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## Amidst capitalist crisis and war, Russian Communists struggle against Putin and the oligarchs

By C. J. Atkins

MOSCOW—Walking along the thoroughfares of the Russian capital these days, it's easy to feel as though you've gone "Back to the Future." Like Marty McFly in the classic 1985 movie, visitors to Moscow might imagine they've traveled back in time to the Soviet past, when socialism beat Hitler and the future of communism beckoned on the horizon.

Everywhere, crimson banners bearing the word "Победа!"—"Victory!"—flap in the wind next to giant billboards of heroic Soviet soldiers on the battlefields of World War II. Golden hammer-and-sickle emblems festoon the buildings on Red Square, and out at the old Exhibition of Economic Achievements—a grand, Disneyland-sized theme park extolling the accomplishments of the Soviet Union—the statues of workers and collective farmers are all polished up like new.

Down in Volgograd, where Hitler's troops met their Waterloo back in '42, the local air hub has just been rechristened "Stalingrad International Airport," and rumors suggest the whole city may soon return to its old name.

What's going on? Has Russia gone red again? Is it time to rock out to The Beatles and sing along to "Back in the USSR"? Well, not quite.

Tatiana Desiatova, a straight-talking Communist with a reputation for bluntness, says there is a much simpler and more cynical explanation for all of it: "The oligarchs have built nothing but their own wealth, so now we see them cleaning up the old monuments, putting out the old Soviet symbols, singing the old songs, and celebrating some of the USSR's achievements in an attempt to bolster their own flagging legitimacy."

Desiatova is the Advisor to the Deputy Head of the International Commission of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. It's a long-winded title, but what's immediately apparent when you meet Tatiana Desiatova is that you're dealing with a person who knows Russia and knows the world.

A third-generation Communist and lifelong political activist, she spoke with People's World in Moscow last week on the sidelines of the Second International Antifascist Forum, a meeting which brought together 164 delegates from 91 countries to analyze the resurgence of fascism around the world and share strategies on how to resist it.

With the whole country decked out for the upcoming 80th anniversary of Hitler's defeat on May 9th, she said there's definitely a celebratory spirit in the air, a sense of pride among Russians for the fact that their country helped save the world from the Nazis. It's a legacy that the state is trying to co-opt and append to its own increasingly costly war in Ukraine.



But that legacy belongs to the Soviet people, not to the president and the capitalist class around him which rules present-day Russia, Desiatova said. "Putin is completely part of the oligarch clique," she emphasized, even though he's tried to portray himself as a defender of law and order and public wellbeing.

"The economy got better after the disastrous years of Boris Yeltsin and the looting of public wealth that happened under privatization," she said, and the public understandably gave Putin a lot of credit for that turnaround. But the question arises: Is the day coming when that's no longer enough?

### Disaster capitalism

The scale of the catastrophe that befell Russians and the other peoples of the former Soviet Union after the overthrow of socialism is hard to exaggerate.

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CONTINUING THE DAILY WORKER



For over a century, People's World and its predecessor publications have taken the side of the 99 percent and worked to promote the struggle for a sustainable environment, jobs, democracy, peace, and equality.

## Amidst capitalist crisis and war, Russian Communists struggle against Putin and the oligarchs

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The “shock therapy” prescribed by U.S. economists in the 1990s nearly destroyed the country.

If you think inflation in the U.S. has been bad these last few years, imagine prices rising by more than 2,000% in just three years—a \$1 cup of coffee skyrocketing to \$20. That’s exactly what happened in Russia after price controls were eliminated in 1991.

Public healthcare systems collapsed at the same time, and economic stress triggered an explosion of mental illness and alcoholism. Life expectancy plummeted. For women, it sank from 74 to 71 years, while men, who had been living to 64 on average, could expect to die by the age of 57 by 1994.

Mass layoffs led to millions of unemployed. For those lucky enough to keep their jobs, though, things weren’t much better. Wages in both the public and private sectors went unpaid for months or even years at a time. The collapse of the ruble in 1998 made things worse.

But perhaps the most sinister development of those years was the corrupt privatization of the public property that had belonged to the people of the Soviet Union. The first sell-off of socialist property was launched by Yeltsin in 1992 under the pretext of a “fair and open” process. The 148 million citizens of Russia were issued “privatization checks,” or vouchers, supposedly representing their individual share of the publicly-owned national wealth.

These vouchers could be used to buy shares of state enterprises. A small parasitical class who’d managed to accumulate some wealth—whether by embezzling it from their public sector employers, by trading on the black market, or via the businesses that the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had legalized in the 1980s—used their resources to scour the country, buying up as many of these vouchers as possible from citizens desperate for cash.

Within less than two years, this now fully-fledged capitalist class gobbled up nearly 70% of the Soviet economy. Whole industries were put on the auction block and sold to the highest bidder. The most valuable companies were still in state hands by the mid-’90s, however, and with his government near collapse, Yeltsin and the new rulers of capitalist Russia came up with another scheme.

As the 1996 presidential elections neared, it was obvious that Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov was likely to win. The Russian people had gotten a taste of capitalism and didn’t like it, so Yeltsin had to act fast.

With the mafia in charge of Moscow’s streets and the government out of rubles, Yeltsin’s cabinet turned to a secret plot known as “Loans for Shares.” Essentially, the richest and most corrupt among the new oligarchical class were offered huge blocks of shares of public enterprises in exchange for billions of dollars in loans to the state.

