

The Workers' Advocate

Supplement



Columbus's legacy: 500 years of racism, stolen land and genocide

From a leaflet of December 1991 by the Los Angeles Supporters of the MLP, USA:

Just why is the approaching quincentennial of Columbus's so-called "discovery" stirring up so much controversy and debate? The answer is closely related to the reason why the corporate media have launched a torrent of articles decrying the concepts of "political correctness" and multiculturalism and all those who dare to not bow before ruling class mythology. The goals of this media blitz have been:

- (1), to preserve and perpetuate the myth of Western Civilization, for which Columbus is a convenient prop; and
- (2), to eradicate independent, critical thinking which could lead people to develop, horror of horrors, a scientific approach in their analysis of society.

The dark side of Western Civilization

By means of an extremely selective telling of history we have all been subjected to the myth that nearly every contribution to society has been bestowed upon humankind by European or Western (read: white, male) civilization. It is no mere accident or oversight that an essential aspect of Western Civilization, namely conquest by violence, has received such short shrift by the learned scribblers of bourgeois historiography. Rather, what this does signify is a conscious, systematic attempt to whitewash and justify these horrific crimes against humanity by fostering the absurd notion that somehow "We are God's chosen people."

Columbus's assault on Native people and their way of life was not simply "a clash of two cultures," as it is often described. It was an INVASION, that ushered in the age of conquest or imperialism into the Western hemisphere. This period of history was marked by the last gasps of a dying European feudalism and its desperate attempts to hold out against the emerging capitalist system. To hold their crumbling society together, the monarchs and nobility of Spain required new, external sources of plunder and thus, they turned their eyes westward. The purpose of the voyage was made clear in his sailing orders: "to discover and

acquire"; to bring back "pearls, precious stones, gold, silver (and) spiceries...." As history shows, the primary obsession of Spanish ruling classes became the acquisition of gold—by any means necessary.

The indigenous people whom Columbus encountered were described by him as being unbelievably generous with their possessions: "When you ask for something they have,

Continued on the next page

Inside

More on the material basis for socialism in the modern world	3
After the Soviet Union: the Commonwealth of Independent States	6
Puerto Rico: Cerro Maravilla case-FBI Involved with death squad in murder of activists	8
In brief: Vs. racism and bigotry	9
Repression, a growth industry:	
A captive workforce in Mass. prisons	10
Dissatisfied renters face jail	10
More police violence against women	10
At the workplace:	
Lessons of the Boston bus drivers' strike ...	11
Strikes in brief: Caterpillar/Freightliner/Coal in Colorado/Yale/Record injuries	12
Reforming workers' comp out of existence ..	13
Hospital news: Remember Bettye Collins, killed by overwork	14
More work, less health care	15
Deregulation in Massachusetts	15

they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone..."but in a statement far more revealing of his true intentions he said that "They would make fine servants.... With 50 men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want." Columbus, the self-described "Christ-bearer", believed it was his mission to bring the civilizing power of Christianity to the "savages" he would confront. Indeed, the European invaders would invoke the name of their God many times as justification for the atrocities they inflicted upon the Indians. On the island of Hispaniola, by order of Columbus, each person at least 14 years old was required to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. If they failed to fill this quota they would have their hands cut off and would bleed to death. Resistance grew amongst the Arawak, but they were no match for the weaponry of the Spaniards. Those who fled were hunted down with dogs and were killed. Many were hanged 13 at a time, "in memory of Our Redeemer and His 12 Apostles." Many of the Arawak people were burned to death at the stake, some for the "crime" of refusing to convert to Christianity. Mass suicides began; so desperate did they become that they even resorted to killing their infants to save them from the Spaniards. In two years, half of the 250,000 Natives of Hispaniola had died under the "tutelage" of Governor Columbus. By the year 1550 there were perhaps 500 Arawaks remaining.

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Genocide of the Caribbean Natives signaled only the tragic beginning of Western Civilization's expansion throughout the Americas; racism, violence, slavery and exploitation have been its constant companions. Western expansion in the U.S. was achieved through fire and sword, resulting in the near extermination of indigenous peoples. Those who managed to survive were driven into oblivion, forced to live on desolate parcels of land known as "reservations." Much to the chagrin of those who own and rule this country, Native Americans reemerged out of nowhere in the 1960's to assert their Red Power. They made the unthinkable demand that the U.S. government live up to the nearly 400 treaties it had signed with Native Peoples; all of which had been broken, probably before the ink had dried. Needless to say this "outrage" was off the agenda of King Capital and once again the Indians were brutally suppressed.

Time for healing, or a time for struggle?

The issue at stake for the ruling class in this current storm of debate swirling around the rethinking of history and Western Civilization, goes far beyond defending the reputation of a man named Columbus. It is all about the historical events of the intervening 500 years, what is going on in the world today and, most crucially, how people will assess and respond to these events. In response the media have dragged out their well-paid apologists for Western Civilization to beseech the "uppity historical revisionists" to let bygones be bygones and make this a time for reconciliation and healing, since we are, after all, just one big, happy family. What this represents is their attempt to mask the fact that this is and always has been a class-divided society, that people are distinguished and privileged according to their social and economic position, that some people materially benefit from the crimes of U.S. imperialism, while others suffer from these same crimes. What they want to eliminate, what they really detest, is that method of historical inquiry which causes people to doubt the "glories" and "heroes" of Western Civilization which add to that "warm glow of patriotism" upon which they so heavily depend to carry out their dirty, imperialist wars of aggression.

The time is NOW, to end 500 years of treachery, deceit and murder of Native Americans carried out by European colonialists and the U.S. government. No government that exploits, robs and tramples on the rights of other nations and peoples, both within its own borders and throughout the world, can possibly be considered democratic.

To stop the U.S. government's abuse and torment of American Indians—workers, students and all progressive people must break from the Democrats and Republican-KKKlans, the two parties of King Capital and imperialism, and form an independent movement in support of Native Americans and all other oppressed people fighting against imperialism, racism and genocide. □

More on the material basis for socialism in the modern world

January 18, 1992

Editor
Workers' Advocate Supplement

Dear editor:

Enclosed are some critical points on the article *The technical and cultural basis for workers' socialism in the modern world* which appeared in the July 20, 1991 *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, and was originally given as an MLP May Day speech in Seattle last year.

First, I'd like to compliment the Seattle comrades for producing this speech, and *WAS* for reprinting it. It's thought-provoking and timely in standing against the bourgeois propaganda about the "death of communism." Contrary to such propaganda, this speech boldly maintains that modern technology and culture are bringing us closer to socialism. In this it maintains the basic stand of the classical writers on socialism, but also tries to update their insights with points about post-World War II technology.

With a subject as vast as this, it's almost inevitable that some differences would come up about some of the points raised or the way they were raised. Here I would like to raise some points of difference:

1) Abolition of class distinctions is linked to the abolition of private property.

