

Buffalo Forum



Local Publication of the
U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

Workers of all countries, unite!

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May 20, 2016

Vol. 20 #5

New School Board Requires Increased Organizing for Equal Right to Education

Elections for the Buffalo School Board in May brought forward three new members, who all took a stand against Common Core testing and receivership and for a new contract for teachers. The three include Jen Mecozzi for West District, Hope Jay for North District and Paulette Woods for Central District. These three districts combined account for the majority of Buffalo public schools. The newcomers, combined with incumbents Sharon Belton-Cottman, Theresa Harris-Tigg and Barbara Seals Nevergold also now together constitute a new majority on the nine-member board.

Expectations for improvements in the schools among parents and teachers have risen. To make them a reality requires strengthening the independent

New School Board • 15

OBAMA VISIT TO HIROSHIMA, WHERE U.S. DROPPED ATOMIC BOMB

U.S. Crime of Mass Destruction Requires Apology, Reparations and U.S. Disarmament

President Barack Obama will be visiting Hiroshima, Japan at the end of May, the first sitting president to do so. Hiroshima was one of the cities, in August 1945, that the U.S. bombed using nuclear weapons — a crime of mass destruction and genocide against the people of Japan.

Nagasaki was also bombed three days later. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed and civilian infrastructure destroyed, a crime even during war. Generations have suffered to this day, from numerous illnesses, birth defects,

U.S. Apology and Reparations Required • 3

68TH ANNIVERSARY OF AL-NAKBA

Support the Just Struggle of the Palestinian People! Defend the Right of Return

On May 15 the Palestinian people joined by the people of all countries commemorate Al-Nakba, the catastrophe. Demonstrations occurred through out Palestine, in Israel and across six continents, including from South Africa, to Brazil, to London and New York City. This year

marks the 68th anniversary of Al-Nakba, the beginning of the forcible expulsion and exile from their land of 750,000 Palestinians by Zionist militias in 1948. In the immediate aftermath, approximately 4,244,776 acres of land were stolen and

Defend the Right of Return • 6

Not a Single Day More of the Unjust Imprisonment of Oscar López Rivera!

Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity

We demand Oscar's freedom!

The Executive Secretariat of the Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity (REDH, for its Spanish acronym) demands the immediate release of Oscar López Rivera, the oldest political prisoner in the history of Puerto Rico and Latin America in a United States prison. Lopez

Rivera was never accused of hurting anyone or taking part in any violent actions. He is imprisoned for fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico, a just cause that the Network in Defense of humanity is committed to support.

This year Oscar López turns 73 years old and 35 years of incarceration in U.S.

Free Oscar López Rivera • 11

NAKBA DAY PROTEST IN NEW YORK

“We will not forget and we will return”

Joe Catron, MintPress News

“The strongest message we send in Nakba Day commemorations is that we will not forget, and we will return,” a Palestinian activist said as hundreds mobilized in New York.

As thousands of Palestinians mobilized

Nakba Day in New York • 7

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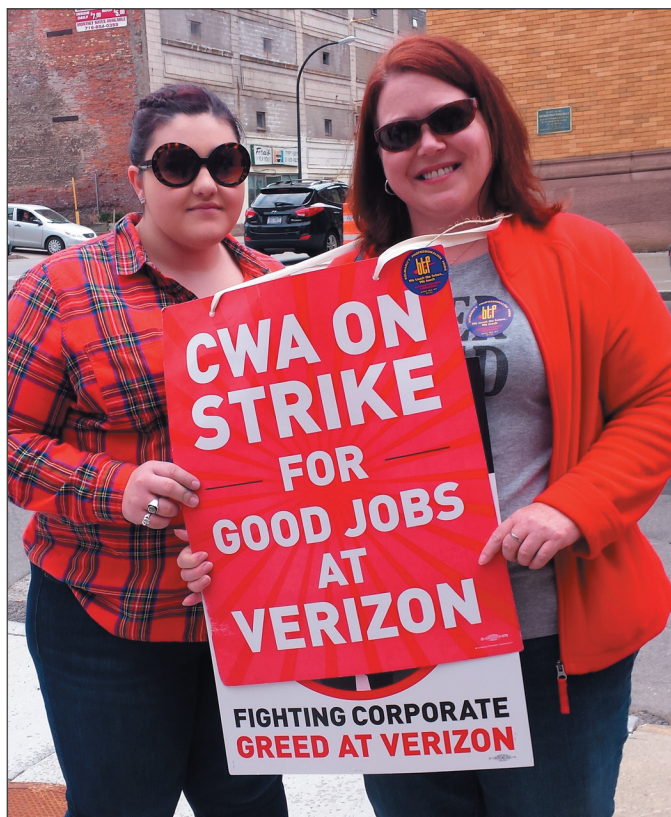
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S
OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS (OCR)**

Thursday, June 9, 2016

5:30pm-7:30pm

McKinley High School

1500 Elmwood Ave.

**QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WILL FOLLOW
PRESENTATION BY OCR REPRESENTATIVES**

HOSTED BY

**THE NIAGARA FRONTIER MOVEMENT FOR THE ADVOCACY OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS**

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I • U.S. APOLOGY AND REPARATIONS REQUIRED

and other physical and mental problems.

It is this issue of U.S. genocide and war crimes that needs to be addressed, as many people and organizations in the U.S. and worldwide are demanding. Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction, and like chemical and biological weapons, their use by the U.S. was a crime. It is for this reason that President Obama is duty-bound to apologize for their use, to pay reparations to all those impacted and their descendents, and to take action now to eliminate U.S. nuclear weapons. This is a stand that would contribute to peace.

Obama however, though visiting Hiroshima, is refusing to apologize. And while speaking of a future without nuclear weapons, he is organizing to modernize the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The Congressional Budget Office estimated in January 2015 that Obama's plans for nuclear forces would cost \$348 billion over the next decade. Others have said it could approach \$1 trillion over three decades. That is, there is no U.S. plan to eliminate its nuclear weapons.

In addition, Obama has ensured that more money for war-related initiatives has been allocated than under Bush: \$866 billion dollars under Obama. Obama has unleashed 372 drone strikes against Pakistan, according to data gathered by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 112 strikes in Yemen and 19 in Somalia, all illegal, all war crimes. In fiscal year 2014, U.S. Special-Operations Forces were deployed to 133 countries, or roughly 70 percent of the entire world. The size of SOCOM has expanded by almost 25 percent since Obama took office. These are the actions

of a war president. Military war games in June with Japan and south Korea further indicate that the visit to Hiroshima has nothing to do with taking responsibility for U.S. crimes present and past, nothing to do with peace.

The U.S. just completed its largest war games ever with south Korea. And now it is planning yet more war games with Japan and south Korea, including use of top-ranked Aegis-class destroyers. The games are part of U.S. actions to further incorporate both Japan and south Korea into its military command structure and missile "defense" systems. The war games are in part directed at China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and also a means to further militarize Japan and south Korea. Again, nothing to do with peace.

In this context, plans by Obama to spotlight the "toll of war" and offer a "forward-looking vision" of a non-nuclear world have no legitimacy. Modernizing the largest nuclear arsenal in the world and conducting the largest war games, not only in Korea but also the Middle East, is not recognizing the "toll of war."

In addition, according to White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest, "What President Obama will do is make note of the fact that the relationship between the United States and Japan has emerged stronger than anybody could have imagined back in 1945."

