

How to yellow-cake a tragedy: the NY Times spreads the virus of hatred, again

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Doctors from across China are being dispatched to help tackle the coronavirus Covic-19 in Hubei province. Photo: Xinhua

"In the end, the plague touched us all...it was not confined....breeding in a

compost of greed and uselessness and murder...promising life and delivering death...[serving] as furnished rooms for ideology.”

—Pete Hamill, liner notes to Blood on the Tracks

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus, first detected late last year in the hub city of Wuhan, China is a rapidly-spreading viral disease, often characterized by a cluster of acute respiratory symptoms. The virulence of this outbreak has put most of China under a lockdown: over 50 million people have been quarantined in the immediate region; 40,000 people have been infected, and over 900-[and counting](#)-have died. Many neighboring Chinese cities also have restrictions on travel and movement to stem the tide of infection; and across the country, all of China is facing restrictions and hardship. In the face of this sudden and tragic crisis-and the extraordinary social distancing measures the Chinese government has taken to safeguard public health and prevent infection-the western media has made a highly political choice on how to report about it.

Instead of voicing support or encouraging solidarity-“We are Wuhan”—western corporate media have chosen to go all out to criticize and demonize China, sparing no effort to recycle and rekindle ugly, racist, orientalist, and [dehumanizing tropes](#), using any perceived misstep, pretext, and shortcoming to tar China and the Chinese. One virulent narrative is that this is deliberate [Chinese bioweapon to reduce population](#), another narrative, no less toxic and virulent, alleges that the Chinese leadership, out of a “fear of political embarrassment”, suppressed free speech and silenced the flow of information “at critical moments”, “allowing the virus to gain a tenacious hold”, thus creating the conditions for a lethal epidemic that has led to the deaths of hundreds and the infection of thousands.

The NY Times takes the [yellow] cake for sowing this toxic, racist disinformation, alleging in numerous articles and opinion pieces of a “cover up”: that “China’s old

habits put secrecy and order ahead of openly confronting the crisis”; that “they played down dangers to the public, leaving the city’s 11 million residents unaware that they should protect themselves”, and presenting this as proof dispositive that the Chinese system is fatally flawed. All this while reveling in and boosting on its website, unseemly *schadenfreude* that suppression of information and free speech has led to condign and expected catastrophe.

The most recent iteration of this propaganda concerns a Dr Li Wenliang, recently deceased. Dr Li spoke of the disease at an early moment in the outbreak (December 30th) to a group of colleagues. He was later reprimanded by the police for “spreading rumors”. After going back to work, he himself contracted the virus, and despite being young and seemingly healthy, he tragically passed away. Latching onto this unexpected fatality like a virus itself, the NY Times grafted onto his death, the “authoritarian suppression of the truth” meme, thus exploiting tragedy to circulate a political myth: that Dr. Li was a valiant, dissenting whistleblower who had “tried to sound a warning that a troubling cluster of...infections...could grow out of control”. In other words, he had tried to warn the public early on about the virus, but had been brutally silenced and suppressed.

In particular, the Times claims that Dr Li was arrested by the government, “in the middle of the night”, no less; and suggests that had he not been silenced, 100’s, perhaps thousands of lives would have been saved, and countless infections prevented. In other words, the Chinese communists, because of their obsession with political appearances, their mendacious secrecy, and totalitarian control, instigated a cover up that has had a nightmarish consequences for global health.

This disclosure would be truly extraordinary, heroic, award-meriting journalism. Except for one small problem: none of the assertions are supported by the facts, and none of the interpretations bear scrutiny.

In order to peddle this toxic canard, the NY Times—as it did with its gutter journalism

justifying the Iraq War—has had to *yellow-cake up* a foul brew of innuendo, half-truths, misrepresentations, outright lies, spiked fiercely with stereotypes, racial hatred, and red-baiting, while torturing the English language, eliding logic, ignoring science, and shredding the credibility of the fourth estate—yet again.

These are the facts:

1. Not a whistle blower.

The NY Times suggests that Dr Li was a whistle blower, “sounding a warning”. But Dr. Li was *not a whistle blower*, by any usual definition of the word. He didn’t notify the Chinese CDC or any public health organ. He did not notify the hospital authorities. He did not warn the public of wrongdoing, danger, or cover up. What he did do is share information with 7 school colleagues on 12/30 on a private messaging group. (He also shared a photo of a confidential medical record). How that constitutes “whistle blowing” is not explained by the NY Times.

2. Fraudulent Timeline.

The NY Times claims that the sanctioning and silencing led to suppression of timely and important information—a cover up of a dangerous but necessary truth. This assertion is not borne out by the facts. The “whistle”—if we can call it that—had *already been blown* by others. For example, doctor, Zhang Jixian, the director of respiratory and critical care medicine at Hubei Provincial Hospital, [had officially notified](#) the hospital on December 27th of an unusual cluster of viral cases, and the hospital had notified the city’s disease control center. After further consultation on the 29th, the regional CDC was notified and had started full scale research and investigation. The government was already actively investigating and doing their due diligence with other cases long before the NY Times allegations (constructed as always from anonymous sources). Zhang herself, contrary to the suppression and punishment narrative, was recognized and commended by the

government.

3. Wrong Claim.

The doctor had claimed it was SARS, a related, but different coronavirus. However, it was not SARS. Why is this important? Given the panic that spread during the prior 2003 SARS epidemic, spreading this incorrect information would be a understandable reason to try to restrict inaccurate, and possibly panic-inducing information.

4. No Evidence.

Well what's in a name? SARS or no SARS, it was still dangerous, and shouldn't have been suppressed, no?

In making its claims of cover up, the NY Times suggests that the authorities recognized and knew that the disease was dangerous, but covered it up anyway. This is far from the truth at the time: there was little clear evidence that this was a dangerous or severe epidemic at the time of the outbreak.

In particular:

a) there was no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission at that time (the first case happened two weeks later, on 1/14)

b) there had been no fatalities (the first fatality was 1/09/20, ten days later), and there were only a handful of cases.

c) even later, as more casualties started to appear, most of the casualties were older people with serious existing pathology or co-morbidity.

