

*In the Spirit of
Gabriel & Nan,
Nat Turner,
Solomon Northup,
Madison Washington,
John Brown,
Mary Bowser,
Elizabeth Van Lew,
John Mitchell Jr.,
Barbara Johns,
Oliver Hill & all who
struggle for Justice.*

The Virginia DEFENDER

FREE



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Conditions so bad that prisoners set themselves on fire ...

Crisis & cover-up at Red Onion super-max

By Phil Wilayto

Just how bad are things at Virginia's Red Onion supermax prison?

On May 24, 2023, DeAndre Gordon deliberately started a fire in his cell that caused a third-degree burn on his leg. Gordon, who is Black, said he had been badly beaten by guards at the prison and feared for his life.

"I didn't know any other way that I could get out of their custody besides to set myself on fire," Gordon told a reporter with Radio IQ. "Because they don't have a burn center in Southwest Virginia, I knew that I would be going to Richmond."

According to the American Burn Association, Virginia has just three facilities capable of dealing with severe burns. Two are in Richmond: the Evans-Haynes Burn Center at VCU Health, a state institution, and the Wound Healing Center at Doctors Hospital, a private hospital. The third is at the Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk.

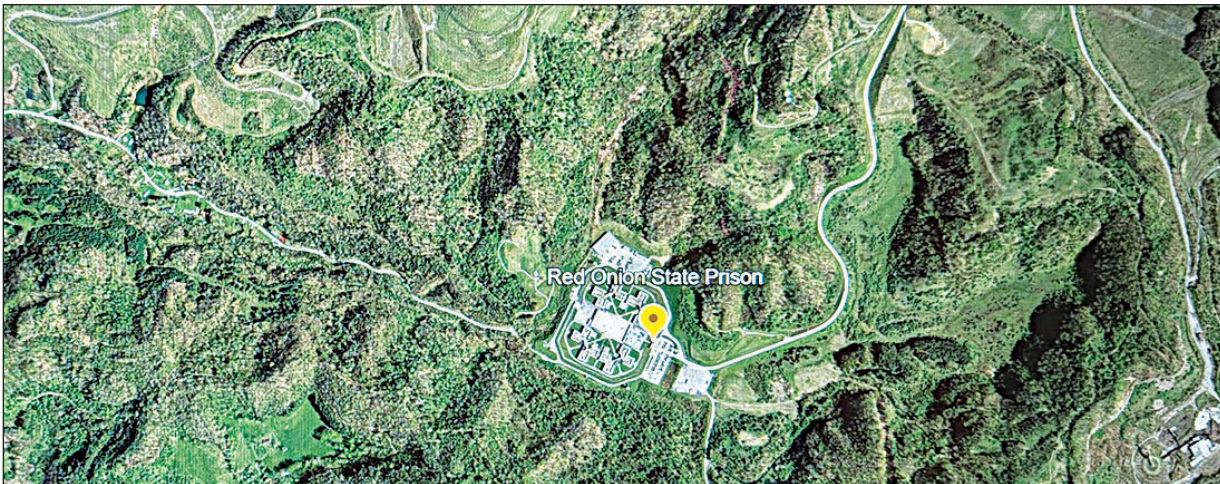
Red Onion, in Wise County, is about 375 miles west of Richmond.

On Aug. 23 of this year, Demetrius Wallace, 27, also Black, says he set fire to his leg to force a transfer out of Red Onion.

The Defender spoke with Wallace on Nov. 1.

"I did actually set my foot on fire," Wallace said. "I got the charge that shows it. They came to my cell door and saw the flames on the side of my leg. They took me to medical, they assessed me right there that night, told me they don't deal with burns, they would have to talk with the

skin from a skin bank] and a skin graft. After 14 days I was sent back to Red Onion state prison. Harassed me, everything is still the same, stuck me in the hole, still being denied access to my JPay [a commercial email service for prisoners] or my actual phone."



This Google Earth map gives some idea of how isolated the Red Onion super-max prison is, situated on top of Red Onion Mountain in rural Wise County, far from the families of most of the men confined there.

nurse practitioner, and that I would have to be taken off the mountain.

"That was Friday, Aug. 23. ... so Monday around 2 in the afternoon, they drove me seven hours away to the VCU burn unit. As soon as the doctor sees me, he said, 'When did this happen?' I said, 'Friday.' He said, 'Why haven't you been here?' I said, 'I'm not trying to be funny, but I can't drive myself from the prison.'

"He said to the COs [correction officers], 'You see this foot? You tell your major I can't treat him immediately, I have to put him on antibiotics' to treat the infection.

"I stayed in the hospital for 14 days. They had to do an allograft [a temporary graft using

Asked why he had set himself on fire, Wallace said, "I got a lawsuit in because I was assaulted and sprayed by the COs twice while I was handcuffed. So as soon as I filed the lawsuit, they started retaliation. They denied my fiancée access to the prison, for no reason, you had COs and a lieutenant looking at her Facebook, they messaged her. ... She has screenshots."

Wallace also said he wasn't the only prisoner who has recently set himself on fire.

"I was in medical and I witnessed five other offenders who came back there. They had burned their legs or arms. There are still two or three there now."

On or about Sept. 15, Ekong Eshiet, a 28-year-old African-born prisoner at Red Onion, says he also set fire to his leg.

On Oct. 25, he gave an interview to Prison Radio, a Philadelphia-based online program that provides a platform for prisoners to speak out about prison conditions and other issues.

In the interview, Eshiet said that, two days

See RED ONION on page 10

"If you stick a knife nine inches into my back and pull it out three inches, that is not progress." — Malcolm X – May 19, 1925 - Feb. 21, 1965

regional & national news



Photos by Phil Wilayto

Supporters of the Uhuru 3 hold a well-attended press conference Sept. 3 across the street from the courthouse where the trial was to begin the next day.

Split verdict an important victory in free speech trial of Uhuru 3

By Phil Wilayto

In a free speech case that has attracted national media attention, the longtime activists known as the Uhuru 3 were acquitted Sept. 12 in Tampa, Fla., of acting as agents of a foreign government, but found guilty of conspiring to act as unregistered foreign agents.

The split verdict is being seen as an important victory for the defendants. The first charge could have meant a sentence of up to 10 years. However, the conviction on the second, less serious charge could still send the three to prison for up to five years.

The defense has said the guilty verdict will be appealed.

The jury of eight men and four women had no Black members.

The three activists are Omali Yeshitela, the longtime chairman of the African People's Socialist Party, and white supporters

Penny Hess, chair of the African People's Solidarity Committee, and Jesse Nevel, chair of the Uhuru Solidarity Movement. A fourth defendant is a former member of the Uhuru Movement.

Sentencing has been set for Dec. 16 in Tampa, and supporters are being urged to attend.

The weeklong Uhuru 3 trial opened Sept. 4 at U.S. District Court in downtown Tampa, Judge William Jung presiding.

According to the Tampa Bay Times, "The Uhurus are formally known as the International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement. The word Uhuru means freedom in Swahili. They operate as the activist arm of their umbrella organization, the African People's Socialist Party, which has long been a political and social force in [nearby] St. Petersburg."

The APSP also has a strong presence in St. Louis, Mo.

As noted in a post by the Hands Off Uhuru! Coalition, 82-year-old Yeshitela "has protested every U.S. war that has taken place during his lifetime."

That includes the current U.S./NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, which is what attracted the attention of the FBI and is the real reason for the trial.

About 80 Uhuru 3 supporters turned out for a press conference the day before the trial across the street from the courthouse.

Among those demanding that all charges be dropped were Pam Africa, leader of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Jill Stein, presidential candidate of the Green Party; Efia Nwangaza, executive director of the Malcolm X Center for Self Determination in Greenville, S.C.; former New York City councilman and former Black Panther Charles Barron; and Benjamin Prado, under-secretary of Unión del Barrio of California.

Mwezi Odom read a support statement from Jenipher Jones, an attorney with the Leonard Peltier Ad Hoc Committee, and Jacqueline Luqman of Washington, D.C., brought a statement from Black Alliance for Peace Chair Ajamu Baraka, who arrived the next day for the trial.

The well-organized Uhuru movement had built a national support campaign, raised nearly a half-million dollars for defense expenses, held regular webinars about the case and posted daily summaries of the trial.

The Virginia Defenders were among the first to reach out to support the Uhuru 3. The day we heard about the raids on their homes and offices, we called the St. Louis headquarters and left a message offering to help. We knew the phone would be tapped, and we wanted the government to know there was outside support.

Later we joined the national support effort, issued a solidarity statement condemning the raids, wrote letters of support, sent a financial contribution, traveled to Tampa to attend the first day of the trial and were invited to speak at the 15th and 16th annual Black People's March on the White House.

On Oct. 22 we received this message from Chairman Yeshitela:

"The jury saw that I have never been under



APSP Chairman Omali Yeshitela addresses a rally Nov. 2 just before the 16th Annual Black People's March on the White House. The events were both a celebration of the courtroom victory and a call to arms to resist the increasing repression facing activists in every area of struggle.

the "direction and control" of the Russian government. The African People's Socialist Party has always worked for Black people. This was a political trial. The colonial State's goal was bigger than simply convicting me and putting me in prison; their failed efforts to convince a jury that we are "foreign agents" was part of a larger political goal to forever discredit speech by Black people and other colonized peoples against our oppression at the hands of the U.S. government. I am a revolutionary. I am not for sale.

"We salute the Virginia Defender for your good work and steadfast support and it was great to see you at the trial! We appreciate the significance of The Virginia Defender in helping to break out of the information blockade imposed on our movement and struggles for liberation around the world."

The background of the case of the Uhuru 3 along with updates can be found at: handsoffuhuru.org.

Do you want to fight for Freedom, Justice & Equality? JOIN THE DEFENDERS!