The U.S. has occupied Japan with tens of thousands of troops since 1945 and continues to do so. It is building yet another base in Okinawa despite repeated protests and broad opposition by the people of

Okinawa. The brutality of U.S. occupation is seen in yet another killing of a woman by a U.S. Kadena airbase worker and former Marine in Okinawa. U.S. troops and their "civilian component" cannot be prosecuted for such crimes — and these crimes are many, including rapes and killings of young girls.

While the visit to Hiroshima is designed to make it appear the U.S. is interested in peace and a "nuclear-free world," it cannot hide all the war preparations, drones, and wars actually being waged. Obama will likely not speak to a proposal from the DPRK for a nuclear-free zone on the Korean peninsula. This is a proposal made repeatedly, and rejected repeatedly by the U.S. He will not speak to the demand from the majority of the world's governments to ban nuclear weapons, now, as indicated at the recent UN meeting of the working group on nuclear disarmament.

As the U.S. contends for world empire, it can provide no "forward looking vision." That requires representing the anti-war sentiment of the majority of the people in the U.S. and worldwide. Such a vision can only come from the people themselves and their fight today for an anti-war government. Such a government recognizes U.S. responsibility for its crimes, present and past, which includes reparations. It acts to bring *All U.S. Troops Home Now* and to *Ban Nuclear Weapons*, beginning with U.S. nuclear disarmament. War games have no place in a modern world where there should be no use of force and where diplomacy and relations of mutual respect and benefit are necessary. That is the start of a forward looking vision.



Joint Military Exercises Draw S. Korea Closer to U.S. and Japan

Hankyoreh, South Korea, May 17, 2016

Joint military exercises planned for June by South Korea, the U.S. and Japan are an expected move after the three sides concluded an agreement on sharing North Korea nuclear and missile intelligence in December 2014, analysts said. Seoul, however is saying the exercises are not a step toward full integration on missile defense with the U.S.

With the agreement clearing the last legal and institutional obstacles to trilateral military defense cooperation, Washington's vision for missile defense in

Northeast Asia is now taking clear shape — a situation that could lead to U.S.-led missile defense cooperation gaining further momentum going ahead.

For the exercises, Aegis-level destroyers from all three sides will be sharing real-time intelligence online via the U.S. in accordance with their military information sharing agreement. The agreement does not recognize direct sharing between South Korea and Japan, making it a different format from typical trilateral intelligence sharing. But the real-time transmission of

missile detection and tracking information online, through an early warning system, is expected to produce the same effect as real-time trilateral intelligence sharing.

The exercises also appear to be a preparatory step for linking the three countries missile defense networks. South Korea and the U.S. have already made plans to complete inter-linkage of U.S. Forces Korea's (USFK) missile defense system with Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system within the year.

Joint Military Exercises • 5

FAITH AND SCIENCE LEADERS AGREE

Reduce the Threat of Nuclear Catastrophe Now

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, May, 2016

Nuclear weapons remain a real and urgent threat to humanity and our planet. If there is even a limited nuclear exchange, millions—if not billions—of people could perish; large swaths of the planet could be contaminated; and the global economy could collapse. As President Obama said in his historic April 2009 Prague speech, the United States has a moral responsibility to lead the world in a life-affirming effort to reduce the risks posed by nuclear weapons and pursue the peace and security of a world free of them.

We the undersigned — representing organizations of faith and science — share that goal and urge President Obama to take meaningful, practical nuclear risk-reduction steps.

First, we are deeply concerned about the administration's proposal to spend more than \$1 trillion building a new generation of nuclear warheads, missiles, bombers and submarines. These new programs are inconsistent with the vision the president outlined in the Prague speech, and likely will lead to a dangerous and costly nuclear arms race. Spending money we don't have on weapons we don't need won't make us safer. The president should scale back these plans and cancel the new nuclear-armed cruise missile, which is destabilizing and unneeded. Congress should refuse to fund such dangerous and

unnecessary weapons programs.

Second, as a concrete step toward the eventual multilateral elimination of nuclear weapons, President Obama should reduce the U.S. deployed strategic arsenal by a third, which is a level the Pentagon agrees is adequate to maintain security. He should call on Russia to follow suit. Reducing nuclear arsenals worldwide will also reduce the risk that these weapons could fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

Third, the United States and Russia each keep hundreds of nuclear weapons on high alert, so they can be launched within minutes. This practice makes the risk of an accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch unacceptably high. Over the last several decades, there have been numerous near misses when human or technical errors—combined with a short amount of time in which to respond—increased the risk of a nuclear catastrophe. Faith and science leaders understand human frailty. We must guard against both human error and hubris.

To greatly reduce the risk of catastrophe, President Obama should remove U.S. land-based nuclear missiles from their current hair-trigger status and eliminate the option in U.S. war plans of launching them on warning. He should urge Russia to reciprocate. As he noted back in 2008,

just before taking office: “[K]eeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of the Cold War. Such policies increase the risk of catastrophic accidents or miscalculation.”

Each of these steps would help fulfill U.S. obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in which the nations of the world have agreed to work together toward the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. Heightened tensions between the United States and Russia, and the growing risk of nuclear use worldwide, are all the more reason for the president to take these meaningful steps to strengthen national and international security.

As faith and science leaders, we stand ready to support these steps toward a safer world. We call on all Americans to join us.

Leith Anderson, president, National Association of Evangelicals

Bishop Oscar Cantú, chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Kenneth Kimmell, president, Union of Concerned Scientists

Gabriel Salguero, president, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR, CUBA, SEPTEMBER 21-23, 2016

Reality and Challenges of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace

Official Announcement, Cuba-Network in Defense of Humanity, May 17, 2016

The Proclamation of the region of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, subscribed by the Heads of State and Government at the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, the Spanish acronym), held in Havana in January 2014 is a true historical milestone, since it is the most profound and politically far-reaching agreement achieved in centuries by Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Proclamation has been possible because of the historical confluence of Heads of State and Government with political will to change in their respective countries the harmful impact of centuries of colonialism, neocolonialism and neoliberalism, and develop a brotherly cooperation in solidarity among the nations in the region, based on respect for the sovereignty and individuality of its members and on the Purposes and Principles established in the Charter of



the United Nations and International Law, which is an indisputable strength in the face of the imperial policies and actions opposed to these projects.

The Proclamation extols Peace as a “supreme good and legitimate aspiration of all peoples, its preservation being a substantial element of the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean and a principle and common asset of CELAC.” In accordance

with these postulates, a substantial part of its text emphasizes the need to demilitarize the region, one of the essential conditions for the existence of a true Zone of Peace.

In spite of the approved Proclamation, Latin America and the Caribbean are not exempt from vulnerabilities. In order to have a lasting Zone of Peace, it is necessary to eradicate the multiple problems breaking the Peace in the countries of the region, as well as others derived from the policies and actions of imperialist countries.

With this first international seminar, the Cuban Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples intends to:

- Convoke the peace movements, the regional and international civil society, researchers and political leaders interested in debating global problems and their incidence in Latin America and the Caribbean, the vulnerabilities of the region and

Zone of Peace • 6

4 • JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES

With USFK and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) already operating linked missile defense systems, the trilateral missile defense exercises appear likely to take place on a regular basis.

The South Korean Ministry of National Defense said on May 16 that the exercises “are merely about sharing missile detection and tracking information and do not include missile interception drills.” The ministry stressed, “This has nothing to do with involvement in US-led missile defense.” But missile detection and tracking constitute key early stages in missile defense — which means the sharing of related intelligence cannot actually be called unrelated to missile defense involvement.

Ministry officials were tight-lipped when asked whether there were plans to make the exercises a regular occurrence or how they would be developed in the future. “Nothing has been decided yet,”

one said.

