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GM declares war on auto workers

Threatens to slash retirees' health benefits

By Dianne Mathiowetz
Doraville, Ga.

As tens of thousands of General Motors employees clocked out at the end of their shifts on July 1—to begin an annual two-week nationwide shutdown for inventory and maintenance—questions about their job security, health-care costs and pensions remained unanswered.

At a June 7 stockholders' meeting in New York, GM Chair and Chief Executive Officer Rick Wagoner had announced that the giant corporation would cut 25,000 hourly jobs by 2008. Hit with falling stock prices and car sales, the auto boss blamed health-care costs, especially for the company's almost 500,000 retirees, as the source of GM's financial woes.

Claiming that \$1,550 of each vehicle's cost goes to pay for medical benefits, Wagoner threatened to unilaterally abandon sections of the union contract. He told the United Auto Workers that it had until June 30 to figure out ways to pare down health-care expenses.

Within days the union convened an emergency meeting of local presidents and shop committee chairs in Detroit. UAW President Ron Gettelfinger rejected any notion of reopening

What happened to GM workers' deferred wages?

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the contract to alter health-care benefits. But he said the union would continue to talk with GM management, looking for a "win-win" solution.

War on workers' benefits

GM spokesperson soon stated that there is "no deadline." But it is clear that the corporation has declared war on hard-won benefits that have provided current and retired auto workers a sense of security.

For many years, UAW contracts have provided health coverage with no monthly premium or deductible for GM's hourly employees and retirees. Only with the last contract in 2003 were modest co-pays for doctor visits and prescriptions instituted.

In the late 1970s, GM had an hourly work force of almost half a million. Now, after three decades of plant closings, outsourcing and high-tech automation, there are 111,000 active employees in the North American division and almost

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Finding the right word

By Leslie Feinberg

"We had no words for ourselves," stressed Harry Hay. "That's the important point—we didn't have words."

Organizers of the Mattachine Society were trying to build a movement to battle same-sex oppression in 1951. But how could they organize—write a leaflet or an article or hold a consciousness-raising discussion—without language that precisely conveyed the same meaning to large numbers of people?

Descriptions of sex between two people of the same sex existed in writing—it was codified in every law book, with harsh penalties attached. But the word "homosexual" didn't first become an entry in a U.S. dictionary until 1938. More dictionaries only followed suit after World War II.

Mattachine leaders rejected the word. The term had been so criminalized and pathologized that it didn't socially invoke the meaning "same-sexual."

Other terms did exist, of course. Most were epithets and slurs that cut painfully deep.

Chosen language and euphemisms for same-sex love and variant gender expression developed among smaller social circles of what today would be referred to as LGBT people in towns and cities, among different nationalities and economic classes. But there was no recognizable term of pride that could be used for mass political organizing.

Instead, the Mattachine founders set out to coin what they thought was a new word: "homophile." The term was drawn from the New Latin *philia*—friendship—which in turn had derived from the Greek word *philos*—loving.

Homophile: The word meant same-sex affection and loving.

"I really thought we had invented something new," recalled Hay. "I was astonished when Rudi [Gernreich] told me that he remembered the same word from the Hirschfeld movement."

The voice of the European movement had been so violently silenced or dispersed by fascism that it took those who had escaped—like Gernreich, a gay Jewish émigré from Austria—to retain and spread the knowledge of its gains in language and concepts.

As the Mattachine leaders crafted a term, it in turn helped hone their own thinking, like a sharp shovel blade. Hay in particular began digging around in history, sifting for answers: "Who are gay people? Where have we been in history? And most important, What might we be for?"

Early socialists like Edward Carpenter had asked these same questions half a century earlier. So had the leaders of the German Homosexual Emancipation movement.

But now these questions were being asked by a new generation of communist organizers looking to give their movement a historical foundation.

Marxist tools

Harry Hay was the Mattachine member most concerned with finding the historical roots of same-sex expression in order to understand where and why the oppression arose. He had for many years been a Marxist educator. He'd taught a series of popular lectures examining folk music from the standpoint of what it revealed about the historical conflicts between the laboring and ruling classes.

He was a voracious researcher who had spent years scouring the work of anthropologists, particularly those writing from a historical materialist viewpoint, looking for mention of those who lived in a social role outside of

"heterosexual man" or "heterosexual woman."

Hay had explored the role of women in pre-class societies and the remnants of matrilineal traditions on the European continent. The Catholic Church—characterized by Frederick Engels as the political party of feudalism—had carried out a counter-revolutionary wave of terror to eradicate them.

Hay also studied the more complex paths of sex/gender/sexuality in Native nations on this continent.

He found a great deal of what he was looking for. Enough to develop his own ground-breaking survey and analysis of the history of "gay" people—a study he continued for many years.

The gist of the early conclusions he drew from his research can be found in talks he began to present at Mattachine meetings and discussion groups in 1953. "The Homosexual and History—An Invitation to Further Study" is reprinted in "Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder," edited by Will Roscoe. (Beacon Press: 1996)

Hay stressed that "Since a proper coordination of the social history of the Homosexual in Society has yet to be attempted, some of my material organizations and coordinations must be regarded as speculation. But, even so, it is speculation carefully molded in the anthropological tradition of Lewis Morgan, whose 19th-century speculative reconstruction of American Indian clan or tribe culture out of similarities between the Iroquois Matriarchate and the Hawaiian group marriage culture was authenticated completely in the 20th century by Boas, Benedict and Densmore in the Americas, Herskovitz in the Caribbean, and Mead in Melanesia."

Frederick Engels and Karl Marx thought the work of Morgan was as profound and revolutionary a contribution to anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution was to biology.

Morgan documented "family" relationships among communal peoples that were completely unlike the father-dominated families in class-divided societies. Descent in these cooperative, pre-class societies was determined through the mothers, creating radically different familial formations—what Hay is referring to as Matriarchate.

Engels based his book "The Family, Private Property and the State" on Morgan's research. Engels made a landmark contribution to the struggle for women's liberation by showing how, as group labor grew more skilled, the accumulation of more than what was needed for immediate survival became wealth. He documented how this wealth developed in the male sphere of labor—primarily through animal domestication—and eventually led to the overthrow of matrilineal societies and their replacement with patriarchal family units designed to pass on wealth to male heirs.

"Leaning upon the coherent picture presented by these great scholars," Hay said he was "attempting a new correlation in assigning similar roles and developments to identical historical and cultural artifacts as they appeared earlier in the Mediterranean and later in Western Europe."

It was in this historical nexus between pre-class and class-divided societies that Hay looked for what he described as "the long-hidden outline of truth—and within that truth the real measure of the Homosexual's great contribution to society, to history, and to progress."

Hay traced the modern legal hounding of homosexuals in California back to that earliest accumulation of wealth at the dawn of class society. □



PART 41

The entire Lavender & Red series, which explores the history of the socialist movement and the struggle for sexual & gender liberation, can be read online at www.workers.org.

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WW CALENDAR

LOS ANGELES

Sat., July 16

Brunch & book signing with Leslie Feinberg. Feinberg is a managing editor of WW newspaper and an author of *Stone Butch Blues*, and *Trans Liberation*, among other works. Sponsored by Workers World Party. 11 a.m.-1 p.m. At 5274 W Pico Blvd, Suite 203. For info (323) 936-1416.

Sat., July 16

IAC Forum: Lavender & Red, featuring Leslie Feinberg, lesbian transgender author and activist. 2 p.m. At the Gay & Lesbian Center, Village at Ed Gould Plaza, 1125 N McCadden Pl. (one block E of Highland, N of Santa Monica Blvd). For info (323) 936-7266.

NEW YORK

Fri., July 8

Workers World Party Meeting: Dianne Mathiowetz, GM assembly parts worker for 29 years and WWP leader in Atlanta, on GM's declaration of war on autoworkers. 7 pm. (Dinner at 6:30) At 55 W. 17 St., 5th Fl., Manhattan. For info (212) 627-2994.

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Anti-war group calls for unity

Sept. 24

The following statement is from the Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC) in support of a Sept. 24, 2005, anti-war protest in Washington, DC. A Sept. 24 coalition, initiated by the ANSWER coalition, also includes TONC, National Council of Arab-Americans, Haiti Support Network, Alliance for a Just and Lasting Peace in the Philippines, Muslim American Society (MAS) Freedom Foundation and National Lawyers Guild. Some of the Sept. 24 demands are: "Stop the war in Iraq—Bring the troops home now! End colonial occupation from Iraq to Haiti to Palestine and everywhere!"

Go to troopsoutnow.org for more information on how to get involved in building for this important mobilization.

The Troops Out Now Coalition on Palestine and the Sept. 24 anti-war protest

As TONC works to revive and re-energize the struggle to not only end, but defeat, the colonial occupation of Iraq, we

will walk every extra mile and spare no effort in our efforts, along with others, to forge greater unity in the anti-war movement. The central question is, how can this best be done?

We don't think that you can make the movement "broader" by narrowing its appeal and relevance. We believe that the idea that the movement should strive to look more white, colorless and vapid, and that it should be fearful of looking too Arab, Black, Latin and Asian, is a false notion. There is no power or future in a movement based on this notion. Either the composition, politics and outlook of the anti-war movement in this country is going to reflect the world, or it's going to be little more than an irrelevant reflection of a distant past.

Clearly the focus of the movement is Iraq. But we must resist any effort to either exclude or minimize the occupation of Palestine as a focus of the movement. We must do this because the struggle for the Right to Return and against the occupation of Palestine is central to the struggle

of Arab people and it is impossible to separate the Palestinian question from Iraq. Trying to separate the occupation of Iraq from the occupation of Palestine is, to us, the same as trying to separate the struggle against the war from the struggle against racism at home.

Moreover, instead of abetting anti-Arab and Muslim racism and repression, the movement must spare no effort in facilitating the widest participation of the Arab and Muslim community in the Sept. 24 anti-war protest in Washington, and in all of our activities. The movement reached such a high-water mark at the anti-war march on Washington in April 2002, when after years of struggle within the movement, the anti-war movement embraced the struggle of Palestine, and for the first time in history, the streets of the capital were filled with tens of thousands of Arabs and Muslims marching arm and arm with anti-war protesters.

The movement has moved forward on Palestine and the Troops Out Now Coalition is determined to fight any back-

sliding. Our friends in the National Council of Arab Americans, as well as others in the Arab and Muslim community, have engaged TONC on this important issue. We have told our friends and we want to make it clear to all that the Troops Out Now Coalition supports the call for unity in the anti-war movement for the Sept. 24, 2005, mobilization on the basis of the political program achieved on March 20, 2004, the first anniversary of the war on Iraq. We support, as a basis of the September 24 mobilization, the Arab American and Muslim community in the political slogan: End Colonial Occupation from Iraq to Palestine to Haiti, Support the Palestinian People's Right to Return. Meaningful solidarity with the Arab and Muslim community will truly make Sept. 24 broader and stronger. TONC believes that this is what the world wants to see, and what the imperialists don't want.

TONC hopes to build unity on this basis for Sept. 24 and beyond to unleash the full mass potential of the struggle to shut the war down. □

THE COST OF WAR

As people came down to the beach near the Santa Monica pier on the weekend of July 4, looking for a day of fun in the sun, they were reminded of the human cost of war. Veterans for Peace and Topanga Peace Alliance, along with countless other volunteers, had put up 1,745 symbols representing the U.S. soldiers who have died needlessly in the war in Iraq.

