

Chicago ordinance bringing laid-off hotel workers back to work stalls



By Mark Gruenberg

Marie Lourdie Pierre-Jacques, a naturalized Haitian immigrant who was a banquet server in Swissotel in Chicago's Loop, gave her life to her job for 18 years.

She almost had her first baby at the hotel. After only six weeks of leave, she returned to work. After that, her first son called her sister "Mommy" and "It broke my heart," she said.

"When I was pregnant, people said to me 'You're going to have that baby right here in the hotel' because I worked right up to my due date," she told the Chicago City Council earlier this year, according to a transcript of her testimony posted by the Chicago Crusader, a Black community newspaper.

"And after giving birth to my son, I was back at work six weeks later. I did this because I thought if I worked hard and gave my all, the job would respect me back. I spent more time with my coworkers at the hotel than with my own family. I thought it would be worth it to be able to support my children and provide health insurance.

"When I found out I was being fired, I couldn't believe it. It is still difficult to talk about. After all these years, all the sacrifice. How could they do something like that?"

"The hotel told us we were a family. What kind of people treat their family this way?"

But when the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2020, the hotel's bosses didn't reciprocate such loyal service. They gave her the back of their hand. They still do.

The hotel laid her off, as hotels citywide did to 16,000 workers, members of Unite Here Local 1, when the plague shut down that industry, and so many others from coast to coast.

Swissotel's closing left Pierre-Jacques with two asthmatic sons, blood clots of her own, a troubled

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marriage, and no health insurance. But at least she has Local 1 in her corner.

The union has set up and still runs, a fund, on its website, seeking aid for the fired workers.

And now Local 1 proposed a city ordinance, and got eight council members to sponsor it, mandating

Union says workers who lost jobs due to the pandemic must be the first to be called back.

that as hotels, bars and restaurants reopen in the Windy City, they take their former workers back, by seniority. That would help veteran workers like Pierre-Jacques.

“Moms who were fired from their hotel jobs during the pandemic don’t want flowers this #MothersDay, they want the City of Chicago to pass the Hotel Worker Right to Return to Work Ordinance!” Local 1 tweeted then.

“When we talk about an equitable recovery, women—specifically Black and brown—MUST be at the center of our efforts,” Women Employed added in its supportive tweet. “The Chicago Hotel Worker Right To Return To Work ordinance can help address the disproportionate way working women have been impacted by the pandemic. “

So far, so good, except that after the council’s Workforce Development Committee hearing early this year on the measure, where Pierre-Jacques testified, it’s apparently marooned. A check of the council’s website shows no action since.

Meanwhile, the hotel industry is lobbying for the city to turn over \$75 million of the American Recovery Act funds Chicago got from the \$1.9 trillion federal law earlier this year, to help hostels get back on their financial feet. And the state lobby for the industry opposes rehiring the workers by seniority. It wants to let hotel HR managers pick and choose.

That leaves Pierre-Jacques bereft, and it leaves Local 1 lobbying to get the Right To Return To Work bill, ordinance 2020-5078, out of the committee, by rounding up more co-sponsors. A supportive Chicago Sun-Times editorial noted California, Boston and Baltimore have similar right-to-return laws.

Local 1 President Karen Kent told WBBM Newsradio early this year that Pierre-Jacques and her colleagues otherwise face “a very uncertain future.” Restoring that future by restoring them to their jobs would be a great way to show the city values the workers, she said.

In historic ruling, Dutch court rules Shell needs to abide by Paris agreement

By Olivia Rosane

In a first-of-its-kind ruling, a court of law has held a private company responsible for its contributions to the climate crisis.

The court at The Hague in the Netherlands ruled Thursday that fossil-fuel giant Royal Dutch Shell must reduce its emissions by 45% by 2030.

“This is a turning point in history,” Roger Cox, a lawyer for Friends of the Earth Netherlands, said in a press release. “This case is unique because it is the first time a judge has ordered a large polluting company to comply with the Paris Climate Agreement. This ruling may also have major consequences for other big polluters.”

