

Car rally: Stop sentencing incarcerated people to death by Covid-19

written by Struggle - La Lucha
April 8, 2020





April 6 — The New Orleans Workers Group called a car rally today in solidarity with all incarcerated people. While we practiced social distancing rules, our motorcade was over 70 cars long and drove several times around the Juvenile Justice Court, the Orleans Parish Prison, the New Orleans Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office and City Hall. This effort was to demand the immediate release of all people in ICE detention centers, jails and prisons who are not convicted of violent crimes.

We know that the inhumane conditions in these institutions are ripe for death and horror, all the worse with Covid-19 ravaging the state of Louisiana. We are also calling for an immediate moratorium on all arrests, deportations and ICE raids. The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, VOTE Louisiana and the New Orleans Center for Racial Justice also participated in the rally.



[Free the Prisoners - Workers Group Motorcade April 6 2020 - #freethemall](#) from [Marion Hill](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Yesterday, the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office confirmed that 15 incarcerated people have tested positive for the coronavirus. We also know that the numbers of positive cases are quickly rising in youth detention, ICE detention and prisons all over the state. We cannot let this happen to our community members.

While the state government has no shortage of prison beds, there are shortages of hospital beds and ventilators during the Covid-19 crisis. Year in and year out, our local and state budgets reflect the priorities of the government: mass incarceration and violent policing of our communities. Instead of wasting millions of our tax dollars on prisons, detention centers (concentration camps) and police, these funds should be used to fulfill the needs of the people, especially during the pandemic.

Containment of this virus and survival are of top importance to us, and we know that this is impossible as long as there are people locked in prisons.

[#FreeThemAll!](#)

Source: [New Orleans Workers Group](#)

Photos: NOWG



On the anniversary of Dr. King Jr's assassination - fighting racism during the coronavirus crisis

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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On the anniversary of Rev. Dr. King Jr's Assassination -

"Fighting racism during the coronavirus crisis"

Speakers include: Rebecka Jackson and John Parker, Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice; Jasmine Johnson, youth activist and recent high school graduate; Lee Siu Hin, National Immigrant Solidarity; Attorney Roger Wareham, December 12 Movement; Gloria Verdieu, Coalition to Free Mumia and All Political Prisoners; Rev. Annie Chambers, Baltimore housing activist, Peoples Power Assembly; Nana Gyamfi, Black Alliance for Just Immigration; Lizz Toledo, Latinx LGBTQ2S activist, Atlanta Socialist Unity Party



Webinar unites groups to fight capitalism's coronavirus crisis

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At the national webinar “Defending People During the Coronavirus Crisis” on March 28, organizers from across the U.S. spoke about their struggle on the front lines of a humanitarian catastrophe magnified by the capitalist response to Covid-19.

Health care workers, delivery drivers, Amazon workers, housing representatives and advocates in defense of prisoners and migrants joined activists fighting against racism and repression to discuss steps to defend their communities and build unity.

The event was initiated by the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly and the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice in Los Angeles. More than a hundred people attended, representing diverse communities and sectors of the working class across the U.S.

Besides sharing experiences and perspectives, organizers aimed to begin building a national people’s defense network to support the struggles that are sure to emerge in the weeks and months ahead. People have begun taking action in response to the lack of adequate health care and job safety, and an economic crisis that has already thrown millions out of work.

Mahtowin Munro of United American Indians of New England opened the webinar with a land acknowledgement, urging attendees to remember that we live on stolen Indigenous lands. Government officials are “exploiting the land, and they’re handing out lands and contracts as favors to all their capitalist corporate allies.”

Munro reported that the Trump regime’s Interior Department had just informed the

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe that their reservation land would be “taken back from them in the middle of this unprecedented pandemic.”

This crisis “has completely washed the makeup off of the decayed face of capitalism,” she said. “It is clear to thousands more every day that capitalism considers all of our communities utterly expendable and wants to kill us, just as it has been clear to Indigenous people for centuries that settler colonialism considers us expendable.”

Frank Chapman of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression spoke of “the crisis before the crisis.” He said, “The pandemic crisis did not create the crisis we have in the health system. It was there when it came. We already had over 140 million people living in poverty. We already had 500,000 people who are homeless, including children.

“The prisons are going to be turned into death camps for our people unless we unite and organize a very intense struggle to get people out,” Chapman explained. “This should be a period in which we demand and insist on the depopulation of the prison population. We must demand that everybody be let out, not based on what their criteria is, but based on our criteria.”

He concluded: “The coronavirus has no prejudice. It has no class outlook. It has no race. It has no nationality. It infects and kills human beings. But those who make policies in our country — they do have prejudices, and they do have a class interest.”

New challenges for worker organizers

Speakers acknowledged the challenges of organizing in the new conditions created by the pandemic. In many places it is now impossible to organize protests or mass meetings. Much of the work must be educational and preparatory in character, to get ready for the day when it is possible for the people to take to the streets again.

In the meantime, maximum creativity is needed to find other ways to struggle.

Meg Maloney of the New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance said, “The closures are necessary to stop the spread of the virus, but we can’t leave workers in the dust.” She explained that her group is building a coalition of workers and organizations around a series of popular demands to local government, such as the expansion of unemployment benefits to migrant workers and gig workers.

“All workers, whether in health care or in food delivery, need PPE [personal protective equipment]. Whatever solutions are going to come forth are going to come from the people, from the workers.”