Every weekend these groups put up crosses, stars and moons to represent the dead soldiers, so many of them fresh-faced young people of color.

Children were the most affected by the day's events, asking their parents as they gazed at the symbols and photos of soldiers, "Why did these people die?"

Family, friends and strangers leave notes and mementos of sympathy, solidarity and outrage for the fallen soldiers. One sign says that if symbols were put up to represent all the Iraqis who have died in this bloody war, they would fill the entire beach. This sad fact never makes it into the mainstream media.

As the day came to a close, children stopped playing to assist in the removal of the crosses and other symbols.

—Photo and story by J. La Riva



'Eminent domain' in Philly

City readies seizure of workers' homes

By Betsey Piette
Philadelphia

Over 80 people gathered in West Philly's Clark Park June 29 for the premiere of the film "All for the Taking." This work documents the stories of residents affected by Philadelphia's urban-renewal program, and of housing activists fighting eminent-domain abuse.

The film was the first of a biweekly outdoor summer film series, now in its third year, sponsored by the Philadelphia International Action Center.

Since the city of Philadelphia established the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative in April 2001, over 5,334 properties have been scheduled for demolition. Carolyn Thomas's home on Hoops Street was one of them.

In May 2003, Thomas, age 62, found a notice stuck under her door informing her that the city planned to demolish her home.

Thomas, who attended the film premiere along with producer and director George McCollough and co-producer

Joy Butts, told those gathered in Clark Park: "I worked all my life to acquire the little bit I have. Their letter basically told me that the city had already taken my home, which my parents had owned before me. I knew I would have to fight to take it back."

NTI has a budget of \$1.6 billion. But the city offered Thomas only \$40,000 for her home, half of which was for moving costs.

Thomas fought because this "would only leave the option of moving to another blighted area that would be subject to demolition as well."

Because she fought back, Thomas was eventually able to get over \$70,000, nearly twice the amount first offered. However, to add insult to injury, the city sent her a bill for over \$9,000 for demolishing her property. They also turned off her electric and phone service before she had a chance to pack to move.

Under the NTI project, Philadelphia has authorized the seizure of thousands of homes. The object is to create a massive land bank to entice private developers to rebuild some of its most historic

neighborhoods.

Philadelphia's program is part of a nationwide epidemic of eminent-domain abuse. Using the vaguely defined "public" purpose of eminent domain, developers have convinced governments to seize the land they desire.

On June 23, a five-to-four Supreme Court decision in a New London, Conn., eminent-domain case gave the green light for wealthy developers to snatch the land and homes of working and poor people without

just compensation. Cities can claim that development will "create jobs and increase municipal tax revenue."

Al Alston of the Philadelphia African-American Business and Residents Associ-



WW PHOTO: BETSEY PIETTE

Carolyn Thomas, left, whose home was seized by the city, at film showing in park with co-producer Joy Butts.

ation, who is also featured in the documentary, told the Clark Park audience, "The 'Blight Plan' was allegedly to improve communities, but the real plan

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What happened to GM's \$25-B cash fund?

By Jerry Goldberg
Detroit

In the face of \$1.3 billion in losses the first quarter of this year, General Motors has demanded that the United Auto Workers either negotiate massive cuts in health benefits for its retirees or the corporation will unilaterally impose the cuts.

The UAW has been in the forefront among major unions in negotiating significant benefits that have set the precedent for the entire labor movement. About 40 years ago, the union won "30 and out." This means that autoworkers who work 30 years in the plants can retire with their full pensions, regardless of age. The idea of this benefit was to open up jobs for younger workers to enter the factories. The key to 30 and out is that UAW retirees not only receive a fairly decent income, but also are entitled to almost all the benefits of active workers, and most significantly free health care.

Unfortunately, despite this benefit, due to GM's relentless restructuring, today there are only 111,000 UAW GM workers, compared to 225,000 20 years ago, and over 400,000 in the 1960s. GM is crying crocodile tears that with only 111,000 active workers, it no longer can afford to pay health benefits to nearly half a million retirees.

However, seldom reported in the media is that these 111,000 workers produced 4.6 million cars and trucks last year, only 400,000 less than the 5 million cars and trucks produced by 225,000 workers 20 years ago. In other words, productivity has virtually doubled.

GM accumulated huge cash fund

In fact, over the last few years General Motors was enjoying huge profits that allowed it to put away a \$25-billion cash fund. The losses today have a lot more to do with GM's choice to continue making high-profit SUVs and trucks at a time when gas prices are climbing and the public is clamoring for fuel-efficient cars like the hybrid Toyota Prius, which has propelled that corporation to the top of the automotive world.

In the face of United Airlines' successfully using bankruptcy to stop paying the pensions it owes the workers, and in the face of corporation after corporation successfully eliminating health benefits for salaried retirees—the auto supplier Visteon just made such an announcement—GM wants to take advantage of its temporary losses to bluster the UAW into accepting a fundamental reduction in retiree benefits.

Thus far, the UAW leadership has not caved in. The union is refusing to reopen the contract which is in effect until 2007, and is demanding that General Motors essentially open its books and prove that these health benefits are behind GM's losses before the union negotiates any fundamental cuts in benefits. Naturally, that is not what the company has in mind.

The entire ruling class understands the stakes in this struggle, and significant sectors are pushing GM to unilaterally take away the UAW retiree health benefits. Articles are appearing in newspapers across the country quoting so-called auto industry experts like Brian Johnson of the New York investment firm of Sanford and

Bernstein, who argues that under bourgeois law "GM can unilaterally and immediately terminate health benefits for most retirees without the fear of a legal battle."

Benefits are deferred wages

In so arguing, Johnson notes that while under ERISA (the Employee Retirement Income Security Act), pension benefits are vested and thus guaranteed (except when the corporation goes bankrupt as a United Airlines), ERISA explicitly excludes letting health benefits for retirees be vested. They are called "welfare benefits" under the law.

The fact that health benefits are not vested under ERISA was the basis for the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in Sprague versus General Motors, in which the court upheld GM's eliminating fully paid health benefits to 84,000 GM salaried retirees in 1998, including 50,000 who took early retirement relying on this promise.

However, in another important decision by the Sixth Circuit, UAW versus Yard-Man, the court upheld the right of union retirees to their health benefits. In that decision the court got it right, holding that retiree benefits are typically understood as a form of delayed compensation or reward for past services. In other words, pensions are owed to the workers for the labor they produced and should not be capriciously stolen by the corporations.

It goes without saying that no union can rely on the courts to protect the pensions of its members. Only by asserting the power of the workers to shut down the corporation can the pensions be protected. That's how they were won in the first place.

And it is precisely the fear of unleashing such a struggle that is causing General Motors to proceed somewhat cautiously in the current period, though the attack could come at any time.

In the meantime, it's up to the union movement as a whole to take on the struggle to protect and guarantee the pensions of the workers as the workers' property.

It's time to demand that ERISA be changed so that retiree health benefits are protected and vested under the law.

It's time to demand that the bankruptcy laws be immediately changed so that the workers' pensions are off limits.

Incredibly, just a couple of months ago, the bankruptcy law WAS changed to virtually eliminate the right of an average worker to use bankruptcy to escape massive and onerous debts, which usually result from a health-care crisis. Well, why shouldn't the law be changed to take pensions off the chopping block of the corporate vultures?

What's needed more than ever is a massive mobilization of the workers, a Solidarity Day III, where the union movement, by bringing out millions to Washington, D.C., can reassert a workers' agenda for a living wage, health care for all, money for the cities and not the Pentagon's wars, and protecting the workers' hard-earned pensions.

At a time when there is a debate over how to reinvigorate the labor movement, nothing would do so more than the unions hitting the streets in massive numbers on behalf of the entire working class.

Goldberg worked for many years at Ford's Michigan Truck Plant.

Threatens cuts in medical coverage

GM opens war on auto workers

Continued from page 1

500,000 retirees. According to GM, some 70 percent of its total 2004 health-care costs were for retirees.

In Wagoner's address to GM stockholders, he complained that companies such as Toyota, Honda, Mitsubishi and Nissan have an unfair advantage over GM in the U.S. market because their production facilities aren't saddled with union-mandated health insurance and pension costs. Likewise, even vehicles imported from Europe generate higher profits because of national health-care programs and government-backed pensions there.

At the Doraville, Ga., GM plant, some 3,100 workers produce the mini-vans known as "crossover vehicles." Here, the announcement that 25,000 jobs would be cut by the year 2008 caused a wide range of emotions—from anxiety to anger, from resignation to resolve.

Doraville, built in 1947, is one of the oldest production plants still operating. It occupies 157 acres of valuable land on the I-285 perimeter interstate that encircles Atlanta. This area is undergoing upscale development. The facility is always high on the list of potential closings.

Local 10's elected leaders have long resisted GM's attempts to replace work rules with a form of "team concept" that destroys seniority rights and increases work load. High-ranking GM bosses have openly threatened to shut down production of the crossover van with the 2008 model unless the Doraville workers conform to this developing national program.

The current national contract expires in the fall of 2007. Under its terms GM cannot permanently close a plant. However, it can temporarily stop production if inventories are too high. Or it can implement a "de-rate," reducing the number of vehicles produced per hour, which would cause layoffs.

Doraville management has announced a "de-rate" program, reducing the number of vans produced per hour to 54, to take effect on Sept. 6. Exactly how many layoffs will result has not yet been announced. But for workers with under five years' seniority, this is most unsettling news. Their futures are filled with uncertainty.

Likewise, workers with 30 years of service who can retire are unsure what to do, given that the pension benefits they had counted on might be reduced in 2007.

Great pressure is being brought on the union, both nationally and locally, to make concessions to save jobs. Every day

there is another announcement of major corporations declaring bankruptcy or closing plants and stores. So far, labor unions, including the UAW, have not responded with a united fight-back program designed to galvanize workers and their families into an organized, energizing resistance.

Such a campaign could demand national health-care insurance, fully funded pension programs and a viable Social Security system.

Local and state governments across the country are responding to GM's announcement of looming job cuts by scrambling to offer tax breaks and other inducements to keep their GM facilities open. It is estimated that for every auto production job, 10 additional jobs are created in a community. By announcing now that it will cut 25,000 jobs in 2008, GM will be able to whipsaw competing offers and extort even more money from localities before making its final decisions.

It is clear from Wagoner's June 7 speech that GM seeks to bolster its profits at the expense of its workers, retirees and the tax-paying public at large.

Ironically, just days after the auto boss declared war on the GM work force, the company appealed to its employees to lobby Congress not to raise gas mileage standards because that would cause job losses.

Although GM bemoans its high medical costs, it has not used its tremendous influence to push for national health-care insurance. Instead it spends millions of dollars to advertise gas-guzzling but high-

profit sports utility vehicles and heavy trucks, and to keep mandated fuel-efficiency standards to a minimum.

