

Propping up the U.S. military is driving the economy down

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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Members of the U.S. Army 1st Division 9th Regiment 1st Battalion unload heavy combat equipment including Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles at the railway station near the Pabrade military base in Lithuania, on Oct. 21, 2019.

Talk about inflation. On Oct. 18, a Senate panel approved an annual Pentagon budget that's at least \$29 billion more than last year and \$10 billion more than requested.

Most of the increase is earmarked for "equipment purchases" — a big, fat giveaway to the military-industrial complex.

Whatever happened to the necessity to limit spending, to cut back government spending?

The Pentagon's budget over nine years, from 2011 to 2020, has been \$9.1 trillion. Funding for the Pentagon constitutes most, but not all, U.S. military spending.

The CIA budget, for example, is unpublished and uncounted.

The U.S. spends more on its military than the [next 10 countries](#) combined (alphabetically): Brazil, Britain, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia and South Korea.

Congress, meanwhile, can't come up with \$350 billion a year — which is \$3.5 trillion over 10 years — to fund President Joe Biden's Build Back Better Act.

Of course, there's very little about the military budget being reported in the major media. The military budget isn't open to debate or dispute. Even the efforts of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Bernie Sanders to slow down military spending go mostly unreported.

War has ended?

Why did the Pentagon budget need to get a big increase, plus an extra, mystery \$10-billion bonus?

The Afghanistan war has ended. Yet military spending is higher than ever and expanding at a faster rate than ever.

Some say the big spending is meant to counter the economic crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One sometimes hears that it was the military buildup for World War II that finally ended the Great Depression of the 1930s.

But military spending was already at record highs when the recession of 2020 hit, so

it clearly didn't prevent an economic downturn.

Of course, the 2020 recession was more than the usual cyclical downturn. But there were many signs a recession was developing before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Industrial production in most countries had already ceased to rise. The U.S. Federal Reserve System had already initiated an "easing" cycle — that is, increasing the money supply — in an attempt to contain the incipient downturn.

Capitalism's boom and bust

The capitalist boom-and-bust cycle was noted long ago by Karl Marx. While capitalism has changed since Marx wrote, evolving from industrial capitalism to monopoly capitalism, the boom-and-bust cycle has continued.

The domination of capitalism on a world scale means that periodic crises return again and again, each one causing great hardship.

The system's dependence on relentless expansion and its inherent drive to maximize profit rather than meet human needs causes periodic collapses. And the bosses make the workers pay for the collapse.

Marx identified the essence of the periodic crises of capitalism as crises of overproduction very early on, even in the Communist Manifesto in 1848.

Traditional bourgeois economic theory denied that capitalism could have crises. Bourgeois economist John Maynard Keynes, looking at the catastrophic crisis of the 1930s, may be best known for acknowledging the reality that capitalism can have crises.

Keynes — and the economic policies identified with him — believed the state could intervene to lessen the crises if not eliminate them altogether.

According to Keynes, capitalism does not have crises of overproduction, as Marx had shown. Rather, Keynes argued that it was a crisis of under-consumption that can be resolved by the state stepping in to purchase goods directly, printing money to give people to spend themselves and/or using government deficit spending to put more money into the economy.

Part of the reason Keynes favored ending the gold standard was to allow this to happen more easily.

A stimulant becomes a depressant

Military spending was at first a powerful stimulant to production — a fact that Keynesian economists never tire of noting. The constant and expanding military spending in the U.S., however, has become a primary cause of inflation, even if that is not acknowledged by the bourgeois economists.

At the same time, military spending represses the expansion of capitalist reproduction.

Economic reproduction is the process whereby the means of production — the raw materials, facilities, machinery and tools used in the production of goods and services — are replaced. Expanded reproduction — or reproduction on an expanded basis — is the economic essence of capitalism.

Under expanded reproduction, the existing means of production are not only replaced, they are expanded. The capitalist must expand capital and machinery — constant capital. If not, there is failure: expand or die.

However, military spending means contracted reproduction. Factories that under normal conditions produce commodities that are used to replace the equipment of existing factories or build new factories are instead producing the means of destruction.

The economy rots from within by destroying the productive forces, including, in the case of actual warfare, the most important productive force — the workers.



Our future vs. neoliberalism

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In country after country around the world, people are rising up to challenge entrenched, failing neoliberal political and economic systems, with mixed but sometimes promising results.

Progressive leaders in the U.S. Congress are refusing to back down on the Democrats' promises to American voters to reduce poverty, expand rights to healthcare, education and clean energy, and repair a shredded social safety net. After decades of tax cuts for the rich, they are also committed to raising taxes on wealthy Americans and corporations to pay for this popular agenda.

Germany has elected a ruling coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats that excludes the conservative Christian Democrats for the first time since 2000. The new government promises a \$14 minimum wage, solar panels on all

suitable roof space, 2% of land for wind farms and the closure of Germany's last coal-fired power plants by 2030.

Iraqis voted in an election that was called in response to a popular [protest movement](#) launched in October 2019 to challenge the [endemic corruption](#) of the post-2003 political class and its subservience to U.S. and Iranian interests. The protest movement was split between taking part in the election and boycotting it, but its candidates still won about 35 seats and will [have a voice](#) in parliament. The party of long-time Iraqi nationalist leader Muqtada al-Sadr won 73 seats, the largest of any single party, while Iranian-backed parties whose armed militias killed hundreds of protesters in 2019 lost popular support and many of their seats.