In other words, it was unclear how serious this was, and whether and how serious

actions should be taken: commonsense tells us in winter, colds, flu and pneumonia are not uncommon; discerning a novel, serious outbreak is not a simple task. The mere fact that the Chinese authorities were able to identify and take action on this so rapidly is indicative of how competent, effective, and conscientious many of them were.

5. No Expertise or Qualification.

The NY Times claims the “doctor tried to sound a warning”, but it’s important to note that Dr Li had no expertise in the subject matter, was not familiar with the situation, was not treating affected patients, and had no expertise to make any such claims: he was an ophthalmologist (not an epidemiologist, virologist, infectious disease specialist, internist, ICU specialist, or even a GP or X-ray/CT technician). There’s no proof that he was privy to any specialized insider information that was being covered up; and the hospital was already taking all known precautions with patients at the time.

6. Not arrested.

Dr Li was *not arrested*, as the NY Times claims. The doctor was called in, lightly reprimanded (talked to, and signed a document not to spread rumors) and went straight back to work. This begs the question, if a non-specialist (for example, a podiatrist) at a public General Hospital had claimed that there was an outbreak of infectious disease (for example, bubonic plague (and released HIPAA-protected documents (like Dr. Li did))), how credible is it that they would have escaped some sort of official sanction?

7. Understandable Reasons for Acting Methodically

The government had reasonable, and defensible reasons to act prudently and methodically. While the jury is still out, and the timeline bears elaborating, there’s

still little evidence that this was a deliberate attempt to “stifle criticism” and “silence” to avoid “embarrassment”. Based on the evidence available at the time, we can reasonably surmise that:

a) The authorities didn’t know how serious this was at the time—a reasonable assumption given the known evidence at the time.

b) The “nocebo” effect (negative placebo) is real—people can take any ambiguous symptoms (that are always present in the body) and think they are sick.

c) Panicked, [mass hysterical responses](#) are not uncommon, and themselves can constitute a public [health hazard](#). Either of these effects, caused by premature or careless disclosure could have resulted in:

i) People thinking themselves sick

ii) People crowding hospitals, stretching resources, while spreading the infection faster, as well as preventing genuinely sick people from getting care (all at a time when public services are winding down)

iii) Mass exodus, spreading the infection outside of Wuhan much faster

iv) Hoarding & scarcity of masks and other supplies, vigilante quarantines, and other hysterical, dangerous, and unproductive behavior.

It’s important to note also that this was the period of the Spring Festival, the busiest and most important holiday of the year. While it’s easy to criticize the cautious, tentative responses in hindsight, It’s understandable that authorities might not want to take extreme measures if it was a false alarm.

8. Upfront Transparency.

The NY Times alleges “cover up” and “secrecy”: however, the Wuhan authorities *publicized* that the doctor had been sanctioned. In this way, they actually spread information about his “whistleblowing” and the fact of the disease symptoms. As a matter of fact, they have publicized all the people sanctioned for similar actions. This would seem to indicate that:

a) at the time, they genuinely believed they were taking correct actions—actions that would be justifiable and vindicated—and they did not know that this disease was as serious as it turned out to be (and it’s not clear how could they have known)

b) it’s unlikely they were trying to hide or cover up anything. If they had been trying to silence or cover up something, this incident would most likely have gone unannounced.

9. Not Ahead of the Government.

The NY Times claims that Dr. Li sounded an alarm in a context where the governments “initial handling” was slow, negligent, or reluctant. The facts belie this:

Dr. Li was not ahead of the government. As we noted above regarding the timeline, the government (Wuhan disease authorities) had already been informed, and they delivered their own public warning the same day as Dr Li’s sharing with his friends. There is little evidence to show that this was “forced” or “compelled” by the ophthalmologist’s message (as the NYTimes has claimed).

In fact, as is usually the case with public announcements, the health department had likely been discussing, drafting, and planning their statement prior to release on that day.

Note, also that this information was released before Dr. Li was called to the police for reprimand on 1/03 (in other words, the information was already out, and the reprimand can be interpreted as a critique of the speculation, as well as the how, why, and who of sharing than an attempt at erasure). Whether the reprimand was judiciously or skillfully delivered is another matter, but the facts remain that no coverup can be asserted from this incident.

10. “Yellow-Caking” the Experts, Again.

The NY Times implies that the Chinese government knew the outbreak was serious, but covered it up and delayed notification anyway to avoid political embarrassment. But again, it seems that the facts belie the assertion:

The WHO was also notified on 12/31 (the following day) of an “unknown virus” but did not consider it serious. The WHO did not suggest any quarantine or extreme public health measures. On 1/05, they advised against a travel restriction. 1/15, they again indicated there was no human-to-human transmission. 1/23, they indicated it was not a public health emergency. Only on 1/30 did they declare an emergency—fully 30 days after the so-called NYTimes-imputed “whistleblowing”.

11. Communist Catastrophe, Really?

The NYTimes, in particular, along with its ideological cousin the CFR, has been avidly red-baiting, pumping up the narrative of “whistleblower-cover-up” and “weak governance” endemic to “authoritarian-dictatorships-that-create-catastrophes-like-Chernobyl” trope. “Undemocratic Governance is dangerous for your health” claim the ideologues. But freedom-loving capitalist America easily outdoes any modern socialist state in its negligence and damage to public health and wellbeing. A casual point of comparison is the 2009 H1N1 A “San Diego” virus. This took the US To 6 months to declare an emergency and take active measures. Because of this inaction, 150k-575K people died all over the world. 80% were under 65 years old. Or last

year's flu (61,000 deaths in the US). Or this year's flu (8-10,000 dead since October), 1400 dying in a single week. Oh, and let's not forget the AIDS crisis. The opiate crisis. The lead crises. The homelessness crisis. The list is endless, repetitious, atrocious.

12. New Standards in Crisis Response.

Contrary to NYTimes claims of incompetence, "weakness", and slowness, it seems that the Chinese have been setting new, groundbreaking standards and practices in [outbreak detection and response](#). Examination of the facts shows that the Chinese were [actually well prepared and well coordinated in their response](#)—this has been acknowledged and commended by the WHO, and other public health agencies and [experts of repute](#). They had a centralized database and control tower, which is why they were able to react so quickly to isolate, identify, sequence, and take public action on this. Let's not forget, they also built two full-functioning, state-of-the-art isolation hospitals in a matter of days.