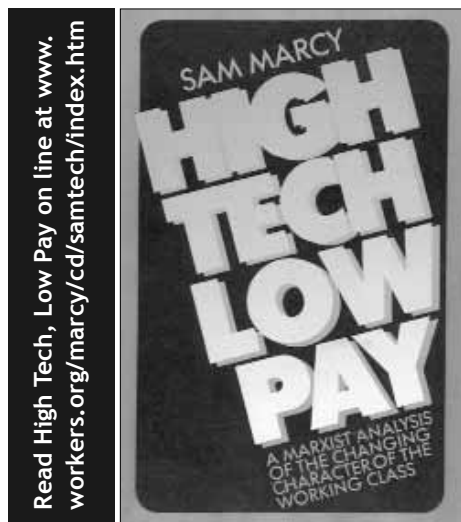
Wagoner placed all the blame for GM's recent financial losses on its employees. Assembly line workers at Doraville don't buy that. They currently build over 900 vans a day, starting from the rolls of raw metal and ending with a finished vehicle. For the last three years the Doraville workers have placed first or second in rankings for the most efficient van production plant in the United States.

Multi-million-dollar bonuses and obscenely extravagant pension plans for top management are a slap in the face to the hundreds of thousands of workers who have labored in the past and continue now to labor in the heat and noise and fumes of auto plants.

Since the June 7 stockholders' meeting, GM has announced a new sales promotion. The public would receive the same discount as employees on GM dealers' stock. June sales figures skyrocketed, up some 42 percent over last year's numbers. The all-important market-share percentage claimed by GM rose to 30 percent.

Some 17 million vehicles have been sold during this promotion, which proclaims that "everyone will be treated like a GM employee." With GM employees looking at the loss of 25,000 jobs, reduced health-care benefits, loss of pensions and increased work loads, that's no bargain.

Mathiowetz is a member of UAW Local 10, Doraville, Ga., who has worked more than 29 years on the assembly line.



Labor Department takes aim at unions

By Sue Davis

Part of the mission statement of the U.S. Department of Labor is to promote workers' "welfare" and strengthen "free collective bargaining." This language was wrested out of the government in earlier periods of labor militancy.

But more and more in recent years, the DOL has turned that topsy-turvy. It has devised a variety of weapons—all paid for by workers' tax dollars—to defend the bosses, attack workers' rights, and harass, penalize and impede union organizing.

Since 2001 when Bush took office, the numbers of DOL staff assigned to prosecute employer violations of laws on occupational safety, enforce the right to organize and labor standards on such things as child labor, minimum wage and overtime, have been significantly reduced. That sends the bosses a clear signal: you're free to exploit and oppress workers, especially the lowest-paid, unorganized immigrants, women, people of color and youth.

Meanwhile, over the same time period, the staff for the Office of Labor-Management Standards, which investigates and audits unions' financial records, received a 60-percent increase in its budget and added 94 new staff positions.

"We haven't seen anything like this before," said Bob Frase, executive assistant to the secretary-treasurer of the Paper Workers (PACE), which represents 275,000 workers. (Reuters, March 8) Last January the PACE local that represents workers at two Houston-area refineries was audited for two weeks.

"They said it was our first audit since 1983," said David Taylor, secretary-treasurer of PACE Local 4-227. "My secretary's been here 25 years and she said she had never seen this before." The DOL told the local to reclassify some line items, but found no irregularities on its fishing expedition.

Though the DOL claims its purpose is to fight corruption in unions, the AFL-CIO disputes that. Noting that the labor federation is at the top of the DOL's audit list,

President John J. Sweeney said, "[It's] pure political payback for the labor movement's opposition to the president's anti-worker policies." (New York Times, April 17) The Reuters dispatch also called it "payback for opposing President Bush's reelection."

But the aggressive auditing policy was well underway before the election. Last year the DOL revised its revenue reporting requirements for unions, imposing extraordinarily detailed demands "that far exceed those placed on corporations," wrote David Moberg in the March 8 In These Times.

The new forms are so complicated, Edward P. Wendel, general counsel of the United Food and Commercial Workers, told the Times, that "We've spent untold hours on it—hundreds, thousands of hours more [than before]." AFL-CIO spokesperson Suzanne Folkes told Reuters, "It means diverting time from critical work to a massive amount of paperwork." And it also drains dues money that could otherwise have been spent providing member services or organizing new workers into the union movement.

But neglecting workers' rights and aggressive audits are not the only anti-worker weapons in the DOL's arsenal.

Last year the Bush administration

stripped hundreds of thousands of government workers of union representation when it reorganized dozens of offices into the Department of Homeland Security. "Republicans plan to follow up Bush's success last year in curtailing overtime protection with legislation that would make both overtime payments and the 40-hour week optional for employers," writes Moberg. He also notes that the Bush administration supports "right-to-work laws that prohibit requiring employees in a unionized workplace to pay dues to unions."

And the National Labor Relations Board, which was established as a supposedly unbiased arbiter of boss/worker disputes, under Bush "has adopted the viewpoint of the ardently anti-union National Right-to-work Committee," Fred Feinstein, NLRB general counsel under the Clinton administration, told Moberg. The Bush-appointed NLRB chair is none other than Robert Battista, the union-busting attorney who represented the Detroit newspapers in the 1990s.

It must be noted, however, that unions are not the only non-profit groups harassed by the Bush administration. Last year the NAACP and at least 60 other tax-exempt groups devoted to civil rights and social justice were investigated by the Internal Revenue Service.

No wrongdoing was found.

But it's not only the Republicans who are at fault. When did the Democrats ever filibuster to defend the right of workers shifted into Homeland Security to be represented by unions, or to protest regressive overtime regulations?

The leaders of the union movement have relied on the Democratic Party to be a "friend of labor," spending vast amounts on elections that could have been used to organize and strengthen their base. This reliance on the other party of big business has gotten them nothing but a further shift to the right.

The NLRB, no matter which party has been in office, has functioned to put restraints on the working class. Whenever the NLRB has been forced to recognize workers' rights, it was as a result of pressure from the struggle in the streets and on the picket lines.

All these attacks on workers and the oppressed are part and parcel of the war on the home front. They're part of the drive to dismantle Social Security, underfund Medicaid and Medicare, end subsidized housing, starve public education and strengthen racist, sexist, anti-LGBT divisions. What's needed now is a strong, united insurgency of the workers and oppressed determined to fight for what's rightfully theirs. □

After NLRB ruling

NYU nixes recognition of grad-student union

By Bryan G. Pfeifer

In a clear attempt to smash the 950-member graduate-employee union at New York University, administrators recently announced that as of Aug. 31 they would no longer recognize the union, an affiliate of Auto Workers Local 2110.

"NYU should no longer use a union as an intermediary with our students; accordingly, the University should not negotiate a new contract with the UAW," read a June 16 memorandum issued by Executive Vice President Jacob Lew and Provost David McLaughlin.

In place of the union, the administration proposes a "representative" student group to "interact" with the bosses. The administration claims that through this group a grievance process and written rights and responsibilities for graduate and teaching assistants would be adhered to.

But union leaders and members aren't fooled. Without a legally binding union contract the student-workers have virtually no protections and rights. And graduate student-worker unions are often a stable ally for progressive organizations at universities.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled in July 2004 that graduate students at private colleges are solely students, not workers, and cannot form unions. This ruling reversed a 2000 Labor Board ruling that graduate students did indeed have the right to organize as workers and that private universities like NYU therefore had to recognize their unions.

After a multi-faceted organizing drive that included dozens of job actions and various protests, NYU recognized the graduate student union in March 2001. Union and management negotiated a five-year contract, retroactive to 2000 and due to expire this Aug. 31.

Graduate employees who work at public universities are public employees, with labor rights governed under different federal and state laws.

Whether at public or private universities, graduate employees teach classes, often with hundreds of undergraduate students, conduct research, grade papers, host review sessions and often do very

similar work to that of tenured professors. But they are paid a pittance, have few or no benefits, and live in virtual poverty. They often work with inadequate or no support staff or facilities while simultaneously attempting to complete their own graduate work and, in many cases, raise children.

In response to the NYU decision, Graduate Student Organizing Committee-UAW 2110 president Michael Palm, a doctoral candidate in American studies, said the graduate employees are fighting for their union as they have been doing for years.

"We're very disappointed and quite frankly appalled, but we're definitely not surprised," Palm said June 16. "[We're] appalled that a supposedly liberal institution would not respect the overwhelming desire of its graduate students to bargain collectively as a union.

"What this means for us is that we're now organizing for recognition, just like we were five years ago. I see them backing us into a corner where we will have no choice [but] to strike."

Many unions, including the 2,400-member Graduate Employee Organization, UAW Local 2322 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, support the NYU graduate employees. In an emergency email to its members, the Local 2322 union leadership called on its members to support their sisters and brothers at NYU.

Likewise, the AFL-CIO asked readers of its June 23 "Voice at Work" email update to contact the NYU administration and demand that it recognize the union.

According to the NYU administration, a 30-day period of notice and comment on the proposed decision will run through July 16. Email ga.dialogue@nyu.edu to demand the administration recognize the union.

For more information see www.2110uaw.org/gseu.

Michigan workers say

'Raise minimum wage!'

Nearly 1,000 union and community activists gathered outside the Michigan State Capitol Building in Lansing on June 29. Called together by the Michigan AFL-CIO, they demanded that the legislature not adjourn for the summer until the lawmakers had raised the minimum wage and extended unemployment benefits. Michigan's unemployment rate of over 7 percent is one of the highest in the country and the state's minimum wage is still the federal \$5.15 an hour. Twelve other states have already raised their state minimum wages.



—Story and photo by David Sole

Police rampage preceded racist attack in Queens

By LeiLani Dowell
New York

The racist attack on three Black men in the Howard Beach section of Queens in New York has garnered national attention. On the night of June 29, a group of white men viciously attacked three Black men and chased them through the streets of the neighborhood. When 22-year-old Glenn Moore tripped on a lawn, the assailants beat him with a metal bat, causing injuries that sent him to the hospital in serious condition.

The events of June 29 are strikingly reminiscent of an attack that occurred mere blocks away in 1986, when a Black man, running for his life from a mob of white men, was hit and killed by a car.

Knowing history well, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is running for reelection this year, was quick to respond to the incident, denouncing hate crimes and going on the record to say that "racist attacks will not be tolerated." In the

sixties, racist atrocities in the south—the bombing in Birmingham, the killing of the civil rights workers in Mississippi—coupled with troop demoralization led many youth of color to question why they should fight in Vietnam when the real enemy is at home.

The rising revolutionary consciousness among the Black masses and the soldiers was a big factor in the U.S. defeat.

The last thing the ruling class wants now, when they can't recruit adequate numbers of ranks to the military to carry out their goal of world empire, is a social upheaval.

The media has latched on to the idea that the victims were in the neighborhood to steal a car, somehow justifying the hate crime. Although the picture most often shown in the papers of Glenn Moore has him in military fatigues, discussion about his participation in the military is noticeably absent from the press.

Meanwhile, what has received little attention in the bourgeois media in the past few weeks has been the racist profil-

ing that occurred over three days in another section of Queens. Police in the 105th Precinct of Cambria Heights went on a rampage of racist profiling from June 14-16, arresting 181 Black men on misdemeanor charges and so-called "quality-of-life" violations. They made 93 arrests on the first day alone.

The dragnet was in response to an incident in which a cop allegedly got shot in the leg by his own gun while trying to arrest a man for smoking marijuana. The officer had described his assailant as a Black man in his early 20s, with a medium build and a medium complexion. Despite this, many of those arrested fit only two aspects of this characterization: they were Black and male.

