



Speak Out Now

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Rising Up Behind Bars – National Prisoners' Strike

On August 21, prisoners in 17 different states launched a prison strike against the brutal conditions and state violence directed primarily against the poor and minorities. Prisoners are refusing to work or eat for the 19 days of the strike. The strike, coordinated and spread by the prisoners themselves, reached into prisons across the U.S. In addition, hundreds of immigrant prisoners of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency joined in the strike. This prison strike is truly a revolt of the oppressed against an institution that oppresses them.

Prisoners began to get organized after seven inmates were killed by guards during a riot in a South Carolina prison last April. The violence, on top of all of the other indignities of prison life, was one step too far. Death is an all too common occurrence in prison. For example in the last three weeks, ten prisoners have died in their cells with prison authorities offering no concrete cause of their death. Organizers of the strike, calling themselves "Jailhouse Lawyers Speak," have said that they hope to bring public attention to the number of deaths of prisoners and to the horrific treatment they are forced to endure. According to the statement released by the organizers, "Fundamentally, it's a human rights issue...prisoners understand they are being treated as animals. Prisons in America are a warzone. Every day prisoners are harmed due to conditions of confinement. For some of us it's as if we are already dead, so what do we have to lose?"

The prisoners on strike are demanding an immediate end to the inhuman violence perpetrated against them and improvements in basic necessities. They also demand minimum wage laws apply to prisons, ending the common practice of paying prisoners pathetic sums of money for forced labor – in Louisiana it is as low as four cents per hour. The prisoners are demanding that racist over-sentencing and parole denials for minorities be stopped, and that all prisoners have a right to eventual parole, not having to die in prison. Finally prisoners are demanding rehabilitation and education programs that have been cut.



1971 Attica Prison Strike

The prison strike began on August 21 to commemorate the day, 47 years ago, that Black Panther George Jackson was killed in San Quentin Prison. George Jackson had joined the Black Panthers while he was in prison, developing a political consciousness of the society that had incarcerated him. Jackson was killed in an alleged escape in 1971. Jackson's writings became well known among prisoners. Following Jackson's death, an uprising in New York's Attica prison was organized by the inmates there, demanding improvements in their conditions. The uprising was suppressed by state police who stormed the jail, killing 33 prisoners and ten prison guards.

The current strike is set to end on September 9th to mark the 47th anniversary of the Attica prison uprising in

which prisoners rose up and seized control of their prison. The choice of these symbolic dates links this prisoners' strike to the history of resistance by prisoners in the U.S.

In capitalist society, prisons function to absorb the thousands upon thousands of people who have been marginalized, abused, and deprived of a place in so-called normal society. There are 2.2 million people in prisons and jails in the U.S. The racism of this society guarantees that the weight of the prison system falls most heavily on minorities, especially Black people who make up 40% of the prison population. The prisoners are absolutely right to stand up against the prison system and demand these basic reforms at the very least.

Back to School – We Need to Fight for Good Schools for All!

As they do every year, school superintendents and principals across the country have made their speeches about their hopes for the new school year. But reality doesn't inspire much hope. While the high school graduation rate is about 91 percent nationwide, the rates of high school seniors who test "proficient" are just 37 percent in English and 25 percent in math. About 60 percent of first-year college students take remedial courses to bring their reading, writing, and math skills up. And the cost of going to college has continued to skyrocket, piling an average of \$37,000 in debt onto students who are unable to pay. As a result, many students leave college early and never get the education they need and deserve.

Despite all this, total education spending per student is greater in the U.S. than in any other country. But in international education ratings, the U.S. ranks 14th best in the world, behind mostly Asian and European countries, including South Korea, Poland, and Russia. This is important, not because of rankings, but because it shows the general poor quality of education in the U.S.

Since 2008, states across the country have made drastic cuts to K-12 funding, a reduction of over \$23 billion. And the number of K-12 teachers and other school workers has fallen by 135,000 since 2008 while the number of students has risen by 1,419,000. Many students in wealthier communities go to public schools that are far better equipped and have the most experienced teachers compared to impoverished communities, which are disproportionately communities of color. Students in impoverished communities rarely have new textbooks, computers, or other technology, and often lack adequate heat, air conditioning, or clean water.