13. Monday Morning *Schadenfreude*.

The NY Times has been willfully ignoring all of that is positive: skilled, coordinated mobilization; technical and medical tour-de-forces; mass acts of solidarity, generosity, and kindness across the country; and valiant, extraordinary medical and medical worker competence and heroism. Instead the Monday-morning epidemiological quarterbacking of the NY Times (and derivative media) has been savage and odious in exploiting every perceived mishap as a pretext to pile on and attack the Chinese people and the Chinese system: for example, the [NY Times article on 2/01/20](#)—insinuates cover-up, and "systemic weakness" (but it has to exclude the specific timeline* in order to make its case).

[Nicholas Kristof](#), taking a sabbatical from his paternalistic, [prurient, misguided](#), and [misleading reportage](#) on child sex

trafficking, is especially toxic in his offensive, red-baiting misrepresentation:

“Xi used his tight rule to control information rather than to stop an epidemic”.

“China makes poor decisions because it squelches independent voices...[it listens only to] flattery and optimism.. Xi is a preening dictator, some citizens are paying a price”.

In times of crisis, for western nations, the normal response is “We are Paris, NY, etc”. When it comes to Asia and China, the measured response is: “You deserve this because of your dirtiness, immorality, and bat-eating communist dictatorship”; “You would rather control your citizens than save lives”. This is often followed up by some variant of “nuke China”. Kristof and his ideological teammates can be isolated here, patients zero with their null set of facts, turning up the dials to 10 in this toxic wind tunnel of Sinophobia and hate speech.

14. Bashing China on “Free Speech”

Running lapdog parallel to Kristof, taking the baton/bone from the NY Times, the [Guardian also](#) says “if China valued free speech, there would be no coronavirus”. This is the offensive viral meme cultured and replicated from the death Dr. Li. Of course, even cursory reflection might lead one to consider-in the capital of “Free Speech”-lead poisoning in Flint Michigan, the AIDS crisis, H1N1 A pandemic, mass shootings, not to mention Global Warming. It also bears emphasizing that the HK rioters-and their media backers-have a strong track record of opposing any “Free Speech” that doesn’t agree with theirs, by burning, beating, lynching, threatening, and doxxing everyone who disagrees with them.

Of course, fetishizing “Free speech” is not a panacea to all political or social ills. Certainly in a public health crisis, it cannot be assumed that unbridled “Free speech” is factually correct, or even [beneficial](#) (cf. “yelling fire in a crowded

theater"). Underlying this fetishized concept is the liberal/anarcho-capitalist conceit that "in the marketplace of ideas" the correct one will naturally emerge to benefit all of society. Of course, history has shown, time and time again, that this is hardly the case. The "free speech" of the "anti-vax" movement is a case in point: it increases the chances that the US will be subject to a deadly pandemic. Various local epidemics, as well as the US (San Diego) H1N1 A Pandemic of 2009 with 280K dead (150-575K dead) signal to us this potential risk.

Another point of comparison: [11,435 people died](#) in the 1st 2 weeks of August of 2003 in the free-speech capital of France. This was from heatstroke, dehydration and their sequelae—all easily preventable and predictable deaths for a government with a commitment to public health.

French capitalism/governance was not raked through the coals for this, nor considered to have lost fundamental legitimacy because of this tragedy—nor charged with covering it up or underreporting (although they did)—although to prevent these deaths required no special treatments, hospitals, protective equipment, medicine, research, or technology. It just required, some extra water, some common sense, and perhaps a few public shelters. And political will and care. Can you say "*politique de deux poids, deux mesures*"?

15. Amateurism Trumps Experts.

In order to bolster their trumped-up case, the NY Times, along with others (the rabid anti-China newssite DemocracyNow!, the CFR/FP) has trolled out a shadowy truck-load of ideological scientific amateurs to bolster and backstop their case. Of course, it's convenient to overlook the fact that epidemiology is a complex science—and that predicting the course, virulence, and lethality of an outbreak is not unlike predicting the strength, path, and effects of a hurricane. Trotting out amateurs from the NYTimes to troll the epidemiologists and the WHO is like getting amateur bloggers to attack atmospheric scientists (for getting a detail of global warming wrong).

15. Was the Chinese response fast enough?

There's a perpetual insinuation by the NY Times and its ideological allies that hide-bound, "authoritarian" bureaucracies cannot respond appropriately, quickly, or effectively to such outbreaks: "Weak, undemocratic governance is dangerous for your health".

This question really begs others: fast relative to what? These responses were some of the fastest institutional response seen in modern epidemiological history. Appropriate relative to what? This was the period of the Spring Festival, with the largest mass migration in history (billions of trips taken) with all the conflicting demands, uncertainties and strains that that entailed.

Effective relative to what? Modern responses under neoliberal order (MERS, Ebola, H1N1) have been an endless catalog of global catastrophes.

When the investigations are completed—and the Chinese government is ruthlessly investigating itself—and the history written, the record may judge that these were the best possible actions of an organized, conscientious government, trying to do the best under difficult, almost impossible circumstances. Were the responses perfect? Most certainly not. Were there gaps and lapsus? Absolutely, yes. Did the central and local government work hand-in-hand perfectly? Most certainly not. Was there discontent expressed on Weibo and other public fora? Most certainly. But given the extraordinary complexities and challenges of responding to the outbreak, its timing, its conflicting priorities, the size of the population, its stresses, strains and demands, we can be sure that this response will be written up in the Public Health text books, and when the final judgement call is made, it will be largely favorable to the Chinese government, bloviating ideologues and racists be damned.

*** Brief Timeline of Outbreak and Responses:**

12/8 First suspected case

12/8-12/18 investigations started by authorities of 7 cases of suspicious pneumonia;
2 linked to seafood market

12/21 First cluster of patients identified with “an unknown pneumonia” (reported
1/01)

12/25 Report of medical workers possibly infected

12/27 Dr. Zhang Jixian, the director of respiratory and critical care medicine at
Hubei Provincial Hospital, [notifies](#) the hospital of an unusual cluster of viral cases;
the hospital notifies the city’s disease control center.