But with trilateral missile defense cooperation having already been set in motion through the sharing of detection and tracking information, analysts said the path is now open for more advanced forms of collaboration such as missile defense control system sharing or command system cooperation — or for de facto incorporation into the U.S. missile defense system.

To date, the U.S. has used the [excuse of the] North Korean threat to carefully integrate the South Korean and Japan missile defense systems into the network it directs. Its proposal to South Korea to discuss deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system with USFK came just before North Korea’s long-range rocket launch on February 7, while the proposal to hold the trilateral missile defense exercises came two days later on February 9. [...]

A May 16 report in the Asahi Shimbun newspaper noted that South Korea “had consistently avoided policy measures that would provoke China, but after careful consideration made the decision to strengthen cooperation with Japan and the US.”

Many have voiced fears about South Korea being needlessly drawn into US-led trilateral missile defense cooperation with the ultimate aim of keeping China in check. Others have advised wariness of a trilateral cooperation framework that would increase Japan’s voice on peninsula issues.

“With these exercises, we’ve taken the first step toward being incorporated into US missile defense irrespective of our intentions,” said Yonsei University professor Choi Jong-geon. “We could end up becoming an outpost in a U.S. Northeast Asia missile defense system targeting China,” Choi warned.

I • DEFEND THE RIGHT OF RETURN

annexed into the Zionist state, which had declared its existence four days previously. By 1949 this state occupied 78 per cent of Palestinian land.

Between 1948 and 1950 more than 500 Palestinian towns and villages were systematically destroyed or repopulated. Today, Israel, backed by the U.S., occupies even more Palestinian land and more than half of the 11.5 million-strong Palestinian people are refugees from the Nakba and subsequent forced displacement and genocide.

At the heart of Nakba events is affirmation of the right of return of Palestinians. Their undaunted resistance for all these many years shows Palestinians will not stop until the right of the Palestinian people to their homeland, to determine their own affairs, to be, as a people, is secured. Palestinians are standing firm against U.S.-Israeli aggression, despite the crime of the siege of Gaza, the crime of occupation, the crime of continued Israeli state terror.

Palestinians, those living under Israeli occupation and the many refugees worldwide, are organizing to return to build a nation of their own making, that rejects imperialist dictate and overcomes the genocide, racism and constant punishment of the 68 years of U.S.-Israeli occupation and terrorism. *Buffalo Forum* expresses its firm support of the just struggle of the Palestinians and demands an immediate end to all U.S. support for Israel. It is the U.S. that sustains and funds Israel, politically and

militarily, and is guilty of crimes against the Palestinians. People of the U.S. join those worldwide in more vigorously defending the right of return and demanding an end to the U.S.-Israeli occupation of Palestine now!

The right of return is well-founded in international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination affirms this right with the emphasis that it cannot be denied on the basis of "race, color, or national or ethnic origin." The Fourth Geneva Convention states that persons evacuated by an Occupying Power during warfare must be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities cease. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights states, "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country." UN General Assembly Resolution 194 adopted on December 11, 1948 declares that the Palestinian refugees "wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date." The UN General Assembly has reaffirmed resolution 194 more than 110 times since its first adoption. UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 adopted in 1974 affirms "the inalienable right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and



calls for their return."

While refusing the right of return has no legitimacy, the U.S. continues to block, through UN vetoes and military backing of Israel, the exercise of this right. The imperialists require the Zionist Israeli state to maintain its occupation in order to carry out subversion against the peoples of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and the whole of West Asia and Northern Africa.

The Palestinian people and youth the world over are eager to return to their homeland, as evidenced in the many Nakba actions. Palestinians are burning to see their country free from a ruthless occupation which continues to imprison their children and take so many lives with impunity.

Buffalo Forum salutes the Palestinian people for their determination and their enduring struggle that inspires all to step up efforts to *End the Occupation Now! Defend the Right of Return!*

5 • ZONE OF PEACE

distinctive features of the countries that conform it.

- Foster a culture of sustainable peace in the region that will grant priority to the rise of the cultural level, access to public health and sports, and empowerment of women, as well as eliminate inequalities and all kinds of violence.

- Eliminate the possibility of reestablishing neoliberalism, the terrible consequences of which subsist in the region.

- Promote solidarity among the peoples and support to the democratic and revolutionary governments that foster social welfare in their nations and regional co-operation.

- Create awareness among the international public opinion and political leaders on the real benefits of eliminating nuclear weapons and achieving a general and total disarmament at the world level, and on the social, economic and environmental costs derived from its maintenance.

- Reject the existence of military bases and enclaves disseminated throughout almost all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and of the military operations of the U.S. Fleet in the seas of the region, supplied with the most modern military and nuclear technology.

- Evaluate the existence of domestic military conflicts encouraged by the extreme

right in the countries with the financial support of imperialism, which cause thousands of deaths, wounded and mutilated among the civilian population, in addition to harming the infrastructure and environment, events that contradict the Peace we are proclaiming.

Humankind has the far-reaching responsibility of struggling to make Peace prevail in the world, of acting in accordance with the legitimate expectations of the peoples, and of contributing decisively to international security, to the survival of the human species threatened by huge nuclear arsenals, by the global climatic change and by the pillage of natural resources.

Palestinians March to Demand Right Of Return on Nakba Anniversary

Millions of people worldwide joined in marches, rallies and meetings to mark the 68th anniversary of the Nakba, or catastrophe, when more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from Palestinian lands and massacres and atrocities occurred as part of the establishment of Israel in 1948. Dozens of events spanned six continents.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians also gathered in Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere. The right of return was at the heart of the events, affirming that the millions of Palestinian refugees have the right to return to their homes and lands

and this right will not be relinquished. A main march took place in the Negev desert for the first time. While there are scores of smaller commemorations every year, the main march always happens in a different village that was uprooted.

A sea of Palestinian flags were prominent as thousands of people defiantly strode through the desert near the Bedouin village of Rahat, with many holding signs demanding the right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees, whose homes were taken by Israel.

Organizers said the march took

place in the Negev desert because the Palestinians living there had “paid the highest price” in terms of constant housing demolitions and displacement. Speakers decried Israel’s displacement of “over 90 percent” of Palestinians living in the Negev, and called for all those expelled from their homes to be able to return. “We will never give up, and we will never forget,” crowds of people chanted.

The 40-plus buses that arrived in the Negev carried mostly younger Palestinians from all over the occupied territories.

Palestinians March on Nakba Day • 8

I • NAKBA DAY IN NEW YORK

throughout the West Bank, Gaza Strip and present-day Israel to mark the 68th anniversary of the Nakba on May 15, more gathered with their supporters in cities around the world. Global outpourings each Nakba Day demonstrate the determination of millions to return to their homes, however many generations removed.

These gatherings both publicize the mass displacement that accompanied Israel’s founding and demand the right of return for over 7 million Palestinians, now the world’s largest and longest-lasting refugee community.

In New York, hundreds rallied beside City Hall in Manhattan before marching over the Brooklyn Bridge to gather in Cadman Plaza Park. The gathering showed “that the diaspora, especially younger generations, do not forget their rightful home and that they will continue to fight for it,” Nerdeen Kiswani, chair of New York City Students for Justice in Palestine said.

Kiswani, a student at the City University of New York’s College of Staten Island and Hunter College, was barred by Israeli occupation forces from traveling to the West Bank after 15 hours of interrogation at the Allenby bridge from Jordan last year.