The recent strikes of teachers and education workers in several states have exposed the poor compensation that these workers receive. And policymakers, led by both Obama and Trump, have touted charter schools as an education strategy that, among other problems, often pays teachers less than regular public schools. Both Democrats and Republicans are responsible for education policies that fail students, families, and communities – from Bush's "No Child Left Behind" and Obama's "Race to the Top" to the

Trump administration's intensification of charter schools and for-profit vocational colleges.

Education funding at the federal, state, and local levels does not address disparities in students' needs. For example, studies have shown that students who do not have intellectually stimulating activities during the summer tend to lose two to three months of learning by the time they go back to school. But students from families with more money can go to summer camps focusing on math, reading, science, or the arts. Those from less affluent families don't have the same opportunities and may spend the summer in front of the TV or hanging on the corner. Research shows that this inequality in wealth generally accounts for a significant achievement gap by ninth grade. But impoverished school systems can't spend to develop summer programming without cutting school year budgets, which are already too low. So the result is there is one kind of education reserved for the rich, and another one for the working class and the poor.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, was supposed to put an end to segregated schooling across the country and provide quality education for all. But this hasn't happened. Because of the racism of our society, schools still remain deeply segregated, mirroring the segregation of our neighborhoods. The result is that if you live in a poor neighborhood, the chances are your school is underfunded. And so Black and Brown students continue to go to schools that are underfunded compared to predominantly white schools.

The politicians, and the banks and corporations they work for, don't care about the quality of schools for working class children. Schools function to turn out lots of workers for low-paying jobs and far fewer college-educated people to keep the bosses' system running. Only a national movement to demand well-funded quality schools for all could begin to address this system-wide problem.

But there is hope in 2018! The students from Parkland, Florida showed they could spark a nationwide movement against gun violence in schools. Teachers across West Virginia and several other states have shown they could break the law and go on strike to get better funding for education. And now it is up to students and educators, together with workers in general to show that we are ready to unite to get the kind of schools and lives we need. We can't let racism divide us. We can't let the bosses' laws keep us in check. We can follow the lead of the students and teachers who have said and continue to say, "No more!"



Climate Change: Their System is Not Normal

While the summer fires blazed throughout California, burning over 600,000 acres and destroying thousands of homes, Governor Jerry Brown said: "We're in a new normal." It's true that the scale of these fires is new mainly since climate change has caused sky-rocketing temperatures and intensified drought conditions, making for ever-growing fire seasons. But the catastrophes brought by climate change are the consequences of an economic system that is anything but normal. There is nothing normal about a system that destroys so much just to make a profit.

What's at Stake?

The facts of climate change speak for themselves. An enormous amount of carbon has been released into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels, primarily from oil, coal, and natural gas, and this has led to rising global temperatures. Sixteen of the warmest years on record have

occurred since 2001, with the last four years being the hottest. Arctic glaciers continue to melt at increasing rates, now reaching some of the thickest ice sheets that scientists thought would take decades to begin melting. The rate of ice-melt in Antarctica has tripled since 2007. All of this melting is accelerating global sea level rise. Fueled by warmer ocean temperatures, climate change continues to cause extreme weather events like powerful hurricanes, and now scientists warn that there will have to be new hurricane ratings that include categories six and seven to account for the intense winds and enormous rainfall.

The consequences of climate change are already here. Along with heat waves, longer fire seasons, extreme weather and droughts, the changing climate is leading to another mass extinction event, threatening at least fifty percent of the earth's species, including humans. Scientists estimate that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird and mammal become extinct every 24 hours, about 1,000 times the norm, and greater than anything the world has experienced since the extinction of the dinosaurs nearly 65 million years ago.

Climate change has already led to the greatest number of displaced people on the planet: climate refugees. Since 2008 alone, an estimated 172 million people have been displaced due to climate change-related extreme weather events like hurricanes, floods, drought, and fires. In fact, a 2016 study by 25 U.S. military experts warned that climate change poses a "significant risk to U.S. national security... and could lead to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions."

Their System is the Problem

Climate scientists have made it clear what is required to reduce the risks of climate change. The entire global economy would have to rapidly shift to only renewable energy, with zero emissions of carbon, combined with a whole host of measures to pull carbon out of the atmosphere. This wouldn't stop the impact of climate change but it could reduce its severity. Even though the technology to carry out these necessary changes already

exists, we see the problem actually getting worse.

