

Solidarity Saturday energizes Baltimore activists

written by Struggle - La Lucha
February 8, 2019



Activists in Baltimore declared chilly Jan. 26 “Solidarity Saturday.” They weren’t kidding, either.

A whirlwind of activities encompassed the fallout from Donald Trump’s government

shutdown, the U.S. coup attempt in Venezuela and solidarity with migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The day started at McKeldin Square downtown, where the Peoples Power Assembly had put out a call to “Shut down Trump, not workers!” Just the night before, Trump and congressional Democrats had reached a temporary deal to fund government services and put furloughed federal workers back on the job — hours after a mass “sickout” by affected workers threatened to shut down major East Coast airports.

But a dozen activists turned out anyway, to leaflet and talk with people affected by the more than monthlong shutdown — and who might be again if a further agreement isn’t reached by mid-February. Trump has threatened to shut down services and jobs once more if Congress won’t fund his racist wall on the border with Mexico.

“We’ve heard from federal workers who are losing their apartments because of the shutdown,” explained PPA’s Sharon Black as she passed out flyers to passersby. “Others are in danger of having their utilities cut off in this freezing weather. So it’s important that we’re out here to talk to people, so we can provide them with resources and help organize to defend their rights.”

Baltimore, about an hour’s drive from Washington, D.C., is home to many federal workers and workers employed by government contractors affected by the shutdown, especially in the city’s Black community.

Following this outreach to the community, activists went to the Harriet Tubman Solidarity Center to warm up and get ready for more actions. The face of anti-slavery freedom fighter Tubman greets visitors from the front window.

The center is equipped for making signs and banners for protests, but easily converts into a welcoming meeting space. Beautiful and historic banners and protest

placards line the walls, many sporting the image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Hands off Venezuela!

From the center, people carried signs, banners, leaflets and sound equipment to a nearby park at the corner of North Avenue and Charles Street in West Baltimore. Unfurled banners declared: "U.S. hands off Venezuela!" and "No war on Venezuela!"

The demonstration quickly grew, with more than 30 people joining in, representing the community and a variety of political organizations, including the PPA, Youth Against War & Racism, Struggle-La Lucha and the Communist Party of Maryland.

Many drivers honked their horns in solidarity as they passed through the busy intersection. Young people from the neighborhood stopped to take leaflets and listen to talks about the importance of defending the workers' struggle and Bolivarian revolutionary process from Big Oil and the Pentagon.

Activists carried a historic banner from one of President Nicolás Maduro's visits to the U.S., which declared him "The People's President" and pictured Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez.

The crowd chanted, in Spanish and English, "Maduro, amigo, the people are with you! Baltimore is with you!" A speaker explained how desire for oil profits and for grabbing other Venezuelan resources was behind the latest round of U.S. attacks.

Despite the freezing temperature, the spirited protest continued even longer than expected, as people loudly voiced their solidarity with the Venezuelan people against U.S. imperialism.

Finally, as the sun set, many of those who had gathered in solidarity with Venezuela trekked back to the Harriet Tubman Solidarity Center for the day's final event: a meeting in solidarity with the migrant/refugee caravans trapped at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Imperialism responsible for refugee crisis

The meeting area was filled with those who came from around the city and the region to hear the speakers. People talked and warmed themselves with homemade chili before the program, which was livestreamed.

PPA's Sharon Black, who chaired the meeting, and Greg Butterfield, a correspondent for Struggle-La Lucha from New York, reported on their visit to the border in late November as part of a Los Angeles solidarity caravan bringing aid to refugees in Tijuana. They spoke about the importance of building working-class

solidarity with those fleeing U.S.-imposed political and economic violence in Central America, and of linking the migrant struggle with those of striking teachers and furloughed federal workers.

Lucy Pagoada-Quesada gave the featured talk. She represents Department 19, the North American branch of the liberation struggle in Honduras, and the Libre Party. She explained the impact of the 2009 military coup against progressive President Manuel Zelaya, which created the conditions that have led many thousands to leave their country and demand asylum in the U.S. — whose government planned, funded and supported the coup.

“These are political people,” Pagoada-Quesada explained. “They know who is responsible for the tragedy in our country and they are demanding the U.S. take responsibility.”