“Nakba Day is extremely significant for Palestinians,” Ibrahim Mossallam, outreach director for the Muslim American Society – New York and a member of American Muslims for Palestine, said. “It commemorates the day that hundreds

of Palestinian villages and cities were ethnically cleansed and destroyed by the Zionist forces, resulting in massacres where thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced to refugee camps.”

Israel’s attempts to exclude Palestinians in the diaspora from their homeland, to revoke the residency permits of East Jerusalemites, forcing them further into the West Bank, to forcibly relocate West Bank residents accused of resistance activities to the Gaza Strip, and to deny Gaza a functioning economy through a crippling siege and periodic bombardments, forcing its occupants to seek opportunities abroad, show the state’s continuous determination to reduce the Palestinian population and push those who remain into heavily-guarded enclaves, many say.

As the rally by City Hall swelled in numbers, many speakers recounted their own family’s histories of displacement. One, Ayman Nijim, talked about Israel’s refusal to allow him to re-enter the Gaza Strip, which he left to study in the United States in 2014 and where his wife and



children still live. Another, Lamis Deek, spoke of the recent takeover of her childhood home in the West Bank by Israeli occupation forces.

Others memories reached the beginnings of the Nakba, with Abbas Hamideh, the vice chair of Al-Awda: The Palestine Right to Return Coalition, who traveled from Cleveland for the event, speaking of a notorious massacre by Zionist militias that emptied his family’s village west of Jerusalem, Deir Yassin, before Israeli forces occupied it in 1948.

“Nakba Day is a day of remembrance of the Palestinian catastrophe for all Palestinians, especially the refugees wishing to go home,” Hamideh said. “It is also a recommitment to the promise of keeping the struggle alive and a rededication to hold steadfast to the inalienable right of return to our ancestral homeland, Palestine.”

2,000 Palestinian Youth Arrested, 25 Palestinian Children Killed in 3 Months

Twenty-five Palestinian children were killed by Israeli troops in the last three months of 2015, often after Israeli claims the youth were “suspected” of carrying out “stabbing attacks.” The number of youth detained, more than 2,000, many indefinitely and with no charges, is the highest in seven years, the UN’s UNICEF reported.

“Serious concerns arose regarding excessive use of force, particularly in relation to incidents where Palestinian children were shot dead by Israeli security forces,”

It said more than 1,300 Palestinian children were injured by Israeli forces, almost all in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, while three Israeli children were hurt in the West Bank and West Jerusalem.

UNICEF cited the example on October 25 in Hebron in the West Bank of a 17-year-old girl who was “taken by IDF (Israel Defense Forces) soldiers for a search, shot with at least five bullets and killed.”

The report said, “Israeli authorities said that she had attempted to stab a policeman, however an eyewitness stated that she was not presenting any threat at the time she was shot, and was shouting that she did not have a knife.”

Compared with the high toll for the October-December period, UNICEF recorded four Palestinian children killed and 165 injured between July and September.

UNICEF also voiced alarm over the number of Palestinian children aged between 12 and 17 held by the Israeli army, noting the tally stood at 422 at the end of December according to the Israeli prison service, the highest recorded since March 2009. More have been arrested since then. Israeli law allows Palestinian children from the age of 12 to be put on trial.

More than 200 Palestinians have been killed since October as Israel enforces its occupation. Many of those killed did not pose a threat to Israeli troops and were shot during clashes and protests or in alleged stabbing attacks.

Israel Arrested 2,000 Palestinian Minors

A Palestinian human rights group also reported on Israeli detentions of Palestinians. It said Israeli military forces have arrested at least 2,000 Palestinian children under the age of 18 since the third Intifada (uprising) against the Israeli Zionists began last October.

Spokesman for the Palestinian Prisoners’ Center for Studies (PPCS), Riyad al-Ashqar, said the detentions constitute 36 percent of the total 5,500 arrests Israeli forces have made so far. He added that children were mainly detained in the occupied West Bank. Some of those arrested were younger than 10 years old, and were suffering from gunshot wounds sustained at the site of various protests.

The PPCS spokesman stated that the number of arrested Palestinian children and teenagers has hit a record high compared to previous years, noting that Israeli officials view the youngsters as the driving force behind the ongoing Intifada across the occupied lands.

7 • PALESTINIANS MARCH ON NAKBA DAY

“For the Palestinians, the Nakba isn’t just a historical event, but a personal wound in the heart of every refugee and displaced person,” said Mohammed Barakeh, head of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee. “What happened in the Nakba was a crime of slaughter and displacement, and it’s impossible to correct this injustice without ensuring the right of return. [...]”

A moment of silence was held in memory of the Palestinians killed and displaced in 1948, and was followed by the crowd pledging to preserve the Bedouin lands of the Negev. Ayman Odeh, a member of the Knesset and head of the Arab Joint List of deputies told the crowd that this march was particularly important because residents who were displaced from the village of Wadi Zubala in 1948 fled to the unrecognized Bedouin towns of Atir and Umm al-Hiran. Both villages are slated for demolition.

Odeh referred to the pending



demolitions as “the continuing Nakba” and added that “the issue of Nakba is not an issue of the past, but an issue especially important for the future.” He said,

“Recognizing the Nakba, and working on correcting this injustice is the only way to ensure a just peace and achieve real reconciliation between the two peoples.”

Palestinians on Nakba Day 2016 — Defiant, Undeterred and Organizing

Nada Elia, Palestinian organizer

Dima al-Wawi knows what she wants to be when she grows up: “My dream is that when I grow up I can be a lawyer who can defend children who have been oppressed,” the twelve-year old said in an interview shortly after her release from a four-month sentence in an Israeli jail.

Al-Wawi will likely be extremely busy: at any time in the past few years, Israel has held anywhere from 400 to 700 children in its prison cells, where physical and psychological torture are routine, adding injury to the insult of being arrested strictly because one is Palestinian.

Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people seems indeed relentless. The gloves have come off, the masquerade of the peace talks is finally seen by most as a futile waste of time, as Israel bares its unadorned face as an expansionist settler-colonial state. Thus the new deputy foreign minister recently declared “this land is ours. All of it is ours,” while a growing number of Israeli politicians finally acknowledge what Palestinians have been saying for years: it is apartheid.

May 15 is observed annually as “Al Nakba Day,” and groups all around the globe hold actions and events to commemorate the fateful months of 1947-48. We name the villages that were destroyed, erased of the map, to allow for Israel to become a “Jewish homeland” in historic Palestine. We speak of the refugees, still in exile. But Al Nakba is not a memory, it is an ongoing daily reality. Sixty-eight years into our catastrophe, Palestinians in the West Bank are still losing towns, homes, land, olive groves, to the Zionist settlers.

Within Israel, Palestinian villages are still being demolished in the Negev desert. Innocent civilians are being detained, tortured, executed by Israeli soldiers and citizens, with no accountability. The Gaza Strip, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, is still in a stranglehold. And refugees are still languishing in camps throughout the region, many displaced multiple times.

And still we persist, maintaining our right to freedom, dignity, self-determination. Our struggle to Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS), is so effective that Israel is trying desperately to stem it by threatening prominent activists with civilian assassination and/or exile. Yet as BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti asserted, upon being denied a travel permit: “I am unnerved but certainly undeterred by these threats. Nothing will stop me from struggling for my people’s freedom, justice and peace.”

And daily, along with the horrific news of ongoing oppression and dispossession, we get empowering reports of campaign successes, a growing number of allies joining our struggle, more voices speaking out. We know ours is a just cause and that knowledge, that certainty, sustains us. So we continue to resist, to heed the call of Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour, who urges us, from her house arrest, to “resist, my people, resist.”