Although all the alleged charges were minor, the Queens district attorney's office reports that every one arrested was handcuffed, taken to central booking, fingerprinted and spent 24 hours or more in



the court system. In addition, several of those arrested report that they were grabbed by police with guns drawn, some thrown to the ground, and taken to jail without any explanation.

In a city that saw Black male unemployment rates of almost 50 percent in 2004, these men—many of whom are youth—will now have an arrest record whenever they go to apply for a job.

While Bloomberg may have pledged that the city "would not tolerate" racial attacks in response to the Howard Beach case, he has been silent about the situation in Cambria Heights, short of decrying the "dangers" that police officers face.

In respect to the Howard Beach incident, two of the three assailants who were caught are being held without bail on charges of first-degree assault as a hate crime and first-degree robbery. But the third, Frank Agostini, has not been charged. Agostini is the son of a detective in the Brooklyn robbery squad. □

Baltimore Central Booking

Another jail death sparks new protests

By Sharon Black
Baltimore

Protests have continued here around the case of Raymond Smoot, who was brutally beaten to death by guards at Baltimore's Central Booking. On July 1 Smoot's family and supporters from the Emergency Coalition for Justice gathered in front of the office of the state's attorney during rush hour to call for the indictment of those who murdered Smoot.

The state's attorney's office has yet to issue indictments.

Smoot's 15-year-old grandniece, Tiyanna Decator, read a poignant poem asking "Why? Why?" while other family members gathered at adjacent corners chanting, "Tell the truth, stop the lies, Raymond Smoot didn't have to die" and "Tear down the walls."

Denise Lowery, an organizer with the All Peoples Congress, helped family members carry a blown-up picture of Smoot, whose face had been brutally bashed. Lowery exclaimed, "This is Baltimore's Emmett Till." Emmett Till, a 14-year-old from Chicago, was brutally beaten to death by racists in Mississippi in 1955. Nearly a quarter million people viewed his battered body. Outrage over this atrocity against a child gave impetus to the civil rights movement.

The protest over the killing of Smoot followed a week of events focusing on the brutal conditions in city jails. On Wednesday, June 29, the family of Lennard Benjamin held a vigil and protest in front of Central Booking, joined by the Smoot family and the All Peoples Congress. Benjamin, 23, had been beaten to death in his cell and died on June 23, allegedly by another inmate. He had worked in a supermarket in Northwest Baltimore before enrolling in classes at Baltimore City Community College.

Over 100 people gathered in the pouring rain for several hours to denounce the jail system. Dominique Gasque, a cousin

of Benjamin, proclaimed, "We don't want our brother to have died in vain. Before I breathe my last breath on earth, there will be a change in the system so others don't have to suffer anymore."

At a town hall meeting organized on Monday, June 27, by the Baltimore Chapter of the NAACP, protesters and family members continued to pursue the case. Renee Washington, All Peoples Congress organizer, confronted the city's acting police commissioner about their policies of "zero tolerance" and an arrest quota system. Police murdered Washington's fiancé five years ago.

Acting Police Commissioner Leonard Hamm was visibly rattled. He tried to deny the existence of a quota system, but community organizers have police documents to prove its existence.

Donnetta Kidd, Smoot's niece, demanded that State's Attorney Patricia Jessamy indict the guards who murdered her uncle. In response, Jessamy said that her office would meet with the family. A representative of the FBI, which is doing a so-called civil rights violation investigation, was silent during the back and forth with the community.

While the community continues to mobilize, Judge John M. Glynn continued with hearings in a lawsuit brought by the public defender's office against state corrections officials. It seeks the release of suspects who are held longer than 24 hours at Central Booking without an initial court hearing. Glynn demanded that

Members of Raymond Smoot's family at court house.

WW PHOTO: SHARON BLACK

officials provide a written report within 30 days of their plans to improve efficiency. The city is seeking to become a part of this suit against the state, showing that the pressure for the mass arrests is coming, at least in part, from higher up.

Advocates of prisoners' rights have filed suits against the inadequate and non-existent health care at the facility. It was built to process up to 45,000 people annually, but 100,000

people were arrested last year. Conditions are dehumanizing and brutal. Cells designed to hold seven to eight prisoners are crammed with 17 and 18. Lack of proper medical care has led to a rising number of deaths. Police sweeps of entire neighborhoods, leading to mass arrests, have compounded the problem.

The Emergency Coalition meets every Thursday at 7 p.m. at the All Peoples Congress Hall, 426 E. 31st Street, Baltimore, Md. 21218, and can be reached by calling (401) 235-7040. Brother Daren Muhammad also provides information, action and analysis on the "Final Analysis" radio program on station WOLB, 1010 on the dial, every Wednesday at 12 noon. □



Crowd watching the film.

WW PHOTO: BETSEY PIETTE

Continued from page 3

was to get people to sign on to a program that would move them out."

As far as the developers were concerned, Alston said, "The people were the blight!"

Alston also said, "The classic justification for gentrification is 'neighborhood improvement,' but it's really intended to drive the poor out."

He offered the example of West Girard Avenue in Philadelphia's predominantly African American northwest side. There, neighbors had no notice that the city was taking their homes until the law was passed. "Now the developers are putting up \$200,000 luxury condominiums on West Girard," Alston said.

Often the lifelong community residents whose homes are targeted for demolition are elderly, poor and people of color. In the film, Arun Prabhakar of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union pointed out that development like this brings dramatic rent and tax hikes, driving these residents out and further away from city centers and services.

"All for the Taking" documents the struggles of residents like Thomas and community activists from the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and the Community Leadership Institute, who are organizing residents to fight back.

For more information on "All for the Taking," contact georgemccollough@hotmail.com. □

California prison scandal

Federal judge orders takeover of health care

By Judy Greenspan
San Francisco

Branding California's infamous prison system "terribly broken," U.S. District Court Judge Thelton Henderson announced June 30 that he would appoint an independent authority to oversee health care in this state's prisons. According to Alison Hardy, an attorney with the Prison Law Office, "The judge has clearly recognized the ongoing risk of death and harm to patients is unconstitutional."

Henderson's decision, after hearing two weeks of testimony and scathing reports of prison visits in the class action suit *Plata v. Schwarzenegger*, represents the most radical and complete takeover of a prison health-care system in U.S. history.

Henderson, who began his legal career as the first African American lawyer in the U.S. Justice Department who investigated civil rights cases, has taken bold action in other class-action lawsuits involving prisons and civil rights in this state. In 1995, Henderson ruled in favor of Security Housing Unit (SHU) lockdown prisoners in Pelican Bay State Prison. Henderson also tried to block implementation of Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action initiative in this state. Unfortunately, his ruling was later overturned by a higher court.

Prisons stuffed with poor

Medical neglect and abuse are no strangers to the California prison system. For the past 20 years, civil rights attorneys, prisoner activists, human rights advocates and family members have pointed the finger at the California Department of Corrections for its inhumane treatment of prisoners.

California, with a prison population of nearly 165,000, has set a national trend in the building of mega-prisons. With the cooperation of racist sentencing laws, it has packed its prisons to double and triple capacity with poor people of color.

Ten years ago, the legal and public spotlight was on the abysmal care and medical neglect in this state's women's prisons. A class-action lawsuit called *Shumate v. Wilson* exposed needless deaths and torture of women prisoners. An unprecedented legislative hearing inside one of the women's prisons brought forth heartrending testimony from women prisoners about their poor care.

According to Cassie Pierson, staff

attorney with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and one of the litigators of the *Shumate* case, "Judge Henderson's decision validates what women prisoners have been telling us for many years and may give them hope. In 2000, women prisoners voiced their concerns before the legislature and nothing happened. Right after the hearings, eight women died and women have continued to die unnecessarily."

Women prisoners inside the Central California Women's Facility have told this reporter that, if anything, medical care is worse than ever.

Yvonne/Hamdiyah Cooks, Executive Director of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners, worries that women prisoners, who are often "invisible" within the predominantly male prison population, will continue to have their health care needs overlooked, even by a federal monitor.

Prisoners' rights advocates, community activists and family members see Henderson's decision as an important step forward. However, many emphasize that the appointment of a federal receiver is only one of several measures that should be taken to change this brutal prison system.

So much more needed

Corey Weinstein, M.D., a founder of California Prison Focus, a statewide organization fighting for the human rights of prisoners, points to the massive and unnecessary incarceration of poor people in this state, along with a legacy of prison guard brutality and murder, as equally serious problems to address.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his newly anointed California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation have used the excuse of prison overcrowding to prepare the public for the building of more prisons. However, groups like Critical Resistance, and the Prison Moratorium Project have made a strong case for releasing large numbers of prisoners convicted of drug-related and nonviolent crimes into community programs and treatment centers.

Battered women's groups and Families to End California's Three Strikes laws are calling for the expedited release of lifers who have been held years beyond their expected release dates.

Mark Smith, a recently released lifer



April 2002: Protesters at Central California Women's Facility demand proper medical treatment for prisoners.

PHOTOS: CALIFORNIA PRISON FOCUS



with serious medical problems, stated, "I am thrilled with Judge Henderson's decision to tackle this terribly troubled system. If, however, the guards' union is allowed any influence in this much overdue undertaking, like all else they get their hands on, then we can expect a watered-down version with little long-term benefit."

In California, prison guards with a nursing assistant license are able to dispense medications and decide whether prisoners can see a doctor. This conflict of roles for these medical technical assistants (MTAs) has had deadly consequences for prisoners with chronic and serious illnesses.

According to prisoners' rights activists, trying to access care from an MTA is like

having to go to the state police for your yearly physical. The California Correctional Peace Officers' Association (CCPOA) is a wealthy political action committee that "contributes" to the campaign funds of most state legislators.

Geppetto Launer, formerly incarcerated in California's Corcoran prison, is "hopeful and cynical" about the effect of the federal takeover. Living with HIV while inside prison, Launer had a great deal of experience fighting to get proper medical care. Launer fears that state and prison interference with the receiver will lead to stonewalling. "I wish the governor and other state officials were forced to spend one week in any of our state's prisons—they would quickly change their tune!" Launer added. □

Paper retracts racist cartoon



By Cheryl LaBash
Dearborn, Michigan

Community anger and demonstrations along the Michigan Avenue shopping district forced the Dearborn Press and Guide newspaper to publish an apology for a racist, anti-immigrant cartoon published in June. The cartoon implied that Latin@s came to the United States for welfare. But on June 25 and July 2, protesters demanded more than a small apology. They want the newspaper to publish a series of articles accurately depicting the contributions and lives of Mexican workers and also give them proof that the person responsible was fired.

The cartoon appeared near the beginning of the summer, when migrant workers and their families following the fruit and vegetable harvest come north into Michigan. While heroic organizing by the United Farmworkers Union and the Farm

Labor Organizing Committee improved conditions for farm workers, the work is still difficult, dangerous and very low paid.

The paper insulted not only migrant workers but immigrant workers from Mexico and other South and Central American countries and the Middle East. These immigrants are beginning to change Dearborn from the exclusive racist stronghold founded by Henry Ford into a multinational community. On June 25 the community met at ACCESS, the Arab Community Center For Economic and Social Services.