Trump is now trying to carry out the same kind of attack in Venezuela, said Pagoada-Quesada.

A statement from D19 distributed at the meeting said: “The violence in Honduras has occurred under the auspices of the governments of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and of the supremacist and fascist regime of Donald Trump and his accomplices. That crime against our democracy created the conditions of the massive exodus of Hondurans to the United States and that has reached its climax in recent years, with the massive displacement of thousands of entire families trying to cross the Mexican border in search of refuge and asylum. ... In the exodus of thousands of displaced people in the caravans, more than 80 percent are from Honduras.”

In the discussion that followed, several people commented on the significance of the day of action and the need to continue organizing and uniting the struggles of poor and working people from Baltimore to Honduras and beyond.

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What can we do?

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Hey, psst ... that's right, I'm talkin' to you. Can we talk. Want to know what we can do to fight back and win?

What can we do about capitalism's white supremacy, racist violence by the cops against Black and Brown people and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement against im/migrants and refugees? What can we do about mass incarceration, sexual violence and misogyny, anti-trans violence and the general attack on LGBTQ2S communities? What can we do about further war against the living standards and jobs of working and poor people; and about climate change, which threatens our very existence?

In the first place, we must understand who our friends are as compared to our enemies. That's important because many of the solutions proposed by both Democrats and Republicans would have us rely on politicians bought and paid for by the industrial and financial monopoly entities that actually run this country. We can't depend on them. They profit from our misery. So who can we depend on and get leadership from?

Well, if you look in the mirror, you may see the courageous teachers in Los Angeles, whose strike successfully challenged the ruling-class march towards school privatization and denial of opportunity for our children. You might see Black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, whose determination to remain in the struggle and whose strength outlasted those who would execute him and who now has won the right to appeal — a major win for our movement and the national liberation struggles of all oppressed working people. Oh yeah, you'll also see yourself — because you, as a member of our class, in unity with all the sectors of our working class, are the solution.

That unity is probably one of the most important weapons that empowers our class — as long as it remains principled. In other words, we don't throw any sector of our class under the bus for any temporary gains. The need to fight racism, misogyny, LGBTQ2 oppression and the persecution of migrants must never be questioned, and these issues must never be pitted in opposition to each other.

Unfortunately, when they ask us to support U.S. imperialist wars, that is exactly what is being called into question — our solidarity with the international working class. We must never forget that U.S. imperialist war eats up all the resources necessary for the basic needs of people in this country.

So, what can we do? We can build a movement that puts the building of unity of our class and unity of all progressive forces in society, especially left and socialist forces, at the forefront. We can build a movement that therefore rejects racism and sexism. And, for that matter, rejects any sophisticated sounding new or old ideologies attempting to erode our solidarity with each other by directing our anger against each other, rather than against the real enemy.

We can also build a movement that emphatically and consistently says No! to U.S. wars and the phony justifications for those wars, like the attempts to pit us against the people of Venezuela and their elected government.

March 16 in Los Angeles: Unity for Revolution & Socialism Conference

And, we can join forces with a gathering of revolutionaries dedicated to doing all of the above, by attending the conference hosted by Struggle for Socialism/La Lucha por Socialismo, being held this March 16 in Los Angeles. Many organizations and individuals are being invited to participate for a dialogue on solutions and immediate steps to move forward in revolutionary unity for the purpose of defeating U.S. war, racism and capitalism and for building socialism.

So, what are you going to do? (Hint: get to Los Angeles! Call (323) 306-6240 for more details.)



Recession, racism, repression: Are you ready to fight back?

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In December, two children died in Border Patrol custody — that we know of.

Jakelin Caal Maquín, age 7, died on Dec. 8 after being detained many hours in high heat on a prison bus. Sixteen days later, on Christmas Eve, 8-year-old Felipe Alonzo-Gómez died of flu complications [after being shunted between four different detention facilities](#) in the six days following his detention.

Both of these children trekked thousands of miles from Guatemala as part of the Central American Exodus of refugees fleeing political and economic violence. Both were accompanied by parents who protected them on that long journey but were powerless to help them in the clutches of the white-supremacist border cops.

Are you ready?