And from London, England, Salman Abu Sitta reminds us in his recently published book, *Mapping My Return*: “It is the determined will of people that counts. It must of course be accompanied by vigorous planning and action. An iron will does not bend in the face of obstacles or challenges, failures or disappointments. These challenges only sharpen it. Its ultimate reward is to enforce justice, to return home.”

Young and old, in the homeland and the diaspora, we are undeterred, determined, we have not given up, we continue the struggle. We are millions, and our numbers are growing daily. Our persistence has changed the political landscape in the U.S. too. [...]

The shift in attitude towards Israel is significant, because of the political immunity



the U.S. offers Israel, an immunity that is beginning to crumble and fritter away at the grassroots level, where “radical” change begins. Thus the battle has also expanded, from on the ground in Palestine, to the global intifada that is BDS.

Our struggle, our losses, our suffering, are not over. But our successes are also accumulating. Along with the shift in discourse, Palestinian activists, thinkers, organizers are planning for what comes next, for a future when we finally have self-determination, for the welcome responsibility of running our own affairs. Many of the conferences we now organize, as well as the books we are writing, are focused on that vision. [...]

This year, as we commemorate al Nakba yet one more time, as we remind the world that our catastrophe is ongoing, let us also act upon the belief that merely speaking out against injustice is not enough. “Demonstrations” are not enough. BDS is a means to an end: liberation, the abolition of apartheid, the return of the refugees. We are approaching this end, and must look beyond it... and engage in productive discussions about the best ways to forge our new nation, as we map our return to a homeland finally rid of injustice.

Nada Elia is a Palestinian scholar-activist, writer, and grassroots organizer, currently completing a book on Palestinian Diaspora activism. (mondoweiss.net)

Israel Controls More than 85 Percent of the Land of Historical Palestine

WAFA, Palestine, May 15, 2016

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) said that Israel controls more than 85% of the total area of the historical land of Palestine, while Palestinians, who comprise 48% of the total population, utilize less than 15% of the land.

In a report issued by PCBS to mark the Palestinian Nakba Day, the central bureau said, "The Palestinian world population totaled 12.4 million by the end of 2015," which it stressed indicates that the number of Palestinians worldwide has multiplied about nine-fold in the 68 years since the Nakba.

According to statistics, the total number of Palestinians living in historic Palestine (between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean) by the end of 2015 was 6.2 million and this number is expected to rise to 7.1 million by the end of 2020 based on current growth rates, said PCBS.

Statistical data also show that refugees constitute 42.8 percent of the total Palestinian population in Palestine. It said United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) records showed that there were 5.59 million Palestinian refugees registered at the beginning of 2015. "Around 28.7 percent of Palestinian registered refugees live in 58 refugee camps, of which 10 are in Jordan, 9 in Syria, 12 in Lebanon, 19 in the West Bank, and 8 in the Gaza Strip."

PCBS said, "The number of Palestinians who remained in their homeland in the 1948 territory after the Nakba was estimated at 154,000 persons, but estimates for 2015 show that it has grown to 1.5 million on the 68th anniversary of the Nakba." It said the number of Palestinians in Palestine was estimated at 4.8 million at the end of 2015: 2.9 million in the West Bank and 1.9 million in Gaza Strip.

Regarding the Palestinian density, PCBS said, "The population density in Palestine at the end of 2015 was 789 individuals per square kilometer (km²): 513 individuals/km² in the West Bank and 5,070 individuals/km² in Gaza Strip. In Israel, the population density of



Arabs and Jews in 2015 was about 391 individuals/km²."

As for illegal Israeli settlements built on the historical land of Palestine, it said there were 413 illegal Israeli constructions in the West Bank (including 150 settlements and 119 outposts) by the end of 2014. Furthermore, during 2015, the Israeli occupation authorities approved the building of over 4,500 housing units in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank in addition to the units approved in Jerusalem.

Still, these same authorities deny Palestinians the right to build, which undermines any potential urban expansion especially for the Palestinians in Jerusalem and Area "C" which is under full Israeli control, added PCBS. It should be noted that Area "C" represents over 60 percent of the West Bank area.

Israel also erected its Expansion and Annexation Wall, which isolates behind it more than 12% of the West Bank land.

Data indicated that the total number of illegal settlers in the West Bank was 599,901 at the end of 2014, 286,997 of them in the Jerusalem Governorate [what is this?] (they represent 48 percent of all settlers in the occupied West Bank). Moreover, 210,420 of these illegal settlers live in Jerusalem J1 (that part of Jerusalem, which was forcefully annexed by Israel following its occupation of the West Bank in 1967).

In demographic terms, the proportion of settlers to the Palestinian population in the West Bank is around 21 settlers

per 100 Palestinians compared with 69 settlers per 100 Palestinians in Jerusalem Governorate.

Regarding water resources, PCBS stated that Israel controls more than 85 percent of Palestinian water. "Palestine suffers from scarcity of water and resources."

It maintained that the situation is further complicated by the prolonged Israeli occupation, which controls most of the existing water sources (85 percent) and prevents the Palestinians from their right to access their water sources or any alternative sources. Consequently, the Palestinians are compelled to buy water from the Israeli Water Company (Mekorot), purchasing around 63.5 million metric cubed in 2014.

Nakba in literary terms means a natural catastrophe such as an earthquake, volcano, or hurricane. However, the Nakba in Palestine describes a process of ethnic cleansing in which an unarmed nation was decimated and its population displaced to be replaced systematically by another nation, PCBS explained.

"Unlike a natural catastrophe, the Palestinian Nakba was the result of a man-made military plan with the consent of other states, leading to a major tragedy for the Palestinian people. The subsequent occupation of the remaining land of Palestine in 1967 resulted in an additional tragedy."

In 1948, 1.4 million Palestinians lived in 1,300 Palestinian towns and villages all over historical Palestine. More than 800,000 of the population were driven out of their homeland to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, neighboring Arab countries, and other countries of the world.

Thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes but stayed within the Israeli-controlled 1948 territory. According to documentary evidence, the Israelis controlled 774 towns and villages and destroyed 531 Palestinian towns and villages during the Nakba. The atrocities of Zionist forces also included more than 70 massacres in which more than 15,000 Palestinians were killed.

MAY 27-29

Thirty-five Poets for Oscar Poetry Marathon

National Boricua Human Rights Network

Poets from 3 cities will unite in a live stream poetry marathon to free Oscar López Rivera. These poets, from across the country, are joining together to mark the 35th Anniversary of the arrest of Puerto Rican independence activist Oscar López Rivera. The 35 Poets for Oscar Poetry Marathon will take place during three days, in at least three cities, and the event will be live streamed on the National Boricua Human Rights Network website:

- Friday, May 27th at 8:00pm (PST): 5 poets from Los Angeles County reading at Tia Chucha Cultural Center

- Saturday, May 28th at 1:00pm (ET): in New York City, La Marqueta Retoña located at 1607 Park Ave, and E. 115th Street in El Barrio, East Harlem

- Sunday, May 29th at 2:00pm (CT): 35 Poets from Chicago will be reading at Casa de Oscar, 2628 W Division St.

