

MUNDO OBRERO

El salario mínimo y la lucha de masas 12

NATIONAL OUTCRY

Defeats Bush's Medicaid cuts

3



WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

• Feminism & Marxism An enduring contribution 5

• Wal-Mart's bosses impoverish women 4

WOLFOWITZ, BOLTON

What do nominations signal?

8

BOLIVIA at crossroads

Who will control riches?

9

Boston meets VENEZUELA

People-to-people friendship

9

Lesbian Gay Bi and trans PRIDE

LGBT STRUGGLE

Roots of Cold War resistance

2

Over 40 countries, 700 U.S. cities Protests demand: End Iraq occupation

By Leslie Feinberg
New York

A new anti-war movement is rising. People all over the globe took to the streets on the weekend of March 19-20 to demand an end to the U.S. war for expanding empire. Demonstrations took place in more than 40 countries. And in the U.S., the belly of the beast, demonstrations, rallies, meetings and vigils took place in more than 700 cities and towns.

These were not the massive marches like those before the opening blitzkrieg bombing of Baghdad, when millions rallied hoping their efforts would stay the hands of the warmakers in Washington.

This is a new stage of protest. It is stirred by two years of the Iraqi population's refusal to surrender to re-colonization—despite untold casualties and the brutality of imperial occupation—and the inexorable resistance movement that has generated.

In the U.S. in particular, the movement is fueled by the num-

ber of soldiers coming home disabled or in coffins, the threat of forced military conscription, and the starving of the cities to feed the insatiable war machine.

As these hardships weigh most heavily on the most downtrodden and disenfranchised sectors of the working class, the leadership and participation of Black and other nationally oppressed peoples in the March 19 protests signals a new direction in the anti-war and anti-imperialist struggle here.

A march by 15,000 people of all nationalities and ages through the streets of Harlem demanding "Bring the troops home now," received warmly by those on the sidewalks, was just such a harbinger. The march was led by the Million Worker Movement and the militant youth group FIST—Fight Imperialism, Stand Together. It met up with thousands more protesters in Central Park.

In Los Angeles, a long car caravan that snaked its way through Watts to an ANSWER demonstration of thousands in Hollywood on March 19 was hailed by the oppressed South Los Angeles

Continued to page 5



March goes from Harlem to Bloomberg's mansion 7

WW PHOTO: G. DUNKEL

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Constance Walcott, the grandmother of Jamaal Addison—the first GI from Georgia to die in Iraq—speaking at the rally held following the "Two Years Too Many! Bring the Troops Home Now" march and rally in Atlanta.

WW PHOTO: TOM DORAN

Early resistance to state repression

By Leslie Feinberg

In the inhospitable social climate of the Cold War, struggles were taking root in the U.S. that would later flower in the gay and trans liberation movement of the late 1960s.

How was it possible, some may wonder today, for gays to have resisted and organized in the 1940s and 1950s when state repression and a reactionary ideological offensive were at their height?

In the war between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed, the relationship of forces may change many times, but those under siege never cease to find ways to struggle for their freedom.

Much of the history of the struggle for homosexual and gender and women's rights in the decades of greatest political repression has been buried under the reactionary weight of the Cold War propaganda machine. Understanding how the early stirrings of the homophile movement of the 1940s and 1950s began serves to arm today's movement, which has much greater opportunities for resistance against political reaction.

Also, the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion and the mass political wave of struggle it unleashed can seem almost accidental or episodic without a general overview of the acts of resistance and attempts to organize that preceded the four-night-long uprising.

The choice of language to describe these earlier decades is difficult. Similar words may be used to describe sex, love and affection with regard to different historical periods, economic classes, nationalities, ethnicities and regions. However, the ways people saw themselves and each other and the ways medical authorities, police, courts and military brass categorized and criminalized people and their behaviors have undergone many changes.

The world of same-sex love among many blue-collar and oppressed people in the first half of the century in the U.S. was intertwined with gender and sex variance—or what today might be referred to as transgender and transsexual. It's also hard to separate bisexuality from the exclusive expression of same-sex love in early periods.

Here "LGBT" will be used, not to stamp the past with a modern acronym that has come to symbolize a united front coalition of sexuality, gender and sex minorities, but to show the inability to parse the population into distinct categories.

Centralizing force of capitalism

The rise of the 1940s and 1950s homophile movement itself is hard to fathom without taking into account the awakening of LGBT people in the 1920s and 1930s. Material developments in life under capitalism made this not only possible in those early decades of the 20th century, but necessary.

By the end of the 19th century, Northern industrial capital and banking had consolidated its victory over the Southern slave-owning landed aristocracy. The overturning of Black Reconstruction through lynch "law" and Jim Crow fascist conditions had brought a violent end to an unfinished revolution. This created huge shifts in the population from agriculture to urban areas in search of jobs. In these vast, anonymous cities and port towns, with

same-sex boarding houses and parks and piers, nascent LGBT subcultures took shape.

U.S. capitalism, unable to satiate its hunger for profits through domestic expansion alone, emerged as an imperialist power, exporting war for empire and profits to Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1898. A decade and a half later the world's imperialist powers dragged the workers into a gory struggle over redividing the world's colonies in the first World War.

The military deployment and wartime industry also pulled massive numbers of women and men from rural areas, small towns and cities into same-sex living conditions and new social conditions that broke down the old order.

It was workers' revolution that scared the imperialists into finally ending the war. The Cold War really began in the U.S. after the workers and peasants of Russia rose up in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and established the first lasting workers' state. The revolution reverberated around the globe, lifting the heads of laboring and oppressed peoples in every part of the world.

The communist government in Russia immediately struck down the anti-homosexual laws. In the U.S., however, the capitalist government made LGBT people one of the early targets of repression, along with communists, anarchists, trade unionists and immigrants.

Military witch hunt

In the spring of 1919, the brass at the Newport Naval Training Center covertly sent a group of young enlisted men into the base and the nearby community to lure "sexual perverts" and bring back evidence about "immoral conditions."

After entrapment had provided the necessary "evidence," naval and municipal officials rounded up more than 20 sailors and 16 civilians. They faced naval and civilian trials.

It was one thing when the dragnet ensnared enlisted sailors, mostly from the working class. But when a prominent minister from the Episcopal Church of Newport got caught in the nets, and civilian and later military officials forced him to stand trial, all hell broke loose.

"Protests by the Newport Ministerial Union and the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island and a vigorous editorial campaign by the Providence Journal forced the Navy to conduct a second inquiry in 1920 into the methods used in the first investigation," historian George Chauncey Jr. wrote.

"When the inquiry criticized the methods but essentially exonerated the senior naval officers who had instituted them, the ministers asked the Republican-controlled Senate Naval Affairs Committee to conduct its own investigation."

The Republicans agreed, eager to attack the Democratic administration.

The Senate committee issued its report in 1921. It exonerated the minister. Although the report, Chauncey noted, "expressed deep anti-homosexual loathing, it condemned the conduct of the highest naval officials involved, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, President Wilson's Assistant Secretary of the Navy and the 1920 Democratic vice-presidential candidate." ("Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual



This week ...



★ In the U.S.

- Early resistance to state repression 2
- Senate rejects Bush's Medicaid cuts 3
- Coalition fights to defend public education. 3
- Flight attendants tell bosses: 'Pay up!' 4
- Wal-Mart and the feminization of labor 4
- Study examines the roots of women's oppression. 5
- Vets, resisters, families protest war. 6
- Community caravan joins anti-war action. 6
- Thousands defy cops to protest war 6
- March from Harlem to Bloomberg's mansion 7
- Thousands fill streets of San Francisco 7
- Behind the Wolfowitz, Bolton appointments 8

★ Around the world

- Protests demand: End Iraq occupation 1
- Bolivian workers & peasants join forces. 9
- Venezuela delegation in U.S. 9
- U.S. plays Japan card against China 11
- Colonialists propose relief for African poverty. 11

★ Editorials

- Afghanistan, Iraq and women's rights. 10
- The Terri Schiavo case 10

★ Noticias En Español

- La historia muestra el potencial de la lucha de masas 12

WW CALENDAR

NEW YORK

Fri., March 25

Workers World Party meeting. What's next in the struggle against war, racism and capitalism? Hear Joyce Chediak; Larry Holmes, co-director of the International Action Center; and Carl Webb, member of Army National Guard who refused to go to Iraq. 7 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 pm. At 55 W. 17th St., 5 fl., Manhattan. For info 212-627-2994.

SAN DIEGO

Every Friday

Int'l Action Center weekly meetings. 7 p.m. At 3930 Oregon

Street #230. For info email bob2046mcc@cox.net. or phone (619) 692-4422.

SAN FRANCISCO

Sat., March 26

Women's History Month Celebration: Workers World Party forum featuring Sharon Black, regional coordinator of the Million Worker March, Ruth Vela and Lilia Huato of FIST (Fight Imperialism Stand Together), and Judy Greenspan, LGBT and prisoners rights activist. 4 p.m. At the Women's Building, 3543 18th St. (between Valencia and Guerrero). For info (415) 561-9752.

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Continued on page 4

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After mass national outcry

Senate rejects Bush's Medicaid cuts

By Mary Owen

After a mass outcry against the draconian Medicaid cuts proposed by the Bush administration, the Senate voted March 17 to remove \$14 billion in proposed cuts from its version of next year's national budget and create a one-year commission to recommend program changes.

That seven Senate Republicans joined all 45 Democrats shows the extent of nationwide popular opposition to cuts that would have slashed health-care funding for some 53 million low-income people: pregnant women, seniors, disabled people and uninsured children.

The vote is a stinging rebuke to the Bush administration's domestic agenda. The Associated Press said it amounted to "killing the heart of the plan's deficit reduction and dealing an embarrassing setback to President Bush and Republican leaders."

However, the struggle to stop the cuts is not over. The House narrowly passed a budget proposal calling for more severe Medicaid cuts—\$20 billion. Health-care advocates and unions will need to keep up the pressure as budget discussions continue.

Jointly funded by the federal and state governments, Medicaid pays for necessary medical care for low-income patients. Covered services include doctor visits, inpatient and some outpatient hospital services, laboratory and x-ray fees, nursing home, family planning and pregnancy-related services, home health care, nurse-midwife services and periodic screening for children under 21. Some states offer additional benefits.

Medicaid funding accounts for up to 22 percent of state budgets and is the largest source of federal revenue to the states. Federal Medicaid cuts would have a devastating ripple effect nationwide at a time when health-care and drug costs are rising, giant low-wage employers like Wal-Mart do not offer health insurance, and workers fortunate enough to have work-based health coverage lose it due to layoffs.

One such Medicaid patient, Cynthia Bryant, spoke out on March 17 at a rally in Livonia, Mich., against the proposed cuts. A spinal cord injury at work left her paralyzed from the waist down, and Bryant turned to Medicaid when her health insurance and financial support from her family ran out.

"I don't want to see any of my care be potentially cut," she said, "because I'm making progression and hope to someday live on my own."

Unions mobilize against cuts

New York state receives the most federal Medicaid funding. Unions representing health workers there are mobilizing against proposed cuts.