Chile's billionaire president, Sebastian Piñera, is being [impeached](#) after the Pandora Papers revealed details of bribery and tax evasion in his sale of a mining company, and he could face up to 5 years in prison. Mass street protests in 2019 forced Piñera to agree to a new constitution to replace the one written under the Pinochet military dictatorship, and [a convention](#) that includes representatives of indigenous and other marginalized communities has been elected to draft the constitution. Progressive parties and candidates are expected to do well in the general election in November.

Maybe the greatest success of people power has come in Bolivia. In 2020, only a year after a U.S.-backed right-wing [military coup](#), a [mass mobilization](#) of mostly indigenous working people forced a new election, and the socialist MAS Party of Evo Morales was returned to power. [Since then](#) it has already introduced a new wealth tax and welfare payments to four million people to help eliminate hunger in Bolivia.

The ideological context

Since the 1970s, Western political and corporate leaders have peddled a quasi-religious belief in the power of "free" markets and unbridled capitalism to solve all the world's problems. This new ["neoliberal"](#) orthodoxy is a thinly disguised reversion

to the systematic injustice of 19th century laissez-faire capitalism, which led to gross inequality and poverty even in wealthy countries, famines that killed [tens of millions](#) of people in India and China, and horrific exploitation of the poor and vulnerable worldwide.

For most of the 20th century, Western countries gradually responded to the excesses and injustices of capitalism by using the power of government to redistribute wealth through [progressive taxation](#) and a growing public sector, and ensure broad access to public goods like education and healthcare. This led to a gradual expansion of broadly shared prosperity in the United States and Western Europe through a strong public sector that balanced the power of private corporations and their owners.

The steadily growing shared prosperity of the post-WWII years in the West was derailed by a combination of factors, including the 1973 OPEC oil embargo, Nixon's freeze on prices and wages, runaway inflation caused by dropping the gold standard, and then a second oil crisis after the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

Right-wing politicians led by Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. blamed the power of organized labor and the public sector for the economic crisis. They launched a "neoliberal" counter-revolution to bust unions, shrink and privatize the public sector, cut taxes, deregulate industries and supposedly unleash "the magic of the market." Then they took credit for a return to economic growth that really owed more to the end of the [oil crises](#).

The United States and United Kingdom used their economic, military and media power to spread their neoliberal gospel across the world. [Chile's experiment](#) in neoliberalism under Pinochet's military dictatorship became a model for U.S. efforts to roll back the "pink tide" in Latin America. When the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe opened to the West at the end of the Cold War, it was the extreme, neoliberal brand of capitalism that Western economists imposed as "[shock therapy](#)"

to privatize state-owned enterprises and open countries to Western corporations.

In the United States, the mass media shy away from the word “neoliberalism” to describe the changes in society since the 1980s. They describe its effects in less systemic terms, as globalization, privatization, deregulation, consumerism and so on, without calling attention to their common ideological roots. This allows them to treat its impacts as separate, unconnected problems: poverty and inequality, [mass incarceration](#), environmental degradation, ballooning debt, money in politics, disinvestment in public services, declines in public health, permanent war, and record military spending.

After a generation of systematic neoliberal control, it is now obvious to people all over the world that neoliberalism has utterly failed to solve the world’s problems. As many predicted all along, it has just enabled the rich to get [much, much richer](#), while structural and even existential problems remain unsolved.

Even once people have grasped the self-serving, predatory nature of this system that has overtaken their political and economic life, many still fall victim to the demoralization and powerlessness that are among its most insidious products, as they are brainwashed to see themselves only as individuals and consumers, instead of as active and collectively powerful citizens.

In effect, confronting neoliberalism — whether as individuals, groups, communities or countries — requires a two-step process. First, we must understand the nature of the beast that has us and the world in its grip, whatever we choose to call it. Second, we must overcome our own demoralization and powerlessness, and rekindle our collective power as political and economic actors to build the better world we know is possible.

We will see that collective power in the streets and the suites at COP26 in Glasgow, when the world’s leaders will gather to confront the reality that neoliberalism has

allowed corporate profits to trump a rational response to the devastating impact of fossil fuels on the Earth's climate. Extinction Rebellion and other groups will be [in the streets](#) in Glasgow, demanding the long-delayed action that is required to solve the problem, including an end to net carbon emissions by 2025.

While scientists warned us for decades what the result would be, political and business leaders have peddled their [neoliberal snake oil](#) to keep filling their coffers at the expense of the future of life on Earth. If we fail to stop them now, living conditions will keep deteriorating for people everywhere, as the natural world our lives depend on is washed out from under our feet, goes up in smoke and, species by species, dies and disappears forever.

The Covid pandemic is another real world case study on the impact of neoliberalism. As the official death toll reaches [5 million](#) and many more deaths go unreported, rich countries are still [hoarding vaccines](#), drug companies are reaping a [bonanza of profits](#) from vaccines and new drugs, and the lethal, devastating injustice of the entire neoliberal "market" system is laid bare for the whole world to see. Calls for a "[people's vaccine](#)" and "vaccine justice" have been challenging what has now been termed "vaccine apartheid."

Conclusion

In the 1980s, U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher often [told the world](#), "There is no alternative" to the neoliberal order she and President Reagan were unleashing. After only one or two generations, the self-serving insanity they prescribed and the crises it has caused have made it a question of survival for humanity to find alternatives.

Around the world, ordinary people are rising up to demand real change. The people of Iraq, Chile and Bolivia have overcome the incredible traumas inflicted on them to take to the streets in the thousands and demand better government. Americans

should likewise demand that our government stop wasting trillions of dollars to militarize the world and destroy countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, and start solving our real problems, here and abroad.

People around the world understand the nature of the problems we face better than we did a generation or even a decade ago. Now we must overcome demoralization and powerlessness in order to act. It helps to understand that the demoralization and powerlessness we may feel are themselves products of this neoliberal system, and that simply overcoming them is a victory in itself.