Oscar López Rivera was imprisoned on May 29, 1981 and has spent 35 years in federal prison, 12 of which were in solitary confinement for political activities relating to Puerto Rican independence. In 1999 President Clinton offered clemency to 13 Puerto Rican political prisoners including López Rivera. Oscar rejected this offer of clemency because two other co-defendants were not included in the offer. Since then, all except Oscar have been released. Support has grown for his release. From 10 Nobel Laureates including Desmond Tutu and elected officials from across the political spectrum in Puerto Rico, including the 7 candidates for



governor representing the major political parties. In addition, The Hispanic Congressional Caucus, the four Puerto Rican U.S. Congressmen, as well as several City Councils in the U.S. have sent President Obama letters urging his release. So far over 65,000 petitions calling on Obama to free Oscar have been collected.

I • FREE OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA

federal prisons.

Twelve of his co-defendants were released in 1999 through a presidential pardon from then-President Bill Clinton. And two others were released in 2009 and 2010 respectively through the U.S. Parole Commission.

The only remaining prisoner is Oscar López Rivera. All of his co-defendants have proven to be productive members of their community; there is no reason to think otherwise about Oscar, who enjoys strong support from his family and his community. Also important personalities from Puerto Rico and the world are calling for his freedom.

It is necessary to take into account that Oscar López Rivera has endured the toughest of all possible conditions in prison during the past 35 years of confinement.

Oscar Lopez is a veteran of the Viet Nam war and received the Bronze Star Medal for his heroic act of saving the life of an American during one of the battles in which he participated. After Vietnam Oscar returned to his community in Chicago where he became a respected

activist. Among other important actions, he helped found the Pedro Albizu Campos High School in the Puerto Rican community there and the Juan Antonio Corretjer Cultural Center, which currently, is still in operation providing services to youth and adults residing in the area.

Thousands of people in Puerto Rico of different political spectrums, affiliations and ideologies have supported the commutation of his sentence. Among these political figures, is the former Governor of Puerto Rico Anibal Acevedo Vila, the current Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla, who recently visited him in prison in the penitentiary in Terre Haute, and the current resident Commissioner Pedro Perluisi and Carmen Yulin Cruz, Mayor of San Juan.

Well-known personalities in the fight for Human Rights including the Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina, Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor, Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Ireland and tens of thousands of people have signed letters asking for his release.

For all the reasons expressed above and

representing the feelings of thousands of intellectuals, artists, and social organizations, the Secretariat of the Network in Defense of Humanity asks President Obama to make use of the powers conferred to him by the Constitution of the United States and commute the sentence of the Puerto Rican Patriot Oscar López Rivera so he can return to his home and his family in Puerto Rico.

Executive Secretariat

Carmen Bohórquez, General Coordinator Alicia Jrapko (Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity REDH, for its Spanish acronym, U.S.); Ángel Guerra (REDH-Cuba/México); Nayar López Castellanos (REDH-México); Ariana López (REDH-Cuba); Omar González (REDH-Cuba); David Comissiong (REDH-Caribbean); Atilio Boron (REDH-Argentina); Juan Manuel Karg (REDH-Argentina); Marilia Guimaraes (REDH-Brazil); Fredy Nández (REDH-Venezuela); Roger Landa (REDH-Venezuela); Hugo Moldiz (REDH-Bolivia); Katu Arkonada (REDH-Basque Country); Luciano Vasapollo (REDH-Italy)

Unanimous Support for Liberation of Oscar López Rivera

José A. Delgado, El Nuevo Día

In unanimity, three dozen Puerto Rican elected officials in the United States agreed to ask for a meeting with President Barack Obama to demand the liberation of Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera.

“(Clarisa) your father will be in your arms this year. He will walk the streets of San Sebastián and Chicago this year,” said Democratic congressman Luis Gutiérrez (Illinois) to López Rivera’s daughter before dozens of Puerto Rican leaders at a meeting in Federal Hall, near Wall Street.

Led by Puerto Rican congressional representatives Gutiérrez, José Serrano (New York) and Nydia Velázquez (New York), and the speaker of the New York City Council, Melissa Mark Viverito, some 30 elected officials had their first meeting after last October’s creation of the Caucus of Puerto Rican Elected Officials in the United States.

The session took place parallel to the activities of a summit in New York convened by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at the Hunter College School of Social Work and Health, located on the other side of the city in the old Puerto Rican neighborhood in Harlem.

At the meeting at Federal Hall, in the heart of Wall Street and where George Washington became president of the U.S. in 1789, state legislators and city council members from New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Illinois

and other states attended.

The group included, among others, state legislators Marco Crespo, Gustavo Rivera and José Serrano, Jr. (New York), Victor Torres (Florida), Minnie González (Connecticut) and Angel Cruz (Pennsylvania).

Independently, the National Puerto Rican Agenda — comprised of elected officials as well as some fifty organizations from the diaspora — also agreed to support the call for the release of López Rivera.

On May 29, the 73 years old López Rivera will mark the 35th anniversary of his arrest and imprisonment in U.S. prisons, having been convicted in 1981 of sedition and other charges due to his membership

in the clandestine independentista group the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN).

Bearing in mind that his punishment has been disproportionate, the leadership of all the political parties in Puerto Rico, governor Alejandro García Padilla, the Puerto Rican legislature, and religious, civic and union leaders have supported the request that president Obama grant him clemency.

As part of the agreements, a Freedom Concert will take place in Washington, as well as a mobilization to support López Rivera, in Lafayette Park across from the White House, at some point during the month of September.



Visit our website: usmlo.org

Empire of Lies: How the U.S. Continues to Deceive the World About Puerto Rico

Nelson A. Denis

(Note: On May 19, members of the House of Representatives announced an agreement concerning Puerto Rico. No bill has been passed as of May 20. Puerto Rico is rightly refusing to pay the debt to mainly Wall Street hedge funds, and did not pay an estimated \$422 due May 1, saying the funds would be used in Puerto Rico for social services. Actions in Puerto Rico continue to demand that the debt be canceled and U.S. colonialism ended.)

* * *

“There are three kinds of lies,” said Mark Twain. “Lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Unfortunately for Puerto Rico, this is not an aphorism; it is an operating principle.

Separated by an ocean and a language from the mainland, Puerto Ricans have watched the U.S. government lie brazenly and repeatedly — to the American people and the world at large — about its actions and interests in the Caribbean.

Efforts to Lower the Minimum Wage

On April 12, 2016, the House Committee on Natural Resources released HR 4900: the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, with the acronym of PROMESA. The bill creates a Financial Control Board, which will act as a collection agency for the hedge funds/vulture funds throughout the island. (The bill has not yet been passed and is widely opposed by people in Puerto Rico and the U.S. — BF Ed. Note)

Taking their cue from *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, the *Krueger Report* and a study commissioned by 34 hedge funds, the committee decided that a “good” way to spark the Puerto Rican economy and improve the lives of its residents would be to lower their minimum wage ... so they stuck that in the bill, as well.

This appears in Section 403 of PROMESA (p. 75-6) with intentionally convoluted language. The section title, “First Minimum Wage in Puerto Rico,” suggests that Congress is creating a minimum wage on the island. It then requires you to read Section (6)(g)(4) of the *Fair Labor Standards Act*.

Only then do you realize that PROMESA will cut the minimum wage of newly hired young workers throughout the island, from \$7.25 to \$4.25 per hour. This will apply to everyone aged 20 to 24, whenever they start a new job. In Puerto Rico, there are over 200,000 people in this age bracket.

At \$4.25 per hour, \$170 per week, \$8,840 per year, a young worker will make 25 percent of the per capita income of a resident of Mississippi, the poorest state in the U.S. Someone needs to explain to the House Committee on Natural Resources that this is not “economic development.” It is indentured servitude that smells of racism.

Standing for Ethics and Integrity — While Accepting “Gifts”

Another brazen contradiction, which reeks of dishonesty, is the PROMESA policy toward “gifts” for the Financial Control Board.

