

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Helen Thomas comes to my rescue

By Tim Wheeler

The telephone rang in my office in the National Press Building. On the line was Gus Hall, national chairman of the Communist Party USA. This must have been sometime in 1977 or 1978.

Luis Corvalan, the exiled leader of the Communist Party of Chile had applied for a visa to visit the U.S. and had been rejected. "Is there anything you can do to help out?"

I was at a loss for words. "Well Gus, I can go to the White House press briefing today and ask President Carter's press secretary. That's about the only thing I can think of."

So I did. My White House Press Pass entitled me to attend the daily briefings and Presidential news conferences. Yet the White House was hardly my favorite destination.

Yet I was conscious of the ordeal Luis Corvalan had endured. His Party---and Corvalan personally---were part of the broad coalition that elected Salvador Allende as the first socialist president of Chile in 1970.

Gen. Augusto Pinochet and his minions overthrew Allende's democratic election in 1973 with the full connivance of President Richard Nixon, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Corvalan went into hiding. The fascists arrested



and tortured Corvalan's son, Alfredo, who died of the wounds.

The fascists tracked Corvalan down. He was tried and convicted of "high treason" but a worldwide outcry forced Pinochet to back off from executing him. In 1976, the Pinochet regime released Corvalan in exchange for the Soviet release of dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky.

Corvalan went into exile in Moscow and it was there that he applied for a visa to tour the U.S.

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When I entered the Press Briefing Room, I stood at the back, behind all the assigned seats.

I raised my hand. Powell called on me. "Luis Corvalan, leader of the Communist Party of Chile has applied for a visa to visit the United States and has been rejected by the State Department. In light of

**Then at the front of the room a woman spoke up in a loud, commanding voice.**

the President's call for upholding human rights, can you explain why the visa was denied?"

Powell listened to my question with a bored expression and then snapped, "When Brezhnev stops persecuting Dr. Andrei Sakharov and hounding Alexander Solzhenitsyn we'll have an answer for you."

The press corps broke into embarrassed giggles at Powell's witticism.

"You haven't answered my question," I replied. "Well, I've given you as good as you're going to get," Powell replied.

Then at the front of the room a woman spoke up in a loud, commanding voice. "He's right, you haven't answered the question."

It was Helen Thomas, dean of the Press Corps, White House correspondent for United Press International who had covered every president since Dwight Eisenhower.

Powell turned ashen white and the smirk disappeared from his face. The briefing room fell silent.

In a polite voice, Powell told me, "I don't know the answer. But I will take your question."

In press corps jargon, it meant that Powell was promising to get an answer, and call me back. (He never did, despite my repeated calls to the White House).

I pushed my way to the front of the Press Briefing room, leaned over and whispered to Helen Thomas. "Thank you."

I would congratulate her for her sharp questioning during presidential press conferences. By tradition, she asked the first question. She was of Lebanese background and sometimes asked pointed questions on why the U.S. gave billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, no questions asked. On that day, Helen Thomas proved herself a defender of freedom of the press, and a defender as well of democracy in Chile.



**Tim Wheeler is a correspondent for People'sWorld.**

## **GOP frauds voters**

**By Leo Gerard**

**Republicans are robbing citizens of the fundamental right to vote.**

**P**ITTSBURGH (PAI) - The GOP is working desperately to deny the right to vote to citizens it doesn't like. You know, poor people, black people, Hispanic people, old people, female people, especially people it believes are inclined to vote for Democrats.

Republican politicians hatched a multitude of schemes in states across the country to accomplish this gambit, passing laws demanding specific voter identification at polling places, eliminating early voting days and purging voters from registration rolls.

The right-wingers on the U.S. Supreme Court last year gave Republicans a hand in this effort by striking down key protections in the Voting Rights Act. Joining them this month were three Republican judges on the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago.

What they're really intended to prevent is voting by people Republicans detest, the derided "47 percent" that GOP presidential candidate Mitt

Romney spit on. Republicans are robbing citizens of the fundamental right to vote.

Since 2010, Republicans have passed voter-suppression laws in 22 states, and nearly half the nation's population could be affected in November's balloting.

Groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP succeeded in postponing and overturning some.

But so is disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of citizens, particularly when disenfranchising them does not prevent voter fraud.

If the three-Republican judge panel's ruling is not reversed, hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin citizens could be disenfranchised by Republicans in a state where there has been no documented in-person voter fraud since it joined the union.

That's exactly what Republican politicians and judges want, especially when their GOP governor is running neck-and-neck with his Democratic challenger.

# Teaching Tolerance “New Jim Crow” author Michelle Alexander

By Michelle Kern



**T**eaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, in conjunction with author Michelle Alexander, author of “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” is developing an innovative teachers guide to direct lessons on racism and social justice.

“The New Jim Crow” outlines the use of the justice system in the United States as a form of racial control that especially impacts young African American males. There are more Black men in jails today in America than were enslaved in 1850, and explosion of incarceration that has taken place over the last 30 years. Alexander’s studies have pinpointed the disproportionate effect of the War on Drugs on communities of color as the cause of mass incarceration.

