



January 18, 2025

Los Angeles wildfire deaths rise to 24 as more fierce winds are forecast

By Christopher Weber and Holly Ramer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A growing force of firefighters moved into the Los Angeles area Monday as more powerful winds were expected to trigger new wildfires that could set back the recent progress made in [containing blazes](#) that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people.

Crews and equipment arrived from across the U.S., and from Canada and Mexico — including water trucks and planes that drop firefighting chemicals — as the National Weather Service warned that the coming days could become “particularly dangerous.”

It predicted [severe fire conditions](#) will last through Wednesday, with wind gusts in the mountains reaching 65 mph (105 kph). The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behavior analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting Sunday night.

The relative calm Sunday allowed some people to return to previously evacuated areas. But even as [containment increased](#) in the [worst of the fires](#), more bad news emerged from the ashes: The death toll surged late Sunday with an update from the Los Angeles County medical examiner. At least 16 people were missing, a number authorities said was also likely to rise.

Fierce [Santa Ana winds](#) have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires sparked last week into infernos that [leveled entire neighborhoods](#) around the nation's second-largest city where there has been no significant rainfall in more than [eight months](#).

In less than a week, four fires around the nation's second biggest city have ignited more than 62 square miles (160 square kilometers), roughly three times the size of Manhattan.

Most of that destruction has been from the Eaton Fire near Pasadena and the Palisades Fire, in a wealthy enclave along the Pacific Coast. Firefighters have made progress on both fronts in recent days, with the Eaton Fire roughly one-third contained.

The returning high winds could trigger explosive growth of the existing fires and new outbreaks in areas untouched so far, creating new challenges for firefighting crews already stretched thin.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone said 70 additional water trucks arrived to help firefighters fend off flames spread by renewed gusts. “We are prepared for the upcoming wind event,” Marrone said.

Fire retardant dropped by aircraft will act as a barrier along hillsides, officials said.



A group of artists, musicians, and friends in Topanga Canyon banded together to stop fires breaking out in new areas by turning off gas lines and propane tanks.

“We helped hopefully save a couple houses and we put out a couple spot fires, Derek Mabra said as he drove along the coast looking at the destruction. “It’s complete and total devastation.”

Some residents have been able to return to their homes to survey the damage.

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CONTINUING THE DAILY WORKER



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Los Angeles wildfire deaths rise to 24

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Jim Orlandini, who lost his hardware store in Altadena, a hard-hit neighborhood next to Pasadena, said his home of 40 years survived.

“Tuesday night we didn’t sleep at all because we figured the house was gone,” he said Sunday as he recalled the moment the fires spread to his neighborhood.

“The whole time I was thinking, I don’t know what I’m going to find when I get back here and after 40 years, you know, you got a lot of stuff you forget about that would disappear if the house burned down. So we’re thankful that it didn’t.”

Sixteen of the 24 deaths were attributed to the Eaton Fire and eight to the Palisades Fire, according to the Los Angeles County coroner’s office.

Twelve people were listed as missing within the Eaton Fire zone and four were missing from the Palisades Fire, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

In the meantime, LA city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley urged people to stay away from scorched neighborhoods.

“There are still active fires that are burning within the Palisades area, making it extremely, extremely dangerous for the public,” Crowley said Sunday. “There’s no power, there’s no water, there’s broken gas lines, and we have unstable structures.”

Officials warned the ash can contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials.

About 50,000 people in Los Angeles County remained under evacuation orders, with more than 700 residents taking refuge in nine shelters, Luna said. Officials said most of the orders in the Palisades area were unlikely to be lifted before the red flag warnings expire Wednesday evening.

“Please rest assured that first thing Thursday we will begin talking about repopulation,” Marrone said.

Firefighters continue to battle flames

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes nearly 1,400 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico.

Firefighters over the weekend managed to fight back flames in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities near Pacific Palisades not far from the coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill.

Arrests for looting

Looting continued to be a concern, with authorities reporting more arrests as the devastation grew. Those arrested included two people who posed as firefighters going into houses, Los Angeles Police Department Capt. Michael Lorenz said.

With California National Guard troops on hand to guard properties, Gov. Gavin Newsom posted on X: “California will NOT allow for looting.”

Historic cost

The fires that began Tuesday just north of downtown LA had burned more than 12,000 structures. No cause for the largest fires was determined.

AccuWeather’s early estimates suggest the fires could be the nation’s costliest ever, topping \$250 billion including what’s to come in the next days.

Rebuilding will be a challenge

Newsom issued an executive order Sunday aimed at fast-tracking rebuilding by suspending some environmental regulations and ensuring that property tax assessments were not increased.

“We’ve got to let people know that we have their back,” he said. “We want you to come back, rebuild, and rebuild with higher quality building standards, more modern standards.”

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said Sunday that she had spoken with President-elect Donald Trump’s incoming administration and expected that he would visit the city.

Groups to converge on DC this weekend to confront MAGA forces

By Taryn Fivek

A crowd fills Independence Avenue during the Women's March on Washington, Saturday, Jan. 21, 2017, in Washington. | Alex Brandon/AP



WASHINGTON – On January 18th, dozens of civil society organizations plan to converge on Washington, D.C. as “The People’s March” to spark a “new social movement” that will confront the MAGA forces descending on the 20th to take power of all three branches of federal government. Among these groups are immigrant, environmental, and civil liberties advocates, racial justice groups, labor locals, and feminist organizations.

