Class war rages across South America

By Greg Butterfield

On Oct. 20, Sebastián Piñera, the right-wing president of Chile, declared: "We are at war with a powerful, relentless enemy that does not respect anything, or anyone, that has the power to impose violence and crime without limits." Piñera said these words to slander the popular uprising in Santiago, and to justify his government’s repressive actions. The uprising in Chile has been supported by the working class, peasant farmers and all classes fighting against the interests of the wealthy and private imperialist powers seeking to continue their domination.

Although he is on the wrong side of history, Piñera was right about two things. There is a class war—raging today, not just in Chile but across the South American continent, from the rainforests of Brazil to Ayacucho mountains of Peru. And one side of that war—Piñera’s side—that of the capitalist oligarchy, repressive police and military forces, and the imperialist bosses and bankers who call the shots from Wall Street and Washington—does not respect anything, or anyone, and is willing to use violence and crime without limits.

At least 15 people have been killed by the Piñera regime by Oct. 23. Tens of thousands are in the streets of Santiago in defiance of emergency decrees. The country’s military union federation, which includes economically critical miners and port workers, has called for a general strike on Oct. 23-24. But there were no calls in the U.S. Congress to sanction Piñera’s government or ban weapons sales to the military, whose repression is endangered by Morales’ re-election.

In the case of today’s class battles raging in Latin America, there is an easy litmus test: where does the protest movement or government stand in relation to U.S. imperialism? Is it struggling to lift the boot of Washington off the people’s necks, or seeking to give Trump & Co. free reign? For several years, the U.S. imperialists and South American oligarchs have been trying to roll back the social gains and moves toward independence won by the people during the years of the “red tide” of the early 2000s, inspired by the advances of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez as well as socialist Cuba’s tenacious will to survive.

But enough rollback is enough. Now the people are fighting back. Students and teachers in Colombia are defying repression to challenge tuition hikes and unchecked assassinations of movement leaders and community activists. Peruvian workers pushed back another attempt by the ultraright in Congress. Powerful class forces are testing their forces. Students, farmers, Indigenous communities and students are learning valuable lessons every day in the streets.

Here in the U.S., we must keep an eye on the developments in Latin America and the Caribbean, to make it too dangerous for the U.S. bankers and bosses and their political stooges to impose their will.

Victory to the popular uprisings in Chile and Ecuador!

GM workers speak out

Nearly 50,000 members of the United Auto Workers are in the fifth week on their nationwide strike against General Motors. Key issues for the union include ending the company’s use of tiered wage plans that pay less to new hires; ending the company’s reliance on temporary workers and creating permanent jobs for thousands of long-term temps; and pushing back GM’s attempt to saddle workers with more health care costs.

Struggle-La Lucha visited UAW members in White Marsh, Md., northeast of Baltimore. Hear what they have to say at tinyurl.com/36xfk7r5

Copper miners on strike in Arizona

After more than a year of company stalling at the game playing instead of fair negotiations, workers at ASARCO-owned copper mines and mills are on strike. Rejecting their bosses’ so-called “best and final offer,” some 2,000 copper workers voted overwhelmingly to walk off their jobs Oct. 17.

ASARCO operates three open pit copper mines and a smelter in Arizona. The joint strike by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and SEIU Local 73 began October 17. The teachers and school workers are on strike for “the schools our students deserve”: smaller classes, genuine sanctuary schools, and a nurse and librarian in every school. Among their demands are political demands, or what the CTU calls “bargaining for the common good.” These include the demand for affordable housing for working-class Chicagoans, something that the mayor refuses to put into the language of the contract. Teachers say is a key issue to resolve before they can return to work.

Full at tinyurl.com/36xfk7r5

LGBTQ2S & Supremes

PG&E

LABOR

Chicago teachers’ strike continues

The joint strike by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and SEIU Local 73 began October 17. The teachers and school workers are on strike for “the schools our students deserve”: smaller classes, genuine sanctuary schools, and a nurse and librarian in every school. Among their demands are political demands, or what the CTU calls “bargaining for the common good.” These include the demand for affordable housing for working-class Chicagoans, something that the mayor refuses to put into the language of the contract. Teachers say is a key issue to resolve before they can return to work.

