

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

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ELECTIONS 2018

Call on Candidates to Support an Anti-War Government and Peace Economy

Primaries for the 2018 elections are already underway in many states and more will be taking place in the coming months. The existing set-up does not give people a role either in selecting candidates to run, or in determining their platform. Both are left to the candidates, who are

mainly chosen by very wealthy backers representing various economic interests, like the military, energy, financiers, and so forth.

Buffalo Forum considers that this approach is backward and undemocratic.

Anti-War Government • 3

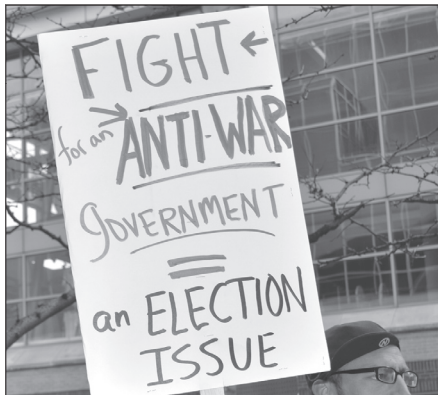
WE NEED A PEACE ECONOMY

Oppose Military Contractor in Buffalo

On April 26 Governor Cuomo announced that military contractor Research and Engineering Development, or RED-INC. will open a new facility in Buffalo. His statement said, "Since 1998, RED-INC has provided expert research, engineering and development services for military weapons systems and warfighter solutions in the fields of conventional and irregular warfare. The new division, known as Team 2, develops new and emerging technologies that include Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and other solutions," for military purposes. People in Buffalo are supposed to support this war company as it provides a few jobs (40 is the number given, not what actually exists yet). RED-INC is also taking advantage of the free training and educational development provided by University at Buffalo. Most of their employees are graduates of UB.

The statement also makes clear that RED-INC is a main contractor for the Navy, that it develops technology for

Oppose Military Contractor • 3



70TH ANNIVERSARY OF AL NAKBA

Great March of Return Affirms Palestinian Rights and Defies U.S./Israeli Massacres

The Palestinian's Great March of Return began on Land Day (March 30) and was to culminate on May 15, the 70th anniversary of Al Nakba (the catastrophe) — May 15, 1948, when close to one million Palestinians were driven from their lands with the founding of the Zionist State of Israel. The March has called for the return of the Gaza Strip's 1.3 million refugees to their

original villages. It affirms the right of return for all Palestinians refugees and their descendents. People remain encamped not far from the boundary of Gaza, where spirits are high and several generations of Palestinians regularly converge to express the profound demand that their lands and homes must be returned to them.

Great March of Return • 10

MAY DAY NATIONAL STRIKE

Puerto Ricans Defy Police, Defend Rights and Demand Independence

Puerto Ricans from all walks of life and from across the island and Vieques united on May Day for a national strike, closing businesses, small stores, schools and factories on May 1. They demanded that all debt be canceled, an end to the brutal austerity measures of the U.S.-imposed unelected Control Board, and Puerto Rico's right to be free of U.S. colonialism. Organizing various feeder marches and bringing together numerous unions,

large numbers of students, women's and other rights organizations, thousands converged on the financial center, known as the Golden Mile. Workers and families island-wide who could not attend the demonstrations followed the guidelines of the convening organizations for May Day: Do not go to work or to school; do not buy anything; do not make any bank transactions.

Puerto Ricans Defend Rights • 4

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New York State Funds Drone Corridor

On May 1, Governor Cuomo today announced that “The state-supported Northeast UAS Air-space Integration Research Alliance has selected key partners in the development of New York’s unmanned aircraft system traffic management (UTM) corridor in Central New York. The corridor, which runs from Central New York to the Mohawk Valley, is the first of its kind, and most advanced drone testing corridor in the nation. Gryphon Sensors, a world leader in intelligent drone detection, and Raytheon, a technology and innovation leader specializing in defense, civil government and cybersecurity solutions, have both received awards to complete the UTM corridor. The overall project will consist of the system planning, design, implementation, commissioning, and operational support of a state-of-the-art UTM research, development, test and evaluation infrastructure.” Cuomo praised the corridor, which will mainly serve drone warfare and drone spying and police use inside the country, as “strengthening the economy.” He boasted that the “multi-million dollar corridor creates unparalleled drone testing capability.”

Raytheon is one of the largest military monopolies, with sales of \$24 billion in 2016 alone. It is yearly provided with guaranteed Pentagon contracts — meaning guaranteed payments of public dollars for war. It also is a weapons manufacturer and involved in sales of weapons of war abroad. Now Raytheon and Gryphon Sensors are getting public dollars at the state level to do their war-making research. No doubt New York’s universities will also contribute free researchers, development and trained engineers.

The drone corridor is a multi-million dollar project with significant funding by New York State. Its development is part of “Central NY Rising,” which provides state funding to the monopolies to conduct their robbery in New York. The State has already invested more than \$4.7 billion in the region since 2012. This includes \$500 million through the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, announced by Governor Cuomo in December 2015. Another \$30 million in state public funds were provided in 2016 specifically for development of the 50-mile flight traffic management system between Syracuse and Griffiss International Airport in Rome. While there are potential commercial uses for the drone corridor, Raytheon’s



participation indicates it will largely be used to further develop the military’s drone warfare and use of drones for “public safety” — meaning spying on and disrupting protest, strikes and similar organizing.

New York is already home to two military bases that fly drones, one near Syracuse. Certainly it is no accident the drone corridor is in this same vicinity. Niagara Air Force base near Buffalo also is involved in drone warfare. Drones are illegal weapons of war, as they are used to carry out aggression against many countries in the Middle East and Africa that have not attacked the U.S. and pose no threat, like Yemen. Indeed the Niagara base is currently also being used for re-fueling missions for U.S.-supplied Saudi-planes that are bombing Yemen and committing massacres and other war crimes against the people there.

New York needs to provide public funds for the public, not the military. A War economy does not serve the interests of the people here or abroad. It serves to fund and foment war while robbing the economy of needed investments in peace, such as social programs like education and health care, and jobs programs that are not war related. Human beings by nature do not want to kill and main other human beings and destroy the hospitals and schools of the peoples worldwide, as drone warfare does. A peace economy is needed to advance the interests of the people and an anti-war government is needed to take the economy in that direction.

I • ANTI-WAR GOVERNMENT

For a modern democracy, the people themselves need to play the decisive role at all stages, not just as voting cattle at the end, whether in primaries or the general election. A new electoral set up is required that puts the people at the center. This includes the right to select and elect candidates of their own choosing, as well as to be elected by their peers. It also includes setting the agenda, deciding what issues are decisive and what solutions needed. Then the candidates that can best represent that agenda can be chosen.

Why should the voice of students, for example, be silenced when it comes to selecting candidates and demanding they represent their solutions on issues like education and gun violence? These solutions include *Counselors Not Cops*, *Arm Teachers with Resources, Not Guns*, and *Demilitarize the Police for Peace in Our Streets*. Why should teachers be marginalized when it comes to choosing candidates that will defend the equal right to education and remain true to the aim of education to change the world? Collectives like students and teachers need to be organized at the schools and universities to identify candidates from among their peers and provide them with the platform that serves the interests of the people.