The logistical efforts will be anchored by the Women’s March, a group that emerged from the Women’s March on Washington in 2017 that protested the first Trump inauguration. Though the weight of the mobilization will be focused on Washington D.C., more than 300 supporting events have been planned across the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

According to the People’s March website, forces will be spread among three different meet-up locations, Farragut Square will contain contingents focused on democracy, immigration and peace; McPherson Square will contain contingents focused on DC-specific issues like home rule; and the Franklin Park location will focus on bodily autonomy, gender and LGBTQ issues.

After gathering in these three locations, a march will proceed to the Lincoln Memorial for a rally and opportunities to network. The most important aspect of the mobilization, according to organizers, is to help those who attend find “political homes” through “onboarding, political education, organizing and mobilizing work capacity.”

Though organizers do not expect the same level of turnout as the 2017 Women’s March, which was the largest protest in United States history, they do not see it as an indication that the movement is any weaker. “Mobilizations of this kind are much better indicators of people who are moving into movement,” said organizers. “Rather than representing the totality of movement, or even a temperature check of movement.”

“We want to meet people where they’re at, and looking at the next four years of another Trump presidency is daunting,” Ryann Perkins, co-director of the Claudia Jones School for Political Education, told *People’s World*. “To face another Trump presidency and its fascist agenda, we must approach the tasks that lie ahead with the broadest possible unity.”

Mobilizing organizations include Movement for Black Lives, UFCW3000, Time to Act, Popular Democracy, Sunrise Movement, Harriet’s Wildest Dreams, Claudia Jones School for Political Education, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Adalah Justice Project, the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Jewish Voices for Peace, United We Dream and the Women’s March.

The Democratic Socialists of America and the Communist Party USA will also be present in DC on the 18th.

NeeNee Taylor, of Harriet’s Wildest Dreams, said her organizing was mobilizing to McPherson Square because of the threats that a MAGA-run government present directly to DC. “Washington, DC is not a state. Donald Trump has made threats to revoke D.C.’s Home Rule,” a law that allows DC residents to elect their own leaders. “This is not just a D.C. issue; it’s a national one... a threat to local governance in D.C. is a threat to local governance across the country.”

Indeed, one of the greatest MAGA threats to local rule regards access to reproductive and gender-based healthcare. Sweeping federal bans or reviving the federal Comstock Law which monitors federal mail could limit hundreds of millions from accessing abortion and trans healthcare. “Make no mistake, misogyny is on the march,” said Tamika Middleton of the Women’s March. “If you believe that decisions about your body should remain yours, that books belong in libraries, not on bonfires, that healthcare is a right, not a privilege for the wealthy... then you should march too.”

The Communist Party also intends to mobilize members from across the Mid-Atlantic to participate this weekend, while elsewhere members intend to join local actions hosted by the People’s March. “We’ll be at the People’s March because we want to be where the people in struggle are. The resistance lives!” CPUSA co-chair Joe Sims told *People’s World*. “The struggle against the Project 2025 agenda will affect all communities and workers, and the Communist Party is willing to do our part to build the broadest and deepest possible anti-fascist coalition possible to meet these challenges.”

At the same time as pro-democratic forces converge on Washington D.C., MAGA forces are allegedly gathering to celebrate what they consider to be a major victory. More than \$170 million dollars have been raised by the Trump inauguration committee since November. That money will go towards paying for lavish events that the ultra-rich plan to hold across the DC area this weekend, including a fireworks display and reception at Trump’s in Lowes Island, Virginia and a MAGA victory rally on the 19th at Capital One Arena.

While the Trump campaign insists that inauguration events are all at capacity, the New York Times reports that many donors sent money without the expectation of VIP tickets. If this inauguration is anything like Trump’s previous inauguration in 2017, the resistance to the incoming Trump administration may well outweigh MAGA supporters in the streets.

Corporate greed, not Karen Bass, behind lack of water in L.A.

By Mark Gruenberg

Jack Nicholson and others in a scene from the 1974 film Chinatown, which foretold criminal corporate honchos seizing control of the California water supply and making the people of Los Angeles suffer.



LOS ANGELES—Remember the movie *Chinatown*?

That 1974 epic starring Jack Nicholson told how politics and greed, mixed with more than a little violence, led to a fortunate few early in the last century seizing control of the Los Angeles water supply at the time when the city was starting the sudden and phenomenal growth that has made it the nation's second largest.

"People are gonna be mad when they find out they're paying for water they're not gonna get," an undercover source tells the Nicholson character in one of the movie's key scenes.

Which pretty much sums up the situation Angelenos—and, indirectly, the rest of us—now face: Despite spending millions of taxpayer dollars over decades to construct one of the world's most-extensive infrastructure projects to transfer water from naturally rainy Northern California to naturally parched Southern California, there's not enough available water to fight the monster fires now ravaging L.A.

The lack of the water needed to provide fire hydrants that provide water rather than fail has nothing to do with Mayor Karen Bass, as the new York Times and much of the corporate media claims but has much to do with corporate greed instead.

And climate change only makes things worse, scientists report. It's fueling the out-of-control winds that have made The City of Angels a flaming hell on earth.

The fires have left federal, state and local Fire Fighters dazed, frustrated, short-staffed and exhausted, at least 23 people dead so far and sent billions of dollars' worth of homes and businesses literally up in smoke.