12/29 Hubei Provincial hospital convenes and consults with a group of experts, and
then notifies the regional CDC.

12/30 An Ophthalmologist , Dr Li Wenliang, in Wuhan, China, posts a warning about
a cluster of patients diagnosed with SARS to colleagues. patients quarantined. (This
doctor is censured by authorities for spreading unconfirmed rumors; This is the
incident is characterized by the western media as “suppression”; however, it’s
important to note 1) he’s not a virologist or epidemiologist, 2) he was not treating
these patients 3) it wasn’t SARS 4) the nature of the disease was being investigated,
but was still unknown at the time 5) most importantly, *all of the patients were
quarantined*).

Notice issued and public health announcement made by Wuhan Municipal Health
Committee of an unknown viral illness.

12/31 Chinese government informs WHO of existence of a new unknown virus;
emergency symposium held on treatment; experts dispatched to investigate
1/1 Seafood market shut down as potential cause of outbreak. Chinese researchers

at the CCDC publish an article on suspected outbreak.

1/2 41 patients confirmed with nCoV 2019

1/05 WHO advises against travel restrictions; no human to human transmission found at this time

1/7 Mayor's Party meeting (didn't mention virus, human transmission unclear at this time)

1/9 First casualty of outbreak (61 yr old with co-morbid symptoms-liver disease and stomach cancer)-death publicly reported on 1/11 after autopsy. To note-no one knew that the disease was fatal until this case, nearly one month after the initial case, and this person was already seriously sick.

1/10 First genetic blueprint sequenced and posted of nCoV 2019 (this is a medical accomplishment)

1/12 "Surge in chest illnesses" reported; Dr. Li Wenliang hospitalized.

1/13-1/15 Japan and Thailand confirm first infections outside of China (based on publicly released blueprint)-transparency assisted identification

1/14 first suspected human to human transmission (wife of 1st casualty). This is the first time that it's suspected that human transmission is involved.

1/15 WHO indicates no sustained human to human transmission

1/18 Community "potluck" in Baibuting, Wuhan with 40,000 attendees (severely criticized afterwards, however human-human transmission was still unclear at this point); 312 cases

1/20 Premier Li Keqiang urges decisive and effective actions

1/22 People in Wuhan told to wear masks

1/23 Quarantine announced of Wuhan; all outbound traffic frozen, WHO states this is *not* Public Health Emergency of Global concern

1/24 13 Hubei cities quarantined; 7 provinces declare public emergency; 26 dead, 830 infected

Lancet article published.

1/25 10 provinces declare public emergency; NY Events cancelled around China; 5 other cities quarantined in Hubei; 56M affected; Xi declares “grave situation”.

1/26 All wildlife trade banned; 56 dead 2000 cases

1/27 106 dead 4515 cases

1/30 WHO declares Global Emergency (170 dead, 7,711 cases)

2/01 1st death outside of China (Chinese man in Philippines); 304 dead, 14280 cases

2/02 Huoshenshan hospital, dedicated to treatment of nCov 2019 opened; new mask factory commences production in Beijing

2/03 361 dead, 17,205 cases (however infection rates outside of Wuhan are flattening or diminishing)

2/04 2nd death outside of China (Chinese man from Wuhan in Hong Kong). 427 dead, 20,000+infected.

2/07 Dr. Li Wenliang dies from 2019 nCoV.

2/10 910 dead, 40,000+infected.

Source: [Counterpunch](#)



NY Gov. Cuomo's war on the poor

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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People are protesting New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's vicious campaign against folks who can't pay New York City's \$2.75 subway fare. Over a thousand people gathered at Grand Central Terminal on Jan. 31 and marched across midtown Manhattan. At least 13 were arrested.

The real crime is that New York City transit fares have increased 55 times since 1948. Back then, it cost a nickel to ride, but now the price of a weekly MetroCard is \$33.

It's tragic that Malaysia Goodson fell to her death on Jan. 28, 2019, while protecting her baby. The Black mother died falling down the stairs because the subway station at 53rd Street and 7th Avenue—like three quarters of New York's stations—lacks elevators. That's illegal and a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's law breaking doesn't bother Gov. Cuomo too much. Cuomo's outrage is reserved for people who jump a turnstile or enter the back door of a bus because they can't afford the fare. The greatest crime In capitalist society is to be poor.

Cuomo demanded that the MTA hire 500 more cops to arrest and harass people. [This will cost at least \\$50 million, enough money to buy 62 electric buses.](#) But the Cuomo-controlled MTA board rubber-stamped the governor's ultimatum.

The [Community Service Society](#) rightfully called Cuomo's actions "antiquated broken window policing" that will "not reduce police bias, but rather enable it." Rep. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez wrote on Twitter that "ending mass incarceration means challenging a system that jails the poor to free the rich. Arresting people who can't afford a \$2.75 fare makes no one safer and destabilizes our community."

Never forget Michael Stewart and Darryl Goodwin

Between October 2017 and June 2019, 90 percent of those arrested for allegedly not

paying the fair were Black or Latinx, [according to New York Attorney General Letitia James.](#)

“I got tired of hunting Black and Hispanic people because of arrest quotas,” [said a former police officer, Christopher LaForce.](#)

Adding 500 cops will mean even more racism.

Instead of “fare-beating,” 37 years ago the capitalist media were screaming about graffiti. One result was that the 25-year-old Black artist Michael Stewart was beaten and choked to death by 11 transit cops in September 1983.

Andy Cuomo’s father, Mario Cuomo, was New York governor at the time. [Mario built more prisons than all the other New York governors put together did.](#) To do so, the elder Cuomo stole billions from the state’s Urban Development Corporation that was supposed to have built affordable housing.

Latinx women selling snacks are victimized by police. The Ecuadorian immigrant Elsa Morochoduchi was arrested on Nov. 8, 2019, inside the Broadway Junction station for selling churros.

Vendors like Morochoduchi stand on their feet for long hours so that they can pay their high rent. Gov. Cuomo doesn’t have to worry about that.