Full at tinyurl.com/36xfk7r5
It’s Autumn, and I can’t wait for the fall (of Columbus)

By M. Tiahui

I write this in October, in the midst of all of the fall celebrations in the U.S.—Columbus Day, Thanksgiving and even Halloween—that can give some big headaches to Indigenous people by enhancing the erasure of Indigenous history and the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples.

Responding to these fall holidays is just a starting point, but first steps are important. Of course, we still need to get rid of the vampire economic system that profits from misery and destruction of the Earth, along with settler colonialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and much more. But in the meantime, we can all work to ensure that Indigenous peoples and histories are not marginalized and disrespected as one of the many ways to support frontline Indigenous struggles.

Here’s some more information about the fall holidays to think about, including what you can do to bring positive change to each holiday.

Columbus Day

Sometimes referred to as “Crewelump Day” by those who oppose it, Columbus Day is a disgusting celebration of the genocide of Indigenous peoples and theft of land that began when Columbus and his men got lost and arrived in this hemisphere in 1492. It does harm to everyone who grows up learning that he was a great hero and “discovered America.” The holiday sends the message that it is fine to completely whitewash history and celebrate the genocide of tens of millions of people. Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean and elsewhere were not “discovered” by anybody since they were already there. Nor did they need to have civilization or spirituality brought to them, since they already had civilizations and beliefs. They had and still have the inherent right to continue to live in their own ways on their own lands.

Columbus’ policies on the islands where he landed, including slave labor, starvation, sex trafficking and murder, resulted in the near-complete genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico and other places where the Spanish invaded. (Columbus was Italian, but he invaded on behalf of the Spanish crown.) Altogether, Columbus shipped approximately 5,000 enslaved Indigenous people across the Atlantic—filling his pockets and setting the stage for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of millions of Africans as well as Indigenous people. He told Indigenous women and girls as young as 9 and 10 into sexual slavery. The Spaniards hunted down Taíno and Arawak people with huge dogs that tore them apart and devoured them. Bodies were fed to these dogs. The men tested the sharpness of their blades by cutting off the hands of the people.

Columbus has a terrible impact not only on Indigenous people, especially kids, but also on non-Native people. What you can do: The Columbus Day holiday needs to be abolished. Indigenous Peoples’ Day is the holiday that replaces it. Work with Indigenous people where you live to get the truth out about Indigenous history and get Indigenous Peoples’ Day celebrated instead of Columbus Day in your community, school, organization, workplace. Put up signs saying that the day is Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Put the day in your union contract. We can lead and celebrate this day, making it part of everyone’s life, even when some bigots refuse to pass legislation.

Halloween

Halloween is fun, especially beloved within LGBTQ2S communities and by kids. And yet, every year, Halloween is also a hallstorm of cultural appropriation, with non-Native people “dressing up as Indians,” wearing blackface, brownface and yellowface, and so much more.

Use of Pocahottie costumes (sexually suggestive fake-Native costumes for women) increases the view that Indigenous women exist for sexual exploitation. This is especially sickening given the crisis of thousands of #MMIW2S (Missing & Murdered Indigenous, Women, Girls & Two-Spirit) in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

If you see someone wearing a costume that smacks of cultural appropriation, you might talk to the person or send them this link (https://tinyurl.com/y3qsjlmu) for lots of information about what cultural appropriation is and why they shouldn’t do it. When you see fake-Native costumes at a store, tell them you won’t shop there unless they stop selling those costumes. Our culture is not your costume!

Thanksgiving

You may be asking yourself: “Wait a minute. Can’t I even celebrate a harvest festival without this writer complaining about something?”

Here’s the problem: Thanksgiving in the U.S. is not just a harvest festival. It is a celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims and the English theft of Indigenous lands and colonization of the U.S.

The myth of Thanksgiving is that the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, Mass., the Native people welcomed them, they had a feast together with the “Indians,” and everyone lived happily ever after.

The myth doesn’t talk about the enslavement of the Wampanoag, Nipmuc, Massachusetts and other Native peoples, the colonial wars against them, how their lands were stolen and they were forced into concentration camps such as Deer Island, how widespread starvation and hangings of Indigenous people came to be.

And the myth of Thanksgiving certainly doesn’t tell you that the turbulent day of thanksgiving in Massachusetts was proclaimed by Massachusetts colony Gov. Winthrop in 1636 to celebrate the safe return of the white men who had helped to massacre several hundred Pequot children, women and men at Mystic, Conn.