The only things missing now that were in the movie are its violence, the ultimate identity of some of the biggest beneficiaries—Corporate farmers and, Greenpeace says, fossil fuel firms—and the downwind impact as dangerous smoke from the monster fires drifts eastward over the continental U.S.

Campaign contributions, made possible by corporate greed, have something to do with the fires, or, more particularly, the lack of water to fight them.

For one thing, the cash answers the old Latin question: "*Cui bono?* Who benefits?"

The answer, according to A More Perfect Union documentary, "*How this billionaire couple stole California's water supply*," is corporate farmers of California's Central Valley, led by one politically powerful couple, Stewart and Lynda Resnick, who funneled favors and campaign contributions to their favorite Golden State politicians, especially the late Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

In return, agribusiness growers got federal funding for millions of dollars' worth of water projects—projects which benefit their growing operations at the expense of Los Angeles residents who see their homes and businesses burning up.

The story begins decades ago. That's what *Chinatown* was about. But it accelerates with a closed-door deal 31 years ago between construction companies, state "regulators" and the big growers of California's Central Valley to control the lion's share of the water.

The deal: Water, paid for by the public, goes first to the growers, then to federally built reservoirs and then—maybe—to everybody else. Before the deal, the cities of Southern California had first call on the water, A More Perfect Union reported.

Taxpayers pay again

But now, when the water runs dry in the South, taxpayers pay again as their municipal water systems must pay the private firms to import needed water. And municipal water rates rise. And when the cities can't import water, or when the current seven-year drought leaves reservoirs at record lows and fire hydrants run dry, L.A. burns.

Republican Gov. Pete Wilson didn't know about the backroom deal an Internet research check shows. The state legislature didn't know. Taxpayers—and California then was a "purple state" heading for blue thanks to Wilson-GOP anti-Hispanic racism—didn't know.

The Resnicks' private company controls at least 60 percent of the water flowing south from the Central Valley, and specifically from its biggest water producer and "storage tank" built to hold water in reserve for times of drought and fire, the Kern County Water District, A More Perfect Union's film said.

The California Water Resources Board put overall water usage figures statewide at 54 percent for agriculture and five percent for the cities of the South. Northern California has enough water, for now.

Campaign contributions prod California politicians into doing the growers' will and feeding their corporate greed. As chair of a relevant Senate subcommittee, Feinstein kept funneling federal cash for water projects, the infamous pork barrel, which the Resnicks and other corporate farmers sought.

Feinstein didn't take campaign cash from the Resnicks, records show, though she was often a guest at their vacation home. She may not have needed it. Her last available financial disclosure, seven years ago, on OpenSecrets.org, showed the already wealthy ex-San Francisco supervisor had a net worth of \$87.8 million.

Other politicians, most of them Democrats, did receive Resnick campaign cash. The Resnicks' biggest single donation to politicians last year, OpenSecrets.org said, was to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

That campaign finance committee for House Democrats got a \$289,100 check last May Day. And last February, the Resnicks gave \$25,000 to the "Newsom's Ballot Measure Committee," established by backers of Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to weigh in on ballot initiatives. More on Newsom below.

The others got less than \$5,000 each. They include Sens. Jackie Rosen, D-Nev., and John Hickenlooper, D-Colo., and Reps. Jimmy Panetta, D-Calif., and David Valadao, R-Calif. What water for L.A. doesn't come from Northern California, groundwater, or Sierra Nevada Mountains snowpack comes from the Colorado River. And Nevada—read "Las Vegas"—and Colorado have shares of it, too.

Panetta and Valadao have more direct interests. Their districts include some big specialty farm areas, for berries and those pistachios, south of Monterey Bay and in the Central Valley. Valadao is one of two remaining House Republicans, out of ten overall, still in office who voted for Donald Trump's impeachment four years ago—a position popular in deep-blue California.

Corporate greed behind lack of water in L.A.

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First Feinstein, and then other California politicians are pushing another big project, called The Delta Tunnel, to divert even more water from the San Joaquin River delta—whose water feeds Oakland, San Francisco and the Bay Area in *Northern* California—to the farms.

When a critical study challenged the need for and environmental impact of the tunnel, Feinstein convinced Congress to fund a \$750,000 rerun. It came to the same conclusion, and the project is stalled.

Despite a protest letter

That's despite a protest letter to the Bureau of Reclamation from Valadao and the state's other Republican U.S. representatives.

Written just around Labor Day, the lawmakers said the environmental impact statement for all California water projects was too heavily weighted towards the environment and species preservation and not enough towards irrigation.

No mention of wildfires.

The L.A. wildfires are also a political football on Capitol Hill. Last year, then-Republican nominee Donald Trump threatened, if elected, to withhold federal firefighting aid from California unless Newsom knuckled under and changed California fire and water policy in unspecified ways.

On January 12 TV talk shows, Vice-President-elect JD Vance, still an Ohio Republican senator, denied his boss, Trump, would commit any such punishment. Trump, Vance said, "cares about all Americans."

Trump's own actions during congressional consideration eight years ago of the Trump-GOP tax cut for corporations and the rich contradict Vance's statement—which may bode ill for finding enough water, and paying for it, to fight the L.A. fires.

Then, Trump singled out "blue states," including California, for punishment. And now, a Trump follower, Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso, R-Wyom., wants to attach unspecified conditions to firefighting aid for California.