On the evening of Jan. 8, U.S. President Donald Trump gave a televised national address in which he again demanded billions of dollars to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump justified the federal government shutdown by [repeating his racist claims](#) that the refugees are criminals, drug runners and sexual assailants.

He threatened to declare a “national emergency” granting him special powers to bypass Congress and build the wall, including using funds that are supposed to go for disaster relief in Puerto Rico and California.

Two days later, Trump visited the border at McAllen, Texas, for a “border security roundtable.” Surrounded by [stacks of drugs and weapons](#), he admitted it was nothing but a glorified photo-op.

Are you ready?

Democratic Party leaders, meanwhile, show far more concern with using the shutdown as propaganda for their war-mongering campaign to paint Trump as a “Russian asset” than they do for thousands of children in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention, furloughed federal workers, or millions of poor and oppressed suffering from cuts in vital public services.

Robert Reich, former Clinton administration labor secretary and frequent spokesperson for the liberal group MoveOn.org, tweeted on Jan. 13: “Trump’s wall and shutdown are designed to distract from the real issue. The president of the United States was asked over the weekend by a friendly interviewer whether he is a Russian agent. He refused to answer.”

To which [independent journalist Max Blumenthal aptly responded](#): “It’s actually the other way around. Trump’s xenophobia, border militarization and cynical shutdown of the federal government are real issues that resonate with real people. Russiagate

is the elite moral panic that establishment Dems have chosen to focus on instead.”

Are you ready?

The Pentagon has [extended the U.S. military deployment along the border](#) to “assist” the Border Patrol through Sept. 30, ABC News reported on Jan. 15. Currently there are 2,350 troops illegally stationed at the border in violation of the Posse Comitatus Act, down from 5,900 in November. But the number is expected to go up again as the Army has been ordered to lay 1,600 miles of razor wire between ports of entry.

Here’s a glaring example of how the capitalist state — those repressive forces that protect the power of the billionaire U.S. ruling class, like the military, police and prisons — are completely exempt from the so-called “government” shutdown, which is actually an attack on jobs and programs relied upon by the working class.

Are you ready?

Speaking of the state: the U.S. war machine is rolling full steam ahead. After pulling a fast one in Syria — Trump claimed Pentagon occupation troops would be quickly withdrawn, and then White House national security adviser [John Bolton announced they would remain](#) for months or years – Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spent the first weeks of the new year [on an international junket trying to drum up support for war against Iran](#).

The U.S. has nearly 1,000 foreign military bases — 95 percent of the world’s total, [according to the international Coalition Against U.S. Foreign Military Bases](#). The [U.S. spends more](#) on the military than the next seven biggest military powers combined.

U.S. troops and proxies are at war in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine, throughout much of Africa and elsewhere. Countries currently facing U.S. military threats include Iran, Russia, China, Venezuela and the Democratic People’s Republic

of Korea, to name a few.

Are you ready?

It all comes down to a system in crisis: the system of private ownership for profit, which we call capitalism. For decades the rich and powerful in the United States have propped up this system by spending lavishly on weapons, wars and occupations, while taking it out of the hides of workers through high-tech speedups, lower paying jobs and shredding the social safety net.

They have increased the power of the police and ICE, winked at the rampage of racist killer cops in Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities, and mass incarcerated whole generations of young people to keep the working class in check. And increasingly since Trump's political rise, they are unleashing violent white supremacist gangs to further their agenda of divide and conquer.

Business media are speculating [that the next recession is coming](#) or may already be underway. There is [overproduction of big ticket items like cars](#). [Retail stores are closing](#) and their stocks are falling. [Rents are out of control](#) and homelessness is rampant while millions of housing units go vacant or are purchased by Airbnb speculators. Even workers fortunate enough to have steady, full-time jobs are drowning in debt and only one paycheck away from disaster.

When the bottom falls out of the economy, big hirers like Amazon.com will slash their payrolls too.

Are you ready?

With their powerful strike, Los Angeles teachers are showing the way to fight back, uniting workers, students and communities to defend the future of public education. Im/migrants and refugees who brave Border Patrol tear gas attacks to demand their international right to asylum are showing the way.

Yellow Vest protesters in France who defy police repression to fight government austerity are showing the way. People from Venezuela to Donbass to Palestine, who refuse to be silently butchered by U.S.-backed fascists, who stand up and fight back against impossible odds, are showing the way.

