

MUNDO OBRERO

Morales promete cambios en Bolivia 12



NO TO DEATH SQUADS

Students boot Coca-Cola off campus 3



WW PHOTO: G. DUNKEL

NYC TRANSIT STRIKE

Its lasting repercussions 4

DETROIT AUTO SHOW

Angry workers will be there 5

DRASTIC CUTS

Congress slashes social programs 6

NO JUSTICE, NO OIL

Iraq economy collapsing 7

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Thieves fall out Abramoff scandal lifts lid on corporate bribery

By Fred Goldstein

A plea-bargain agreement signed by a key right-wing Republican Washington lobbyist, Jack Abramoff, is expected to lift the lid on the endemic corruption the ruling class uses to dominate the capitalist government.

Abramoff, who was facing 30 years, settled with federal prosecutors for a reduced sentence after pleading guilty to fraud, corruption and tax evasion charges, on the condition that he testify against members of Congress, congressional staffers and others whom he bribed. It is said that he has the goods on up to 60 members of Congress and their staffs. Where the investigation will go remains to be seen.

The most sensational charge against Abramoff is that he and his partner Michael Scanlon bilked Native tribes out of \$80 million they paid him to protect their casino operations and then bribed various legislators and an Interior Department official. Abramoff and Scanlon used most of the money for personal schemes of enrichment. E-mails released to the press show how the two used racist insults against their clients, falsified information and outrageously padded bills.

Because they were defrauding the Native tribes, they fell into the hands of right-wing militarist John McCain, who is head of the Indian Affairs Committee of the Senate. McCain also is an arch-enemy of George W. Bush and has made ending corruption and campaign finance reform a cause célèbre of his political career, resulting in the passage of the McCain-Feingold bill outlawing soft money in political campaigns.

The pressure of McCain, who called open hearings on the scandal, was reinforced by the general pressure of the ruling class to break this scheme open.

Abramoff is said to have given millions of dollars to Tom DeLay, the former Republican House leader, now indicted for money laundering in a Texas scheme involving discriminatory congressional redistricting. Abramoff's partner, Scanlon, is a former DeLay aide. He is accused of bribing Rep. Bob Ney (R-

Ohio) with campaign contributions, free meals and a trip to an exclusive golf course in Scotland in order to get legislation passed for his clients.

Abramoff bribed Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) to get a \$3 million grant for one of his clients. Burns was the number-one recipient of cash contributions from Abramoff's clients. He paid Ralph Reed, former head of the Conservative Christian Coalition and Bush's southern election campaign coordinator, \$4.2 million to block construction of a casino that would have competed with one owned by his clients. Grover Norquist, a right-wing outside adviser to the White House and a key architect of Republican lobbying strategy, arranged for White House meetings for Abramoff's clients after they agreed to donate money to Americans for Tax Reform, Norquist's organization.

Abramoff associate David Safavian, who was in charge of the \$300 billion budget of the Office of Management and Budget, was also arrested for covering up his collusion with Abramoff in a land deal. Abramoff also paid the wife of DeLay aide Tom Rudy \$50,000 to help his clients.

Abramoff did not leave the Democrats out.

He paid \$67,000 to Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) to help his clients. And House minority leader Harry Reid received payments of \$60,000 and \$10,000 from Abramoff to write a letter on behalf of his clients.

In addition, Abramoff is part of a criminal investigation in connection with a fraudulent casino cruise ship deal and a related gangland-style murder in Miami.

This is only what has been revealed so far.

Why ruling class cares

What has shocked the establishment is not that there is corruption, but that it has gotten out of hand. It is worrying sections of the ruling class and is so corrosive that it is damaging the prevailing political system. Abramoff may be the most dramatic symptom of the present malady, but the primary targets of the

Continued on page 6



BUSH BANS BASEBALL

A tournament without Cuba?
No way

10



BOLIVIA & CUBA

Revolutionaries
arm in arm

9

By Mumia Abu-Jamal from death row

What a difference a 'constitution' makes?

With the proposed constitutional voting out of the way, the nation's president and the press are calling for celebrations, suggesting that Iraq, battered, beaten, all but broken Iraq, is on the yellow brick road to "democracy."

Forget, for a second, the nonsense about "democracy," as if it is a lily that can be planted in desert soil, but the legalistic, word-infested, daze with which Americans treat the subject of "constitutions" leads many folks to think that once words are written on paper, the deed is almost done.

That is the thinking of many in this business-oriented contract culture: paper equates to power, and what is written becomes real.

But Iraq threatens to prove that paper is, after all, just paper.

And some observers are seeing, not "democracy" on the horizon, but the harrowing specter of civil war.

Much American commentary is spent on the claim that the Iraqi military is beginning to shoulder its burden of defending the country. There is one serious problem with that claim, and that's that no such national military exists.

What exists, according to former U.S. Ambassador Peter Galbraith, is an assortment of regional and essentially ethnic militias. Galbraith, writing in a recent edition of the New York Review of Books, argues:

"In this deeply divided country, people are loyal to their community but not to Iraq, and the army reflects these divisions. Of the 115 army battalions, 60 are made up of Shiites and located in southern Iraq, 45 are Sunni Arab and located in the Sunni governates, and nine Kurdish peshmerga, although they are officially described as the part of the Iraqi Army stationed in Kurdistan. There is exactly one mixed battalion (with troops contributed from the armed forces of the main political parties) and it is in Baghdad ... Kurdistan law prohibits the deployment of the Iraqi army within Kurdistan without permission of the Kurdistan National Assembly." [Peter Galbraith, "Last Chance for Iraq", *NYROB* (10/6/05), p. 22.]

Oh—the so-called "constitution"? It insures the autonomy of the regions, and separate states. The central government isn't central at all. In Iraq, it's "all power to the provinces."

Galbraith cites U.S. military sources for the fear that a civil war is imminent.

Months ago, I wrote that the alleged elections are virtually irrelevant.

I've found no reason to change that view.

The idea of "nation" differs from one religious community to another. What holds them together, just barely, is the memory of a nation-state. For some, that memory was one of dread. For others, Iraq was a place of glory.

And as there are different memories, some negative, some positive, these forces are pulling together, and pulling apart.

The idea of "nation" is slippery, illusive, ever-changing.

In time, perhaps in a surprisingly short time, there may be two, or three Iraqs. A Shi'a Iraq; a Sunni Iraq; and an Iraqi-Kurd homeland.

Without question, U.S. "national interests" (meaning "oil") will come from one of them (or perhaps all of them).

A nation under foreign occupation isn't really a nation, after all; it's a colony.

It doesn't make the really big decisions; those decisions are made for them by the occupying power. That's the very definition of "empire."