Exploring “The New Jim Crow” with students in the classroom can be a critical tool in undoing the oppressive systems. Teachers can participate in the “undoing” by leading discussions on race with young people, said Alexander. “Students need to view teachers as change agents,” she said.

Alexander acknowledged that teachers could be reluctant to open the subject of racism with young people, fearing they will get something wrong or

cause offense. However with an “open mind, open heart, and willing to take risks,” teachers can facilitate necessary conversations in the classroom.

Societal change will not come with just ending harsh punishments and changes to rules and laws, Alexander said, but it is important to bring about a shift in consciousness around the subject of race, because until that happens, society will still produce oppressive systems.

It is more important to listen to what people closest to the problem are thinking and feeling about race and how they are responding with movements, said Alexander, than to simply leave solutions up to politicians.

Men missing from families as a result of long, harsh jail sentences have an impact on women and children. There are far more single women of color trying to raise children and be the breadwinners as a result of fathers being in jail, or being barred from gainful employment and full rights as a result of felony post-incarceration restrictions.

The disappearance of industrial work in cities had a greater impact on Black men in the United States.

Alexander said her next book would be about building a transformative movement for justice.

**Teachers can facilitate necessary conversations in the classroom.**

## NLRB hits Postal Service for breaking labor law

by Mark Gruenberg

**W**ASHINGTON - In its crusade to cut costs and fire workers, management at the U.S. Postal Service seems to be making a habit of "blowing it" - consistently breaking labor law in its dealings with its unions and workers.

That's when Administrative Law Judge Arthur Amchan decided Postal Service managers must give the union documents dealing with their outsourcing of transportation services, so the union would have the data it needs to contend union workers can do the work more efficiently. But USPS didn't turn over the documents - the evidence.

The dispute over the outsourcing is part of what postal unions call the Postmaster General's creeping privatization of the Postal Service.

But his privatization scheme also includes eliminating workers who don't directly serve the public, such as workers who run highway contract routes to Postal Service terminals.

When APWU official Michael Foster asked for summary contract numbers - so the union could determine if its members could run the routes more efficiently - the Postal Service refused. USPS cited confidentiality of proprietary company information, from the contractors, to deny turning over the key form involved, which listed the costs item by item.

## Justicia para los niños de Centroamérica

Tefere Gebre

**S**é por lo que están pasando los niños que están llegando a la frontera. Era 1982 y apenas tenía 13 años cuando, junto con cuatro de mis amigos de mi infancia, salimos de Etiopía en una travesía brutal a través del desierto de Sudán.

Antes de emprender mi viaje vi como muchos de mis amigos y familiares fueron torturados o asesinados por un gobierno militar sanguinario. Mi familia sabía que para poder sobrevivir tenía que huir de Etiopía. No quería hacerlo. Mis padres tampoco querían que me fuera. Sabíamos que era un riesgo tener que pasar por Sudán para buscar asilo.

Hambrientos, caminamos miles de millas sin saber dónde estábamos. Cuando finalmente llegué a Estados Unidos, me tocó pasar por varios exámenes para probar que mi vida corría peligro y poder conseguir el estatus de refugiado.

Aunque estaba contento de haber llegado a este país, sólo pensaba en estar en mi casa junto con mi familia. Después de irme de Etiopía no volví a ver a mi padre, ni siquiera pude viajar para asistir a su funeral y rendirle honores. Sólo puedo imaginarme lo que me hubiera dicho mientras yo me esforzaba para poder ser el hombre que él siempre quiso que yo fuera.

Tampoco me enteré por muchos años cuando mi hermano querido y admirado fue asesinado. Ni siquiera supe donde fue enterrado. Tampoco pude estar en el nacimiento de mi sobrino, ni supe nada de mi madre por casi una década.

Pude escapar la violencia, el caos político, una crisis ambiental y la

hambre, gracias a mis amigos y a que pasé por un proceso judicial.

Como un ex niño refugiado, no puedo acabar de entender por qué nuestro gobierno está retornando a los niños que están llegando a la frontera a sus países de origen sin que pasen por un proceso judicial básico.

Los estadounidenses debemos responder rápidamente a esta inflexibilidad y lidiar con los problemas que cada niño centroamericano tiene. Se necesitan guías claras para investigar a los niños que lleguen y procesar las peticiones de refugiados para los refugiados que se encuentran en peligro.

Todas las mañanas, cuando me miro en el espejo, veo las caras de mis amigos de la infancia que no pudieron llegar a ser adultos. Y veo las caras de los niños centroamericanos dentro de buses que son recibidos por pedradas, tomates y profanidades.

Muchos de los refugiados centroamericanos que están llegando a las fronteras de este país necesitan urgentemente un reasentamiento, al igual que yo cuando dejé mi país. Sus casos se deben atender. No se los puede retornar de una manera casual, o dejarlos en centro de detenciones. Lo sé, porque un día estuve en sus zapatos.

Tefere Gebre, Vicepresidente Ejecutivo, AFL-CIO es el primer inmigrante refugiado en llegar a ser vicepresidente ejecutivo de la AFL-CIO, la central sindical más grande de Estados Unidos.

### NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523  
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org