from the fact that I am clean, on methadone or suboxone or completely abstinent. I am clean.



From Hawai'i: To the U.S., we're a giant military station

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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Increasing militarization of the Pacific continues to cause tension inside and outside the region. In Hawai'i, where the U.S. Navy's Pacific fleet is stationed, Indigenous rights advocates have fought for decades against expansive military occupation and use of their lands and surrounding ocean.

One of them, Joy Enomoto, who lives on the island of O'ahu, talks to Teuila Fuatai about that fight and the legacy of the U.S. military in Hawai'i.

In the recent U.S. federal election, a bunch of Hawaiians voted for Trump.

I don't think that's because Trump represented our values and needs. It was more that a lot of folks here felt abandoned and overlooked by the U.S. under the Democratic Party. Many felt that our islands, away from the mainland, had been forgotten in the past few years.

But as Kānaka Maoli — Indigenous Hawaiians — I want us to understand that there is so much more to our relationship with the U.S. than who is president and what they promise us. We need to understand why the social, health, and environmental problems we experience will never be genuinely addressed by any U.S. politician or leader, especially someone like Trump. And why the U.S. is so invested in keeping us under its thumb.

Hawai'i is valuable to the U.S. because its navy can fuel up here. We're a launching pad into the Philippines and the wider Asia region. To the U.S., Hawai'i is a giant, strategically significant military station.

When my partner and I moved from Maui to the island of O'ahu, we found the presence of the military overwhelming. Every branch — army, navy, air force, marines, and the coastguard — has bases here. We constantly have army helicopters flying over the house, and at the airport, it's normal to see B-52 bombers taking off for exercises.

Then, when the RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) military exercise takes place, things really ramp up.

RIMPAC is massive. It's the world's biggest international maritime warfare exercise. Hosted by the U.S., it happens every two years and involves about 30 countries, including New Zealand. The exercises are performed on and around different islands in Hawai'i.

The intensity of the military activity is bad enough. Last year, 40 ships, three submarines, and 150 aircraft were part of RIMPAC. In Honolulu, that resulted in about 25,000 soldiers coming into town.

But there's also the impact on our local communities and families. At bars and strip clubs, the "Welcome RIMPAC" banners come out. An increase in military personnel

always results in a rise in violent incidents in our islands. There's a significant increase in domestic violence incidents, and a lot of the shootings here, as well as rape cases, are tied to former or current military personnel.

Of course, military activity also affects our environment and the animals that inhabit our islands.

In 2020, during our Covid restrictions, RIMPAC was canceled. Nothing was allowed to land in Hawai'i, so the only exercises were at sea. We didn't have any amphibious landings, and there was no coastal damage or noise from war exercises. As a result, turtles that used to nest along the coastlines of some of our islands returned.

The U.S. military is a significant polluter. In Hawai'i, we see the impacts of that everywhere.

Take Pearl Harbour, for example. This was one of our critical, food-producing deep sea harbors in O'ahu. It was particularly unique because you could catch deep sea fish close to the land. It also had around 20 fish ponds and was a place where sharks mated. For the local Kānaka Maoli, that harbor was our food basket. But it's been heavily contaminated by the U.S. military. Now, it's classified as a "superfund" site by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency due to the amount of hazardous waste that's been dumped in it. Eating any fish from there, even swimming in that water, will make you sick.

What makes me most angry about the militarization of our islands is the level of occupation — there's a monumental amount of land controlled by the military. Much of that area encompasses culturally significant sites.

On O'ahu alone, the U.S. military controls about 25 percent of the land. Overall, across the Hawai'i islands, the military occupies 5.6 percent of the land, according to an analysis of Department of Defence property by [Visual Capitalist](https://www.visualcapitalist.com/2018/05/22/visualizing-the-us-militarys-land-ownership-in-hawaii/). That's the

highest proportion of military-controlled land in any U.S. state. There are 11 military bases in Hawai'i.

Fighting against that presence and control is particularly tough because of the vast resources of the U.S. military and government.

For example, on the west coast of O'ahu, we've managed to stop live-fire training in an area known as Mākua Valley after decades of organizing against it. Locals first came together in 1996 to object to the military exercises. In 2023, following several court cases, the U.S. military finally announced that it had no more plans to conduct any more live-fire training exercises in the area.

Mākua is culturally significant for Kānaka Maoli because it's where we believe human life was created by Papa (earth mother) and Wākea (sky father). The area was seized during World War Two by the U.S. government, and the families living there were evicted. It was bombed until the early 1990s, creating widespread destruction and harm to the environment and species there. Many of these animals and plants are now endangered as a result.

Notably, the army lease for land at Mākua — a \$1 agreement between the state of Hawai'i and the U.S. Army signed in 1964 — is due to expire in 2029. It's among a suite of lease agreements between the army and state government, which cover about 30,000 acres of land in Hawai'i. Unsurprisingly, the military is pushing for these leases to be renewed or for new arrangements to be put in place, so it can continue its current operations.

On the big island of Hawai'i, near its center, the U.S. military has created a bombing range in an area we call Pohakuloa. The scale of what happens there is insane.

The Pohakuloa Training Area encompasses about 132,000 acres of land. That's nearly five times the size of our smallest island, Kaho'olawe. Like Mākua, Pohakuloa

is culturally significant to Kānaka Maoli, particularly because it sits between the peaks of Mauna Kea — where protesters have continually objected to the proposed construction of a 30-meter telescope — Mauna Loa, and Hualālai volcano. In Hawaiian tradition, the peaks of the island's mountains and volcanoes are sacred.

For the U.S. military, however, Pohakuloa is a giant training ground. Every one of its branches conducts exercises in the area. It's also used by other countries for bombing practice, for example, during RIMPAC. These bombs and military activities have meant the land can't be accessed by Hawaiians. Over the years, we've seen huge fires and damage to the native flora and fauna. There's been contamination of the land and waterways by hazardous waste products like uranium, lead, and white phosphorus.

So much of what goes on in these military-occupied areas is about inflicting violence on our land and sacred sites through bullets, bombs, and destruction. I refer to it as bio-colonialism because, at its heart, it's about wanting to control all forms of life.

Even the military's own people — servicemen and women and their families — have been left without help when in need.

The Red Hill fuel storage facility in Honolulu is a prime example. During World War Two, the Americans built 20 fuel storage tanks within the mountain of O'ahu's largest aquifer. The vertical fuel tanks sat on top of the porous volcanic rock. Critically, 80 percent of the island's freshwater came from here.

In 2014, and then 2021, there were two massive fuel leaks at the Red Hill facility —27,000 gallons and 21,000 gallons respectively. The first leak didn't appear to reach the water table. But in 2021, there was contamination of the water supply. The leak primarily affected the water supply which went to areas where navy personnel lived.

In total, it affected 93,000 military personnel and their families. People broke out in skin rashes, became seriously ill, and children developed neurological issues. The fallout from that is [ongoing](#) and victims are suing the U.S. government for the harm caused.

That lack of care, decency, and respect is something I've been fighting against for a decade.

The entire arrangement, where the U.S. uses Hawai'i as a strategic war base, is fundamentally violent and harmful. It relies on the perpetual suppression of our rights and potential as Kānaka Maoli.

We have to see that for what it is. We also need to think long-term about how we're going to reclaim our own narrative. Because the solutions to the challenges we face, and our prosperity as people, don't lie with the U.S.. They lie within us and our own vision for the future. For me, that picture is simply incompatible with an occupier that can't see beyond its own might and colonial mentality.

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As told to Teuila Fuatai. Made possible by the Public Interest Journalism Fund.

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