Additionally, elections need to be



run so people can vote on an informed basis. This requires public funding of the process, not the candidates. It requires a process that puts all candidates on an equal footing when it comes to advertising and debates. Outlawing negative campaigning and character assassination are an integral part of this. Regular and repeated arenas for serious political discussion at schools and universities, for example, are needed. Information about the issues and solutions are required so that the agenda can be identified and argued out.

Mobilizing the polity to be political and defend its interests is what elections need to be about.

Steps can be taken in this direction, independent of the existing electoral set up. This includes organizing meetings among

students and teachers where candidates can hear from them and respond to their demands — not the other way around. It means collective discussions at the workplace and in public settings where people can argue out the platform for 2018. That is, the election season is not mainly about picking and choosing from among the existing candidates, most representing the rich, but organizing in a new direction for a new electoral set up of our own making.

From an overall perspective, *Buffalo Forum* is advancing an aim for all candidates to endorse, which serves to unify the public and bring to the fore the necessity

to stand against war as an issue impacting all areas of life. We endorse the aim of an anti-war government and peace economy. Every candidate should be called on to support such an aim and contribute to elaborating what it concretely means. In New York for example, it means eliminating drone warfare and support for bombing Yemen, as is occurring at bases near Syracuse and Buffalo. It includes calling for a solar farm to replace the Niagara air base, so as to contribute to a peace economy. Candidates need to call to *Ground the Drones! No Public Dollars for War or the War Economy! No Support for Bombing Yemen! Public Dollars for a Peace Economy! Let all unite for an Anti-War Government!*

I • OPPOSE MILITARY CONTRACTOR

war and its employees, some of the former military, will be engaged in supporting war. It explains, “RED-INC has established its office and high-tech lab space in the Larkin Commerce Building at 701 Seneca St. in Buffalo. RED-INC has positioned itself as a valuable resource for Department of Defense customers and commercial companies alike. The new employees will be experts in areas such as product development; physics; numerous engineering disciplines to include computer, software, mechanical and aeronautical; and will be former military

operators with specific and relevant mission experience. They are presently working on tools and systems to support the United States Navy’s MQ-8C “Fire Scout”, which is a combat proven, autonomous helicopter system that provides real-time Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Target-acquisition (ISR&T), laser designation, and battle management to tactical users without relying on manned aircraft or space-based assets.”

Governor Cuomo also promised to continue to attract high-tech companies like

RED-INC, meaning potentially more military contractors will be coming to Buffalo. The city does not need military contractors or to provide trained graduates for military research and war purposes. Buffalo, and the state, require a peace economy. Far more jobs can be made available through development of renewable energy, like solar, and the research needed to enhance renewable energy, food and water resources, etc. And also such development needs to be in the hands of the people themselves, not the military, not the monopolies.

Google Employees Resign Over Artificial Intelligence Contract With Department of Defense

s.e. smith, Care2, May 17, 2018

Google is famous as a fun-loving, free-wheeling workplace, and outsiders might struggle to see why anyone would want to give up all the perks of having a job there. One group of employees has a very good reason, though: After calling on the company to drop a Department of Defense contract and getting no response, they are choosing to resign in protest.

Their laudable decision brings up a larger crisis of conscience for the largely unregulated, “disruptive” Silicon Valley.

The story began earlier this year when more than 4,000 Google employees — including some senior engineers — signed a letter demanding that the company terminate a Pentagon contract they feared would be used for military applications. The project involved the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze video images — technology that could potentially be used to guide drone strikes and increase their accuracy.

Employees maintained that Google should take a hardline stance on not contributing to the development of technologies that could be used as weapons

of war, arguing that it goes against the company’s values. With Google’s internal strife in the news a lot lately, fears about what kinds of values the company wants to espouse are well founded.

They also note that Google is experiencing some negative public relations surrounding issues of artificial intelligence and user data, which could even make it more challenging to recruit talented employees. The company’s “moral responsibility” in this situation, employees said, was clear — even though other tech companies also work with the military.

The employee letter highlights a growing tension for Silicon Valley companies and the larger tech industry. Government contracts — especially with the military — can be extremely profitable, and at times provide access to technologies that are not otherwise available. Collaborating with the government can boost revenues and give engineers a chance to work on cutting-edge, innovative projects, developing tools that will eventually make their way into civilian life.

But these contracts also involve pro-

ducing tools that can be used to kill other human beings in military actions, or to engage in human rights violations, like harassing people attempting to cross the U.S. border.

AI experts warn that there are serious risks to being involved in the production of such technology, and that tech companies like Google should think carefully before committing their resources to this kind of work.

With no clear moral compass, some companies are opting to dismiss these concerns. Others, like Google, are trying to have it both ways — accepting the contract and maintaining that they are not responsible for the ultimate use of the technology.

But employees who signed the petition did not feel this goes far enough — and for some, the issue was worth quitting over. Google staff members who spoke to Gizmodo noted that the company has a long history of encouraging employees to speak up, and that after feeling unheard, they concluded that resigning was the most appropriate choice.

I • PUERTO RICANS DEFEND RIGHTS

Marchers demanded that their public dollars be utilized for hurricane recovery, with many still without drinking water and electricity more than nine months after Hurricane María hit. Puerto Ricans are demanding that they decide how to rebuild the energy grid, basing it on renewable energy like solar. They are demanding that the tens of billions demanded in debt payments instead be used for hurricane relief efforts controlled by and for Puerto Ricans. Those calling to cancel the debt bring out that Puerto Rico has \$37.8 billion in outstanding capital appreciation bonds (CABs), imposed by Wall Street. This accounts for a very large share of its total outstanding debt. The underlying principal on these CABs is just \$4.3 billion. The remaining \$33.5 billion is interest — an effective interest rate of 785%. Given the colonial status of Puerto Rico, where the U.S. has long robbed the

country of her resources, disrupted her economy and committed genocide, such as sterilization of women — the debt has been paid many times over and what is owed are U.S. reparations!

To express their rejection of the Control Board, demonstrators organized to march past their offices in the Golden Mile, but were brutally blocked by police in full riot gear. Police violently attacked the demonstrators, using tear gas, pepper spray and other means. Protesters resisted and defied the police, confronting the lines of police with lines of their own. Youth especially resisted and contended with a police witch hunt afterwards, where students were arrested in their homes. Large numbers of teachers also took part in the actions.