Along with his \$225,000 salary, Andy gets to live in a rent-free executive mansion set on 10 acres of land. To travel around the state, [he got a brand new \\$12.5 million helicopter in 2017.](#)

Police also target transit workers. Station agent Darryl Goodwin was arrested on May 16, 2017, at the Columbus Circle station for supposedly unlocking a subway gate too slowly for police. The 27-year-long member of Transit Workers Union Local 100 was eligible to retire the following year.

Because of the stress caused by his illegal arrest and the need to work overtime to make up for being suspended for 60 days, Darryl Goodwin didn't make it. The Black worker died three months later on Aug. 15, 2017.

Cuomo was even going to send armed state police last year [to take attendance and check the overtime](#) of Long Island Railroad workers.

That smells of fascism.

Tax-free interest and stolen wages

A trillion dollars of Manhattan real estate would be worthless without a rapid transit system. It's union workers on subways, buses and commuter railroads, as well as in repair shops and offices, that move millions of people everyday.

To the billionaire class the function of the Mass Transit Authority is to [pay interest on its \\$44 billion debt](#).

In 2018, capitalist bankers and other capitalist bondholders [lapped up over \\$2.5 billion in tax-free interest](#) like pigs at the MTA feeding trough.

Next year, this massive robbery will gobble up [19 cents of every dollar in fares](#). But we're supposed to get upset over some poor person who couldn't pay \$2.75?

The capital of capitalism actually has fewer miles of rapid transit than it did in 1940. That's largely because elevated lines, like on Third Avenue, were torn down but not replaced by subways, though they should have been. [Twenty-one cities in the socialist People's Republic of China have opened subway systems just since 2009](#). It can be done.

Meanwhile, Gov. Cuomo celebrated New Year's Day by vetoing legislation that would help workers recover their stolen wages. [Bosses in New York state steal more](#)

[than \\$1 billion in wages from workers annually](#), according to a U.S. Department of Labor study.

The [Securing Wages Earned Against Theft](#) (SWEAT) act would have closed loopholes by putting liens on sweatshop owners who cheat workers out of their pay.



The real State of the Union

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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Let's talk about the State of the Union.

No, not Trump's speech. Don't worry, I'll get to that shortly.

I'm talking about the real deal: the political reality facing poor and working people living in the United States.

In Brooklyn, N.Y., on Feb. 6, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) cops attempted to grab Gaspar Avendano-Hernández, a construction worker from Mexico, as he was leaving his home.

[They weren't wearing uniforms or badges.](#) They didn't have a warrant. And they attacked Gaspar with a taser.

So Eric Díaz, a son of Gaspar's partner Carmen Cruz, intervened to stop the kidnapping. He was unarmed.

And one of Donald Trump's ICE goons shot Díaz in the face.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio likes to portray himself as a progressive. He says New York is a sanctuary city and that he's standing up to Trump. That was the basis for the mayor's short-lived presidential bid last year.

But what happened when the New York Police Department showed up at the scene of the crime? Did they arrest the ICE agent who shot Eric Díaz? Did they free Gaspar and send the ICE gangsters packing?

Of course not. Instead, they helped ICE make a clean getaway.

The NYPD militarized Maimonides Hospital, where Díaz was taken and where his family gathered. Activists who came to support the family, including health-care union members, clergy and local officials, were kept out. Many stayed outside around the clock anyway.

Police roughed up protesters as ICE dragged Gaspar off to the Hudson County Correctional Center in New Jersey, where he is now awaiting deportation.

This happened just two days after Trump's State of the Union address to Congress on Feb. 4 — a racist, anti-worker rant that demonized migrants and refugees like Gaspar, including thousands of children who've been separated from their families and kept in conditions that constitute torture.

Four days after Trump's campaign rally on Capitol Hill, and two days after Eric Díaz

was shot in Brooklyn, 150 masked white supremacists marched through the streets of Washington, D.C.

Apparently D.C. police only oppose people wearing masks when they are Black and Brown and anti-fascists. Because, according to reporters and counterprotesters on the scene, the various Washington police agencies assigned to the march pampered the fascists and gave them first-class protection.

The cops even closed off the lawn in front of the Capitol for the fascist rally. Commenting on this, [Zach Roberts of Visu News](#) said, “I’ve covered rallies in Washington, D.C., for nearly 20 years now. I’ve never seen a group allowed to have a private space protected by the police department and no one else was allowed in.”

These weren’t just any bigots, either. This was Patriot Front, formerly known as Vanguard America — one of the main groups behind the “Unite the Right” invasion of Charlottesville in 2017. The fascist who killed Heather Heyer was one of them.

You may remember that Trump referred to the white supremacists who terrorized Charlottesville at that time as “very fine people.”

But not just that. At the State of the Union, Trump awarded bigoted radio “personality” Rush Limbaugh, a hero of the Charlottesville set who is dying of lung cancer, with the Congressional Medal of Freedom.

Is it any wonder that the racist filth are emboldened to march through the streets of Washington — a city that is still [nearly half Black](#), despite advancing gentrification?

Pelosi’s rip and Guaidó’s ovation

Contrast this kid gloves treatment with the [four Embassy Protectors](#), who were illegally dragged out of the Embassy of Bolivarian Venezuela in May 2019 and today are on trial in Washington, despite having express permission to be in the embassy

from the legitimate government of Venezuela.

Which brings us to another feature of the State of the Union.

Everyone saw the clip of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi tearing up a copy of Trump's speech. This was supposed to show her (and the Democratic Party leadership's) intransigent "resistance" to Trump. Pelosi did it knowing that the Senate was poised to reject Trump's impeachment the next day.

But something else that Pelosi did that night-and that most other congressional Democrats in attendance did too-spoke much more eloquently about where they really stand.

Pelosi and her Democratic colleagues joined Trump and the Republicans in giving a standing ovation to Juan Guaidó, the self-appointed, U.S.-approved, would-be "president" of Venezuela.

Guaidó was supposed to be installed last year by a U.S.-backed coup that would finally end Wall Street and Big Oil's long nightmare of a Bolivarian Venezuela moving toward socialism.