From the very beginning, it was intended that the government would intentionally default on these “loans,” allowing the capitalists to keep the profitable public sector corporations they held as collateral—steel companies, mines, oil companies, shipping companies. Yeltsin and the oligarchs worked out in advance exactly who would get what and for what price. Figures like Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich picked up entire industries for a steal.

In return, the oligarchs did everything possible to get Yeltsin re-elected, spending millions on his campaign. Together with the election interference orchestrated by the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton, they pulled it off. But the sham of “Russian democracy” couldn’t paper over the corruption of the regime and the theft it had facilitated. Yeltsin, the notorious alcoholic, stumbled along in office for a few more years before eventually resigning on New Year’s Eve 1999 and handing over the reins to Putin.

The new president’s rule was characterized by an emphasis on order; the mafia was brought to heel, and the oligarchs were kept in line (but also allowed to hold onto their ill-gotten gains). High oil prices, a cancellation of Soviet debts by some major lenders, and the eventual attraction of legitimate foreign investment from countries like China helped stabilize the country’s finances.

In urban areas, there eventually emerged a semblance of economic normality, even though poverty and limited job prospects continued to plague the population of the countryside. Ethnic minorities, meanwhile, found themselves increasingly relegated to low-wage service sector jobs. Inequality continued to accelerate during Putin’s first two decades in power, but the employment situation improved, wages were paid on time, and family incomes finally started to grow.

After the disaster of that first decade under capitalism, stability was enough for many people, at least for a while.

### Russia (and Ukraine) today

Putin “has lived on that record for a long time,” Desiatova argued, “but it can’t last forever.” She said that is why there has been an increase in the state’s “selective coopting of the Soviet legacy” over the last several years, especially as it relates to war and other themes that easily lend themselves to nationalistic ends.

“He knows that the memory of the Soviet Union and its accomplishments,” foster pride in many Russians and that “the help the USSR provided to other countries still buys Russia a lot of goodwill in the developing world” and among nations struggling against imperialism.

The Russian state manipulates those positive sentiments linked to the past in order to raise its own profile at home and abroad, opportunistically cherry-picking from the Soviet record while still taking advantage of every chance to trash Lenin, Marxist ideology, and socialist economics.

For the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the evolution of how the Soviet past is treated has produced new challenges. In previous years, the party was the sole defender of the USSR and its achievements and was the political home for Russians who felt jaded about their new capitalist reality.

As Putin’s party gradually ate into its share of support, however, the CPRF has become a shrinking political force. It has to work harder these days to make the case for socialism, especially among those generations born after the fall of the Soviet Union who have no memory of a time before the oligarchs.

The economic reality of life under capitalism leaves many people consumed with just trying to make ends meet and little time to think about alternatives—the norm for workers in all capitalist economies. And for those who were scarred by the chaos of the 1990s, there is a reluctance to rock the boat.

The coming of the Ukraine war in 2022 complicated things even further.

The CPRF is recognized by all, both at home and abroad, as being behind the war effort when it comes to liberating the oppressed peoples of eastern Ukraine (in Donetsk and Lugansk, the Donbass areas in particular) from the rule of the far-right, fascist, and neo-Nazi elements that influence the Ukrainian government installed by the 2014 U.S.-backed coup.

The CPRF is not of one mind with Putin, however, when it comes to the nature of the war.

Having personally witnessed what was happening in the Donbass before Russian troops entered in 2022, Desiatova said, “the situation for the ethnic Russians living there was actually much worse than even the international media showed on television.” Violence and human rights abuses by fascist forces were widespread.

The CPRF had advocated action to help the people of the Donbass for years, from 2014 to 2022, but for most of that time, the Putin government didn’t seem to care much about the fascist terror underway in Ukraine. Instead, he preferred to continue communicating and bargaining with Ukrainian oligarchs, supplying only limited help to the rebel forces there.

The CPRF was therefore somewhat surprised when suddenly in late 2021 the president seemed to take greater interest in assisting the people of the Donbass and began to talk of the need to combat fascism. The U.S. intention to expand NATO was always an ever-present part of the picture, but significant provocations aimed at speeding up that process and further isolating Ukraine from Russia appeared to move Putin’s hand.

In February 2022, the Russian government launched the “Special Military Operation,” sending soldiers across the frontier in force. Desiatova said that most believe it was necessary to assist the people in the Donbass, but differences exist as to whether “there may have been other means to accomplish that” besides an outright invasion.

Now, three years and thousands of dead later, the situation remains bleak, and hopes for peace seem narrow. “So many people are dying, but only the oligarchs of Russia, Ukraine, and the U.S. win,” Desiatova lamented.

So, while some commentators in the Western left media portray the CPRF as simply mimicking the talking points of the Putin government, the party’s views on the war are far more nuanced and complex than many recognize.

Asked about the matter, Desiatova pointed to an analysis put forward by Denis Parfenov, a CPRF Member of the State Duma, titled “The People Need Peace” ([English translation](#)).

Turning to Lenin, Parfenov argued that the war in Ukraine exhibits elements of two types of war: an imperialist war and a war for national liberation. The CPRF, according to Parfenov and Desiatova, clearly recognizes that there is a proxy war between U.S.-NATO imperialism and the capitalist ruling class of Russia, but the fight in Ukraine is far more than that.