As we reject the inevitability of neoliberalism and Thatcher's lie that there is no alternative, we must also reject the lie that we are just passive, powerless consumers. As human beings, we have the same collective power that human beings have always had to build a better world for ourselves and our children – and now is the time to harness that power.

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The NFL's racism, misogyny and homophobia exposed

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In early October, email messages from Jon Gruden, an NFL head coach for 15 seasons, were leaked in the media. On Oct. 11, Gruden resigned as head coach of the Las Vegas Raiders because of what was in the leaked emails.

While Gruden was an ESPN analyst from 2011 through 2018, he frequently spewed racist, homophobic and misogynistic slurs in messages to Bruce Allen, the president of the Washington football team, and other NFL league executives. The leaked emails were from 2011, during the preseason lockout imposed on the players by team owners. In them John Gruden used a racist stereotype to describe DeMaurice Smith, the executive director of the NFL Players Association.

Gruden used homophobic and misogynistic language to disparage Michael Sam, a gay player drafted by the St. Louis Rams in 2014, and Roger Goodell, the NFL commissioner, for welcoming Sam. He also criticized Goodell's efforts to reduce concussions, condemned the use of women as referees and said that Eric Reid

should be fired for joining Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, in protesting racism and police terror by kneeling during the national anthem.

Jon Gruden also used derogatory language to describe some NFL owners and coaches as well as the journalists who cover the league. Jon Gruden and Bruce Allen, with some others, exchanged nude pictures of women, including one photo of two Washington Football Team cheerleaders.

Washington Team investigated

How did all this come to light? It came to light because of an investigation into the Washington Football Team and its owner, Daniel Snyder. The Washington Football Team was fined \$10 million by the NFL after a year-long investigation. The investigation found that the team had cultivated a culture of sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation.

The investigation was not about Gruden. Daniel Snyder and the Washington Football Team have a history of racism and misogyny, starting with the previous team name of more than 80 years that was finally dropped in 2020 because it was a slur toward Native Peoples, as well as the organization's mistreatment of its cheerleaders.

In the summer of 2020, The Washington Post published a report that described the pervasive sexual harassment, bullying and abuse at the Washington Team.

That's when NFL Commissioner Goodell instructed league executives to look at the emails of Daniel Snyder and others over the summer. Those emails included Gruden's racist, sexist, and homophobic exchanges with Snyder. Goodell got a summary of the findings this month, and the league sent the Raiders some of the emails written by Gruden.

On Oct. 8, after The Wall Street Journal reported on Gruden's emails about the

Players Association Director, Smith, the Raiders owner, Mark Davis, issued a statement calling the remarks “disturbing.” Gruden apologized and was allowed to keep his head-coaching job for the Raiders. Two days later, just before the Chicago Bears game, Gruden held a team meeting to pre-emptively address the situation. Gruden was trying to maintain his head-coaching job. But the next day the New York Times reported a more detailed account of Gruden’s emails. Two days later Gruden resigned.

One might ask why Gruden was allowed to resign instead of being fired? In addition, why haven’t other NFL owners, executives and coaches who were also exposed in the emails been fired or reprimanded? Gruden deserves to be fired but the fact is that his resignation has served to cover up the bigger problem.

No justice for Kaepernick, Reid

With high-ranking NFL executives demonstrating their true views in the email messages about players standing up for justice, it is no surprise that Kaepernick and Reid are deemed throughout the league as persona non grata.

After the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked weeks of militant national protest, the NFL was finally embarrassed into changing its position on issues of race such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Goodell came forward, after being called out by players, to say what he had previously avoided: “Black Lives Matter.” He apologized for not doing so before and vowed that the NFL would change.

It was because of the mass movement against racism that Jon Gruden is now out, even though he wasn’t fired but instead was forced to resign.

In the wake of the protests and civic unrest of 2020, the league continues to make a big deal of its supposed commitment to supporting women, LGBTQ2S people and

particularly African Americans. This year, the NFL kept up the practice of painting feel-good phrases like “End Racism” in end zones and of allowing players to wear approved slogans like “Black Lives Matter” on the back of helmets.

Even though the league gives lip service against racism, the numbers demonstrate the NFL’s hypocrisy. Black players make up close to 70% percent of the NFL rosters, including most of the league’s biggest stars. However, there are only five Black general managers of teams. There are no Black team owners with majority shares. In addition, only three out of 32 head coaches are Black, even though there were eight head coach vacancies from last season.

Ironically, the Raiders under the ownership of Al Davis was one of the most progressive teams in the league. In 1989, the Raiders hired Art Shell, the first Black head coach in the league’s modern era. The Raiders also hired the first Latinx head coach, Tom Flores, in 1979. The Raiders in 1997 also hired Any Trask, the first woman to become an executive for a NFL team.

After the hiring of Art Shell 32 years ago, not much has changed. Powerful, wealthy white men have by far the most control over professional football. How they act, whom they appoint and hire, what they say — and in this case the casual jokes and demeaning put-downs — underscore the lie of the league’s public relations displays. These are the men who make the day-to-day decisions in football. And those emails are where the NFL owners’ culture was exhibited.

The league may try to spin and make John Gruden to be just one bad apple but the truth is, the whole NFL ownership and management is rotten to the core.



Rosemary Neidenberg, honored by Bob McCubbin

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Rosemary Neidenberg died in Brooklyn, N.Y., on March 29 at the age of 99. A memorial commemoration was held Oct. 10 in Brooklyn. Here is Struggle-La Lucha's Bob McCubbin's contribution to the commemoration:



Also see: [Rosemary Neidenberg: a century of revolutionary struggle](#)



Clean water and bathrooms are human rights!