But the workers and peasants, the women and Indigenous of Venezuela rejected the Empire's scenario. A year after Guaidó's first coup attempt, he is farther than ever from his goal.

But Trump and Pelosi, Republicans and Democrats, are united in their hostility to Venezuela, its combative people and their democratically elected President Nicolás Maduro.

After the State of the Union, Guaidó met for [photo-ops with Pelosi](#) and other officials, who reiterated their commitment to bringing his brand of "democracy"-currently on display by the far-right coup regime in Bolivia-to

Venezuela. Trump brandished [new sanctions](#) against Venezuela's state-owned airline CONVIASA.

As the perfectly engineered meme of Pelosi ripping Trump's speech made the rounds of the corporate media, many progressives were asking: Wouldn't it have been better if she and the Democrats had ripped up the [\\$738 billion war budget](#) that they handed Trump in December?

Of course. But while they may differ on details of how to administer the capitalist state, Republicans and Democrats, Trumps and Pelosis, are all united in the main cause of the bosses they serve: to wage a war for exploitation against the workers and oppressed, both here and abroad.



Baltimore march honors Dr. King's fight against war and racism

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 12, 2020

Braving a blizzard, two dozen people marched through Baltimore city's oppressed

neighborhoods for three hours on Jan. 18. They carried signs demanding “Stop food stamp cuts” and a beautiful red banner with the image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which read: “Jobs, education and healthcare, not racism and war!”

“We demanded no cuts to food stamps, disability benefits or Medicaid,” explained march organizer Miranda Bachman of the Peoples’ Power Assembly. “Then we caravanned to Washington, D.C., where we were welcomed by representatives of the FMLN of El Salvador for a gathering in solidarity with anti-imperialist movements in Latin America.”

Marchers reported an especially strong response from the community on the issue of cuts to the SNAP food assistance program (food stamps). Up to [15,000 Baltimore residents](#) could lose food assistance under Trump administration rule changes set to take effect in April, in a city where a quarter of the population already faces hunger.

The Peoples’ Power Assembly in Baltimore initiated a call to [“Reclaim and honor Dr. King by resisting war and racism”](#) in the wake of U.S. war provocations in the Middle East, including the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani while he was on a peace mission to Iraq.

“In 1967 on April 4, Dr. King passionately spoke out against the Vietnam War,” said the call, which was endorsed by many national and local groups. “He exclaimed that the bombs in Vietnam also exploded at home in our decaying cities. These words are just as true today. Donald Trump and the trillion dollar oil and fracking businesses stand to profit from a war on Iran and Iraq while the people of the world suffer.

“In Baltimore, we remember Trump’s hateful racism in describing our city and attacking Congressman Cummings. His insults hurled at our city are comparable to his attempts to demonize the people of Iran and Iraq to justify war for oil profits.

“This is the same white supremacist ideology that justifies the assassination of

foreign officials of color and the nearly one million Iraqi children killed by U.S. war. These are war crimes. We will not be fooled by those who would dismiss the humanity of our international family.”



MLK Day in Los Angeles: ‘Money for food stamps, not war on Iran’

written by Struggle - La Lucha

February 12, 2020

At the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parade held in Los Angeles on Jan. 20, tens of thousands of spectators and parade participants along MLK Boulevard were welcomed with over a thousand fact sheets against U.S. war and sanctions, and demands for money to fight poverty.

A large banner hovering over two literature and sign-up tables at the beginning of the march also greeted march participants and spectators. Amplified sound carried the messages of money for food stamps, housing, health care and education, not war on Iran, and for the immediate removal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

This action was part of the [national call to reclaim the MLK holiday](#). Unfortunately, the parade in Los Angeles, like in many cities, uses commercial interests, police and Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) youth contingents to promote values of war and profit that are foreign to King's message. The grassroots action on Monday was an attempt to refocus toward the struggle for social justice and against the drive for blood for oil profits.

In this mostly African American parade in South Central L.A., many heads were turned in response to the calls for stopping police killings and bombs against people of color fighting U.S. imperialism. Appeals were made to the ROTC youth to not believe the lies they were being told by recruiters.

In Los Angeles, the Peoples' Power Assembly, the Socialist Unity Party and Unión del Barrio initiated the event.



Los Angeles protest hits Bolivia

coup

written by Struggle - La Lucha

February 12, 2020

About 35 Bolivians and other activists demonstrated in front of the Bolivian Consulate in Los Angeles on Jan. 22, demanding that the U.S.-backed coup government of Jeanine Áñez step down.

Speakers denounced the vicious repression against supporters of President Evo Morales, who was forced into exile in November. Protesters chanted support for the candidates of Morales' party, the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), in the May 2020 national election: Luis Arce for president and David Choquehuanca for vice president.

Immediately after the coup took place, the U.S. government announced its support for the illegitimate regime that took over. Supporters of the MAS are still being arrested, physically attacked and jailed on a daily basis.

In spite of the repression, many tens of thousands—mostly Indigenous people—marched in Cochabamba on Jan. 22 to show their determination to continue the struggle. The same day in Argentina, President Morales spoke to a massive solidarity rally in a sports stadium. The new Argentine government has granted Morales sanctuary.

Jan. 22 is a national holiday in Bolivia that commemorates the inauguration of Evo Morales in 2006. On the same date in 2009, Bolivia's "re-foundation" was carried out with a new constitution, and the name of the country was officially changed to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in recognition of the country's Indigenous cultures.

President Morales said at the time that the new constitution "protects all Bolivians equally" and enshrines "the deepest aspirations of the most abandoned sectors,"

referring to Indigenous peoples and the working class. It's advances like these that Washington and its Bolivian allies seek to roll back.



John Parker on legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 12, 2020

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Hear Struggle-La Lucha's John Parker speak about the struggle legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the Jan. 19 episode of WBAI Radio's "Voices of Resistance." Parker's interview with Lucy Pagoada-Quesada begins 17 minutes into the broadcast.

Listen:



Open letter to gun rights supporters coming to Richmond, Va., on Jan. 20

written by Struggle - La Lucha

February 12, 2020

My name is Phil Wilayto, and I'm the editor of The Virginia Defender, a community newspaper based here in Richmond. We cover issues of interest to working-class folks from all communities.