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The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an all-volunteer organization of Virginians working for the survival of our communities through education and social justice projects.

We started out in June 2002. Many of us had relatives in the Richmond City Jail or state prisons and were concerned about the physical conditions of these institutions.

As we worked around these issues, we learned more and more about the connections between jails, jobs, poverty, racism, sexism, class, war and political representation. We

began to organize around these issues as well.

We now sponsor the Virginia Defender quarterly newspaper and the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network, which we co-founded.

If you agree with the principles below and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a real difference in the life of our communities.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural

attacks of white-supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice

We believe that every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe that these rights are meaningless unless we also have the right to a job at a living wage, to decent housing, to adequate health care, to a meaningful education. We believe that all people have the right to stand equally before the law, to equal and fair treatment by the police, by the court system and in jails and prisons. And we believe that the death penalty is the ultimate exercise in injustice.

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world.

But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants.

This country does not belong to the wealthy few who have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action.

We believe that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free. We believe that for any one of us to have justice, we must all have justice. We believe that equality for anyone is impossible without equality for everyone.

As members of The Defenders, we pledge ourselves to defend our community, its men, its women and especially its children, from all forms of oppression.

We pledge to fight for a world where all people can live in dignity, freedom and peace.

community news

news u can use

Free 24/7 advice from a nurse

It's 3 a.m., your child wakes up and says they aren't feeling well and you don't know what to do? "CONSULT A NURSE" is a free, 24/7 hotline that provides professional advice on health issues. Call 833-866-6727.

988 for mental health support

Feeling overwhelmed? Maybe even suicidal? Thanks to federal funding, people in need of mental health support can call 988, the number that connects the caller to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

Free legal advice

Legal Aid offices across Virginia offer pro bono (free) help for low-income individuals facing civil (noncriminal) legal problems. Call 866-534-5243 to reach your local Legal Aid office and find out if you're eligible.

\$35 consultation with an attorney

If you think you have a civil or criminal issue that may require the services of a lawyer, you can call the Virginia Lawyer Referral Service for an up-to-30-minute consultation for a prepaid fee of \$35. Statewide, call 800-552-7977. 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Free safety vests

In an effort to reduce pedestrian injuries and deaths, Henrico County is distributing free high-visibility vests to both children and adults. The vests can be picked up at government centers, libraries and police stations. In 2023, the county experienced 87 vehicle crashes involving pedestrians, resulting in nine fatalities, and 23 involving bicyclists, resulting in one fatality.

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Photo by Phil Wilayto

PATH Reentry co-founders Andrea Edmunds and Anthony Gomez pose for a photo, surrounded by items for sale in the organization's thrift shop in Highland Springs. Proceeds from the store help fund their work supporting ex-prisoners.

Henrico thrift shop offers support & PATH to new lives for ex-prisoners

By Phil Wilayto

The storefront at 6 East Nine Mile Road in eastern Henrico's Highland Springs neighborhood used to house a church ministry. Now it's many things: a thrift shop, moving company, for a while a furniture renovator.

But most importantly, it's a community where formerly incarcerated people can find a place to rebuild their lives.

PATH Reentry was the brainchild of Andrea Edmunds, a former probation officer, and Anthony Gomez, a former prisoner. The organization is in the process of becoming a nonprofit. For now, it has a fiscal sponsor, which allows it to receive tax-deductible contributions.

The two founders met back in 1997, when Andrea was tasked with writing a presentencing report for Anthony. At the time, he was a 17-year-old Puerto Rican kid from the Bronx who, despite growing up in a rough neighborhood, had led a crime-free life, always working.

His family moved him to Virginia, to get him away from the streets, and it was here that he made the one bad decision that cost him his freedom. It would be 2020 before he would see the outside world again.

He and Andrea stayed in touch.

"Anthony left an imprint on me," Andrea said. "What impressed me was that he took full responsibility, turned himself in that night and didn't put the victim's family through a trial. But despite his young age, good record and his cooperation, he was sentenced to life-plus-157 years."

Anthony might never have left prison if Virginia hadn't passed a law allow-

ing the possibility of parole for prisoners convicted when they were juveniles. He was the first person paroled under the new law. By that time, Andrea had moved on from parole work and launched Posh-Tots.com, a successful online business that sold children's furniture.

A year later, in 2021, Andrea helped start a moving company called Property Angels to provide work for Andrea's son, who had just graduated from high school and Anthony's best friend, who had recently been released after 27 years behind bars.

Their customers were often older people who were downsizing, with furniture and other possessions they no longer wanted. The movers would bring the items to Goodwill or otherwise give them away to other local thrift stores. That's what led to the idea to start the PATH Thrift Shop in Highland Springs.

And it was about that time that the Virginia Department of Corrections contacted them to ask if they could find a place to live for a recently released prisoner. Sent to prison at the age of 16, he was now 62 - without an ID, social security card or any real preparation for surviving on the outside. He also was living in a motel room paid for by VADOC, which was about to stop paying for the room.

The solution? Rent a house to provide lodging for former prisoners, and pay for it with profits from the thrift shop and moving company. With four men now sharing the small house, PATH is looking for a second house.

The whole operation is bare bones. The thrift shop is run by one full-time employee and a few dedicated volunteers. The moving company has one

employee, Andrea's son, Evan, and hires ex-prisoners for the moving jobs.

And those projects, plus donations, fund PATH Reentry, which provides a broad range of services to the many formerly incarcerated folks seeking help.

"We set them up with IDs, drive them to food banks, help with resumes, teach financial literacy," Andrea said. "We set them up with medical and dental and even help them find a primary physician."

The Richmond area has many good people trying to help the community. PATH Reentry stands out as one effort that has leveraged the fierce dedication of a few founders into a multi-service project helping some of the most vulnerable among us to make a fresh start, begin new lives and contribute back to society. It's an effort more than worthy of support.

"For me, PATH is a way to give back to the community," Anthony said. "I can never repay for the harm that I caused, so this is just a way for me to give back, do my part in keeping the community safe. Because when people have housing and services, they're less likely to panic and relapse."

"We counsel, we direct people to services. I'm available anytime for our residents."

PATH Thrift, at 6 East Nine Mile Road in Henrico County, is open Thursdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Property Angels Movers can be reached by calling 804-921-7660.

To volunteer, call 804-921-7660 or email pathreentry@gmail.com.

Tax-deductible donations to PATH Reentry can be made on the organization's website: pathreentry.org.

community news



Umama, and so she sows

This beautiful “Monument in Residence” sits just to the right of historic Ebenezer Baptist Church at 216 W. Leigh St. in Richmond’s historic Jackson Ward. According to an accompanying plaque, “This public artwork pays homage to the indomitable spirit of Black women who have shaped and nurtured communities throughout the world.” It will be on display through Saturday, Dec. 14.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond’s planned waterfront amphitheater stirs controversy

By Danielle DiBlasio

It has been announced by partners Live Nation and Red Light Ventures that Richmond’s new amphitheater, to be located next to the American Civil War Museum by the James River, will be named Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront, after the venue’s title sponsor, Allianz Partners.

Allianz is an international insurance firm headquartered in Germany, with a large local office at 9950 Mayland Drive in Henrico County. The announcement of the sponsorship deal came much to the dismay of local activists, who have decried the relationship between Allianz and Israeli weapons firm Elbit Systems.

Elbit is Israel’s number one arms manufacturer. Per the company’s own website: “As the premier artillery supplier to the Israel Defense Forces, Elbit Systems offers a comprehensive array of fully-integrated artillery solutions that incorporate smart technology, automatic laying and loading capacity, Fire Control Systems (FCS), and modular weapon products.”

Weapons fragments recovered in the aftermath of strikes confirm that these weapons have been used in assaults on civilians in both Gaza and Lebanon.

A 2021 report by San Francisco-based research group CorpWatch pointed out that Allianz was invested to the tune of \$5.1 billion in Elbit Systems. Allianz offices in England, Ireland and Wales have been the target of protests due to the company’s investment in Elbit.

This is not the first time the amphitheater project has come under scrutiny. In January 2023, community members voiced concern to Richmond City Council about the removal of historical markers from the project site.

Located at 470 Tredegar St., the land once was home to Tredegar Iron Works, a company that relied on the labor of some 200 enslaved people, who also lived there in slave quarters.

The markers that commemorated the enslaved workers were researched and installed by the American Civil War Museum. Those involved in their installation noted that, in 2020, NewMarket Corporation, which owns the property, removed the markers in order to do landscaping. They were not reinstalled.

When museum staff asked about their whereabouts, they were told the markers were held in a warehouse.

NewMarket is a developer and manufacturer of petroleum additives.

VMFA to greatly expand space for African art

Staff Report

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, located on Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond, has announced plans for a \$261 million expansion, the largest in its history. The addition of a new, five-story McGlothlin Wing II will make the museum the fourth largest in the country, with the second-largest exhibit space for African Art.

The first floor of the new wing will roughly double the museum’s present space for art from Africa. When completed, the only U.S. museum with more space devoted to African art will be the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

The new wing is expected to open in 2028, when the museum will be 92 years old.

In recent years, the museum has been expanding its collection of both African and African-American art. Among its exhibits is a piece called “Ana’s Corner” by internationally famous sculptor Mel Edwards. The piece is named for his daughter Ana Edwards, a Defender and Richmond-based public historian.

Richmond ordinance would partially protect neglected Black cemetery

By Ana Edwards

A proposed Richmond ordinance calls for a 1.3-acre section of the more than 31-acre Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground site to be formally established “as a cemetery to assure its perpetual protection from disturbance and to memorialize it as a solemn and sacred landmark in the City of Richmond and for all residents and visitors to the city of Richmond.”

Some 22,000 Black people, both free and enslaved, are believed to be buried at the long-neglected cemetery.