Additional demonstrations took place in the days following May Day, showing the undaunted determination of Puerto Ricans to defend their rights. United together they continue to demand: *Cancel the Debt! Eliminate the Control Board! Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans.*

Puerto Ricans Have the Right to Defend Themselves and to Independence

Zoe PC, *The Dawn News*, May 8, 2018

Today, the people of Puerto Rico face a difficult situation generated by U.S. colonial rule, imperialism and climate change. In September, Hurricane Maria, a category 4 storm, ravaged the Island leaving millions without access to water and electricity and destroying key infrastructure. This coupled with the existing debt problem and harsh U.S.-imposed austerity measures have plunged the Island into a precarious state. However, as they have done throughout history, the Boricua people of Puerto Rico continue their resistance and their struggle for dignity and freedom. The *Dawn News* spoke to Jocelyn Velazquez Rodriguez, spokesperson of Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas (Promises Are Over Collective) about the current situation in Puerto Rico and the efforts of her organization to struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

What is Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas?

Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas emerged in 2016 when the PROMESA Law (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act) was passed in Puerto Rico. PROMESA, which means promise in Spanish, is a law from the U.S. Congress, where Congress authorizes the creation of a Fiscal Control Board (FCB) imposed by the U.S. government but paid for with funds of the Puerto Rican people. The board is not elected by the people so when PROMESA was passed, and the FCB was set up, various sectors of the people, pro-independence and socialist comrades from many decades of resistance on the Island all came together to begin to design a strategy against the FCB and in favor of the independence of Puerto Rico. We called this initiative Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas (Promises Are Over).

Its function in the beginning was to stop a conference called for by the wealthiest sectors, the Chamber of Commerce, wherein they wanted to celebrate the naming of the



members of the FCB. We decided to stop this activity from happening and we were successful, and as of this date, Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas has been a focal point of resistance and struggle against the FCB that brings together different people and different organizations across the Island.

What was the call for the May Day March?

Last week, on May 1, Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas called on the country to mobilize towards the Milla de Oro – the Golden Mile. In Puerto Rico, the golden mile represents the zone where the headquarters of the principal banks of the country are located, as well as those of the insurance agencies. Basically, capital itself is represented in this area of the golden mile.

We wanted to go there for various reasons. The first demand was the repeal of PROMESA and the dissolution of the FCB. The call was also to recognize the imminent necessity of beginning a process towards independence and decolonization of Puerto Rico so that we can have the necessary tools to be able to solve the grave economic problems that the country has. We were

also protesting the closure of 188 schools, the cuts to the pensions, and demanding to restore all the labor legislation that has been repealed.

We wanted to take over the space of the Golden Mile because it is there where the sectors of capital, the investors, and the banks that brought the country to its bankruptcy and collapse are located. So we thought it was emblematic to take these streets, also because the headquarters of the FCB is there.

What was the response of the state to the mass actions this day?

The mobilizations on May 1 were extremely successful, 6 marches were organized from 6 different points and the idea was that they would culminate together in the Golden Mile around a stage.

As soon as we began the mobilization, the government began an absurd deployment of the repressive forces of the state. Almost all the protests in their trajectories had different levels of police aggression towards them, because the police would not let all of us take the routes that we had established for the marches. Once we were near the Golden Mile and the stage, the

Promises Are Over Interview • 6

5 • PROMISES ARE OVER INTERVIEW

Jornada Se Acabaron las Promesas march was stopped by the police, and we entered a negotiation process that took around 2.5 hours. At times, it seemed like they would allow us to advance and continue and actually they did let us advance, but after the 2.5-hour negotiation process, they blocked our path again and decided to end the dialogue and attack the protesters.

They not only used tactics [like massive tear gas] to disperse the mobilization but after achieving this, a witch hunt began on the streets of San Juan. The police entered the University City and began to enter the houses of the students and take them out of their houses. They began to use tear gas in a community where there are children and old people. They literally bombed the streets with tear gas, and of the around 20 people who were arrested, many were released without charges because there was no justification for their arrest. Many of those arrested were brutally beaten up. They were hospitalized, and there are still people in the hospital as a consequence of the tear gas.

The response of our incompetent government to a brutal crisis is repression and intimidation to impede the exercise of our right to demand an audit of the debt, to demand that the austerity measures are stopped and to demand that we have rights to a decolonization process so that Puerto Ricans can take the decisions about what happens in our land.

What are the principle problems that the Island faces 9 months after Hurricane María?

After Hurricane María, the recovery efforts have been extremely slow. The U.S. government has been a complete obstacle to our recovery. For weeks, they blocked the arrival of supplies, they took control of the entire health and security apparatus, they have basically served to slow down the process of recovery, denying to citizens the aid that they rightfully should receive.

Currently, there are thousands and thousands of families that for 9 months have not had access to water or electricity services. We have dozens of houses without roofs, because they do not have the money to rebuild their homes. The biggest worry

we have right now is that we are very close to the beginning of hurricane season and the country has still not recovered enough to be able to handle any sort of atmospheric phenomenon even ones less severe than what we saw last year. There are still people dying because of the lack of electricity and lack of water, and the government continues to hide the real statistics of deaths and it continues to hide the reality that for many sectors of the country it feels like the hurricane happened yesterday. Every day, the recovery process becomes harder.

What is happening with the debt and austerity measures?

A few weeks ago, the Control Board along with the Puerto Rican government, passed a new five-year fiscal plan. In this plan, they reduced the pensions of the retirees by 10%. They also tripled the cost of state university tuition and imposed a labor reform that takes away absolutely all of the rights and guarantees of the workers that we had won after years of struggle. The plan also calls for the sale of one of our principal assets – the Electrical Energy Authority. One of the greatest worries we have now is that not only will they be selling one of the main dams in the country but also our water, and our access to these water sources. A series of laws have been created that go toward relaxing environmental regulations to promote the industry of carbon-burning, mining, and other extractive activities that indiscriminately take resources from our Island.

We are facing a government that does not want to listen to its people and that does not have an interest in resolving this crisis, neither with dialogue nor with legislation. Every day, the indignation and suffering of this country is increasingly suppressed because while on one hand they talk to us about the cuts, on the other hand, we have top officials that are being paid ridiculously high salaries, like the Secretary of Education and the Representative to the FCB, even more than some in the U.S. So the indignation is growing, because while we the poor are getting cutbacks, the government keeps siphoning money. The corruption cases are growing. This week, a large part of the cabinet of the Governor had to resign

because of a scandal linked to the elections and the buying and selling of government positions.

What are the next steps for Jornada Se Acabaron las Promesas? How will you continue fighting?

Jornada decided that May 1 would be the beginning of a longer period of protest. After the events that occurred on the Golden Mile, we returned to the streets on May 2. We were in the Condado zone which is the tourist area and where many of the wealthiest people on the Island live. The purpose of this march was to denounce Laws 20 and 22, which the Government framed to convert Puerto Rico into a fiscal paradise for foreign companies. Our demand was that while the government is forcing our brothers and sisters into exile, they bring in dozens of rich investors without levying any type of taxes, and facilitating their stay in the country.