On the East Coast, you can observe the 50th annual National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Mass., on “Thanksgiving” day, Nov. 28. On the West Coast, you can observe “Unthanksgiving” at Alcatraz Island. You can also do something with your own family or community to tell the truth and decolonize the holiday.
The third case, R.G. and G.R. Harris Funeral Home v. EEOC, involves transgender Alimee Stephens, who, after years of working at the funeral home was fired when she explained to her employer that she is transgender.

No right to discriminate

As the cases were being heard inside the court, outside, supporters of equality marched a short distance to the steps of the Supreme Court, until they were stopped by a cop and ordered to leave. The activists were all arrested in an act of civil disobedience. The Trump administration is hell-bent on pushing back against equality for LGBTQ2S people. Donald Trump has already reinstated the ban on transgender people in the military. It is one of the many things he has done to try to turn back progressive gains made under President Barack Obama. Under the Obama administration, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission decided in 2015 that it would accept LGBTQ2S charges in its enforcement of Title VII. The Washington Blade, a weekly LGBTQ newspaper in Washington, reports that approximately 1,800 charges have been filed each year since alleging anti-LGBTQ2S discrimination. Trump has done his best to erase all the beneficial things that were won for working and poor people under the first African American president.

The tremendous showing for equality outside the Supreme Court demonstrates that the LGBTQ2S community and allies have had enough of these right-wing attacks. The Equality Act, which was passed by the House of Representatives, will have an uphill fight in the Senate in order to get passed out of Congress. If so, Trump will no doubt veto the bill. However, it takes more than passage of a law to get full equality and respect. It will take a fundamental change in this country to destroy the system of capitalism that promotes anti-LGBTQ2S and anti-immigrant bigotry as well as racism and sexism. Capitalism must be replaced with a socialist society that values each individual for what they can contribute to the betterment of society, instead of for making the bank accounts of the rich fatter.

Why PG&E turned off the lights in California

By Scott Scheffer

Los Angeles

Poor maintenance by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) has caused wildfires in California in recent years that resulted in well over 100 deaths and billions of dollars in property damage. The utility company has declared bankruptcy to avoid paying settlements to its victims and is rejecting a federal judge’s orders to come up with safer ways to deliver gas and electricity to millions of Californians.

The 2017-2018 fires aren’t the first time that PG&E’s greed has turned deadly. Investigations of a 2010 natural gas explosion in San Bruno that killed 8 people and burned an entire city block revealed that a pipe replacement project was called off prematurely to save money and should have included in their budget. PG&E employees had voiced concerns and were ignored.

Experts have voiced the opinion that a rigorous operation of trimming tree branches and clearing vegetation away from electrical lines and towers would have prevented the 2017-2018 fires. Others point to the possibility of burying power lines as is done in many other countries. But PG&E spokespeople ridicule the idea of tree-trimming or burying power lines because of the expense. Instead, they unilaterally decided to shut down power in times of high risk for fires.

This plan was implemented when winds kicked up on Oct. 8 with little advance warning. PG&E shut off power to nearly 370,000 customers that day and others in the days following.

Refugees didn’t run, food spoiled, communications were hindered, medicines that needed refrigeration went bad. The power shut-offs were a cheap Band-Aid solution to a problem of PG&E’s own making. The cutbacks would put their capital elsewhere if investments in infrastructure lowered profits relative to other investments. As Karl Marx put it, “Capital flows to the highest rate of profit.” That’s the way it works under capitalism.

Socialism means power to the people

It also raises a question that every social and economic justice activist

Continued on page 4

Los Angeles

The moment of Oct. 8, several hundred LGBTQ2S people and allies defined rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court to demand protections against discrimination in the workplace. The three cases being heard by the Supreme Court seek to extend federal anti-discrimination protections to cover sexual orientation and gender identity. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It bars discrimination on the basis of sex but does not address the question of sexual orientation or gender identity. This has passed years before the Stonewall Rebellion in New York opened up the modern LGBTQ civil-rights movement.

The three cases being heard as a group address workers who were fired after it was revealed that they were gay or transgender.

Gerald Bostick, a social worker in Clayton County, Ga., was fired after an article about a local gay softball team revealed that he was gay. Donald Zarda was fired as a skydiving instructor when he revealed that he was gay. Their consolidated cases, Bostock v. Clayton County, Ga., and Altitude Express v. Zarda, are being argued together.