Rasika Ruwanpathirana, an Amazon warehouse worker in Baltimore, drew on his own experience as an immigrant, explaining that his family in Sri Lanka is under quarantine, meaning people are not even allowed to leave their houses. He has no choice but to keep working here to support them.

Baltimore and Maryland Amazon workers have drawn up a [list of five demands](#) and launched a [petition campaign](#), he reported. Some of those demands were won during the first week of April as Amazon and Whole Foods workers from Staten Island, N.Y., to Detroit staged protests and walkouts.

Fernando Figueroa, a UPS Teamster in Jacksonville, Fla., explained, “People are getting sick at various UPS facilities around the country. Believe it or not, we have no personal protective equipment available for workers even though we’re handling thousands of boxes every day, and hundreds of drivers are driving all over the city.

“There are four main demands that we’re pushing,” Figueroa said. “We think that all nonessential businesses should be closed immediately. We think that no workers should lose income as a result of this crisis. We think that every worker who has to work needs to be kept as safe as possible. We also think that every person should

get hazard pay if you're still being forced to work through this crisis.

"The only people that are going to liberate us, who're going to improve our lives, are ourselves, banding together. And we're really trying to push that message."

Mutual aid and political pressure

The Rev. Annie Chambers of the Peoples Power Assembly, and tenant representative at the Baltimore Douglas Homes public housing development, explained that "I have been distributing food and asking organizations to help me. We have got no relief from the city or the state." Providing food and water, milk and baby formula for the residents of public housing is a constant fight, she said, and caregivers and family members are prevented from visiting elders who live in highrise buildings.

"Residents are having trouble even trying to get their medications," Rev. Chambers said, "because they don't have their copayment or because they are not even allowing us into the hospital now. They've got the National Guard guarding the hospitals, so if you don't go in by ambulance you don't get in. And they're picking and choosing who they take, and if they don't pick you, you don't get health care."

Ron Gochez of Unión del Barrio said: "About a year and a half ago or so, the mayor in Oakland, [Calif.,] warned the people when they found out that ICE raids were going to happen. So that's something we want the mayor here in Los Angeles to do. If there's any kind of confirmed ICE activity within the city boundaries, then the city itself should alert the residents. That's something we can put pressure on officials all over the country to do as well."

Gochez said his group was producing informational videos to counter misinformation. "We want to inform the community not only with the attacks of coronavirus, but also the attacks of capitalism on our communities," he concluded.

Nana Gyamfi of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration spoke about the importance of freeing migrants in detention centers, pointing out that 20 percent of those in detention are Black people, many hailing from the Caribbean. “Nothing will move unless we make it move,” she said.

Pam Africa of MOVE and International Concerned Family & Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal spoke about RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison), which has been successful in getting prisoners released — including political prisoners — based on health issues of older people. “That’s a strategy we can use,” she said.

Terri Kay of the People’s Alliance reported on an array of actions in the Bay Area, including a victorious struggle in Oakland for a moratorium on evictions. “People have very understandable concerns about the deployment of the National Guard across the country and the possibility of martial law, as well as abuse of voting rights.”

Irving McQueen of Pan African Community Action in Washington, D.C., drew attention to the plight of Black and Brown workers in the capital: “Public transit is shut down. People are unable to move around the city for groceries or to seek medical care.” He explained that there are survival programs in the Parkland Heights area to help distribute resources and necessities, but that it is crucial that these efforts be accompanied by education to explain to our communities that the capitalist class can’t meet our needs. “Only we can, through socialism.”

Crisis of imperialism and neoliberalism

Bernadette Ellorin of BAYAN USA said capitalist governments around the world are using the pandemic “as an opportunity to advance a fascist agenda.” In the Philippines, U.S.-backed President Rodrigo Duterte imposed a mandatory quarantine and curfew. To suppress the mass movement, Duterte is charging government critics with curfew violations and other trumped-up charges, “taking a militarist approach

rather than a medical approach.”

“Disease and illness are a fact of life, but imperialism and neoliberalism — those are the real crises,” said Ellorin.

Berta Joubert-Ceci of the Puerto Rico Tribunal and Struggle-La Lucha newspaper was on the line from Puerto Rico: “We have had two natural disasters, with two unnatural, terrible responses from the government,” she said. Puerto Rico, a U.S. colony, has yet to recover from Washington’s negligent response after hurricanes and earthquakes ravaged the country’s people and infrastructure.

“Like the Philippines and all over the world, more skilled workers and professionals migrate out of the country to escape the despondent living conditions created by imperialism, leaving behind few skilled workers to complete the work of recovery. Skilled workers like nurses are an ‘export,’” Joubert-Ceci explained. Test kits and treatments from nearby Cuba are blocked in Puerto Rico, as they are in the U.S.

Lucy Pagoada of Departamento 19, North American chapter of the Popular National Liberation Front (FNRP) of Honduras, and a public school teacher, described Honduras as a “narco colony” of Washington, where the head of state, illegally installed through U.S. intervention, is a drug trafficker whose brother is being tried in New York for smuggling. Bringing attention to the bogus drug charges that Trump has levelled against Venezuelan officials, including President Nicolás Maduro, Pagoada charged: “The U.S. sets up its own narco states, then projects its crimes onto anti-imperialist countries to justify intervention.”