The response of the state to this protest was also a heavy police presence and multiple attempts to stop the march. We are continuing with this period of mobilization of struggle. We will be holding forums in the public plazas. We will be going to schools to speak to students, organizing ourselves in the communities, and we will be constantly holding activities of resistance in the streets. The objective is to paralyze, so that these sectors are economically affected and they will have to agree to negotiate. We have been very emphatic in that these sectors have their ears in their wallets not in their heads. So the economic impact and damage that we will do are vital to force them to listen and put the necessary pressure on them so that they stop these plans of austerity that seek to bring us misery.

Jornada Se Acabaron las Promesas has been emphatic that the people have the right to defend themselves in the ways that they think are necessary. We have emphasized that we will not allow ourselves to be intimidated by the state even if it costs us our lives. We will go to the end and face any consequences because our children and our country deserve the right to live in a space where there is peace, harmony and where all of us have the same rights and possibilities of success.

An Open Letter to Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló

Make the Road, NY and many other organizations

Dear Governor Ricardo Rosselló,

We, the undersigned organizations, stand in solidarity with the Puerto Rican people and organizations that came together on May 1, 2018 to march against inhumane austerity measures that continue to drive a massive exodus of families in search of a better life. We stand with the millions of Puerto Ricans who remain on the Island and fight every day to sustain their families and improve their collective quality of life. We write today to condemn the inhumane and violent police actions of the government of Ricardo Rosselló.

On May 1, 2018, thousands of Puerto Rican people, including elderly adults and children, who were exercising their First Amendment right to protest were met with state violence through the use of tear gas and violence at the hands of the police. Images captured at the event, corroborated by first-hand accounts, show crowds of people fighting to catch their breath as they ran away from police in riot gear. This type of scene has no place in a democratic society. The right to assemble and express frustration at the government is essential to the practice of democracy. We are deeply disturbed by Governor Roselló's defense of the police brutality and demand that the local government take the appropriate actions to prosecute those who gave and executed the orders for these actions to take place.

On May 1, 2018, thousands of Puerto Ricans came out to protest the measures that the governor and the fiscal control board have put forward over the last two years. These measures adversely affect working class Puerto Ricans, and include:

- Privatizing of the public school system and the power company
- Doubling the tuition costs in Puerto Rico's public university
- Closing over 300 schools
- Slashing labor rights
- Raising taxes
- Cutting pensions

This dire situation is forcing families to flee the Island *en masse*. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies estimates that Puerto



Rico could lose 14% of its population, 470,000 people, by 2019.

On May Day, the people of Puerto Rico came out with clear demands for their government. Today we stand with them and echo their demands in solidarity, and we commit to advocate for them in the United States.

We further demand immediate accountability for the May Day violence. Our demands are as follows:

Stop austerity: The Government of Puerto Rico should stop all austerity measures and invest in the working people of Puerto Rico by strengthening labor rights, raising the minimum wage, and promoting other policies that allow families on the Island to live with dignity. Living with dignity includes rebuilding Puerto Rico's power grid with 100% clean and renewable energy and keeping the power grid and power generation in public hands under community control, so as to mitigate the climate crisis and adapt for future extreme weather.

Cancel the Debt: The Government of Puerto Rico should not make, and the U.S. government should stop promoting, any more debt payments to billionaire bondholders. Instead, all government efforts should focus on securing payments to pension holders. The Puerto Rican government should also prosecute any individual that has profited from the debt

crisis.

Prosecute: The Government of Puerto Rico should conduct a full, transparent and impartial investigation into the police violence during the May Day actions and prosecute every police officer and civil servant who instructed and executed these acts of violence against the Puerto Rican people. We also encourage human right organizations to conduct their own independent investigations and oversight to guarantee that this process is done with full transparency.

We, the undersigned organizations, stand in solidarity with the Puerto Rican people and their demands, condemn the actions of the Puerto Rican government, and demand that the local government take the appropriate actions to prosecute those who instructed and executed these actions.

Sincerely,
Center for Popular Democracy
Women's March
Make the Road NY
SEIU 32BJ
United We Dream
VAMOS4PR
United for a New Economy
Black Voters Matter Fund
Alliance for Puerto Rico-Massachusetts
Make the Road NJ
Chicago Boricua Resistance!
Refund America Project and many more

Puerto Rican Teachers and Students Protest Budget Cuts and Privatization On May Day

Kate Aronoff, *Rethinking Schools*

In a May Day event largely overlooked by mainland U.S. media, strikers representing various unions, opposition parties, and social movements all converged on San Juan's banking district, known as "Milla De Ora" (the Golden Mile) for a national strike.

Pushing back against a slew of austerity measures being unveiled by the Washington-appointed Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (La Junta), strikers took the opportunity to bring their fights to their opponents' doorsteps, rallying throughout the day at their offices in locations scattered throughout the city. By the end of the day, police were firing off several rounds of tear gas and wrestling students to the ground.

Striking teachers from around the island began Tuesday outside the Department of Education. Just a few days earlier, several of those same teachers had been pepper sprayed during another demonstration against the fiscal control board's plan to close 283 public schools on the island and replace them with charter schools that likely will not be subject to regulatory oversight. That education plan was one of a rash of new proposals released by La Junta (colloquially known as "la junta") just a day before certifying them in mid-April, which together lay out dramatic transformations for everything from labor law to energy.

"It's a colonial situation that we are facing," Mercedes Martinez, president of the Teachers Federation of Puerto Rico (FMPR is the Spanish acronym), tells me. "The fiscal oversight board is the ones telling the governor what to do. They are not here for the people, they are here for themselves." In addition to school closures and charterization of the island's school system, FMPR is also fighting proposed cuts to public sector pensions, which the board has suggested should be cut by 25 percent.

Inspired by opposition to those plans and, in part, by striking teachers in Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Kentucky, FMPR voted in an assembly several weeks ago to strike on May 1. (At that point, Arizona's walkouts had not yet happened.)

So under a blazing sun Tuesday, union

members in the education bloc wore different colors to denote their respective affiliations. FMPR wore yellow, and many members hoisted matching yellow signs denouncing the fiscal plans as "abusive and criminal," and the board itself as a colonial body. As the location of Tuesday's demonstration might suggest, one of the main targets — for teachers and demonstrators more generally — was Puerto Rico's controversial education secretary Julia Keleher, tapped by Governor Ricardo Rosselló for her record as a Bush-era Department of Education staffer turned education consultant.

The month after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, Keleher tweeted that Puerto Rico should look to the transformation of New Orleans' school system after Hurricane Katrina as a model. After that storm, [all teachers were fired], New Orleans public schools were rapidly privatized, in many cases while students still resided in other states waiting for their homes and communities to be rebuilt. {Today there are no public schools — BF Ed Note]

Since that time, Keleher supported policies that seem to be moving the island further in that direction — including the fiscal control board's — and received hearty financial and advisory backing from U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Many of today's demonstrators also took issue with the gap between Keleher's \$250,000 salary and the teachers' own salaries. Puerto Rican teachers make the least on average of any of their counterparts in other U.S. states and territories, just \$33,952 per year.

One of the day's more colorful signs, a banner around 12 feet tall, featured a fake mug shot of Keleher at the top above the Spanish word for "surplus." [...]