In New York, Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 37 and other public health-care unions held a massive, week-long petition drive at 12 city public hospitals and facilities March 7-11 to give patients, their families and city health-care workers a voice against the cuts. (dc37.net)

The city's public hospitals could lose \$300 million if Medicaid cuts go through, while the Family Health Plus insurance program for low-wage workers faces \$17 million in cuts.

"DC 37 members fought hard to save public hospitals when the city wanted to sell them," said Executive Director Lillian Roberts. "Now we're speaking up again to stop proposed Medicaid cuts that threaten to undo the gains that city hospitals and

facilities have made in providing state-of-the-art health care to those most in need."

Local 1199 Service Employees union represents tens of thousands of health-care workers in nonprofit hospitals and facilities as well as home-care workers statewide. The union will hold major rallies against Medicaid cuts in eight cities across New York state on April 7. (1199seiu.org)

"The national priorities in Washington today are fighting wars, redistributing wealth upward and starving programs that serve essential human needs," said 1199 SEIU President Dennis Rivera in a call to action to union members.

At a recent conference of Medicaid Matters New York, a coalition of more than 100 community-based organizations, one participant outlined another challenge of the Medicaid struggle.

"There's a war going on," he said. "But as the Bush administration cuts back on veterans' benefits and closes VA hospitals, where does he think injured vets will go? They'll go on Medicaid." (medicaidmatters.org)

All the more reason, say health-care advocates, to redouble efforts to stop the Medicaid cuts. □

Coalition fights to defend public education

By Judy Greenspan
Oakland, Calif.

According to the Oakland Coalition to Defend and Improve Public Education, Oakland schools are not for sale. And actions this March by this concerned coalition of unions, students, parents and community members—including a sit-in, a town meeting and a large rally in front of the state building—demonstrate the fighting spirit needed to save Oakland's public school system.

The combined impact of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act and a large budget deficit enabled the state government to step in last year and take over Oakland's public education system. The Oakland Education Association (OEA) and the community have been doing battle ever since with State Superintendent Jack O'Connell. Randolph Ward, state administrator of Oakland's schools, announced plans to close six of

them, shut down the Adult Education Department, which serves 25,000 students, and turn eight public elementary schools into charter schools run by a private company.

On March 1, six Oakland long-time community activists and members of the coalition sat in at Ward's office to demand a return to local control of Oakland's schools. The protesters also demanded no layoffs and no school closings.

Then on March 8, a Town Hall meeting of nearly 400 teachers, students and community organizations unanimously demanded, "Stop the dismantling of public education." Clarence Thomas, an Executive Board member of Local 10, International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU), and co-chair of the Million Worker March Organizing Committee, chaired the meeting. Thomas received a rousing response when he asked the crowd, "Are you ready to fight?"



A variety of languages on the placards show some of Oakland's many nationalities in the school struggle.

Left, Clarence Thomas of the Million Worker March.

WW PHOTOS: JUDY GREENSPAN

OEA President Ben Viznick accused the school district of "balancing the budget on the backs of students and teachers." He

urged everyone to come out to the March 15 rally at the state office building in Oakland.

Rev. Dr. Zaida Flowers, a spokesperson from Oakland Parents Together and a pastor at a local Oakland church, stated, "We want the best for our children. We want them to have the best education possible. That's why we are defending the Oakland schools tonight."

On March 15, over 450 teachers, students, parents and community members rallied in downtown Oakland across the street from the state office building. Clarence Thomas again chaired the rally and brought solidarity greetings from ILWU Local 10. "There is a movement afoot to privatize public education and charter schools will weaken the unions," Thomas stated.

The Million Worker March organizer said that on March 19, the ILWU was shutting the Port of Oakland down in solidarity with national demonstrations against the U.S. occupation of Iraq. "We may all have to take such action to save Oakland's schools," Thomas said.

After the rally, the coalition tried to enter the State Office Building to speak with state legislators. Police barred the way. The Oakland Coalition to Defend and Improve Public Education is planning to continue its fight to win "democratic control of our schools" and to "fully fund public education." □



WW PHOTO: G. DUNKEL

Fanmi Lavalas and Haiti Support Network protested the United Nations occupation of Haiti near the UN in New York on March 21. Speaker after speaker at the rally made the point that the UN was acting under the direction of U.S. policy toward Haiti.

Flight attendants tell bosses: 'PAY UP!'

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

Flight attendants protested United Airlines management exploitation and worker pay cuts with a horn-blowing, fist-pumping car caravan demonstration during rush hour at JFK International Airport in New York on March 16.

The Member Engagement Committee (MEC) of Local Council 5, American Flight Attendants (AFA), mobilized the event for the same day that UAL filed its annual report with the Securities and Exchange Commission, revealing huge executive bonuses.

In a statement, the MEC said: "We planned this Caravan Against Cuts because the top five executives at United received a total of over \$1.3 million in bonuses while front-line workers received pay cuts ranging from 13 to 30 percent."

What had the bosses done to earn those big bucks? Nothing. The "success-sharing" bonus was a reward for on-time departures of aircraft and return-customer satisfaction—made possible only by

the work of thousands of flight attendants.

The AFA members—who heft unwieldy bags into storage compartments, get passengers seated quickly, and push service trolleys for miles at 20,000 feet—got nothing but pay cuts from United.

For three hours, the caravan circled Terminal 7 with green CHAOS ribbons flying and signs reading "Stop management harassment" and "Pay day hurts!" The protesters ferried airport workers to and from parking lots, and received strong support and cheers from pilots, mechanics, other flight attendants, customer service and ground service workers.

Create Havoc Around Our System (CHAOS) is an innovative AFA strike tactic based on U.S. connecting flights that use a "hub-and-spoke" system. Actions taken by a few flight attendants can conceivably disrupt the entire system through a cascading effect.

The Caravan Against Cuts also got thumbs-up from a rush of passengers arriving from London, Tokyo, Los Angeles and San Francisco. A London passenger asked how he could support the struggle



Car caravan at at JFK airport March 16.

WW PHOTO: MICHELLE QUINTUS

and was told to let attendants on his next flights know about his solidarity.

United, currently in bankruptcy proceedings, is arguing in court for steep cuts in wages and removal of worker benefits.

Michelle Quintus, Local Council 5 representative, said: "Airline companies are using the bankruptcy courts and the excuse of rising oil costs due to the war on Iraq to gut our collective bargaining agreements, airline workers' pay and pensions. This is why it is essential that airline workers come out in protest of this blatant

injustice. Airline workers will not stand by as our work rules, pay and pensions are eliminated, and corporate pockets are lined at our expense."

Wesley Collier, chair of the MEC, described the protest as "a successful first step of many more as Council 5 turns up the heat."

More worker struggles are ahead as U.S. airlines desperately try to find a way to make profits in an industry wracked by the cut-throat, deregulated competition of capitalism. □

Wal-Mart & the feminization of labor

From a talk by Sharon Eolis at the Nov. 13-14 National Fightback Conference.

Imagine you are a working woman who is paid \$8 per hour. You have no health insurance for your family. This is the condition for thousands of Wal-Mart employees. Wal-Mart is the largest employer in the U.S.

This multi-billion-dollar company has wiped out main street merchants in towns and cities across the country by lowering prices and driving down wages for workers in the retail industry. This company has been miserly and unscrupulous in its manipulation to keep workers unorganized and uninsured.

Management sets up eligibility requirements for entering the health plan, but the workers often are not informed. Premiums are so high that workers can't pay them with Wal-Mart wages: as high as \$264 per month, equal to four days' pay.

In Georgia, officials found that 10,000 children of Wal-Mart employees were enrolled in state-funded health programs at an annual cost of \$10 million. In California it costs the state health program \$32 million per year to aid the children of Wal-Mart workers.

In 2004 California had a ballot referendum demanding that companies like Wal-Mart pay for health insurance or contribute to a state insurance pool. Wal-Mart spent \$500,000 to stop this measure. Despite a major effort by health-care workers, seniors and community organizations, the measure was defeated on Election Day.

Currently more than a million former and current women employees have filed a sex discrimination lawsuit against Wal-Mart.

Women workers fought and won

For more than a century women have worked in industry in the U.S. Long before World War II, women were employed in large numbers in the textile industry, where the working conditions were abominable and wages were almost at a starvation level.



In response to these conditions, thousands of working women took to the streets of New York City during the early 1900s. These strikes were instrumental in leading the Socialist International to proclaim International Women's Day in 1910.

Protective legislation was almost nonexistent in sweatshops that employed women. Over 140 women died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York because the bosses had locked the exits leading to the fire escapes.

Children too were exploited in this period. The wages of a whole family were needed to prevent starvation. It took the tumultuous struggles of the 1930s to force business to accept the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which set a minimum age of 16 for workers in most industries. Unemployed marches and strikes won unemployment insurance, Social Security and welfare benefits.

The labor shortage of World War II opened the door to higher-paying industrial jobs for women. The war enhanced the development of the capitalist economy. To bring and keep women in the factories, daycare centers were opened.

By 1948 women made up 32 percent of the labor force. Of course, at the end of the war, there was a major propaganda campaign to push women out of the factories and back to the home.

During the war wages were frozen. Companies offered health benefits in lieu of higher wages. This became a national tradition and labor unions have fought hard to keep health benefits.

In the past 20 years health care has been a major issue in contract negotiations and has led to many strikes. In non-union jobs,

especially in the service sector, it has been more difficult for workers to win and keep health insurance.

Wal-Mart represents a classic example of this disenfranchisement.

As high-tech capitalist production has marched forward, more women have had to work outside the home. Most of their jobs are in the lower-paid service industries, which also employ men and women immigrants and people of color.

High technology in industry has been responsible for the elimination of jobs for thousands of skilled workers—mostly men. By the 1980s, white men no longer made up the majority of the workforce.

This led to the spread of racist and chauvinist views that women and nationally

oppressed workers have taken jobs away from white men. In fact, those jobs have disappeared due to the workings of the cut-throat capitalist market worldwide.

By the mid-1980s women made up 44 percent of the workforce, but the jobs they held were generally so low paying that more and more women and children began to live below the poverty line, as is true now.

The scientific technological revolution is responsible for the pauperization of the workforce under capitalism. But the leveling down of all workers' living standards also creates a new basis for united action among workers of all nationalities, women and men, to organize and get rid of capitalist wage-slavery forever. □

Early resistance

Continued from page 2

Boundaries in the World War I Era")

Smoke, lilies and jade

The mass migrations to large cities, port towns and military bases in the 1920s and 1930s had created the basis for larger and more concentrated subcultures.

Chauncey provides evidence that LGBT life flourished more in the first third of the 20th century, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, than it did after World War II.

He described same-sex love and gender variance in New York, one of the capitals of LGBT life, as "a working-class world, centered in African American and Irish and Italian immigrant neighborhoods and along the city's busy waterfront, and drawing on the social forms of working-class culture."

The most visible, organized and eloquent LGBT expression in the pre-World War II era came from the Black movement in the United States.

As the Great Migration from the South to the North burgeoned into Black urban capitals, LGBT expression became a part of their histories.