The people in the ethnically Russian Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, the party maintains, were literally struggling for their survival before 2022 against the Ukrainian army and fascist militias like the Azov Battalion. Their struggle, often led by Communists and left patriots, took the form of a “people’s revolution with a socialist tinge,” as Parfenov put it. After Russian troops entered the area, however, Putin suppressed this development and has not allowed the Communist Party to take part in elections there.

Regardless, the war is now a reality, and in order to secure the liberty and security of the people living in the Donbass, the CPRF gives support to the forces struggling there and recognizes the geopolitical complexities involved. The tasks of de-Nazifying Ukraine, blocking NATO expansion, and protecting oppressed people are “fundamental issues,” according to Parfenov.

But, he cautions, “there should be no illusions” about Putin and the capitalist class that rules Russia.

“The people who have gathered to ‘de-Nazify’ Ukraine are people,” Parfenov argued, “who themselves revere fascist philosophers like Ivan Ilyin and allocate money to anti-Soviet and anti-Communist causes.”

Progressives who oppose fascism should not become confused, he said, about the nature of the Russian government, which “is by no means a socialist state that brings liberation from exploiters or ideas of social justice to other nations.”

Desiatova expressed hope that more people who have questions about the CPRF and the Ukraine war will read Parfenov’s paper before making assumptions.

### **Communists forward**

The phrase “Communists forward!” was repeated by numerous speakers on the platform during the Second International Antifascist Forum in Moscow last week.

When Hitler’s armies invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the people rose up to defend their homeland. At the head of their battalions—whether in the official ranks of the Red Army or among the partisans fighting behind enemy lines—were members of the Communist Party. They were the first to volunteer, the first to charge against the Nazis.

Today, as they commemorate the 80th anniversary of the victory over fascism and grapple with the difficulties of politics under the Putin government, the members of the CPRF are again sounding the call, “Communists forward!” They’re fighting for a Russian working class increasingly feeling the strain of life under a capitalism beset by crisis, sanctions, and war.

Looming ahead of them is a struggle against what Desiatova called “the next round of privatization.” After a falling out between Putin and some of the oligarchs, a significant amount of assets were seized and re-nationalized—some \$10.8 billion dollars’ worth in the last three years, at least 67 companies in 2024 alone.

The Communists have urged that this property, much of it stolen from the Soviet people so long ago, should remain in public hands. Finance Minister Anton Siluanov has signaled, however, that the government has no intention of letting that happen.

“We plan to intensify the privatization of property coming into the treasury,” he told a group of state leaders in mid-March. If the government proceeds with its stated plan, the assets will simply change hands, passing from one set of oligarchs to another set currently in favor in the Kremlin.

It all seems to prove Tatiana Desiatova right. Putin sits at the head of a clique that calls the shots on everything—from economics to politics to war. Neither the plastering of Moscow with Soviet symbols and red flags nor the renovation of socialist monuments can hide the reality that Russia is a capitalist state ruled by a class of parasitical oligarchs.



# Justice Jackson says attacks on judges and Constitution ‘not random’

By Mark Gruenberg

SAN JUAN, P.R.—Though not by name, Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson is hitting hard against Republican President Donald Trump for his—and his GOP followers’—“not random” attacks on judges in particular and the U.S. Constitution in general.

The justice told a judicial conference in San Juan, P.R., on May 1 that such attacks not only physically threaten judges, but are direct attacks on the Constitution and the rule of law, a basic U.S. principle.

“The attacks are not random,” Justice Jackson stated. “They seem designed to intimidate those of us who serve in this critical capacity. The attacks are also not isolated incidents; that is, they impact more than just the individual judges who are being targeted.

“Rather, the threats and the harassment are attacks on our democracy—on our system of government. And they ultimately risk undermining our Constitution and the rule of law.”

Such attacks, the justice added, are typical not of a democracy, but of “countries that are not free, not fair, and not rule-of-law-oriented.”

Justice Jackson, though, wound up with a positive note: Urging the assembled jurists to keep following the Constitution and the law, no matter what.

“Other judges have faced challenges like the ones we face today, and have prevailed. I urge you to keep going—keep doing what is right—for the good of the country,” she said.

Jackson spoke on May Day, which is also National Law Day. She wasn’t the first justice to criticize attacks on judges by Trump and other Republicans. Chief Justice John Roberts was. But her speech came after Trump openly defied judicial rulings—one of them a 9-0 U.S. Supreme Court decision—curtailing his tyrannical expansions of presidential power.

But the Republican majority of that same Supreme Court, almost a year ago, basically gave Trump a stay-out-of-jail-free card. Jackson was one of three dissenters. The majority ruled that sitting and former presidents have absolute immunity from prosecution for any crimes they commit while in office and almost total immunity for other actions, such as during campaigns, that could be deemed official.

The High Court’s 9-0 ruling ordered Trump to “facilitate” the return of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Smart Union member from Laurel, Md. ICE agents dragged Garcia out of his car, hustled him off to detention and then put him on a plane to El Salvador, which houses him in a notorious prison. Trump’s ICE agents committed a procedural error in deporting Garcia and admitted it in court. Trump nevertheless refuses to return him.



Garcia’s fate has become a top cause of both the labor movement and of the migrant rights movement. Trump alleged, without proof, that Garcia, a Salvadoran native, was a member of a New York-based gang. Garcia had actually fled El Salvador to escape the gang’s clutches, and was living peacefully in the U.S., with a wife and three children, for years.

Despite Trump, federal district and appellate judges still defy his diktats and uphold the rule of law.