In the section on "Abolition of class distinctions" the speech says:

"...Socialism fundamentally means the abolition of class distinctions in society. (It does not mean 'government ownership' nor 'state ownership,' the definition that is commonly promoted by the bourgeois columnists. If this were so, the Post Office and Amtrak would have to be considered socialist.)" (See the second full paragraph on page 24 of the *WAS* reprint.)

While government ownership is ridiculed, there is no mention of private property in this section. So the impression could be given that doing away with class distinctions has nothing to do with abolishing private ownership of the means of production.

Socialism means the working people taking control of production (and distribution, and the affiliated superstructural elements). This can only be done collectively, through society-wide ownership of the means of production. As long as you have a government, or state, as the highest form of society-wide organization, there's no way around it — socialism requires government ownership of the means of production.

The classical writers on socialism were concerned, not just with voicing their opposition to a system of class distinctions, but with showing the way out. Various alternatives were repudiated by them — e.g., the idea that private enterprise will somehow produce "people's capitalism," a truly democratic all-middle-class system; petty-bourgeois "co-op socialism"; syndicalism; etc. We are still faced with left-overs of many of these same ideas, and in opposing them it's helpful to remind ourselves of the solution offered by the classics — abolition of private property.

(In this connection we should also take exception to the phrase on page 32, first full paragraph, where the speech defines "the basis of class division: the monopoly of scientific, administrative knowledge." If this is simply meant as a discussion of the intellectual side to private property — that it appropriates intellectual products and the wealth generated by intellectual products — then OK. But taken literally, with no mention of private property, it is wrong. The basis of the capitalists' privileged position is not that the capitalists are smarter, or know more, than the workers.)

2) Labor is a need under socialism.

The mention of a workday of "two hours" under socialism (p. 24, second column, third from last paragraph) is probably an exaggeration. Besides, talking this way tends to create the idea that our only interest is in escaping work. The speech says that time can be spent on cultural and intellectual interests, but does not tie this in to productive activity. But under socialism work becomes the greatest need of humans; they look forward to it as creative activity integrated with cultural and intellectual pursuits.

3) Technology doesn't solve everything.

The speech seems to wax euphoric near the end about the ease of organizing a hi-tech socialist economy. This is hard to pin down to particular formulations, but the general spirit seems too optimistic, or not guardedly taking account of possible problems.

One thing making this hard to pin down is that, on the positive side, this is the main use of the speech — that it sees the advances in technology as bringing us closer to socialism (instead of farther away, as the bourgeois media love to promote). I agree with the article's main points — that building socialism in a hi-tech society will be easier than it was in largely peasant Russia, and that advances in technology actually undermine the capitalist economic organization that gave rise to them.

But these points can be exaggerated to the point of euphoria. For example: "Technically, planning the economy

appears almost easy." (p. 31, beginning of paragraph about two-thirds down right column) But then the article notes, "...deciding what resources to allocate ('invest') and what to produce, and the mobilization and participation of the masses in the process, in a democratic way, seems more problematic." (same paragraph)

Planning the economy is easy, it's just that getting the masses to support this planning is difficult! This is the narrow outlook of a computer enthusiast: "Data processing is all very clean and neat, and can keep track of everything; the only problem is the masses." What's revealed here is a tendency to separate people from technology and economics, as if the latter were simply math problems to be solved.

Technology by itself cannot guarantee mobilization of the masses, and without this socialism is dead, no matter how many products are run through bar-code readers. The Soviet Union is the classic case in point: the Soviets had the technology to produce massive amounts of agricultural goods, and actually did so. But then the farm products would rot in the fields. Why? Precisely problems with the mobilization and participation of the masses.

The speech's answer to this problem is simply more technology: "But the advances in the technique of communications have a definite positive impact on the political/organizational side of the problem. They enable decision-making by democratic bodies to be much more informed, ..." (next paragraph on p. 31)

This is hi-tech euphoria. The easy reply is: Do hi-tech communications guarantee democratic decision-making today? Does the existence of electronic mass media guarantee the airing of progressive views? Look at the experience during the Persian Gulf war.

4) The key factor for socialism is the class of oppressed workers.

There is a point related to this hi-tech euphoria in the section "Is the USA ripe for workers' socialism?" Here, in describing the present-day working class, the speech tends to wax euphoric over the technical stratum of workers and to discount or underplay the more downtrodden sections of the class.

The speech mentions as a positive force for socialism "vast armies of white collar strata...who are nearer to blue collar workers in economic and social level." The speech seems to assume this is a base for socialism, although it points out "Of course, others of them who are now highly paid may not like the new society..." (p. 26, last full paragraph in right column)

First of all, there's a mistake here in restricting the issue of class divisions to level of pay. Many engineers, accountants, and technicians do not make millions. But they have a conservative outlook, an outlook of quietly serving their masters. They have a privileged position; they know it; and they are uncomfortable with suggestions about changing society. Even if they aren't paid a lot more than some blue-collar workers (and it's hard to find an engineer who is not

paid quite a lot more than any blue-collar worker), they don't have to work like blue-collar workers.

Secondly, the key to socialist consciousness is not education and culture, at least not in the bourgeois sense (which is the predominant sense in our society). Over time capitalism does create, in general, a more technically informed working class. But the key factors for socialism are, instead, the factors in capitalism tending to produce a more compact, more homogeneous, more militant and determined working class, a working class that is more and more independent of any bourgeois ambitions or thinking.

There are such factors operating today: the growing long-term unemployment, the growing consciousness of the government as simply a tool of the rich (S&L bail-out, military-industrial waste, etc.), the growing use of working class youth as cannon fodder or transitional workers with no future, the growing sense of crisis, etc.

Some trends in employment, in the composition of the working class, are also factors for a growing socialist consciousness. But the speech actually covers them up when it says, "...labor that is really 'unskilled' is becoming somewhat rare in society." (p. 26, next to last paragraph)

Actually there is large-scale differentiation going on. Some of the children of auto workers become CNC machinists, computer programmers, engineers, etc. But many others, ground down by a declining school system and facing unemployment, end up as fast-food workers or in other low-tech occupations.

This differentiation goes on in every industry. Jobs of the past are eliminated and replaced by, on the one hand, hi-tech jobs; but also, on the other hand, by lower-skilled jobs. Look at the transition to automation in the post office. Some jobs in maintenance, in taking care of electronic equipment, are opening up. But on the other hand the semi-skilled workers of yesterday, the LSM operators who were paid a higher wage for their dexterity and memorization of address codes, are being eliminated in favor of OCR mail processors — manual laborers who load and extract from a machine, and for whom literacy is not required at all. The OCRs' sequential sorting of mail will also convert letter carriers into almost full-time deliverers of mail — no longer part-time sorters, but more and more into simply mules hauling mail up and down streets.