Are you ready?

Are you ready to end the shutdown of jobs and services? Are you ready, instead, to throw out this rotten system that values rich profits over people?

Are you ready to make a vote of no confidence in capitalism? Are you ready to struggle for a new system, one that puts people's needs first — for socialism?

Here's one way to start: Mark your calendar for a public conference on Revolution and Socialism on March 16 in Los Angeles, organized by Struggle □ La Lucha. Come in person or participate online. Get an orientation; learn what actions you can take now; strategize with like-minded people. Meanwhile, [join us in the streets.](#)



Let the people vote on Amazon!

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One hundred thousand schoolchildren in New York City are homeless. Lead paint contaminates thousands of apartments in the city's housing projects.

But both New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and New York State Gov. Andrew Cuomo want to give Amazon.com over \$3 billion for setting up a headquarters in the New York City borough of Queens.

People are furious. Over 60 people marched inside Amazon's 34th Street bookstore in Manhattan on Nov. 26. Labor leaders protested the giveaway to viciously anti-union Amazon on Nov. 28 in City Hall Park.

The same day, community groups, including Make The Road While Walking, protested in Long Island City near the proposed site for the headquarters. One hundred people came out in the pouring rain. (Queens Chronicle, Nov. 29)

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is the richest man in the world, with a \$138 billion fortune. Let him keep a billion dollars and his remaining stash could still give \$500 to every family in Africa.

De Blasio and Cuomo claim that Amazon will bring jobs to New York City. Is Bezos going to set up a hiring hall in the nearby Queensbridge Houses, the largest housing project in the U.S.?

Don't bet on it. In 2014, 24 percent of Amazon's "laborers" in its warehouses were Black and 12 percent were Latinx. But only 10 percent of its "nonlaborer workforce" — which includes almost all the headquarters jobs — were Black or Latinx. (Seattle Times, Aug. 14, 2015)

What Amazon is guaranteed to bring to Queens is more jacked-up rents, which are already a median \$2,450 per month in Long Island City. (Gothamist.com)



Over 700,000 jobs lost

Long Island City was once a center of light industry with 50,000 factory workers. When the Swingline company shut down its stapler plant there in 1999, close to 500 members of Teamsters Local 808 lost their jobs, despite a valiant struggle led by the local's secretary-treasurer, Chris Silvera.

But then New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani — now a Trump lawyer — wasn't sad at all. "The city comes out of this quite well," he declared. (New York Times, Jan. 17, 1989)

Sixty years ago there were 980,000 manufacturing jobs in the Big Apple, many of them in union shops. At least 750,000 of them were destroyed.

It wasn't just automation and runaway businesses that committed this crime. Zoning changes also cost jobs. Landlords and the banks that own their mortgages can

charge much higher rents for office space and luxury housing than for manufacturing lofts.

Amazon wants zoning changes, too. Under the act setting up New York State's Urban Development Corporation, Jeff Bezos, the 138 Billion Dollar Man, can ignore city zoning laws.

The UDC was supposed to build affordable housing. It was passed by the Empire State's Legislature in 1968 after Black rebellions erupted coast-to-coast following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

Andy Cuomo's daddy — the late New York governor and liberal saint, Mario Cuomo — spent billions of UDC money to build more prisons than any other governor in U.S. history.

De Blasio's and Cuomo's giveaway deal with Amazon has found almost universal condemnation, even from other elected officials.

Congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose district is located in Queens and the Bronx, isn't an Amazon fan either. She tweeted, "From Minnesota to NYC, everyday people all over the country are organizing to resist Amazon's predatory practices on working-class communities." (Politico, Nov. 22)

Tens of thousands of Black voters in Florida and Georgia had their ballots destroyed in the recent midterm elections. The proposed Amazon giveaway being railroaded by Cuomo and de Blasio is just as anti-democratic.

We need the \$3 billion going to billionaire Bezos for housing, schools and transit. Let the people vote on this giveaway in a referendum. The fight against the rotten Amazon deal has just begun.

The writer was employed for years at Amtrak's Q interlocking tower, on the west

end of Sunnyside Yard, behind the Swingline plant.