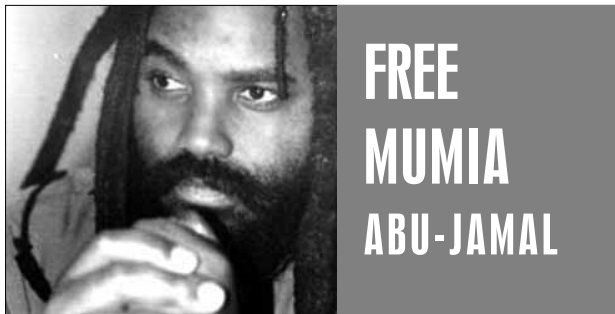
An empire, in order to be an empire, must have colonies.

If you think the Americans aren't calling the shots in Iraq, you're tripping!

They can talk about the Prime Minister and prattle on about the "constitution"; after all is said and done, Iraq is a state in the grip of a foreign power: the Americans.

Nations are taken over for the good of the conqueror; never the conquered!

Iraq is no exception.



Which class will lead?

Two-line struggle tore apart 1950s gay



By Leslie Feinberg

The first mass political gay liberation struggle took a different political turn when the communist founding organizers of the early Mattachine movement were

forced to step down from leadership after the group's May 1953 convention.

A bitter internal battle created the split.

It's not enough to say that the more radical leadership saw gay people as a distinct group in society and the more conservative forces saw gay people as not so different from non-gay people. The differences were much deeper, arising from a battle over which economic class in society to turn to for leadership in order to create change. ...

The full version of this article and the rest of Feinberg's Lavender & Red series can be read on www.workers.org.

Next: Lesbian organizing, "red feminism" and Black liberation.

IN MEMORIAM

Betsy Gimbel, won to the movement in Cleveland by Ted and Frances Dostal. Moving to New York, she joined the 60s/70s demonstrating, marching young people against the Vietnam War. When she became disabled, she took up another battle, forcing the city to implement the National Disabilities Act by installing wheelchair lifts on city buses, and demanding drivers be taught to operate them. She and another disabled activist sat in their wheelchairs at many a cold and windy or hot and sunny bus stop. Later, Betsy took up the cause of Larry Davis, who had exposed the police role in drug dealing in the neighborhood. In reprisal the police raided Mike and Betsy's loft and kidnapped their pets. Quirky, gutsy Betsy, a memorable Workers World comrade.

Edward Merrill 1924 - 2005
Founding member, Workers World Party
Steelworker, student of and teacher of Marxism

Lucia Morehead, 92. Joined the first U.S. demonstration against the Vietnam War in 1962, organized by Youth Against War & Fascism. Defied her background and roots to become a fighting, intransigent anti-war and anti-racist activist. Poet. Had an intense and never-ending interest in the future and present of the world.

Contributed by Rosemary Neidenberg

This week ...



★ In the U.S.

- Thieves fall out 1
- Mumia on 'What a difference a 'constitution' makes?' . 2
- Lavender & red, part 50 2
- U of M students boot Coca-Cola off campus 3
- Katrina survivors confront NYC mayor 3
- Cuban 4: Justice will prevail in our cause 3
- Why TWU strike was an historic event 4
- NYC transit strike was world news 4
- New faces at Detroit auto show: angry workers 5
- Aircraft mechanics reject Northwest contract 5
- Letters from transit workers 5
- Social programs face drastic cuts 6

★ Around the world

- Iraqi economy in collapse 7
- Iraqi: 'Several prisoners died under torture' 7
- What made the Cuban Revolution unique 8
- Bolivia's new president visits Cuba 9
- Morales: 'Our struggle is against U.S. imperialism' . . . 9
- World Social Forum 9
- Uproar as U.S. bans Cuban baseball team 10
- Haitian election postponed again 11
- More Guantanamo prisoners join hunger strike 11
- Okinawans protest new U.S. base 11

★ Editorials

- From a spark to a wildfire 10

★ Noticias En Español

- Morales gana por amplio margen y promete cambios . 12

WW CALENDAR

NEW YORK

Fri., Jan. 6

Workers World Party forum: Korea & the struggle against U.S. imperialism. Guest Speakers Yoomi Jeong & John Choe, leaders of Korea Truth Commission, will

report on the recent battles against the WTO in Hong Kong and an international meeting of the KTC in China. 7 p.m. (Special Korean Dinner at 6:30) At 55 W. 17 St., 5th Fl., Manhattan. For info phone (212) 627-2994.

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In solidarity with Colombian workers

U of M students boot Coca-Cola off campus

By Julie Fry

The University of Michigan announced on Dec. 29 that it is suspending its contract with the Coca-Cola Corp. This makes U of M the 10th university in the U.S. to kick Coca-Cola off campus in the wake of revelations about murders and other abuses of Coca-Cola workers in several countries, especially Colombia.

Rutgers in New Jersey and New York University are among those that have already banned Coca-Cola products. But with 50,000 students, U of M is the largest university so far to suspend its Coca-Cola contract.

U of M's announcement comes after a year-long campaign by students at the university. Similar campaigns are occurring on campuses nationwide. The students at U of M formed



an organization called the Coalition to Cut the Contract with Coca-Cola. It represents a broad range of U of M students and includes among its members Asian, Indigenous, Latin@ and Muslim student organizations, as well as student-labor solidarity organizations, environmental groups and others.

According to a statement released by the coalition, the students, through the university, have been trying to force Coca-Cola to consent to an independent investigation of the murder of nine Coca-Cola workers and union organizers by right-wing paramilitaries in Colombia. The Colombian workers say these murders were ordered and paid for by the Coca-Cola Corp. The workers have sued Coca-Cola and currently have a case pending in Miami against the company.

The students also

demanded an investigation into the environmental devastation Coca-Cola has caused in India, where the company's plants have caused severe contamination of the groundwater. The coalition also raised the issue of Coca-Cola's operations in Turkey, where 100 union supporters and organizers were fired in May of 2005 and then beaten when they demanded their jobs back.

According to the coalition, Coca-Cola refused to consent to any independent investigation without assurances that the information gathered in that investigation would not be used in the current lawsuit against the company.

Workers in Colombia and in other parts of the world have been struggling for years to bring attention to the crimes of the Coca-Cola Corp. The university bans are part of an international boycott called originally by the Colombian union Sinaltrainal. Unions in Colombia hailed the recent decision by U of M and other schools.

"Coca-Cola is a frequent violator of



union rights, and that's why several universities in the United States have decided to protest their conduct," said Fabio Arias, vice president of Colombia's CUT trade union confederation, which represents 550,000 workers. (Associated Press, Jan. 3)

A victory such as this at a school as large as the University of Michigan surely adds to the momentum of the international Coca-Cola boycott. But the fight is not over yet. The U of M students noted that the ban at their school was officially only a temporary one and that the university administration continues to insist that the Coca-Cola Corp. is acting in "good faith."

Students at the U of M and other universities plan to keep up the pressure on their campuses to make sure that the ban stays in place until the workers win their demands.

Julie Fry is a former University of Michigan student.