In the data processing industry, many jobs as programmers and systems analysts are opening up. These are the creative, intellectual-type jobs. But also, at the same time, thousands of jobs as data entry operators are created. The latter are very hard, manual-type jobs which tend to produce lots of carpal tunnel syndrome. Computer manufacture also creates assembly-line jobs that are just traditional capitalist factory work, complete with the hazards of working around dangerous chemicals. In medicine there is a similar proletarianization of much of the work force taking place. There is a growing demand for nurses with masters degrees, hi-tech administrators removed from actual contact with patients. But there is even greater demand for orderlies, cafeteria workers, etc. — workers to carry out

the low-paid, physically demanding drudgery. Or look at the restaurant industry, another rapidly expanding service industry: there's more and more demand for educated chefs, but the fastest growing occupation is dishwasher.

The speech ignores this phenomenon, apparently because it doesn't seem to fit in with its main thesis that advances in technology are bringing us closer to socialism. But it doesn't fit only if you take the narrow view that advances in technology are the key factor for socialism. This would be wrong; the key factor for socialism is the creation of a revolutionary proletariat. In this all sections of the working class, the uneducated as well as the educated, have a role to play. In fact often the less technically proficient — the mass of unskilled laborers — have a greater sense of class solidarity and discipline than the more skilled, educated workers.

5) Welfare is a priority for socialism.

If the more downtrodden sections of employed workers get short shrift by the speech, the chronically unemployed get positively put down. First the speech points out, "...if the new society can provide...jobs for them,... the situation is changed." (last paragraph of section, "Is the USA ripe for workers' socialism?") I agree; this is the main point.

But the speech goes on and raises the prospect of

"various forms of coercion" to get them to work. This strikes an odd note, considering that the speech paints a rosy picture of software programmers displaying "tremendous enthusiasm" working for socialism (second column, page 30). If we're going to strike a stern note with respect to the "underclass," why not a more realistic assessment of the highly-paid privileged workers, some of whom have dreams of becoming Microsoft billionaires and will have to be coerced to work at all, much less display any enthusiasm?

This point is connected to another section, that on welfare (under "Wastage of labor power," third full paragraph in right column on p. 28). Generally the points here are correct, that socializing childcare, etc. can do much to eliminate people vegetating on AFDC and so forth. But beyond finding jobs for people, there is also in socialism the commitment to take care of the sick, the disabled, the aged and the young. Taking care of their needs will itself generate many jobs, and socialist society can no doubt meet people's needs in a more efficient manner than capitalism. But beyond just the issue of jobs, and technology, is the issue of priorities, of putting human needs before capitalist greed.

— Pete, a comrade in Detroit □

After the Soviet Union: On the new Commonwealth of Independent States

In December the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics came to an end, replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States. Nearly all the old Soviet republics are now enrolled in this Commonwealth. But how long will this commonwealth hold together? Will a stable alternative to the old state-capitalist system be built, or will the various parts of the Commonwealth descend into economic chaos and national strife? And what does the working class face in the coming period?

The rise and degeneration of the USSR

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed in the early 1920s as a union of most of the nationalities which had been ruled by the former tsarist regime in Russia. Under the tsars, the Russian aristocracy had cruelly exploited the other nations in the empire.

The immediate result of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was that each nation was granted self-determination and was free to go its own way. But as revolutionary forces came to power in the formerly-subject nations, and each of them recognized the value of affiliating to a larger union, the Soviet Union was formed. The union was conceived as a voluntary union of equal republics, all with the right of self-determination.

For it to succeed as a solid union where the workers' cause would be advanced throughout the USSR, equality among the nationalities had to be preserved. Special attention had to be paid to the poorer and less developed nations. And the restoration of privileges for the Russian nationality had to be fought against.

The Soviet Union did not come into being as a perfect union and there were contradictory tendencies from fairly early on. But as the years went by and the working class rule degenerated into a bureaucratic regime of state-capitalism, things began to turn backwards for the nationalities. Under Stalin's reign in the 30s Russian nationalism was revived, various local national rights were trampled upon, and at the same time within each republic Moscow ruled through a privileged elite of the local nationality. Later during the Brezhnev era, the Soviet rulers spawned a complete system of graft and corruption tying the local national leaders to the center through payoffs and kickback schemes.

State-capitalism finally undermined the Soviet Union to a point where it lost all cohesion. Under the pressure of economic crisis, national rivalries threatened to burst forth. Under Gorbachev's program of *glasnost* and *perestroika* the local national elites felt free to come out in open opposition to domination by the Russian center. The peoples of the different nationalities also felt free to come out with their grievances.

The Baltic republics declared their independence and began breaking relations with Moscow. Some of the southern republics also broke relations with the center, and local disputes flared into armed conflicts in some regions.

Gorbachev veers back and forth

By the end of 1990 Gorbachev was staring into the imminent possibility of the breakup of the Soviet Union. He either faced the prospect of keeping the union together by force or negotiating a new deal with the republics. At this time he played with the option of force. He ordered a clampdown on strikes and protests, and tried to shore up relations with his military and bureaucracy.

But it was too late. Many strikes and protests broke out. Gorbachev next turned towards the liberals, especially Boris Yeltsin. Shortly afterwards, Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian republic with a resounding majority, beating a candidate put up by Gorbachev. The main trend was now clear; Gorbachev had to turn away from his conservative supporters and mend fences with Yeltsin.

This fence-mending resulted in a new inter-republican union treaty negotiated by Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and other republican leaders. This treaty would preserve the Soviet Union, but with much greater autonomy to the local republics.

Conservatives in Gorbachev's administration opposed the new treaty. The climax of this struggle came in early August, 1991. To prevent the signing of the treaty, Gorbachev's cronies declared him "ill" and set up an emergency committee to rule the Soviet Union.

The August coup — a desperate measure

The coup was a last desperate measure to preserve the Union in its old form. Generally speaking, the policy of the coup leaders was *perestroika* without *glasnost*. They supported the free-market restructuring of the economy, but they opposed the political reforms and "openings" which Gorbachev saw as a necessary accompaniment. Their plan was to follow the Chinese path — turn to free markets, invite in foreign capital, but maintain a one-party, despotic state with the forced adherence of all republics.

The collapse of the coup meant the collapse of this alternative. In the aftermath Gorbachev tried to revive the union treaty. But Yeltsin and the other republican leaders had different ideas. During the fall, as the Soviet economy continued to decline, republics began negotiating bilateral and multilateral treaties to govern their economic relations. These were negotiated directly between republican leaders, without input from Gorbachev's central government. Meanwhile, Yeltsin's Russian Republic began to take more

and more powers away from the central apparatus.

The Commonwealth — an attempt to fill the vacuum

In early December, Yeltsin met with the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus (formerly Byelorussia) and declared a new Commonwealth of Independent States.

Gorbachev tried to rally his military and other forces to adhere to the old union, but to no avail. By this time Yeltsin had taken over the funding for the military and bureaucracy. So in late December Gorbachev formally resigned and the Supreme Soviet formally voted itself out of existence.

Unlike Gorbachev's union treaty, the Commonwealth is a very loose arrangement. About the only thing left for the centralized government is a much reduced military and coordination over nuclear weapons, and a vague commitment by the republics to cooperate in economic relations. And even these are just vague promises at this point, with the details still to be sketched in (and argued over each week).