On the one hand, the Control Board will conduct island-wide audits, subpoena witnesses, impose fines and imprison anyone who obstructs its mission of fiscal accountability and honest government.

On the other hand, the Control Board will be authorized to accept and use “gifts, bequests, or devises of services or property, both real and personal.”

It is not clear why the Board needs to receive “gifts,” or how these gifts enhance their standing as an “honest and ethical” ruler of the Puerto Rican economy. What is clear is that this open invitation to bribery, influence peddling and money laundering appears on page 21 of the PROMESA bill.

Dark Money Ads

The Orwellian deceptions are not limited to a “helpful” minimum wage cut, or “gifts” for a Control Board. As recently as May 17, a multimillion-dollar ad campaign funded by “dark money” sources (i.e. anonymous and undisclosed) is willfully deceiving the entire American public.

Throughout April and May of 2016, a group called the “Center for Individual

Freedom” (CFIF) purchased hundreds of TV ads in media markets all over the U.S. to convince legislators to deny any Chapter 9 bankruptcy relief to Puerto Rico. The ads aired on Fox, NBC, ABC and CBS affiliates nationwide. They ran on local news programs and on the April 10 episode of “Meet the Press.”

These commercials are part of a larger propaganda machinery. According to *The New York Times*, “a coalition of hedge funds and financial firms has hired dozens of lobbyists, forged alliances with Tea Party activists, and recruited so-called AstroTurf groups on the island to make their case. This approach has proven successful overseas, in countries like Argentina and Greece, yielding billions in profit amid economic collapse.” [...]

The commercials are lying. They all urge a block of the “Washington bailout of Puerto Rico” and suggest that U.S. taxpayers will be forced to pay for it. But bankruptcy restructurings are not bailouts, and vulture funds are not taxpayers.

When CFIF was pressed for a clarification of its ads, they admitted that Chapter 9 bankruptcy is not a government-funded bailout, and would not be paid for by the U.S. taxpayer. Obviously, CFIF is not a bastion of truth. It is a hired gun.

As they say on TV, “but wait, there’s more!” The lies are not limited to the U.S. Congress and “dark money” organizations. Some of the most lethal whoppers were hatched on Wall Street. Cynically and systematically, the entire Puerto Rican economy was set up to fail by the ratings agencies, with a junk bond rating scam.

Junk Bond Ratings

In 2010, the Big Three rating services (Fitch, Moody’s, Standard & Poor’s) all warned Puerto Rico to “get your act in order.” If this “order” was not established, the services would slap Puerto Rico with the lowest possible credit rating: junk bond status.

In 2010, the government of Puerto Rico dutifully laid off 30,000 workers. In 2013,

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it hiked the water rates by 60 percent. Also in 2013, islanders paid double the average electricity costs of the rest of the U.S., at 29 cents per kilowatt. The government also raised the retirement age, increased worker contributions and lowered government pensions and benefits.

Despite all these fiscal austerities, the three rating services kicked the island's credit rating into the gutter, downgrading Puerto Rico's debt to junk bond status and cut the island off from any further credit. These are the same rating services that were sued by federal and state governments and pension funds nationwide for their complicity in the subprime mortgage crisis.

A History of Lies

For over a century, the abuses heaped on the island's residents are simply not reported in the U.S. mainstream media. This happens so brazenly and frequently that, for many Puerto Ricans, the U.S. is seen as an empire of lies. This mendacity is deeply rooted in the history of U.S. colonial relations with Puerto Rico. Here are just a few historical examples:

1) Blessings of Enlightened Civilization

On July 29, 1898, General Nelson A. Miles delivered the first official U.S. proclamation to Puerto Rico. As his men hoisted Old Glory over the Ponce town hall, Miles declared, "We come to bring you protection, not only to yourselves but to your property, to promote your prosperity, to bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government ... and the blessings and advantages of enlightened civilization."

But just two years later, in 1900, the U.S. devalued the island's currency by 40 percent. Then, in 1901, Puerto Rico was prohibited from negotiating commercial agreements with any other nation, and prohibited from determining its own tariffs. By 1930, U.S. banking syndicates owned more than half of the island's farmland. They also owned the postal system, electric utilities, coastal railroads and the San Juan International Seaport.

2) U.S. Citizenship

On March 2, 1917, the *Jones-Shafroth*

Act conferred U.S. citizenship on every resident of Puerto Rico. One month later, 18,000 Puerto Ricans were drafted and sent to fight in World War I. But 57 years later, after spilling their blood in five wars, Puerto Ricans were still being denied the federal minimum wage ... for working on the very land that they had once owned.

3) The Ponce Massacre

On March 21, 1937, on Palm Sunday, Puerto Ricans marched peacefully and with a permit to protest the land and employment abuses of the United States. Under the orders of then-Gov. Blanton Winship, the police shot at them with machine guns. Seventeen unarmed men, women and children were murdered and more than 200 were sent to the hospital. For weeks, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and others in the mainstream U.S. press kept reporting this as a "Puerto Rican riot," and insisted it had been a "gunfight with Nationalists."

4) The Gag Law of 1948

Under intense U.S. pressure, in June 1948, *Public Law 53* was passed in Puerto Rico, which made it a felony to say one word, sing a song, whistle a tune or communicate anything against the U.S. or in favor of Puerto Rican independence. Ownership of a Puerto Rican flag was also a Law 53 violation.

The U.S. called this an effort to "fight communism" in Puerto Rico, but it was actually a gag law to silence Pedro Albizu Campos (the independence leader who had just been released from prison), and to discourage anyone from joining the Nationalist Party. Law 53 violations were punishable by 10 years in jail.

Ironically, this gag law was passed in the same year that George Orwell completed his novel 1984.

5) Commonwealth Status

In 1952, the U.S. informed the UN Committee on Decolonization that Puerto Rico had freely chosen to associate itself as a "commonwealth" of the United States. This meant that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony and should be taken off the UN



list of non-self governing territories (i.e. colonies).

Years later, the draftsman of the commonwealth filing documents and the "constitution" of Puerto Rico, José Trías Monge, the chief justice of the Puerto Rico Supreme Court, repudiated this commonwealth as a diplomatic ruse.

Monge explained that the U.S. could not wage a 1950s Cold War against the Soviet Union and be the "leader of the free world" while maintaining the oldest colony on the planet — and so the U.S. invented this "commonwealth" status. Monge's book was appropriately titled *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World*. [...]

Countering the Lies

The entire 118-year colonial history of the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship is riddled with deception, but the lies have become unsustainable, and Puerto Rico is at a breaking point. The sales tax is 11.5 percent. Electricity rates are 300 percent higher than in New York City. In 2013, the water rates rose by 60 percent. Thanks to the *Jones Act*, the cost of living is 12 percent higher than in the United States, yet the per capita income is hovering at \$15,200. No tortured logic, no trickle-down theorist or hedge fund hustler can credibly argue that a minimum wage reduction to \$4.25 will help the island — especially when the rest of the U.S. is pushing for \$15 per hour in all 50 states.

This is not public policy. It is thievery in broad daylight. (truthout.org)

I • NEW SCHOOL BOARD

organizing that has been developed against Common Core testing and receivership. It also means continuing to focus on these issues, along with developing our own alternatives, to testing and for curriculum. Leaving things to chance and hoping for a positive result because new people were elected is not an option.

There are several key issues to focus on to advance our own independent program and thus enable the new people, and the board majority, to play a positive role.