The latest court defeat for Trump occurred on May 7. A unanimous three-judge panel of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston ordered Trump to return Tufts University student Rümeyza Öztürk from Louisiana to Vermont. Federal agents yanked her off a street in Somerville, Mass., on March 25, for writing a pro-Palestinian op-ed. They stuck her in a Louisiana hell-hole prison, depriving her of family, friends or communications with lawyers.

“Let me address what I think is the elephant in the room, which is the relentless attacks and disregard and disparagement that judges around the country, and perhaps many of you, are now facing on a daily basis,” Justice Jackson began.

“Every time I read the news or turn on the television these days, I see the affronts, and I am also reminded of the vital work judges do to protect our constitutional order. Unfortunately, that solemn duty seems both more urgent and more difficult with each passing day.

“Across the nation, judges are facing increased threats of not only physical violence but also professional retaliation, just for doing our jobs.”

Citing National Law Day, the justice, the first Black woman on the High Court, and its sole current justice who formerly was a public defender, “took personal privilege to reaffirm the significance of judicial independence and to denounce attacks on judges based on their rulings.

## Justice Jackson says attacks on judges and

### Constitution ‘not random’

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“A society in which judges are routinely made to fear for their own safety or their own livelihood due to their decisions is one that has substantially departed from the norms of behavior that govern in a democratic system,” the justice declared.

#### Key ingredient for freedom

After comparing democracies and dictatorships, Justice Jackson said “having an independent judiciary—defined as judges who are ‘indifferent to improper pressure’ and ‘determined to decide each case according to the law’—is one of the key ingredients that makes our free, fair, and law-centered society work.”

The U.S. judiciary has not always been like that, however, something Justice Jackson politely did not mention in speaking to the judicial conference. During the red-baiting McCarthy era, for example, some federal judges acceded to the hysteria of the times—hysteria which extended, at least in one lower federal court in Chicago, all the way through the early 1970s.

And before the New Deal, federal judges interpreted the Constitution to prevent workers from organizing, calling it a violation of businesses’ property rights which the jurists “found” in the nation’s basic charter. Jurists even said anti-trust laws could apply to unions, while turning a blind eye to the business monopolies those laws were designed to break up.

And in the 1950s, the Supreme Court caught hell, too, for upholding the rights of dissenters. “Impeach Earl Warren!” then the Chief Justice, the far-right John Birch Society screamed after those justices legally stood up for civil rights, for freedom of speech and against the era’s red-baiting hysteria.

Instead, Justice Jackson discussed the courage of Southern federal judges in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, who had to implement in the 1950s and 1960s, in practical terms, the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* ruling. That court unanimously outlawed segregation. Jim Crow, in so many words, violated equal protection of the law.

Justice Jackson said those judges, including Frank Johnson, John Minor Wisdom and J. Skelly Wright, faced down death threats, cross-burnings on their lawns, fire-bombing of Johnson’s mother’s house and public and constant insults—and wholesale resistance from the Louisiana legislature—and upheld the Constitution and the court. They also faced racist governors, notably George Wallace.

“It is very stressful to have to decide a difficult case in the spotlight and under pressure,” said Justice Jackson. As a federal district judge, she issued pro-worker rulings from that bench against Trump’s first-term unconstitutional—her words—executive orders slamming federal unions and workers.

“For a single district judge, having to manage a high-profile, fast-moving, consequential case involving a challenge to government action is enormously difficult. When you add to that having to endure baseless attacks on your intelligence and integrity—coming from people who are not so subtly trying to influence your decision making—it can sometimes take raw courage to remain steadfast in doing what the law requires.”

Which brought Justice Jackson back to another courageous judge, John J. Sirica, and another high-profile presidential scandal, complete with political pressure: Watergate, 51 years ago.

“Judge Sirica followed the law and the facts where they led, ignoring the political consequences that I am sure he knew would befall the presidency—and the party that appointed him to the bench,” under Republican President Dwight Eisenhower. “As he put it, ‘Despite efforts in our executive branch to distort the truth...the court system served to set the record straight.’

“So when I get discouraged about the news of attacks on judges and worry about the personal sacrifices and weighty responsibilities of the role, I think about those courageous district judges, and others, who also served during times of great peril.

“Rather than bowing to the pressure, they stayed the course, using the authority that had been vested in them to do the right thing—and by that I mean, to rule independently in each case and in the manner that they believed the law required. And history now honors each of them for that noble service.”

## Tell Congress: Vote NO on Medicaid & SNAP cuts!

By People’s World

Call and write or visit your members of Congress to demand they vote NO on the Republican budget bill that expands tax cuts for billionaires by cutting \$1.5 trillion from Medicaid, SNAP, and other essential programs.

Medicaid and SNAP protect over one hundred million women, children, seniors, and low-wage workers. These cuts would devastate health care institutions across the country, and throw nearly half a million healthcare workers on to the unemployment line.



Cuts to healthcare and jobs will devastate everyone. No cuts to Medicaid! Support demands for a moral budget!

**Call 202-225-3121 today and ask for your Senators and your Representative!**

Then, [fill in your info](#) to send a short letter to your elected officials. And please share with your coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors.



# Climate disaster costs could reach \$145 billion globally in 2025

By Cristen Hemingway Jaynes



According to a new analysis by Swiss Re Institute, insured natural catastrophe losses globally could reach \$145 billion this year, primarily driven by “secondary perils” such as floods, wildfires, and severe thunderstorms.

This follows a five to seven percent long-term annual growth trend, the institute said.