For the moment, the Commonwealth is an attempt to fill the vacuum left by the disintegration of the USSR. It is a stopgap measure to prevent the republics from flying apart from each other.

To a new unity or further disintegration?

At this point it is still not clear if the Commonwealth will survive for even a short period. Without centralized state structures it is hard to see what will keep the Commonwealth from disintegrating further. Each republic, for the time being, is consolidating itself and rethinking its affiliation to the center. They are also seizing big portions of the military to put under their own control. At the same time, they all have the example of Yugoslavia before them to contemplate. A too-rapid disintegration may well lead to civil war, jealous feuds breaking out into inter-republican warfare. So they see a common interest in maintaining some kind of unity for the time being. The Commonwealth is a transitional step that will likely either lead back to greater unification, or to a permanent split-up.

Either way, Russia dominates

With or without formal unity, Russia will probably dominate many of the other republics. The Russian republic contains a majority of the population and land of the former Soviet Union. It also contains the great majority of natural wealth — minerals, furs, timber, and in particular petroleum and natural gas. This gives Russia a dominating economic position which makes affiliation to it by the poorer republics a practical necessity.

Yeltsin bent on Polish program

While Gorbachev advocated a five-year plan of transition to a market economy, Yeltsin pushed for a crash program. With Gorbachev and the Soviet regime gone, Yeltsin is now free to implement his rapid transition plan, similar to the plan carried out by Solidarity leaders in Poland. On January 2, the Russian government removed subsidies and price controls on most commodities.

The Ukrainian government opposed this plan, preferring a slower transition. Ukrainian leaders are afraid the sudden jump in prices will unleash economic anarchy. And with Russia making the move to end price controls, Ukraine will inevitably be dragged along simply through the close economic relations. Ukrainian leaders tried to block Yeltsin, but to no avail, and at the last moment they decided to give up price controls in the Ukraine as well.

The immediate result of this will be a big drop in the standard of living, and with it will come a drop in confidence in the government leaders. This was the result in Poland, where in the last election less than half the population bothered to vote, and the winning party received only 17% of votes cast. Everyone across the political spectrum predicts economic dislocation and hard times for the immediate future. The ruble, cut loose from state controls, will float against hard currencies of the West and will no doubt lose much of its value. This will wipe out the wages and savings of the Russian workers.

Yeltsin holds out the hope that things will settle down within six to eight months. But even if Russia avoids a deeper depression and economic chaos, it will be "settling down" to capitalist exploitation, not to gains for the working people. As in Poland, the rich bureaucrats will have enhanced possibilities for enriching themselves further, while the workers will be forced to compete in productivity with Western workers in much more developed economies.

Workers need a new socialist alternative and Independent organization

The only thing the workers get out of all this is a somewhat clearer picture of things. State-capitalism is rejected by most sections of the population. Now it is the turn for the promises of the free market to show their hollowness and cruelty.

Under the impact of shock therapy, there will no doubt be spontaneous blow-ups as well as workers developing defensive actions to protect themselves. Strikes, protests and riots are predicted. The development of a class movement of the workers in their own defense will be a vitally important step, but not even organized defensive actions are enough. To seriously challenge the cutthroat exploiters and cynical champions of free market, the workers will have to come up with an alternative perspective to the state-capitalism of yesterday and the free-market system of today. A vital task facing workers in the former Soviet Union is to articulate a vision of genuine workers' communism and to build their independent class movement based on that. □

“Friends of democracy” -- a death squad against Puerto Rican activists

Testimony to a Puerto Rican Senate committee has revealed the participation of U.S. officials in the repression and murder of pro-independence activists, unionists, and other political activists in Puerto Rico, and that the FBI was involved. The ongoing hearings began in late October.

Investigations showed that in the mid-1970's José López, the chief US marshal in Puerto Rico for more than ten years, organized a death squad called “Friends of Democracy.” It aimed at leftists and advocates of Puerto Rican independence, and was similar to the right-wing death squads in Brazil and Argentina. This came to light in the testimony of Ignacio Rivera to Puerto Rican Senate committee investigation of the 1978 ambush and murder by 15 police of two pro-independence activists, Carlos Soto Arriví and Arnaldo Darío Rosada. (This is called the Cerro Maravilla case after the hill on which the activists were murdered.) Rivera, a lawyer and former CIA agent, testified that he was present at a meeting in which one of the cops involved in the killing of the two advocates for independence discussed the activities of the death squad with the FBI.

The Justice Department had conducted two investigations of these murders and let the cops go. The FBI also investigated the murders--in coordination with Puerto Rican police captain Angel Pérez Casillas. It turned out later that Perez not only had masterminded but supervised the murder of the two activists. A witness, Desiderio Cartagena, second-ranking police officer at the time, testified that he took it for granted that FBI agents had been present during

the killings. He said that the FBI were together with the police intelligence division in a joint task force headed by Angel Pérez. And he testified that he had twice notified FBI agent John Hinchcliffe of the plan to lure the two activists to the hill where they were killed.

Earlier, hearings by the Puerto Rican Senate in 1983 threw a bit of light on the murders and discredited the police story, and 10 cops were eventually convicted of perjury. Rivera's testimony at the present hearings shows the existence of a death squad behind the murders.

Rivera's testimony also linked the death squad to the 1979 machine-gun attack on a bus outside the Sabana Seca Navy Base, the 1980 bombing of the Puerto Rican Bar Association, and the harassment of activists against the US Navy's occupation of Vieques island.

The death squad members included US Navy Lt. Alex de la Zerda, officials of the Puerto Rican police, and right-wing Cubans. Chief U.S. marshal in Puerto Rico José López supplied the weapons from the US marshal's office while De la Zerda supplied bombs, grenades, ammunition and other explosives. They planted live mines on the beach to kill fishermen at Vieques who were protesting the US Navy's target practice in 1979 on the island.

Another member of the death squad was implicated in the assassination of Carlos Muñoz Barela. Muñoz was a founding member of the Antonio Maceo brigade, an organization of young Cubans who oppose the US embargo of Cuba. □

Against bigotry

San Jose, California

On November 6, about 400 students marched through the Santa Clara University campus protesting racist incidents on campus in recent weeks. They targeted the administration for its lack of response to previous protests. Some of the demands were: a serious effort to recruit minority students to the school and that Black and Latino students be involved in the process; that graduation requirements include ethnic and women's studies; and that assistance be provided to Asian-American and Pacific Islander students.

Santa Clara University, a Jesuit school, has 4,000 students. In the current freshman class of around 1,200, only 16 are blacks, 2 of whom are women. Most of the 16 blacks are athletes.

The next day, outside the room where university trustees were meeting, about 25 students wearing green armbands lined the hall to present their demands. □

Los Angeles, California

Anti-racists are actively fighting neo-Nazism, and its so-called "Populist Party", in the Los Angeles area.