Thousands attended LGBT balls in Harlem, Chicago, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., which were widely reported on in Black community newspapers.

In New York the balls were held at the Rockland Palace, the Astor Hotel and Madison Square Garden. The most famous was the annual Hamilton Lodge Ball in Harlem, which dated back to 1879. The majority of those who attended were working class. About 800 took part in 1925; 1,500 in 1937. Attendance peaked at 8,000 in 1937 before police raids shut it down.

Harlem was the heart of one of the great cultural and political high-water marks of U.S. history—the Harlem Renaissance—which ran from the end of World War I in 1918 until the capitalist depression.

This flowering of literature, art, music and political organizing—all of which was influenced by aspirations for national liberation and hope for an end to dreams deferred, sparked by the socialist revolution in Russia—also gave voice to LGBT concerns.

Richard Bruce Nugent, a self-identified gay man, published the classic "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" in 1926. It was the first known work by a Black author clearly about same-sex love. He said about LGBT life in Harlem during that period, "Nobody was in the closet. There wasn't any closets."

Next: *German Homosexual Emancipation Movement inspired 1920s U.S. organizing.* □

A look back at Ballan's 'Feminism and Marxism'

Study examines the roots of women's oppression

By LeiLani Dowell

"There is a virtual revolution going on in the minds of women. It is a harbinger of the general socialist revolution and at the same time is an indispensable ingredient for its success. The women's struggle is not subordinate to the class struggle. It is itself a form of class struggle. ... Marx said that every political struggle is a class struggle."

Said Dorothy Ballan in the revolutionary pamphlet, "Feminism and Marxism." Ballan, a leading member of Workers World Party, wrote the pamphlet in 1971 at the height of a burgeoning movement in the United States for women's liberation. At the time, she said: "Many young women throughout the country are beginning to inquire into the origins of present-day social relations of women." Ballan's pamphlet provided an important theoretical contribution to this debate.

Here and now, in 2005, Ballan's words continue to have important relevance to today's struggles for women's liberation, and the attacks we as women face.

In "Feminism and Marxism," Ballan answered the positions put forward by some leading academic feminists who asserted that the oppression of women by men has been an eternal struggle since the dawn of time. Ballan explains that such teachings about the "innate nature" of social interactions and social conditions only helps a ruling class that wants to maintain those conditions.

Conversely, Ballan put forward the teachings of Marx and Engels, who used anthropological findings to prove that the oppression of women had not been a constant throughout time and that, in fact, the

earliest recorded societies were matriarchal and highly cooperative between the sexes.

Today, when opponents of same-sex marriage deny this basic right to lesbian and gay people, they are using the same logic that Ballan answered. They think the bourgeois conception of marriage is an everlasting fact of life, thus denying social evolution and the potential for change, as well as a materialist view of marriage.

Ballan explains that marriage as we know it developed as a result of the accumulation of surplus wealth. Because women are the ones who give birth, the natural division of labor was for women to work near their children while men went out and hunted—although Ballan notes that at that time home was not the isolating place that it has become with the development of private property, but rather the center of the community. And lineage was traced through the mother.

After women learned how to domesticate and breed smaller animals, men eventually took over this area of work, applying that knowledge to the domestication of pigs, sheep and other larger animals they had hunted. With this development came an acceleration of surplus and the beginning of wealth, as well as a need to pass that wealth on to heirs. Thus was the patriarchal family born.

Ballan explained the use of the supposed "innateness" of oppression by the bourgeoisie—their assertion that something is innate is to imply that it is everlasting, unchangeable. This suggests that we shrug our shoulders and walk away, rather than fight. She said, "A more ingenious self-serving theory for the ruling class could scarcely be devised."

This is also the theory recently put forward by the president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, who com-

pletely ignored the role of the oppression of women in saying that "in the special case of science and engineering, there are issues of intrinsic aptitude" that make women less able to succeed in these areas.

Ballan also made an important contribution, that continues to merit discussion, on the necessary connection between the struggle for women's liberation and the struggle against racism. She challenged white women in the women's liberation movement who refused to recognize the added oppression that women of color face, and who engender white supremacy by assuming the right to campaign against male supremacy in communities of color.

This challenge to white women in the movement is still relevant today. For instance, in the current women's liberation movement, the struggle continues to redefine the term "reproductive rights" to be more inclusive of the reproductive needs of all, and thus reflect the complex position of women of color. Reproductive rights as a concept must include the need for economic security, access to daycare, prenatal care, and abortion.

Ballan discusses the relation of these immediate demands to the struggle for the ultimate liberation of women through socialism. She tells us, "We must fight in every way possible to improve the conditions of the workers, knowing full well that this in no way changes the fundamental character of the capitalist exploitation of wage-labor."

Only by doing so will the spirit of struggle be imbued in the working class, as well as the realization that concessions are not the ultimate solution. Only by doing so will the struggle for socialism be strengthened.

She also dismantles the idea that the solution to women's oppression, as well as all oppression, lies in the re-education of



the oppressor, rather than in militant struggle. Ballan shows that the hope for liberation of women and all workers lies with socialist revolution through the example of the Bolshevik Revolution, which began to dismantle the patriarchy.

And the gains made by women in Cuba since its revolution reinforce the lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution today.

An article in Cuba's daily newspaper Granma International in 2000 cites some of these gains. The article pointed out that, while across the world there is concern about the feminization of poverty, "in Cuba there has been a feminization of the technical and professional work force."

In Cuba, women currently work and hold key positions in many sectors. The article notes: "Cuban women took full advantage of the revolutionary government's initiatives aimed at opening the doors to improvement and reintegration into the country's socioeconomic life in terms of education, health care, employment and projects with the goal of attaining full gender equality."

Ballan's book no doubt provided inspiration to young women activists at the time it was written. It endures to this day. Her words will continue to resonate until the victory of socialism over capitalism, and will then only serve as a reminder of how very great a victory we've won. □



Istanbul, Turkey



Warsaw, Poland



Kolkata, India

Protests demand: End Iraq occupation

Continued from page 1

community for demanding that the hard-earned social surplus be spent on health care, not warfare.

San Francisco ANSWER organizers estimated 25,000 came out to the Bay Area protest.

Resistance by GIs and their families was a key feature in the March 19 demonstrations.

In Fayetteville, N.C., home to Ft. Bragg, some 3,000 to 4,000 demonstrators heard GI resister Camilo Mejia, Iraq War veterans and GI family members speak out against the war. Nearly one in every five U.S. troops in Iraq comes through this or other North Carolina military bases.

Mejia had spoken to hundreds at a Detroit protest the day before.

In Atlanta, the grandmother and uncle of Jamaal Addison, the first Georgia soldier to die in the invasion, spoke at the local rally before getting on a bus with others to go to Ft. Bragg.

After a one-hour standoff with police in Chicago, 1,000 protesters marched to the Federal Plaza to join another 3,000 gathered there for a permitted rally. Georgia Rep. Cynthia McKinney keynoted the rally.

Hundreds who rallied at a local church in Baltimore heard Fred Mason, president of the AFL-CIO in Maryland and D.C., denounce the war.

From Texas to Maine, Florida to Washington State, people rallied by the hundreds and thousands against the occupation. Demonstrations took place in Hawaii and Alaska, too.

Around the world

Crowds estimated by organizers in the 100,000-range marched in London, Rome and Brussels.

While the pre-war demonstrations in some European capitals had been massive, at that time many of Washington's imperialist rivals opposed the unilateral invasion.

Now the European ruling class is concerned that a U.S. debacle in Iraq might

lead to an imperialist defeat in the Middle East. The protests face more of an uphill battle to organize and to be heard.

Some 10,000 to 20,000 joined demonstrations on March 19-20 in Istanbul and Buenos Aires.

People in Calcutta, India, formed an anti-imperialist human chain so long it encompassed the whole city, stretching more than 6 miles north to south.

Demonstrations also took place in Australia, Brazil, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Sweden and other countries on all continents.

Sources: Anti-war activists in the United States and around the world.

Protest in military town

Vets, resisters, families protest war

By Yolanda Carrington
Fayetteville, N.C.

On March 19, freedom-loving people around the world observed the second anniversary of the U.S. military invasion of Iraq. People of all ages gathered in cities, big and small, to protest the destructive occupation of the once-sovereign nation of Iraq by U.S. armed forces.

One of the most important protests occurred in Fayetteville, N.C., near Fort Bragg. Many families and friends of military personnel attended the second annual March and Rally to Bring the Troops Home Now.

Fort Bragg is the home base of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division and the Special Forces Command, or Green Berets. Nearly one in every five U.S. troops in Iraq comes through this base or another in North Carolina.

This historic march and rally was a smashing success. Lou Plummer, a military father, announced to the rally that 4,800 people were in attendance. This is three times the number who came together at Rowan Park in 2004 against the war.

This turnout is no small feat for Fayetteville, which, due to its close proximity to Fort Bragg, is one of the most politically conservative locales in the U.S. The anti-war protesters greatly outnumbered a very small contingent of counter-protesters holding signs spouting offensive, pro-war messages.

The anti-war demonstration was called by the United for Peace and Justice coalition and endorsed by organizations such as Bring Them Home Now!, Military Families Against the War, Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Black Workers for Justice, Raleigh FIST (Fight Imperialism, Stand Together), Code Pink, Atlanta International Action Center, N.C. Labor Against the War, Gold

Star Families and others.

The Rowan Park rally featured speakers such as Camilo Mejia, a conscientious objector sentenced to a year in military lockup and given a dishonorable discharge for his refusal to return to Iraq; Lila Lipscomb, the Michigan mother featured in Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 911 documentary, who lost her son in Iraq; Michael Berg, the father of executed hostage Nicolas Berg; and Dennis Kyne, a Gulf War veteran and member of Veterans for Peace who spoke about the sorry treatment of sick and disabled veterans by "our" government.

FIST members carried banners during the march featuring the slo-



gans "Self-determination is a right," "Support the right to resist," "Support military resisters" and "OUT NOW!—Iraq, Palestine, Haiti ... End imperialist occupations."

Other placards raised important issues like racism, gender oppression and economic costs of the war. One placard slogan dealt with sexual violence against women troops: "1/3 of all women GIs are raped." The reverse side stated: "Support women troops: Bring them home NOW!" Protesters traveled from Atlanta,



FIST members protest at Ft. Bragg, N.C.

PHOTOS: BRAD GOODNIGHT

Norfolk and Richmond, Va.; Washington, D.C., plus numerous cities in North Carolina, South Carolina and elsewhere.

The culturally diverse crowd refused to

be intimidated by a large police presence.

Carrington is a member of Raleigh FIST. Contact FIST at fist@workers.org.

Thousands defy cops to protest war

By Lou Paulsen
Chicago

Despite Democratic Mayor Richard Daley's suspension of constitutional rights in Chicago on March 19, thousands stood up to the police and marched in protest of the Bush administration's wars on Iraq, Palestine, Haiti, Colombia and the rest of the world.

After a one-hour standoff with the police, a thousand protesters marched down Dearborn Street to Federal Plaza, where they joined 3,000 who had gathered for a permitted rally keyed by Georgia Rep. Cynthia McKinney.