"I expect that there will be strings attached to money that is ultimately approved, and it has to do with being ready the next time, because this was a gross failure this time," Barrasso told *Face The Nation*. "In addition to the tragedy on the ground, you're also seeing gross mismanagement in California by elected officials."

As for Newsom, *California Water Views* reported that at the end of this year's legislative session, he signed all but one water-related bill lawmakers sent him. But that one, SB366, would have given the public—and workers—a voice in state water decisions.

"SB366 is designed to modify the contents of the California Water Plan while making new findings," *Water Views* reported. The top one: "Requiring the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to expand the membership of the plan's advisory committee to include tribes, labor, and environmental justice parties."

SB366 also would have mandated the agency to "discuss water recharge" of reservoirs, "conveyance"—in other words, transportation—and "the following water needs: Environmental, urban sector, and agricultural." Plus the "costs and benefits" of any water project the agency recommends.

Meanwhile, the same Central Valley agribusiness growers whose corporate greed has siphoned off needed water from Los Angeles also employ—and exploit—migrant workers, domestic and foreign, documented or not, to the growers' benefit from the water monopoly.

"Farmworkers are exempt from most minimum wage and hour guarantees found in the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and state employment laws," a foundation study the United Farm Workers commissioned more than a decade ago reports.

Withhold even mandatory pay

The same growers who benefit from their California water monopoly withhold even state-mandated overtime pay or mandatory breaks for rest or meals," and laws protecting the workers, most of whom make the federal minimum wage, aren't enforced.

The growers also use other thousands of dollars, A More Perfect Union reports, to safeguard their U.S. pistachio monopoly in particular by lobbying to continue federal bans on imports of better-quality pistachios from Iran. So consumers pay in higher pistachio prices, because there's no competition. The plot's the same as in *Chinatown*. So are the victims—consumers.

"They've bought entire departments, which produce studies showing how water systems should be managed," documentary narrator J.T. Chapman says of the Resnicks. "This leads to even more state and federal dollars to be used to fix up what the Resnicks already profit off of.

"This is bad for California even in a capitalistic sense...Their giant monocrops siphon important water and kill pollinators. They subsidize charter schools in company towns which train children to be farmworkers. And, of course like any company of this size they exploit their farmworkers."

Water, the documentary concludes, should be a public good under public control.

The role of climate change is where Greenpeace says a separate group of greedy corporate barons are responsible for the spreading disaster: Fossil fuel companies.

"Communities in California are paying the ultimate price while corporations rake in record profits," says Greenpeace California climate specialist Zach Norris.

"Every year, the state spends billions on wildfire recovery, while the insurance market teeters on the edge of collapse as private insurers face skyrocketing damages from fires and other climate disasters. It's time for the corporations responsible for this destruction to be held accountable and pay for their mess.

"That's why California is considering a new bill," the Polluter Pays Climate Superfund, "that would help pay for wildfire and other damages by making the biggest corporate polluters—the ones responsible for the climate crisis—fund recovery efforts." It "would require these companies to pay for the damage their fossil fuel emissions have caused, providing critical resources for communities impacted by extreme weather events like these.

But that bill has yet to reach Newsom's desk.

MAGA Republicans rushing through attempt to strip noncitizens of fundamental rights

By John Bachtell

Congressional MAGA Republicans are rushing to pass the Laken Riley Act, which would strip noncitizens of fundamental rights, permit indefinite detention regardless of legal status, and open the door to mass deportations.

American Civil Liberties Union warned that the bill seriously threatens civil liberties and violates bedrock constitutional principles, including eliminating due process rights and empowering rightwing state attorney generals to shape federal immigration policy.

The bill passed the House and is now in the Senate. Republicans want the bill on Trump's desk to sign when he takes office on Jan. 20. Trump vows to begin mass deportations of individuals without legal status on the first day of his presidency, order the U.S. military to shut down the U.S.-Mexico border, and end birthright citizenship, a fundamental Constitutional right.

"(The Laken Riley Act) is essentially a highway to mass deportation, and you can have any number of people picked up and put into the criminal justice system simply for being accused, with no conviction, no admission of guilt," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash.

The bill "will strengthen President-elect Trump's hand in unleashing mass deportations on our communities. It will force immigration authorities to detain individuals accused of nonviolent theft offenses like shoplifting regardless of whether or not law enforcement even deems them as a threat," [said](#) Sarah Mehta, ACLU senior border policy counsel.

"Mandating mass detention will make us less safe, sapping resources and diverting taxpayer money away from addressing public safety needs. Detaining a mother who admits to shoplifting diapers for her baby, or elderly individuals who admit to nonviolent theft when they were teenagers, is wasteful, cruel, and unnecessary," said Mehta.

Current law allows ICE to mandatorily detain noncitizens without review by an immigration judge in a bond hearing when courts have convicted them of a crime. However, this unprecedented and likely unconstitutional bill radically changes federal law, wipes out due process rights for noncitizens, and would result in a significant spike in racial profiling of longtime residents.

Under current Senate rules, legislative sponsors need 60 votes to overcome a filibuster and pass a bill. With Republicans united, defeating the legislation requires opposition from 41 Democratic senators. However, last week, 33 Democrats voted to advance the bill.