The lawsuit was first announced in 2018 by Friends of the Earth Netherlands. The group was joined in the case by six other organizations and 17,000 Dutch citizens. The plaintiffs successfully argued that Shell must abide by the Paris agreement, an international accord with a goal of limiting emissions to “well below” two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as BBC News pointed out. The ruling sends a message to companies that they may not only have to abide by national laws, but international policy as well.

While the court did acknowledge Shell’s climate

commitments, it argued that they were not “concrete” and therefore ordered the Dutch-Anglo company to reduce its emissions to 45% of 2019 levels by 2030. It also said the company must move to do so immediately, and that it was responsible for the emissions of both its customers and suppliers, as Friends of the Earth pointed out.

Specifically, the court ruled that climate inaction on Shell’s part violated the rights to life and family life as outlined by the European Convention on Human Rights, according to The Guardian.

This is not the first time that a Dutch court has made a historic climate ruling. In 2019, the country’s Supreme Court upheld a 2015 ruling that the country must reduce emissions by at least 25 % of 1990 levels by 2020, according to The AP.

However, activists say the precedent sent by today’s ruling could extend beyond one country.

“Our hope is that this verdict will trigger a wave of climate litigation against big polluters, to force them to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels,” Sara Shaw from Friends of the Earth International said in the press release. “This result is a win for communities in the global South who face devastating climate impacts now.”

In a first-of-its-kind ruling, a court of law has held a private company responsible for its contributions to the climate crisis.

California Assembly bill aims to remove derogatory term ‘alien’ from state law



By Special to People’s World

Assemblywoman Luz Rivas’s (D-Arleta) Assembly Bill 1096 was approved by the California Assembly Thurs., May 20, with bipartisan support and will now move on to the State Senate. It is expected that this bill will also pass in the Senate. AB 1096 eliminates the offensive term “alien” from all state codes. The legislation would replace the word “alien” with other language that is more reflective of today’s legal terminology, such as a “noncitizen” or “immigrant.” The term “alien” has been used by the federal government since 1798 and in California since 1937.

“From the racially motivated shooting in El Paso to the recent rise in hate crimes against our API communities, we’ve seen a deliberate escalation of xenophobia in our society lead to violent attacks,” said Rivas. “The term ‘alien’ has become weaponized and is now used in place of explicitly racial slurs to dehumanize our immigrant communities. The words we say and the language we adopt in our laws matter—this racist term ‘alien’ must be removed from California statute immediately. No person should ever be referred to as an ‘alien’ because they were born outside of the United States.”

“The word ‘alien’ has no right to be in California statute—no human being is an ‘alien,’” said longtime civil rights activist Dolores Huerta. “Words are powerful instruments and history has shown us how they can be used to justify institutional racism and even violence. I applaud Assemblywoman Rivas for

her leadership on AB 1096 and I look forward to removing that inappropriate language from our laws.”

California’s legislature first introduced “alien” into statute in 1937 to refer to fully naturalized U.S. citizens and immigrants living within U.S. borders. In the 1990s, people began to use the word “alien” as a dog whistle to express bigotry and hatred without using explicitly racist language.

“We know the term ‘alien’ has a dark history going back to the California Alien Land Law of 1913, which specifically prevented Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants from owning property,” said Assemblymember Evan Low (D-Silicon Valley). “Removing the term from California code will be a major step in the right direction. No human being is an alien, and offensive terms like this are often used as a weapon against immigrants of color. This country has reaped countless benefits from immigration, and AB 1096 will help us move forward in treating all California residents with dignity.”

AB 1096 is supported by the Dolores Huerta Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League, the California Teachers Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter.

Assemblywoman Luz Rivas represents the 39th Assembly District, which includes communities within the City of Los Angeles—Arleta, Lake View Terrace, Granada Hills, Mission Hills, North Hollywood, Pacoima, Sun Valley, Sunland-Tujunga and Sylmar—and the City of San Fernando.

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Iranian Communists condemn regime's brutal sentence against woman protesting police violence

By Morning Star

Iranian communists condemned this week a prison sentence of 30 months and 80 lashes handed to a woman for protesting against police violence.

Narges Mohammadi's "crime" was "to campaign for justice for the hundreds of innocent protesters killed in by the Islamist regime's security forces over the course of a few days in November 2019," the Tudeh Party of Iran pointed out after the sentence.