The ordinance was introduced to City Council Oct. 15 by Mayor Levar Stoney and 3rd District Councilmember Ellen Robertson.

If it passes, the legislation also would make advertising of any kind illegal on the site. At present, there is a billboard owned by Lamar Advertising. Under pressure from the community and the City, the billboard currently is not being used, and Lamar has said it would remove it altogether if the City grants it the right to put up six more billboards in other parts of Richmond.

The new ordinance (Ord. No. 2024-283) could give the City more leverage to negotiate with Lamar.

Long-time African Burying Ground advocate Lenora McQueen has asked if the rest of the city parcels that comprise the original 31-plus-acre site will be included in the designation. As of the Defender’s presstime, she hasn’t received a response.

The intersection of 7th and Hospital streets, at the bottom of Shockoe Hill is crossed by the CSX railroad tracks and is known to be an extremely dangerous intersection. Plans to improve signage and add concrete medians to address this problem are invasive and represent further encroachment onto the historic cemetery grounds.

The ordinance goes before the Planning Commission Nov. 4 and is scheduled to be returned to City Council for a vote Nov. 12.

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Before.



After.

Neo-Nazis back in Richmond, spreading racist hate

Staff Report

The same fascist gang that vandalized the Arthur Ashe mural in Richmond’s Battery Park a few years ago was back in town in October, pasting posters and fliers designed to try and whip up hatred against immigrants.

The poster in the above left photo was left at the intersection of Nine Mile Road and Holly Avenue in eastern Henrico County.

Other posters were found in nearby Sandston, as well as Short Pump, Forest Hill Avenue on South Side and around the area of Virginia Commonwealth University.

Anyone who sees this racist filth is strongly encouraged to take it down.


The above poster was attached to a metal surface with what appeared to be wheat paste. A little soap and water and a wire brush made short work of it.

The gang with the posters is the Patriot Front, a national hate organization known for its poster campaigns. Its members also held a march in Springfield, Ohio, after D.J. Trump spread the lie about Haitian immigrants eating pets.

Meanwhile, new armed militias have been springing up around Virginia. Just a few years ago, organizations like the 3 Percenters and the Dixie Defenders (no relation) used to describe themselves as only concerned about big government encroaching on their Constitutional rights.

These days, the thugs are openly pro-Trump, which raises the possibility of fascist groups supplementing official law enforcement if Trump does return to power or if he doesn’t.

Forewarned is forearmed.



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(RTD) CORRECTIONS

Editor’s Note: In our 20 years of publishing, The Virginia Defender has never once been asked to correct a fact or a quote. We’re very proud of that record. But since other publications publish corrections, we’d like to do the same - in our case, corrections to factual errors that have appeared in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Here are our first offerings.

9 protesters arrested after wrapping themselves in wire, lying down on I-95 (3/11/24)

This story stated that “The protests caused delays of up to 4 miles until nearly 11 a.m., according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.” The protest began about 7 a.m. Later testimony at the trial was that traffic was blocked for three miles, but two lanes were reopened shortly after police moved the protesters, which lasted until about 7:45 a.m. (We know this because the Defender was the only media at the site of the protest.) The story also stated that police “guided” protesters to the side of the highway. In fact, according to trial testimony, they were lifted or dragged. So the RTD story exaggerated the effect of the protest on the public and downplayed the police actions against the protesters.

Pro-Palestine protesters march to Kaine’s office, block Richmond intersection (5/6/24)

The story failed to mention the main reason for the march: The day after the police raid on the pro-Palestinian encampment at Virginia Commonwealth University, Kaine had voted to send billions more to Israel. The protesters were taking an Open Letter to his office demanding he stop voting to fund the genocide in Gaza.

Pro-Palestine protesters block traffic, march to Virginia State Capitol (5/14/24)

Protesters marched to the State Capitol May 14 to draw attention to the existence and role of the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board, the only state agency specifically set up to promote trade with a particular country. The RTD story on the march totally neglected to state the purpose or target of the march.

Nonprofit group demands Richmond leaders make changes as city enters year 2 of housing

crisis (5/29/24)

The story reported on a housing protest at Richmond’s City Hall, but totally ignored the mass walkout at the City Council meeting to protest the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Richmond city council members vote to nearly double their salaries (6/11/24)

This story stated that “Currently, [Richmond City] council members make \$25,000 each year, or \$12.02 an hour, and the council president makes \$27,000, or \$12.98 an hour.” Those figures assume that all council members spend roughly 40 hours a week on their council duties. In fact, council seats are intended to be part-time jobs, and most council members also have full-time jobs. If a typical council member spent 20 hours a week on council business, their hourly rate would be \$24.04 an hour. Still not much, but, after granting the next council an 80% raise, a nice side gig.

RVA 100: The Freedom Monument on Brown’s Island (10/17/24)

The story states that Richmond “was once a primary market in the transatlantic slave trade.” Actually, there was very little importation of captured Africans in Richmond as compared to major centers like Charleston. Richmond’s significance was that it was the center of the U.S. domestic, not “transatlantic,” slave trade. (And by the way, it’s “trans-Atlantic,” according to the AP Stylebook.)

This last one isn’t really a correction, but still noteworthy:

Introducing new comics, puzzles in The Times-Dispatch (9/14/24)

In a front-page “note to readers,” RTD Executive Editor Chris Coates referred to the color of his childhood Silly Putty as “flesh-colored.” Without the quotation marks. Coates did not explain what race’s “flesh” he was referring to. While we were unable to find any reference to a “flesh-colored” Silly Putty, the Crayola company began producing a “Flesh” crayon back in the 1920s meant to represent Caucasian skin color. In 1962 the color was changed to “Peach,” which eventually was paired with seven other colors in a box of “Multicultural Crayons.” Evidently some people - including some in a position to influence the public - still prefer the term “Flesh.”

The Defenders Working-Class Guide for Preparing for Big Storms

Hurricane season in Virginia lasts through Nov. 30. Thanks to global warming, the storms have been getting more frequent and more violent. Some guides for preparing for these storms assume that people have resources, but many of us do not. The Virginia Defenders have put together a list of practical tips to prepare for big storms that don’t require a lot of money. Check it out by logging onto virginiadefender.org and typing “Working-class Guide” in the search field. We protect ourselves.

our working lives

ILA flexes worker power in East Coast dock strike

By Kat McNeal

At one minute past midnight on Oct. 1, some 50,000 workers represented by the International Longshoremen's Association went out on strike, bringing 36 ports from Maine to Texas to a virtual standstill. It was their first walkout since 1977.

The issues: wages; the appropriation by employers of supplemental pay called "container royalty;" and, crucially, the future of dock jobs in the face of increasing automation.

The three-day action caused news outlets around the country to breathlessly report on possible shortages of consumer goods and other potential impacts to the economy. Would the U.S. run short of bananas? Should we all hoard toilet paper?

And aren't the port workers overpaid anyway? And isn't workplace automation inevitable, an unstoppable trend that will continue until we're all jobless in a world run by robots?

Every business page had its opinion, but the longshore workers didn't budge.

On Oct. 3, the United States Maritime Alliance, which represents the major shipping lines, blinked. USMX and the ILA came to an agreement to suspend the strike and come back to the negotiating table, with the expired Master Contract extended until Jan. 15.

In the meantime, USMX will raise wages 62% over six years - 15% less than the union initially asked for, but 12% more than the alliance initially offered.

This gives the parties time to continue negotiating outstanding issues, prime among them the union's demand to ban new port automation technologies, which for now means automated cranes, gates, and

container-moving trucks.

The affected ports resumed work on Oct. 4.

In Virginia, ILA picket lines were in evidence 24 hours a day at the four Port of Virginia marine terminals in Norfolk, Portsmouth and Newport News. The Norfolk International Terminal is Virginia's largest shipping terminal and the state's only semi-automated terminal, with 90 automated cranes. Virginia Port Authority personnel, however, were not on strike, so the Richmond Marine Terminal and Virginia Inland Port in Front Royal continued work normally. According to an ILA press release, military shipments and passenger cruise ships were handled normally during the strike, a longstanding union policy.

This action demonstrated the incredible power of organized workers, especially those in key areas of the economy like shipping. It also brought to the forefront the issue of automation under a profit-driven system, something more of us may face as technology like AI and self-driving cars become cheaper and more common.

In an ideal world, some jobs should be automated for efficiency, safety and convenience. But if you think we live in an ideal world, you probably wouldn't be reading this newspaper.

The people who do those jobs still have rent and mortgages to pay and food to buy after the automated crane or truck puts them out of a job. And that crane or truck isn't going to be paying taxes or supporting restaurants or other local businesses.

And depending upon how the current negotiations go, the workers may have to go out again. The strike was only suspended, not ended.

Stay tuned.

Pensions the big issue as Boeing strike continues

By Kat McNeal

Editor's note: On Nov. 4, Boeingworkers voted by 59% to accept the company's latest offer, which did not include restoring the traditional pension plan.

As of presstime, tens of thousands of Boeing workers are still on strike, after voting down the company's latest contract offer.

On Sept. 12, some 33,000 members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers in California, Washington and Oregon rejected a tentative contract agreement with the troubled aerospace giant and voted to go on strike. At issue: 10 years of wage stagnation and, the major sticking point, the stripping away of workers' pensions.

Previously based in Seattle and more recently in Chicago, Boeing's headquarters is now in Arlington, Va.

The strike is taking place in an environment of uncertain job security. The crisis-ridden company had been laying off workers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, on Oct. 18, new Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg announced plans to lay off some 17,000

workers.

The IAM had asked for reinstatement of the pensions that were taken away in 2014, along with a 40% pay raise over four years. To convince the workers to go along with the switch to a 401(k) plan, Boeing had threatened to build its new 777X jet at nonunion facilities.