The webinar was co-chaired by **John Parker** of the Harriet Tubman Center and **Sharon Black** of the PPA. Participants agreed to continue sharing information, support each others’ local efforts and build events together, starting with a national webinar and press conference on April 4, the 52nd anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination. The focus will be on fighting racism during the coronavirus

crisis, from attacks on Asian Americans to repression of Black and Brown communities.

Pam Africa summed up the success of the webinar. She exclaimed, “This is really a great call! I’ve been taking notes and got a lot of great ideas. It came to my head that I need to organize my block. We have to get to know people and get them involved in the movement. I want to be a person who can direct them to different things.”



The pandemic isn't equal: Coronavirus hits the poor at most dangerous rate

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The Covid-19 pandemic is devastating New York City. [Forty-five refrigerator trucks](#) are serving as mobile morgues to store the bodies. [As of April 3](#), 51,810 people have been infected.

Inmates in the Rikers Island prison [are being offered \\$6 per hour](#) to dig mass graves on Hart's Island off the Bronx. That's the site of Potter's Field, where a million people too poor to afford a funeral had their bodies dumped.

What's happening in New York City is being repeated in Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans and Los Angeles. The coronavirus is ripping through the South with Black people suffering the most. [About one in ten deaths](#) has occurred in the adjoining states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

The Pentagon is seeking [100,000 body bags](#). The government's stockpile of personal protective equipment — a life and death matter for health care workers — is almost

depleted. But the Immigration and Customs Enforcement gestapo conducting deportation raids [are guaranteed N95 face masks](#).

[A hundred racist attacks against Asian Americans](#) are occurring every day. Trump incited these attacks by calling the coronavirus “the Chinese virus.” We should call it the Trump virus.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has taken advantage of the pandemic to [roll back bail reform and ram through Medicaid cuts](#) in the state’s budget.

Cuomo calls the virus [“the great equalizer.”](#) That isn’t true even if his own brother, CNN host Chris Cuomo, caught it. It’s certainly false with the [city’s wealthy and powerful fleeing to the countryside](#).

It’s not just density

There’s nothing equal about this pandemic. The coronavirus has been much worse for New York City’s Black and Latinx communities. Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn have been hard hit.

This writer lives two blocks from the Corona, Queens, N.Y., neighborhood where Louis Armstrong lived. Its 11368 ZIP code had 947 cases of the coronavirus as of April 1, the most of any in New York City.

Experts say New York City has been hardest hit because of its density. Nearly 9 million people live on about 300 square miles of land.

Corona, Queens, is crowded with [41,768 people living per square mile](#). Nine out of a thousand people there — nearly one percent — have been infected.

[Murray Hill](#) — ZIP code 10017 — on midtown Manhattan’s East Side is even more crowded, with 51,775 people per square mile. Yet the neighborhood’s infection is

just a third of Corona's.

The difference is that while Corona's median household income is \$45,964, the figure for Murray Hill is \$100,652, over twice as high.

Adjoining Corona in Queens is Elmhurst (ZIP code 11373) with 831 cases and Jackson Heights (ZIP code 11372) with 492 people infected. The Elmhurst Medical Center is being overwhelmed.

[All these neighborhoods are immigrant communities](#) with many service and construction workers who had to continue going to their jobs while the pandemic was gripping the city.

Black and Latinx neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan have also been hard hit. [The eastern Far Rockways in Queens](#), home to four largely Black housing projects, have 436 cases.

The capitalist government is covering up the impact on Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities. [Maryland lawmakers](#) are demanding a breakdown of those who've caught the virus.

Social distancing an impossibility

Medical experts recommend that people keep a "social distance" of six feet from each other. How are the 2.2 million prisoners locked up supposed to follow that advice? Cook County Jail in Illinois already has [213 prisoners with the virus](#).

For thousands of prisoners across the country, the coronavirus will be a death sentence. Activists like those in the [Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression](#) are fighting to free the most vulnerable prisoners.

The hundreds of thousands in homeless shelters are also not able to keep six feet

from each other.

Social distancing is also impossible for the hospital and other “essential” workers taking overcrowded buses and subways in New York City. Ten members of [Transit Workers Union Local 100](#) have died of the coronavirus.

Many essential workers who are risking their lives are among the lowest paid. The [3.6 million cashiers](#) have an average annual income of just \$22,430.

Experts are recommending that trips to the food store be [limited to once every two weeks](#). How many working-class families can do that? Not the ten million workers who have already been fired.

Density and lack of social distancing won't account for all the deaths. We're told to wash our hands, yet [141,000 Detroit families have had their water shut off](#) since 2014. Service hasn't been restored for thousands.

It's worse on the Indigenous reservations. [Forty percent of Navajo nation households](#) aren't connected to a water pipe. They have to haul water to their home.

Overcrowded housing has skyrocketed because of rising rent. Many families are forced to move in with relatives.

Between 1980 and 2010, the number of these doubled-up families increased almost four-fold, 1.15 million to 4.3 million. (2012 U.S. Statistical Abstract, Table 59). Social distancing is impossible for them.

Millions of housing units are kept off the market to keep the rent high. A people's movement is needed to seize them.

Homeless families in Los Angeles [have taken over over 12 empty homes](#). We need to follow their example.



Gov't, bosses use pandemic emergency to escalate repression

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Measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus are being used as a cover by officials of the U.S. capitalist government, from the federal to the state and local levels, to heighten their control and prepare to repress any protest or uprising of the workers and oppressed against the horrendous inadequacies of the for-profit health care system, the rapidly deepening crisis of unemployment and mass poverty, and threatened war moves by the Pentagon.