Demand Increased Funding

The budget for the schools is currently being discussed. It is already clear that it is not sufficient. For example, while the board has been saying it is committed to having kindergarten classes of no more than 18 children, the budget currently calls for 20 children in receivership schools and 25 in non-receivership schools. Since it is known that the labeling of the schools, based mainly on state testing scores, is not reliable or valid, this division for class size also is not valid. Eighteen is what is needed but the state, which provides about 80 percent of school funding, has not provided enough. The lack of funding is also evident in the lack of librarians in various schools, the lack of sufficient teachers, including for physical education, the need for more aides and bus aides, and more.

The new contract needed to improve the working conditions of teachers, which are the learning conditions of children, also requires increased funding. The contract is needed now and should be settled for the coming school year. This will provide less chaos and uncertainty for all concerned.

The school board should vigorously join parents, teachers and students in demanding more funding now, from the state and the city, so as to meet the needs of students and teachers alike.

Keep West Hertel and Futures in Public Hands

Two schools, West Hertel and Futures Elementary Schools, remain on the “persistently struggling” receivership list. This means their one-year timeframe for improvement will be up as of July 1. While

it is possible that Education Commissioner Elia could remove them from the list, it is more likely that she will keep them in receivership. If so, at her next required reporting time in July, the Commissioner could decide to hand these public schools, including the school buildings, to an independent receiver. She is to compile a list of “approved” independent receivers, who can be an individual, a non-profit, or another school district. The decision is entirely up to the Commissioner alone, and the independent receiver is under contract to her. The school board can choose the receiver, pending Elia’s approval. After that, the school board has no role to play.

She could also designate them as charter schools and arrange for a private charter company to take them over, perhaps beginning in the 2017-18 school year.

These schools are Buffalo public schools and belong to the public and should be controlled by the public, not an appointed individual in Albany. The branding of these students, and schools, as failing is not valid, as it is based on what New York State itself says are invalid tests. Many parents and students rightly rejected the testing regime this past April, refusing the tests as an expression of their right to decide.

Now the issue is the public’s right to decide and control the public schools. Every effort must be made to block any effort by Elia to hand our public schools over to private interests, whether for profit or non-profit entities. This means:

1) organizing with parents, teachers and students in these schools and district-wide to *Refuse Receivership* and *Defend Our Right to Decide*, with building meetings, rallies, and house meetings, including over the summer. Elia will likely take action during the summer break and this cannot go unchallenged.

2) demanding now at school board meetings that information be provided about plans for these schools. This has already been done at the last two board meetings and no information has been provided to date. More efforts to insist on public information are needed, including calling on the newly elected board mem-

bers, and the majority to demand and secure such information.

3) calling on the school board members to use their authority to themselves organize meetings with parents, teachers and students at the two schools to inform and discuss what is needed to block receivership and improve the quality of the schools.

4) demanding the board take action to assert its authority over Buffalo public schools by opposing receivership and defending Futures and West Hertel, through legal action and otherwise

Demand Smaller Classes and Music for All

More generally, we encourage school board members to organize such meetings at every school to help inform and activate all in the fight for the equal right to education. Absent that, teachers and parents should continue to take initiative themselves, using house meetings and summer socials, to discuss immediate demands, like smaller classes and music for all and the funding necessary for this, along with a waiver from state testing. This requires working out an alternative means for assessing students, such as portfolio and project based assessments.

Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide

Most importantly, continuing independent efforts to advance the fight for the equal right to education by demanding our right to decide is critical. This includes continuing meetings of those who have been doing this organizing and strengthening outreach and involvement of parents. This requires more efforts to provide information and analysis, using the various community newspapers, summer events and gatherings of various kinds.

An independent program is a pro-active one, that does not wait to respond but rather acts based on analysis of what is needed to move forward. In the current situation, the pressure is to leave things in the hands of the newly elected board. Instead, initiative must remain in our hands, based on our program, to defend our rights. *Who Decides? We Decide!*

Develop Alternatives for Assessments and Curriculum

Many Buffalo parents and teachers, like those at schools 43, 45 and 53, refused the Common Core state tests in April as harmful to their children and to education. Two public forums providing information, stands and a space for discussion, broad leafleting providing facts about the harmful character of the testing and how to refuse, along with many individual and group discussions involved many more parents and students in this resistance. This is an important accomplishment of Buffalo organizers. Further strengthening this resistance demands not only broadening refusal, but developing alternatives to the Common Core testing and curriculum.

The Common Core curriculum is harmful, as it further narrows education and deadens teaching. Perhaps more importantly, like the testing, it is designed to produce non-thinking students who do as they are told. It is not designed to arm and inspire students to address the social problems of the day and work together to solve them. It is not designed to provide enlightenment and encourage learning together and social responsibility.

On the contrary, the aim of the Common Core regime is to repeatedly force teachers and students alike to engage in what they know to be harmful, irrational activity — to become non-thinking drones, not thinking human beings. This is done in various ways, including the scripted modules and timetables that block creativity, investigation and discussion. It is done through “close reading,” which takes things out of context while eliminating reading for purposes of becoming informed and knowledgeable. For many students it renders it as something to be avoided as much as possible.

In rejecting the Common Core testing and curriculum regime, it becomes necessary to think about alternatives. To do so it is important to collectively engage students, teachers and parents. Commonly, in district efforts, the voice of students is left out, and the voice of teachers and parents minimized, in favor



of outside “consultants,” and “experts.” This approach renders those directly involved in the work of education — the students, parents and teachers — passive, as bystanders to something that by right belongs to them to collectively decide.

To counter this pressure, including submitting to whatever the district has in mind, where these officials decide, it is important to develop discussion on the changes needed, including the aim and qualities of the curriculum, and education more broadly. It needs to be organized for enlightenment, to open a path to progress, which requires thinking human beings. Discussion on these issues are needed.

In addition, and as part of such discussion, issues to consider are demanding a waiver from the testing and developing alternative means of assessing students, something that would be welcomed by all. The general orientation that currently exists, where tests tend to measure how well a student can repeat back what they have been told or read, rather than, for example, how well they can apply what is being learned to actual problems, is something to be examined. Similarly, the use of collective efforts, direct involvement in social movements and addressing community needs, are also to be considered.

A current effort by students at Buffalo State also provides potential material for

curriculum. The students are demanding a new cross-discipline major, for undergraduates and graduates, titled: *Inequality and Political and Social Emancipation*. Their petition reads:

“Buffalo State has a diverse student population, with an estimated 26% African Americans, 12% Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans and students from countries of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Caribbean and the Americas. All are confronted by various forms of political and social inequality and concerned about the problem of how to emancipate humanity from the current problems it faces. What is the history of and wisdom gained from the quest for political and human emancipation? What ideological, philosophical, political and economic questions

have been solved, and what questions remain? Scientific inquiry into existing and previous movements for emancipation is needed. Research projects that take up the problem of emancipation from the present informed by the wisdom of the past to which many cultures and peoples have made contributions are needed. Study and investigation of social movements, present and past are needed — to understand them it is important to find out about them directly. We are demanding a broad, inclusive, cross-discipline major to address these problems.”

The students are also demanding that students and faculty work together to decide course content and character for the new major. They are calling for public forums to discuss and debate development of the new major and that programs be organized to involve all concerned.

Development of a model course for this content, for high school or university, is one possible project. Investigating existing alternatives used by Consortium High Schools in New York City and Rochester is another. Developing a portfolio and collective project based method can also be done. By taking initiative and tackling such problems, positive steps can be taken to develop content that serves, and helps develop, thinking human beings.