Traditional pension plans are increasingly rare, because they promise set payments to retirees that must be paid, even if the company is doing badly. Instead, as at Boeing, most institutions have moved to 401(k) plans. In these plans, which were permitted by Congress in 1978, workers put a percentage of their wages in a 401(k) account and employers match it, up to a fixed percentage.

That account is invested in the stock market. If workers don't save enough, or the investments do badly, too bad. Basically, it's a way to move the risks and responsibilities of saving for retirement from companies onto employees.

So far, Boeing hasn't budged on the pension issue. Instead, it countered with an offer of a 35% raise over four years. Workers point out that the company in 2023 gave its last CEO, Dave Calhoun, a 45% raise,



Nearly 200 rank-and-file workers gathered May 17-19 in Charlotte, N.C., for the 2024 Southern Worker School, the annual organizing conference of the Southern Workers Assembly network.

Photo courtesy SWA

Southern Workers Assembly model comes to Virginia

By Kat McNeal

Both historically and currently, the South is home to some of the country's worst labor laws. In 2023, only 4.3% of workers in Virginia were unionized. Virginia is one of only 10 states to have a unionization rate of less than 5%. Of those, six are in the South.

The Southern Workers Assembly, founded in 2012 and based in North Carolina, is a social justice organization fighting to organize unorganized workers across the South. The SWA uses a system of local assemblies where rank-and-file workers from multiple workplaces and organizations can come together for advice, support and collaboration on larger efforts. The SWA is pushing for worker power - people power - because, according to its website, "Once organized, workers can defend everyone."

There currently are 12 workers assemblies in six states. Virginia has two.

The Tidewater Workers Assembly was founded in 2020 when sanitation workers in Virginia Beach spontaneously walked off the job.

"That was what started the idea of getting a workers assembly in Virginia Beach," says Al Long, a TWA member. With help from a United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) organizer, the assembly was formed and began building ties with local unions and organizing efforts.

increasing his salary to \$33 million a year.

Boeing also offered some improvements to the 401(k) plan and promised to preserve an incentive bonus program that the previous rejected contract would have replaced.

On Oct. 23, nearly two thirds of the workers voted to reject the new proposed contract. They're holding out for those pensions.

Boeing is the world's largest aerospace company, the largest U.S. exporter by value and, as of 2022, was the fourth-largest global "defense" contractor.

If you've been following the strike in the media, you'll see plenty of pundits talking about how unrealistic it is for Boeing workers to try to get their pensions back. But the global credit rating agency Standard & Poor's estimates that the strike is costing Boeing \$1 billion per month.

Let's wait and see.

Long says the TWA is involved in the fight for public sector collective bargaining in cities across the Tidewater region.

The Richmond Workers Assembly formed in the summer of 2022 after several organizers attended one of the SWA's biyearly Worker Schools in Charlotte. Kat Harville, an RWA coordinating committee member, former union carpenter and current student, says that membership is primarily made up of educators, people in the building trades and workers in the restaurant industry.

Some members are in unions already, while others hope to organize their workplaces. Meetings offer a place to strategize - about unionizing and about organizing rank-and-file members within unions to push leadership for more militant action. RWA meetings also include a political education component.

"We invite anybody who is not a boss or a cop to come to a general meeting. If you are feeling really isolated or really agitated or really abused in your workplace and you don't have anywhere to turn, we can better support you," said Harville.

The Tidewater Workers Assembly can be reached on its Facebook page and at (757) 317-0165.

The Richmond Workers' Assembly can be reached on Instagram or by email at richmondworkers@riseup.net



Postal workers press for decent contracts

By Kat McNeal

Postal workers represent one of the largest blocs of unionized federal workers in the country. The U.S. Postal Service also has historically been a reliable source of good jobs for the Black community; in 2020, 23% of postal employees were Black, compared to 13% of the workforce in general. It pays to keep an eye on the service, both in terms of political efforts to privatize and sell it off and in how it relates to its employees.

On Oct. 18, the USPS and the largest union representing its employees, the National Association of Letter Carriers, came to a tentative agreement on a new contract. The NALC represents some 295,000 active and retired non-rural letter carriers. This was a long time coming. NALC members had been working without a contract since their last collective bargaining agreement expired in May 2023.

The new contract has yet to be ratified by NALC members, but some highlights include seven modest cost-of-living adjustments, three pay raises of 1.3% by 2025 - two paid retroactively - and a requirement that the postal service “make every effort” to ensure mail trucks have air conditioning.

Not everyone at USPS has their contract, though. At midnight on Sept. 20, the collective bargaining agreement between the USPS and the American Postal Workers Union expired.

The APWU represents approximately 200,000 workers,

including maintenance and support personnel, motor vehicle pool workers and clerks. It is the second largest of the four major unions representing USPS personnel, smaller than NALC and larger than the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. The union and the USPS office mutually agreed to extend negotiations, but, as of the Defender presstime, these talks have not resulted in a new contract.

On Oct 1, the APWU held a National Day of Action, demanding that the postal service: reinstate quarterly public comment at Postal Board of Governors meetings, commit to better staffing for better service and listen to postal workers at the bargaining table.

The Virginia Defender attended the Richmond Day of Action, where, despite heavy rain, more than 30 supporters gathered outside the Brook Road post office, holding signs and waving to passing motorists.

The Defender spoke with APWU Local 199 President Jerome Cosby, who said that the service issues of such great concern to the public – poor staffing of clerks at offices and mail delivery problems – are a direct result of both labor conditions within the postal service and top-down leadership issues.

“For every 10 people, they’re only keeping five,” Cosby said, describing the poor retention at the postal service.

The Virginia Defender will be following this story as it progresses.

Richmond Public Schools fires union president

By Kat McNeal

On March 4, 2024, Richmond Public Schools terminated Richmond Education Association President Neri Suarez in a move that REA is describing as retaliation for union activities. REA represents the largest bloc of RPS employees, who are organized into seven bargaining units represented by four unions: REA, two separate Teamsters locals and the Laborers’ International Union of North America.

Suarez, a special education teacher, filed a request for a year’s unpaid leave of absence to serve full-time in her capacity as union president, to begin in January 2024. This practice, called “union release,” is common for civil service union leaders in order to conduct union activities.

According to the REA, obtaining such leave from RPS had not been a problem before. In fact, it says that from 1989 to 2016 no RPS president had been denied their request for leave. From 2016 to 2024, no requests were made.

Suarez’s request, however, was denied. RPS cited an ongoing teacher shortage as a reason for the denial. Suarez filed a grievance on the grounds of retaliation. RPS said that the grievance was not filed in time, did not hear it and began the process of firing her. Suarez’s termination ultimately went to the school board on June 3, where it was upheld in closed session. (The Code of Virginia allows personnel matters to be handled in closed sessions.)

The Defender spoke with REA Vice President Anne Forrester, who said the union was initially baffled by RPS’ denial of Suarez’s leave request, but quickly came to view it as an act of retaliation which they described explicitly as union-busting. Jason Kamras, RPS superintendent, has called this charge “libel.”

The union is questioning RPS’ explanation for denying Suarez’s leave - a teacher shortage - because, as of this April, according to publicly-available documents, RPS

has ceased to recruit for 30 open special education teacher positions.

The Defender also spoke with Cory Adkins, an REA board member and LIEP (Language Instruction Education Programs) teacher at Elizabeth D. Redd Elementary School. Adkins said that Suarez’s firing has been widely understood as a retaliatory act.

“It was shocking,” Adkins said. “Many people started questioning why the union president would not be granted leave, unless it was due to retaliation for being a vocal and a strong leader. This led to people wondering what would happen to them if they spoke up - would they face this same type of retaliation as well?”

In addition to pursuing action around Suarez’s firing, REA is currently working to amend the school system’s leave policy to require the school board to permit unpaid union leave.

At the Richmond City School Board Policy Committee meeting on June 25, the committee voted to draft language to this effect, which Forrester described as a good sign. However, the proposal has faced pushback from RPS administration because of the number of vacancies it would create. Forrester specified in an email to the Defender that, contrary to the number cited in school board meetings since - seven, the policy would permit the union release of only one person per union: four people out of some 2,000 RPS staff members.

Kenya Gibson, school board representative for the 3rd district and current candidate for city council, argued at the Aug. 20 meeting that, each year, about 660 staff members leave the system. Losing four to temporary union duties seems a small sacrifice in comparison. Nonetheless, the school board voted in August to continue the issue until December.

The Defender reached out to RPS for comment on this story. Alyssa Schwenk, director of communications and media relations, replied that the school system does not comment on personnel matters.



Live better - work Union!

reclaiming our sacred ground



reclaiming our sacred ground



State marker recognizes community struggle

Participants in the 22nd Annual Gabriel Gathering unveil a new state highway marker on Oct. 10 recognizing the significance of the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground and the nearby Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground. Significantly, the marker explains that the burial ground was reclaimed as the result of a prolonged community struggle. The marker stands at the southeast corner of the burial ground, at what would be 16th and East Broad streets. Photo by Taimir Gore

Gabriel's Rebellion honored at site where it was planned

By Daijah Eames

Despite the threat of a thunderstorm, about 60 people turned out Aug. 30 for a profoundly moving event marking the 224th anniversary of Gabriel's Rebellion. The gathering was held just outside Richmond at Spring Park in Henrico County, where the historic uprising was initially planned.

The gathering paid tribute to Gabriel, the 24-year-old leader of the 1800 rebellion against slavery, who labored under harsh conditions, but coordinated a bold but ultimately tragic attempt at freedom.

The commemoration began with an evocative speech by Ana Edwards, a prominent activist and public historian, who performed a traditional African libation ceremony. Edwards used water gathered from the very spring where Gabriel and his co-conspirators convened, symbolically connecting past and present struggles for liberation.