[In Albuquerque, N.M.](#), police shot and killed a 52-year-old Latinx man in his home after his employer asked them to do a welfare check. As is all-too-common, the cops claimed after the fact that their victim was responsible because he had a rap sheet. In Baltimore, National Guard units rolled through the city's streets and set up roadblocks, but did nothing to provide food to hungry residents of public housing like Douglas Houses. The [Baltimore Housing Authority](#) even tried to ban activist groups and food banks from distributing food there.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, while sparring with President Donald Trump and running a thinly veiled campaign for the White House, has called on the racist New York Police Department to [get “more aggressive”](#) in enforcing social distancing rules on youth. He also introduced legislation to [roll back bail reform](#) that went into effect Jan. 1, threatening to keep many more poor and oppressed people in the state’s worst incubators of disease — the jails.

[California Gov. Gavin Newsome](#) floated the idea that martial law might be necessary. He backpedaled after an outcry, but the state and cities continue to tighten police measures. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) stormtroops have taken advantage of the situation to [escalate attacks on migrant workers](#) in that “sanctuary state.”

The worker who led a walkout of Amazon warehouse workers in Staten Island, N.Y., demanding greater health and safety measures, was fired by billionaire boss Jeff Bezos, supposedly for violating social distancing. Across the country, health care workers have been threatened with retaliation for speaking out on their desperate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and the public’s need for mass testing for the virus.

The Trump administration’s Bureau of Indian Affairs chose the very day that U.S. coronavirus cases topped 100,000 to announce it was planning to strip the [Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe](#) of Massachusetts and Rhode Island of its official standing. On March 21, the [Department of Justice under Attorney General William Barr](#) requested that Congress enact legislation granting it sweeping emergency powers that would allow police to hold suspects indefinitely without charge and suspend other constitutional rights.

State governments have taken advantage of the public focus on the coronavirus crisis to heighten anti-women [attacks on abortion rights](#) and enact [anti-transgender measures](#).

After tightening deadly sanctions against Iran, which is fighting a major attack of Covid-19, Trump [threatened that country](#) with military aggression. Then, on April 1, Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used a media briefing on the coronavirus to announce they were [deploying Navy warships](#) to threaten Venezuela, another country struggling under U.S. sanctions.

There are many, many more examples.

Defend the right to protest

Working-class communities, their organizations and other progressive forces well understand the need for urgent measures to “flatten the curve” and try to slow the spread of the deadly disease, even though it is at great hardship to their lives and livelihoods.

At the same time, more and more workers classified as “essential” — most of them low-paid, and disproportionately Black and Brown — are walking off the job and engaging in other forms of protest against their mistreatment by the bosses.

It’s clear to everyone forced to work in dangerous conditions without necessary safety measures and equipment, adequate health coverage, sick time or job protections, that their “essential” categorization is seen by their employers as nothing but an excuse for greater exploitation and greater profits — the health of the workers, their families and communities be damned!

One of the first restrictions to be put in place in many cities, like San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C., were strict limits on gatherings. First gatherings of 100 or more were banned, then 50, then 10 or fewer. Now [any “non-essential gathering”](#) of any size is a no-no in New York. People are advised to social distance — put a minimum of six feet between them and another person — and stay in their homes as much as possible. (This advice is ludicrous, not to mention insulting, to the

hundreds of thousands of homeless people.)

Physical distancing makes sense from the point of view of limiting the virus's spread. At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and other official bodies in the U.S. have resisted repeated advice from China and other countries that have successfully brought the pandemic under control to encourage people to wear protective masks when they leave their homes. Wearing masks has proved to be effective in limiting the spread of the virus, but the capitalist profit system was not able to produce the masks as needed, thus the policy to discourage use of masks, unlike socialist China, where masks were available for all.

Front-line workers have found creative ways to engage in protest while trying to respect the social-distancing guidelines. Nurses and food-processing workers have staged actions outside their workplaces while holding signs, carefully spreading out at a six-foot distance from one another. Immigrant rights and prisoners' advocates have [held car rallies](#), with protesters driving in vehicle caravans to detention centers and prisons to demand the captives' release from dangerous conditions.

[The firing of Christian Smalls](#), the African American man who led the Amazon walkout in Staten Island, N.Y., shows how the bosses and the capitalist state can use the emergency measures to punish workers who stand up to them. "It was blatant retribution," Smalls said.

In Bolivia, the right-wing coup regime brought to power last year with U.S. help has issued arrest warrants for six transportation workers who joined a [mass protest by hungry workers and peasants](#) in Riberalta, reported [independent journalist Ollie Vargas](#). The protest was viciously attacked by government troops for defying the country's quarantine measures. Of course, measures to stop the spread of the virus mean little if people starve to death.

With National Guard troops [already activated in 27 states](#) — mostly by Democratic

governors — and President Trump authorizing further mobilizations, it is not hard to imagine the possibility of similar scenes in the streets of U.S. cities in coming weeks and months as depression-level unemployment, and lack of adequate health care, potentially leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths, drive working-class communities to take mass action just to survive.

The deepening crisis and the repressive power-grab by capitalist politicians shows the urgency of initiatives like the national webinar sponsored by the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly and Harriet Tubman Solidarity Center of Los Angeles on March 28, [“Defending People During the Coronavirus Crisis.”](#) That online event brought together activists and organizations from across the U.S. to begin building a fightback network that can organize a united response to the crisis and mobilize to defend the workers and oppressed over the coming months.