African American drivers passing the demonstration honked their solidarity and called out, "They're racist against us, too." To this day it is still commonly considered risky for African American men in particular to be in Dearborn after dark. Demonstration organizers vowed to continue the fight against racism in all its forms. □

Support for brutalized youths

Members of the Somerville 5 defense committee picketed a pre-trial hearing at Cambridge District Court outside Boston on July 5. They were protesting the frame-up of five African American youth who were brutalized by local police in April and then charged with assaulting the cops. For almost two hours, "Youth need jobs, not war: Free the Somerville Five!" and other chants greeted passersby and those entering the courthouse.

Log on to www.iacboston.org to join the Somerville 5 campaign and for more information.

—Story and photo by S. Gillis



Immigrant workers declare:

'No human being is illegal'

Casa Freehold, a coalition made up mostly of immigrant workers from Latin America, held a rally and march in the central New Jersey town of Freehold on July 4. The protest, which brought out an estimated 200 people from around the region, including New York City, focused on the important struggle of immigrants who face daily racist attacks from bosses and politicians.

These workers face the terrible stigma of being declared "illegal"—a divide-and-conquer tactic meant to keep them invisible, unorganized and subject to starvation wages.

Although these workers face daily harassment and demonization from bigoted cops, the mainstream media and the Freehold mayor, they, with the support of North American activists, fought for and won the right to form a muster zone. That's an area where day laborers meet prospective employers in a kind of hiring hall.

Because they are together as a group, they can demand at least a minimum wage, and help build working-class unity against the bosses' greed to make more

profits. Freehold has the only known muster zone of its kind for immigrant workers in the United States.

Most of these workers came here from Mexico. They can be taken into custody under the Homeland Security laws and face endless time in detention, including torture, without being brought up on any kind of charges. Civil-rights attorneys in

New Jersey are filing lawsuits on behalf of these victims.

This sort of brutality, sanctioned under the Homeland Security and Patriot acts, is similar to what is occurring in Guantanamo to Muslims and South Asians at the hands of the U.S. military.

The White House has given the green light to extra-legal terrorist vigilante groups like the Minutemen and Ku Klux Klan to

both scapegoat and physically assault immigrant workers. It is important that the U.S. progressive movement and the trade unions show solidarity with the most oppressed workers, like those in Freehold.

They are on the front lines in fighting not only for their own rights, but for the rights of all workers, foreign and native born, especially in the United States.

— Monica Moorehead



Day laborers organize with support from activists. Alejandro Abarca, Casa Freehold leader, is on bullhorn.

PHOTO, ABOVE, PAUL GUBA
LEFT, WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

San Ysidro says

'No' to vigilante Minutemen

By Gloria Verdieu
San Diego, Calif.

On July 2, the community of San Ysidro hit the streets to say NO to racist vigilante "Minutemen" and groups like them. Organized by La Gente Unida coalition, the proactive march drew close to 400 people. Enrique Morones of the Border Angels said, "They [Minutemen] are not welcome here and they're not welcome anywhere. We say no to the militarization of the border."

San Ysidro is the southernmost community in San Diego. The march assembled in San Ysidro Community Park and continued about 2.5 miles right through this mostly Mexican/Chican@ neighborhood to Border State Park. It was full of the positive energy of people young and old shouting "No human is illegal," "One race, the human race," "Tear down the borders," "Viva Che, viva Chávez, viva México,

viva Zapatistas," and "Open all borders."

As the march went through residential areas, people in the community came out and joined in the chants and listened to the rally speakers.

FIST speaker Ruth Vela

Ruth Vela of San Diego FIST—Fight Imperialism, Stand Together—spoke at the opening rally. Here are excerpts from her talk:

"I want to dedicate this talk to our sisters and brothers in New Jersey who have recently had to defend themselves against the Minutemen. But we cannot ignore the fact that the INS, the border patrol, La Migra with their military technology and stadium lights, with their raids, their violence, arrogance and bigotry have been terrorizing our pueblo for far too long! We must also realize that we are not alone in our struggles. There are borders like this

one in too many places.

"Just ask our brave compas in Palestine who cross checkpoints every day to get to and from work, like so many do here at San Ysidro and Otay. In the Dominican Republic, the Haitians who share the island are the 'illegal aliens' being brutally deported, just like we saw in Los Angeles last summer.

"The truth is that these stupid walls and borders and agents of the state don't protect us. Don't make us safer! In fact, the only reason they exist is because the rich need them so they can get richer. They continue to make groups of humans beings illegal. Make them appear less human ... so that it seems okay to deny them basic human rights.

"All over the world people are fighting, bleeding, struggling, dying in an effort to have their basic needs met. Why, in 2005, if we are so advanced, are we still fighting

the same battles against racism? Why are people still starving to death?

"We shouldn't have to fight these same battles over and over. We shouldn't still be asking for health care, housing, jobs and education. We as a class have the strength to take these things. Take our power back!

"So let us march with strength and dignity and remind the rich ruling class, that parasitic elite, that we have a history of fightback. The same fightback that exists in Palestine, Iraq and Haiti. That fightback that comes from the jungles of Chiapas, the hills of Morelia, to the streets of Tijuana. That fightback that lives and breathes here in the belly of this imperialist beast.

"Let us march as more than just a pueblo united against the Minutemen, but as a pueblo taking steps towards uniting with the workers and oppressed peoples of the world. Workers and oppressed peoples of the world, RISE UP." □

Puerto Rico's teachers want sovereign union

By Arturo J. Pérez Saad

In the United States, AFL-CIO membership is at an all-time low and internal strife over the direction of the labor movement is now open to heated debate.

In the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico, however, the American Federation of Teachers, a member of the AFL-CIO, is on the defensive—but from the workers. Last year, on Sept. 29, a delegates' meeting of the Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers (FMPR) voted over 70 percent in favor of disaffiliating from the AFT. The FMPR, representing over 43,000 teachers, is the largest union in Puerto Rico.

The vote to disaffiliate was due to a long history of corruption, misuse of dues money and the vaporization of the workers' medical plan under the tutelage of the AFT. An overwhelming majority voted in favor of the independent move and have taken control of how their dues money—over \$2.6 million a year—will be spent.

Rafael Feliciano Hernández, president of the FMPR, told AFT leaders at a closed meeting on June 7 that the money "was taken from us without supplying us with any essential benefit [and] since we don't have to pay [them the] \$2.6 million that the AFT used to take, we have more resources to attend to the necessities of the FMPR and its membership." In addition, "We, the FMPR, do not recognize the AFT since we democratically voted to disaffiliate from you last year."

Since the vote last year the AFT has not respected the democratic choice of the teachers. It has utilized any means available to undermine the sovereignty of a colonized people by paying hefty salaries to dissidents and making backroom deals with the Puerto Rican government to bring the FMPR under its trusteeship.

The AFT believes it can impose its will, under the veil of democracy, while it criticizes the FMPR leadership as

undemocratic. Sound familiar? It's the same arrogant excuse President George W. Bush now uses to continue U.S. occupation of the sovereign nations of Iraq and Afghanistan: "We [the USA] are bringing democracy to the region."

Since the disaffiliation, the FMPR has eliminated its budget deficit and has been using the participatory model as its modus operandi, where the workers themselves choose how they want their dues money spent.

A growing number of AFL-CIO Puerto Rican affiliate unions have democratically voted their independence.

The previous governor, Pedro Rosselló (1992-2000), began to privatize every public sector enterprise. This has created a backlash of resentment and protest.

The privatization took place under the AFT's watch, which drained the medical plan of the FMPR of \$43 million, thus driving it to extinction.

Hernández of the FMPR blames the AFT and the pro-AFT members, many of whom are ex-FMPR leaders, for "embezzling" the money and for not doing anything to stop the erosion of the workers' health-care benefits.

This past June 7, the AFT held a closed meeting in the Normandie Hotel in San Juan to discuss legal, extra-legal and anti-democratic ways to take over the FMPR. Hundreds of teachers from the FMPR and workers from over 40 independent unions in Puerto Rico protested outside the hotel. A small delegation from the executive committee broke into the meeting to denounce the vile attempts of the AFT to undermine the Puerto Rican teachers' right of self-determination.

More strategizing meetings continue as the FMPR negotiates a collective bargaining agreement with the Puerto Rican government.

Pérez Saad is an AFT member in the United States.

At Venezuela's initiative

Caribbean countries join energy accord

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

Fourteen Caribbean heads of state met at the end of June in the Venezuelan city of Puerto la Cruz, invited by President Hugo Chávez to ratify an energy accord during the First Energy Gathering of Caribbean Heads of State.

This was the third meeting of the group. In 2004, the initial discussions and commitments took place at meetings in Caracas, Venezuela, and Montego Bay, Jamaica. Called Petrocaribe, this agreement on energy cooperation will allow poor countries in the area to overcome the terrible energy crisis brought about first by International Monetary Fund and World Bank policies, and secondly by the recent hike in oil prices on the world market.

Dependent for energy supply on foreign imperialist oil companies, mostly based in the U.S., these countries, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, do not possess significant energy resources for their domestic needs. They have always been at the mercy of voracious companies that charge an enormous amount of money for transport and delivery of this important resource. "Apagones" (blackouts) can be a daily occurrence, making even the most routine chore a great difficulty for the masses.

Not deterred by U.S. letter

So despite a letter critical of Chávez sent by the U.S. State Department to the participants just before the meeting—basically a veiled threat by the Bush administration designed to discourage any association with Venezuela—the leaders met. With the exception of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, 13 signed the agreement with the Bolivarian Republic.

These were the Dominican Republic, Antigua, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, St. Vincent and Suriname. Cuba, which also signed, had already endorsed previous agreements with Venezuela.

Dominican President Leonel Fernández, whose country is guaranteed 50,000 oil barrels per day from Venezuela, described Chávez's energy proposal as one "full of solidarity, noble and generous which will help ease the oil problems that affect the economy of the Dominican Republic and of the other countries of the region."

It is important to review some of the provisions of the agreement to fully grasp its nature and its impact, not only on the signing countries, their peoples and the region, but also on the U.S. oil corporations' "sphere of influence."

The treaty begins with 11 points of general background. It is worth reading the first point, which sums up the purpose of the agreement. It reads: "We salute the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's initiative towards the creation of PETRO-CARIBE, whose fundamental goal is to contribute to energy security, social-economic development and the integration of the Caribbean countries, through the sovereign use of energy resources, all these, based on the principles of integration called the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA)."

Blaming colonialism and imperialism for the current economic system that has devastated the region, the signers conclude that only an integrated Caribbean can survive and develop with respect to their independence and sovereignty. To that effect they state that Petrocaribe's function is to "contribute to the transformation of Latin American and Caribbean

societies, making them more just, participative, with more solidarity, and that is the reason it is conceived as an integral process that promotes the elimination of social inequalities...."

For the purpose of helping the region develop socially and economically, a fund called ALBA-Caribe has been created to which Venezuela will initially grant \$50 million. Every nation involved will contribute from the savings that will result from direct oil trade, and from other government instruments.

The Venezuelan oil company PDVSA will create PDV Caribe, which will be Venezuela's company within Petrocaribe.