About 75 people picketed a gathering of the Populist Party at a public library in Pasadena on October 13. Bottles were thrown and police tried to break up the crowd, 5 of whom were arrested. Two were charged with assault with a deadly weapon.

In November, the Populist Party tried to hold a conference at the Pasadena City College, but, after this was exposed by anti-racist activists, the school cancelled the

reservations. The neo-Nazis then tried to move the conference outside the school, and under a fictitious name they reserved the American Friends Service Committee meeting hall. The group People Against Racist Terror found it out, and AFSC canceled.

Meanwhile, Students For America, a youth front in Pasadena for the Populist Party, invited Darryl Gates, the ignominious Los Angeles police chief, to speak at the state university Northridge campus on November 13. But after protests were announced, Gates cancelled, citing security reasons. The Northridge campus has seen attacks on lesbians and gays, Jews and Mexicans recently. □

New York City

200 lesbians and gay men marched through the neighborhood where a gay bartender, Julio Rivera, was killed last year by a gang of bigoted skinheads. They celebrated the conviction of the three gang members, from the "Doc Marten Style Skinheads", who killed him.

The gang's leader, Daniel Boyle, who was one of those convicted, is the son of a retired New York City police detective. Rivera actually died from Boyle's knife thrust, but Boyle got a lesser charge for testifying against the other two skinheads involved. In videotaped testimony, he said that he masterminded the plan to "stretch out" a homeless person, gay person or a drug dealer.

The police did not at first classify the attack on Rivera hate-related. This is not surprising because of the prevalent anti-gay and racist bigotry among the police. No wonder most victims of anti-gay bigotry refuse to report it for fear of harassment. □

Repression, a growth industry

Weldonomics: prison slavery returns

Excerpted from an article on prison labor from the Dec. 4 issue of Boston Worker, voice of the MLP-Boston:

15 million workers are unemployed (twice the official figure which doesn't count those who have given up looking for work or who are working only a few hours a week). At the same time, unemployment benefits and welfare benefits are being slashed in state after state. But the American capitalists have a solution for this problem. Prisons and chain gangs. The black people who long suffered the highest rate of unemployment among the American workers are now seeing one in four men under 30 in jail, in prison, on parole or on probation. Jail has become the method of choice for dealing with the poor. In Michigan where 80,000 unemployed people were recently cut off General Relief, the Director of the Community Service and Referral Center in the state capital said his advice to these people who are now being thrown into the streets is: "I tell them to commit a simple larceny. Especially if they're sick. I tell them to do that. I explain to them it's a roof over their head."

But with prison populations exploding, the rich have decided to take advantage of this most oppressed section by bringing back the chain gang. Here in Massachusetts, Governor Will Well-to-Do Weld has become a national trend-setter in bringing back the chain gang. Prisoners are now being used to do the work of laidoff Department of Public Works employees cutting brush along the highways and taking care of the grounds at the state capitol. Prison labor is being used to solve Chelsea's financial crisis with the streets and parks now being cleaned and repaired by prison slaves. The brush along the commuter rail lines is also being cut by chain gangs. Weld, who is always looking for a business deal, eyes the prison population of 16,500 young men and says, "If I have a choice of having prisoners doing work for free and paying someone else \$24 an hour, I'm going to have the prisoners do it for free." Already over 1,000 prisoners are being used in chain gangs. No one can object to prisoners being given useful work or job training. But this is modern day peonage. It is a sign of how low the rich want to push the working class. □

Pay the rent or go to jail

While homelessness grows, landlords are taking revenge on people who can't come up with their rent. Indeed, things have gotten so bad that, on December 23, the Salt Lake City Council actually passed a new law to jail people

who don't pay their rent.

The ordinance makes defrauding a landlord a misdemeanor with a maximum punishment of six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The seven City Council members, three of whom have been landlords themselves, claim the law is only against "professional rent thieves" and punishment requires proof that the renter intended to defraud the landlord.

But, obviously, this law can easily be used to punish anyone who refuses to pay rent in order to force the landlord to make repairs. And the mere threat of the law is enough for landlords to drive out of their homes almost anyone unable to make their rent payments. □

More police violence against women

From the Nov. 13 issue of Boston Worker, voice of the MLP-Boston:

Boston cop Guy Bowen abused Joyce Hodge in her Dorchester home early morning September 9. Her case is typical of how the police and courts have no concern for women victims in domestic disputes.

Joyce had called police to her home during a dispute with her ex-boyfriend. Although police told Joyce to remain seated and quiet, she was still angry that the ex-boyfriend had slammed a hammer through her television set, and she threatened him with a screwdriver. After the ex-boyfriend was removed to the kitchen, Officer Bowen grabbed Joyce, pinned her to a sofa, ripped her blouse open and sat staring at her exposed breasts. Joyce struggled to get him off her, and demanded the cops leave. Bowen refused.

Bowen filed two counts of assault and battery against Joyce (standard operating procedure for all police who brutalize people), claiming that she assaulted the cop and her ex-boyfriend. Joyce filed charges against Bowen for assault, but the Dorchester clerk refused Joyce's request for time to prepare, and dismissed her petition for charges against Bowen.

Later, on Oct. 31, Joyce was tried for assault and battery. She was railroaded through without time to formulate a defense. She was denied access to Bowen's records to see if he had a history of such assaults. And the judge wouldn't allow her to see if Bowen had a cut on his arm as he falsely claimed. She was found guilty and sentenced to one year's probation. This is the attitude of the police and the courts toward women, especially black women. There will be no justice without a mass movement against police brutality, and for the rights of minorities and women. □

Lessons of the Boston bus drivers' strike

The Nov. 1 issue of the Workers' Advocate reported on the Boston school bus driver's strike. Later in November, the strike ended. Democratic Mayor Flynn and the city administration wanted to make an example of the bus drivers, and they spent more to break the strike than it would have cost to meet the drivers' highest demands. They succeeded in denying any wage increase, and in tying the bus drivers down for four years during which they cannot legally strike. But they utterly failed to get scabbing going and to break the workers.

The Nov. 13 issue of Boston Worker, voice of the MLP-Boston, discussed the strike and what was done by the AFL-CIO and by the reformists, associated with the Workers World Party, who were in the leadership of the local bus drivers' union. Below are excerpts from that article:

After the strike the media was filled with views of various pundits that the strike was ill-advised, that strikes aren't the way to go anymore, etc., etc. But what other recourse is there for workers in their struggle with the capitalists? The answer is that there is no other. The issue is that for strikes to succeed they need to be organized quite differently than this one was.

With the whole capitalist establishment bearing down against the drivers, it was essential to build up solidarity among all workers around the city. The AFL-CIO union officials signed a call for workers to support the drivers, but that was all they did. They didn't mobilize any of the tens of thousands of workers who will be directly affected by the outcome of the strike, such as T workers and teachers, to join the picket lines, hold rallies, etc. The leaders of the Carmen's union did not organize the slightest resistance to T workers doing extra runs [of the city's mass transit system] during the strike. They did not send their workers a single notice of support for the school bus drivers' strike. Other union leaders did the same. While the drivers were on strike, the AFL-CIO leaders came out actively for Mayor Flynn's reelection, showing just which side they were really on. And finally, the bus drivers' international union representative threatened to cut off all financial support if the drivers did not go back to work.