The main march was preceded by a dozen neighborhood actions and feeder marches, including pickets at the Colombian and Israeli consulates, the offices of Leo Burnett—the Army's ad agency—and the headquarters of Boeing.

Hundreds of heavily armed police and sheriff's deputies turned the "Magnificent Mile" shopping district into a war zone in their determination to prevent a scheduled news conference at Michigan and Oak and a sidewalk march down Michigan Avenue.

Police busted up the press conference, arresting organizer Andy Thayer for



PHOTO: CHICAGO/INDYMEDIA

attempting to speak to reporters.

Veteran community organizer the Rev. Paul Jakes led chants as the protesters were forced away from the news conference site and met protesters from the other feeder marches. Surrounded by a police cordon, the bulk of the protesters refused to take a police-dictated route down a more isolated street, and finally were able to proceed down Dearborn.

In the weeks preceding the demonstration, organizers of the protest had fought a grueling and ultimately unsuccessful court battle for a permit.

Coalition organizer Chris Geovanis, writing at the Chicago Indymedia Web site, concluded: "We should never, ever again participate in the sham that is the 'permit' process in Chicago... [T]he thugs in power make—and change—the rules as they go along." □

Community caravan joins anti-war action

By John Parker
Los Angeles

On March 19 a car caravan rolled through the African American community of Watts and on to Hollywood with lights on, horns honking and banners displayed. Unlike the meaningless commercial ads commanding the attention of people along the sidewalks, this caravan was greeted by the South Los Angeles community with fists in the air and shouts of approval, because it was about something real—health care and the demand to stop sacrificing social services for the billions spent on war in Iraq.

The International Action Center initiated the motorcade in conjunction with an action held the same day in New York City called by the Troops Out Now coalition. The caravan went from King-Drew Medical Center in South LA to a Hollywood demonstration called by the ANSWER coalition marking the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Rally organizers said that 20,000 people were in attendance.

The motorcade's cars were draped with banners stating, "Save King-Drew, shut down the war" and "Money for health care, not war." A Service Employees Local

660 van and SUV participated in the motorcade.

King-Drew Hospital has been threatened with closure and now faces demands to cut back services by county officials. The predominately Latin@ and Black community served by the hospital has launched a successful fightback with help from Rep. Maxine Waters.

South LA's community contains fewer health-care facilities per resident than the California average. Many here believe that closing the facility would be tantamount to an act of genocide against people of color and an injustice to working and poor people in general.

The IAC organized the caravan to show solidarity with the people of South LA and expose the direct links between the war budget and the theft of services from working-class and especially nationally oppressed communities.

The caravan fed into the anti-war demonstration held in Hollywood in order to strengthen that rally with voices from communities that have not always been well represented in the anti-war protests.

IAC organizers saw the caravan as a success and an important step toward uniting the community and anti-war struggles. □



WW PHOTO: JULIA LA RIVA

Los Angeles caravan connects struggle at home to save King-Drew Medical Center.

From Harlem to mayor's mansion, marchers say,

'Bring the troops home now!'

By Deirdre Griswold
New York

As the brutal occupation of Iraq grinds on after two years of death and destruction, its toll on working-class youth and the growing impoverishment of already oppressed communities are reshaping the anti-war movement in the United States.

A demonstration here on March 19, the anniversary of the day two years ago when the Pentagon began its "shock and awe" campaign, reflected this

change when it began in Harlem, the historic cultural center for African Americans.

"Why Harlem?" asked emcee Nellie Bailey of the Harlem Tenants Council. "Because when other communities catch a cold, the Harlems of this country catch pneumonia." She was referring to the war-induced budget cuts and layoffs, and the disproportionate number of people of color on the front lines.

After a rally at Marcus Garvey Park opened by Brenda Stokely—president of the daycare workers' union, AFSCME District Council 1707, and an organizer of the Million Worker Movement—some 15,000 people of all nationalities marched through streets where boarded-up brownstones face gentrified new housing too expensive for the average Harlem resident.

Stretching 15 blocks, the march passed an armed forces recruiting center on 125th Street, where the chant went up, "Bring the troops home now" and "Armed forces out of Harlem." It then proceeded to the "Barrio" of largely Latin@ East Harlem before winding up in

Continued on page 10



AFSCME D.C. 1707
Pres. Brenda Stokely



Hadas Thier, Carol Lang
and Justino Rodriguez
arrested at CCNY for
protesting recruitment.



Kadouri Al-Kaysi



Ramsey Clark



Larry Holmes



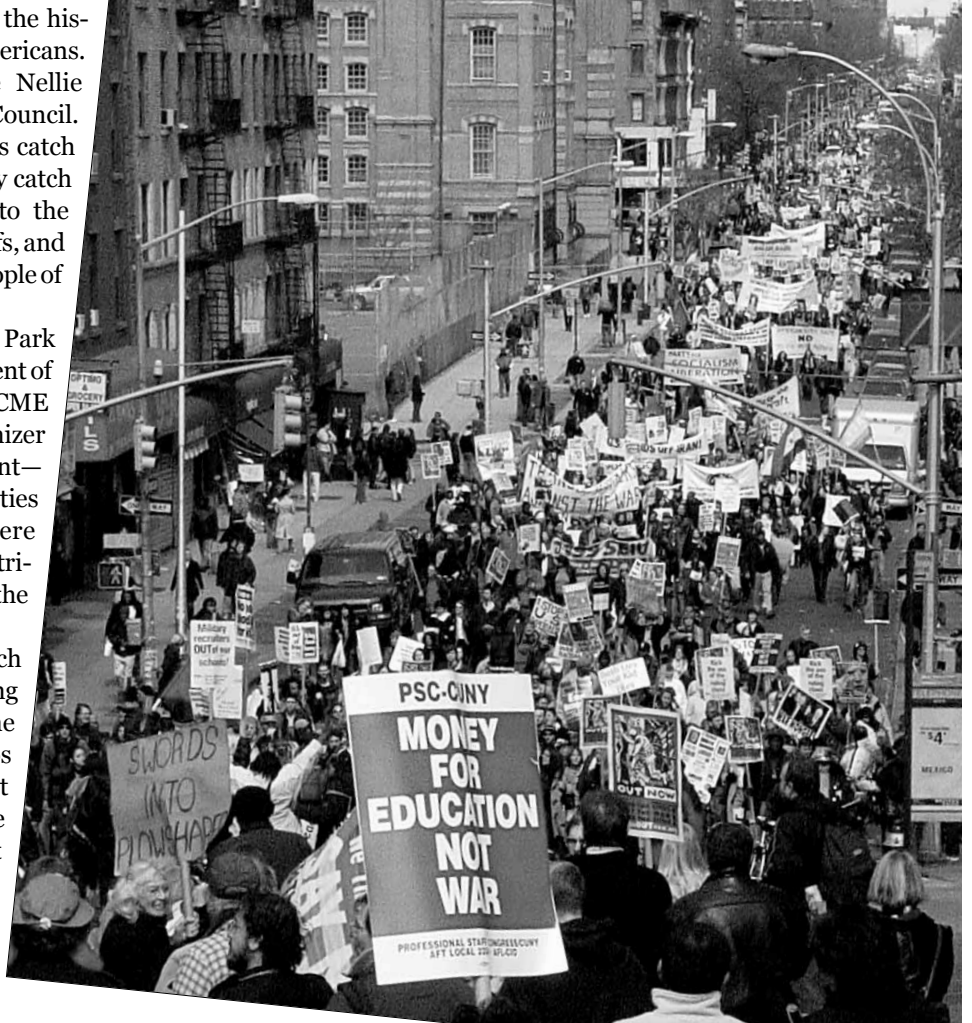
Lynne Stewart



Chris Silvera



Nellie Bailey and Charles Barron



Thousands fill streets of San Francisco

By Brenda Sandburg
San Francisco

About 25,000 people marched through the streets of San Francisco on March 19 to demand an end to the war and occupation of Iraq. Protesters came from throughout California and included many student, community and political groups.

Labor organizations brought out the largest contingent of people. Before the march began they held a separate labor rally, linking the Bush administration's brutal war on the people of Iraq to the government's campaign to slash wages, education, health care and Social Security for people in the United States.

The demonstration, organized by the ANSWER coalition, began with a rally at Dolores Park and then marched to the Civic Center.

Those marching included a campus anti-war group with a banner that read "College Not Combat"; Women in Black, a group that opposes the Israeli occupation of Palestine; a lesbian/gay/bi/trans contingent with rainbow flags; a Free the Cuban Five contingent; and a Workers World Party contingent carrying a banner that read, "Bring the troops home now! Support the global struggle against U.S. imperialism."

International Longshore & Warehouse Union Local 10 had a large contingent that included its dynamic drill team. The Million Worker March Movement, Service



Workers World Party contingent at March 19 protest.

WW PHOTOS: BRENDA SANDBURG



Judy Greenspan

Employees Local 790 and United Transportation Union Local 1741 of San Francisco School Bus Drivers were among many other unions in the march.

The bus drivers also donated their labor to drive ILWU Local 10 members from their union hall to the labor rally.

The labor rally was co-sponsored by six Bay Area labor councils, as well as U.S. Labor Against the War, the Million Worker March Movement, Bay Area Labor Committee for Justice & Peace, ILWU Local 10 and Pride At Work.

As it did last year, ILWU Local 10 shut down ports along the West Coast to com-

memorate the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Local 10 President Trent Willis told the crowd at the closing rally that the union had also stood against the Vietnam War, the Korean War and the apartheid regime of South Africa. In 1984 the union refused to unload cargo from South African ships.

"Our young members understand that in this struggle we have to rise up at the same time," Willis said. "We're not working the port of San Francisco or Oakland or any port we have jurisdiction over today."

Judy Greenspan of Workers World Party spoke linking the U.S. war in Iraq,

the threats against Iran and the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine to the war against poor and working people at home.

"We have to be activist warriors, gladiators in the struggle, whether it's teachers, parents and the community fighting against the private takeover of schools, or the nurses and firefighters battling Governor Schwarzenegger's plan to cut their wages and benefits," Greenspan said.

The Million Worker March held last October in Washington, D.C., "is the type of independent action that is needed in the days ahead," she concluded. □

Washington's quest for world domination

Behind the Wolfowitz, Bolton appointments

By Fred Goldstein

With the appointment of John Bolton as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and the nomination of Paul Wolfowitz to be president of the World Bank, President George W. Bush is trying to accomplish in the political and financial spheres what he has been unable to do by military means—that is, to drastically and unilaterally expand Washington's world domination.

Bolton ("There is no such thing as the United Nations") and Wolfowitz ("They [the Iraqis] will greet us as liberators") are two of the most hard-driving unilateralist hawks in the Bush administration. Hawkish unilateralism has been a disastrous failure in Iraq; foreign policy by military threat has only stiffened world resistance to Washington and revealed its vulnerability.