[Alarmed immigrant rights organizations, labor, and civil liberties groups urged constituencies to inundate their senators with calls, emails, and office visits.](#)

The Laken Riley Act is named after a young Georgia woman who was raped and murdered by a person from Venezuela without legal status. Authorities had previously arrested the perpetrator for shoplifting and subsequently released him.

Instead of focusing on the issue of violent crime or femicide, Republicans restricted the bill to minor nonviolent offenses like shoplifting, burglary, and other related crimes. The U.S. has one of the highest rates of femicide among advanced industrial countries. Yet, Republicans ignored this issue to exploit anti-immigrant hysteria even though immigrants without legal status commit far fewer crimes than citizens.

The rightwing is exploiting Riley's tragic death to impose draconian repression on immigrants, whether they have legal status or not. The bill would throw due process out the window by authorizing the federal detention of immigrants with or without status who are arrested for a minor crime, like shoplifting, whether they are guilty or not. And once detained, federal officials can jail them indefinitely.

"The Laken Riley Act...undermine(s) the principle that people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Worse, this bill would let activist state attorneys general file harmful, pointless lawsuits against the federal government over immigration policy just to score political points," [said](#) the Center for Immigrant Rights.

The Act even covers immigrants permitted to be in the U.S., such as Dreamers (DACA), asylum seekers, and those under Temporary Protected Status (TPS). It does not make an exception for minors.

The Act grants extraordinary power to state attorney generals over immigration policy, an authority granted under the Constitution to the Federal government. State officials would be allowed to sue the federal government for failure to detain noncitizens who commit nonviolent crimes. Such actions would threaten the entire immigration system with massive gridlock.

"This bill allows people like Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to hijack federal immigration policy. He could demand federal judges lock up asylum seekers en masse or block visas for doctors, engineers, or students from entire countries. Imagine one MAGA state deciding who can live and work in the United States. That's what this bill allows," said Indivisible co-leader Leah Greenberg.

By imposing blanket visa bans, the bill threatens to shut down legal immigration altogether, an aim of Stephen Miller, Steve Bannon, and other MAGA extremists.

By expanding mandatory detention, thousands of people could be swept up into jails and detention centers — at enormous taxpayer expense and diverting law enforcement resources — even when an immigration judge or immigration agent doesn't think they pose a threat to the community or flight risk, warned the ACLU.

The bill incentivizes officers influenced by racism and anti-immigrant hate to commit racial profiling and arrest immigrants with or without legal status. It would potentially entail a colossal waste of federal resources to detain individuals while disrupting families, communities, and workplaces.

Republicans stoked anti-immigrant fears during the election and hammered Democratic candidates on immigration and border security. Some Democratic elected officials are reacting to the highly toxic anti-immigrant environment by making concessions on the issue to MAGA. Some hope that by supporting the legislation, they will be immune from GOP attacks. For example, Sens. John Fetterman, D-Pa, and Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz, are co-sponsors of the Act.

But by giving in to anti-immigrant hysteria, these Democrats are greasing the skids for fascist authoritarianism and mass deportations and turning their backs on critical base constituencies of the Democratic Party. This shortsighted outlook is reminiscent of the fear that caused some to cave into passing the repressive Patriot Act following 9-11, only to regret it later profoundly.

Relief for Cuba from U.S. terrorist designation, but for how long?

By W. T. Whitney Jr.



People move past downed power lines after the passage of Hurricane Rafael in Guira de Melena, Cuba, Nov. 7, 2024. Biden's ending of the SSOT designation against Cuba will bring some relief after a difficult period, but the U.S.' blockade remains in place. | Ramon Espinosa / AP

Only days before he will leave office, President Joe Biden on Jan. 14 finally removed Cuba from the U.S. list of “State Sponsors of Terrorism” (SSOT). Designating Cuba as a terrorist state has long been a part of the U.S. blockade against the socialist country, imposing specific coercive measures on trade and imports.

President Barack Obama had previously removed the designation, in 2017, but Donald Trump restored it on Jan. 11, 2021, at the very end of his first term. It is widely expected that Trump may reimpose the SSOT label during his second term, likely undermining the practical effect of Biden’s decision.

In Havana, the Cuban Foreign Ministry greeted the announcement, saying that “despite its limited nature, this is a decision in the right direction.” The government emphasized, however, that the U.S.’ “continuing economic war is still the fundamental obstacle to the development and recovery” of Cuba.

Tightened the blockade’s impact

Cuba’s assignment to SSOT list had constituted a major part of the U.S.’ economic blockade of Cuba—the so-called “embargo”—which has been in effect for over six decades. The SSOT designation has contributed mightily to shortages of money, goods, and supplies in Cuba that add up to sustain a festering humanitarian crisis.

The designation requires that international financial institutions not use U.S. dollars in transactions involving Cuba; the use of U.S. dollars is targeted because they are the dominant currency in international monetary dealings and trade. Consequently, the flow to Cuba of loans, payments on account, and agency funding from abroad has slowed to a trickle.

Removal of the SSOT designation comes after the Biden administration in May removed Cuba from the State Department’s short list of countries that it deems less than fully cooperative against violent groups.

Over the course of its four-year term, the Biden White House faced a steady onslaught of demands that the SSOT designation be ended.

They came from congresspersons, the United Nations, political advocacy groups worldwide, U.S. political activists, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and nations of the world, particularly in Latin America.