Nearly everyone I spoke with agreed that



the administration officials and the board had both taken advantage of the storm's devastation. "Her background isn't in education. It's in business. All she knows about is money-making. It's like me — an educator — running a hospital. The only place to learn about education is in the classroom," said a retired teacher. "We're fighting for our rights as teachers. Our rights are being violated in ways you cannot imagine," he added.

While the convergence of marches from each part of the city resolved in a kind of festival of speeches and music from the main stage, the latter half of the day took a more chaotic turn.

After many marchers had dispersed, a contingent comprised of students from the University of Puerto Rico and several others were hoping to march to the center of Milla De Ora, only to be stopped by police. At some point marchers believed a settlement had been reached whereby police would let them pass, but no such thing happened. Demonstrators pressed on in a tense confrontation, attempting to push through police lines to their destination. Within minutes police fired several rounds of tear gas into the crowd, sending not just students but children and elderly people running to escape the fumes. At least 100 police, some in SWAT gear and others in military-like garb, proceeded to push crowds south

Teachers and Students Protest • 9

Puerto Rico's Governor is Handing the Island to Investors on a Silver Platter

Julio López Varona

Since Hurricane María left Puerto Rico destroyed, Governor Ricardo Rosselló has focused most of his energy on paying bondholders. We are talking about billionaires who would hardly be affected by any moratorium on debt payments until the island recovers.

In every version of his proposed fiscal plan, the one figure that increased with each subsequent draft was his recommended appropriation for debt service, which ultimately maxed out at the staggering sum of \$7.3 billion over five years.

The governor is doing exactly the opposite of what Puerto Ricans have been calling for and need: to care for “the people before the debt.” It is no surprise that the unelected Fiscal Control Board, no friend to Puerto Rico, ratified the governor’s blueprint for paying off Wall Street by approving a still high debt payment allocation of \$4.9 billion over the next five years.

Wall Street won the hurricane recovery fight. Their negotiations with Rosselló paid off. That is why protests in and outside Puerto Rico will continue.

For several years, activist members of Hedge Clippers, joined by unions, have been working with Puerto Rican groups in the mainland and the Island to push for an end to the debt crisis.

Extensive research turned into dozens of published reports on vultures and the debt led us to demand a stop to payments to vulture funds and to the harmful auster-

ity measures. In fact, one of those reports put out by our partner ReFund America Project, revealed that a huge part of Puerto Rico’s debt is illegitimate because nearly half of the debt is interest rate generated through a payday lending scheme.

According to the Report, Puerto Rico’s Payday Loans by the Roosevelt Institute: \$33.5 billion of the Island’s debt is actually interest on payday loans.

“As the debt crisis engulfs the Island, the people of Puerto Rico are facing a humanitarian crisis caused by a depressed economy, astronomical unemployment and poverty rates, a high cost of living, and austerity measures that have shredded the social safety net. It is important to revisit former Governor Alejandro García Padilla’s statement that the Commonwealth’s debt is not payable. It is true that Puerto Rico cannot pay back all of its debt. It is also true the Commonwealth should not pay back all of it. \$33.5 billion of the island’s outstanding debt is not debt at all, but is unpaid interest on capital appreciation bonds — the municipal version of a payday loan.

A capital appreciation bond (CAB) is a long-term bond with compounding interest on which the borrower does not make any principal or interest payments for the first several years, and, in some cases, until the final maturity of the bond. In this way, it is similar to a negative amortization mortgage, in which the outstanding principal actually grows over time because

the unpaid interest gets tacked on to the amount owed and compounds. Because of this structure, borrowers often end up paying extraordinarily high interest rates over the life of the bonds. In this way, a CAB is like the municipal version of a payday loan.

“Puerto Rico has \$37.8 billion in outstanding CABs, accounting for a very large share of its total outstanding debt. The underlying principal on these CABs is just \$4.3 billion. The remaining \$33.5 billion is interest — an effective interest rate of 785%!”

Cancel the Debt

As the demands for hurricane recovery funding and debt forgiveness intensified, secretive bondholders have been ousted and pension funds have divested from hedge funds strangling the Island for a quick buck. And most recently, students have joined protests against their university endowments, which are heavily invested in some of these same vulture funds.

Consequently, respected economists and policy makers have declared that Puerto Rico’s debt should be forgiven and some bondholders have made their own calls for canceling the debt, filing a lawsuit against COFINA bondholders (Puerto Rico’s Sales Tax Financing Corporation), also arguing the debt is illegal. [...]

Instead of delivering to his people,
Cancel the Debt • 10

I • TEACHERS AND STUDENT PROTEST

toward the University of Puerto Rico (PR), periodically firing off new rounds of tear gas and marching forward.

Soon after, police entered off-campus student housing, pulling out and arresting people from behind fences. The interaction was particularly charged given the history of San Juan police and the university. After UPR student Antonia Martínez Lagares was shot and killed by police during an anti-war demonstration in 1970, officers are not

permitted to enter the campus.

Among those arrested in that same Rio Piedras neighborhood was Luis Rodríguez Sánchez, the head of Proyecto de Apoyo Mutuo Mariana, which provided food and solar power in Mariana after the storm. According to illustrator and journalist Molly Crabapple — who has been writing about Sánchez’s mutual aid project for the last several months — the reason given for his arrest was “expired plates,” although sev-

eral people versed in Puerto Rican politics speculated that the police were targeting well-known organizers.

Late Tuesday night, Martínez, president of the teachers union, posted on Facebook that 22 students — who were protesting massive tuition hikes and other deep cuts to the UPR system — had been arrested. “Today was a militant May 1st, International Workers Day. Thousands of teachers and workers on the streets of Puerto Rico,”

I • GREAT MARCH OF RETURN

It has been clear to all the world that the Palestinians are unarmed and justly protesting for their rights in Gaza, while the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), armed to the teeth, standing inside Israel, have used snipers firing live ammunition; chemical weapons, like tear gas and pepper spray; and rubber bullets to terrorize and kill the Palestinians. Given the brutal massacres by U.S.-backed, armed and funded Israeli armed forces, massacring at least 60 unarmed protesters May 14 and bringing to more than 100 the number killed since March 30, demonstrations and strike actions are continuing beyond May 15. This includes tens of thousands participating in the funerals of some of those killed standing up for the Right of Return and for Palestine's right to exist.

The U.S./Israeli forces have not only targeted protesters, but also journalists and medics. Prior to the May 14 massacre, it was reported that 47 people had been killed, including five children and two journalists. More than 8,536 Palestinians have been injured, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. More than 2,000 people have been injured by live ammunition. Injuries have also been caused by rubber bullets and tear gas asphyxiation.

Rights organizations report that the IOF

is deliberately targeting medical staff as they attempt to aid the wounded. The Gaza Ministry of Health reported that more than 163 medical personnel have been injured by live ammunition and gas asphyxiation. Twenty-four ambulances have been damaged. Journalists covering the protests also report that they are being deliberately targeted.