I'm also a gun owner who's opposed to some of the laws being proposed in the 2020 General Assembly.

And I'm a Richmonder who's concerned about what might happen in my town on Monday.

The Virginia Citizens Defense League [VCDL], the organization that has called for lobbying and a rally on Jan. 20 at Capitol Square, says that as many as 50,000 people may show up. They wanted to come armed — Virginia is an open-carry state — but Gov. Ralph Northam has declared a state of emergency and banned civilians from carrying firearms on the Capitol grounds.

Nobody knows just what to expect, and tensions are running high. Some normally open downtown businesses plan to close on Monday. Some non-gun lobbying groups have cancelled their plans to come to Richmond. Virginia Commonwealth University is advising its more than 31,000 students to stay away from the downtown area. The VCU Health System's emergency room has tripled its staff to be prepared for possible mass casualties. And the cops are gearing up for trouble.

Some liberals view all gun rights activists as racist, right-wing yahoos, lumping them in with the extremist organizations that try to infiltrate the gun rights movement for recruitment purposes. And the FBI arrests on Jan. 16 of three neo-Nazis who supposedly put together a homemade machine gun and bought more than 1,500 rounds of ammo as part of their plans to join the Richmond rally didn't do much to calm anyone's nerves. We've heard rumors that white supremacist organizations like the Proud Boys and the League of the South are coming to Richmond. These kinds of thugs are not your friends. Far from it.

I believe that people have a right to own guns: for sport, for hunting, for self-defense. I agree that guns don't kill people, people kill people — although they often do it with guns. And that's what scares non-gun owners.

In 2017, the most recent year for which there are figures, nearly 40,000 people died from gun-related injuries in this country. More than half the deaths were actually suicides, which raises the question if those people would have killed themselves if they hadn't had a gun at hand.

Then there are the senseless killings by mostly young men in poor city communities. We lost 66 people to homicides last year here in Richmond. So there are good reasons why some people think there are too many guns in too many hands.

But it's also true that you could ban all the guns in this country and we would still have people killing people. The real reason for the mass shootings and the endless fatal individual killings is that this society is addicted to violence.

It's true. We promote it in our movies, TV shows and video games. Our police departments are armed to the teeth with "surplus" military equipment. We make violence the basis of our foreign policy. This country was born in violence against Indigenous and enslaved people, and that culture of violence has continued to define us as a country. Banning guns does nothing to address that.

What I'm really worried about is that, with the liberal Democrats acting like anyone who owns a gun is suspect, the average person who has a gun for legitimate reasons will be more open to right-wing arguments and possible recruitment. That would be a disaster for all working people.

You have to understand that, while you might see your movement as just against government overreach, it can come across as something else altogether. The idea that thousands — maybe tens of thousands — of armed, mostly white men are coming to Richmond on Monday is not a good "optic," as they say. It sets off deep historical memories.

I know the VCDL states on its website that, "We are not there to push any other agenda. Our total focus is on protecting our right to keep and bear (sic) arms. Period. This is not about flags, statues, history, etc. Just guns." We appreciate that. People with very different political views on other issues can still agree that people have the right to self-defense.

Of course, picking Jan. 20 as a gun rights lobby day is already a pretty bad optic. It's the federal holiday honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a man of peace brought down by a gun. The VCDL might have picked a better day.

Plus, it means the schools are out, and there may be a lot of kids in the area.

And with Northam banning civilians from having guns on the Capitol grounds, that means thousands of armed people roaming the downtown area. And this includes some openly right-wing groups that have a whole other agenda.

I'd like to point out here that the right to self-defense is not a "white" issue. The old Black Panther Party stood for the right to armed self-defense against police brutality. The Southern-based Deacons for Defense provided armed security for many civil rights events. And today, people who live in crime-plagued neighborhoods have a legitimate interest in being able to protect themselves and their families. And if unreasonable gun laws are passed, they're likely to be enforced in the same racially discriminatory ways as other laws already are.

In other words, there are other possible allies out there. So there are all kinds of reasons to make sure your movement isn't hijacked by extremist groups promoting division and hatred.

I think most gun owners don't hold grudges against other people because of their race, creed or color. They just want to be able to protect themselves and their families, and they have a right to do this without unreasonable interference from the government.

But if this movement is going to be successful, it needs to consciously exclude those right-wing elements that would attempt to infiltrate this movement and subvert it for their own twisted agendas.

People who respect Adolf Hitler will never respect democracy. They're not our

friends. In fact, they're our enemies. And they should have no place in a real gun-ownership movement.

So welcome to Richmond. Be safe, watch each others' backs and be sensitive to the people who live here. They'll be here long after you're gone.

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[Listen to podcast version here](#)

[Source: Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality](#)



Reverend Annie Chambers Invites

Baltimore to March on Dr. King Jr. Weekend

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 12, 2020



[Add your organization as an endorser here](#)

Reclaim and honor Rev. Dr. King Jr. by resisting war and racism

A call to action on the Dr. King Jr. birthday week

STOP WAR ON IRAN

BALTIMORE MARCH TO WASHINGTON D.C.: Jan 18

Money for jobs, education, health care & people's needs

In 1967 on April 4, Rev. Dr. King Jr., passionately spoke out against the Vietnam war. He exclaimed that the bombs in Vietnam also exploded at home in our decaying cities.

These words are just as true today. Donald Trump and the trillion dollar oil and

fracking businesses stand to profit from a war on Iran and Iraq, while the people of the world suffer.

In Baltimore, we remember Trump's hateful racism in describing our city and attacking Congressman Cummings. His insults hurled at our city are comparable to his attempts to demonize the people of Iran and Iraq to justify war for oil profits.

This is the same white supremacist ideology that justifies the assassination of foreign officials of color and the nearly one million Iraqi children killed by U.S. war. These are war crimes. We will not be fooled by those who would dismiss the humanity of our international family.

If war is to be declared in our name, let it be a war on racism, police terror, low wages, homelessness and poverty. End anti-immigrant violence, sexism and LGBTQ2S bigotry. Close the detention camps.