The refrain, cropping up repeatedly, was that Biden could end the designation “with the stroke of a pen.” That did not happen until now. Appeals from Colombia’s government were central to the outcome, according to an informed *People’s World* source.

Biden took other actions in addition to stripping the SSOT designation. He also announced that the U.S. government would no longer enforce Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Law. Under this provision, U.S. citizens, Cuban émigrés among them, may appeal to U.S. courts to gain relief from the use by foreign individuals and companies of properties once belonging to their families, ones that had been nationalized by Cuba’s government.

There had been no enforcement of Title III until President Donald Trump did so in 2019. The impact of enforcement has been to add further precariousness to foreign investments in Cuba as many international companies became more reluctant to sink money into Cuba.

The Biden administration also eliminated measures put in force by Trump in 2017 prohibiting U.S. tourists and organizations from paying for a wide range of specified services in Cuba. Their overall purpose had been to cut back on income received by Cuba’s government.

In announcing these new measures, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre referred to “ongoing dialogue between the government of Cuba and the Catholic Church.” She was suggesting that the latter had facilitated the Biden administration’s decision to end the SSOT designation.

In its reporting on the new development, Cuba’s Foreign Affairs Ministry mentioned that Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez and President Miguel Díaz-Canel had brought Cuba’s SSOT designation to the attention of Pope Francis when they met with him in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Relief for Cuba, but for how long?

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The Ministry also indicated that Díaz-Canel recently communicated with the Pope, informing him that, “in the spirit of the ‘Ordinary Jubilee’ of 2025” (during which universal [pardon](#) is celebrated), Cuba’s government would soon be releasing 553 prisoners charged with various crimes.

Right recoils

The Trump transition team did not immediately comment on the Biden administration’s announcement.

However, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [proclaimed](#): “Today’s decision is unacceptable on its merits ... The terrorism advanced by the Cuban regime has not ceased.”

He pledged to “work with President Trump and my colleagues to immediately reverse and limit the damage from the decision.”

In a social media post, Florida Republican Rep. Carlos Giménez [added](#): “President Biden is a pathetic coward... Come January 20th, there will be a new sheriff in town and President Trump alongside Secretary of State [\[Rubio\]](#) will not only put [\[Cuba\]](#) back on the list but pulverize the regime once and for all!”

Better late than never

In stark contrast to the cheerleading for Cuban suffering evident on the right, the reaction among organizations that stand in solidarity with Cuba combined tempered celebration with demands that the full blockade be lifted.

The [Communist Party USA](#) welcomed the “long overdue removal” of Cuba from the SSOT list and said it represents a “significant step toward justice.” The CPUSA attributed the achievement to “years of struggle by the Cuban people, the international community, and broad sections of...democratic, labor, civil rights, and communist organizations around the globe.”

Pointing to the crippling effects of the blockade and the aggressive anti-Cuba stances of Sen. Mark Rubio, Trump’s Secretary of State appointee, the CPUSA encouraged peace supporters to rally in opposition to his confirmation and continue working to mobilize a coalition against the blockade.

The anti-war women’s group CODEPINK also hailed the change in policy, but said it was “unacceptable” that it took the administration four years to do it. “President Biden made the inhumane decision every single day to not alleviate the suffering of millions of Cubans by keeping this designation in place,” the organization said in a statement issued late Tuesday.

The director of international policy at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Alex Main, said Biden’s decision is “better late than never,” but argued that “sixty years of failed policy” should have been enough to convince U.S. officials to change their approach to Cuba long ago.

Several lawmakers in Washington praised the change and seconded the call for further relaxation of the U.S.’ coercive economic measures.

Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., called the change “a step toward ending decades of failed policy that has only hurt Cuban families and strained diplomatic ties.” She said removing the SSOT designation would create new opportunities for trade and cooperation between the U.S. and Cuba.

New York Rep. Nydia Velázquez said labeling Cuba a terrorist state did nothing to advance U.S. interests and only made it harder for Cubans to access humanitarian aid, banking services, and other needs.

“It has also deepened food and medicine shortages and worsened the island’s energy crisis, especially after Hurricane Rafael,” she said, pointing to the electricity blackouts and waves of outward migration in recent months.

Back in Havana, the Foreign Ministry said that this correction should have happened years ago and that the ongoing economic war against Cuba must end. Despite the continued U.S. aggression, though, Cuba said it “remains willing to develop a relationship of respect” with the U.S. government, “based on dialogue and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.”

People take part in a demonstration against the U.S. blockade and demand Cuba’s removal from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, in Havana, Cuba, Dec. 20, 2024. | Ramon Espinosa / AP



In farewell address, Biden warns of a reign of oligarchs

By Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON—The U.S. faces a coming reign of rich oligarchs, retiring Democratic President Joe Biden warned the nation in his January 15 farewell address. And unless the people resist, he declared, we'll lose our democracy.

Biden didn't name names, but he didn't have to do so. His predecessor and successor, Republican Donald Trump, is an oligarch himself, and has filled his prospective Cabinet with rich corporate colleagues—some of them with sketchy backgrounds.

And lurking behind convicted felon Trump, pulling the leash to make the incoming president bark, is Elon Musk, reportedly the world's richest person. Musk is a multibillionaire who's creating monopolies in social media and who's virulently anti-worker and anti-union—traits Trump shared when the two had a public tete-a-tete during the presidential campaign.