The two journalists who were killed were both well away from the IOF and wearing blue flak jackets that clearly said "PRESS." The Israeli Defense Minister later sought to justify the killings of the journalists.

The U.S. was a main force in the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel on May 15, 1948 and the mass expulsion of Palestinians. In recognizing Israel at that time and in providing billions in funds every year and billions more in military equipment and planes, it is clear that Israeli crimes can only be committed with U.S. financial and military backing. In addition it is U.S. political backing and interference that repeatedly block efforts at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to take action against Israel. Most recently the U.S. blocked effort to pass a UNSC resolution expressing rage with the May 14 massacre and calling for an independent and transparent investigation. The U.S. is guilty of these



many crimes as is its partner Israel.

Further the U.S. directly gave the green light for the massacre by moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14. Their celebrations with the Zionists continued despite the massacre taking place. The moving of the embassy is also directly against UN resolutions and the demand of Palestinians for Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine.

Buffalo Forum salutes the bold and determined actions of the Palestinians and stands with them in affirming the right to resist and the right to return! We condemn U.S. actions in backing and arming Israel and demand an end to all U.S. aid, military, financial and political Now!

9 • CANCEL THE DEBT

Rosselló offered vultures a bailout: tens of billions of dollars that Puerto Rico needs to recover will instead pay the debt over the next 30 years. Rosselló recently told reporters that emergency Medicaid — public funding from Congress — will be used to erase balance sheet deficits and provide bondholders a surplus from which to get paid. He is going out of his way to help hedge funds secure lofty profits after they bought the debt at pennies on the dollar.

This latest commitment to bondholders is perfectly consistent with the actions Rosselló has pursued since taking office last year: his policies have shown little concern for the well-being of Puerto Ricans.

Meanwhile, the dire situation is forcing families to flee the Island *en masse*. Just

two days before the seven-month mark of Hurricane María ripping through Puerto Rico, the whole island was once again left without power.

The Center for Puerto Rican Studies estimates that Puerto Rico would lose 14% of its population by 2019 or 470,000 people.

School closures, an ongoing foreclosures crisis, poverty wages, and double-digit unemployment will drive more families off the Island, and depress the economy even further.

Just as the governor was promising tens of billions to his friends in Wall Street, he announced a unilateral decision to close 283 public schools, leaving parents, teachers, students, and local governments out of the decision-making process.

The money "saved" by massive school

closures comes at just 3% of the total payout he promised Wall Street. The 283 school closings are in addition to 150 schools he closed last year. In one year, governor Rosselló will have closed more than one third of Puerto Rico's schools. He has also closed or sold all but one public hospital.

Whose side is Rosselló on? What is he trying to accomplish by handing the Island to investors on a silver platter while destroying the future of the people he was elected to represent?

This week of May Day Puerto Ricans are taking their outrage to the streets of San Juan. They refuse to stand for any more abuses. I am joining them.

(Julio López Varona is the Director of Puerto Rico Campaigns with the Center for Popular Democracy.)

BROOKLYN'S LITTLE PALESTINE

Bay Ridge Rallies to Support Great Return March and Jerusalem for Palestine

Jessica Schwartz

More than 200 people gathered in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn for a press conference, rally and march, May 14, in response to moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, the historical capital of Palestine. It also marked 70 years since the Nakba, or the catastrophe, where Palestinians were driven from their homes. The protest stood in solidarity with the Great Return March, and took place right after the massacre of Palestinian protesters in Gaza.

The event started with a press conference. The organizations represented included those in the NY4Palestine coalition, as well as other organizations that support Palestine. Nerdeen Kiswani from Within Our Lifetime - United for Palestine introduced



the press conference, stating, “Today is a historic day in Bay Ridge, because the

Palestinian community here that has existed for decades is standing up and declaring themselves as a part of the Great Return March.” Bay Ridge is a particularly symbolic location, as it has a large Palestinian population, and is nicknamed “Little Palestine.”

After the press conference, the crowd rallied and then marched around the neighborhood. Protesters led chants and waved Palestinian flags, receiving attention from residents in the area.

The action was organized by NY4Palestine and was a lead-up event to Nakba Day 2018: Great Return March protest set for Friday May 18 at 3 p.m. in Times Square.

Denounce Cuomo’s Plan to Visit Israel and Support the Massacres Against Palestinians

On May 10 Governor Cuomo announced plans to lead a delegation of New York officials to Israel to lend support, despite the killing of unarmed protesters occurring as part of Israel’s attack on the Great March of Return. Palestinians were regularly protesting, in Gaza and Israel was responding with snipers firing live rounds and tear gas. In addition, Israel was bombing Syria and threatening Iran. Far from standing against such crimes, Cuomo reaffirmed his long-standing and unconditional support for Israel. He said, “It’s these moments that dissolve the gray into black and white and ask each of us individually, where do you stand and who do you stand with? My answer is simple. As long as I am Governor of New York, this state stands 100 percent with Israel and we are proud.” Meaning he is proud to endorse massacres of Palestinians,

including children and young men, proud to support use of the chemical weapon tear gas, banned in warfare, proud to support human rights crimes, proud to deny the Palestinians their rights. He is definitively on the wrong side.

Cuomo also specifically spoke to the *Taylor Force Act*, which uses blackmail to directly interfere in Palestine’s internal affairs and endorses collective punishment of those guilty of no crime. The law prohibits U.S. assistance for Palestine if the Palestinian Authority does not terminate “payments for acts of terrorism against U.S. and Israeli citizens to any individual who has been convicted and imprisoned for such acts, to any individual who died committing such acts, and to family members of such an individual.” Naturally it is the U.S. and Israel that decide what is and is not an act of terrorism. Given that the

protesters are being branded as terrorists while Israel’s massacre of them is not, it is easy to see how the law will be used against Palestinians and their families.

Cuomo’s trips to Israel right when she is committing horrendous crimes are not new. He also headed a delegation in 2014, when Israel was brutally bombing Gaza, and others. In his statement he also brags about opposing efforts in the U.S., especially among students to advance the campaign to Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) Israel. Cuomo follows the federal government’s lead to use the blackmail of denying state funds to those who support BDS, including blocking funding to state universities simply for having pro-Palestinian speakers or student BDS organizing. In this manner it can be seen that Cuomo is also the side of tyranny, not democracy.

DEMONSTRATE MAY 16, SHUMER'S NYC OFFICE, 6-8 PM:

Emergency Action to Support Palestine

Jewish Voice for Peace

On May 14, Israeli forces killed at least 60 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded thousands. Meanwhile, at the very same time, just miles away in Jerusalem, Jared Kushner, Ivanka Trump, and others, were clinking glasses to celebrate the moving of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, a green light for continued Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands. This is the ongoing Nakba (Catastrophe)

Senator Schumer has praised Trump's embassy move, calling it "long overdue."

For the past 6 weeks Senator Gillibrand has remained silent on the ongoing massacre of unarmed protesters in Gaza by Israeli forces. These atrocities are made possible by unparalleled U.S. backing. We must demand accountability!