So the Bush administration has repositioned Bolton and Wolfowitz into areas where they can continue to pursue their inflexibly belligerent unilateralist policies but where anti-imperialist resistance is not as formidable as it is on the streets of Baghdad or Mosul, Gaza, south Lebanon, Tehran, Pyongyang, Caracas or Havana.

Bolton was formerly undersecretary of state for arms control and international affairs. He was the representative of Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in the State Department. Bolton was a protégé of ultra-rightist, militarist and racist senator Jesse Helms from North Carolina, who said of him at his confirmation hearings in 2001: "John Bolton is the kind of man with whom I would want to stand at Armageddon, if it is to be my lot to be on hand for what is forecast to be the final battle between good and evil in this world." (www.fpis.org/republicanrule)

Bolton: the hit-man diplomat

The United Nations is the arena in which Washington will try to step up its pressures on Iran. Bolton has made a cause out of getting Mohamed ElBaradei fired from his job as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency because ElBaradei failed to take a tougher line with Iran. Bolton was quoted by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz in early 2003 as saying that "the United States, after defeating Iraq, would 'deal with' Iran, Syria and North Korea." (International Herald Tribune, March 8)

Bolton's appointment is a particularly aggressive move against China, since he is a paid lobbyist for the Taiwanese government and was helping the Taipei regime develop a strategy to get UN recognition.

Bolton had to be excluded as a negotiator from the six-party talks on North Korea after he called its leader, Kim Jong Il, a "tyrannical dictator" of a country where "life is hell." In an unprecedented concession, the State Department removed him from the delegation after the North Korean government said that "such a human scum and bloodsucker is not entitled to take part in the talks."

According to the Tribune article: "In an interview with the New York Times in 2002, Bolton was asked about what seemed to be mixed signals from the administration on North Korea. He grabbed a book from a shelf and laid it on the table. Its title: 'The End of North Korea.'"

"That," he told the interviewer, "is our policy."

These candid public outbursts from

Bolton are nothing more than a crude repetition of Bush's "axis of evil" pronouncements in his belligerent 2002 State of the Union message.

This, however, was all pre-Iraqi resistance, pre-quagmire. It represents the aggressive mood of the neo-cons and the other right-wing militarists who dominate the Bush administration. But while the mood and the ambitions may persist, the world-wide resistance has forced the Bush administration to rely more heavily on diplomatic methods, intimidation, financial strangulation and subversion while it tries to deal with its political setback in Iraq.

The nominations of Bolton and Wolfowitz are calculated to convey forward aggressive momentum by bringing two of the most important world institutions of imperialism, the UN and the World Bank, more closely under the domination of U.S. imperialism—especially the right-wing grouping represented by the Bush administration.

Wolfowitz: integrating militarism and banking

There are several important aspects to Wolfowitz being nominated to head the World Bank. It is highly significant that the second most powerful figure in the Pentagon could make the transition to becoming the head of the largest public financial institution in the imperialist world.

Much is being made of Wolfowitz's lack of experience in economic development. But the World Bank is only secondarily about economic development. Its primary function—all the altruistic pronouncements of its liberal advocates notwithstanding—is to channel funds for investment and exploitation to the giant monopolies, particularly the oil giants. This facilitates their plunder of the oppressed countries around the world.

V.I. Lenin, the organizer of the Bolshevik Revolution, wrote a groundbreaking book in 1916 entitled "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism." Lenin summed up what was then a new stage of capitalism, after the competitive stage. He described the development of giant monopolies and cartels and the merger of bank and industrial capital into finance capital. This integration of the banks with the transnationals laid the basis for the division of the entire world into different spheres of imperialist interest.

Lenin was writing in the first stage of the development of imperialist militarism, during World War I. Particularly since World War II, one of the most pronounced developments in the evolution of imperialism has been the deep integration of the military with finance capital. And the Pentagon has become that nexus in the U.S.

Wolfowitz is Cheney's protégé. Together they served in the first Bush administration in the Pentagon, Cheney as secretary of defense and Wolfowitz as undersecretary for defense planning and policy.

After the collapse of the USSR, they co-authored a document made public in March 1992 asserting that henceforth the U.S. would be the absolute dominant power in the world and no power or group of powers should even think about challenging this supremacy. That document was leaked to the New York Times and

Hawkish unilateralism has been a disastrous failure in Iraq. So Bush has repositioned the two neo-cons where they can still pursue their inflexibly belligerent unilateralist policies but where anti-imperialist resistance is less formidable than in the streets of Baghdad or Mosul, Gaza, south Lebanon, Tehran, Pyongyang, Caracas or Havana.

then disavowed by the elder George Bush, then the president.

This thesis reemerged in an even more aggressive form in Bush's National Security Strategy document, issued in 2002. It was the voices of Cheney, Wolfowitz and their backers in the Pentagon and Wall Street, just updated from 1992.

The connection between Cheney and Wolfowitz is important because Cheney, as the former CEO of Halliburton, an oil service company, is at the hub of the oil industry and deals with all the giant companies. These companies, in turn, have a global outlook that is all but identical with that of the Pentagon. The oil monopolies are at the center of U.S. capitalism, integrated with industry, finance and the military. The appointment of Wolfowitz is a step in the further deepening of this integration.

As U.S. and German imperialism competed to dismember Yugoslavia, culminating in the Clinton administration's war in 1999 and the sending of U.S. troops to occupy Kosovo, the World Bank was on the scene ready to give loans and grants to the corporations for "reconstruction."

In March 2002, after the Pentagon pulverized Afghanistan with bombs and missiles, the World Bank came on the scene to finance an oil pipeline from Turkestan through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean on behalf of the oil monopolies. The bank was also on the scene after the Iraq invasion to help with "reconstruction" designed to bolster the U.S. occupation of that oil-rich country.

World Bank and Halliburton

The World Bank is as close as you can get to the Halliburton corporation. Cheney's former firm has a lock on energy contracts in Iraq and is positioned to help U.S. oil giants take control of Iraqi oil.

Wolfowitz was an architect of the war, which was all about that oil. When Wolfowitz takes over the World Bank he will still be in the war for oil; he will still be working with Cheney, Rumsfeld and the Pentagon in the service of finance capital and its empire, just in a different capacity.

During the period of 1992 to 2004, the World Bank financed fossil fuel projects—oil, coal, gas, electric power plants, privatization of plants and natural resources—to the tune of \$28 billion. ("Wrong Turn from Rio," www.seen.org) Of that \$28 billion, Halliburton got \$2.575 billion for projects in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chad, Cameroon, Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, Mozambique, Russia and Thailand. Halliburton was the largest oil contractor with the World Bank. ("The Energy Tug of War," www.seen.org)

Not to be left out, ExxonMobil got \$1.367 billion for projects in Argentina, Chad, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea,

Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia; Chevron-Texaco got \$1.589 billion to go into Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, Congo-Brazzaville, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Russia and Thailand; Unocal got \$938 million; and Enron received \$744 million. All the oil giants of the imperialist world got in on the take.

One glance at the list of oil-producing countries reveals they are also countries of interest to the Pentagon, the banks and other transnational profiteers.

So the shift of Wolfowitz to the World Bank amounts to shifting a militaristic hawk from one part of the imperial apparatus to another part. The centralizing nexus is the military-industrial complex, the Pentagon and big oil. They are all inseparable from imperialism itself.

It is no accident that the architect of the Vietnam War under President Lyndon Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, was also sent to become the president of the World Bank. He had been the CEO of Ford Motors and was familiar with running a corporate empire. His shift to the Pentagon and then to the World Bank was a natural transition within the empire.

There has been speculation that Wolfowitz is being kicked upstairs because he is so identified with a failed war of aggression—in the same way that McNamara was moved out because of the failure to conquer Vietnam. To be sure, Wolfowitz has been removed from the military policy-making position in which he has spent his life. But only time will tell the meaning of this shift, should it succeed.

Wolfowitz's nomination has many dire economic and political implications for the fate of the Third World. He will undoubtedly deepen the reactionary, neoliberal policies already being pursued by the World Bank.

The World Bank is really a collaborative institution with the International Monetary Fund. The WB withholds loans until a dependent government submits to all the austerity measures ordered by the IMF: putting national industries and utilities up for sale to the transnationals; putting fees on basics such as healthcare, education, and water; slashing government subsidies for the workers; exporting nationally needed natural resources to the imperialist countries, and many other onerous measures. The WB is under attack in many countries right now.

Wolfowitz is so openly identified with the war in Iraq, the occupation, the torture, the killing of civilians, the destruction of Falluja, and all the openly war-like and aggressive positions of U.S. imperialism that his nomination to the World Bank, should it go through, could easily touch off a new wave of struggle to throw this imperialist institution out of the oppressed countries. □

As corporations grab for Bolivia's riches

Workers & peasants' groups join forces

By Rebeca Toledo

For several weeks, the Bolivian masses have mounted effective protests and blockades in every department in Bolivia. Indigenous people, trade unionists, peasants, women and students have come together in the streets to press for the nationalization of gas, electricity and oil, among other demands on the government of Carlos Mesa, a U.S.-educated politician.

Bolivia is the second-poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean, just ahead of Haiti. Nearly half of the 8.7 million Bolivians live on less than \$2 per day. Seventy percent live below the poverty level. The gap between rich and poor, European descendant and Indigenous, is widening.

However, Bolivia is rich in natural resources, including the second-biggest reserves of natural gas in Latin America, after Venezuela. These reserves remain mostly untapped. But these resources are in the hands of private corporations, bringing about the social and economic contradictions that dog Bolivia.

Who should benefit from the country's natural resources? The 26 foreign oil companies in Bolivia, such as Exxon-Mobil (U.S.), Total (France), British Gas and Repsol (Spain) have their answer.

The masses, disciplined and well organ-

ized, have their own answer. "First they took our silver, then they took our tin, they took everything," said Carmelo Colque. "The oil and gas is all we've got left. We Bolivians have awakened, we won't let them have it." (Houston Chronicle, March 19)

Class war over water, gas

For many years now, the rich oligarchy in Bolivia has been trying to sell off the country's resources. In 2000, in what became known as the "Water War," their attempt to privatize the entire water supply aroused fierce protests.

Then, in October 2003, in the "Gas War," President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada fled the country after massive blockades and protests against his plan to sell off the country's oil and gas to the U.S. and Mexico. The plan failed.

Seventeen months later, the presidency of Carlos Mesa, who replaced Lozada, is again facing massive protests, even after a referendum last year that allegedly gave Mesa a mandate to increase the exploitation of the natural resources.

For example, in El Alto, the French company Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux runs the water supply. It controls a large proportion of the world water services market and is allied with the World Bank. Many residents of El Alto live on 50 cents a day.

To set up water services with the French company costs \$450 per household.

Because Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux denied water to more than 80,000 families, the people of El Alto mobilized and forced the Mesa government to cancel its contract with the company in January of this year. But that wasn't good enough. The people demanded that the company leave immediately and receive no compensation. El Alto, which started as a shantytown suburb of La Paz, the capital, and now houses 800,000 people, is still raging with blockades and protests.