The report, *Natural catastrophes: insured losses on trend to USD 145 billion in 2025*, said “primary perils” such as earthquakes and hurricanes pose the biggest risks, potentially pushing insured losses to \$300 billion-plus during a peak year.

“2025 started with wildfires in Los Angeles, causing an estimated USD 40 billion in insured losses. While these losses from a secondary peril are substantial, primary perils remain the biggest threat: when a severe hurricane or strong earthquake hits a densely populated urban area, insured losses in that year could be more than double the long-term loss trend,” a press release from Swiss Re Institute said.

The last peak year was in 2017, driven by Hurricanes Irma, Harvey, and Maria. The institute said peak years caused by a few “primary-peril events” or an accumulation of those and “secondary-peril events” should not be viewed as an anomaly.

Since 2017, underlying risks have grown consistently, along with population growth, economic expansion, and urban sprawl, including in places vulnerable to natural catastrophes. The effects of climate change are also playing a part in compounding losses for certain weather perils and regions.

“Our recent analysis of over 200 in-house models and the loss trend over the last 30 years show what is at stake: When a severe hurricane or a major earthquake hits an urban area in a country with significant insurance take-up, insured losses could easily reach USD 300 billion in that year,” said Balz Grollmund, head of catastrophe perils at Swiss Re, in the press release.

Estimates by the institute have found that some early 20th-century hurricanes would result in losses of more than \$100 billion if they struck today. Hurricane Andrew, for example, caused \$35 billion in losses to those insured in 1992. Today, a hurricane on the same path would result in nearly three times the losses because of economic and population growth, as well as urban sprawl.

“Meanwhile, Hurricane Katrina, the costliest single insured loss event for the re/insurance industry ever, would not cause the same destruction as 20 years ago. Insured losses would still reach around USD 100 billion due to rising housing and construction costs, but improved flood defences and a 20% decrease in local population along Katrina’s path have significantly reduced exposure,” the press release said.

Although the severity of losses has been increasing globally, the United States accounted for nearly 80 percent of the world’s insured losses last year because of its vulnerability to severe hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, thunderstorms, and floods.

There are many factors that inform insurance premium rates, including inflation and local regulations. But across geographies over the long term, the primary factor in determining the cost of premium rates and claims is the exposure to natural perils.

This is apparent in states like Texas, Florida, California, Colorado, and Louisiana, which make up roughly half of all U.S. natural catastrophe losses. With its high hurricane-related losses, Florida’s per-household premiums are twice the national average. Meanwhile, the highest premiums in California are in areas that have the most exposure to wildfire risk.

“Close collaboration between the public and private sectors is vital for effective protection measures to reduce losses. In addition, a well-capitalised reinsurance sector, backed by USD 500 billion in capital, acts as a vital shock absorber, helping communities and economies recover more quickly. That is why it is important that capital grows in line with rising risk, for the industry to fulfil their role for future peak years,” said Jérôme Haegeli, group chief economist at Swiss Re.

Last year, insurance losses due to natural catastrophes worldwide climbed to \$137 billion, driven by major floods and wildfires worldwide, Hurricanes Milton and Helene, and severe thunderstorms in the U.S.

“As natural catastrophe losses continue to rise, it is crucial to reduce loss potential from the outset, both to reduce the cost of insurance and to maintain the viability of risk transfer business. For example, severe storms can overwhelm local protection systems and cause flooding, and while mitigation measures come at a price, a recent Swiss Re Institute study shows that flood protection through dykes, dams and flood gates is up to ten times more cost-effective than rebuilding after a disaster,” the press release said.

# Over union objections, House panel cuts deep into student loan dollar

By Press Associates

WASHINGTON—Brushing aside strong objections from the AFL-CIO and its own panel's Democrats, the deeply partisan Republican majority on the highly polarized House Education and the Workforce Committee cut billions of dollars in federal education spending, specifically student loans.

The budget blueprint the entirely GOP-run Congress approved, on party-line votes, several weeks ago mandated the cuts. They feature an \$880 billion 10-year-cut in Medicaid—which another House panel handled—and cuts in food aid and funds to schools which educate poor kids, plus slashes in college student aid, including Pell Grants, too.

Panel chair Tim Walberg, R-Mich., said the bulk of his committee's \$330 billion in cuts would come in lower and fewer loans. "The current system is effectively broken and pushes tuition prices upwards," he said, in one of his milder statements during the late-April work session.

All the spending slashes from various House committees will be rolled into a giant "reconciliation" bill, and they'll be used to pay for top Republican and Trump priorities.

But since the work session, the House's ruling Republicans have been fighting each other over details of that measure—particularly whether to increase the cap on itemized deductions for state and local taxes. That's a key issue for a group of Northeastern lawmakers who have vowed to vote "no" unless they get their way.

And there are enough of them—five Republicans—to sink the big reconciliation bill, given the slim GOP majority.

The centerpiece of reconciliation will be yet another tax cut for corporations and the rich, estimated to drain \$4.5 trillion over the next eight years. That entire subsidy will go to Wall Street denizens, secret hedge fund traders, corporations, their CEOs and rich oligarchs such as Trump and his puppeteer, Elon Musk.

Reconciliation will also add \$175 billion more for the military, pushing the Pentagon officially over \$1 trillion. That sum includes \$25 billion to start building a "Golden Dome" defense over the continental U.S. There will also be more money for ICE agents to roundup and deport brown-skinned people using the excuse that they're all illegal migrants, and even more money for Trump's racist Mexican Wall. And that's for starters.