The reason for this is simple – profits. The fossil fuel industry is among the most profitable industries in the world. Everything from the production of energy, food, plastics, drugs, transportation and even weapons is linked to fossil fuels. Tens of trillions of dollars are invested in this system of production, and despite the devastation and threat to life as we know it, those in power will not stop it.

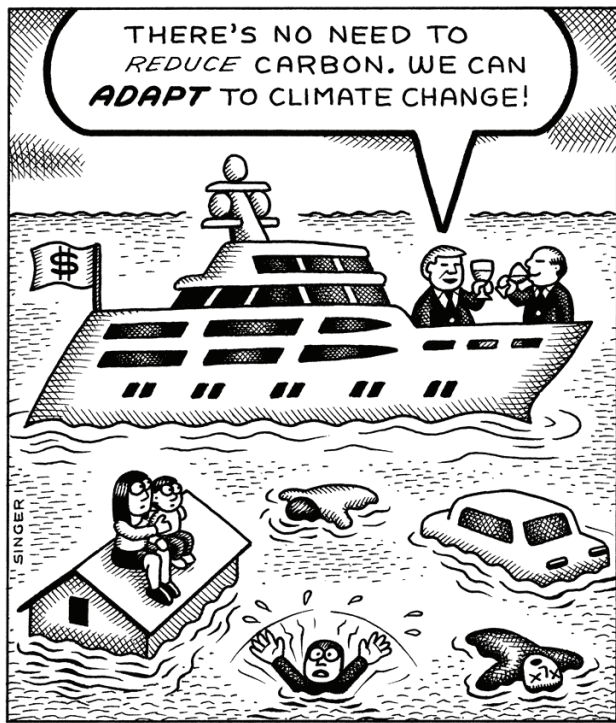
Their power, their wealth and their lives are tied into defending their investments, their profits, and their entire system, based on the exploitation of labor and the earth's resources. We cannot look to them to change their system that has caused these problems.

And today, the policies of the Trump administration are only making matters worse. Instead of pretending to support policies to address climate change like the Democrats, the Trump administration pretends climate change doesn't even exist. This administration has begun to eliminate even the most minimal environmental protections, reduced the Environmental Protection Agency, and pushed for an expansion of the coal industry – all in its blatant effort to enhance the profits of the energy companies. It is no surprise that Trump is a climate change denier because their whole system is in denial.

Another Future is Possible

An economic system that places profit above life itself should not be considered normal. We face a choice humanity has never confronted. We either change their system based on making profit or we could face extinction.

Much of the scientific knowledge and technology already exists to solve these problems. We can live in a way that prioritizes the needs of humanity and the environment. The vast majority of people on this planet, those who do the work to make society run, have every possibility to use our collective power to reorganize society and address this crisis. But to do this means we will have to put an end to the capitalist system once and for all. Our lives and the future of millions of other species depend on it.



Film Review: *Sorry to Bother You*

Capitalism is a system that forces people into roles they wouldn't otherwise choose, just to make money. Workers talk, act, and follow rules set down by the boss whose agenda is money-making overall. Writer and director Boots Riley's *Sorry to Bother You* revolves around this fact – to get ahead you must follow the bosses' rules and prove how you can make them a profit.

The story of *Sorry to Bother You* is based on a young Black man from Oakland who picks up a job as a telemarketer in a call center. The hero, Cassius, is a failure at his new job until he discovers the secret to success – to speak with a "white voice." The film uses strange effects to point out the strangeness of capitalism. Cassius' "white voice" is overdubbed, making him sound ridiculous. And of course he is a big success. In reality, we live in a system that is just as ridiculous and corrupt.

The beauty of *Sorry to Bother You* is that it shows that "getting ahead" means buying into a system based on exploitation and violence. As Cassius gets better and better with his white voice, he starts to make even more money. But when he discovers that he and his co-workers have the power to fight the system collectively, he is forced to make a choice. He can either give in to this system alone or unite with others to change it. This is a choice we all face.