Katrina survivors confront NYC mayor

By Stephen Millies
New York

Michael Bloomberg, New York's billionaire mayor who bought his second term in November, hadn't planned on being confronted by nearly a hundred protesters during his extravagant inauguration on New Year's Day. But there they were, picketing on Broadway across from City Hall. Their 50-square-foot banner demanded justice for survivors of the hurricanes that devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

Some 4,000 of these survivors are currently living in New York City and the NYC Solidarity Committee for Katrina/Rita Evacuees, which organized the protest, says that many of them are facing a Feb. 6 eviction deadline. They need housing and jobs, not broken promises from government agencies. "There is no escape from the red tape," said Dick Darby, an evacuee who has been staying at the Apollo Hotel in Harlem.

Bloomberg's administration was so alarmed by the demonstration that Deputy Mayor Dennis Wolcott came to the protest and asked leaders that it be called off. The organizers refused to do so and the chanting grew louder. Despite the denial of a sound permit by the police, chants led by Charles Jenkins, a member of Transport Workers Union Local 100 and the Million Worker Movement, could be heard across the street. Bloomberg notoriously called TWU members on the subways and buses—70 percent of whom are Black, Latin@ or Asian—"thuggish" for going on strike.

Whatever embarrassment Bloomberg felt about being confronted by destitute hurricane survivors, that didn't stop him from spending at least a million dollars on his swearing-in party. Two huge "Jumbotron" viewing screens were erected within the small confines of City Hall Park so the megabucks mayor could look at himself. The master of ceremonies was John Lithgow, who, appropriately, is currently starring in the Broadway show "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels."

Bloomberg has grown so wealthy from his financial news empire that if he gave \$10,000 apiece to 100,000 of the people driven out of New Orleans, he would still have a tidy \$4 billion left.

After the inauguration ceremony dispersed, demonstrators marched up Broadway to the local headquarters of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), which let Black people drown in New Orleans.

Survivors and their supporters spoke eloquently at a rally there chaired by Joan Gibbs. Dick Darby said that coming from New Orleans he didn't realize the high rate of homelessness in Harlem. Mike Bartley reminded everyone that Jan. 1 was the traditional date that slaves were sold and families broken up when plantation owners were in debt.

Virginia Fields, who had retired a few hours before as Manhattan Borough President and was a candidate for mayor in 2005, addressed the rally. Brenda



WW PHOTO: ELLEN CATALINOTTO

Billionaire Bloomberg didn't expect this kind of reception at his inauguration.

Stokely of the Million Worker Movement and former president of AFSCME District Council 1707 spoke, as did Brenda Walker of the Millions More Movement. Gwen Debrow brought greetings from

the New York Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition. Solidarity messages were also heard from representatives of the National Conference of Black Lawyers and the International Action Center. □

Justice will prevail in our cause

The Cuban Five, still in U.S. jails despite an appellate court ruling that they did not receive a fair trial on trumped-up charges of conspiracy to commit espionage, sent the following New Year's message to the Cuban people.

The year 2005 comes to an end amid great challenges and also important victories.

Despite the intensified criminal blockade and low blows from the neofascist Bush administration, the reality is that the friendship and the shows of solidarity between the people of the U.S. and Cuba have strengthened.

The Cuban economy has not only resisted but managed to grow by more than 11 percent. Once again, the obnoxious blockade was overwhelmingly condemned by 182 countries at the UN General Assembly.

On the other hand, the Bolivarian Revolution [in Venezuela] closely joined with ours, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and the growing trade with friendly countries promise a brighter

future, not just for our country but for the Americas and humanity. A new hope is burgeoning on the planet. The development of Cuba's military, political and economic invulnerability, as stated by our Commander-in-Chief, represents vital strategic victories.

In our particular situation there were also some important victories in 2005.

In May we learned of the decision from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions that declared our detention as arbitrary and illegal.

Later, on Aug. 9, a unanimous decision from three judges in Atlanta overturned our convictions and ordered a new trial outside of Miami. Despite the fact that the prosecution and the U.S. government are using legal maneuvers to stall justice, we are convinced that in the end we will be victorious.

This 2006 will be a decisive year in our case. We must not stop in this battle for truth and justice, denouncing all the maneuvers and bad faith of the prosecution. In the end, we will surely all celebrate the victory with our return to Cuba.

Many challenges and difficulties lie ahead but we are sure that our united people will win each battle as there is no human or natural force that could stand in the way of all the love and justice behind our cause.

Dear compatriots, we, your five brothers, are deeply proud of you, of our Revolution and of having the honor to live this important moment in our country's history.

From our trenches in the heart of the empire, we want to wish you success and happiness in 2006.

We hope to soon be together with you in our beloved country to celebrate another glorious anniversary of our Revolution.

Long Live the 47th Anniversary of the Revolution!

Happy 2006!

Gerardo Hernández
Antonio Guerrero
Fernando González
René González
Ramón Labañino

Why the TWU strike was an historic event

By Milt Neidenberg
New York

For three days in December, this city, which houses the financial center of the imperialist world, was rocked by a strike of 34,000 transit workers. These workers of many different nationalities, members of Transport Workers Union Local 100 who carry over 7 million subway and bus riders safely to their jobs and destinations, shut the city down on Dec. 20-22.

At the height of the holiday shopping season, they paralyzed the corporate and business community. Wall Street estimated losses at a billion dollars a day. Billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg admitted that the strike cost the city over \$400 million a day in police overtime and lost revenues.

Plantation justice

The union members, a majority African American and Latin@, had been treated shabbily for many decades. They were fighting for more than a decent contract. They were standing up for dignity and respect.

In an interview with New York's major Black newspaper, TWU President Roger Toussaint, originally from Trinidad, described the racist assault against the union members: "The cultural problem is what we call a plantation justice mentality. ... It's not unusual for us to have 16,000 disciplinary notices issued in a year. ... There are inadequate facilities and time for bathroom breaks. Some bus drivers, male and female, when they can't find a store to run in to to relieve themselves, have had to master the art of relieving themselves in a cup when push comes to shove." (Amsterdam News, Dec. 8)

During the strike Mayor Bloomberg described Toussaint and his members as thugs, selfish and greedy. And this from a mayor who hasn't even bothered to move into Gracie Mansion, but instead chose to continue to live in his five-story, 7,000-square-foot townhouse, which made the Forbes magazine list of "400 Billionaire Homes."

For decades, Gracie Mansion, with its 11 acres of parkland in the middle of the city, was a luxurious perk for New York mayors.

Bloomberg spent \$75 million on his first election and over \$77 million on his second. This left an almost invisible dent in his assets. He spent \$103 for each vote he received—well worth it to him and his class.

Up against an unjust law

The union was faced with the vicious anti-union Taylor Law, which outlaws strikes by public sector workers in New York state. The first day, a state judge imposed a fine of \$1 million a day on the union, and two days' pay for each day of the strike on the workers. The jubilant bosses were optimistic that the strike would be broken. Toussaint and his negotiating committee would have to settle cheap. The capitalist newspapers and television cackled that Toussaint was boxed in.