Watch national webinar: Defending

people during coronavirus crisis

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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Did you miss the March 28 webinar, “Defending People During Coronavirus Crisis”?



Now you can watch the entire event. Hear from groups organizing on the front lines from Los Angeles to New Orleans, Chicago to Baltimore. We are building a people’s fightback network to defend the workers and oppressed!



Speakers include:

- Mahtowin Munro, United American Indians of New England
- Frank Chapman, National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression

- Meg Maloney, New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance
- Adam Rice, Los Angeles Community Action Network
- Ron Gochez, Unión del Barrio
- Baltimore Amazon warehouse worker
- Fernando Figueroa, UPS worker and Teamster
- Pam Africa, MOVE Organization
- Rev. Annie Chambers, Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly
- Omowale Clay, December 12th Movement
- Berta Joubert-Ceci, Puerto Rico Tribunal and Struggle-La Lucha newspaper
- Irvin McQueen, Pan-African Community Action, Washington, D.C.
- Terri Kay, Peoples Alliance, Bay Area
- Lucy Pagoada, Departamento 19 - Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular
- Nana Gyamfi, Black Alliance for Just Immigration



Co-chairs: John Parker, Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice - Los Angeles and Sharon Black, Peoples Power Assembly



<https://youtu.be/2d2qli2-lSg>



In solidarity with Sri Lankan migrant workers fleeing Italy

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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In the wake of Covid-19, countries around the world are moving to close their borders and locking their citizens in their homes in an attempt to stop or slow down the infection. For the past few days, my Facebook feed has been full of disturbingly unfriendly, unwelcome posts about Sri Lankan nationals coming home and risking the country's well-being. Those running away from Italy, the new coronavirus hotspot, are especially highlighted.

This is particularly heartbreaking because many of these migrant workers are undocumented, spent their life savings on smugglers and risked their lives in order to get to their destination. After getting to Italy, they have to live in the darkness and in fear, every day, of being caught and deported, not to mention exploited, raped, robbed and unable to report it or defend themselves.

History of undocumented Sri Lankan migrant workers in Italy

Sri Lankan migrants have been traveling to Italy since the 1970s. In the past, Italy has been deeply nationalist and not allowed foreign nationals, specifically non-Europeans, to settle down. Yet it allows migrant workers to work in the dark in order to exploit their cheap labor.

I remember growing up in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. People I knew in the village and city would come home from Italy with new electronics and refrigerators and, of course, show off Italian-fashion clothing. This was the time Sri Lanka barely had its electric grid in place. Many of us didn't have electricity in the house.

Over the years, it has become harder and harder to travel to Italy, mainly because, like any other Western nation, it had heightened its border security and started cracking down on undocumented migration. So the travel becomes more deadly by the day, as we hear many horror stories of people traveling inside shipping containers, etc.

Boeing 747 hijacking case of Sepala Ekanayake

There was the famous case of [Sepala Ekanayake](#), a Sri Lankan national who was married to an Italian national. They had a child. Ekanayake was denied a visa to stay in Italy and told he couldn't get one for six years. When he took the desperate measures to hijack an Alitalia Boeing 747 and demanded the return of his partner and child on June 30, 1982, Sri Lanka didn't have a law to prosecute Sri Lankan nationals in case of a hijack.

When the Italian government demanded the extradition of Ekanayake, the public rose against it. The Sri Lankan government had to pass a new law and make it retroactive in order to prosecute Ekanayake in the homeland. He was sent to jail for 40 years and was never allowed to see his partner and child again.

The reason I'm highlighting this case is to show the extent of the racism the Italian

government carried out over the decades towards migrant workers.

Migrant workers, legal vs. 'illegal'

I moved to the U.S. in 2000, winning the diversity green card lottery. In the legal sense, I had some form of defense since I had residency. Nevertheless, I was told to keep my head down, don't question authority and do my work without question, because I could lose my privileges at any time without warning. A simple case of arrest could cause denial of renewing visas.

Many of my countrymen have taken Western names in order for them to be more acceptable in the working environment. During my citizenship interview in 2008, the agent repeatedly asked me if I wanted to change my name. He insisted that I would have an easier time if I did so. I have experienced denial of employment/callbacks because of it. Most of the time my roommates who had Western names, if applying for the same job, did get a callback.

I was stopped by the Los Angeles Police Department multiple times while riding my bicycle to work and to college because I was going through a certain neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley. I was denied work as a food service worker in the aftermath of 9/11 because I "looked like Osama." Not to mention denial of visitor visas to immediate members of my family, whose only crime was living in a Third World country. This is, by definition, family separation and a violation of basic human rights. This was my experience as a so-called legal worker.

While I was living in Los Angeles, I saw many hundreds of undocumented migrant workers who wait in Home Depot parking lots looking for day labor. Seeing them never affected me the way it does now, because I was always struggling to get my own life going and didn't really have the time to open my eyes. Truth is, the cycle I was pumped into didn't allow me to see beyond what I was "supposed" to see.

A visit to Italy

In 2011, during my college years, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Milan, Italy. Milan is now much more diverse, and younger generations of Milanese have welcomed this diversity. Nevertheless, you could still find those who live the invisible life in every corner.