The backstabbing by the AFL-CIO leaders was a betrayal not only of the school bus drivers but of all workers. The school bus drivers' contract will be used as a precedent to impose more concessions on other workers.

Unfortunately, the bus drivers' union leaders, who claim to be leftists, had a policy of relying on the AFL-CIO bureaucrats, and various politicians, to build up solidarity for the strike. This was a disaster. Today solidarity of the workers can only be built by going directly to the rank and file. This would mean actively distributing flyers all over town to tell the truth about the strike. It would mean organizing roving pickets at important places like T bus garages and at schools. It would mean appealing to the rank-and-file workers and ordinary people in other occupations in spite of the inaction and resistance of the AFL-CIO leaders. To carry out this kind of tactic requires a high degree of mobilization of the rank-and-file bus drivers. But the school bus drivers' union leaders lost sight of the real strength, the rank and file. They did not prepare the rank and file for the strike in advance. When confronted with a small section of workers who did not want to strike, they stopped holding mass meetings rather than air the issues openly. This tactic allowed the small, anti-strike section to be manipulated and painted much bigger than it was by the media. The drivers union leaders' faith in the bought-off AFL-CIO bureaucrats, politicians, and legal maneuvers rather than the rank-and-file workers weakened the strike considerably.

Despite the pressures, the drivers *did* maintain a strong picket line throughout the strike. The attempts by the media and the capitalists to organize scabs to cross the lines were met with militant mass opposition and the scabs did not cross. The strike was followed carefully by workers around the city as was shown by the interest shown in *Boston Worker* leaflets supporting the strike. All these facts show that it is quite possible to organize rank-and-file action.

Rank-and-file workers need to take matters into their own hands, organize solidarity and build the class struggle on as wide a basis as possible. □

Strikes in brief

Caterpillar struggle remains strong

Since early November, more than 9,000 workers at Illinois plants of Caterpillar, Inc. have been either on strike, laid off, or locked out. Caterpillar has pulled out all stops in its drive to smash the union and save money at the expense of the workers.

Caterpillar wants to break the pattern bargaining between the UAW and heavy earth-moving machinery companies, and it refuses to abide by a contract that had been reached with John Deere Co., its main competitor. In fact, the Caterpillar bosses insist on negotiating a separate contract for each individual Caterpillar plant — further dividing the work force.

Caterpillar is a huge corporation stretching over Brazil, Japan, Indonesia, Belgium, France and England as well as the U.S. Their sales in third quarter of 1991 exceeded two and a quarter billion dollars. Yet Caterpillar is crying poor, and wants wage cuts to make up for their \$37 million loss.

In the time leading up to the strike, Caterpillar closed a unionized plant in Canada and replaced it with a non-union operation in North Carolina. It has stockpiled a six-month inventory, and refused to negotiate since Nov. 3. On December 11, it threatened to close its plant in York, Pennsylvania. This would throw another 1,450 workers onto layoff along with those from five previous plants. Each time Caterpillar tries to pit the laid-off workers against their fellow workers manning the picket lines.

But Caterpillar workers remain strong. The picket lines have been solid, and the strikers have enjoyed wide support from their local communities and retired Caterpillar workers. They are determined to fight the assault on their rights. □

Workers strike against Freightliner

On December 9, more than 700 workers and supporters rallied outside the Freightliner Corporation truck assembly plant at Mt. Holly, North Carolina. The crowd shouted, "Contract! Contract! Contract!" during a sunrise rally which marked the sixth day of their strike.

In April 1990, 1,200 workers at the Freightliner plant voted for union representation by the UAW. But there's been no contract. In fact, during the last year and a half, Freightliner has excluded workers in the bargaining unit from two rounds of pay raises granted to other employees. It has also fired a prominent union man on trumped-up charges.

On the first day of the strike, a company supervisor rammed two picketing strikers with her Mercedes-Benz.

The strikers are demanding a contract. They are concerned about wages, work being subcontracted out, and

lay-offs, and they are worried about health and safety issues. The UAW says that the Freightliner plant has the highest rate of on-the-job injuries in all of North Carolina. Workers report that some pregnant woman workers have miscarried because they were forced to work against medical advice. Workers have been exposed to high levels of phenol — some have levels four times higher than OSHA standards.

The Freightliner strikers have enjoyed wide support from other workers, who refuse to cross their picket lines. The local UAW bargaining committee chairman, however, wants to "cut the picket line to 15 people and keep it quiet" in the name of "show(ing) that we're serious about negotiating." But it's only the determination and militancy of the workers that will show Freightliner that the workers are serious about fighting for their rights. □

Coal strike in Colorado

In Colorado, coal miners have been on strike against Cyprus Minerals Co. since May 13. It began at the Empire Mine in Craig, Colorado. Cyprus Minerals wants to destroy the union and gut what safety measures there are. Since the mid-1970s, six miners have died at the Empire Mine.

The strikers demand that the nearby city of Colorado Springs stop doing business with the coal company. The Colorado Springs Public Utilities uses Empire Mine coal to fuel their power plants, and a new coal contract, worth \$80 million, is in the works. The capitalist city managers would thus add to the war chest of the Cyprus bosses.

On November 21, 60 striking coal miners demonstrated at the Colorado Springs city hall. They demanded that the city stop supporting the coal bosses. None of the city officials would meet with them, and the local capitalist-owned newspaper didn't even cover the protest.

Meanwhile, Cyprus Minerals has harassed strikers through the court system. A court restraining order demands that the Empire Mine strikers only use a symbolic, 4-person picket at Cyprus Minerals' nonunion Twenty Mile Mine.

And a number of miners have faced charges. Two miners were charged with slashing the tires of non-union employees entering the mine, and acquitted. Two more miners faced charges in connection with a June 16 incident where a Vance security agent (hired by Cyprus) tried to run over a group of picketers with a motorcycle. One striker received a knife wound in the hand. No charges were filed against the security agent, but the striker with the wound was charged with felony assault. The misdemeanor charges against the other miner were dropped on December 9.

But the Empire Mine strikers are standing fast, and have kept their strike alive over half a year. □

Graduate students strike at Yale

Graduate students at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, are fighting for union rights. They teach for meager pay with no benefits while they study for their own degrees. About 1,300 of the 2,200 graduate students have joined the Graduate Employee and Student Organization (GESO) and are demanding union recognition. GESO is calling for larger stipends for teaching assistants, lower health care payments, changes in the time requirements for completing Ph.D. degrees, and a reasonable grievance procedure.

On December 4, the graduate student workers held a one-day strike. Other Yale employees — clerical, technical, maintenance, housekeeping and cafeteria workers — honored the GESO picket lines despite the Yale administration's threats of retaliation. Thousands of Yale students also honored the picket line. As well, 4,000 people rallied in front of the president's office to demand the GESO be recognized. And a rally was held at the New Haven coliseum.