Not true. He invoked a higher moral authority over an unjust law. He cited Rosa Parks, whose courage in breaking the segregation laws 50 years ago began the Civil Rights movement.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, led by Peter Kalikow, a multimillionaire real estate tycoon, was also convinced it could get a cheap concessionary contract. The MTA board chairperson is appointed by Gov. George Pataki, who directly controls six of the 14 votes on the board. Mayor Bloomberg has influence with the remaining votes. Both politicians are soul mates of bankers, big-time bondholders and well-heeled contractors who are the beneficiaries of the \$10 billion MTA budget. Like vultures, they suck the wealth from the transit corporation through exorbitant interest rates and rollovers of outstanding bonds.

In the Amsterdam News interview, Toussaint described the financial manipulations of the MTA. He reminded the public: "The MTA was reporting a deficit about a year ago, now they're reporting an over-\$1 billion surplus. ... So rather than using the surplus to shelve plans for future fare increases ... or rather than setting aside a portion of it to deal with our outstanding labor contract, they're looking at everything else. This is not right."

When negotiations opened up on Dec. 7, the MTA offer was insulting: a 2 percent wage increase over two years, the second year contingent on extending disciplinary citations on members who take "too much" sick leave; making newly hired workers pay 2 percent of their earnings into the pension plan; and extending the retirement age to 62 after 30 years of service. Currently transit workers can retire at 55 after working 25 years.

The MTA also demanded the merging of job titles of cleaners, station agents and bus helpers. Conductors and transit engi-

neers would merge into a one-person operation per train. At a time when many more riders are using public transportation, these demands would eliminate jobs and create an unsafe transportation system.

The MTA demanded concessions in wages, pensions, health care and working conditions for new hires—a two-tier system that has become the scourge of the labor movement, which in general has been retreating on these critical issues. The union was fighting an uphill battle.

Toussaint called the proposals an insult. Three days later, on Dec. 10, thousands of members converged on the huge Javits Convention Center in mid-Manhattan and overwhelmingly authorized a strike. For the next 10 days until the first day of the citywide strike on Dec. 20, the multinational membership was mobilized to fight back.

They organized massive, militant rallies and demonstrations. They held informational picket lines and planned "work-to-rule" job actions to force the MTA to improve its offer. They delayed the Dec. 15 strike date, when the contract expired, in consideration of the 7 million subway and bus riders and in the hope that the MTA would come to its senses. It didn't.

On Dec. 20, following a strike of over 700 Queens bus drivers not yet under the MTA who hadn't had a contract for almost three years, the 34,000 transit workers unleashed their power and shut the city down. It was an awesome act of defiance. Their own TWU International betrayed them by denouncing the strike. National union leaders like AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Change to Win's Andy Stern and Teamster President James Hoffa were nowhere to be seen.

Solidarity and national oppression

This multinational union won the admiration and sympathy of Black, Latin@ and other oppressed nationalities in this diverse city. These workers identified their own oppression with the TWU struggle, even though the strike created major obstacles in their getting to work. White workers angry at the rich and powerful also supported the strike.

The ruling class took note of this solidarity and how the transit workers were staying strong. Two days later, mediators were called in. A tentative agreement was arrived at the following day, ending the strike. The proposals were a

far cry from what the MTA had originally called its final offer.

TWU Local 100 assessed the gains in this offer over the MTA's original proposals. Highlights were a 37-month contract without the pension differentials or the divisive two-tier for new hires. Many workers were to get a refund on money already put into the pension plan—a boost of \$8,000-\$14,000 for some 20,000 members—and members attending school would get subsidies. They won a paid holiday on Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday and a host of other gains, along with a 10.5 percent wage increase over the length of the agreement. Broadbanding, a vicious practice to intensify productivity at the expense of eliminating subway and bus jobs, was taken off the table.

Equally significant were the gains in their quest for dignity and respect. The MTA agreed to reduce pre-disciplinary suspensions and brought in an independent third party to review the structure of the MTA's "cultural plantation" racist practices. And hurray for this: maternity pay for the first time ever.

The contract included a concession from the union—a contribution by the members of 1.5 percent of their wages for health care premiums. But they got lifetime medical coverage and the elimination of the prescription drug deductible for retirees.

The three-day strike exposed the lineup of class and racial forces between the multinational transit union and the MTA corporate/banking fraternity. To serve their class interests, there are no contracts, no rules they can't break.

The MTA was furious that the union refused to be boxed in by binding arbitration, which would have taken the decision-making out of the hands of the rank and file under the Taylor Law. Governor Pataki had sworn there would be no negotiations until the TWU returned to work—bitter words he later had to eat.

There is nothing like the fury of the rich and powerful and their political hacks when they get gored. They were enraged that this union, which broke their repressive Taylor Law, could win a decent contract.

It wasn't enough for this cabal of wealth and greed to punish the union with a \$3 million fine and assess the members two days' pay for each day on strike. Governor Pataki and the MTA are now threatening to renege on the agreement on retro pay for thousands of retirees and to withdraw the dues check-off—a financial lifeline of the union. The union is threatening to postpone the ratification vote until the contract is honored. The class and racial lines are once again being drawn.

The three-day transit strike unleashed an awesome power that shook up the ruling class. They were vulnerable to the timing of the strike and the unshakable will of 34,000 transit workers.

The strike will resonate far beyond this city, particularly among the more oppressed, low-paid multinational workers—including many women and immigrants—who suffer intensified deprivation and indignities. Because of the strike, TWU Local 100 and its leaders came out stronger, with a contract they can live with and their dignity intact. Considering that it came during the most relentless and protracted attack on the labor movement, this was the biggest and best thing that has happened in years. That makes it an historic event. □

Transit strike was world news

By G. Dunkel

From Qatar to Morocco and Angola, in India, China and Japan, throughout the Caribbean and across Europe and Canada, press services and newspapers covered the transit workers' strike by TWU Local 100 in New York City.

Reports ranged from sympathetic in the progressive journals—which exposed the racism of billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the injustice of the Taylor Law that makes public service strikes illegal—to dismissive and hostile in some of the pro-business European press.

The Gleaner, the major paper in Jamaica, proclaimed TWU 100 President Roger Toussaint "person of the year" for his struggle to defend the rights of his members.

Everybody's magazine, based in Brooklyn and oriented to the Caribbean community there, also felt Toussaint should be recognized as "person of the year" because "by waging an honorable battle to maintain workers' hard-won pension and other benefits Toussaint and the Transport Workers Union demonstrated that they are keeping alive the best traditions of the American labor movement."

Everybody's continued, "We applaud Roger Toussaint for the dignified way he conducted himself during the 54-hour strike, his principled approach, his oratory and his effective communication of the transit workers' demands." The article saluted Toussaint "and the selfless, valiant workers of the Transport Workers Union" for standing up for the rights of today's workers and the next generation of work-

ers by "resisting pension givebacks and the erosion or elimination of workers' health-benefit coverage."