## Opposed the cuts

The AFL-CIO and Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., strongly protested the slashes. The panel's ruling Republicans brushed them aside and crowed about forcing college students to repay their loans.

AFL-CIO Legislative Director Jody Calamine said the Republicans' plan would hurt, not help, the struggling college students who, when they graduate, would face a mountain of debt.

"To pay for tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy, this bill would make higher education less accessible and more expensive for working families.," Calamine wrote committee members.



It "eliminates subsidized undergraduate loans, increasing debt burdens for low-income and working students who can least afford it," as well as graduate and parent plus loans. Those moves "cut off essential financing options for working-class families and graduate students."

The GOP's bill "caps student loan limits at levels that fall short of typical college costs, which may force students to abandon their education entirely or take on riskier, more expensive private loans." Big banks love that, though Calamine didn't say so.

The Republicans also end "existing income-driven repayment plans," where loan payments are geared towards a graduate's ability to pay. That was a Biden administration innovation which survived court challenges.

Instead, said Calamine, students would face "a more burdensome system that increases required payments and delays loan forgiveness, including borrowers" who go into public service careers."

Left unsaid was that during Trump's first term, 2017-21, his then Education Secretary, GOP donor Elizabeth "Betsy" DeVos, rejected all but 3% of those public service loan applicants. The Teachers (AFT) sued DeVos to try to pry the money loose. They won the case, but DeVos ignored the ruling and wouldn't OK loans.

The Republican measure also restricts Pell Grants to full-time students, eliminating grants to working parents and loan repayment deferrals due to "economic hardship" suffered by workers getting laid off.

If predatory trade schools aka "diploma mills" go belly-up while profiting off loan money from their students—as the Trump University did—the students are more likely to get stuck with the bills.

All this makes college both "less affordable and less accessible for millions of families," all "to pay for tax cuts for billionaires." Calamine concluded by urging the panel to reject the Republican cuts and instead make college more affordable, accessible and accountable.

Scott hit many of the same themes, and added a few of his own, describing what else the GOP rejected during the work session. School meals would be gone in pre-K-12 schools. Student loan debtors who fall behind could have their wages garnished. Colleges could ban access to contraception and reproductive health services.

And multibillionaire Musk, and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency computer nerds could use personal and sensitive financial information they grabbed off government computers for their own private gain, Scott said.



# CPUSA, Popular Socialists of Mexico: No walls or deportations!

By Communist Party USA AND Partido Popular Socialista De Mexico

Joint greetings from the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and the Popular Socialist Party of Mexico (PPSM) to the working class of the world, and in particular to those of the United States of America and Mexico.

In the face of the threat of North American imperialism, today represented by Donald Trump, which empowers right-wing forces around the world and various fascist expressions by promoting racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and discriminatory discourses that foster hatred against migrants, the working class, and vulnerable sectors of the population, our parties express their solidarity with the struggle of the workers and peoples of the world who daily combat the attempts of new colonialisms and the subjugation of peoples for the sake of the domination of global monopoly and financial capital.

In this context, the American people have mobilized against the imperialist capitals of their country and in defense of their rights and interests. Similarly, the Mexican people are rising today in a sovereign transformative process toward national independence, the expansion of the democratic regime, and social well-being. Workers in the United States and Mexico are uniting their struggles for their class rights and full emancipation.

For this reason, in the face of the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few corporations and wealthy individuals, we vindicate the historical struggles of the working class, particularly of migrants whose rights to a fair income for their families are violated. We demand decent wages, social security, respect for the rights of working women, the right to rest, the defense of unions, and protection for farm workers who face grueling and precarious work.



We firmly believe in advancing the construction of a world in which the working class is guaranteed a dignified life and our people are free from all forms of exploitation, colonialism, and oppression.

In the face of the aggressions of Donald Trump's corporate and fascist government, let us defend the rights of migrant workers!

Migration is not a crime; fighting is a right!

No walls or deportations!

Against hatred and exploitation: unity of the working class!

For a combative and united May Day!

"Workers of all countries, unite"

## Is Trump trying to incite a race riot?

By Jamal Rich

Are the Trump administration and its allies trying to incite a race riot in order to invoke martial law or the Insurrection Act? His recent executive orders on further militarizing the police, shielding them from accountability, and rumors of a potential pardon of Derek Chauvin—the killer cop who murdered George Floyd in May of 2020—may foretell an all-out MAGA assault on African Americans in order to institute a full-scale fascist dictatorship in the United States.

In early March, Ben Shapiro, fascist commentator and founder of the right-wing outlet The Daily Wire, launched an online petition to pardon Chauvin, claiming that the jailed former police officer did not actually murder Floyd. His false claims state that Floyd died of substance abuse and a heart condition, not from being racially profiled and assaulted by Chauvin and fellow officers.

Chauvin is currently serving 22 years in prison on federal charges in addition to state charges in Minnesota, meaning a federal pardon alone would not free him. Shapiro thinks that a federal pardon would create conditions for an early release of the killer cop, however, and his petition has already garnered over 50,000 signatures.

Several MAGA commentators and known Trump supporters have encouraged the effort, including Elon Musk and *Turning Point USA's* Charlie Kirk. The fifth anniversary of the murder falls on May 25, 2025, less than a month before Juneteenth and weeks before Trump's planned military parade in Washington, D.C.