Despite the extensive and careful preparations, there was a terrible storm on the day of the planned rebellion that forced the conspirators to delay their plans, which then were betrayed by one of their members.

Captured several weeks later, Gabriel maintained a stoic silence about the details of the rebellion. Tried and sentenced to death, he was executed at the gallows in Richmond, a martyr to the cause of freedom.

The anniversary event was a platform for communal reflection and discussion. An open mic session allowed attendees to voice their thoughts and feelings.

One participant praised the inclusive and welcoming nature of the gathering, affirming that "freedom is a family affair because freedom is for everyone." Another speaker highlighted the interconnectedness of Gabriel's Rebellion with contemporary liberation movements in regions such as Palestine and Haiti.

The recurring theme of the day was the imperative of continued education and solidarity in the fight for freedom, with a poignant reminder that "We aren't free until we are all free."

The event, sponsored by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders, concluded with a renewed sense of purpose, honoring Gabriel's legacy and reinforcing the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

Proposed Richmond ordinance would partially protect neglected Black cemetery

By Ana Edwards

A proposed Richmond ordinance calls for a 1.3-acre section of the more than 31-acre Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground site to be formally established "as a cemetery to assure its perpetual protection from disturbance and to memorialize it as a solemn and sacred landmark in the City of Richmond and for all residents and visitors to the city of Richmond."

Some 22,000 Black people, both free and enslaved, are believed to be buried at the long-neglected cemetery.

The ordinance was introduced to council Oct. 15 by Mayor Levar Stoney and 3rd District Councilmember Ellen Robertson.

If it passes, the legislation also would make advertising of any kind illegal on the site. At present, there is a billboard owned by Lamar Advertising. Under pressure from the community and the City, the billboard currently is not being used, and Lamar has said it would

remove it altogether if the City grants it the right to put up six more billboards in other parts of Richmond.

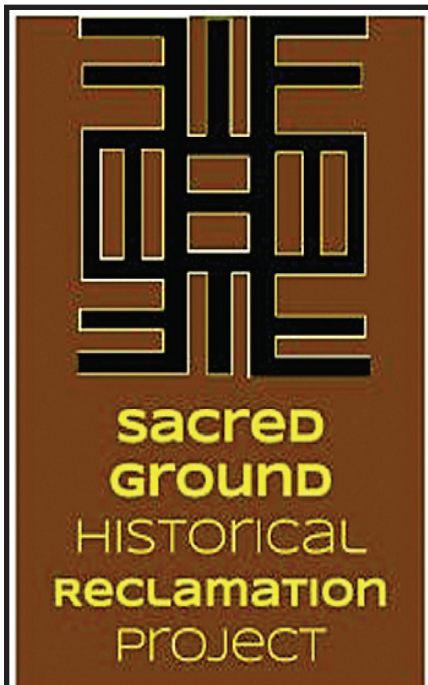
The new ordinance (Ord. No. 2024-283) could give the City more leverage to negotiate with Lamar.

Long-time African Burying Ground advocate Lenora McQueen has asked if the rest of the city parcels that comprise the original 31-plus-acre site will be included in the designation. As of the Defender's presstime, she hasn't received a response.

The intersection of 7th and Hospital streets, at the bottom of Shockoe Hill, is crossed by the CSX railroad tracks and is known to be an extremely dangerous intersection. Plans to improve signage and add concrete medians to address this problem are invasive and represent further encroachment onto the historic cemetery grounds.

The ordinance goes before the Planning Commission Nov. 4 and is scheduled to be returned to City Council for a vote Nov. 12.

In the absence of a land base, culture is what keeps a people a Nation.



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cops, courts & prisons

RED ONION Continued from page 1
before, on Oct. 23, he had begun a hunger strike.

“I’m trying to get off of here. I’m doing my best, I’m going about this the right way, I guess, with the hunger strike way. But if I have to, I don’t mind setting myself on fire again, and this time I’ll set my whole body on fire.

“Before I have to stay up here and do the rest of my time up here, I would rather die before I stay up here, because every day I’m dealing with discrimination, whether it’s behind my race, my last name or my religion.”

The Defender has been in touch with Kevin Rashid Johnson, a longtime prisoner activist and author who last December went on a 71-day hunger strike, demanding to be transferred from Red Onion because he said there were no medical facilities in that area equipped to deal with his several severe medical issues. He eventually was sent to VCU Health, then transferred to Greensville Correctional Center, and is now back at Red Onion.

Rashid wrote the Defender that he was in the medical unit at the prison when Eshiet was brought in for treatment, and Rashid said he saw for himself the severe burns on the man’s leg.

“He had been placed in a cell next to me in the prison’s medical department, where I overheard him talking with others about a series of prisoners including himself setting fire to themselves. I could not help asking him what was going on.

“He told me simply that the racism, the horrid and inhumane conditions at the prison, were so intolerable that he and others were setting themselves on fire in desperate attempts to get transferred. These were not protests, he made clear, but acts of desperation hoping to get out of an insufferable situation.”

Rashid, at great risk to himself, wrote a report that he sent to outside news media and support groups. The report was picked up by Prison Riot Radio, the Arlington-based Interfaith Action for Human Rights and The Virginia Defender, among others.

On Oct. 25, this reporter called Red Onion and spoke with the warden, David Anderson. I explained that we had received a report that as many as a dozen prisoners at Red Onion had recently set themselves on fire, and asked if the report was correct.

“No, it’s not true,” Anderson said.

After a pause, he added, “I really shouldn’t be commenting on this.”

“So you’re saying that no one has set themselves on fire?” I asked.

“I can’t speak any further about that,” Anderson answered.

I told Anderson I would send him an email, with further questions. He said he would forward the email to the proper department for a response.

These are the questions sent on Oct. 25:

* Over the last two months, did

one or more prisoners at Red Onion set themselves on fire, as claimed by the letter writer?

* If so, what are the names and prison ID numbers of the men?

* What is now the location of each of the men?

* What is the medical condition of each of the men?

* Have any of the men been charged with institutional or criminal offenses as a result of these alleged actions?

As of this writing, on Nov. 4, there has been no response.

Meanwhile, we have been trying to find corroboration on the reports.

In addition to speaking directly with Demetrius Wallace, we called Marsha Prichett, Eshiet’s mother, on Oct. 25. She said her son has had a very hard time since being sent to Red Onion in June.

“There’s been name calling, they call him Eat-Shit, they spit in his food. After he hurt himself, they treated him for minor burn wounds.

“Then the hospital called us to let us know Ekong was in the hospital, but they said we couldn’t visit with him or talk to him because the warden said he was a danger to himself or others. So we couldn’t visit because of what the warden said.”

On Nov. 1, a Friday, the Defender reached out to VCU Health to ask if any Red Onion prisoners had been treated there recently for severe burns. At first we were told the hospital was not allowed to give us that information because of the issue of patient privacy. We hadn’t asked about any particular patient.

On Nov. 4, a Monday, we received a call from Danielle Pierce with VCU Public Relations. We asked if, from Aug. 1 until the present, any Red Onion prisoners had been brought to VCU Health for treatment for severe burns.

“I’m happy to look into it for you,” Pierce said.

Since our press deadline was the next morning, we didn’t expect to receive an answer in time for this story, but we will post any response on this newspaper’s website: virginiadefender.org.

[Post-press update: As of Friday, Nov. 8, there has been no response.]

On Nov. 1, the Defender also called and left messages at the offices of Virginia General Assembly Delegate Don Scott, a former prisoner who is now Speaker of the House. We will report any response we get on our website. (Update: As of Nov. 8, no response.)

We also have been trying to get various Virginia media to cover this story.

What is Red Onion?

The Justice Policy Center of the Urban Institute describes a super-maximum prison, or “super-max,” as “designed to hold the putatively most violent and disruptive inmates in single-cell confinement for 23 hours per day, often for an indefinite period of time.”

Red Onion is a super-max prison. It opened in 1998 in the midst of a big

right-wing and media scare about a new crime wave that supposedly was coming, but somehow never did.

Red Onion was supposed to house around 800 of “the worst of the worst” Virginia prisoners. As it turned out, there weren’t enough “worst” prisoners to fill the cells, so Virginia began taking in prisoners from other states - for a price. Further, many of the Virginia prisoners who wound up there were transferred from lower-level security prisons simply for breaking rules, not for committing violent crimes.

Red Onion quickly gained a reputation for extreme repression, cruelty and racism.

A 1999 report by Human Rights Watch stated that the “Virginia Department of Corrections has failed to embrace basic tenets of sound correctional practice and laws protecting inmates from abusive, degrading or cruel treatment” and claimed that “racism, excessive violence and inhumane conditions reign inside.”

In 2001, Amnesty International released a report citing human rights violations at the prison.

The 2016 HBO documentary film “Solitary: Inside Red Onion State Prison” focused on the use and effects of solitary confinement.

In one particularly notorious case, Nicolas Reyes, a Salvadoran immigrant, was kept in solitary confinement for 13 years because he couldn’t complete the mostly English-language Step-Down Program required to be released.

Reyes only spoke Spanish and couldn’t read or write in any language.

With support from the ACLU and other organizations, Reyes was finally released and received a monetary award of \$115,000 - which works out to about a dollar for every day he suffered in extreme physical, social, cultural and linguistic isolation.

This is what Rashid has recently written about the prison:

“Red Onion and its sister supermax Wallens Ridge State Prison are both located in the mountains of the far southwestern corner of Virginia in rural, segregated white communities, while their prisoner populations are near totally Brown and Black.

“Since opening in 1998 and 1999, respectively, both prisons have operated without oversight in regions where the local populations are culturally conditioned to secrecy and hostility to outside scrutiny. Which makes for prisons shielded by a curtain of secrecy, inhumane abuse and racism.

