



# Speak Out Now

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## Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Fight!

On June 18, a march is being held in Washington D.C. It builds on the legacy of the Poor People's Campaign, proposed by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., in 1968 to protest the systemic poverty, racism and injustices faced by Black and poor people in the U.S. The march is held in connection with Juneteenth gatherings around the U.S. that commemorate the end of U.S. slavery and represent the struggle of Black people ever since.

Today, most Black Americans and other working-class people are confronting increasing economic and political challenges. There is a growing mobilization and activism by right-wing forces using the U.S. political apparatus and the courts to attack us. Their goal is to strip away the rights that people fought for and won in the mass movements from the late 1950s to the 1970s.

That was a time when ordinary people organized and mobilized their numbers and power. Local struggles in the 1950s and 1960s built the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. These movements showed people who joined those fights that change was possible. This fueled the opposition to the U.S. war on Viet Nam. It led to the formation of militant organizations and mobilizations by Native Americans, Latinos and other oppressed people. The demands for equality spread throughout the society, generating the Women's Movement, the movement for Gay Rights and others. In the 1970s, workers across the country organized and often went on strike for safer working conditions and better pay and benefits.

Tens of millions of people were activated and participated in these struggles. But when those in power held out the hope and promise that elections and legislation would secure our rights, the movements demobilized. Some activists ran for office and some won, and some legislation was passed. But over time the gains began to be rolled back. And for many people the lessons of using our power have been lost and instead the focus was re-directed to the ballot box.

Today the attacks are accelerating. The Supreme Court is preparing to overturn the Roe vs. Wade decision, that guarantees the right to legal and safe abortions. They want to ban access to abortions, which is essential to women's healthcare. This is the latest assault on our rights by the U.S.

courts, and by many state legislatures. Other attacks include voter suppression (especially targeting Black people), reversing environmental and health and safety protections, banning books and mandating a narrow social and political curriculum in the public schools, and limiting LGBTQ+ rights.

The Democrats may talk a good line, but even when they had a majority in the Senate and House of Representatives, and the Presidency, they failed to pass legislation that addresses the problems we face. The Republicans don't even pretend. They promote a right-wing agenda at all political levels and through the courts.

These attacks come as people are reeling from the Covid pandemic's consequences on our physical and mental health. We face rising inflation, increased poverty, homelessness, neighborhood crime and violence. There have been increasing right-wing and racist attacks.

It's not like people are accepting of these attacks. When George Floyd was murdered, tens of millions took to the streets. But after the politicians made their promises, and the protests subsided, little or nothing has been done to end police violence.

Recently people have started to mobilize to defend abortion access. And there have been strikes and other worker actions to protect their lives and health during Covid, and to win better wages and working conditions. Some workers have organized new unions. But this organizing has remained relatively isolated.

We can do something! We can use these Juneteenth gatherings to begin a new mobilization to defend our rights. When we go home, or back to work, we can bring a spirit of hope to our families, friends and co-workers. This hope lies in our understanding that we must depend on ourselves. We are the 99% - the majority. We do the work that produces all the goods, runs the transportation, and provides health care, education and all the other services. We have the power, and we have the interest to organize and mobilize to fight for our rights, our lives and our future.

And in making this fight we stand on the shoulders of those who fought before us.

# The State of the Working Class in the U.S.

## Covid Hits Workers the Hardest

- U.S. billionaires increased their wealth by \$2.1 trillion since 2019 while many workers faced eviction, hunger, and record unemployment.

### Being a worker meant having a pre-existing condition:

- Nearly 80 percent of workers ages 20 to 64 who died of Covid worked in essential industries.
- Workers who had to go to work during stay-at-home orders were twice as likely to die from Covid.
- In the poorest counties (with median yearly incomes between \$12,000 and \$46,000), Covid death rates were more than double those in the wealthiest counties (with median yearly incomes above \$100,000).

### While the greatest number of deaths have been among white people, death rates have been higher among people of color:

- Black people and Indigenous Americans ages 25 to 54 died at a rate more than three times as high as white people.
- Latinos ages 25 to 54 died at a rate more than four times as high as white people.

## Inflation: The Big Rip-Off

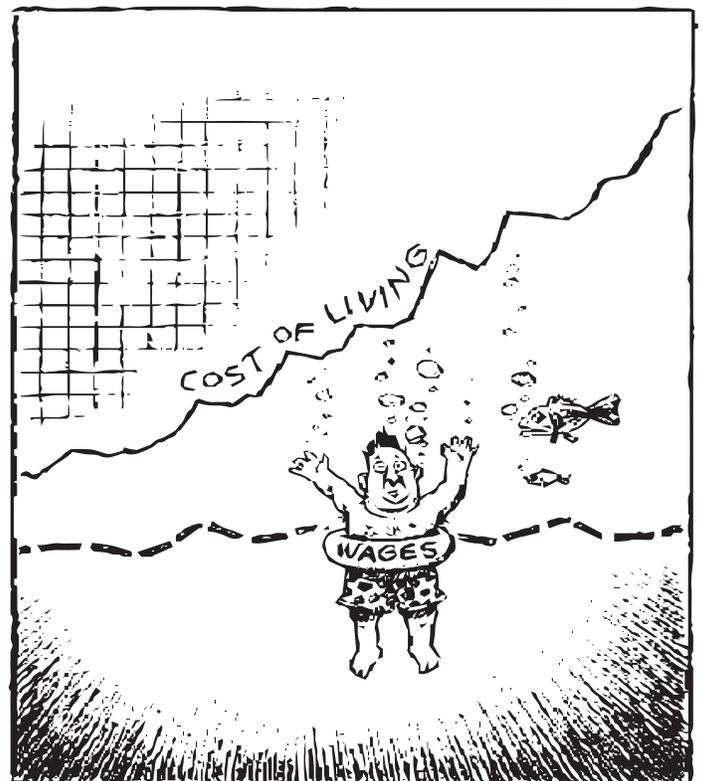
- This is the highest inflation in 40 years, with an 8.5% average increase in prices since June 2021.
- Gas prices nationwide have increased by 38% since June 2021.
- Prices of all food nationwide have increased by 9.5% since June 2021.
- Average rent nationwide has increased by 20% since June 2021.
- Fast food companies from Starbucks to McDonald's have seen their highest profits in five years.
- The biggest retail companies from Target to Walmart to Amazon have seen their biggest profits ever.
- The profits of meat packing companies are soaring as food prices skyrocket.
- Gas companies are making their highest profits in almost a decade, increasing by 300% since last year.

## They Profit as We Scrape By

- There are 140 million poor and low-income people in the U.S. (which means they don't have enough income to meet their basic needs).
- 52% of children are poor or low-income.
- Over 40 million people in the U.S. experienced food insecurity in 2019.
- 52 million workers earn less than \$15 per hour.
- The bottom 90% of households hold 70% of the debt in the U.S.
- One in three Black and Latino households have debts greater than their total wealth.

## The Rich Get Richer — The Poor Get Prison

- Over 60% of the prison population had an income at or below the federal poverty level before going to prison.
- A year after release, roughly 60% of the formerly incarcerated remain unemployed.
- Black men are more than six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men, and Latinos are more than three times more likely.



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