Oil at preferential prices

The oil will be traded at preferential prices, paid for with cash, goods or services, with a considerable percentage of the long-term financing paid by the Bolivarian Republic (RBV). For example: If the price per barrel is US\$15, the RBV will pay 5 percent; at \$50, RBV will pay 40 percent; and if it reaches \$100, the subsidy will jump to 50 percent. As the price per barrel goes up, so does the percentage paid by the RBV. Even if oil reaches \$100 per barrel, the Petrocaribe countries will have to pay only \$50 per barrel to Venezuela; the rest will be financed by Venezuela on a long-term basis.

There is a grace period of two years and an extraordinarily flexible repayment plan. Short-term financing will be extended from 30 to 90 days and the long-term repayment will extend to 17 years, with the possibility of 25 years when the price of oil exceeds \$40, payable with only 1 percent interest. All or part of it could be paid with goods and/or services.

In return, this trade will help Venezuela

create 100,000 jobs and buy, at preferential prices, agricultural products like sugar, banana, corn and avocados, among many other regional industries that have been in great danger because of U.S. and other imperialist countries' "free" trade agreements.

Petrocaribe also projects the building of infrastructures, including refineries, exchange of technology and training. It will touch each and every sector that falls within the energy industry. Alternative energy and conservation projects will be encouraged.

It is not surprising, then, that coverage of this important development has been almost totally absent in the U.S. or any other capitalist media, except for negative comments. An AFX News Limited release on June 30 read: "According to Goldman Sachs analysts, the agreements unveiled yesterday 'should not be seen from the standpoint of economic rationality, but rather from the broader perspective of Venezuela's aggressive foreign policy and attempts to increase its influence in the region.'"

Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago did not sign the agreement. An article in Business Week of July 2, entitled "Barbados seeks Venezuela oil deal details," quotes Energy Minister Anthony Wood as saying, "We have genuine concerns with the document and they would have to be addressed before we can sign," adding, "I need to know more about the mechanics of the fund and how the participating territories can access the fund."

The same article states that Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Patrick Manning "said he was concerned the Petrocaribe accord would put his oil-producing nation at a competitive disadvantage." □

Interview with Colombian trade unionist

Behind the 'Justice and Peace Act'

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

In June the Colombian Congress approved a bill entitled the "Justice and Peace Act" (JPA) that will reduce the sentences of right-wing paramilitaries—really death-squad members—who confess their crimes, return stolen goods and compensate their victims. This law's opponents say it will grant immunity to paramilitaries for their many crimes.

Around the same time, the U.S. Congress extended Plan Colombia, which was due to end this year.

To explore the consequences of these decisions, Workers World interviewed Gerardo Cajamarca, Colombian human rights advocate and member of the Coca Cola workers' union, SINALTRAINAL. Cajamarca is in exile in the United States precisely because of death threats he received from paramilitaries. He currently works with the Steelworkers Union in the Global Justice project.

Cajamarca said the Justice and Peace Act is "an initiative by the paramilitaries to make sure that they will not be punished for the atrocious crimes they have committed. The law also fails to punish the paramilitary mob for drug trafficking and the theft of land that has resulted in 3 million people being displaced in Colombia."

Cajamarca said that although the paramilitaries are considered terrorists, even by the U.S. government, paramilitary

leader Salvatore Mancuso has stated that they have control of 35 percent of the Colombian Congress, with influence on many governmental agencies.

On June 21, says Cajamarca, while the Colombian Congress was arguing about the JPA, Congress member Gina Parody, loyal to President Alvaro Uribe, told the news media that the paramilitaries control 70 percent of the Congress, not just 35 percent. "This makes Colombia a Narco State," said Cajamarca.

The criminals include the Colombian president. Uribe's links to drug trafficking and formation of paramilitary groups have been exposed in a book written by Joseph Contreras and Fernando Garavito: "El Señor de las Sombras" (The Lord of Darkness).

Cajamarca also quoted from two articles in the U.S.-based media. One is from the June 23 issue of El Nuevo Herald, which accuses Uribe of protecting a brother and two cousins who are alleged assassins. The June 23 New York Times criticizes the JPA and Uribe's complacency with the paramilitaries.

The trade unionist said less than 30 percent of the Colombian Congress opposed the JPA. "Those who are not paramilitaries are corrupt politicians or representatives of the oligarchy," he added.

Cajamarca pointed out that the people have only a few representatives in Congress. These belong to the Democratic Pole and the Social and Political Front. Representatives like Gustavo Petro have received death threats for speaking out in the congressional debates. Former mayor of San Jose de Apartadó Gloria Cuartas and Father Javier Giraldo, both human rights advocates, were paid no respect. Their testimony was dismissed.

'You're either a revolutionary or a reactionary'

Speaking about the impact of the congressional decision on the general population, Cajamarca said that it has brought "fear, desperation, frustration and outrage." He added that in Colombia there is no "progressive" movement, "You are either a revolutionary" or a "reactionary."

The movement's response to the decision did not take long. On June 30 a new initiative against impunity was launched in Bogotá, he said. SINALTRAINAL and Father Javier Giraldo launched a People's Tribunal.

"We will appeal to the international community, that great force, the peoples of the world, who are in the most part opposed to war. We will continue organizing against war and against social injus-

tice," said Cajamarca.

About the U.S. Congress's decision to continue Plan Colombia, Cajamarca said he did not understand how an initiative supposedly aimed at combating drug trafficking could send money to Colombia to be handled by the General Prosecutor's Office. This office is itself closely linked to paramilitarism.

He added: "The U.S. Congress is making a mistake by not listening to the voices of the victims in Colombia. The extension of Plan Colombia means \$800 million more for the fumigation of our parks and jungles with dangerous glyphosphate. For our people it means more war, more misery.

"It means the continuation of a policy of extermination of the social movement, the demonization of our social struggle, more persecution of activists, more arrests and assassinations. But we will continue because our social struggle is to defend our lives, for national sovereignty, for dignity."

Cajamarca ended by saying, "My message to the U.S. government is that Colombian workers will take power in Colombia, and when that happens, we would like good relations with all of the countries, including the U.S., as long as our dignity is respected. Things will happen both in Colombia and in this country. Just remember what Simón Bolívar said: 'Let us unite and we will become invincible.'" □

Spain, Canada and the pope

The power of the capitalist media is truly awesome. So how come many things don't turn out the way they're "supposed" to?

Take the issue of same-sex marriage. It is slowly gaining ground in many countries around the world, the result of a struggle for basic equality and democratic rights. More and more people recognize that discrimination based on sexual orientation is cruel, unfair and a throwback to a less enlightened era. The issue is not one of sanctifying the institution of marriage, it is merely of extending equal rights under the law to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

And so, in the space of a few days at the end of June, the legislatures in both Spain and Canada legalized same-sex marriage. In Spain particularly—historically a Catholic country and one where the church campaigned vigorously against the bill—the vote was greeted with elation by the progressive community, gay and straight.

Here's where the question about the media comes in. Flash back to a few months ago. For days and weeks the giant media corporations that control so much of what we see and hear were focused on the dying of the pope and then the choice of his replacement. We awoke to news of what he had for breakfast. We went to sleep with the whispered sounds of his final words.

Has the death of a cleric ever occupied so much attention in media that pride themselves on being neither parochial nor insular but tuned in to the most important events of the whole world? Obviously, the message was that this was a most extraordinary person, more than the leader of one religion among many, a demigod who helped save the world from unspeakable evil.

Communism, of course. He was the Polish pope who blessed the CIA's role in bringing Poland into the capitalist camp, so Polish workers could take their place in Europe as highly skilled, low-paid laborers able to produce lots of surplus value for some lucky boss.

But this pope was also a hard-liner on sex—at least in his public pronouncements. No sex

before marriage. No marriage for priests. No women clerics. No birth control or abortion. And—heaven forbid!—no gay/lesbian/bi/trans sex. That would get you to hell on the fast track.

Participating in putting over the great spectacle of the pope's death were all the usual venal characters who produce television footage and shouting headlines on whatever topics please the mighty corporations that pay their generous salaries.

But did it work? Did it produce a mighty movement to carry forward this reactionary cleric's views on social policy? It certainly looked like that was what was happening. On television, the adoring crowds were legion and no one had a word of criticism.

But now the cameras have moved on and it seems this whole imperialist-orchestrated campaign had little effect. Viz, the vote in Spain and in Canada, where there is also a large Catholic population but one often sympathetic to the underdog because of suffering discrimination themselves.

A final observation: Where does it leave the U.S. in terms of the ruling class's ambitions to be THE world leaders? Further isolated from all enlightened thinking, whether it be stem cell research or family planning or human evolution or understanding that users of medical marijuana are not criminals.

It is one of those ironies of history—Marx called them contradictions that would be resolved in a burst of forward motion—that the country with the most powerful technological apparatus seems to be at war with the science that made it all possible. Science has shown there is nothing to fear from variations in sexuality. They have existed since the beginning of our species and probably most other species as well.

Fortunately, this seems to be sinking in with a large part of the population, despite the propaganda barrages by those seeking scapegoats. Can the official institutions in the U.S. afford to remain so far behind the people? □

Don't panic

Sandra Day O'Connor is leaving the Supreme Court, which means the abominable Bush will be able to pick another "justice for life." This has many progressive organizations horribly worried. O'Connor is being described as often providing the "swing vote" on important issues like abortion.

In developing a reasonable strategy against the right wing, we must be realistic about how progressive change—and holding on to what gains have been won—comes about. So much faith is placed in elections, when in fact they are generally very shabby affairs that produce little if anything for the masses of people that they haven't already won in direct struggles.

The defeat of Kerry was received by so much of the movement as a mortal blow when in fact Kerry took terrible positions on such pivotal issues as the war in Iraq. Now the old chorus of "Vote Bush out" is heard once again when what's called for are pickets, demonstrations, sit-ins, confrontations, and other militant actions to turn back the right.

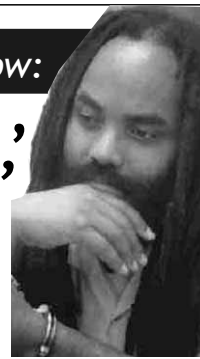
Let's not forget who Sandra Day O'Connor was. Was she a Democrat? Not a bit. Was she nominated by a liberal Republican? Not unless you consider Reagan a liberal. Did she always "swing" to the left? No, in fact she is credited with getting Bush selected in 2000. So what's the big deal? Why should those yearning for liberal judges be in such a panic over her departure?

Even judges-for-life are political animals in the broader sense—not that they fear being unseated but that the system they defend could be. So they try to be fine-tuned for signs of mass discontent and usually come up with ambiguous rulings that are supposed to placate everyone. When a strong social wind is blowing, however, even the conservatives may find it the better part of wisdom to vote for something like Roe v. Wade or Brown vs. the Board of Education.

Don't panic. Just get that social wind moving in the right direction. □

Mumia Abu-Jamal from death row:

When they say 'aid,' they mean 'raid'



Recently, the news columns were full of a supposed dispute between the Americans and the British about foreign aid relief to Africa. If the news reports are to be believed, the British wish to push the Americans further, to provide more debt relief for countries staggering under their economic burdens.

The media image that arises is one of the rich Western white nations caring about the lives and conditions of starving Black Africa. And like many media images, it simply isn't true.

What is often lost in this angelic imagery is the truth behind the so-called aid. That "aid" that was given years ago was given to military dictatorships, and it was often military aid meant to strengthen dictatorships against not foreign attacks, but popular resistance from their own people!