“And while Virginia has been closing down many of its predominantly Black-staffed prisons across the state, it has shifted resources and focused new prison construction projects in favor of opening and operating prisons in remote, racially segregated regions of the state like where Red Onion and Wallens Ridge are located.

“The strongest public exposure and

protest needs to be directed at these expensive, inhumane and unneeded human warehouses. They must be opened up to broad public scrutiny and accountability, and closed down.

“This exposure and protest should be continually directed against the Virginia governor, Virginia Department of Corrections director Chadwick Dotson and the state’s General Assembly.

“Every effort must be made to share this information and increase public awareness about these places, their inhumane conditions and the desperate extremes they are driving fellow humans to in their pleas for relief.

“Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!

“All Power to the People!”

Interfaith Action for Human Rights has started an online petition urging change at Red Onion. To sign, log onto change.org and search for “Investigate Self-Harm Episodes and Improve Inhumane Conditions at Red Onion Prison.”

As we go to press, Kevin Rashid Johnson, Ekong Eshiet and Demetrius Wallace are all being held in solitary confinement - what the prison calls “restrictive housing.” All three men have reason to fear for their lives.

Rashid, who has been targeted because of his outspoken condemnation of the whole Virginia prison system, has outside attorneys working to try to get him transferred out of Red Onion.

Note: Both Rashid and Demetrius Wallace have given the Defender permission to quote them for this story. We haven’t spoken directly with Ekong Eshiet.

Conclusion: At this point, we are confident in reporting that at least two men held at the Red Onion State Prison - Demetrius Wallace and Ekong Eshiet, and possibly others, have taken the desperate step of setting themselves on fire to try to force the prison officials to transfer them out of that notorious hellhole.

And the prison system is not only denying that these events ever happened, but have taken steps to isolate the men involved in order to keep the public from knowing about it.

The Virginia Defenders are calling for an immediate, independent, impartial, outside investigation of the conditions of these three men, as well as the general conditions at Red Onion. We will be sending copies of this story to Gov. Glenn Youngkin, Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, all members of the Virginia General Assembly, U.S. Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, Virginia Department of Corrections Director Chadwick Dotson and all our contacts in the Virginia media.

And to our readers: If you want to get involved in the struggle for Prison Justice, email the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality at DefendersFJE@hotmail.com; call or text 804-644-5834 or write to: Defenders, PO Box 23202, Richmond, VA 23223.

cops, courts & prisons

Norfolk rally demands 'Reopen the Ford cases!'

Staff Report

Former prisoners, family members and their supporters held a rally Oct. 12 at Norfolk's Town Point Park to demand justice for people they say were wrongfully convicted as a result of actions taken by a crooked cop.

"These men are not just statistics, they are human beings who have lost years of their lives and been denied their basic human rights," said Angela White, the wife of a Virginia prisoner



Photo by The Virginia Defender

Angela White, founder of From Conviction 2 Redemption, speaking Oct. 12 at the Ford rally.

and the founder of From Conviction 2 Redemption, the organization sponsoring the rally.

The formerly incarcerated men and their family members and supporters who addressed the crowd were speaking about cases connected to a now-discredited Norfolk police detective, Robert Glenn Ford, who in 2010 was sentenced to prison for 12-and-a-half years for extortion and lying about it to the FBI.

Among the rally speakers was Gilbert Merritt III, who served most of a 30-year

sentence. He was fully exonerated after receiving support from the Innocence Project at the University of Virginia School of Law and later pardoned by then-Gov. Ralph Northam..

The [Norfolk] Virginian-Pilot has reported that two other people have been freed who had been convicted in cases where Ford was the lead detective.

Altogether, Ford was involved in hundreds of cases.

According to a statement released by the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of Virginia at the time of Ford's sentencing, "The evidence presented at trial showed that in instances dating back to the 1990s, Ford obtained monetary payments exceeding \$80,000 from and on behalf of individuals charged with criminal offenses, in return for helping them secure release on bond and sentence reductions by falsely representing to prosecutors and judges that these individuals provided assistance in the investigation of homicides in Norfolk. Ford also made false statements to federal agents during a voluntary interview conducted during an investigation."

What Ford did not get prosecuted for was framing people. One of his most notorious cases was that of the Norfolk Four, four sailors convicted of a 1997 rape and murder. All the men said they only confessed because of prolonged, intense interrogation by Ford, who was the lead investigator in the case.

In 2009, the four received conditional pardons from then-Gov. Tim Kaine. In 2017, after new evidence was found, they were exonerated, and finally were granted absolute pardons by Gov. Terry McAuliffe. In 2018, they received a combined settlement of \$8.4 million from the City of Norfolk and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Another case that has received publicity is that of Jermaine Doss of Norfolk. Originally charged with murder-for-hire, he was convicted in 1999 of first-degree murder as an accessory before the fact.

Doss was convicted after the actual confessed murderer, Nathaniel McGee, testified against him. But McGee later repeatedly stated that he gave false testimony because



This artwork is by Kevin Rashid Johnson, who at the time of this printing is being held in solitary confinement at the infamous Red Onion super-max prison.

prosecutors had threatened him with the death penalty.

It was Ford who had arrested McGee. Doss has said that Ford tried to shake him down for a large sum of money or else Ford would take him off the streets. Doss said he refused the extortion demand, and then was arrested.

McGee was sentenced to 17 years for the murder, plus more time for related crimes, and is scheduled to be released from Pocahontas State Correctional Center on Nov. 22. Ford was released several years ago after serving most of his sentence.

Doss was sentenced to life-plus-38 years, and was recently turned down for parole for the fifth time.

Doss' sister Felicia Dixon spoke about his case at the rally, and Angela White read a statement from the Virginia

Defenders, who have been supporting Doss for more than 15 years.

On Oct. 27, 2023, Norfolk Commonwealth's Attorney Ramin Fatehi announced there would be a conviction integrity review of all closed prosecution files associated with Ford.

Earlier this year, Fatehi told the Defender that he had turned over all his files on Ford cases to the UVA Innocence Project. The project's founder, Professor Deirdre Enright, now leads a new effort called the Project for Informed Reform, which reportedly is taking the lead on examining Ford-related cases.

UVA Law describes PIR as "a clinic in which students will work alongside scholars and experts to conduct extensive research and investigation on issues relating to criminal justice, and then generate evidence-based data and policy recommendations."

REMINDER: EVERY MONDAY "CALLS FROM HOME" TO VIRGINIA PRISONERS

Call in: 7-9 pm Broadcast: 9-10 pm
Phone: 1-888-396-1208

Do you have a loved one/friend in a faraway Va. prison - Keen Mt., Red Onion, Wallens Ridge or surrounding local jails & federal prisons?

Every Monday, the WMMT "Calls from Home" radio show broadcasts brief messages from friends & family, faith-based communities & advocates to incarcerated people in Va. prisons, jails & federal facilities in SW Appalachia.

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Mass
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in Virginia

In our opinion

And now to work.

Nov. 5 is a big day for The Virginia Defender. It's the day we finally go to press.

We had planned to be out three weeks ago, but the crisis at the Red Onion super-max prison (see the story on the front page) demanded a lot of time. We also had the Gabriel Rebellion commemoration on Aug. 30, the 22nd Gabriel Gathering on Oct. 10 and preparing for the Black cemeteries conference on Nov. 23.

And, yes, we know Nov. 5 is also Election Day, but this year that isn't so important for us. We weren't going to endorse anyone for president, senator or Richmond mayor, and didn't have strong opinions on the other local candidates.

What we are laser-focused on is what happens *after* Nov. 5.

If Trump wins, we'll be facing an extremely right-wing, racist, authoritarian government led by a man who thinks Hitler "did some good things." If Harris wins, we may well see a violent backlash from Trump's followers.

And voting for Harris, after she's stood by while her administration funds the genocide in Gaza, was never an option. If that horror isn't enough to make you hold your vote, then you'll have lost any hope you think you may have had to stop the Democrats' steady move to the Right.

As we've been saying for years, if all we have between us and fascism is the Democratic Party, we are truly doomed.

For months now, the Defenders have been talking with other activists about how to prepare for the political tsunami that's headed toward us at breakneck speed. We need to commit to coming together to defend ourselves, our organizations, our communities and our movement against whatever threats we'll be facing.

And first, we all need to close ranks and defend our immigrant sisters and brothers, who are first in line to be attacked, no matter who wins the White House.

What's needed is a true United Front of all working-class organizations and all communities of color. And not everyone who votes against the Democrats is lost. Some can be reached. But they first need to be challenged to reject the racism that oppresses people of color and divides us all.

We have a tremendous amount of work to do in a very short period of time. If you want to fight back, get in touch.

We're here, and we're not waiting for the camps to open.

Letters to the Editor

22 Years & Counting In Prison For A Non-Murder Conviction!!

In January of 2002 I was involved in an exchange of gunfire with a Gary, Indiana kop during a bogus traffic stop that he didn't have the authority to make. A kop who wasn't seriously injured and was only hit by flying glass and bullet fragments.

A kop who was initially taken away from the crime scene by a superior officer only to return 10 or 15 minutes later and go through the motions of receiving medical treatment and be transported by ambulance.

A kop who ran out of ammunition during the exchange and took cover in his vehicle, when, according to testimony, I still possessed a magazine with at least 10 or 15 more rounds and could have walked those rounds into the target and taken his life. Instead I got into my vehicle and pulled off. An act which in itself negates/contradicts the intent to kill, the primary element of the charge for Attempted Murder.

A kop who left the outcome of the case up to the State and had agreed to a 12 year plea offered by the State. My acceptance of this plea wasn't communicated by my attorney to the prosecutor during my trial. Instead, their meeting blew up in a heated argument and I ended up getting a 63 year sentence for a Non-Murder conviction. (See Transcript/Court Records)

A kop who was never vindictive and has since retired.