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San Francisco has [77 billionaires](#) and [7,000 homes](#) without indoor plumbing. While billionaire Jeff Bezos has his own rocket ship, [500,000 homes](#) in the United States don't have their own bathrooms with indoor plumbing.

What's more important to public health than clean water and bathrooms? Doctors, nurses and other health workers urge us to wash our hands frequently to stop the spread of COVID-19.

It's hard for many poor people to follow that advice. One out of 17 Indigenous families don't have indoor plumbing.

Every square inch of the United States was stolen from Indigenous nations whose people were killed and forced into reservations. The Bantustans that existed in apartheid South Africa were modeled after reservations in the U.S.

On many reservations people have to haul water from miles away. The [Hopi Nation in Arizona](#) has three times the amount of arsenic in its water than the Environmental Protection Agency considers to be safe.

Former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder should be jailed for poisoning Flint's children with polluted water. Instead of getting clean Lake Huron water from Detroit, Snyder hoped to save a few million dollars by pumping filthy water out of the Flint River.

Flint isn't the only city where children are being lead poisoned. The drinking water in Baltimore, Cleveland, Milwaukee and Newark, N.J., also has high levels of lead. All these cities have majority or near majority Black populations.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that [one out of 40 children](#) in the U.S. have high levels of lead in their blood.

The \$14 billion wasted on the newest U.S. aircraft carrier could go a long way to getting the lead out of the drinking water.

Defend water protectors

More Union Army soldiers in the Civil War died of disease than of battle wounds because of a lack of sanitation. Generals took note.

Capitalists didn't care how many workers died in their factories or slums. Pittsburgh didn't filter its water until 1907. The city had one of the highest rates of people dying from typhoid fever.

At the time, most tenements or farm dwellings didn't have bathrooms. Milwaukee built seven natatoriums where people could take baths. Some of them were built while Socialist Party mayors were in city hall.

By the 1960s most urban families in the U.S. had access to fresh water and their

own bathrooms. That wasn't the case for farm workers.

A real advance in human rights was making ranchers and rich farmers provide bathrooms for farm workers. The bosses preferred workers being forced to relieve themselves in the field.

This wasn't just because farm bosses were cheap. They wanted to humiliate workers. The United Farm Workers union and the grape boycotts it called helped turn things around.

Since the 1970s, the wave of cutbacks has included millions of water shutoffs. Water and sewage service to over [20,000 people in Detroit](#) was stopped in 2014.

Water shutoffs kill. According to the [Food and Water Watch](#), a U.S. moratorium on water shutoffs could have saved more than 9,000 lives of people who died from COVID-19.

This attack on public health is a product of capitalist decay. The Roman aqueducts built 2,000 years ago are well known. The older water and irrigation systems in Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico and Peru should be too.

In 2021, capitalists can't provide clean water in much of the U.S. Widespread droughts in the western United States are caused by capitalist climate change.

One of the biggest struggles in defense of clean water is the fight against new oil pipelines being built. Over 700 water protectors were arrested trying to stop the Dakota Access pipeline.

Among them was [Red Fawn Fallis](#), a citizen of the Oglala Sioux nation who was sent to prison. Former Gov. Snyder should be in jail, not the water protectors.



Congress will do nothing for us without struggle

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Eighty-one million people voted last year against Trump and racism. For nearly 50 years, poor and working people have suffered from frozen wages and cutbacks.

People want action now. Yet Congress is failing to pass the modest “Build Back Better” bill. [Here’s some of what it includes:](#)

- Two years of free community college.

All education should be free. Even in capitalist France and Germany students don’t pay college tuition. A trillion dollars that’s owed for student loans should be wiped off the books, too.

- Expand Medicare to include dental care, vision and hearing. Increase Medicaid coverage.

Healthcare is a human right! Who wants their grandparents to be unable to go to the dentist and get their teeth fixed? Or not able to get glasses or hearing aids?

Nobody has to pay to go to a hospital or clinic in socialist Cuba.

Rev. Martin Luther King declared that “of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.” Medicaid would cover more poor people in a dozen states where they have been [excluded from the program](#) by reactionary state legislatures.

- Cut prescription prices.

The pharmaceutical outfits are thieves. Pfizer and Moderna made billions from their COVID-19 vaccines, which were subsidized by the U.S. government.

No one should have to choose between paying their rent and buying food or purchasing medicines. Alec Smith died in Minnesota on June 27, 2017, because he couldn’t afford insulin anymore.

The price of insulin in the U.S. [costs ten times more](#) than what it sells for in other countries. When the Minnesota legislature passed the “Alec Smith Act” to guarantee emergency access to insulin, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America [tried to get it thrown out](#) in federal court.

Big Pharma spent [a million dollars a day](#) in the first three months of 2021 to lobby Congress.

One result is that Medicare is prohibited from negotiating with drug companies. So it pays [nearly twice as much](#) for medicines as the Veterans Administration does.

Child poverty is obscene

- Expand the child tax credit to pay families \$300 per month for children

under 6 years old and \$250 per month for children ages 6 to 18.

Over 10 million children in the United States [live in dire poverty](#). That includes more than one out of four Black children.

While [22,000 children](#) live in New York City homeless shelters, there's not a single homeless child in Cuba.

- Help subsidize childcare for children under five. Universal pre-kindergarten for children aged 3 and 4 years old.

Free child care should be guaranteed to every family that needs it. It was the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai that helped [establish universal childcare](#) in the socialist Soviet Union.

- Paid family and medical leave.

Of the 41 countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the [United States is the only one](#) that doesn't allow working parents time with their newborn or sick children. Japan offers more than a year of paid leave for new parents, while Canada offers six months.