I immediately started to recognize fellow countrymen. I could see how difficult life was just by seeing their behavior, how much they were being ignored by the residents there, who most of the time acted annoyed by them. I immediately drew parallels to migrant workers in the U.S.

Whenever I introduced myself to a stranger and saw their facial expression change when they found out I was from Sri Lanka, it made me feel very uncomfortable and strange. I knew exactly why they reacted differently. I started claiming “I’m from Los Angeles” just to avoid the awkwardness.

For the first time in my life I understood what kind of life migrant workers there have to live through in order for them to earn a few bucks, so they and their families can have slightly better conditions in the future. As much as I had difficulty in the U.S., it was nothing (nothing!) compared to what they have to go through. In the big picture, none of us, legal or otherwise, were really welcomed here as we were forced into this hidden class.

Coming home

In the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak in Italy, while the country is overwhelmed with huge numbers of people infected, of course undocumented migrant workers would be the last to be treated. (I have yet to see a proclamation from the Italian government declaring that all people in the country are being taken care of.) On many occasions people fled Italy for fear that they would be arrested in the process

of testing and could die while waiting in custody.

Who in the world wants to die alone, away from home, away from their loved ones? It makes absolute sense that their immediate reaction would be to run back home to the hands of loved ones. Expecting them to be aware of spreading a disease and risking the health of fellow countrymen would be unfair, and we wouldn't expect the masses who have been kept in the dark and shut out of society to understand this. Nobody in that situation really has the ability to think logically in these conditions; it is the responsibility of the governments.

These are failures of our governments, who we elect and give power to to defend us in difficult situations like this.

Around the world, there are many reports of countries' governments, both developed and underdeveloped, failing in the attempts at containing this pandemic. And there are many discussions about how much force can be used in order to contain it and the ethics of those decisions.

Mass media consistently miscategorize countries based on Western liberal biases in these discussions. Most common would be putting states like the Saudi kingdom and Cuba in the same category. They do this on purpose in order to deceive the public and to maintain the status quo. But they do not elaborate on why the U.S. will continue to do business and sell weapons to governments like Saudi Arabia, which are notorious for international terrorism and heinous crimes in violation of human rights, while they sanction Cuba. If you cannot see the hypocrisy in this, I'm not sure what to tell you.

Cuba

The news of the Cuban government letting a British cruise ship infected with Covid-19 dock is being shared through social media. Cuba, with all the difficulties of

dealing with the U.S. embargo, has been the champion of the working class when it comes to providing health care to its own people and sending out an army of doctors internationally in crises like this. It's because, by definition, they understand the responsibility of a government to take care of its citizens and the well-being of its international compatriots. We can learn a lot from them.

If one looks closely at how Cuba runs its society, you would know they are nothing like so-called authoritarians but rather a genuine democracy with popularly elected officials. The difference is, their elections are not run by money from the corporations and the oil industry.

If you have seen the news lately, you know Cuban doctors have arrived in Italy to help handle the dire situation.

Sri Lanka

It is clear that the Sri Lankan government was not prepared early enough to get a hold of the situation. Closing borders and implementing curfews can help slow the spread of the virus, but what are the human choices we can make during a crisis like this?

At this point, we should consider Sri Lanka as a nation of migrant workers. There's practically no one there who doesn't have a family member who lives in another country or personally knows someone who lives abroad. While Western nations drain our natural resources and recruit the most skilled citizens, most of the others who leave by themselves to find better conditions do bring something back home.

There are many reports of Sri Lankan citizens returning home from Italy and going into hiding. Fear has grown that they are spreading the virus by doing so. So they might be. However, it is the government's responsibility to make them feel comfortable and educate the masses so they don't have a fear of being prosecuted or

unfairly targeted, so they can come out and get treated, and so they can be isolated humanely.

We still have time to make things right. It is our responsibility to demand that we make things right and educate when our government doesn't get things right. It is also our responsibility to create a government that willingly listens and makes changes demanded by the people.



Profits more precious than life

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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We hold this truth to be self-evident: that Donald Trump doesn't give a damn about the millions of workers who've lost their jobs because of the coronavirus shutdown. So why does Trump want to wind up the absolutely necessary emergency measures needed to prevent the spread of this pandemic?

Doesn't the Donald realize that anybody can catch it? Even British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Prince Charles are sick. So far, three members of the U.S. Congress have the virus.

For the capitalist class, preserving profits is more important than saving lives, even possibly their own. Wealthy parasites consider the loss of some of their capital to be a fate worse than death.

The defeated French slave masters in Haiti had a chance to escape on two vessels owned by Philadelphia shipowner Stephen Girard. Instead of fleeing, they filled the ships with gold plates and other valuable property.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines administered justice to these torturers and murderers. Girard sold the loot and ended up as the wealthiest person in the United States.

Dr. Huey P. Newton, who founded the Black Panther Party with Bobby Seale, called this behavior “avaricious,” meaning extremely greedy.

Karl Marx quoted T.J. Dunning about the lengths that the rich will go in order to make a profit. “With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged.”

The banker J.P. Morgan named his yacht the Corsair in honor of a reputed ancestor, Henry Morgan the Pirate, who risked being hanged. A legacy is the JPMorgan Chase Bank with \$2.7 trillion in assets.

Better dead than red

To be sure, not everyone is in the same boat when it comes to the coronavirus. For millions in homeless shelters and prisons, the virus is a possible death sentence. For [28 million people](#) in the U.S. without health insurance, it's more frightening than it is to the pig in the White House.