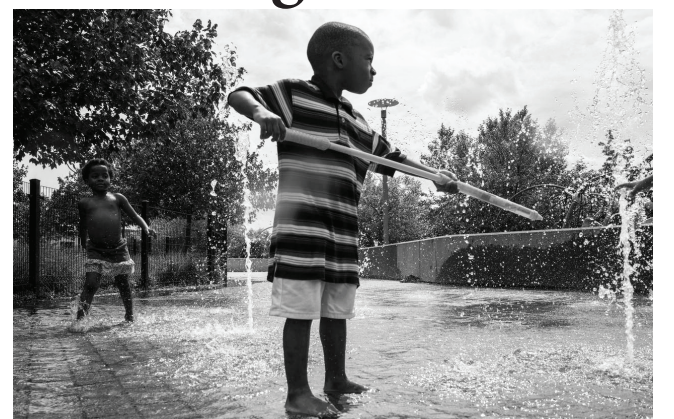
Lead in Our Water: Poisoning the Poor

In the spring of 2016, reports showed that schools in Newark, New Jersey had high levels of lead in their water. But besides shutting off contaminated water outlets and supplying some filters, that was it – there was no further information, no more repairs. Students, education workers, and the community were kept in the dark while they continued to drink contaminated water in the city.

In 2017, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reported the findings from a city-wide water test in Newark. The average lead level of households tested was 27 parts per billion (ppb), more than five times the federal limit. And newer tests have shown even higher levels, with some residences as high as 182 ppb. According to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, any level of lead above five ppb is considered dangerous. Lead can contribute to impaired brain functioning and can affect a person throughout their life. Lead can even be absorbed into calcium in bones and leach back into the blood supply in times of stress.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, high lead levels require city officials to begin digging up and replacing all the old lead service lines that run from the city's main water lines to private residences. But city officials have continued to deny there is even a problem, claiming that Newark's water is safe and uncontaminated. It's true that the water entering Newark has safe levels of lead, but once it enters the old Newark lead pipes, it becomes contaminated. City officials have tried to make residents responsible for replacing these service lines but this is ridiculous. Over 30% of people in Newark live in poverty and could never afford the \$1,000 or more to replace these pipes.

Rather than forcing working families to pay for problems they did not cause, the solutions are obvious. The city officials should pay for all residents to get their water tested, and wherever lead levels are above 5 ppb, the pipes should be replaced. And until their water is free of lead, the city should have to pay for safe drinking water to all residents. The people of Newark shouldn't have to pay a



dime. There is more than enough wealth in Newark to pay for this solution. But, of course, Newark politicians don't want to touch the wealth of corporations and the rich.

This problem goes beyond Newark. In 2007, Baltimore schools were found to have lead-contaminated drinking fountains. There too, city officials refused to spend the \$3.3 million to fix the fountains, and instead purchased bottled water for over ten years at a cost of about \$500,000 per year. They have never fixed the problem throughout the city. In 2014, lead-contaminated water was also found to have poisoned thousands of residents in Flint, Michigan. Since then reports of water contaminated with lead and other poisons have been rolling in from Detroit and other cities in Illinois, Ohio, California, Wisconsin and other states. In cities across the country, lead water pipes were the standard prior to the 1920s and continued to be installed until the 1950s. So, many more cities across the country still have lead pipes with contaminated water even though tests may not have been conducted yet.

It is clear what needs to be done to address this national problem. But we live in a system that is concerned only with saving profits, not saving lives. And city, state, and federal officials are willing to protect the wealth of the rich even if it means poisoning the poor.

Where We Stand

The world we live in today is increasingly ruled by prejudice and fear, under a system of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, with the many dominated by the few. The name of this system is capitalism.

The Force For Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people's labor makes society run. Working people have the power to bring this system to a halt and bring about the changes needed. Like slavery, feudalism and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism's removal is long overdue. The time for socialism has come.

We Stand For Socialism

- A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working class people – not the exploiters who rule today.
- The common ownership and sharing of the world's resources and productive capacity.
- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up.

- Protection of the world's ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism or homophobia.

Who We Are

We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason our group aims its activity primarily at workplaces, where struggles have the most potential to transform the world. Our newsletters are a tool to begin this work. What a handful of people decide today can determine our future. Join us to work for a better future – one that is both necessary and possible.

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