Could he be angling to incite a reaction from Black freedom movement and its allies?

If the bait does not work, what else may Trump have up his sleeve?

For one, his MAGA team has begun labeling Haitian immigrants as gang members, similar to the designation given to Latino immigrants which led to the wrongful deportation of several immigrants to El Salvador's prison camp. Kilmar Abrego Garcia was among those swept up.



The same “mistaken” deportations could happen to not only Afro-descendant immigrants but also African Americans. Moreover, the continued attacks on “DEI” throughout the federal government, on the Smithsonian museums, and educational institutions, are a general attack on African Americans as a people.

The Chauvin scheme is bad enough, but probably the most extreme provocative action would be the pardoning of Dylan Roof, the white supremacist terrorist who murdered nine Black worshippers in 2015 at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina and/or Payton S. Gendron, who massacred ten African Americans at a shopping center in 2022 in Buffalo, N.Y.

What if one of these tricks work, and Trump gets the huge protests he wants? Would it lead to a declaration of martial law or the invoking of the Insurrection Act? Trump recently signed an executive order asking the U.S. military to explore ways it could support local police via the deployment of armed soldiers and the use of military equipment when needed.

These moves are steps toward dictatorship.

The Insurrection Act of 1807, which grants the president limited authority to deploy federal troops domestically to suppress insurrections, civil unrest, or rebellion when local authorities are unable or unwilling to maintain order, has been used fourteen times.

One was President Dwight Eisenhower’s dispatching of federal troops to Little Rock, Ark., to enforce desegregation.

Martial law, on the other hand, suspends civil liberties, and the military takes over the typical functions of the civilian government like enforcing laws and maintaining order. Martial law has been implemented at least five times in U.S. history, most recently in Maryland in 1963 in response to violence arising during the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement.

Under martial law, the military typically has authority to enforce curfews, make policy decisions, detain people without due process, replace the police, restrict movement of the population, and more.

These are extremely concerning times, and it is up to the people’s movements and democratic forces to build the widest united front against the dictatorship of MAGA. The centrality of the fight against racism is part and parcel to this effort, as Black people have been sounding the alarm bell against white supremacist power and fascist terror for decades, for centuries even.

Whether it be Palestine, the fight for real democracy, the fight for diversity programs and affirmative action, the fight for gender affirming care, the fight for reproductive care, the fight for immigrant rights and due process—we have a responsibility to unite all these struggles into a single effort to block fascism.

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## SEIU member Rümeysa Öztürk released from ICE detention by judge’s order

By Combined Sources

A federal judge [ordered](#) Tufts University student Rümeysa Öztürk to be released from ICE detention on Friday after several weeks of [demonstrations](#), often led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), as well as continuous fights in the courts.

“She is free because workers stood up and demanded justice,” said April Verrett, President of SEIU. Öztürk is a member of Massachusetts SEIU Local 509.

“But our work is far from over. Rümeysa is free, but millions of other immigrants are not. They are still in the shadows. Our work is not done until everyone who calls this country home gets to live with freedom, dignity, and respect,” Verrett [added](#).

Dave Foley, President of SEIU Local 509, also [celebrated](#) Öztürk’s release: “Today, we celebrate the release of our union member, Rümeysa Öztürk, who was unjustly detained over a month ago by ICE and is now returning to her community here in Massachusetts. Throughout her detention, our union sibling has shown extraordinary courage. Her strength is the spirit of what drives the labor movement. We are thrilled to welcome her back home.”

He warned of rising fascist attacks scapegoating immigrants, busting unions, and political repression but reaffirmed the labor movement’s fight back. “The labor movement will not be intimidated,” he said. “Our struggles are bound together. Solidarity means no one gets left behind.”

Öztürk was arrested on March 25 by plainclothes ICE agents as she walked to dinner with friends. Just four days earlier, the State Department had quietly canceled her student visa, [according](#) to NPR. Agents transported her from Massachusetts to New Hampshire and Vermont before flying her to a detention center in Louisiana the next day.

The Department of Homeland Security accused Öztürk of “engaging in anti-Israel activism” after October 7, 2023, specifically citing an op-ed she co-authored calling on Tufts to “disclose its investments and divest from companies with ties to Israel.”



However, an internal State Department memo admitted there was [no evidence](#) Öztürk engaged in antisemitic activities or supported terrorist organizations.

In his ruling Friday, Judge William Sessions of the U.S. District Court for Vermont stated her arrest likely occurred in retaliation for her criticism of Tufts’ response to the genocide in Gaza. “Her continued detention potentially chills the speech of the millions and millions of people in this country who are not citizens,” Sessions said.

“I suggested to the government that they produce any additional information which would suggest that she posed a substantial risk,” Sessions added. “And that was three weeks ago, and there has been no evidence introduced by the government other than the op-ed. That literally is the case. There is no evidence here.”

“Rümeysa Öztürk should never have been abducted and unlawfully detained. She is a cherished member of our community and I’m so relieved she is headed home,” said Ayanna Pressley, Congresswoman from Massachusetts.

“This is a victory for Rümeysa, for due process, and for our democracy.”

### Vietnam, beacon of peace and freedom, marks 50 years of reunification

By Amiad Horowitz

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam—When Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, before the U.S. war on Vietnam had ended, he wrote: “My last desire is that our whole Party and people should stand in solidarity, striving to build a Vietnam of peace, unity, independence, democracy, and affluence, that would play a commensurate part in the international revolutionary cause.”