Donald Trump isn't alone in claiming "the cure is worse than the disease." Former Wells Fargo CEO Dick Kovacevich [wants people to go back to their jobs](#), whatever the consequences. "Some of them will get sick, some may even die, I don't know," said the current executive at Cisco and Cargill.

The Wall Street Journal on March 25 ran an editorial and three opinion pieces demanding a rapid end to the current public health efforts to stop the pandemic. It's laughable to read the Journal's editorial lamenting the "excess suicides" committed during the last recession and their possible rise now.

Has the Wall Street Journal ever shown any concern for the unemployed? They're a cheerleader for cutbacks in SNAP benefits, formerly known as food stamps.

The coronavirus is so dangerous that in-person trading in the supreme temple of capitalist accumulation — the New York Stock Exchange — was moved off-site and is being done electronically. Some of New York City's wealthy have [fled to the countryside](#). Don't the Wall Street Journal's editors realize they could die too?

Well, what's the attitude of the billionaire class towards nuclear war? Won't H-bombs incinerate both the poor and the polo-playing set?

Many capitalist leaders thought nuclear war was winnable. War criminal Henry Kissinger became famous for writing "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy," which contemplated using tactical nuclear weapons.

During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the toilet seat covers in the offices of the reactionary National Review were painted with the slogan "better dead than red." The magazine's editors were euphoric about the impending nuclear Armageddon that could wipe out the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist camp.

By most accounts, President John F. Kennedy and his brother Attorney General Bobby Kennedy stood alone in not wanting war. The rest of the cabinet, as well as

the Pentagon brass, wanted to attack. War was averted, but eventually both JFK and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated.

Letting grandma and grandpa die

The most repulsive argument for ending the quarantines and business closures is that while younger people can supposedly withstand the coronavirus, “only” older folk will die. Why waste ventilators on them?

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick put these thoughts more artfully on the fascist Tucker Carlson’s Fox News show. “Let’s get back to work,” [said the Texas statesman](#), “... and those of us who are 70 plus, we’ll take care of ourselves. But don’t sacrifice the country.”

California lawyer Scott McMillan was more blunt. [He tweeted](#), “The fundamental problem is whether we are going to tank the entire economy to save 2.5 percent of the population which is (1) generally expensive to maintain, and (2) not productive.”

Hitler would have described this “2.5 percent of the population” as “useless feeders.” Disabled people are also more vulnerable to the coronavirus. Nazis sterilized or murdered hundreds of thousands of disabled people.

This sort of talk isn’t too popular. But to the capitalist class, the elderly, like old machines, should be sent to the junkyard.

A mile from where this writer lives in Queens, N.Y., [13 people died of the coronavirus](#) in the Elmhurst Hospital Center on March 24. A refrigerator truck holds the bodies. A long line of people waits outside the facility to be tested.

Also dying on March 24 was Kious Kelly, a nursing manager at Manhattan’s Mount Sinai West Hospital. Medical workers there have been [forced to use garbage bags](#) as personal protective equipment.

The capitalist state is incapable of stopping this pandemic before many more lives are lost. Poor and working people have to organize ourselves to fight it. Playing a vanguard role are nurses and other health care workers.

The great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg declared over a century ago that the choice for humanity was either socialism or barbarism. Today, the choice is socialism or war and pandemics.



People's War against coronavirus: Why Washington fears China's example

written by Struggle - La Lucha
April 8, 2020

Gleaning the news, anyone can find articles acknowledging that China's "People's War" against the Covid-19 epidemic is on track for total victory. The sacrifices by the Chinese people and the confidence they have in the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) have resulted in gaining control over the enormous health crisis.

The Trump administration's miserable profit-before-people response to the arrival of the virus in the U.S. has stripped capitalism naked. Thousands are losing their livelihood, unable to get needed supplies and unable to get real medical help. The Democrats' emergency bill provides only some help to a small section of the population.

The contrast between socialist China's great work and the cruelty of U.S. capitalism threatens a sea change in the way workers think about the two social systems.

The Trump administration is trying hard to erase that possibility by slandering China. The official line is that China concealed the danger of a pandemic, punished people who sent out early warnings, rejected help from the U.S. and caused a three-week delay in the response that they claim would certainly have been underway in the U.S. if only they had known.

Yeah, right.

The notion that China had bought time for the rest of the world is often asserted by health officials. Some nations that had the resources took their cue from China and were prepared when the virus spread internationally.

The blame for the lack of resources in much of the world belongs on the doorstep of U.S. imperialism. Vicious U.S. economic sanctions, International Monetary Fund austerity programs and sapping of resources have left countries vulnerable.

The White House tightened sanctions against Venezuela, Iran and Cuba in recent days. The virus has reached Gaza and countries in Africa where sanctions and imperialist domination have broken the economies. Long ago, Trump cut the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) budget and efforts to prevent outbreaks in China, Pakistan, Haiti, Rwanda and Congo.

U.S. punishes while China helps

China, meanwhile, is sending medicine and all forms of aid that it can to other countries, including France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Iran, Iraq and the Philippines. The Chinese people's humanity and solidarity are so threatening to the U.S. that the headline of a March 25 [Foreign Policy article](#) cries, "How China is Exploiting the Coronavirus to Weaken Democracies."