The magazine concluded, "Indeed, our person of the year is charting a course that we hope labor leaders throughout the nation will emulate."

France's Le Monde, one of the major papers there, featured the strike on its front page with a photograph.

Much of the coverage in newspapers around the world made the following points: This was the TWU's first strike in 25 years, launched in the face of heavy fines. The strike was solid and shut the system down. And passengers and other workers in New York expressed a significant amount of support for the strike, even though it caused them a great deal of inconvenience. □

New faces at Detroit auto show: angry workers

By Martha Grevatt

Every year Detroit is host to the North American International Auto Show. Promoted as being “among the most prestigious auto shows in the world” and “one of the largest media events in North America,” NAIAS is the premier venue this side of the Atlantic for auto manufacturers to show off new products.

This year, angry Delphi workers and their supporters will be crashing the bosses’ party.

Soldiers Of Solidarity (SOS) is a growing, grassroots movement of rank-and-file workers formed in response to CEO Steve Miller’s outrageous attacks on Delphi workers. It has called for a protest at Cobo Hall from noon to 4 p.m. on Jan. 8—NAIAS media day—around the following slogans: support Delphi workers, stop the wage cuts, preserve benefits, preserve pensions, universal health care, and, they emphasize, no concessions.

Miller, whose field of expertise is the use of bankruptcy courts to gut union contracts, has demanded the United Auto

Workers (UAW) accept drastic cuts in wages and benefits, including a two-thirds cut in hourly pay. The UAW refused to go along. Delphi, the world’s largest auto parts company and a former General Motors parts division, then declared bankruptcy.

Delphi made a second offer slightly reducing the proposed wage cuts, but that has also been rejected by the UAW. The bankruptcy court, which has denied the UAW a role in its proceedings, had initially set a December deadline to rule on Delphi’s proposals, but no ruling had come down by the end of the year.

Worker rallies draw thousands

The UAW and other unions have held huge rallies in cities where Delphi has plants, typically drawing thousands. The six unions that represent the 34,000 Delphi workers in the U.S. have launched the Mobilize @ Delphi—“M@D”—campaign. UAW International President Ron Gettelfinger has warned that a strike is “more likely than not.” Strike training sessions are scheduled for January.

SOS activists, however, are determined to hit Delphi, and consequently GM, at the point of production. With meetings around the Great Lakes region drawing a minimum of 100 Delphi workers each, these rank-and-file leaders recognize that the time to act is now. They are organizing workers in their plants to “work to rule”—working in a manner faithful to the job description and nothing more. Workers will follow safety and quality guidelines strictly and won’t offer their expertise to management.

For bosses accustomed to making semi-secret, concession-laden deals with the top UAW leadership, the specter of independent rank-and-file resistance could be a major headache. Business analyst James Womack had this to say about the rising rank-and-file movement: “We’ve gone beyond the charted ocean where everybody understood what an iceberg was and what a supertanker was and what a whale was. Now there are all kinds of creatures leaping out of the water and nobody knows what these creatures are.” (New York Times, Dec. 13)

All the mobilizations have had an effect. The bankruptcy court’s date to rule on Delphi’s proposal was postponed to January and then again to Feb. 7. Delphi’s Miller has withdrawn his second proposal and expressed his willingness to go back to the bargaining table with the UAW.

What concessions will Delphi push now, and what demands will they drop? This has not been made public. Nor have Gettelfinger or other UAW officials made clear what they might settle for—only that Delphi needs to “narrow the scope of its demands” if it wants to avoid a strike.

Huge opposition to Ford, GM concessions

When GM itself claimed to be losing billions of dollars and threatened bankruptcy, citing the rising cost of employee and retiree health care, the UAW leader-

ship agreed to a mid-contract deal that would increase health care costs for retirees and strip active workers of a dollar an hour in scheduled wage increases. Worried that even greater health costs might be forced onto retirees, workers voted to go along with the deal. However, despite GM’s alleged losses, nearly 40 percent of those voting gave it thumbs down.

GM’s thank-you gift to its workers was the announcement that it would eliminate 30,000 jobs, on top of plant closings already agreed to in the 2003 contract with the UAW.

Also claiming billions in losses, Ford followed suit by declaring that it would eliminate 25,000 hourly positions. UAW-represented workers voted on the same concession package ratified at GM. It narrowly passed with a mere 51 percent of the vote, and remains in question. Several large Ford union locals rejected the deal, with well over half their members voting no. At least two mid-level union leaders have asked for a recount.

The GM and Ford votes suggest there could be an actual rejection of the pattern-setting concessions at DaimlerChrysler, where the bosses are still raking in profits.

All these developments point to serious rumblings on the production floor. Sooner or later, anger will turn into action. Workers need to flat-out reject the notion that Delphi, GM, Ford or DaimlerChrysler has the right to make any concessionary demands.

In the words of SOS leader Gregg Shotwell, “We have been indoctrinated with the policy of helplessness. It’s a lie. We are not defenseless victims. We have power. We control production. We can bring General Motors to its knees.

“The [1930s] sit-downers won because they seized control of the shop floor. They won because they shut down GM. Our challenge is no less.”

Martha Grevatt is on the executive board of UAW Local 122 at DaimlerChrysler’s Ohio Stamping Plant.



LETTERS from transit workers

MTA guilty of racist, sexist abuse

WW PHOTO:
G. DUNKEL

I’m a former MTA conductor from the A-division IRT line. The management of MTA was exceedingly verbally abusive. Racist, not to mention sexist. I’m available to testify at the Supreme Court as a witness if they need me.

They illegally terminated a number of Black females for wearing braids and dread locks. And I too was falsely terminated for “a crooked tie.” “Failure to adhere to uniform regulations.” Wow! Meanwhile a supervisor was allowed to curse at me: “Here’s your f’n radio” and “Hurry up and get on the f’n train.” I cried a lot while employed with the MTA, too scared to quit and go back to welfare, so I stayed and tolerated it.

MS. YOLANDA ALLISON
New York

Wants to fight Taylor Law

I am a New York City Transit bus driver. As per the recent strike, I am interested in campaigning to repeal the unfair Taylor Law. I would like some suggestions and/or help in how to proceed and who to write to as far as politicians or through a labor organization. I have a lady who writes for the New York Times that I am working with and I think we can put our efforts in the paper to get more publicity and hopefully get lots of labor and political support to repeal the law and give power back to the unions.

D. WEISS
New York

Aircraft mechanics reject Northwest contract

By Cheryl LaBash

The Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) announced on Dec. 30 that its members had rejected Northwest Airline’s strike settlement proposal. With 77 percent of eligible members participating, 57 percent voted “no” after four months on the picket line.

In a prepared statement, Northwest Airline (NWA) management responded that it was disappointed: “A ratified agreement would have ended the mechanics’ strike and allowed both parties to move forward.”

How do NWA bosses want to “move forward”? They are demanding an additional \$1.4 billion in concessions from the pilots, flight attendants and other workers who had previously agreed to givebacks.