While the media says this bill will cost \$3.5 trillion, that's spread over 10 years. So the real annual cost is \$350 billion.

Compare that to the trillion-dollar annual war budget, which includes not just the Pentagon but also the spy agencies and other government departments. The U.S. spent \$6 trillion in building nuclear weapons that, if used, would kill every human being on the planet.

No struggle, no progress

The only reason why this legislation is being considered by Congress is that 26

million people marched last year to declare Black Lives Matter!

The provisions of “Build Back Better” may seem meager to those familiar with social conditions in other countries with stronger labor movements. But socialists shouldn’t sneer at workers who hope this legislation is enacted.

These simple measures mean a lot to people who desperately need them. Revolutionaries are the best fighters for reform.

Sen. Bernie Sanders originally wanted a \$6 trillion bill. Now there’s talk of reducing the cost of this bill to \$2.3 trillion by either cutting out items or making its measures last for just five or six years instead of a decade.

Passing “Build Back Better” should have been twinned with pushing for a big increase in the federal minimum wage. One of the demands of the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom—where Dr. King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech — was for a \$2-per-hour minimum wage.

That’s worth \$17.82 today, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator](#). Fighting to raise the minimum wage will win the support of millions.

Frederick Douglass declared that “without struggle there is no progress.” U.S. Rep. Cori Bush from Missouri knows that. She forced President Biden to extend the moratorium on evictions by leading a sit-in on the steps of the Capitol.

The AFL-CIO should follow Cori Bush’s example and call for a new Solidarity Day to march on Washington and demand that Congress help the people, not the billionaires.



Wages cut by inflation: Building Back Better or return to austerity?

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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Wages are being cut by inflation — the worst round of inflation in 30 years.

The dollar store is officially dead. Dollar Tree, the last of the big dollar-store chains selling items for \$1 or less, said on Sept. 28 that it was officially “breaking the buck.” Today dollar stores are selling at \$10 or less, no longer devoted to \$1 items.

Personal income from all sources — wages, unemployment compensation, stimulus checks, Social Security benefits, etc. — when adjusted for inflation, fell in August.

Personal income should have grown as more workers got jobs, and wages increased for some jobs.

Congress and the Biden administration are locked in what almost seems like a game being played out for the TV cameras. The “Build Back Better” program promised by the Biden campaign had popular support. Already Democrats are talking about

removing most of the plan's popular provisions. That'd mean a return to the austerity budgets of previous years.

In April, Biden proposed another 2% increase in the Pentagon budget, taking it up to \$753 billion for 2022; there was no opposition from the Democrats or Republicans.

Biden's "Build Back Better" plan before Congress is reported as being \$3.5 trillion, but if that's broken down into a single fiscal year amount — as is done with the Pentagon budget — then it is only \$350 billion, less than half of annual war spending.

Inflation rate now as high as 13.5%

The most well-known inflation measure is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics; the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) is produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. In general, the CPI tends to report higher rates of inflation, which may be why the Federal Reserve prefers the PCE.

According to the Fed's preferred [PCE measure](#), with food and energy included, inflation is at a rate of 4.8%. This is the highest PCE inflation measure since January 1991.

The CPI report of [inflation for August](#) put it at 5.3%.

The CPI and PCE reports are controversial and not universally accepted. On Wall Street, other measures are frequently used.

The CPI used to be determined by comparing the price of a fixed basket of goods and services spanning two different time periods. A few years ago that was changed to a cost-of-living index, a purposeful manipulation that allows the U.S. government to report a lower rate of inflation.

[Business Insider](#) reports that John Williams at Shadow Government Statistics says that the real inflation rate is now 13.5% and it is going to get higher. Williams uses [the original CPI methodology](#) based on a basket of goods and services.

In the spring, the Fed dismissed rising inflation as something that was “transitory,” caused by bottlenecks and supply chain problems, that would be gone by the end of the year. Now the Fed is saying that “transitory” inflation will continue into late 2022.

On Sept. 29., Fed Chair Jerome Powell told a European Central Bank forum, “Inflation is high and well above target and yet there appears to be slack in the labor market,” making an apparent reference to the 1970s “stagflation” that combined high unemployment (Powell calls that “slack”) and fast-rising prices.

Today, employment is still almost [7 million jobs short](#) of where it was before the pandemic.

Actually, the cause of inflation is not a quickie supply chain disruption that’ll just go away, Powell seemed to admit.

“The current inflation spike is really a consequence of supply constraints meeting very strong demand, and that is all associated with the reopening of the economy, which is a process that will have a beginning, a middle and an end,” he said.

Fed handed out \$4.5 trillion

What is “very strong demand”? The Federal Reserve Bank handed out \$4.5 trillion over the last 18 months, along with short-term interest rates near 0% and long-term interest rates at record-low levels. The Fed’s trillions are the source of the “demand,” meaning spending, that Powell refers to.

The other part of the “demand” comes from Congress, which put out \$5 trillion over

the past 18 months in forgivable small business PPP loans (over \$800 billion); funds sent to states to spend how they see fit; and bailouts for airlines and other big companies.

While some say that the inflation is “transitory” (over within the next year or so), other capitalist economists think it will be long term, such as [Nouriel Roubini](#), professor of economics at New York University’s Stern School of Business. He says that what’s coming is 1970s-style “stagflation” — a situation in which the inflation rate is high, the economic growth rate is slow, and unemployment remains high.

Trump's trade war against China

The focus on supply-chain disruption ignores the fact that the supply chain was already disrupted before the pandemic began, though the pandemic did add to the disruption in some areas.

Trump's MAGA trade war against China, which has been continued by Biden, had already created chaos in the supply chain. Tariffs raise prices and reduce availability of goods and services.