In heartbreak and rage, we will mourn those who have been killed.

With respect and inspiration, we will amplify the demands of Palestinians, ringing out for 70 years: the right to live in freedom and dignity, and the right to

return home.

Join us outside the offices of New York Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand to say: *Not In Our Name. Support the Right of the Palestinian People to Rally, Resist, and Return!*

Emergency Action

6 pm: Meet at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza (47th St & 2nd Ave). Wear black!

6:30 pm: March to offices of Senators Schumer and Gillibrand (780 3rd Ave.)

NEW YORK CITY

All Out in Commemoration of the Nakba and the Ongoing Struggle for Liberation and Return

March 30th, Land Day, marked the first day of the Great March of Return, a 46-day struggle leading up to Nakba Day on May 15. From now until then and beyond, we in New York and around the globe must support the ongoing struggle in Palestine. As the struggle escalates throughout historic Palestine and the Diaspora, join NY4Palestine as we reiterate our commitment to the liberation and the right of return of all of historic Palestine, Times Square, May 18 at 3pm.

It has been 70 years since nearly 1 million Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by Zionist

forces during the Al-Nakba (Arabic for the Catastrophe). To this day they and their descendants are still barred from returning. Israel has recently escalated its racist and genocidal policies, with the detention and killing of children increasing whilst Al-Quds (Jerusalem), the capital of Palestine, is under threat. In reaction to the increase in these policies of ethnic cleansing the resilient Palestinian people, alongside their international allies, are organizing to let the world know that the land ... will be liberated and that a sovereign, independent, free Palestine is inevitable as long as its people remain

beacons of resistance.

While we mourn the Nakba, we celebrate the resistance and its steadfast sacrifices in ensuring that the question of Palestine gets an answer. The Zionists did not expect that 70 years later Palestinians would still be fighting for their freedom and dignity. As the fight for liberation continues in the homeland, the fight for liberation continues from inside the belly of the beast. We will be rallying to demand the right of return for ALL Palestinians in the Diaspora, to demand Israel keep its hands off al-Quds, to celebrate 70 years of resilience and resistance.

NAKBA DAY 2018

Support the Right of the Palestinian People to Rally, Resist, and Return! 1948–2018

Brooklyn for Peace, May 12, 2018

On the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, we demand:

- An end to U.S. military aid to Israel (\$4.8 billion/year), which violates the *Arms Export Control Act of 1976*, specifically forbidding arms deals with governments that abuse human rights.

- An end to Israeli attacks on unarmed protesters!

- An end to the illegal siege of Gaza which has caused untold human suffering and degradation of life.

- An end to the racism that favors one ethnicity or religion over the other in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

The right of all refugees to return to their homes is recognized in international law. This right is recognized in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("Everyone has the right to . . . return to his country"), in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in UN Resolution 194 (Palestinian Right of Return). We call for the right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to their homes throughout historic Palestine,

Right to Resist and Return • 13

Unacceptable and Inhuman Violence by Israeli Army Against Palestinian Protesters in Gaza

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), May 14, 2018

As teams from Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) treat people wounded today in Gaza, Marie-Elisabeth Ingres, MSF representative in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, provided the following statement:

What happened today is unacceptable and inhuman. The death toll provided this evening by Gaza health authorities — 55 dead and 2,271 wounded — including 1,359 wounded with live ammunition, is staggering. It is unbearable to witness such a massive number of unarmed people being shot in such a short time.

Our medical teams are working around the clock, as they have done since April 1, providing surgical and postoperative care to men, women, and children, and they will continue to do so tonight, tomorrow, and as long as they are needed. In one of the hospitals where we are working, the chaotic situation is comparable to what we observed after the bombings of the 2014 war, with a colossal influx of injured people in a few hours, completely overwhelming the medical staff. Our



teams carried out more than 30 surgical interventions today, sometimes on two or three patients in the same operating theater, and even in the corridors.

This bloodbath is the continuation of the Israeli army's policy during the last seven weeks: shooting with live ammunition at demonstrators, on the

assumption that anyone approaching the separation fence is a legitimate target. Most of the wounded will be condemned to suffer lifelong injuries.

As new demonstrations are announced for tomorrow, the Israeli army must stop its disproportionate use of violence against Palestinian protesters.

12 • RIGHT TO RESIST AND RETURN

from which nearly a million people were driven and fled in 1947-48, when Israel became a state. Palestinians call that time the Nakba, or Catastrophe. These refugees and their descendants are now dispersed throughout the region in refugee camps and foreign countries. [...]

We support the rights of all peoples to peacefully assemble and to make their grievances known to the world. We call for an end to Israeli shootings and assassinations in Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine. On March 30, and on subsequent Fridays, tens of thousands of Palestinians living in Gaza participated in the "Great Return March" to the fence that imprisons them, and assembled for a six-week tent city

and peaceful protest of the violations of their human rights — set to culminate on Nakba Day on May 15. During five weeks of demonstrations by unarmed civilians in Gaza, Israeli snipers have killed at least 47 people, including children and journalists, and wounded thousands more, many critically.

The Nakba continues to this day. Palestinians continue to be forced off their land, their homes demolished, to be replaced by waves of Jewish settlers protected by the Israeli army. Jerusalem, the center of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish faiths and originally intended by the UN to be administered as an international city, has been annexed by Israel, which

denies Muslim Palestinians access to holy sites. Trump has legitimized this theft by agreeing to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

Today, more than 2 million Palestinians including 1.3 million descendants of original 1948 refugees, live in the tiny strip of fenced-in land known as Gaza, under an Israeli blockade that has lasted for 10 years. Lack of potable water, medical supplies, food, electricity, and waste treatment have led the UN to declare Gaza "basically unlivable." Israel bombs Gaza periodically, killing thousands of civilians, including children, and destroying infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and water treatment plants. [...]

Visit our website: usmlo.org

Gaza: Avoiding a Greater Blood Bath

Jason Cone, May 11, 2018

(Written before the Israeli massacre on May 14)

The exit wounds are fist-size. Bone is pulverized into dust. This is the reality for half of the injured patients received in my organization's clinics since the launch of the Great Return March in Gaza.

Over the past month, the number of people treated in Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) clinics in Gaza is more than were treated in all of 2014, when Israel's Operation Protective Edge was launched in the Gaza Strip.

MSF clinics admitted almost 781 trauma victims between March 30 and May 10 — more than one-third of the 1,916 trauma casualties recorded by Gaza's health ministry. The situation may worsen with the planned move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem on May 14 and the approach of May 15, the anniversary of Israel's founding, regarded by Palestinians as the "Nakba," or catastrophe. [Israel massacred more than 60 people and injured more than 2000 unarmed demonstrators May 14 — BF Ed. Note]

Medical facilities, including our clinics, are completely overwhelmed and will soon be unable to manage additional wounded. The health system, strained by the ongoing blockade of Gaza, is on the verge of collapse.