One of the main demands of the national protests and blockades has been a hike in royalties paid by the foreign oil companies from 18 percent to 50 percent. After Congress refused to accept Mesa's resignation on March 8, street blockades and protests escalated, bringing the country to a virtual standstill by March 10. Nearly 1,500 trucks were stranded with their supplies rotting outside of the main cities. The road to La Paz, the capital, was completely blocked.

Although Mesa tried to call out the middle class to support him, the numbers did not match those of the workers and peasants. So Mesa resorted to threatening to arrest all the protesters. Bolivian Workers Confederation leader Felipe Quispe

responded, "Let him first arrest the real blockaders—the IMF and World Bank—they are the ones blocking any progress."

On March 17, the Lower House of Congress dealt the president another blow by passing a bill that added a 32-percent tax on top of the 18-percent royalty paid by the foreign oil companies, and made it non-deductible to boot.

As a result of this vote, the blockades were called off to await a Senate vote on Tuesday, March 22. Evo Morales, leader of the Movement Towards Socialism and a member of the Lower House, explained that the protest would continue outside of Congress. He vowed that blockades would resume unless the oil companies were made to pay.

The struggle has led to the formation of the "Pact for the Dignity and Sovereignty of the Bolivian People." This pact was signed by many organizations carrying out the protests, including the Bolivian Workers Central, the Bolivian Workers Confederation, the Movement Towards Socialism, the Coordination for the Defense of Gas and the Federation of Neighborhood Boards of El Alto.

Who will control the riches of Bolivia? This historic unity could be the catalyst for future struggles to determine who it will be. □

Venezuela delegation in U.S.

Diplomats build people-to-people friendship

By Berta Joubert-Ceci
Cambridge, Mass.

On March 17, a diplomatic delegation from the Bolivarian Government of Venezuela attended a public reception at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). This visit to Boston and other major cities is of crucial importance as a goodwill gesture from the Venezuelan government to the peoples of the United States. Its goal is to thwart the vicious campaign of the Bush administration against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and to strengthen ties with other countries.

The delegation included Caracas Metropolitan Mayor Juan Barreto, who won his post in local elections held last October; María Pilar Hernández, vice minister for North American (Canada and the U.S.) Affairs; and Bernardo Álvarez, Venezuela's ambassador to the United States. Venezuelan consuls from several U.S. cities and Puerto Rico were also present, as were consuls in Boston from Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Portugal, Japan and El Salvador.

Martín Pacheco, Venezuelan consul in Boston, introduced the forum, stating its goal of "attaining mutual understanding [between Venezuela and the U.S.]."

In a moving message of solidarity, Félix Arroyo, a Puerto Rican councilmember at large in Boston, remarked that "The process that the Venezuelan people are developing is one that involves all of us. In it is defined the future of Latin America."

Ambassador Álvarez explained that the idea of this visit developed to inaugurate a new CITGO sign, a Boston landmark. The CITGO oil company is largely owned by Venezuela. He stated what all the speakers stressed during the evening, the need for better relations between the U.S. and Venezuela.

"We want to start a long and productive relation with the city of Boston," Álvarez said. "We want to have concrete actions, programs regarding health, housing, regarding not only things that we can get here, but also things that we can bring from Venezuela to the city.

"We truly believe that in the essence, the people of this country have the same dreams and goals that we are trying to achieve in Venezuela," he added.

'An example to the world'

North American Affairs Vice Minister María Pilar Hernández spoke with the passion that the people in Venezuela have when they explain their revolution to foreigners: "I am proud of my country and its people, for whom I work. ... At this moment, 17 million compatriots who never had the opportunity to receive health care service are receiving care by doctors in their own homes. We are proud of having provided literacy to 1.2 million people last year."

Hernández, who had been speaking in Spanish, quickly switched to English when she was made aware that the simultaneous translation was not working.

"With humility I say that Venezuela now is a very good example for the world, we can show that social programs are not incompatible with economic development. Last year the GDP increased 17.3 percent, a record in Venezuela, Latin America and the world.

"We put people, especially the poor people first. And now we are more committed to the people because they want to be better. This is difficult to understand for some people. That is why we have to talk. And that is the reason I am trying with a very bad English to speak to you in English, because we want to understand you and we hope you will understand us."

Bernardo Álvarez,
Venezuelan ambassador
and María Pilar
Hernández, vice minister

WW PHOTOS: LIZA GREEN

Caracas Mayor Juan Barreto explained the process taking place in his city: "From the Metropolitan government of Caracas we are construct-

ing a project for the progressive but continued transfer of power to the people."

This is a significant step, taking into consideration that until Barreto's victory last October, Caracas' Metropolitan mayor was strongly with the opposition and used the Metropolitan police against the pro-Chávez population.

Neighborhood 'People's Power'

Barreto described how organizations at the neighborhood level called Boards of People's Power allow local discussions of each neighborhood's social, economic and political problems.

Every community is organized according to its specific needs. Barreto gave the example of the peasants' land committees (CT) and the urban land committees (CTU) in the cities. Each of the 5,200 poor neighborhoods in Caracas has a CTU. From these CTUs arise health committees that work together with doctors and are responsible for visiting every household to track each resident's health. Barreto says this has enabled the government to establish a good relationship with the people.

This research provided the basis for the "misiones" — projects of literacy, education, health and job development.

Larger or smaller assemblies, depending on the size of the neighborhood, take place where all the structures—health committees, technical boards, land committees, job committees and so on—meet



to discuss their problems. This gathering constitutes what they call Houses of People's Power. The houses then elect the Board of People's Power. Barreto said jokingly: "Some people like the word 'people' and the word 'power' but do not like when both words go together."

"In these boards," Barreto continued, "the people discuss the community's problems but also plan, project and carry out. They control the budget and take action so that the problems get solved. This is what we call a participatory and protagonist democracy of co-responsibility. We hope that the exercise of this new democracy is not threatening to anyone."

He ended with an appeal to those present: "I invite all of you to help us build, brick by brick, a bridge of solidarity between Venezuela and the United States."

MIT, the Western Hemisphere Project, CITGO, the Boston MLK Bolivarian Circle, the Venezuelan Embassy and the Venezuelan Consulate in Boston hosted the event.

Bolivarian Circle director Jorge Marin thanked organizations and individuals for their support in the work on behalf of Venezuela, among them the Tech Exchange, the International Action Center, Hands off Venezuela, and especially "Venezuelans, U. S. citizens and the school bus drivers' union for a sizable donation for the flood victims." Venezuela was hit with torrential rains in December. □

Afghanistan, Iraq and women's rights

The Bush administration has shamelessly propagandized its recent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq as "liberation"—and boasted that these brutal acts of aggression would free the women there.

Bush and company hired Madison Avenue spin-doctors to saturate the media with the idea that the lives of the women in these underdeveloped countries would be better because of U.S. "intervention"—that is, invasion.

The Bush government promised to save Afghan women from the terrors of the Taliban. But this group came to power with funding, training and encouragement from the U.S., which used reactionary feudalist groups like the Taliban to overthrow a progressive pro-socialist government in a long and devastating war. That government, set up by a revolution in 1978 and led by the People's Democratic Party, had begun to implement land reform, literacy and health programs, and equal rights for women—reforms crushed by the reactionaries and eventually by the Taliban.

After almost 30 years of U.S. manipulation and the 2001 invasion of their country, what is the fate of women in Afghanistan today?

On March 21, Afghan women leaders announced at a press conference in Washington, D.C. that gender inequality was rising in their country. The delegation of non-profit leaders told of a dramatic increase in the trafficking of women, rape, forced marriage, domestic abuse, illiteracy and lack of health care. Their fear? That so-called economic "reforms" brought by imperialism will actually undermine women's rights in the country.

Economic reforms under imperialist control invariably mean enhancing the extraction of profits by transnational corporations. Any benefits gained from this kind of "modernization" accrue only to a thin layer of collaborators and administrators on the top.

The Terri Schiavo case

The tragedy that befell Terri Schiavo, her husband and her parents when, 15 years ago, she suffered brain damage that left her in a persistent vegetative state, is real enough. According to her doctors, there can be no happy resolution of her condition.

What is not real but is fake, cynical, opportunist and hypocritical in the extreme is the phony concern for human life expressed by right-wing politicians and religious bigots, from President Bush all the way down, who have leaped to make her case a cause célèbre of the misnamed "right to life" movement. Imagine, the pressure from these forces has so much clout in Washington that Congress met in a special session to pass a new law!

A horrible U.S. war has been raging in Iraq for over two years. At least 100,000 people have died and more are dying every day. It's been proven and admitted that the reasons given for that war were false. Has Congress convened an emergency session to bring the troops home now and stop the killing of Iraqis and GIs?

Malnutrition is a fact of life in the deaths of millions of children every year. A small percentage of the resources the U.S. government spends on the military could end hunger in the world. Does Bush think that his professed concern over replacing this unfortunate woman's feeding tube will make

Human rights advocates say from 60 percent to 80 percent of marriages in Afghanistan are still forced on women sold for their "bride price." The 2004 Human Development Index from the United Nations shows one Afghan woman dying from pregnancy-related causes every 30 minutes. The bride price had been abolished over a quarter century ago by the young revolutionary government, which had also sent medical teams of women into the countryside to improve rural health.

Similarly, in Iraq, under the secular nationalist governments that followed the expulsion of British colonialism in 1958, women benefited from redistribution of some of the country's oil wealth to the people.

There was free education through the university level for all, encouraging families to keep daughters in school and not pull them out for early marriage. The Iraqi government guaranteed jobs for women who wanted to work, equal pay for equal work and free health care, including pre- and post-natal care for mothers. Working women were guaranteed six months paid maternity leave, with subsidized daycare available in most workplaces. Basic food and housing were subsidized.

The 12 years of U.S.-led sanctions followed by invasion obliterated this system of support for women, while it murdered thousands of women along with their families. Now, under the current U.S. puppet government in Iraq, women are actually losing legal rights that had been theirs since the late 1950s.

U.S. imperialism has nothing to give the women of the world but more misery. The vast majority of women are fettered by poverty, violence, illiteracy and ill health. The struggle for national liberation of oppressed nations and the struggle for socialism are essential to the struggle of women to liberate themselves. □

the world forget his role in perpetuating the hunger of millions?

Bush is said to have "cut short his vacation" and come back from Texas to try to "save the life" of Terri Schiavo. But when he was governor of Texas and approved the execution of 152 people, he never spent more than 30 minutes reviewing a case. He certainly never cut into his vacation time. Some were juveniles, others people with mental and physical disabilities. A number have since been proven innocent. Isn't it obvious that Bush is using the Schiavo case for an image makeover from Governor Death to President Life?

Decisions about such deeply personal and emotional issues as abortion or when to end life-support measures are hard enough when people are honestly informed of the medical facts and the options. They are made excruciatingly difficult when reactionary political forces that promote religious dogma and scoff at science use them to promote their own agenda.

The working class has plenty of reasons to be skeptical of decisions made by a medical profession that is increasingly dominated by profit-making pharmaceuticals and HMOs. The answer, however, is not to succumb to the medieval thinking of the religious right, but to reorganize medical care and society itself on a caring socialist basis, free of the divisive pressures of capitalism. □

Harlem to Mayor's mansion

Continued from page 7

Central Park, where thousands more anti-war folks already attending a rally there cheered the arrival of the Harlem contingent.