As [Forbes](#) noted: “Donald Trump’s tariffs and the trade war his administration launched against China turned out to be far more damaging than many believed. ... The U.S. economy paid a heavy price for the Trump administration’s protectionist trade policies.”

Protectionist tariffs are inflationary; they increase prices as they keep out lower-priced foreign imports. Also, Trump's trade policy and his protectionist, anti-globalization policies hurt shipping. The [shipping industry](#) was already limping, and supply chains were disrupted before the pandemic.

War spending and inflation

Sanctions are a form of economic warfare. In its hybrid wars against Iran and Venezuela, Washington has imposed sanctions against both countries that block oil trade. The sanctions, no surprise, mainly benefit Big Oil and are responsible for increasing the consumer price of fuel.

Also left out of the discussion of inflation is the ever-increasing Pentagon budget, perhaps the most important factor driving the inflation surge.

The Pentagon budget routinely eats up more than half of annual U.S. discretionary spending. By the Department of Defense's own accounting, military spending in the U.S. budget was \$13.34 trillion from 2000 through fiscal year 2019 in inflation-adjusted 2020 dollars. Add to that another \$3.18 trillion for the Veterans Administration, and the yearly average comes to a whopping \$826 billion.

Every year for the last seven years — under both Democratic and Republican administrations — the U.S. military budget has set a new historic high. The U.S. is spending more on its military than at any point since World War II.

Do weapons have use value?

In ["Generals Over the White House,"](#) Marxist theoretician Sam Marcy wrote that "military production in the epoch of imperialism is a special case of commodity production. ... The products of the military-industrial complex are by Marxist definition commodities. However, in addition to having an exchange value, commodities must also have a use value. ...

"The products of the military-industrial complex enter into the process of capitalist production not as commodities in general but as ... commodities of a peculiar type. While they have use values in the narrow economic sense, their broad sociological significance is that of a cancer which tends to consume the entire body politic.

"The process of capitalist production and exchange in the final analysis does mean

that the capitalist, in order to realize his profit, must produce a useful product. If not, it undermines the very process of capitalist reproduction.

"The sum total of the product that emanates from the military-industrial complex is devoid of usefulness to society. This is not readily apparent in the U.S., which was the victorious country in World War II. At the end of the war, after having spent billions and billions of dollars, the U.S. appropriated most of the profitable world markets and sources of scarce raw materials which had belonged to its allies and its adversaries, thereby vastly enriching monopoly capitalism at home.

"However, since the Korean War, the U.S. imperialist establishment has consistently lost ground in its military adventures. It has flooded the U.S. as well as the rest of the world with small pieces of paper whose decreasing value gives evidence of the indebtedness it has incurred as a result of military adventures for which there has been no material return to compensate for the vast expenditures entailed in producing the planes, guns, tanks and other sophisticated equipment employed. ...

"Cranking up the war machine in the very early 1930s was a stimulus to the capitalist economy. Cranking it up again in a period of hyperinflation and worldwide capitalist stagnation will operate as a depressant instead."



Solidarity with longtime anti-war activist Joe Lombardo!

written by Struggle - La Lucha

October 22, 2021

On the heels of its defeat in Afghanistan, the United States government has made it clear it is now once again setting its sights on anti-war activists in the United States. Their latest target is Joe Lombardo, a leader of the country's largest anti-imperialist coalition.

Joe Lombardo is 73 years old and has been an organizer in the anti-war movement for decades. He is a cofounder and lead organizer for Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace, a local anti-war group based near Albany, New York. Lombardo also serves on the administrative committee for the country's largest and most active coalition of anti-intervention organizations, the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC).

UNAC and its member organizations are consistent in their unequivocal and vocal opposition to all forms of U.S. imperialism, from criminal sanctions and embargos to illegal coups and military interventions.

As one of the coalitions' main leaders, Joe has helped to coordinate conferences, mass mobilizations and webinars around the issues of peace and justice at home and abroad for UNAC. In his long time as an activist, Joe has travelled to countries throughout the world as an ambassador for peace and human rights.

This week, federal agents once again made their move against the anti-war movement. Out of the blue, they called Joe's ex-wife for questioning. The FBI agents pressed her to answer questions over the phone and to meet in person discuss Joe's past activities and travels. They specifically asked about Joe's 2019 trip to Venezuela, which he took as part of a U.S. Peace Delegation.

The feds rely on the fact that the average person is caught off guard and gets very nervous when federal agents come knocking with demands for information. Luckily, Joe Lombardo's ex-wife knew to reach out to him and to a movement lawyer and made the correct decision not to meet or speak with the FBI about Joe.

All those active in the movements for peace and justice should use this moment as a reminder to never speak with agents of the federal government prying into your political activism or the activism of others. "I have nothing to say, please speak with my lawyer," are all that need to be said. Activists should also take the time to educate friends and family members on this subject as well. Although not necessary, having the name of a movement or civil liberties lawyer on hand could help people feel less nervous in such a situation.

All this begs the question: why is the federal government once again going after anti-war activists? The powers that be, Democrat or Republican, feel threatened by the influence and power of our people's movements and will use any opportunity to try to criminalize, silence or destroy them. An attack on one is certainly an attack on all. Solidarity is always the order of the day.

The Committee to Stop FBI Repression (CSFR) stands in unwavering support of our

brother in the movement, Joe Lombardo. We oppose all efforts by the U.S. government to target activists in any progressive movement in this country. We call for an end to investigations, political harassment and threats against activists and our movements.