This is the significance of the AMFA members refusing to give up the strike. Although the other airline unions did not strike in August, the struggle is not over. With the example of the three-day New York transit workers’ strike, which successfully rejected similar concession demands, still fresh, NWA knows the potential for united action against the airlines is real.

NWA must also be keenly aware of the rank-and-file upsurge among Delphi auto parts workers, who are fighting against a similar attack.

Pilots and flight attendants at NWA’s feeder carrier, Mesaba Airlines, picketed Detroit’s Metro airport on Dec. 19, exposing the paltry wages that already exist in the airline industry. Mesaba pilots are paid only \$21,000 per year, yet the company is demanding double-digit pay and benefit cuts.

The aircraft mechanics at Northwest went on strike Aug. 20, 2005, fighting cuts in jobs, pay and benefits that the airline and other industries are attempting to force on workers. Although Northwest claims to be “operating normally,” it has sharply reduced the number of flights—and is at the bottom of the on-time report. On Sept. 14, NWA went to bankruptcy court, using the authority of the capitalist state as a hammer against the workers.

AMFA National Director O.V. Delle-Femine commented on the vote: “This is a victory for AMFA members and for unionism. Our striking members refused to bow down to Northwest’s arrogant, self-enriching management and will continue

the strike against this renegade, union-busting airline. AMFA members approved recent agreements with Alaska Airlines, Horizon Air and even United Airlines in bankruptcy. Only Northwest’s management is out to deny all its employees a living wage while awarding themselves millions in frivolous bonuses.

“ALPA [Air Line Pilots’ Association], IAM [International Association of Machinists] and the flight attendants should take note that their failure to support AMFA encouraged Northwest to come after them in the same way and did not weaken our resolve to fight for our rights with dignity and professionalism.

“Unions outside of Northwest, especially the UAW and others who have lent us financial and moral support, can take pride in the fact that the vast majority of AMFA members have never faltered, even in the face of extraordinary economic pressure. Many of our Northwest members have gone on to better things than working for the unreformed Scrooges on this airline’s management team, but continue to support our brave strikers in person or in other ways. I could not be prouder.” □

Social programs face drastic cuts

By Kathy Durkin

Why did Vice President Dick Cheney interrupt a trip overseas last month to rush back to Washington early?

He raced in on Dec. 21 to break a tie vote in the U.S. Senate and ensure that the brutal Budget Reconciliation Act passed. This ruthless bill will go back to the House of Representatives for a final vote and then on to the White House to be signed.

This 778 pages of legislation is an elaborate, detailed five-year plan for nearly \$40 billion in devastating cutbacks across an array of essential social programs. It is a cruel blow to millions of poor and working people, including single mothers, children, the elderly and disabled. It will cause enormous harm to those who have the least and will set back gains made over decades.

Especially targeted by these modern-day robber barons—who made sure to include in this bill \$70 billion in tax cuts for their multi-millionaire friends—are Medicare, Medicaid, student loan programs, childcare subsidies and public assistance.

Student aid programs—which enable children of working-class families to attend college—would be cut by a staggering \$12.7 billion. Education advocate David Ward said this is “the biggest cut in the history of the federal student loan program.”

The cutbacks in Medicaid are sweeping and devastating. Health care costs will rise for the poorest families, causing many to forgo needed services; some will be too disheartened to even enroll. Some will die.

States would be allowed to charge mil-

lions of Medicaid recipients premiums and higher co-payments and limit or end coverage. They could drop those not able to pay premiums within 60 days or give on-the-spot co-payments for medications, visits to doctors or hospitals, including for emergency care. Higher co-payments will discourage the use of newer, higher-cost drugs, including for mental health, even if they're more effective.

The budget also affects the working poor. Many who have no on-the-job health insurance turn to Medicaid for their families. This bill would reduce their ability to do so, forcing more to join the 46 million presently uninsured. At a time of employer cuts in health insurance, this will severely hurt low-income workers' families.

Medicaid is an essential federal-state health care program that covers more than 54 million poor and working-poor families; 25 million of those covered are children. The National Women's Law Center says Medicaid provides health insurance for 40 percent of single mothers and 3.6 million elderly women, and that 71 percent of adult beneficiaries are women. This bill would callously permit states to reduce Medicaid coverage for contraception and family planning services for poor women.

The Medicare program, which insures 42 million elderly and disabled people, will also be impacted. And poor, disabled recipients of Supplemental Social Insurance may have to wait for up to one year for their benefits.

This bill imposes a stunning assault on public assistance recipients. It mandates harsh “workfare” requirements, continuing the precedent set 10 years ago by the

cruel Welfare Reform Act promoted by then-President Bill Clinton. More single mothers will be pushed into “workfare” programs and, to add insult to injury, childcare subsidies will be decreased for them.

To no one's surprise, however, two groupings that did not come under the budgetary ax were the pharmaceutical industry and health care companies. They come out of this with their mega-profits unscathed, while the poorest people suffer.

Many organizations representing children, women, poor people, the elderly and the ill have condemned this bill.

AIDS activists have expressed outrage at lawmakers who voted for provisions that would risk the lives of hundreds of thousands who live with HIV/AIDS. Medicaid is this country's largest payer of HIV/AIDS care. (gaywired.com)

The Human Rights Campaign says states, not health care providers, would have the authority to decide who receives medical care under Medicaid, and they could discriminate against recipients.

David Gartner, Global AIDS Alliance policy director, warned of the bill's ramifications. He said that an Oregon law raising Medicaid premiums and co-payments led to a recipient dropout rate of 50 percent. He signaled that “the cuts to the Medicaid program would be devastating to all people on Medicaid.” (Advocate.com)

But Congress and the White House have so far given in to the voracious appetite of the rich for massive tax reductions and social program cutbacks. They have given them whatever they asked for in “steal from the poor, give to the rich” schemes to get hundreds of billions of dollars in tax

cuts and to carry out their wars.

It should not be forgotten that almost all the elected officials in both houses of Congress, and in both capitalist parties, voted for the war in Iraq and all the budgetary appropriations for it—which amount to an admitted \$230 billion-plus so far with no end in sight. In fact, Congress just voted another \$453 billion in military spending, including \$50 billion more for the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

But who can stop the Bush agenda of war, racism, poverty and corporate greed? Only the power of the people—who everywhere are becoming fed up with the war, with the millionaires' tax cuts, and with the growing assaults on their standards of living, their communities and their cities.

Their rightful anger is sowing growing opposition to the horrendous policies coming from the imperialist ruling class. This will only broaden and increase as the war goes on, the tax cuts continue, the federal government does little to help Katrina survivors, and the budgetary ax falls on more poor and working people.

There is real potential for a mass struggle by working people, in and out of unions, including immigrants and those in other oppressed communities, the poor, women, the elderly, lesbian/gay/bi/transgender people, the disabled and their organizations, advocates and supporters.

The answer to all this militarism, corporate greed and cutbacks is an independent movement, with broad mass organizing and fightback.