Later, protesters marched down to the Fifth Avenue mansion of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire supporter of the Bush administration, for a third and final rally.

The Troops Out Now coalition, which organized the protest, represents a coming together of anti-war and -intervention groups like the International Action Center (IAC) with community groups fighting poverty, police brutality and homelessness, as well as the dynamic new Black-led organization of militant trade unionists, the Million Worker Movement.

A constant theme of speakers, placards and chants was how the price tag for the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the funding of Israel's occupation of Palestine are taking funds away from education, health care, housing and other social needs. Budget cuts in social services are drying up major sources of jobs, too, leaving young people in poor communities vulnerable to the false promises of military recruiters.

Now soldiers returning from these wars find that even veterans' benefits have been cut. A number of veterans, as well as National Guard member Carl Webb who is refusing deployment to Iraq, spoke of how no one should be forced to fight in a "rich man's war." Family members of soldiers also called for ending the war and bringing the troops home.

Embattled activists like attorney Lynne Stewart—who faces a 30-year sentence in a case widely seen as a government attempt to intimidate lawyers from defending those it calls "terrorists"—and a group from City College arrested for protesting military recruitment on campus all received impassioned applause. "Dying in Iraq is not a job opportunity!" said one of the students, promising that resistance to military recruitment on campuses will grow.

The crowd warmly greeted speakers representing other nationalities—Filipino, Korean, Iraqi, Palestinian, Iranian, Venezuelan, Puerto Rican and Haitian—who exposed U.S. imperialism's crimes in their countries and called for international solidarity in the struggle for a world without racism or imperialist exploitation. There was broad support for resistance to intervention and occupation.

The poetry, music and rhythms of Harlem were felt throughout the day as young hip hop artists and singers translated the political yearnings of their communities into spoken word and song.



Above, Esperanza Martell. Right, military resister Carl Webb.

WW PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION: DEIRDRE GRISWOLD, G. DUNKEL AND JOHN CATALINOTTO



Rep. Charles Rangel

Long-time opponents of imperialist aggression like Professor Howard Zinn and IAC founder Ramsey Clark were interspersed with a rising generation of new activists.

Among the many speakers were elected representatives—U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel and New York City Council members Charles Barron and Margarita Lopez—who have bucked their party to come out against the war. Barron has also introduced a Troops Out Now resolution in the City Council.

Emmy winner Ruby Dee sent a message of solidarity through her son-in-law, Waleed Muhammad and the voice of death-row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal was heard in a taped greeting to the march. Strong support was also expressed for the Cuban Five, jailed in the U.S. for trying to stop terrorist acts against their homeland.

Michael Letwin spoke for New York City Labor Against the War, which organized a labor contingent in the march from Harlem. Attorney Jeff Fogel, who represented the coalition in a struggle with the city for march permits, spoke for the Center for Constitutional Rights. Brian Becker spoke for the ANSWER coalition.

Paul Washington, president of the Vulcan Society of Black firefighters, described how budget cuts due to war spending were endangering poor communities.

A complete list of speakers can be found at troopsoutnow.org.

This new coalition of forces is already planning its next move. Holding up a photo of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez as he spoke, Larry Holmes of the IAC and Workers World Party announced that Troops Out Now and the Million Worker Movement will jointly sponsor a May Day demonstration this year at Union Square, the historic gathering place for worker militants in New York.

As the war in Iraq becomes ever more a war against the workers here, all eyes will be on this important revival of the class struggle in a form that corresponds to the multinational character of today's working class. □



U.S. plays the Japan card against China

By Sako Sefiani

Ever since World War II, U.S. imperialism has tried to present itself as a liberator of the Asian peoples. Despite its bloody wars in Korea and Vietnam, and its earlier seizure of the Philippines from Spain, Washington capitalized politically on having defeated Japan, which had become a hated colonial power in Asia.

A latecomer to the capitalist carving up of the world, and desperate for markets and raw materials, imperial Japan had annexed Korea in 1910, invaded China in the 1930s, and moved aggressively to seize the Asian colonies of France, Holland, Britain and the U.S. before being defeated in the war.

Now, in what is sure to be viewed by the peoples of China and other countries in the region as a provocative and hostile move, President George W. Bush has signed a new military agreement with Japan identifying security in the Taiwan Strait as a "common strategic objective" between the U.S. and Japan, thus pushing Japan to abandon decades of official pacifism by claiming a right to intervene there.

This expansion of Japan's military role under the aegis of Washington is a slap in the face to those Asian countries where millions of people died before and during the second imperialist world war—especially China.

Under the new agreement, signed on Feb. 19, Washington is devising a bigger role for Japan as a strategic hub from which U.S. forces can respond to "threats," from the Middle East to Korea. Many foreign policy analysts see this as an expansion of the U.S.-Japan alliance, with the

goal of making Japan the "Britain of the Far East," to be used as a proxy in countering North Korea and China—a role Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has been all too willing to play, similar to that of Britain's Tony Blair in Iraq.

As part of that strategy, the U.S. has been pressuring to accelerate Japan's rearmament. Article 9 of Japan's constitution forbids the use of force except as a matter of self-defense—a provision demanded after the war not merely by the Allied powers but by the Japanese people. But in recent years, the U.S. has repeatedly pressured Japan to revise that article and become a "normal nation."

Last Aug. 13, then Secretary of State Colin Powell told Japanese officials that if Japan ever hoped to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it would first have to get rid of its pacifist constitution.

Japan has complied. It has been acquiring new submarines and aircraft carriers to project its military power in the area. (Asia Times, Feb. 20)

When the U.S. attacked Iraq the first time in 1991, Japan did not add its troops. In fact, its laws forbade troop deployment. That, however, has been changing. Several laws have since been enacted that allow Japan to be a military player on the world scene.

The International Peace Cooperation Law of 1992 for the first time authorized Japan to send troops to participate in UN "peacekeeping" operations. More money has been allocated for military expenditures in recent years.

Japan's latest sign of rearming came with its agreement to join the costly and

destabilizing U.S. missile defense ("Star Wars") program—something Canada refused to do in February.

The rearming process has accelerated since Koizumi took office in 2001.

Since the signing in 1952 of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, U.S. forces have occupied some 91 bases on the Japanese mainland and the island of Okinawa. In fact, the old Japanese naval base of Yokosuka is the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet. Japan subsidizes these bases, at a cost of \$70 billion since 1991, and U.S. forces are supposedly there for its defense—but Japan has no control over them.

Why has the Bush administration been whipping up the "nuclear threat" from North Korea? It virtually forced that country to resume its nuclear development by cutting energy aid negotiated a decade ago and by refusing to give it assurances that the U.S. would not attack. On Feb. 25, the State Department announced that "the U.S. will refuse North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's demand for a guarantee of 'no hostile intent' to get Pyongyang back into negotiations over its nuclear-weapons programs."

The answer was given by Janice Tang in Japan Today (March 21): "Unpredictability and uncertainty" in the region will help convince the Japanese public of the need to strengthen the alliance to maintain U.S. deterrence in the area and thus accelerate talks on the realignment of U.S. forces." The North Korean bogeyman is also aimed at preventing the reunification of North and South Korea, which could loosen Washington's grip on the peninsula.

However, the real objective of rearming Japan is China. It comes at a time when

the Chinese economy is growing rapidly and Washington fears that Taiwan, which was first separated from China when Japan seized it in 1895, could be reunified with the mainland. Chalmers Johnson, president of the Japan Policy Research Institute, says that "Contrary to the machinations of American neo-cons and Japanese rightists ... the Taiwanese people have revealed themselves to be open to negotiating with China over the timing and terms of reintegration."

Japanese political commentator Yoichi Funabashi observes that East Asia is "becoming less dependent on the U.S. in terms of trade." Tony Karon of Time magazine says that "All over the world, new bonds of trade and strategic cooperation are being forged around the U.S. China has not only begun to displace the U.S. as the dominant player in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC), it is fast emerging as the major trading partner to some of Latin America's largest economies," including Brazil, Argentina, Cuba and Venezuela. In Iran, China is replacing Japan as the main trading partner.

Concerned about losing economic and political clout in the region to China, the U.S. plays the Japan card, raising once more the specter of a newly rearmed imperial Japan and refreshing in the minds of millions in the region memories of genocide and brutal oppression committed by Japanese imperialism. The goal is the same—pillage, super-exploitation and hegemony—but this time Japan is allied with and acting at the behest of U.S. imperialism. □

What about reparations?

Colonialists propose relief for African poverty

By G. Dunkel

More than half the people in Africa live in extreme poverty. The World Bank, an institution responsible for putting many people into these dire straits, defines extreme poverty as a household living on less than \$1 a day.

Extreme poverty means that a household cannot meet its basic needs. Its members go hungry, lack access to health care, education, safe drinking water and basic sanitary needs like soap. Often an extremely poor household doesn't even have a roof to keep the rain off or basic articles of clothing like shoes.

The proportion of extremely poor people in Africa has actually grown in the past 20 years, while the rest of the world has become more prosperous.

Tony Blair, the British prime minister who is this year's convener of the G7 summit meeting of the seven biggest imperialist powers, has announced a plan to "solve" Africa's debt crisis.

Jeffrey Sachs, a U.S. economist with deep ties to the ruling class and a strong connection to the United Nations, just put forth a separate plan in a book called "The End of Poverty." It was summarized in the March 14 edition of Time magazine. Sachs was a consultant in Poland for the counter-revolutionary group Solidarity and worked with Boris Yeltsin in Russia for two years.

Blair's plan is being compared to the "Marshall Plan" created by the United States, which rebuilt Western Europe after World War II, while guaranteeing continued capitalist domination and big profits

for U.S. companies.

According to Kenya's The Standard: "The Blair plan is savvy in its appeal and grand in its vision. It recommends, among other things, the improvement of governance and ending of wars in Africa, provision of more and better aid, debt relief and repeal of global trade rules."

The Standard mentions the skepticism surrounding Blair's plan, growing out of Britain's need to refurbish its image after backing the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. But it sees the issue that will make or break Blair's plan in whether or not "its ownership by the people of Africa" is assured. Of course, it would help if U.S. opposition to a key financial technique was dropped.

Sachs' scheme, in details close to Blair's

but from a U.S. vantage point, is really aimed at convincing the U.S. ruling class that spending \$500 billion—half a trillion dollars—on the "war on terrorism" won't succeed unless a small fraction of it is diverted to alleviating poverty.

Sachs does not feign as much concern about "corruption" as Blair. He even points out that Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan experienced major economic growth in the 1990s although corruption was rampant.