Source: [*Committee to Stop FBI Repression*](#)



New Orleans day of action demands real hurricane relief

written by Struggle - La Lucha

October 22, 2021

On Sept. 26, several revolutionary and progressive organizations came together for a day of action in downtown New Orleans. Organizers were responding to the horrible conditions affecting working class and oppressed communities following Hurricane Ida, as well as the capitalist-made crises that preceded it.

All the organizations raised demands and outlined visions for a broad, mass fightback, based on non-sectarian cooperation and unity through struggle.

Cancel the rents

The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) - Central Gulf Coast started things off at City Hall with a Cancel the Rents rally, as part of a national campaign. The campaigners are calling for an immediate cancellation of rent debts and an indefinite eviction moratorium.

A PSL organizer said that, while doing aid work in southeast Louisiana, "We were struck by the compounding crises. The Supreme Court had just thrown out the eviction moratorium. ... Just a few weeks ago Louisiana was the COVID epicenter of the entire world. And now people are trying to survive in the aftermath of a hurricane with no power, some with no water, and some in 100-degree weather.

"When we were in LaPlace, we noticed that the local police were patrolling the streets, not to help people, but to protect property, looking for looters."

Hold Entergy accountable — make FEMA pay

The March for Real Hurricane Relief kicked off at City Hall after the Cancel the Rents rally. Sponsoring organizations included Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) - New Orleans, New Orleans Renters Rights Assembly, New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance, Unión Migrante, Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, New Orleans Mutual Aid Society and the Socialist Unity Party.

The march went from City Hall to the Civil District Court Building (where evictions happen) to the Federal Building.

At City Hall, Serena Sojic-Borne with FRSO said: "We need public-run utilities. That means the government manages the power grid. But more importantly, we need a people's board that oversees the government running the power grid!"

In front of the civil court building, Daiquiri Jones represented the Renters Rights

Assembly, stating: “In that climate [of COVID-19 and other crises] it’s unconscionable that they’re opening eviction court and prioritizing the interests of a few people. We still don’t have adequate assistance for the people who are actually paying the property taxes [renters], the people who are going to work every day—they’re the ones supporting the city. … The idea that the burden is on the people who work the most, and support the city the most, is unconscionable.

“We have reasonable demands. We want \$500 million in rental assistance to southeast Louisiana. We want eviction court to stay closed until all rental assistance is distributed to the people, not just writing the landlord a check.”

On the street, organizers building toward an Ida Survivor Town Hall event distributed a flyer calling for a movement where survivors can “propose demands for consideration, to debate these proposals and to vote on whether a proposed demand is to be part of the collective voice,” citing the historical lessons of Hurricane Katrina, and the folly of “throwing ourselves at the mercy of politicians, bureaucrats and disaster capitalists.” They can be reached at howellnow1958 [at] gmail [dot] com.

The crowd chanted as they began to march, “All the money for the people!”

There was no plan

At the Hale Boggs Federal Building, a speaker with *Unión Migrante* said: “We are indignant at the injustice of being totally exploited as immigrants. We’re not eligible for support from FEMA and so many government programs because of being undocumented. Our neighborhoods are the last to have their trash picked up, and the mayor is not doing a very good job as mayor.

“She didn’t have an evacuation plan or anything when the hurricane came. We as *Unión Migrante* made a video informing the community what to do when a hurricane

came and then when the hurricane came around, nothing was actually orchestrated. And the mayor just says, 'save yourselves, whoever can get out.' But there was no plan for how to actually implement that."

A Unión Migrante sign read, "We built this city! We deserve hurricane relief too!", referring to the fact that immigrants did so much of the rebuilding following Hurricane Katrina.

Jackie of the New Orleans Mutual Aid Society explained that, although Ida hit and caused an emergency, "what all the mutual aid groups in New Orleans are responding to is the emergency that preceded the emergency, which is that people don't have what they need. We're trying to meet those needs, but we can't do it because the need is too great."

They elaborated that the problem is the historical effects of capitalism and oppressions like racism, which have made communities vulnerable.

Echoing Jackie's words, David Brazil with Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition said that the disaster of the storm "took place within the larger disaster, which is capitalism, and the larger disaster, which is white supremacy.

"The real source of wealth in society is workers. All the money that FEMA has is workers' tax money. It's our money! And as soon as we need it, it should be coming back to us.

"It's great that people have come together, but we cannot fill the gap by asking community members to step in where social services should exist," Brazil said. "We need to get together as a community — and this rally is a great example of what it looks like when working class people from many different backgrounds and regions get together to make common cause.

"We have to struggle together. These people aren't coming to save us. There is no

plan. Rather, we saw the plan. The plan is abandonment. It's 'good luck'! That's the plan. And we're going to continue seeing climate disasters, and disasters like this pandemic. So we as working people have to get it together to begin to build the alternatives now, because the government is not going to do it for us.

"I am so grateful to FRSO for organizing this, for keeping the working class and class struggle at the center of this, for naming and denouncing capitalism, because we have to fight this thing or it's going to kill us all!"



Texas lawmakers: Why you gotta be so cruel?

written by Struggle - La Lucha
October 22, 2021

In September, 666 laws passed by Texas lawmakers went into effect — laws that are so repressive and restrictive that it's mind-boggling.

Some background on this writer

I came to Texas from California in January 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and months before the U.S. presidential election. I needed proof of residency to check books out of the local library and a Texas ID to register to vote. I made an appointment online at the Texas Department of Public Safety and Health for a driver's license and contacted the registrar of voters to find out how to register to vote.

When I called the registrar of voters, I was told to fill out the application online, print, sign and mail it directly to the county's election office. I did not have a printer, so I asked if the application could be sent to me via postal mail. I received the application, signed it and returned it using the address listed. My voter registration card did not arrive until six months later, in September 2020.