FEED THE PEOPLE, NOT THE PENTAGON

- This April 700,000 people will lose food stamps; millions will get fewer benefits. In Baltimore, 22.2% of people, many of them children, go to bed hungry. The loss of food stamps (SNAP benefits) will mean that many small grocery stores will have to close their doors. But not the Pentagon! This year the military got a \$130 billion increase. In addition, social security disability will be cut.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE

- The children of Baltimore, DC and everywhere need clean lead-free drinking water, more and better paid teachers, books and decent schools. Redirect the billions for war to save our youth and pay for free universal health care for all.

LOW WAGES & WORKERS RIGHTS

- Close to half of the workers in the U.S. are poor! 53 million workers between the ages of 18 to 64 — 44% of all workers — qualify as low-wage. This amounts to a median income of \$18,000 per year. Amazon and Walmart refuse to respect workers rights to unionize. Amazon even threatened to fire workers who spoke out against climate change.

PENTAGON, THE WORLD'S BIGGEST POLLUTER, SHUT IT DOWN

- Indigenous people courageously protected the Amazon rainforest from fires and destruction. Now Australia is engulfed in flames threatening the existence of an entire continent and killing millions of animals. Jakarta, Indonesia home to 30 million people is literally sinking, destroyed by flood waters. The capitalist climate crisis threatens the entire planet. The Pentagon with it's 800+ military bases and endless wars is one of the world's biggest polluters.

WAR BREEDS REPRESSION

- Police departments across this country are militarized, increasing racism and repression. Globally the US is number one in mass incarceration. Yet the problems of drug addiction, despair and violence continue. Instead of investing in the community, Johns Hopkins has hired a private armed police force.

ONLY THE PEOPLE CAN STOP THE WAR!

The people of Baltimore are Marching on the Dr. King Jr. weekend. We invite you to join us. If you cannot come to Baltimore, and we expect that many can't, please hold

solidarity actions in your city, town, school or work place.

Now is the time to reclaim and honor Rev. Dr. King Jr. by resisting war and racism.

ENDORSE THE CALL

Endorsers: Peoples Power Assembly; Rev. CD Witherspoon; Rev. Annie Chambers, Douglas Homes Community Leader; Youth Against War and Racism; Black Alliance for Peace, Baltimore; ICE Out of Baltimore; Prisoners Solidarity Committee; The Marlyn Barnes Family; Baltimore Peace Action; CODE Pink; Union del Barrio; Puerto Rican Alliance; Popular Resistance; Union of Progressive Iranians; UNAC, United National Antiwar Coalition; Harvard Boulevard Block Club of South Central Los Angeles; Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice; Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ; Peoples Alliance, Bay Area; Bail Out the People Movement, Wisconsin; Women in Struggle/Mujeres en Lucha; Solidarity with Novorossiia & Antifascists in Ukraine; Stand with Okinawa NY; International Concerned Family & Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Socialist Unity Party/Partido de Socialismo Unido; Struggle - La Lucha; Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA Province; Jennicet Gutierrez; Phil Wilayto, editor, The Virginia Defender; William Camarada, Comité de Solidaridad con Venezuela Alberto Lovera NYC; D19: Partido Libre USA Canada; Baltimore City Green Party; Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network; Familia: TQLM; Malaya Movement, Baltimore; San Diego County Central Committee of the Peace and Freedom Party of California; Communist Party of USA - Baltimore Club; U.S. Peace Council; Freedom Road Socialist Organization; Ujima People's Progress Party; New Orleans Workers Group (list in formation)

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Protest hits treatment of special education students in Puerto Rico and New York

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 12, 2020

The Timón Committee of People and Families with Special Needs, New York Chapter, along with allied organizations, protested on Dec. 14 at Union Square in opposition to Puerto Rico Draft Law 1945, and denounced the treatment of families and children with special education needs both in New York and Puerto Rico.

Organizations from the New York area joined in solidarity with the Timón Committee, N.Y. Chapter, to denounce the living conditions of hundreds of special needs families in Puerto Rico and the United States, and to reject Puerto Rico draft law 1945 presented in the Puerto Rican Legislature. Timón Committee in Puerto Rico is an important instrument for defending family members and children with special needs.

“The burden that the government imposes on parents and students of special education in Puerto Rico is unfair. The U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial relationship and the crisis this relationship creates was already complex. Now, new demands from the Financial Oversight and Control Board, which prioritizes Wall Street vultures over the most vulnerable, highlight hardships caused by the actions of corrupt and insensitive governments,” said Milagros Cancel, spokesperson for the Timón Committee, N.Y. Chapter.

“The 1945 draft bill harms the rights of students registered in the Special Education Program of the Department of Education (DE), and attempts to scale back provisions gained from the Puerto Rico judicial case of Rosa Lydia Vélez v. the Department of Education,” continued Cancel.

“The Puerto Rican diaspora opposes the draft law’s approval because it promotes institutional segregation instead of integration, marginalizes infants and rescinds rights gained through many years of struggle by mothers, fathers and caregivers. The bill excludes infants, depriving them of early intervention services. It also violates due process by prohibiting the request for reconsideration of decisions taken by administrative judges. The bill also politicizes the appointment of

administrative judges by eliminating the judges appointed by the Department of Education,” said New York professor Lorraine Liriano.

According to Sara Catalinotto from Parents to Improve Student Transportation (PIST N.Y.), “This year, the Department of Education in Puerto Rico does not have the necessary budget, estimated at nearly \$550 million, to meet the needs of students with functional diversity.

“The crisis in services in the country is real. The ongoing cuts to public education on the island are so severe that they are causing a huge emigration of families with needs, furthering the uncertainty in the lives of thousands of human beings. Upon arrival in New York or in other cities in the U.S., when these families request special education services, they discover that the system does not meet their needs. Our objection to 1945 is also due to the immoral competition for limited funds and services that it creates in Puerto Rico. Sadly, New York also faces cuts for our most vulnerable populations.”

“The diaspora has joined with associations that represent the population with functional diversity in Puerto Rico in opposing the aforementioned law and in demanding emergency corrective actions in the face of this humanitarian crisis,” concluded activist Milagros Cancel.