A kop who has been approached after my 20th years of captivity and who wasn't opposed to my receiving some form of Post Conviction Relief.

Why am I still sitting in prison with a 63 year sentence for a Non-Murder Conviction? I received 38 years for Attempted Murder, which was enhanced by 25 years by the Habitual Offender/Three Strikes Law, a law that in Indiana has since been changed. My second strike was for a Class D Out of State Felony, just one step above a Class A Misdemeanor. Under the new law in Indiana that was changed in 2014, this second strike today would no longer be used/applied in the same manner it was when I went to trial. I have served/completed the time for the original Attempted Murder conviction. I'm required to serve 19 years of that 38 yr sentence which I have done.

Regardless of the politics around this case, how can a 56 yr old man, father, grandfather, great grandfather



More than 90 people turned out Oct. 10 for the 22nd Gabriel Gathering to honor Gabriel and his courageous comrades who attempted a mass rebellion in Virginia against slavery. Gabriel was executed on Oct. 10, 1800, at the town gallows in Richmond. The annual event is sponsored by the Defenders Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and takes place at the Shocke Bottom African Burial Ground. Photo by Phil Wilayto

and husband still be held in prison for 20 plus years with all of the circumstances mentioned above being taken into account?

Since my incarceration, I have been diagnosed with Spondylitis, a degenerative disc disease which is a deterioration of the vertebrae and disc within the neck and spinal column. I had major surgery related to this condition in 2015 and still having procedures done in 2023 related to this chronic care Issue.

I also have neurological issues, producing limb and body tremors, mostly concentrated in my hands, leading to muscle atrophy.

In 2009 I was diagnosed with stage 2 kidney disease that was left untreated by the prison authorities. Now, in 2023, after repeatedly complaining about pain in my kidney area, it was discovered that I have a mass growing on my right kidney that may be cancerous (medical is referring to it as carcinoma until it

is disproven). This requires surgery for a partial or full kidney removal in order to remove this growth and to prevent the spread of possible cancerous cells. I'm still undergoing tests.

While I'm only getting hit with waves of pain periodically, both kidneys are known to swell and cause immobilizing pain in my lower back area.

I've served my time and paid my dues. In further support of the campaign to liberate our elders being waged by the Spirit of Mandela Campaign, it is further Cruel and Unusual Punishment and a Human Rights Violation to continue to hold me in prison for another 20 years!!!

FREE THE LAND!!

FREE SHAKA SHAKUR!!!!

For more information on my case and for a link to donate to my legal fund, go to www.shakashakur.org

Shaka Shakur
BUCKINGHAM CORRECTIONAL CENTER

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The real roots of the ‘Border Crisis’

By Phil Wilayto

Editor’s note: This essay is based on an interview the author did in January with the Washington regional office of the Sputnik news agency.

As we go to press, the final votes are being cast in the election that will determine who will be the next president. Whether it’s Harris or Trump, the government will still be deporting undocumented workers.

We offer these thoughts as a way to try to explain to workers, especially white workers, the reasons why so many people want to come to the U.S., and why we all should view them as sisters and brothers and potential allies in the overall struggle against the bosses, the landlords and the oligarchs who make life so difficult for the vast majority of us, wherever we come from and however we got here.

Despite the great risks to life and limb and the fierce repression promoted by both major political parties, millions of people are still trying to enter the United States, in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Mexicans make up the largest number of migrants - 30% of the total, but many also are coming from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

Former President Donald Trump and the Republican Party he now controls accuse the Biden/Harris administration of promoting “open borders,” with no restraints on immigration, while President Biden and Vice President Harris blame Trump for scuttling a bipartisan Congressional deal they say would have addressed the issue.

What both sides ignore are the reasons why so many people are crossing the border in the first place: poverty, violence, wars and climate change, all of which can largely be traced back to policies of succeeding U.S. administrations.

For example: In 1993, Washington rammed through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA),

signed by the U.S., Mexico and Canada. In the following years, millions of rural Mexicans fell deeper into poverty as the corn and other crops they grow couldn’t compete with the subsidized products pouring in from their northern neighbor.

By 2014, there were about 20.5 million more Mexicans living below the poverty line than in 1994, while the rest of Latin America saw a decrease in poverty.

The result was a big surge in migration north. The sharp increase in poverty also forced more people into the drug trade, which has its roots in the U.S. drug addiction crisis. This led to an increase in gang violence, which in turn spurred more migration.

And then there’s the central fact that the area now called Texas was once part of Mexico, along with California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona and parts of New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming - all of which were stolen from Mexico in the U.S.-provoked war of 1848.

As many Mexican migrants put it, “We didn’t cross the border - the border crossed us.”

In a similar way, the U.S.-backed wars in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s disrupted the local economies, leading to the growth of criminal drug gangs.

El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are now among the most violent countries in the world. (Nicaragua, under a more progressive government, was able to contain the resulting chaos, and thus has a lower rate of migration to the U.S. than the other three countries.)

Another major source of migrants is Venezuela, which has been the target of devastating U.S. economic sanctions and coup attempts.

Many Haitians also have tried to enter the U.S., fleeing extreme poverty and political violence that is the result of many decades of U.S. intervention and occupation.

And there is an increasing number of migrants coming from countries in Africa and Asia, which also experience

poverty and political violence with their roots in Western imperialism.

‘Open Border’?

There is no “Open Border” policy in the U.S. The Biden/Harris administration has arrested record numbers of people crossing the Southern border. And the immigration deal the Democrats worked on with the Republicans would have given Biden the authority to completely close the border with Mexico, which he said he would do, thus condemning many thousands of migrants to inadequate camps on the Mexican side of the border.

‘States Rights’ emerging again as a political battleground

In the United States, immigration policy and enforcement is the responsibility of the federal government, not the states. And yet, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed a law allowing the state’s law enforcement agencies to arrest migrants, something only federal law enforcement is constitutionally authorized to do.

Abbott has said he will build his own border wall along the Texas-Mexico border. He has ordered deadly barriers complete with chainsaws to be installed in the Rio Grande, a major crossing river for migrants. He has forbidden U.S. Border Patrol agents from accessing certain areas where migrants gather along a section of the Texas-Mexico border in Eagle Pass, a town with about 29,000 residents, almost all of whom are Latino.

In addition to being especially cruel, all this is unconstitutional and a direct challenge to federal authority.

Last Feb. 4, about a dozen Republican governors joined Abbot in Eagle Pass to express their support for his resistance to Washington. Several have offered to send state National

Guard troops to support his efforts. And on Feb. 16, Abbott announced that construction is underway for a “base camp” to house hundreds of Texas National Guard members serving as part of the state’s border security initiative.

Abbott is doing all this to increase his personal political prestige among the right-wing Republican base, perhaps laying the groundwork for a bid for higher office. In every aspect, it’s a cruel and repressive policy and is leading to a further fracturing of the country along political lines.

Where is all this going?

Unless the economic and political situations improve in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, migration to the U.S. will continue to grow. A starving person goes to where there’s food, no matter how difficult the journey or how unwelcome they may be once they get there.

The Biden/Harris administration was putting pressure on Mexico to slow the flow of migrants through its territory to the U.S., but the desperation of the migrants is stronger than the determination of the Mexican or U.S. governments. The rate of migration to the U.S. will increase, and the right-wing here will continue to use the issue to spread fear and xenophobia, further moving a large part of the public to the right.

The solution has to be a recognition that fleeing poverty and violence is a human right, that the descendants of the people who stole North America from the Indigenous people have no right to deny others the right to come here, and that addressing the deep problems caused by many decades of U.S. foreign policy is the only way to “solve the crisis at the border.”

And that will take a mass movement - as all great social changes do.



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international & antiwar news



FREE PALESTINE! -- This beautiful mural appears on the side of a building in the 1100 block of North 25th Street in Richmond's Church Hill. Like the Palestinian West Bank, the neighborhood has been the target of an intensive settler gentrification process that has resulted in the displacement of many of its longtime Black residents. Photo by Phil Wilayto

While Israeli genocide expands, pro-Palestinian actions spread across Va.

By Danielle DiBlasio

Despite organizing in an increasingly hostile and repressive environment, pro-Palestinian activism across the Commonwealth is strong, growing and adapting to ever-changing obstacles imposed by the state.

Some of those challenges include an increased number of arrests and new campus policies at Virginia universities aimed at suppressing dissent.

While publicly visible actions like large-scale, weekly marches have waned in frequency, many organizations across Virginia are now focusing their efforts on boycott and divestment campaigns, as well as lobbying politicians.

Virginia for Palestine, Alexandria for Palestine and the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights have their sights on dismantling the Virginia Israel Advisory Board. Established in 1996, the VIAB is an entity embedded within Virginia state government, with the goal of bringing Israeli businesses to the Commonwealth.

VIAB is the only state agency set up to promote business with a particular country, diverting millions of grant

dollars away from Virginia businesses to benefit Israeli corporations.

Asked about short- and long-term goals of this effort to dismantle VIAB, a representative of Virginia for Palestine/Alexandria for Palestine responded:

“While the dismantling of VIAB is ultimately achieved through the legislative process, we believe we need to engage in education, advocacy, civil disobedience, and so on.

“Our short term goals include meeting with VA representatives and community education. At the core of our collective, we do truly believe that community members are what make this advocacy possible. In order to advocate for the dismantling of VIAB, we have to make sure that everyone knows how VIAB operates.

“This advisory board is not only tying our state taxes to genocide and apartheid, but it puts foreign interests above the interests of Virginians. As a collective, we understand that this is going to be a long process and we are transparent about that. We are also dedicated to this effort and have many organizers working on education, meeting with legislators, and assisting in our efforts.