I searched online for a summary of all the candidates and proposals on the ballot and did not find anything. I called the number on the registration card to ask when I would be receiving my sample ballot. I was told that the ballots for individual counties are normally posted about 3 to 4 weeks before the election. I said that in San Diego, registered voters get a sample ballot summarizing all the candidates and issues. She replied, "Wow, that may be why California has such a good voter turnout."

I asked for a mail-in ballot and was told that it would require a "Ballot by Mail" application. Turned out that I did not qualify for a mail-in ballot. Using my voter registration number, I was able to gain online access to a sample ballot and my assigned polling place about three weeks before the election.

The restrictive laws

I wanted to share that story before discussing [the restrictive laws](#) passed in Texas.

[SB 8](#), "The Heartbeat Law," bans abortion after five-and-a-half to six weeks of

pregnancy, before most women are aware that they are pregnant. The law threatens any individual or entity who “knowingly engages in conduct that aids or abets,” including paying for or reimbursing the costs of an abortion through insurance or otherwise, with a civil lawsuit. Any civilian who sues that person will be awarded \$10,000 plus court costs and attorney fees.

[HB 1925](#) prohibits camping in public places by homeless individuals, making it a criminal offense that carries a fine of up to \$500, and threatens cities that discourage enforcing the law with legal action from the state attorney general and potentially loss of state grant money.

[HB 1927](#), “Constitutional Carry,” grants anyone age 21 or older who legally owns a handgun the right to carry that handgun in public without a license or training. There are 16 additional laws related to possessing a gun, including laws stating how to store and carry it, and places where it is prohibited. People must read the laws closely before openly carrying a gun, especially if you are Black, Brown, or poor and white, because the consequences could be fatal if you carry a gun illegally.

‘Criminal justice’

[HB 1900](#) relates to cities of 250,000 or more that adopt budgets that defund or reduce police budgets. Those cities are threatened financially with reductions in sales tax revenues and increased property taxes.

[HB 929](#), “The Botham Jean Act,” requires that a police officer’s body-worn camera remain activated for the entirety of any investigation. A close look at the law reveals, however, that an “officer can activate a camera or stop a recording currently in progress, for privacy in certain situations and at certain locations.” It is not a crime to turn it off.

Will this bill prevent police from maliciously or recklessly entering someone’s home

and killing them, as in the cases of Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson and Breonna Taylor?

Similarly, [SB 69](#) reads, ‘A peace officer may not intentionally use a choke hold, carotid artery hold, or similar neck restraint in searching or arresting a person unless the restraint is necessary to prevent serious bodily injury to or the death of the officer or another person.’ Isn’t that what they always claim?

People are demanding that the police stop the chokehold and all forms of neck restraints, disarm the police and stop brutalizing people. People, particularly in communities of color, are demanding community control over the police.

Education, history and social studies

[HB 2497](#), “The Texas 1836 Project,” funds an advisory committee established to “promote patriotic education and increase awareness of the Texas values that continue to stimulate boundless prosperity across the state.” The true Texas 1836 history centers on the year Texas seceded from Mexico, led by settlers from the United States who legalized slavery and suppressed the Indigenous population from gaining independence. Mexico had officially abolished slavery in Texas in 1830, and restoring slavery in Texas was the major cause of secession.

The Texas 1836 Project contradicts [HB 3979](#), which states: “For any social studies course in the required curriculum, a teacher may not be compelled to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs.”

The 1836 law includes the development and implementation of the Gubernatorial 1836 Award to recognize student knowledge of “Texas Independence,” in contrast to HB 3979, which instructs school districts, open enrollment charter schools and teachers not to require, make part of a course, or award students who participate in

civic or political activities.

[SB 4](#), “The Star Spangled Banner Protection Act,” requires that professional sports teams that require a financial commitment from the state of Texas or any government entity must have a written agreement that the team will play the national anthem at the beginning of each team sporting event. A default in this agreement threatens the team with debarment from contracting with the state.

In summary

Is the purpose of the government to make people’s lives more miserable? Less secure? There are some who claim this is a Republican ploy, but we say this is capitalism at its worst.

SB 8 states in the text that Texas has compelling interests in protecting the health of women and the life of the unborn child; for women to make an informed choice about whether to continue pregnancy. Yet, aside from taking away programs women need to make that informed choice, Texas lawmakers refused to expand Medicaid health coverage at no cost to the state, a measure [supported by 70%](#) of Texas residents.

Texas has over 29 million people; 154,000 are in prison; 199 on death row. Some 185 death-row inmates have been exonerated nationally, 16 in Texas.

Former Texas death-row inmate Anthony Graves, who spent more than 18 years in prison before he was exonerated in 2010, said in [an interview](#) with the Texas Tribune: “I want to see the death penalty abolished. ... The state was going to murder me for something I didn’t do. It would be naïve to think that I was the only one down there like that.”

Texas, one of only two states that put people to death in 2020 during the pandemic, has already had two executions in 2021 and five more pending.

In this period of uncertainty, everyone should have a primary care doctor or clinic to help decide when and where to get tested, how long to stay in isolation if positive, whether it is safe to get vaccinated, wear a mask or both, instead of having to search for answers on social media.

Free medical care and shelter for all, family planning programs, affordable housing, livable wages, guaranteed income, healthy food, fresh air and a plan for sustainable safe living conditions under growing climate change: These issues should be at the top of any new laws or proposals being introduced or discussed in Texas and nationwide.

What will it take to build a better world for everyone? What kind of world will that be? The world that a growing number of the billions of poor and working-class people worldwide want to see is a socialist one.

It's up to us to fight for a better world — a world where the needs of humanity are the priority to us and the lawmakers that we choose to govern — a socialist world.