This comes six weeks before contracts expire for other staff unions. Yale seeks many concessions, including an unlimited right to subcontract out dining hall and custodial work. This would eliminate hundreds of jobs, mostly held by black workers, and replace them with minimum-wage, part-time jobs. Yale also wants to wipe out the layoff, transfer, and promotion rights of clerical and technical workers. Solidarity among all Yale University workers and progressive students strengthens the struggle against the capitalist administration of this ivy league school. □

Job Injuries at record levels, and thousands die at the workplace

According to a recently released survey of private industry by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were over 6.8 million on-the-job injuries and work-related illnesses during 1990. This is

the highest number ever reported by the BLS, being 200,000 more than the year before. Almost 9% of all workers were injured, the highest percentage since 1979.

Lost workdays as a result of injury or illness rose from 567 million in 1989 to 604 million in 1990. Over 60% of all illness cases involved repeated stress injuries — for example, carpal tunnel syndrome due to repetitive pressure and motion. Injuries increased in most work categories including mining, agriculture, transportation, public utilities and services. However, in manufacturing and construction, the BLS said there was a slight decrease.

The report admits 2,900 deaths in private workplaces with 11 or more employees, but it refuses to give a total figure for deaths, saying that the survey's sample of 250,000 businesses size was too small. It does admit that "the Bureau believes that this count [2,900] significantly understates work-related fatalities for the year." The AFL-CIO estimates 10,000 deaths in the year.

And what was the US Department of Labor's response to the deaths and injuries? Emphasizing the decline in reported cases among manufacturing, the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Gerard Scannell, stated that "these statistics are a positive sign". He claimed that "some of the increases" are due to a "continuing emphasis" by OSHA on "accurate recordkeeping." Tell that to the 25 workers killed in the fire in Hamlet, North Carolina because no one ever inspected the plant. Indeed, as there are less and less OSHA inspectors, tabulating the blood based on employers' report is about all they can do.

The ongoing carnage cannot be glossed over. The bottom line is that US workers are suffering in the capitalist drive for profits. And the productivity drive and restructuring of the economy is making workers pay an even heavier toll. Science and medicine may be progressing, but all the capitalists want to know is how to drive the workers to the wall without leaving marks that can be traced back to a particular workplace. It is time for workers to break the yoke of such an inhuman system. □

What's happening to workers' compensation?

As record number of workers are getting injured and killed, the capitalists have found a solution. No, they're not making the workplaces safer. Instead, in state after state, they want to cut back on disability and medical benefits, and to keep more and more injured workers from receiving any payments at all. As long as they don't have to pay medical and disability payments, let the blood flow and the hands and bodies be crippled.

The following article is from the Dec. 12 issue of Boston Worker, voice of the MLP-Boston.

No to Weld's Workmen's Comp "Reform"

During this holiday season [Republican Governor] Weld and the [Democratic-controlled] Legislature are trying to slide through a major attack on injured workers.

The governor and the legislative leaders have agreed that workmen's compensation insurance costs of the wealthy employers must be reduced. This is not to be done by cutting the profits of the insurance companies or by forcing employers to provide safer workplaces, but rather

by reducing benefits paid to injured workers and cutting off all benefits for thousands of severely injured workers.

The main provisions being considered by the legislature are:

1. Reduce the maximum length of time a worker can collect workmen's compensation from 16.5 years to 10 years, no matter how seriously injured or disabled the worker is.
2. Reduce maximum weekly benefits by 20 per cent.
3. Allow employers or their insurance companies to cut off an injured worker's benefits at any time, for any reason, and it will take the worker 1 year to schedule a hearing to have the benefit restored.
4. Make it nearly impossible for workers to collect for injuries that aggravate a previously existing condition, such as bad back, or occupational diseases that take a long time to develop (e.g. repetitive motion injuries, lung impairment, etc.). This will deprive as many as 25 per cent of all injured workers of any livelihood. The injuries of many of these workers have made them unemployable.

5. Make it more difficult for workers who have exhausted their workmen's compensation benefits or been cut off to sue for a cash settlement by sharply reducing allowable lawyers fees in lump sum settlements. And knowing how greedy lawyers are, it will be difficult to get one to do any serious work on a case.

The productivity drive of the capitalists over the last 15 years combined with cutbacks in health and safety inspections by OSHA have led to an explosion of repetitive stress injuries, accidents and occupational diseases. But now the capitalists simply want to discard the workers they have used up. The kind of cuts being made in workmen's compensation in Massachusetts are being made in state after state. It is notable that the capitalist system in America distributes most benefits for the workers and poor through the state governments so that workers can be beaten down one state at a time.

Workers, at this point it is almost certain that some [form of] Weld's workmen's compensation bill will be passed. The only way that workers will win any improvements is not through polite lobbying of the capitalist politicians but by building up our united mass struggle. □

Overwork at Highland Hospital claims another victim: Remember Bettye Collins!

Excerpted from an article in the Dec. 15 issue of *Bay Area Workers' Voice*, paper of the MLP-San Francisco Bay Area:

While the press and politicians talk about the supposed miraculous turn-around at Highland Hospital, there is another story to be told which will never make the news.

It is the story of hospital workers who are regularly pushed beyond their limits by an administration who cares more for its budget than human life.

It is the story of a nurse, Bettye Collins, who worked on an inpatient ward at Highland until she died a tragic and premature death on November 29, 1991.

Bettye worked at Highland for 6 years and was known for the kind and careful care she gave her patients despite working conditions which were not favorable to her health. She worked on a ward with patients who required a lot of physical stamina on the part of the nurse; a ward which was chronically understaffed due to a productivity drive implemented by the hospital's director, Ophelia Long. She was regularly given 7 patients on the day shift—an impossible workload for any nurse, much less Bettye who was 51 and suffered from diabetes.

Last year Bettye applied for a job in the clinic where the work was less back-breaking. She was denied the

position on the basis that she had used too much of her sick time! The administration put her in a Catch-22. She was forced to come to work without fail to a job which was too stressful in order to make the needed transfer.

Bettye complained that the workload was too much for her. She commented that she didn't know how long she could go on. This fell on deaf ears. On November 29, she died suddenly of a massive stroke.

The sorrow in the hearts of the people who worked with Bettye has turned to anger against administrators whose sole concern is to cut the hospital's budget and please their higher-ups who hold the keys to future career moves.

Beneath the administration's frivolous "Highland is Healing" rhetoric lies the grim truth: staffing cuts are murderous to the workers as well as the patients. But did Bettye's death change the administration's mind about its vicious staffing policies? Just two days after her death, an LVN, who worked on the same floor and shift as Bettye, was assigned nine patients to care for.