Indeed, in a 1960 meeting of the U.S. National Security Council, American spies and diplomats spoke rather openly about U.S. support for military regimes. The minutes of the meeting record them saying:

"We must recognize, although we cannot say it publicly, that we need the strong men of Africa on our side. It is important to understand that most of Africa will soon be independent and that it would be naive of the U.S. to hope that Africa will be democratic ... Since we must have the strong men of Africa on our side, perhaps we should in some cases develop military strong men as an offset to Communist development of the labor unions. The President agreed that it might be desirable for us to try to 'reach' the strong men of Africa" (From NSA meeting, Jan. 14, 1960, as published in "Foreign Relations," 1958-1960, Vol. XIV, pp. 73-78)

From meetings such as this came U.S. "aid" to such dictators as Zaire's late Mobutu, who was among the wealthiest men in Africa, if not the world. Through "African strong men" such as he, the U.S. ran many countries as neocolonies, through which they could further exploit the people of the continent.

The late U.S. president, Richard Nixon, spoke a powerful political truth when he said, "Let us remember that the main purpose of aid is not to help other nations but to help ourselves." (From Graham Hancock, "Lords of Poverty," New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989, p. 71)

Think about it this way: When millions of dollars in military aid are given to a dictatorship, where does the money go? To the receiving country, or to the arms dealers and defense contractors which make the weapons? So, how is this "aid"?

It's aid to ourselves to arm forces that keep their own people in line. Also, since at least the 1970s, U.S. food aid has been tied to the myth of population control. In order to receive "aid" from the nice, white West, African, Latin American and Asian countries have had to pledge they would reduce their populations.

Why would countries that are agricultural gardens of Eden even need food aid? That's because, after formal colonialism, Western powers often installed military dictators who spent the nation's resources on weapons used to break and destroy labor unions! A 1986 study by the National Academy of Sciences found that the single country of Zaire, alone, could feed its own population—62 times over! Indeed, that one country, with high agricultural outputs, could feed the entire continent of Africa!

But, under the rapacious U.S.-supported military dictatorship of Mobutu, much of that agricultural potential, and its vast wealth of resources, was squandered and sent into Belgian and European banks.

The late, great Kwame Nkrumah said, "Political independence, without economic independence, is but a mirage."

The sweet words of "aid" muttered by British and American officials to Africa is to lull the people asleep with promises.

It is, in truth, yet another plan to exploit people who have been exploited by outsiders for millennia.

True "aid" is reparations for the crimes of colonialism.

Real "aid" would be an end to the support of military regimes.

Real "aid" would be an end to political, economic and social interference in the social, cultural and familial affairs of African people.

Real "aid" would be an end to imperialism! □



As Iraqi resistance keeps growing

U.S. loses elite troops in Afghanistan

By G. Dunkel

So many people in Afghanistan and Iraq are confronting and challenging the U.S. presence and behavior there that even the puppets and traitors installed by the United States have had to separate themselves from the occupiers.

Four Navy Seals on a deep-penetration mission in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan were uncovered and attacked by their targets June 28. The U.S. command there sent a team of 16 Special Forces—eight Army Rangers and eight Navy Seals—to fly to their rescue in a Chinook helicopter. The guerrillas brought down the copter with a rocket-propelled grenade, according to the Pentagon.

All 16 members of the rescue mission died. One of the four original Seals was picked up five days later and flown to Germany for debriefing. The U.S. is currently combing the area for the other three and their Afghani “guides.”

This incident cost the U.S. armed forces the most casualties in one battle suffered to date since they invaded Afghanistan, plus they lost 16 highly trained special forces operatives.

The battle was also a lesson in the asymmetric war between the heavily armed Pentagon forces and the Afghans. A rocket-propelled grenade sells for about \$200 on the illegal market. The cost of a Chinook runs into the multi-millions, depending on equipment. The training of 16 special force members, some of whom were officers, also runs into the millions.

The BBC reported July 2 that 25 Afghan villagers died in two U.S. air strikes against their homes. Some were killed as they were trying to help the victims of the first strike.

The past three months have seen some sharp fighting in Afghanistan, as oppo-

nents of the U.S. occupation step up their struggle. (The Independent, July 3) The casualties have been high: 495 suspected resisters, 49 Afghan police and soldiers, 134 civilians, and 45 U.S. troops.

Living conditions have deteriorated along with the fighting. Most people don't have electricity, so they use kerosene lanterns. But the kerosene now on the market in Afghanistan has “leaked” from U.S. military supplies to fuel helicopters and jets. It is much more volatile than the kerosene the Afghans generally use.

Hundreds of Afghans have been horribly burned in the fires and explosions this volatile kerosene causes. They are dying in hospitals that don't have the supplies to treat either their extreme pain or the infections to which their huge, open sores make them vulnerable.

Cholera struck Kabul June 15 because none of the \$4 billion the U.S. has spent in Afghanistan in the last three years went to providing clean water. Kabul is the capital, with an international press corps; what is happening outside the capital is indisputably worse.

Even Afghan President Hamid Karzai, put in power by the United States and protected by U.S. bodyguards, is criticizing the behavior of U.S. troops and requesting that they coordinate more closely with Afghan authorities. (New York Times, June 30) Earlier in May, when he was visiting Washington, Karzai asked President George W. Bush for custody over Afghan detainees. Many Afghans are reportedly losing confidence in the ability of the United States to defeat the resistance.

Iraq also lacks water

Baghdad's mayor, Alaa Mahmoud al-Timimi, threatened to quit July 1 unless the government provides more money to

repair the infrastructure of the city. He asked for \$1.5 billion for 2005. So far he has received only \$85 million.

The day after he threatened to quit, a mortar attack on a power station north of Baghdad set off a fire. This plant supplies the electricity to plants supplying water to northern and western parts of the city.

The 6.5 million residents of Baghdad already face sporadic electricity and water outages, erratic fuel supplies, traffic congested by road blocks, exclusion zones, car bombings and lack of public services to collect garbage and repair the roads.

Summer in Baghdad brings temperatures that range from a low of 120° F to a high of 145° F. To be without water to drink and wash, to lack electricity to run fans, even to cook is life threatening. The dust storms that hit Baghdad force people to close their windows, making fans to move the air even more important.

Part of the reason Baghdad lacks money for basic services is that most of the money available is being spent on the Green Zone, where the U.S. ambassador lives and works and where the quisling government meets. To heavily secure the Green Zone, construction companies use most of the available building materials, equipment and workers, leaving little for the rest of the city.

Unemployment is high, somewhere between 50 and 70 percent. This inability to find work drives many young men to line up for jobs with the police or the army, something unpopular with most Iraqis. It risks death, and there are at least two car bombings or suicide attacks a day, the puppet forces often being the targets.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is proclaiming that U.S. participation in Iraq could last until 2009 or longer. Vice President Dick Cheney says the U.S. must stay the course. This was basically the

message Bush delivered to a silent audience of troops at Fort Bragg, N.C.

These U.S. government figures are all putting pressure on the Iraqi government to train more cops and soldiers so U.S. soldiers can be made available for other military threats or adventures.

But the U.S. authorities have a big problem in their training mission. The resistance fighters have thoroughly infiltrated the Iraqi government. Who then is really benefiting from the U.S. training and the weapons? Those willing to serve U.S. ends, or resistance forces?

Two prominent Iraqi politicians have recently challenged the U.S. occupation. Former electricity minister Ayham al-Samarrai announced the creation of the National Council for Unity and Construction of Iraq June 29, which includes significant Iraqi political and tribal leaders. Al-Samarrai called for recognition of the right of Iraqis to resist the occupation forces, an end of U.S. military offensives in Iraqi cities, and negotiation between the resistance and the Iraqi government.

Al-Samarrai said he represented a group of Iraqi fighters who want U.S. troops out in one to three years.

His exact political program and how many fighters he represents are unclear. But it is still important that an ex-government minister now feels that the government is so weak he can challenge it.

The BBC carried another story about Samir Sumaidaie, currently Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, who is demanding an inquiry into the “cold-blooded murder” of a young, unarmed relative by U.S. Marines. Sumaidaie's cousin was actually helping the Marines search his hometown in “restive” Anbar province. When a dispute broke out, the Marines reportedly shot and killed him. □

Palestinian children's theater inspires U.S. audiences

By Charlotte Kates

The young actors, dancers and singers of Al-Rowwad Palestinian Children's Theater visited New Jersey and New York June 17-22 as part of a U.S. tour that also includes stops in Connecticut, Vermont and Louisville, Ky.

Al-Rowwad center in the Aida camp was founded and is directed by Dr. Abdel Fattah Abu Srour. It consists of an arts, theater and cultural center for children. It also houses a computer center and a library. Abu Srour wrote and directed “We are the Children of the Camps,” the play performed by the children of Al-Rowwad during their tour.

Performed in Arabic with English subtitles developed for the U.S. tour projected behind the actors, this play tells stories of exile and expresses the commitment of a new generation of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands, and to struggle for freedom.

The young Palestinians play and laugh until their joy is broken by the Nakba—“the catastrophe”—of 1948 and their expulsion from Palestine. One by one, the characters recount the destroyed villages of Palestine. Then they face the audience in unison, shouting the names of the villages destroyed by Zionist occupation.

Al-Rowwad were met with great enthu-

siasm at all four of their area performances. Beginning with their opening performance on June 18 at the Passaic County Technical Institute in Wayne, N.J., at a show sponsored by New Jersey Solidarity-Activists for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian American Congress-New Jersey Chapter, the children of Al-Rowwad delighted and inspired their audience, who cheered and clapped at images of resistance and the young actors' portrayal of Palestinian courage, strength and dedication to return to their land.

The warm reception for Al-Rowwad's performance continued on June 20 at the Barrow Street Theater in New York's Greenwich Village. Theater-goers welcomed the performance and again generously supported the group's fundraising efforts.

The following night saw a sold-out performance at the CUNY Graduate Center's intimate Martin E. Segal Theater.

Their final performance on June 22, sponsored by Al-Awda New York, brought the young performers to Brooklyn's Al-Noor School. They were greeted by a large and enthusiastic crowd in the Islamic school's auditorium, who again contributed generously to Al-Rowwad's fundraising to expand their center in Aida camp.

Through song, dance and performance,



A new generation takes up the Palestinian cause.

PHOTO: AL-AWDA NEW YORK

the young actors of Al-Rowwad not only portray the tragedies of the past and present, but continue to express their dedication to struggle, their strength and connection to Palestine, and their unbreakable commitment and hope to return to their homes and liberate their land.

Al-Rowwad's time in New York City was arranged by an ad hoc committee of theater activists from Theaters Against War and Nibras, an Arab American theater group, as well as Palestinian and Palestine solidarity activists from a variety of organizations. All came together to raise funds for Al-Rowwad's visit to the New York/New Jersey area and plan housing, meals and activities for the actors and staff of Al-Rowwad during their visit.

Activities Coordinator Ibrahim Abu Srour and Stage Manager Amal Asad, a graduate of the Al-Rowwad program,

along with Dr. Abu Srour, accompanied the Al-Rowwad cast—11 boys and girls chosen from the dozens who work on art, theater and dance at the center.

Husam Alazza, Ribal Kordi, Hammad Anwar, Rawa Abu-Srour, Salam Alazza, Hamada Alkurdi, Woud Darkhawaja, Ikhlas Abu-Srour, Ahmad Alajarma, Jihad Alajarma, and Hanin Alaarij made up the cast who traveled to the U.S.