To mark the 50th anniversary of national reunification, Ho Chi Minh City—formerly Saigon, the capital of the U.S.-backed puppet regime—hosted the largest celebration and parade in Vietnam’s history.

The U.S. government boycotted the event. According to reports from The New York Times, President Donald Trump did not want any events overshadowing the marking of his 100th day in office. In contrast, Communist Party USA (CPUSA) Co-Chair Rossana Cambron led an official U.S. delegation to Vietnam, which was received with full honors.

Special military units from the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Laos, and the Kingdom of Cambodia marched alongside their Vietnamese comrades in recognition of the vital role these nations played in Vietnam’s victory.

A representative of the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union, the largest youth organization in Vietnam, also emphasized the importance of peace. She said:

“In these days of commemoration, as I gaze into the clear blue sky, where the flight of aircraft carrying the sacred red flag adorned with the golden star—oh, young hearts across our country feel even more deeply: Peace is truly beautiful!”

After the event, CPUSA Co-Chair Cambron remarked that she was moved by seeing what a country that puts people before profits can achieve. “In just a few decades,” she noted, “Vietnam has gone from a war-torn, impoverished nation to one that is at peace and committed to eliminating poverty while expanding social services.”

Cambron paid special tribute to Vietnam’s youth, stating:

“One of the most important messages of the event was the understanding of the youth that their role is to maintain peace and freedom and to use it to their advantage in helping to advance the entire country toward building a socialist society.”

## Denuncian detención injusta del líder sindical panameño Yamir Córdoba

By Telesur

Este martes 6 de mayo, la policía detuvo de forma arbitraria e injusta al coordinador de la Alianza Pueblo Unido, Yamir Córdoba, quien se encontraba conversando con trabajadores en un proyecto de la empresa RM. La corresponsal de teleSUR en Panamá, Rekha Chandiramani, conversó con el abogado de Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Construcción y Similares de Panamá (Suntracs), Antonio Vargas.

De acuerdo con Vargas, en dicha empresa dieron la orden de llamar a la policía en caso de que los miembros de Suntracs se acerquen a arengar a los trabajadores. Precisamente cuando Yamir se encontraba con trabajadores que posiblemente querrían unirse a las protestas, la policía irrumpió y lo detuvo sin dar justificaciones.

En este sentido, el abogado asegura que estos proyectos asociados con funcionarios del Gobierno de José Raúl Mulino han creado un escenario de criminalización de los dirigentes sindicales sin que hayan cometido delito alguno. Se trata de la represión a la expresión política que ha desplegado el Ejecutivo panameño, a contrapelo del derecho a huelga que poseen todos los ciudadanos panameños.

Vargas enfatiza que el Gobierno ha desconocido ese derecho al ejercicio de la huelga, reconocido en la Carta Marga de Panamá; ha desarrollado una política de persecución sindical contra los que accionan a favor del ejercicio de huelga y, violando el foro de huelga, han autorizando a despedir a trabajadores que se encuentren en paro.

En esa línea, el abogado denuncia que en esta política de persecución que se ha hecho efectiva en las protestas masivas, con la detención, persecución y difamación acerca de los dirigentes y los trabajadores que critican las decisiones del Ejecutivo; el Ministerio Público se ha convertido en un instrumento de la policía. El experto afirmó que se ha convertido en juez y parte, deteniendo y diciendo quién comete delito y quién no.

En tanto, la huelga general indefinida se mantiene en todo el territorio, y los gremios que participan han exigido al Gobierno el establecimiento de un diálogo abierto y transparente, que conduzca a soluciones concretas y priorice el bienestar de la sociedad panameña por encima de los intereses económicos privados, en muchos casos en manos de funcionarios del propio Ejecutivo.

De acuerdo con la corresponsal Rekha Chandiramani en reporte para teleSUR, si se mira un poco más lejos, la huelga nacional es una expresión del descontento popular con políticas neoliberales que se han consolidado hace más de 30 años, después de la invasión de Estados Unidos al país.

Un elemento que ha hecho estallar las inconformidades en distintos gremios es la falta de escucha y voluntad de consensuar por parte del Gobierno, que para llevar a cabo las reformas a la Caja de Seguro Social no contempló ninguna de las opciones alternativas presentadas por al menos 11 gremios, de los cuales 9 pedía regresar al sistema solidario de seguridad social, el cual fue abolido en su totalidad tras “las reformas”.

Ello se agrava al tratarse de un Gobierno proempresarial que llegó a la dirección del país sin una base partidaria sólida, que se endosó los votos que habrían sido del expresidente Ricardo Martinelli, inhabilitado por una condena de blanqueo de capitales poco antes de las elecciones.

Actualmente, en la tercera semana de protestas, la corresponsal informa de exigencias por parte de los manifestantes:

- la defensa de la soberanía nacional, vulnerada por el memorándum de entendimiento suscrito por el presidente Mulino con Estados Unidos sin previa consulta de ningún tipo;
- el rechazo a las reformas de la Caja de Seguro Social;
- la reapertura de la mina de cobre, mientras otros sectores protestas contra el proyecto de embalse anunciado por el Canal de Panamá.

Cabe destacar que varias demandas de inconstitucionalidad han sido interpuestas ante la Corte Suprema panameña contra varios funcionarios panameños, por violación de la personalidad jurídica del Estado y poner en juego la soberanía del país, fundamentalmente con la apertura al despliegue de tropas estadounidenses en zonas adyacentes al canal.

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