"I want to warn the country of some things that give me great concern," Biden declared. "That's the dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people, and the dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked.

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead. We see the consequences all across America. And we've seen it before.

"More than a century ago, the American people stood up to the robber barons and busted the trusts. They didn't punish the wealthy. They just made the wealthy play by the rules everybody else had.

"Workers want rights to earn their fair share. You know, they were dealt into the deal"—via FDR's New Deal, though Biden didn't say so—"and it helped put us on the path to building the largest middle class, the most prosperous century any nation the world has ever seen. We've got to do that again."

Biden, the last president who can remember growing up under FDR, has denounced the rich before, but not at such length.

The election returns showed more votes for the oligarch, Trump, than for Biden's VP, Kamala Harris. Some of those voters were so pressed by immediate economic concerns that they found focusing on any other issue very difficult and they went out and voted for what they hoped would be change. Not mentioned but implied by the criticism of the power of the oligarchs is that economic democracy brought about by living wages, the right to organize and health care is also important in the struggle to get people to fight for democracy.

The oligarchs would have people, rather than fighting for economic democracy as well as political democracy, believe that anyone can become rich in the United States.

Oligarchy extends to lawmakers

The oligarchy Biden warned about is not just in the looming Trump government. Congress is festooned with millionaires, past and present. That includes Biden. The president often discusses his working-class roots. But he earned millions of dollars in book royalties in recent years, after 36 years in the Senate and eight years as Barack Obama's vice president. The four-year gap between then and his presidency gave Biden that opportunity to cash in.

And Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas has benefitted from expensive and expansive "gifts" from two Republican heavyweights, Harlan Crow and Tony Novelli.

In first comments, e-mailed and posted on twitter/X, unions and their allies praised Biden, but for reasons other than his attack on oligarchy. None mentioned his attack on the corporate class.

"There's been no greater champion for unions and working people in the White House than President Joe Biden," the AFL-CIO tweeted. "He used every tool in his toolbox to create good union jobs, defend our right to organize, and invest in our economic security. Thank you, President Biden."

The federation accompanied that with a photo montage, including a shot of Biden walking a UAW picket line during the union's successful Stand Up strike against the Detroit-based automakers, GM, Ford and Stellantis, formerly FiatChrysler.

The Electrical Workers (IBEW) tweeted, "At every step of the way, Joe Biden stood with the #IBEW from investing in good jobs to defending the right to organize. Thanks to our partnership with Pres. Biden, the IBEW and the labor movement is growing stronger every day, lifting up working people across the nation."

"The achievements of the last four years were nothing less than historic and we are deeply grateful for President Biden's leadership," said Jason Walsh, executive director of the BlueGreen Alliance, a union-environmental coalition the Steelworkers co-founded.

"Because of his efforts we have seen the beginnings of a manufacturing renaissance after years of decline, our supply chains are once again growing, more than 360,000 lead pipes have been replaced, more and more workers are building careers in the clean energy sector—the list goes on.

"Because of President Biden's leadership, our nation is well on its way to a clean economy that works for all. Our greatest hope is to see that momentum continue. Thank you, President Biden and Vice President Harris."

Only the Service Employees called out the oligarchs, in a tweet just after Biden's speech. "Republicans are pushing for more Trump tax cuts that give YOU less than a dollar a day, while the richest 0.1% pocket your annual salary. And how do they plan to fund this? By ripping away your health care. We see the priorities, and they're not with working people," SEIU said.

Biden didn't mention the Trump-GOP tax cut for corporations and the rich in his 20-minute address re-reciting his administration's achievements. But he did argue the rich should pay their fair share of the costs of running the government on behalf of all of us—a theme SEIU also pushes.

Biden spent most of his speech discussing his administration's domestic achievements in fields ranging from restoring the economy after the coronavirus pandemic wrecked it—and the jobs of millions of workers—to launching the country into combatting climate change. Trump promises to undo them.

Biden also returned to the anti-oligarch theme. The nation, he said, has "ongoing debates about power and the exercise of power. About whether we lead by the example of our power or the power of our example. Whether we show the courage to stand up to the abuse of power, or we yield to it."

"After 50 years at the center of all of this...believing in the idea of America means respecting the institutions that govern a free society: The presidency, the Congress, the courts, a free and independent press."

By contrast, Trump has said he wants to be a dictator "on day one" after his January 20 inauguration. And he shows contempt, disdain and anger at the other institutions Biden cited. All, he said, plus checks and balances, "are rooted in" the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Gaza ceasefire supposedly in sight, but hunt for Israeli war criminals just beginning

By Ramzy Baroud

A dramatic escape was cited by Israeli media as the reason that Yuval Vagdani, a soldier in the Israeli army, managed to evade justice in Brazil. Vagdani was accused by a Palestinian advocacy legal group, the Hind Rajab Foundation, of carrying out well-documented crimes in Gaza. He is not the only Israeli soldier being pursued for similar crimes.

Though a ceasefire is reportedly in the final stages of negotiation, the cataloging of war crimes committed by the IDF over the past 15 months (and beyond) is just starting—as is the pursuit of those who carried them out. According to the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation (KAN), more than 50 Israeli soldiers are being pursued in countries ranging from South Africa to Sri Lanka to Sweden.

In one case, the Hind Rajab Foundation filed a complaint in a Swedish court against Boaz Ben David, an Israeli sniper from the 932 Battalion of the Israeli Nahal Brigade. He is also accused of committing war crimes in Gaza.