The Bush administration must be made to feel the outrage of the masses of people, united in struggle, banging at the gates of Congress and the White House. □

Thieves fall out—Abramoff scandal lifts lid c

Continued from page 1

campaign are the higher-ups who were the architects of the present lobbying system in Washington—the creators of what is known as the K Street Project.

The K Street Project was initiated by DeLay and Norquist in 1995 after the Republicans got control of the House and the Senate in the mid-year elections. The aim was to get right-wing Republicans to take complete control of the vast lobbying apparatus that is housed on K Street in Washington, near the Capitol.

According to Nicholas Confessore, writing in the July/August 2003 issue of the Washington Monthly, Tom DeLay “famously compiled a list of the 400 largest PACs, along with the amounts and percentages of money they had recently given to each party. Lobbyists were invited into DeLay's office and shown their place in the ‘friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ columns. (‘If you want to play in our revolution,’ DeLay told the Washington Post, ‘you have to live by our rules.’)” The rules were to oust Democrats from their lobbying firms and trade associations.

A year later, according to Confessore,

Haley Barbour, who was chair of the Republican National Committee, “organized a meeting of the House leadership and business executives. They assembled several large company CEOs and made it clear to them that they were expected to purge their Washington offices of Democrats and replace them with Republicans,” says a veteran steel lobbyist. The Republicans also demanded more campaign money and help for the upcoming election. The meeting descended into a shouting match, and the CEOs, most of them Republicans, stormed out.”

In 2000, when Bush was elected and the Republicans got control of Congress, Norquist accelerated the K Street Project. Working outside the government, he compiled a database “intended to track party affiliation, Hill experience, and political giving of every lobbyist in town.” (Washington Monthly)

According to Confessore, every Tuesday morning, right-wing Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) convenes a meeting “in the privacy of a Capitol Hill conference room for a handpicked group of two dozen or so Republican lobbyists. Occasionally one or two other senators or a representative

from the White House will attend.

“The chief purpose of these gatherings is to discuss jobs—specifically the top one or two positions at the biggest and most important industry trade associations and corporate offices centered around Washington's K Street.... In the past these people were about as likely to be Democrats as Republicans, a practice that ensured K Street firms would have clout no matter which party was in power.”

Confessore says that “the GOP is building its machine outside the government, among Washington's thousands of trade associations and corporate offices, their tens of thousand of employees, and the hundreds of millions of dollars in political money at their disposal.”

The result: “The corporate lobbyists who once ran the show, loyal only to the parochial interests of their employer, are being replaced by party activists who are loyal first and foremost to the GOP.”

But it is not just Republicans who are being placed in strategic positions—it is right-wing Republicans. An article in Workers World newspaper of Oct. 9, 2005, quoted Elizabeth Drew's piece in the June 23 issue of the New York Review of Books entitled “Selling Washington.”

Drew said that, “When I suggested to Grover Norquist, the influential right-wing leader and leading enforcer of the K Street Project outside Congress, that numerous Democrats on K Street were not particularly ideological and were happy to serve corporate interests, he replied, ‘We don't want non-ideological people on K Street, we want conservative activist Republicans on K Street.’”

Drew gave a sense of how things have

gotten out of hand. “There are no restraints now: business groups and lobbyists are going crazy—they're in every room on Capitol Hill writing legislation. You can't move without giving money.”

And this is increasingly costly to the corporate bosses. According to a June 22, 2005, dispatch in the Washington Post, the number of lobbyists in Washington had doubled since 2000 to more than 34,750 while the amount that they charged had increased by as much as 100 percent. Lobbying firms cannot hire fast enough. Starting salaries have risen to \$300,000 a year for well-connected people. “Half of all lawmakers who return to the private sector when they leave Congress” become corporate lobbyists, said the article.

Fees that used to run from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a month are now \$25,000 to \$40,000 a month. This is something that the bosses understand well. The cost of doing business in Washington is skyrocketing and the terms of doing business are being dictated to them by politicians.

When the corporations resist the instructions from DeLay and Norquist, they suffer or are pressured. The insurance industry, the mutual fund industry, the electronics industry, the motion picture industry and others who resisted going along with Bush-promoted legislation that was contrary to their interests were penalized or threatened.

Drew quoted a Business Week article that told how the Business Roundtable was summoned to a meeting with a special assistant to the president, various cabinet members and Deputy White House Chief of Staff Karl Rove. The

MARKET ELECTIONS: How democracy serves the rich

BY VINCE COPELAND

Every four years, big money chooses the presidential candidates. Their war chests filled to the brim, they are then packaged by the media as “the people's choice.”

It's U.S.-style democracy—of the rich, by the rich and for the rich. But how do these chosen politicians win the votes of the millions as well as the millionaires?

Who has been excluded from voting?

How were electoral politics used to betray Black freedom after the Civil War?

How did two Roosevelts wield reform at home to facilitate empire-building abroad?

Why did no ‘normal’ elections take place between 1960 and 1976?

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Iraqi economy in collapse

Gas prices up, oil production down

By John Catalinotto

While the Bush administration tried to put an optimistic spin on Iraq's Dec. 15 election, its efforts were quickly eclipsed by the ongoing resistance and the economic collapse of the occupied country.

Iraq's oil exports in December were down to 1.1 million barrels per day—their lowest level since April 2003, just after the U.S. invasion. The price of gasoline, historically kept low in Iraq through state subsidies, shot up by six times in the new “free market” economy.

The price hike was such a shock that Iraq's oil minister, Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum, resigned. Adding to the grief of the Iraqis was a two-week shutdown of the biggest gasoline refinery. These problems led to mass protests around the country and a near-uprising in Kirkuk, where police shot and killed four protesters on Jan. 1.

Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi, a longtime Pentagon favorite who is notorious for his corruption and whose party did badly in the election, has now replaced al-Ulum as oil minister.

Iraq's electrical output is still lower than it was before the invasion. In Baghdad there is electricity for at most six hours per day.

And now President George W. Bush says that the U.S. will no longer pay for reconstruction projects in Iraq. At one time the White House had promised the “best infrastructure in the Middle East” for the country that the U.S. has occupied and half-destroyed.

Secular and Sunni-based parties have continued to protest the recent election process and its outcome. The big winners are the members of a Shiite religious coal-

ition that includes the SCIRI and DAWA parties. These groups have cooperated with the occupation but are considered close to Iran.

This coalition, with 130 seats, is still short of the 184 seats, or two-thirds majority, needed to form a government. It must form an alliance either with the pro-occupation Kurdish parties or some other grouping.

While the U.S. occupation forces went along with the SCIRI and DAWA parties' attacks on the secular and Ba'athist forces in the geographical center of the country, Washington has shown hostility to an Iraqi government that could be friendly to Iran. The U.S. prefers to support Chalabi's group, which got only about 5 percent of the vote, and Ayad Allawi, whose party got less than 15 percent.