Even though there is not a war in Gaza, the injuries sustained by our patients are terribly similar to what we see in conflict zones. We estimate that more than 39 percent of our 554 current trauma patients will require long-term rehabilitation, lasting at least until the end of the year. While the majority of our patients are young men around 20 years old, we have treated 98 children and adolescents under 18.

Ninety-one percent of our trauma patients were shot in the legs, many at close range. Several will be handicapped for life, putting tremendous pressure on the already beleaguered health system, impoverished families, and the whole society.

The ongoing Israeli and Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip and recent U.S. funding cuts to the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, or UNRWA,

exacerbate the dire situation.

Gaza hospitals have emptied inpatient wards to make space for the influx of wounded. Patients with chronic health issues were already struggling from the lack of chemotherapy drugs,

kidney dialysis, and diabetes management. Now they have been displaced, and either do not have access to health care or will be forced to turn to expensive private clinics.

Most of our wounded patients say they have nothing to lose, no hope, no jobs, nothing. They tell our staff that they just want to go back and die at protest sites. Some are returning to the demonstrations with casts, on crutches, or with external fixators holding together shattered bones.

The severity of the injuries demonstrates that Israeli forces are resorting to disproportionate force to incapacitate the protesters. The result is unnecessary damage and suffering.

Additionally, the Israeli government does not regularly facilitate access to health care outside of Gaza, which is needed due to the complexity and severity of injuries. According to the World Health Organization, since March 30, of the 27 patients who have applied to be treated outside of Gaza, only 9 have been approved. Failure to transfer these patients will increase pressure on the public health system, and increase the risk of otherwise preventable infection-related amputations.

Lastly, Israel and Egypt need to ease the 10-year blockade of Gaza, which contributes to the ongoing despair and drives people to the fence to protest. Egypt must also open its border with Gaza and permit the flow of humanitarian aid. Israel also must ensure adequate supplies of electricity to the Strip. [...]



Doctors performing two surgeries in one operating theater at Al Aqsa Hospital

The Trump Administration's decisions to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and to enact an 83 percent funding cut to UNRWA, have thrown gas on the fire. The UN's Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) estimates that 36 percent of essential medicines and 32 percent of medical supplies are missing as a result of the blockade and lack of funds.

Since the U.S. embassy move was announced in December, MSF clinics have seen a massive increase in trauma cases, from just a few per week to more than 20 cases weekly even before the current protests. Today, we are seeing more than 20 cases per day. This is on top of the normal workload, including burn victims from accidents linked to the use of unsafe fuels for home heating and cooking, due to the blockade-related shortages in Gaza.

The U.S. government must use its diplomatic influence to ensure a more proportionate use of force by the Israeli government, and make it a priority to restrict the use of live ammunition. [...]

While there is plenty of blame to share over the latest violence in Gaza, the focus should be on mitigating human suffering now and preventing wider harm. As the toll of dead and wounded mounts, an entirely avoidable — potentially even deadlier — blood bath may be just days away.

(Jason Cone is Executive Director of Doctors Without Borders in the U.S.)

Palestinians Call for Strikes, Protests following May 14 Massacre by Israeli Forces

Abhijan Choudhury, May 15, 2018

At least 60 Palestinians were killed and more than 2,700 injured as massive protests shook Palestine against the shifting of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. An eight-month-old baby in eastern Gaza, who is reported to have died of tear gas inhalation, was among the victims. At least 6 of those killed were younger than 18, as were 200 of those injured. More than 80 women were among the injured as were 11 journalists. Also, Israeli fighter jets are reported to have struck seven targets in the Gaza region on Monday.

Tens of thousands Palestinians took part in the protests, with rallies also taking place in the cities of Ramallah and Hebron. There were reports of clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters in the city of Bethlehem as well. The opening of the U.S. embassy coincides with the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding, and takes place a day before al-Nakba Day May 15 – when Palestinians mark the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians following the establishment of Israel.

Arrests were also reported during the inauguration of the new embassy complex.

The fresh round of [U.S.-backed Israeli] violence drew condemnation from around the world. “This is another horrific example of the Israeli military using excessive force and live ammunition in a totally deplorable way. This is a violation of international standards, in some instances committing what appear to be willful killings constituting war crimes,” said Amnesty International, in a press statement. The statement also termed the shifting of the U.S. embassy an act that “condones decades of violations by Israel, including the creation of illegal settlements, which constitute war crimes.”

Red Cross and the United Nations Human Rights Office also Condemn the Massacre

Fresh protests took place on May 15, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, as well as the culmination of the six-week long Great Return March.

[Three days of mourning and a general strike have been called to continue the fight for the Right of Return and show the Palestinians refusal to submit to Israeli attacks.] Many rallies are expected in several West Bank cities, including Ramallah. Schools, colleges and business establishments in East Jerusalem closed May 15 to protest the killing of the Palestinians and defend the right of return.

Global condemnation continued to pour in against Israel's use of force on Monday. In response to the violence, South Africa condemned the “violent aggression carried out by Israeli armed forces” and recalled its Ambassador to Israel. Turkey also recalled its ambassadors from Israel and the US and expelled the Israeli ambassador. China, Ireland, Britain and Jordan were among the other countries that expressed concern at the firing by the Israeli soldiers.

However, at the United Nations, the U.S. blocked the adoption of a Security Council statement that called for an “independent and transparent investigation” into the killing of Palestinian protesters on the Gaza border. The statement, circulated by Kuwait, was supposed to include an expression of rage and sorrow on behalf of the Security Council over the May 14 death toll. The U.S. blocked the resolution, threatening a veto while also joining Israel in blaming the Palestinians themselves.

On May 14, the inauguration of the new embassy saw Jared Kushner, senior advisor to Donald Trump, saying, “Those provoking violence are part of the problem and not part of the solution.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, “The truth is that Jerusalem has always been and will always will be the capital of the Jewish people, of the Jewish state.” U.S. President Donald Trump, in a recorded message, said that the move has “been a long time coming” and that as a sovereign nation Israel



has the right to determine the location of its capital. [...]

The shifting of the embassy had drawn the condemnation of European leaders, with most of the ambassadors from European Union countries saying they would boycott the ceremony. France said that the shifting of the Embassy was tantamount to flouting international law. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that despite all steps taken to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, East Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine. Egypt also on Monday strongly condemned what it said was Israel's targeting of Palestinian civilians.

Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif on May 14 tweeted that the opening of the new U.S. embassy was “a day of great shame.” He said, “Israeli regime massacres countless Palestinians in cold blood as they protest in the world's largest open air prison. Meanwhile, Trump celebrates the move of U.S. illegal embassy and his Arab collaborators move to divert attention.”

Zarif likely was referring to Gulf Arab countries, which so far have remained largely silent on the deaths and the violence. The Arab League is likely to hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss the shifting of the embassy.

In Israel, hundreds of students and participants attended a Nakba Day commemoration at Tel Aviv University May 14. Lawmakers from the Joint List, a political alliance of Arab-dominated parties, joined them in the commemoration.

DEFEND THE RIGHT OF RETURN