The World Health Organization (WHO) was given reports by China even before the potential for a pandemic was certain. WHO shared the information with the U.S. CDC and spoke of the danger repeatedly. There was plenty of timely warning!

The U.S. also had a direct line of communication through Dr. Linda Quick — a CDC staff person stationed in China until July 2019. According to a March 22 [Reuters report](#), Quick's job was to work with epidemiologists to zero in on viral outbreaks and report to the U.S.

She "was in an ideal position to be the eyes and ears on the ground for the United States and other countries." Her position was eliminated by the Trump administration.

This shows what a spurious claim it is that China rejected help from the U.S. They welcomed this liaison and it was Trump who eliminated the position.

It was Dec. 31 when China first reported everything it knew and didn't know to WHO. A Jan. 21 [WHO Situation Report](#) indicates that the city of Wuhan reported 45 cases being treated for pneumonia, but caregivers weren't yet certain of the cause. The earliest patient they knew about fell ill on Dec. 12.

Through research over the recent months, Chinese scientists and others learned that this coronavirus is different from its six known cousins. This one can be contagious while there are mild or no symptoms, but it is potentially deadly — a recipe for a

terrible epidemic or even a pandemic.

China mapped the genome and shared it with the world just 12 days after their first report to WHO — an incredible scientific feat and a big step forward for the world. At the same time, China reported the connection to a seafood market in Wuhan. Although they still hadn't confirmed human-to-human transmission, Chinese officials were concerned enough to close the market and restrict travel to and from Wuhan.

On Jan. 23, the number of confirmed cases had doubled from the previous day to 570, and 17 people had died. Wuhan and three other cities in Hubei province were immediately locked down.

Soon the lockdown was expanded so that 100 million people sheltered at home. Food deliveries, medical treatment, thousands of hours of research, millions of coronavirus tests, “pop-up” test sites throughout China, drones spraying disinfectant in Wuhan and making public announcements, hospitals being constructed at blazing speed — all of this commenced under the leadership of the CCP.

Anti-China slander ramps up

As criticism of Trump has mounted, the anti-China narrative has been employed more often and has been augmented even by liberal and progressive media.

A Feb. 10 [Vox article](#) cites an epidemiologist using newer statistics to contradict the information that was supplied by China before those statistics were available. His deceitful argument is easy to see through. No statistics on an epidemic are accurate until there has been time to compile and study. Cases may have existed earlier, but China reported what it knew and was honest about what it didn't know on Dec. 31.

On Dec. 30, Dr Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, had become aware of a number of pneumonia cases and communicated it to physicians at another hospital in Wuhan. He assessed it to be a coronavirus. He was then

summoned by Wuhan authorities and reprimanded.

The central government of China had good reason to want information to be centralized. Many party officials and scientists were working day and night to learn more about the illness and how to prevent its spread. Still, the central government felt that the action of the police in Wuhan was inappropriate, and to their credit, apologized. They are investigating how the protocol was misapplied.

But the Trump administration has seized on this incident and has used it as another battering ram against China. Howls of condemnation from media outlets have bolstered the China-bashing, Cold War attacks.

Even as the possibility of the U.S. becoming the global epicenter looms, the White House is hinting at reversing course and directing the country to go back to work by mid-April. That bit of news is currently being cheered by Wall Street as investors try to climb back from some of the worst days in the Dow Jones' history.

The contrast between a socialist system whose goal is humanity and a decrepit, violent capitalist system based on the greed of billionaires is evident. The billionaires and their lackeys are right to be worried.



West Coast dockworkers respond to Covid-19

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Once again, in a powerful act of solidarity, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is organizing to protect its members and to support the surrounding community in the coronavirus pandemic. The union has issued a list of demands striking out against unsanitary, life-threatening conditions. The union members can withhold labor in the shipping ports that control commerce to back up their demands.

The ILWU held a press conference along with local leaders from the Bay Area's Filipino community during the third week in March to demand that contaminated waste from the Grand Princess cruise ship, quarantined in San Francisco Bay, be safely disposed of. Also, they demanded adequate medical treatment for all workers still aboard the vessel and a safe repatriation of the staff.

Port companies had planned to expose both dockworkers and community members to the coronavirus by trucking the waste through the East Bay community. The ILWU demanded that the contaminated waste from the ship be disposed of safely through water-side offloading and barge removal. After the press conference, the port bosses backed down and agreed to union and community members' demands.

While the dockworkers on the West Coast continue to fight for sanitation standards, the ILWU is using its power to support the thousands of workers they represent in industries "on the other side of the gate," referring to workers outside of the port terminals. From the nearly 400 workers laid off at Powell's Books in Portland, Ore., to the workers at Anchorsteam Brewing in San Francisco, to education, veterinarian and warehouse workers, the ILWU is working to ensure that inland workers have safe working conditions and enough cash to survive.

It is courageous for the ILWU to make these demands while it is under intense union-busting pressure from legal proceedings. In Portland, a judge awarded the terminal operator ICTS a \$96-million settlement against the ILWU for a slowdown action which began in 2012. Although the original award to ICTS was later reduced

by \$19 million, it is still more than twice the ILWU's total assets, threatening the dockworkers' union with bankruptcy.

A union spokesperson says: "The ILWU has been hit with this massive fine that will have a chilling effect not only for the longshoremen's union, but for workers far beyond the waterfront if we don't act. Now is the time to organize in the face of this terrifying disease.

"And as the saying goes, an injury to one is an injury to all. That's never been more true than right now."