Thousands of dollars were raised for Al-Rowwad during their New York/New Jersey tour, and their success promises to continue in Connecticut, Vermont and Kentucky. Plans for them to return to the U.S. next summer for another tour are already being discussed.

Charlotte Kates is an activist with New Jersey Solidarity-Activists for the Liberation of Palestine and Al-Awda New York.

EDITORIAL

Trabajadores de Irán dicen a EEUU: ¡ALTO!

Porque la administración de Bush amenaza con una guerra contra Irán, las elecciones presidenciales de ese país recibieron una atención mundial, más que cualquier otra elección desde la revolución del 1979 que derrocó al shah y expulsó al régimen neocolonial instalado por los Estados Unidos.

Los medios de comunicación reportaron que sorprendió la victoria de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, el alcalde de Tehrán. La verdadera sorpresa fue el papel jugado por los trabajadores de Irán, cuyos votos le dieron la victoria a Ahmadinejad.

Irán está en medio de una recesión económica profunda, con un nivel de desempleo estimado entre 15 y 20 por ciento. Ha habido protestas extensas por los trabajadores, algo sin precedente durante las últimas dos décadas.

El candidato presidencial que el gobierno de los EEUU esperaba ganar, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, es un empresario rico. Su programa económico era el de acelerar la privatización y alentar más inversiones extranjeras. Él invitó al Banco Mundial y sus políticas neoliberales. En relación a las amenazas de los EEUU, Rafsanjani era considerado como alguien con simpatías hacia los poderes europeos y que también podía acomodarse a los intereses de los Estados Unidos.

Después de todo, él era uno de los agentes principales en el asunto “Irán-Contra” cuando Ronald Reagan y Oliver North secretamente vendieron armas a Irán, mientras estaba en guerra contra Irak, a cambio de ayuda para asegurar la liberación de los rehenes estadounidenses en el Líbano.

Ahmadinejad, contrariamente, sale del movimiento revolucionario que derrocó el régimen títere de los EEUU, el shah de Irán.

Ahmadinejad, hijo de un trabajador de la industria metalúrgica, condujo una campaña electoral populista, culpando a los bancos privados y al programa de privatización por la profundización del desempleo y la pobreza. Algunos hasta lo describen como un socialista islámico. Eso probablemente caracteriza lo que muchos de los trabajadores esperan lograr por medio de esta elección. Ahmadinejad promete más empleos, salarios más altos, mejores viviendas, mejor seguro de salud y una mejora en los beneficios sociales para las mujeres. También promete una distribución más justa de las riquezas producto del tesoro petrolero de Irán —en vez de la distribución a “una sola familia poderosa”, como él lo expresa.

Los trabajadores y los pobres de Irán salieron y votaron en gran número, suficiente para dar un mensaje. El voto fue para empleos, no para el Banco Mundial. Y el voto la dijo a los Estados Unidos: ¡Deténganse, no vengán aquí! □

Las políticas asesinas de la Coca Cola expuestas

Por Bryan G. Pfeifer

Una formidable lucha contra las violaciones laborales y de los derechos humanos cometidas por la Coca Cola en Colombia y en otras partes, crece en los Estados Unidos, Canadá y otros países. La Coalición Estudiantil para Romper el Contrato de la Coca Cola, con más de 20 organizaciones representando a 5.000 estudiantes en la Universidad de Michigan ha dado un golpe más a la corporación multimillonaria.

En un comunicado de prensa el 20 de junio la coalición anunció que la universidad ha puesto en “probatoria” a la corporación por sus acciones en Colombia y en la India.

La Coca Cola, con base en Atlanta, Georgia, vende cuatro de las cinco marcas de soda más populares: Coke, Diet Coke, Fanta y Sprite. Fundada en 1886, la compañía tiene operaciones en más de 200 países. Produce casi 400 marcas de bebidas, incluyendo Dannon, Dasani, Minute Maid y Nestea.

Amit Srivastava, un miembro líder de la coalición estudiantil de la Universidad de Michigan y miembro del Centro de Recursos de la India dijo: “Los estudiantes en Michigan han asegurado una gran victoria para el pueblo de India y Colombia. Sus acciones abren el camino para que otros colegios y universidades se unan al creciente número de colegios que ejercen presión contra la compañía Coca Cola.” (www.IndiaResource.org)

La universidad cedió después de que masivas campañas con meses de duración se dieran en varios campos de la universidad. Las acciones incluyeron dos audiencias públicas en la universidad. En estas participaron representantes de la organización laboral Sinaltrainal, que trabaja en las plantas de la Coca Cola en Colombia. Los representantes participaron en las acciones junto con miembros del sindicato de Trabajadores del Acero y la organización Estudiantes en Contra de los Talleres de Explotación. Sinaltrainal esta pidiendo que no compren los productos de la Coca Cola.

Después de 10 meses de investigaciones por la Junta de Revisión de Pleitos, (JRP)—un cuerpo de asesoría creado por la universidad bajo la presión de la coalición estudiantil—la Coca Cola fue encontrada culpable de violar el Código de Conducta de Venta de la Universidad de Michigan. Según la JRP, la decisión se basó tanto en las pruebas científicas que encontraron altos niveles de pesticida en la bebidas de coca cola en la India y las repetidas violaciones de la leyes laborales por la corporación en Colombia.

En la India, la Coca Cola ha estado vendiendo productos contaminados con pesticidas, incluyendo DDT—algunas veces con niveles 30 veces más altos que los permitidos por los Estados Unidos y Europa.

El 19 de mayo, la Administración de Drogas y Alimentos de los Estados Unidos prohibió la entrada de un cargamento de productos de la Coca Cola

provenientes de la India. La base para la prohibición fue: los productos no eran “seguros” y “no se ajustaban a las leyes de los Estados Unidos.”

En la Universidad de Michigan, la Junta dijo que investigarían mas los asuntos de la depleción del agua del subsuelo por la Coca Cola y la manera en que se deshace de los desperdicios tóxicos vendiéndolos como fertilizantes a los campesinos en la India.

La Junta ordenó a la Coca Cola a que lance una investigación independiente en cuanto a sus prácticas corporativas en la India y en Colombia antes del 30 de septiembre. Una auditoria debe haberse completado para el 31 de marzo del 2006. Y después, la Coca Cola está supuesta a adherirse a un plan de acción correctivo para el 31 de mayo del 2006.

Además la universidad ha renovado su contrato con la Coca Cola solamente de forma condicional por tres meses, comenzando en junio del 2005 y sujeta a que la corporación haya actuado satisfactoriamente.

La Junta declaró además que si la Coca Cola no cumple con las fechas y progresa satisfactoriamente, “la relación de negocio entre la Universidad y la Coca Cola será suspendida y sus productos no se ofrecerán en la Universidad, lo cual se incluye pero no se limita a las vendedoras, los estantes de comida, los eventos atléticos y los eventos organizados por la Universidad.”

La historia de la bebida que mata

En los Estados Unidos, la Coca Cola tiene una historia de discriminación contra afro-american@s. En junio, 2000 la corporación llegó a un acuerdo en un litigio de acción de clase con más de 1.500 trabajador@s afro-american@s.

Había muchísima evidencia de salarios desiguales, promociones prejuzgadas, un ambiente de trabajo hostil a causa de la discriminación racial, y represalias contra trabajador@s que se quejaron de los agravios, según el libro “La guerra en Colombia: hecha en los Estados Unidos” (“War in Colombia: Made in U.S.A.”; www.leftbooks.com).

En Colombia, la embotelladora más grande in Latín América, Panamco, está acusada de contratar paramilitares para asesinar y aterrorizar a líderes sindicales, a sus familias y parientes, y a sus comunidades. (www.killercoke.org)

Desde 1989, por lo menos ocho líderes sindicales de las plantas de Coca Cola en Colombia han sido asesinados por las fuerzas paramilitares. En los Estados Unidos, el sindicato de trabajador@s del Acero está demandando por daños y perjuicios a Coca Cola y Panamco bajo el Acta Alien Claims Tort por haber “contratado o dirigido a fuerzas de seguridad paramilitares que usaron violencia extrema y asesinaron, torturaron, e ilegalmente detuvieron a líderes sindicalistas.” (www.uswa.org)

Más de 3.000 sindicalistas han sido asesinados en Colombia desde 1990. En el período reciente, muchas corporaciones basadas en los Estados Unidos y

el gobierno imperialista estadounidense, casi siempre a través del Plan Colombia, han trabajado mano-a-mano con el gobierno colombiano y la clase dominante para perpetuar este terrorismo.

El 63 por ciento de la población de Colombia vive en la pobreza; 25 por ciento vive en condiciones de miseria.

Pero la unidad y solidaridad internacional con los sindicatos colombianos está creciendo rápidamente.

- En abril, la Asamblea Representativa de la Unión de Maestros Unidos del Estado de Nueva York que tiene 525.000 miembros y está asociada a la Federación de Maestros, adoptó la resolución de abstenerse de servir o vender productos de la Coca Cola en sus oficinas, reuniones y actividades públicas. (www.nysut.org)

- En los meses recientes, federaciones, concilios laborales, y sindicatos por todo los Estados Unidos, han pasado muchísimas resoluciones para protestar contra las violaciones de trabajo y de derechos humanos de la Coca Cola, prohibiendo las máquinas de Coca Cola y otros productos de Coca Cola en las oficinas sindicales, y demandando que las escuelas remuevan las máquinas de Coca Cola. Los sindicatos incluyen varios sucursales de los Trabajador@s de Correos, la Federación de Maestr@s de California, los Trabajador@s de Comunicaciones, Empleador@s de Servicios, Trabajador@s de Automóviles, y los Trabajador@s del Acero. Muchas sucursales de sindicatos canadienses e ingleses han pasado resoluciones semejantes. (www.killercoke.org)

- A causa de la presión masiva estudiantil, la Universidad Rutgers en Nueva Jersey no renovó el contrato exclusivo de Coca Cola, entrando en vigor el primero de junio, 2005. Campañas activas para prohibir la Coca Cola están teniendo lugar en más de 30 campos universitarios en los Estados Unidos y otros países.

- Un taller sobre “La campaña internacional para demandar justicia a la Coca Cola” tuvo lugar en el Foro Social Mundial en Porto Alegre, Brasil en enero. Más de 500 activistas presentes aprendieron varios modos de protesta contra “la bebida que mata — Coca Cola” y cómo apoyar a los sindicalistas colombianos. (www.iacenter.org)

Motisola Abdallah, una mujer afro-americana y una de los cuatro demandantes que llevaron a cabo el litigio en 1999 contra Coca Cola, acusándola de discriminación, resume la lucha contra la Coca Cola: “Estoy feliz de que la lucha contra la Coca Cola sea global y de largo plazo. Eso comprueba que l@s trabajador@s dondequiera que vivan están tod@s junt@s en esta lucha. Una corporación como Coca Cola no es solamente injusta a sus trabajador@s en un solo lugar. La injusticia corre a través de todo un negocio en el cual la ganancia es la mayor motivación.

“Nadie que luche por la justicia dede rendirse. Junt@s podemos lograr cambios, unidad y justicia verdadera” (La guerra en Colombia) □