Bettye Collins's death reveal the reality of the recent government cutbacks being implemented by the administration at Highland. Perhaps her story will inspire a fight against the cuts and overwork at the hospital before another victim is claimed. □

At Cook County Hospital in Chicago: More work, less health care

From the Dec. 19 issue of Chicago Workers' Voice, paper of the MLP-Chicago:

On December 2nd, Cook County Hospital laid off 150 workers. At the same time 400 positions which were temporarily vacant were eliminated. This is bad news for the County workers and for the communities that use County Hospital. For the laid off workers it means no pay checks and no health insurance (and with no advance warning). For many it meant being escorted off the hospital grounds by the police like some kind of criminal. For the hospital workers who weren't laid off, it means more obstacles to getting necessary work done and the impossible task of trying to do several people's jobs at the same time.

For the poor working class people who use County Hospital the layoffs mean more waiting, waiting, and waiting. It means more delays in getting tests done, worse conditions on the in-patient wards and poorer medical care overall. After all, it was wasn't do-nothing big shots who were laidoff. And it wasn't the Cook County Board of Commissioners which had jobs eliminated. No, it was social workers (one-third of the whole department!), technicians from the Blood Bank, Emergency Room, and Newborn Intensive Care Unit; clerical workers, maintenance workers, housekeeping workers, etc. No matter how much the politicians who run Cook County Hospital swear up and down that no "patient care" jobs are being lost, the truth is obvious. All these jobs are part of "patient care" and the patients are already feeling the loss of technical and support workers.

What's going on at the County

Cook County Hospital is run by the government of the County of Cook—the County Board of Commissioners. The new President of the Board of Commissioners, Richard Phelan, ran an election campaign filled with promises of improved hospital care, better conditions for patients and

employees and other lies. The County Board did manage to give itself a 28% raise despite all the "budget constraints". Meanwhile the reality for the hospital workers has been lay-offs, attempted wage freezes and benefit cuts. And for the communities that depend on "The County" there has been a continuing pattern of reduced services, crowding and delays.

Cook County Hospital is the only hospital and clinic system in the Chicago area that accepts patients, even in non-emergencies, whether or not they can pay the bills or have any insurance. Less than ten years ago Cook County Hospital had 1400 beds available, now it has less than 1000, and the County government plans to cut back still more. Is this because of a sudden outbreak of healthiness among Chicago's poor and unemployed? Or perhaps the private hospitals have decided to take more public aid and uninsured non-paying patients so Cook County Hospital doesn't need so many beds? Not on your life! Generally some 65-70% of the beds at County are filled with patients at any given time, and patients are getting to the hospital sicker and having to stay longer. All the reductions in available beds, and cuts in services are part of the cutbacks in health care that we are seeing nation-wide. It's not that there are fewer sick people. It's that the rich capitalists are cutting back even the few pennies they have paid out for health care for the working class and poor.

Health care is a right!

Unite against lay-offs and cutbacks!

Some workers at Cook County Hospital have held protests against the lay-offs and the cuts in patient services. Many more protests are needed to help fight these cutbacks. We need unity between the hospital employees, and the patients. The working class and poor communities that use the hospital need to take up the fight to force the hospital to provide more and better services and to stop it from cutting back even one more service. □

Behind hospital deregulation in Massachusetts

From the Dec. 4 issue of Boston Worker, voice of the MLP-Boston:

**Hospital deregulation:
good for Rabkin, bad for us**

Beth Israel Hospital President Rabkin is very happy that the Massachusetts hospital deregulation bill has passed the House and is headed for the Senate and the Governor. If passed, this bill will drastically increase the competition between hospitals who will be trying to outbid each other

for insurance company contracts by offering lowest prices for medical services. Rabkin says Beth Israel (BI) is ready to compete in a deregulated environment. He claims that BI will come out ahead, providing all BI workers with secure jobs, and therefore we should all get behind him to fight against other hospitals to get the insurance contracts.

Should we go along with Rabkin and join in this competition with other hospitals? *Boston Worker* says NO. For four good reasons.

Number one. Workers inside BI have already been forced to accept pay cuts (a "reduced wage increase deferment" of three months) and increased workload (a six-month hiring freeze aimed at eliminating 150 positions), all in the name of helping BI better compete in the tight economy. *Any increase in competition between hospitals will mean even more belt-tightening for BI workers.*

Number two. Increased competition between hospitals will mean that workers *in the different hospitals will be constantly pitted against each other to see who can work the hardest for the least pay and accept the smallest staffing levels.* This will result in a downward spiral in wages, benefits, working conditions, and jobs for ALL hospital workers. Far from bringing job security, increased competition will bring about layoffs even sooner. In fact experts are predicting that deregulation will force the closing of several smaller hospitals in the next year. Not only will the layoffs involved cause great hardship for the unemployed workers, but the misery of the unemployed and the existence of a large surplus of trained hospital workers will be used as a whip to force down wages and conditions in every other hospital.

Number three. Increased competition between hospitals will mean that *health care for the working class will be reduced.* The bigger, private hospitals will drive the smaller, community-based hospitals out of business. Health care in these smaller hospitals, which is mainly for the working class, will be cut back or eliminated. Public hospitals will not be able to compete for private insurance contracts, meaning they will become exclusively for the uninsured and the poor. These hospitals will face another round of cutbacks, on top of the past decade of devastating cuts.

Number four. *The capitalists and their managers will benefit at our expense.* Big corporations stand to have their medical

insurance rates reduced, increasing their profits. Big, private hospitals stand to gain special contracts. Hospital managers like Rabkin stand to increase their fame and glory (not to mention their bank accounts). Insurance companies stand to have the prices they pay for many services reduced. Medical industry capitalists (drugs, equipment, construction, etc.) stand to keep their profits up at the obscene levels reached during the '80s. All these profits will be made by driving fewer hospital workers harder, for less money.

Rabkin would like us to ignore all these points and join him in fighting the other hospitals. Never mind that we would be shooting ourselves in the foot. Never mind that we would be abandoning our fellow hospital workers. Never mind that we would help drive down health care for all workers. And never mind that all the money would go to him and his class. Hey, we're all one big happy family here!

Active mass resistance is the answer

If going along with Rabkin is suicidal, how can we save our jobs and wages? We have to rebuild the mass struggle against the capitalists. Hospital workers are a potentially huge force. If we get organized and active, we will be able to successfully resist the onslaught on our wages and jobs. To this aim, today we can begin by resisting, department by department, any increase in workload. We can circulate *Boston Worker* to expose Rabkin's promises as lies, and to build up a fighting spirit. We can build up opposition to the wage freeze, and make it clear we need more money just to get by.

Bush talks of "recovery", but he is a liar too. But for the workers there is nothing but more unemployment, more wage cuts, more hardship. Every time you turn around the rich have a new scheme to drive the working people down further. Enough is enough! It is time for workers in this country to start rebelling. Only by rebuilding the mass struggle can we stop the downward spiral. The insatiable greed of the wealthy is leading our society to disaster. Eventually we workers are going to have to fight to do away with this whole profit system and build a system that runs for the benefit of the people. □