Mohammadi was released from jail in October last year, the party stated, after serving 8 1/2 years for "planning crimes to harm the security of Iran, spreading propaganda against the government, and forming and managing an illegal group."

In an Instagram post, Mohammadi said one of the charges against her is that she'd had a party and danced while in prison.

The Tudeh Party said the new sentence was due to her "...human rights activism and refusal to stop despite the intimidation and threats against her." It said the Tehran government was making examples of dissidents ahead of the "sham presidential election due to take place on June 18."

Tudeh's international secretary Navid Shomali said, "The retaliatory sentence widely condemned by all freedom fighters and social activists in Iran.

"This is unprecedented even in the history of the verdicts issued against female civil rights activists. Ms. Mohammadi had recently added her voice to the calls to boycott the upcoming election."

The European Union called Iran to review Mohammadi's case, saying "the recent sentencing of Ms. Narges Mohammadi to prison and flogging is a worrying development."

With his Cuban rumba, Okuté would be a balm in the pandemic

BY ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ

Allá por la década de los 60, Tata percutía con sus manos de niño de 4 años cada pedazo de madera que tenía adelante y repetía a viva voz los aires populares afrocubanos que un viejo cantaba, sentado frente a la bodega de su barrio habanero de Párraga. Su madre Digna y una tía le regalaron al pequeño un tambor, y luego no había forma de callarlo.

"La rumba que me enseñaron fue rumba cruda, (tocada) con una gaveta del escaparate (y) un sentimiento tan profundo que las letras van expresando lo que se siente", dijo a The Associated Press Pedro "Tata" Francisco Almeida Berriel, que hoy tiene 59 años y todavía sigue sin hacer silencio.

Ahora está ansioso con el lanzamiento de su disco "Okuté", el primero del conjunto del mismo nombre, grabado en febrero de 2020 justo antes de que la pandemia paralizara al mundo artístico y que sale a la luz el viernes en Nueva York.

El álbum, en cuya portada aparece su propio rostro mulato, recopila canciones populares de las tradiciones cubanas culturales y religiosas de origen conga y abakúa en una fusión con el jazz, la salsa y el son montuno.

"Siempre he sido un fiel velador de que no se pierda la tradición de los rumberos", dijo Tata el lunes por la mañana en una entrevista con AP para la cual se reencontró con algunos de sus compañeros del proyecto: el reconocido tresero Juan de la Cruz Antomarchi, mejor conocido como Coto; la vocalista Naivis Angarica, la única mujer de la agrupación y cuya voz suena poderosa y tersa, y el percusionista Ramoncito Tamayo.

Los ocho temas del disco fueron

grabados en los Estudios Egrem de Cuba en febrero de 2020 y son en su mayoría recopilaciones de canciones populares del género, entre ellas "Caridad" y "Chichiribako". También se incluyó "Devuélveme la voz" del propio Tata, un homenaje a un amigo fallecido llamado Manolo "Escaparate".

"Conocí a Tata en los estudios Egrem en La Habana mientras grababa una canción para la Orquesta Akokán. Me quedé impresionado por el increíble cantante que era y su vasto conocimiento de las tradiciones folclóricas. Trajimos a los mejores rumberos de La Habana, que eran sus amigos, y así se formó Okuté", explicó Plasse a la AP.

La apuesta de sacar adelante un disco de rumba en tiempos de reggaetón no dejó de ser un gesto audaz. "Creo que es parte del trabajo del artista empujar al público más allá de lo que podría estar familiarizado o con lo que se sienta cómodo", comentó Plasse.

El disco estará disponible en todas las plataformas digitales, así como en formatos de CD y vinilo, y se podrá adquirir en línea y en tiendas de música, explicaron los productores.

"Somos músicos de la calle, se les dice autodidactas, aprendimos mirando a los demás, como lo hacen las personas mayores", dijo a la AP el percusionista Tamayo, a sus 32 años el más joven de la agrupación, mientras golpeaba sus tambores y hacía saltar su coleta de "grelos".

Lleno de la espiritualidad sincrética de Cuba, el álbum, dijeron casi al unísono los músicos entrevistados, será una medicina apropiada para todos, incluso los no cubanos, para curar la tristeza en los tiempos del COVID-19.

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