“Ultimately, we know that we are up against a legislative system that is upholding apartheid and genocide over its own constituents. We also know that Virginians, of all backgrounds, deserve to have their communities thrive and VIAB is in direct contrast to that.”

The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights has been following the activities of VIAB since 2016 and has lobbied the General Assembly yearly on the issue. The coalition currently is focused on scheduling educational meetings with legislators before the next session of the GA starts in January.

The DMV (D.C./Maryland/Virginia) chapter of the Palestinian Youth Movement has initiated the “Mask Off Maersk” campaign, aimed at pressuring the Maersk international shipping company to stop transporting weapons to Israel.

PYM has created and distributed a petition to call attention to Maersk’s complicity in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians and has engaged in rallies across the state. On Oct. 24, Hampton Roads for Palestine supported this initiative by holding a protest in front of Maersk’s Norfolk headquarters.

In Richmond, No Votes for

Genocide VA has created a campaign to gauge the responses of local candidates for Richmond City Council, School Board, and mayor to a questionnaire regarding Israel’s assault on Gaza.

The group has published a tracker so the public can view how candidates have responded to questions like “Do you commit to meeting with your constituents about the war in Gaza when requested?”

In addition, No Votes for Genocide has designed a social media campaign on Instagram to encourage people to demand that candidates running in their districts respond to the questionnaire.

This is not to say that acts of civil disobedience have ceased to be used as tools of dissent. Most recently, in the early morning hours of Oct. 29, two large banners were affixed to the abandoned Southern States factory overlooking the James River in Richmond’s Manchester neighborhood.

One banner called attention to the year-long genocide of Palestinians paid for by U.S. tax dollars. The second read, “Globalize the Intifada,” a statement calling for international solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Anti-genocide protesters face heavy charges; not so with cops

By Danielle DiBlasio

Richmond has been seeing a sharp escalation on the part of law enforcement in respect to pro-Palestinian activities.

Not that harsh police tactics are new: Recall this past April’s violent breakup of a peaceful Gaza solidarity encampment at Virginia Commonwealth University by campus, city and state police.

But in the last few months, Richmond has seen an increase in both arrests and the seriousness of charges leveled against activists.

On Sept. 13, a gathering in Monroe Park called to protest the Virginia Israel Advisory Board quickly escalated when police attempted to pursue protestors marching to the VIAB’s downtown headquarters.

Evidently to deter the police, one or more people set off fireworks between the police and protestors, and the window of a police cruiser reportedly was broken.

One person was charged with three felonies and one misdemeanor - even though they were arrested almost a mile from the protest and may not even have been involved.

Then, on Oct. 7, after a march led by VCU Students for Justice in Palestine to the VIAB office, bike marshal Perry Taylor was pursued by Richmond police. While still on his bike, he reportedly was struck by an RPD vehicle, then assaulted before being arrested. He now faces seven charges, including three felonies. Some of these charges stem from police claims that Taylor eluded their attempts to stop him during a march on May 28.

One of the felony charges was for wearing a mask. Virginia’s anti-mask law, originally introduced to deter Ku Klux Klan activities, has a list of exceptions, including health reasons, which makes it difficult to prosecute. Critics charge that

its enforcement in this case demonstrates the eagerness of local law enforcement and city government to tack on as many serious charges as possible.

Also, Richmond protest organizer Zaid Mahdawi has been charged with a misdemeanor for allegedly defacing a statue of Christopher Columbus during a protest July 24 in Washington, D.C. The charge carries a possible jail sentence of up to one year.

In most cases, community supporters have been able to arrange for attorneys, bail money, court support and, when necessary, financial help for those charged.

The charges against activists contrast sharply with the kind of repercussions police face when they act with excessive force or brutality.

During the mass Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, there were many violent interactions between protestors and the RPD. By August 2022, the city of Richmond had paid out more than \$1.6 million to settle 122 claims against RPD.

But few officers ever faced charges. Two Richmond officers were indicted for using a chemical irritant on civilians, but then had all charges dismissed in June 2022 by Richmond Commonwealth’s Attorney Colette McEachin.

McEachin’s office has a long history of being extremely reluctant to bring charges against any officer, no matter how egregious their actions - most notably when a Richmond police officer shot and killed Marcus David-Peters while the high school biology teacher was experiencing a mental health crisis.

In another instance of evasion of accountability, RPD officer Seth Layton was able to resign from the force while under an internal investigation for using excessive force during the BLM protests. In September 2020 he was hired by Virginia State Police, despite the Richmond investigation still being open.

The following January, Layton was one of two officers involved in the fatal shooting of 18-year-old Xavier Hill. In the end, the investigation into Layton concluded that he had violated the department’s use-of-force policy, a finding that may have prevented him from being hired by the VSP.

War in Sudan continues with no end in sight

By Ana Edwards

“When two elephants fight, it is the grass that is trampled.”

This East African proverb is an apt description of what is happening in the Republic of Sudan.

Two forces have been battling for control of the Republic of Sudan since April 2023 when tensions between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the state’s military, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a rebel paramilitary force, broke into all-out war in the capital city of Khartoum, spreading west into Darfur and eastward toward Ethiopia.

Humanitarian agencies report that “more than 11 million people have been displaced” internally, and of those, 2.1 million are now refugees in the neighboring countries of Chad and South Sudan. More than 750,000 are on the verge of starvation, and the fighting has prevented most aid from reaching those in need.

Further, mass killings in Darfur have led to claims of “ethnic cleansing.”

The challenges to Sudan’s quest for independence and autonomy stem from its former colonial status, 1899 to 1955.

After independence was declared, the terms of the independence agreement

between Egypt, Britain and Sudan assigned control of the nation’s military and economic structures to Egypt in name, and to Britain in reality.

Add to this the stark contrast of wealth and development in the north while the south struggles with underdevelopment and poverty. Since independence, the nation has gone through two prior civil wars, 1955-1972 and 1983-2005. The last one killed 2 million people.

In December 2023, SAF and RSF leaders were invited to Djibouti to negotiate an end to the conflict, but the meeting did not take place. In August 2024, the US attempted to host a peace talk in Geneva, Switzerland, but neither faction showed up.

Internally, a group called the Coordination of Civilian Democratic Forces (Taqaddum) called for civilian participation in any talks between the RSF and SAF. Together with the RSF, the Taquaddum drafted conditions for ending the war that were rebuffed by the SAF, which refuses to engage in any talks until the RSF withdraws completely.

Fighting continues and the death toll rises. With no end in sight, it seems clear that Sudan’s power struggle has little to do with the welfare of its people.

UN overwhelmingly condemns US blockade of Cuba

Staff Report

Once again, the United Nations General Assembly has overwhelmingly voted to condemn the U.S. blockade of Cuba, first imposed in 1960 after the Cuban Revolution overthrew the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

The vote was 187 for the annual resolution condemning the blockade, with only the U.S. and Israel opposing. The Eastern European country Moldova abstained.

The Biden/Harris administration has kept the additional Trump-imposed measures that block the supply of fuel and spare parts needed to maintain Cuba’s power plants and electric grid. This was a major reason for the recent island-wide power failures, which the U.S. blamed on “socialist mismanagement.”

The U.N. has held a vote on the blockade every year since 1992, with the majority of members each time condemning the blockade. Israel has consistently voted with the U.S.

How much money has the US given Ukraine?

The Council on Foreign Relations is an Establishment think tank founded in 1921 that specializes in U.S. foreign policy and international relations.

In an online article dated Sept. 27, 2024, the CFR reported that, since the war in Ukraine intensified in February 2022, “...the U.S. Congress has voted through five bills that have provided Ukraine with ongoing aid, doing so most recently in April 2024.

“The total budget authority under these bills - the ‘headline’ figure often cited by news media - is \$175 billion.

“The historic sums are helping a broad set of Ukrainian people and institutions, including refugees, law enforcement, and independent radio broadcasters, though most of the aid has been military-related. Dozens of other countries, including most members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), are also providing large aid packages to Ukraine.”

Note: The figure of \$175 billion only refers to money actually appropriated by Congress. It doesn’t include the many more billions sent to Ukraine outside of that funding.

All this money - our tax dollars - ensures that the war will grind on indefinitely, weakening Russia and ensuring continued U.S. dominance in that part of the world.

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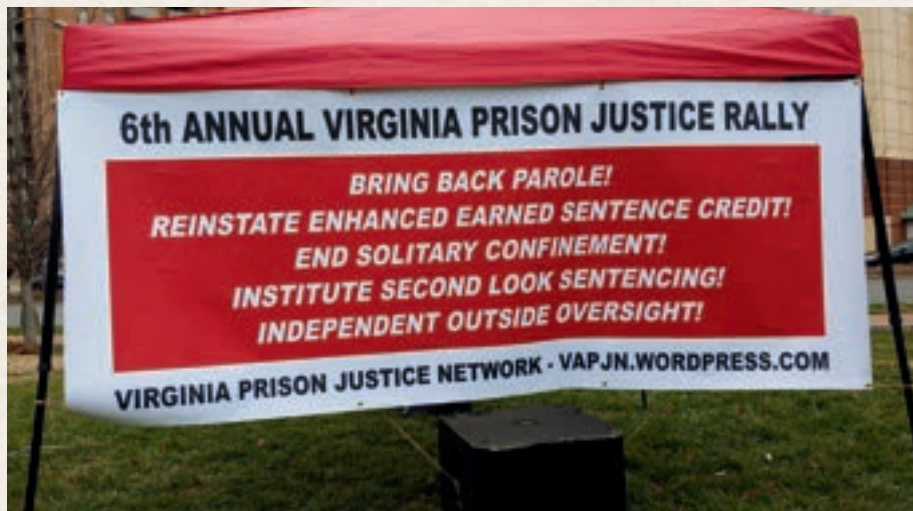
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