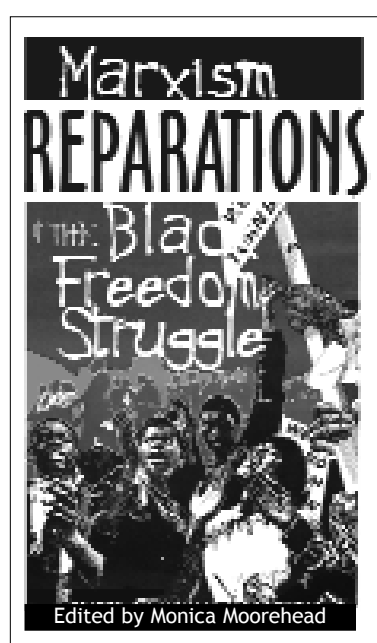
Sachs mentions the experience of Kenya. The country spends two to three times the amount it receives in foreign aid for its rural population to service its international debt. Kenya's budget is being drained, Sachs says, by the "international community"—that is, by the imperialist

banks.

Overall, Africa pays \$13.5 billion a year in debt service, a tremendous capital outflow from the poorest continent to the developed world.

The main problem with these and other plans to alleviate Africa's poverty and enable economic development is that they fail to acknowledge that the countries of Western Europe and North America owe Africa billions of dollars in reparations for three centuries of the slave trade and two centuries of colonialism.

Until the imperialist powers are forced to admit that their growth and prosperity rests on a foundation of slavery and brutal exploitation of Africa, any plan for alleviating poverty is nothing more than putting a Band-Aid on a festering sore. □



- ◆ Racism, national oppression & the right to self-determination *Larry Holmes*
- ◆ Black labor from chattel slavery to wage slavery *Sam Marcy*
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La historia muestra el potencial de la lucha de masas

Por Milt Neidenberg

En una de las más despreciables muestras de cinismo capitalista y de indiferencia hacia l@s obrer@s que trabajan por salario mínimo, el Senado de los Estados Unidos, conocido acertadamente como el “club de los millonarios”, rehusó a principios de marzo aumentar el salario mínimo de \$5.15 por hora trabajada.

Los movimientos contra la guerra y de resistencia al reclutamiento, junto a otros grupos progresistas y organizaciones comunitarias, deben estar alertas al potencial de lucha que se puede desatar por esta decisión del Congreso.

Un vistazo a la historia de la lucha por un salario mínimo puede hacernos hoy entender esta área.

El 6 de marzo fue el 75º aniversario de la protesta nacional sin precedente, contra el desempleo y la pobreza que hizo que 1 millón de manifestantes se lanzaran a las calles en 1930. Fue un día inolvidable.

La protesta surgió poco después del desplome del mercado de acciones en octubre de 1929 que produjo la Gran Depresión de la década de los años treinta. Fue una respuesta militante a la década de los años veinte cuando imperios de riqueza nacieron a costa de l@s trabajador@s y oprimid@s. Bajo banderas que leían “Trabajo o Salario”, más de 110.000 obreros pobres y desemplead@s protestaron en la plaza Union Square de la ciudad de Nueva York.

En Detroit 100.000 manifestantes salieron a las calles y más de 50.000 en Chicago. Una cifra igual llenó las calles de Pittsburg y gran cantidad de personas salió a protestar en Milwaukee, Cleveland, Los Ángeles, San Francisco, Denver, Seattle, y Filadelfia.

“En la ciudad de Nueva York, el mitin fue atacado por 25.000 policías. Cientos de manifestantes fueron golpead@s con macanas y pisotead@s por la policía montada. Un periodista del New York World describiendo al asalto en la plaza de Union Square contó que...detectives, algunos llevando tarjeta de identificación de reporteros, muchos sin llevar insignias, corrían entre la multitud gritando a la vez que golpeaban a aquellos que parecían comunistas... hombres con sangre corriéndole por el rostro y arrastrados hasta el cuartel temporal tirados en el piso.” (Boyer and Morais, “Labor’s Untold Story”)

La historia de la clase trabajadora: una guía de acción

A pesar de estos horribles ataques provocados por la policía que también ocurrieron en otras ciudades, una nueva era en la historia de la lucha de clases se forjaba. Estas luchas produjeron los logros revolucionarios de la clase obrera y leyes progresistas, la Ley del Seguro Social y la Ley Nacional de Relaciones Laborales, entre muchas otras.

De los Consejos de Desempleo, organizados por comunistas, socialistas y trabajador@s militantes conscientes de la lucha de clase, blancos y Negros, surgió el Congreso de Organizaciones Industriales, (CIO). Millones de obrer@s se unieron,

produciendo las huelgas generales y las tomas de plantas de producción de la década de los años treinta. Lucharon por el reconocimiento de los sindicatos y lograron extraer contratos sin precedente de un sector industrial antisindical de la América Corporativa. Un ejército de trabajadores industriales sindicalizados nació, listo para luchar por más reivindicaciones sociales.

En 1938, ganaron la Ley Federal Laboral (de estándar justo de trabajo) o FLSA por las siglas en inglés. Esta elevó el nivel de vida de l@s trabajador@s más pobres y oprimid@s, algo sin precedente en aquellos días. El trabajo infantil, algo que había florecido bajo la tutela de patronos sin escrúpulos, fue prohibido. La edad mínima para trabajar en la mayoría de labores no agrícolas fue de 16 años y 18 años para los trabajos peligrosos. Para estudiantes entre 14 y 15 años de edad, la ley permitió un máximo de tres horas en días de clase, ocho horas en festivos, o 40 horas por semana feriado.

Se estableció un salario mínimo. Un pago de tiempo y medio por el trabajo por más de 40 horas a la semana fue mandado con otros beneficios y protecciones. La FLSA fue el resultado de una década de luchas de clase.

Hoy, todos estos avances sociales y económicos están en peligro.

Desde la recesión del 2000-2001, los salarios reales han seguido cayendo al no haberse podido mantener al ritmo de la inflación. El salario promedio para el 2004 era de \$13.62, o \$8.47 más que el salario mínimo de \$5.15 la hora, el cual no ha variado desde el 1º de septiembre de 1997.

Con un salario mínimo, incluso trabajando 40 horas a la semana, el salario anual es sólo de \$10.500 –muy por debajo del nivel de pobreza de \$16.000 para una familia de tres personas.

En un engañoso debate este año, miembros del Partido Demócrata propusieron un incremento del salario mínimo en tres etapas de 70 centavos cada una durante los próximos 26 meses, a \$7.25. Los Republicanos respondieron con dos etapas de 55 centavos cada una, hasta llegar a \$6.25 y varias propuestas favorecientes a la clase empresarial diseñadas para aumentar la pobreza.

Mientras que las propuestas de los Republicanos eran más amenazantes, las provisiones sugeridas por los Demócratas, aún si fueran adaptadas, no frenarían el empobrecimiento de l@s trabajador@s pobres ni de l@s oprimid@s.

Un reporte de Merrill Lynch de septiembre de 2003 comparó el salario mínimo con el ritmo de aumento del salario de los jefes ejecutivos: “Si el salario mínimo, que era de \$3.80 la hora en 1990, hubiera crecido con la misma rapidez que los salarios de los ejecutivos, hubiera estado en \$21.41 la hora en vez del actual \$5.15”. No importa la razón por la cual este Goliath hizo tal comparación, lo que sí expone es la escandalosa brecha entre ricos y pobres. Y las cifras del 2005 son aún más vergonzosas.

Al proponer un incremento tan pequeño en el salario mínimo, la administración de Bush y los Demócratas están actuando por conveniencia política. Pero pueden estar jugando con fuego. Poniendo unos dólares más en los bolsillos de l@s trabajador@s hubiese sido la acción más prudente.

Represión provoca resistencia

A través de los años, al sobrepasar el sector de servicios de la economía al sector industrial, han habido más demandas iniciadas bajo la FLSA que bajo cualquier otra agencia del gobierno. Hay reportes de abuso de niñ@s trabajador@s, violaciones a las reglas de horas extras y salario mínimo,

falta de entrenamiento en cuestiones de salud y seguridad en el trabajo al igual que de lesiones causadas por condiciones peligrosas de trabajo.

Hoy en día, la Ley Federal Laboral (FLSA) es una farsa – un anexo a la política antiobrera y antisindical de la administración de Bush. Encabezada por la Secretaria de Trabajo Elaine Chao, la mayor parte del lenguaje que sirve supuestamente para proteger a los trabajadores pobres que ganan lo mínimo en el sector de servicios, es pasada por alto por la agencia.

En una encuesta titulada “Detrás de la puerta de la cocina: la desigualdad persistente en la floreciente industria de restaurantes de la ciudad de Nueva York”, un amplio grupo de

académic@s, organizaciones de desarrollo económico de las comunidades, analistas y creador@s de políticas, defensor@s de inmigrantes, organizaciones de trabajador@s, sindicatos y empleadores de trabajador@s de restaurantes, participaron en una investigación de las condiciones de los lugares de trabajo en la industria de restaurantes en la ciudad de Nueva York.

El estudio provee ejemplos precisos de las infracciones de empleadores contra trabajador@s a sueldo mínimo. Las prácticas ilegales incluye la falta de pago por horas de tiempo suplementario (casi una mayoría trabajó más de ocho horas al día). Algun@s trabajaron más de 50 horas a la semana, y otr@s se quejaron de semanas de trabajo de 60 horas. Much@s contaron que recibieron sueldos por debajo del mínimo y otr@s dijeron que los jefes exigieron compartir una parte de sus propinas.

No tenían ningún sindicato. La gran mayoría no tenía seguro de salud, ni permiso de ausencia en casos de enfermedad, ni tiempo pagado por vacaciones, y eran obligad@s a trabajar cuando estaban enferm@s. Much@s informaron sobre violaciones a las reglas de salud y seguridad en el trabajo: cocinas demasiado calientes, pisos resbalosos, falta de medidas de seguridad en las máquinas de cortar, y otras condiciones peligrosas.

Sus quejas terminaron en las máquinas de hacer trizas o en las botes de basura de la FLSA. Las infracciones van mucho más allá de la industria de restaurantes, a otros lugares de servicios: hoteles, supermercados, restaurantes de comida rápida y tiendas al detal, subcontratistas y agencias de trabajo temporero. Wal-Mart, un violador frecuente de la ley, opera con impunidad.

Extrayendo de su amarga experiencia, l@s trabajador@s a sueldo mínimo, la gran

parte inmigrantes, indocumentados, mujeres y jóvenes de color, l@s que salen de las secundarias y universidades y aquell@s que han dejado sus estudios, pueden estar al borde de la paciencia.

Hay un rápido cambio de personal entre est@s trabajador@s, pero habrá más estabilidad al ser aún más difícil encontrar empleo. Podrían brotar furiosas protestas espontáneas en cualquier momento, especialmente de jóvenes quienes representan muchas nacionalidades en estas industrias.

La AFL-CIO tiene la potencialidad de ser catalizadora de los trabajadores no-organizados. Es sumamente importante para el desarrollo del movimiento sindical que los líderes de los sindicatos salgan del embrollo de debates y empiecen a construir un movimiento independiente que abarque a toda la clase trabajadora para que profundicen sus raíces en este importante sector de la clase obrera.

Los hechos son más elocuentes que las palabras. La historia ha confirmado, especialmente por las luchas de clase de los años 30, que una marea ascendiente eleva todos los barcos. □