Even if these 50 individuals are apprehended and sentenced, the price exacted from the Israeli army pales in comparison to the crimes carried out.

Still, capturing and trying Israeli war criminals is not just about the fate of these individuals. It is about accountability—an absent term in the history of Israeli human rights violations, war crimes, and recurring genocides against Palestinians.

Reassured about the lack of accountability, Israeli soldiers have taken countless pieces of footage showing the abuse and torture of Palestinians in Gaza. This self-indictment will likely serve as a major body of evidence in future trials.

All of this cannot be viewed separately from the ongoing investigation into the Israeli genocide in Gaza by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Additionally, arrest warrants have been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against top Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Pursuing alleged Israeli war criminals in international and national courts is just the start of a process of accountability that will last many years. With every case, Israel will learn that the decades-long U.S. vetoes and blind Western protection and support will no longer suffice.

It is time for Israel to learn yet another lesson: that the age of accountability has begun. Dancing around the corpses of dead Palestinians in Gaza is no longer an amusing social media post, as Israeli soldiers once thought.

Los derechos de los trabajadores son un tema importante en la legislatura de Colorado

By Mark Gruenberg

DENVER—Los derechos de los trabajadores, y un obstáculo único para ellos en el estado, se convirtieron en un tema clave cuando la legislatura de Colorado se reunió el 8 de enero.

La batalla, que enfrenta a la AFL-CIO estatal y sus aliados progresistas contra la Cámara de Comercio del Área de Denver y sus compinches corporativos, gira en torno a la “Ley de Paz Laboral” que durante décadas ha convertido al Estado del Centenario en un estado con derecho al trabajo a medias.

La ley, la única de su tipo en los EE. UU., dice que un sindicato no puede representar a los trabajadores a menos que gane dos elecciones: la primera en la que la mayoría de los que votan se sindicalizan, y una segunda en la que tres cuartas partes deben votar que el sindicato puede cobrar cuotas sindicales y cuotas de participación justa.

Ha sido un obstáculo

Esa segunda elección ha sido un obstáculo para los éxitos de la organización sindical en Colorado, dice la federación estatal. Ha patrocinado seminarios, realizado manifestaciones en las escaleras del Capitolio estatal y ha presionado a los legisladores para que la revoquen. Ahora que los legisladores han vuelto a Denver, junto con el gobernador demócrata Jared Polis, la situación se está repitiendo.

La mayoría demócrata en ambas cámaras se muestra comprensiva. Polis puede estar interponiéndose en el camino. Vetó dos leyes clave a favor de los trabajadores al final de la sesión legislativa del año pasado. Fue el único demócrata destacado que no se presentó a la última manifestación laboral a favor de la derogación de la Ley de Paz Laboral, a mediados de noviembre.

La clase empresarial quiere mantener la ley. Argumenta (al igual que sus colegas en todo el país) que el derecho al trabajo “fomenta el desarrollo económico”, palabras clave para los bajos salarios, la falta de seguridad y los malos beneficios.

La federación estatal y sus aliados en la legislatura, predominantemente demócrata, quieren destruir la ley y reemplazarla por la Ley de Protección del Trabajador.

Esta eliminaría el derecho al trabajo y ordenaría a los “oportunistas” que paguen su parte justa del costo que le corresponde a un sindicato negociar en su nombre y defenderlos contra la injusticia.

Stephanie Felix-Sowry, presidenta de Service Employees Local 105 y líder de una coalición que aboga por un mayor poder de los trabajadores, defendió la Ley de Protección de los Trabajadores en un artículo de opinión publicado recientemente en el sitio web de la Reserva Federal estatal.

“Actualmente, la ley de Colorado impone barreras significativas para los trabajadores que buscan sindicalizarse. Las corporaciones a menudo toman represalias contra los empleados que organizan un sindicato, y el requisito de Colorado de dos elecciones separadas hace que sea aún más difícil para los trabajadores negociar términos justos”, escribió Felix-Sowry.

“En la mayoría de los estados, los trabajadores solo necesitan una mayoría simple de votos para formar un sindicato. Esta regla de segunda elección crea un obstáculo adicional, que permite a los empleadores intimidar a los trabajadores.

“Los estudios confirman que los sindicatos no hacen que las empresas fracasen o abandonen el estado. Las empresas sindicalizadas, incluidas las grandes corporaciones como General Electric, Southwest Airlines y Disney, siguen siendo altamente competitivas y exitosas”, dijo Felix-Sowry.

“Los demócratas deben estar del lado de los trabajadores y no del lado de la clase multimillonaria”, dijo el representante estatal Javier Mabrey, demócrata de Denver, uno de los patrocinadores, en una reciente manifestación/conferencia de prensa en la que se presentó la Ley de Protección al Trabajador.

Como era de esperar, los republicanos de la legislatura, superados en número por una proporción de dos a uno en ambas cámaras, quieren conservar la Ley de Paz Laboral y la segunda elección. Lo mismo quieren sus patrocinadores corporativos, encabezados por las Cámaras de Comercio de Colorado y Denver. El director ejecutivo de la Cámara de Comercio de Denver, J.J. Ament, dijo: “Ninguna organización de miembros del sector privado... debería poder sacar dinero de su salario o del mío sin nuestro permiso expreso”.

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