By Andre Powell

Washington, D.C.

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La Red de Intelectuales, Artistas y Movimientos Sociales en Defensa de la Humanidad manifiesta su solidaridad con el pueblo de Chile, con sus estudiantes secundarios, y los trabajadores y trabajadoras en el ejercicio de su legítimo derecho a la protesta social y la desobediencia civil frente a una democracia cada vez más deslegitimada y una socied dad extremadamente desigual.

Lo expresado durante los últimos días en la ciudad de Santiago, como consecuencia del alza del precio del transporte, se suma al rechazo de una multitud de personas y juventudes en la vida del pueblo de Chile al tiempo que benefician en ganancia a las empresas privadas que controlan la provisión de los servicios básicos en ese país.

Denunciamos ante la comunidad internacional y los organismos de Derechos Humanos y los pueblos hermanos, la criminalización a la protesta social que ha emprendido el gobierno de Sebastián Piñera, especialmente contra los niños, niñas y adolescentes que han protagonizado las protestas de los últimos días y que por eso fueron catalogados como “violentistas”, “vándalos” y “delin cuentes”, los cuales han sido perseguidos y reprimidos con brutalidad. Denunciamos que estos hechos constituyen graves violaciones a los derechos humanos.

De igual forma, condenamos enérgicamente las vergonzosas medidas tomadas por el gobierno, que incluyen haber decretado el estado de emergencia y la consecuente restricción del derecho de reunión y de libre locomoción, medidas propias de una dictadura, y que lejos de resolver la compleja situación, la acentúan. Se constata una defensa férrea del modelo neoliberal a ultranza, en el marco de una estrategia que pretende imponer un modelo a nivel continental, que lleva a restringir los derechos del pueblo, y posteriormente se hace un llamado a un supuesto diálogo sin retroceder en las alzas.

Finalmente, hacemos un llamado a intelectuales, artistas y hombres y mujeres honestos del mundo a manifestarse y condenar la crisis en Chile, al tiempo que reiteramos nuestro respaldo a la protesta ciudadana y nuestra completa solidaridad con las luchas sociales por alcanzar un Chile más justo para todos y todas.

Secretaría de la Red en Defensa de la Humanidad
19 de octubre de 2019

STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN CHILE

October 19, 2019

Copper miners

Continued from page 1

but also include seven other unions, among them the Teamsters, IBEW, Machinists, Operating Engineers and Boilermakers. All these unions cooperate in negotiations with the company.

Full at tinyurl.com/ysq6d8c

Fast food workers union to strike

Members of the Burgerville Workers Union (BVWW)—the first officially recognized fast food workers union in the U.S.—are engaged in a strike to protest what they are preparing to engage in what could potentially become the largest strike in their union’s history.

The union, which represents workers at five Burgerville fast food stores in Oregon and Washington state, won official recognition in 2018 and 2019 and is part of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Full at tinyurl.com/yzzarmdm

Why PG&E turned off the lights in California

Continued from page 3

should be thinking about: How is it that countries trying to build socialism avoid this debacle and are able to move mountains when it comes to massive projects for the people?

As PG&E was declaring bankruptcy in January 2019 to get out of paying settlements for its negligence, hundreds of construction workers in Beijing were busy burying power lines in two districts where there are traditional alleys—huts—dense with electrical cables.

Meanwhile, according to Venezuelan analyst, Bolivarian Venezuela, under U.S. attack on multiple fronts, was proudly passing the halfway mark in “Venezuela’s Great Housing Mission” (GMVV) with a goal of 5 million new homes by 2025. Gramma reported that Cuba was continuing work on the largest water diversion in its history, adding power generation plants and increasing agricultural capacity in some areas by 15 times.

Under socialism, there is surplus value in the revenue taken in by enterprises that are owned collectively. But none of it is returned into profit for a tiny handful of rich people. It goes into a fund held by the state. It may be the national government or it may be a provincial administration, but the surplus from the revenue is set aside for the greater good of society. If a multibillion-dollar project is needed for electricity generation, mass transit or mass communication, the decision gets made and the project is undertaken. Capitalism is still the dominant mode of production in the world, and that fact has made it difficult for countries trying to build socialism to attain the full potential of a planned economy. The advanced economic power of China yields the greatest examples, but U.S. aggression hasn’t stopped Cuba and Venezuela from making great gains for their populations.

Safe, clean Power to the People!