

## Martin Luther King Day 2018

**Monday, January 15 at Garfield High School (23<sup>rd</sup> Ave and E. Jefferson St.)  
Workshops 9:30-10:50, rally 11:00 and MARCH at 12:30!**

50 years ago this year Martin Luther King was assassinated while organizing for the 1968 Poor People's March and supporting the Memphis sanitation workers strike. In over 110 cities the black masses immediately rose up in the biggest of all the urban rebellions of the 1960s. Indeed, those were days when the African American people's movement was still surging forward using many different forms of struggle. The movement was helping to fuel the other progressive movements in society and the overall workers' movement, e.g., the last big strike wave in this country was in 1970. Real political and economic gains were being won. But the decline of the movement and counter-offensive of the ruling class has left a situation where the need for renewed mass struggle against racial discrimination and poverty is stark.

Real wages have barely increased in the half century since King's assassination. More than 500,000 people are now homeless on any single night, and they're disproportionately African Americans. The youth poverty rate is the highest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, and the U.S. ranks 35<sup>th</sup> out of the 37 OECD countries in terms of poverty and equality. 14% of white families, 27% of Latino families, and 30% of black families have zero or negative wealth. White median household wealth has crept up to \$116,800 over the past 30 years, but the median black family wealth is just \$1,700 – which is *down* from the \$6,800 (adjusted) it was 30 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Life expectancy of men in the bottom 10% of wage earners is *14 years shorter* than for men in the top 10% of earners, and if you're black you will die 3.4 years younger on average than if you're white.<sup>2</sup>

But the rich have gotten incredibly richer. Just three of them – Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett – now own as much wealth as the bottom half of the U.S. population, or 160 million people.

Moreover, last year 159 United States billionaires added \$315 billion to their fortunes, giving them a collective net worth of \$2 trillion. That's double the \$1 trillion spent by the government in 2015 on health care, education and housing combined.

Now Trump has signed a tax law that blatantly favors the rich, and the Republicans want to use the budget deficits it causes to further attack Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other programs the working people depend on. But the problem is not just Trump and the Republicans. The majority of Democrats happily united with the Republicans to pass a budget-busting \$700 billion war-spending bill that was even larger than what Trump had asked for. As well, when in power the Democrats have also worked to widen the gap between rich and poor. It was Bill Clinton who ended “welfare as we know it.” And during the last financial crisis Barack Obama bailed out the banks, financiers and auto capitalists with \$trillions while giving the masses crumbs and forcing auto workers to take pay cuts.

Thus, 50 years of experience since King's assassination reveals the tendency under capitalism for the rich to get richer while the poor get poorer. It reveals how deeply embedded racism is in the system. And it reveals that rather than having solutions to these problems, the Republicans and the Democrats are part of the problem.

But historical experience also shows that when the masses of people take political matters into their own hands great progressive changes can be won. In the 1930s it was the movement of the workers to organize unions and to wage fierce strikes and sit-downs, the movement of the unemployed and others that forced the federal government to grant unemployment insurance, Social Security and other concessions to the people. And from the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott

through the massive urban rebellions of the 1960s, it was the masses of black people in motion who forced the smashing of Jim Crow, and who wrested other progressive reforms from the establishment. What's more, the mass movements of the 30s and 60s had a revolutionary edge that greatly increased their power. In the early 30s this was crystallized in the Communist Party USA organizing among the unemployed, among Southern sharecroppers, in major industries and more. That party abandoned revolutionary work in 1935. But in the 1960s millions of people were again concluding that revolution was necessary, and *new* groups and parties calling for revolution were being formed.

So as we enter 2018, the second year of the Trump era, let us take these historical lessons to heart. This year let's increase the level of political discussion among our friends and at school and

## Against police murders: Justice for Charleena Lyles and Tommy Le!

More than 1,100 people have been killed by the police for the fourth year in a row.<sup>1</sup> The dead are disproportionately African Americans and other national minorities. And these are often acts of savagery in which the cops have no excuse for aiming to kill and then repeatedly firing, or even for drawing a gun.

Such were the cases of **Charleena Lyles**, a black mom of four who had called the police to investigate a burglary of her Sand Point apartment, and of **Tommy Le**, a Vietnamese nationality student who was acting strangely in Burien the night before his graduation. Ms. Lyles, who was suffering mental problems that the two cops knew about, picked up a kitchen knife or knives. But instead of using batons (both had them), pepper spray (one had it), or defending themselves in other ways, they pulled guns and shot Ms. Lyles seven

work. Let's draw out the class issues involved in political events, and stress the need to fight for the interests of the most oppressed in order to unify the working class to fight back. And let's participate in all the progressive mass protests, like Martin Luther King Day, and unite with like-minded people to fight back against exploitation, oppression and Trump's reactionary program.

By doing these things we'll be helping to build the kind of independent political movement of the working class needed to fight today's poverty and racial discrimination, and ultimately to achieve the liberation of all working and oppressed people from root cause of their oppression, capitalism. <>

1. see <http://fortune.com/2017/09/19/racial-inequality-wealth-gap-america/>

2. see <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/health/life-expectancy-us-declines.html>

times, including twice in the back. And Mr. Le was confronted by two cops outside. But when a taser failed and Le apparently tried to run away, one cop shot him twice in the back and once in the hand. Mr. Le had no weapon whatsoever, only a pen.

Despite many protests, and despite Seattle and King County being run by Democrats who are supposedly on the side of national minorities and the poor, the killers of Charleena Lyles and Tommy Le haven't even had their wrists slapped, nor have there been significant changes in police policies. This shows why it is so necessary for the masses of people to rely on themselves to build ferocious movements for justice for Charleena Lyles, Tommy Le and all other victims of police brutality and murders. <>

1. Source: <http://killedbypolice.net/>

Seattle Communist Study Group, January 9, 2018

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