U.S. frees al-Kubaysi

The biggest step Washington has taken that shows friction with the puppet government is the freeing of prisoners, including those who were associated with the ruling Ba'ath Party in pre-invasion Iraq.

Among the 38 prisoners freed from a camp holding 103 high-level Ba'athists was Abdel Jabbar al-Kubaysi, the leader of the Iraq Patriotic Alliance, a resistance organization.

Al-Kubaysi was an opponent of Saddam Hussein's grouping in the Ba'ath Party who left Iraq in the 1970s but returned shortly before the invasion in order to oppose the U.S. assault. He was arrested in the summer of 2004 and held for 16 months in custody.

The U.S. authorities also freed two

women: Dr. Huda Ammash, known for her work detailing the ravages of depleted uranium on Iraqis, and Dr. Rihab Taha. U.S. propaganda has demonized the two women, calling them, respectively, Mrs. Anthrax and Dr. Germ. The Iraqi puppet government protested their release.

U.S. officials have not explained why at this particular time they have released these prisoners, some of whom said they had been tortured.

Al-Kubaysi, who lost 25 pounds while he was being held incommunicado, has told the French and Jordanian media that three former officials of the Saddam Hussein era had died under questioning. He named them as former Prime Minister Hamzeh al-Zubaidi, former Ba'ath party official Adel al-Duri and former intelligence commander Waddah al-Sheikh.

Recruitment down for 2005

On the home front, the weakest point for the U.S. military has been its inability to replenish its forces with new recruits. Despite the lack of well-paying jobs for non-college-trained youths, both the Army and the Army National Guard fell short of their recruiting goals for fiscal 2005. The Army fell short by 6,000, or about 8 percent. The National Guard

missed its total by 20,000.

These figures are even more striking because the Army has lowered its test standards and is accepting recruits from among those who scored the lowest, while the National Guard has begun paying “finder's fees” to members who direct the service to new recruits.

The Army had looked to the African-American community for a proportionally greater number of recruits. In the year 2000, about 24 percent of Army new enlistees were African Americans. But in 2004, the percentage dropped to 14 percent.

The Pentagon's problems came to a boil in Duluth, Minn., where Vietnam veteran Scott Cameron has put up a sign outside the recruiting station giving the count of U.S. troops killed and wounded in Iraq. The seven military recruiters want the sign taken away. “It's disheartening,” said Staff Sgt. Gary J. Capan, the station's commander.

The truth hurts.

The same disheartened mood seems to permeate U.S. ranks in Iraq. One GI in Iraq wrote an e-mail to his uncle saying that people “back home get a false picture of the war. We don't want to leave the camps,” he said, “because when we go into town, someone tries to blow us away.” □

Iraqi released by U.S. military charges:

'Several prisoners died under torture'

Excerpts from an interview with Abdel Jabbar al-Kubaysi, secretary general of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance, who had been in exile but returned to Iraq just before the U.S. invasion. The interview was conducted by Kulu al-Arab and published on al-Basra.net.

I was imprisoned for 16 months in Camp Cropper jail, located in Baghdad International Airport, the largest U.S. base in the country. In the first six months of my imprisonment they put me in a small [wooden] cell. But the first 11 days I spent in a [wooden] box in which my body barely fit.

After these six first months they transferred me to where the political prisoners were. During my time of imprisonment I was able to speak with all the prisoners except Tariq Aziz and Taha Yasin Ramadan, whom I saw only at a distance. There were a total of 103 prisoners in this jail.

What essentially characterizes this center [of imprisonment] is that it is totally isolated. The prisoner sees only American soldiers—although later they allowed me to contact my family for 10 minutes every 40 days, and they did the same with the other prisoners.

The interrogations and their procedures were exhausting. The sessions lasted more than 20 hours, time that we always spent with our hands and feet tied and our eyes bandaged. The interrogators were formed by groups of four Americans from the CIA or from other agencies, and were changing constantly.

One of the interrogators presented some of my writings to me as proof that I was a political theoretician of the resistance, texts in which I had raised some points to create the conditions of the expulsion of the occupiers. I do not deny that I support the resistance until the

expulsion of the last American and Iranian soldier from my country, but on the other hand I do not know who makes up the resistance.

I had written in some article that four conditions were necessary to be able to end the occupation: first, to extend the geography of the armed activity of the resistance and to let it grow so that it becomes a national resistance without religious denominations; second, to foment the qualitative actions to inflict greater damage to the U.S. forces at the human and material level; third, that Iraq avoid isolation from its surroundings and that therefore everything that occurs in Iraq have effect in the entire zone, which would lead the governments in the Middle East loyal to the U.S. to explain [to the Bush administration] the risk it would undergo by continuing to occupy Iraq and the consequences of strengthening the Iraqi resistance, in such a way that the U.S. will realize that the Zionist entity in Palestine [Israel], which it has protected by waging the war on her behalf, will be in danger; and fourth, that the U.S. has lost its credibility. This will push U.S. society to reject the occupation and the war in Iraq.

Tortures and starvation

I have personally not seen people tortured, except for four people: Taha Yasin Ramadan, [former] vice president of the republic, whose body I saw covered with blood and him trying to heal himself with water and salt; Jamis Sarhan, member of the leadership of the Ba'ath Party and resident of Falluja; Dr. Hazem Achajj Arrawi, a scientist of the biological program; and Mohamad Al-Saghir, official of the secret services.

I am not talking about the usual practice of blindfolding the eyes and tying the

Continued on page 10

on corporate bribery

Business Roundtable is made up of the CEOs of the top 160 corporations in the U.S.—a heavy concentration of powerful capitalists.

“They anticipated a friendly give-and-take about economic legislation, but instead they were told to get behind the president's plan to privatize Social Security. As a result, these organizations have spent millions of dollars promoting Bush's new program.... Business groups have been notably reticent about criticizing administration policies—even ones they deeply dislike.... An adviser to business groups says, “They're scared of pay-back, of not getting their own agenda through.”

Forgetting who's the master

Workers World wrote in its Oct. 9, 2005, article entitled “Behind Washington's political scandals”:

“Bush and the Republican right wing are giving the corporations huge breaks and benefits to serve their profit interests. At the same time, they are making heavy-handed demands for money and political obedience. This is something that the bourgeoisie does not take kindly to—especially from the politicians who are supposed to be their servants.

“If the bosses want a Democrat on their payroll, for reasons of influence, they don't want to be told whom to hire—not by their own servants, the very politicians they have put in office. The bosses will give money in bribes to get what they want, but when those bribes take on a flavor of extortion, then it's a different story.

“Furthermore, the bosses have gone to great lengths to create and nurture the

two-party system of capitalist politics. It gives them more options, depending on economic and social conditions. They certainly do not want to become excessively dependent on one current or grouping in any party.

“The Democrats are now looking at this discontent in the establishment and are licking their lips, hoping that they can get back into a majority in 2006 and have a shot at the presidency in 2008. In other words, they can get their lobbyists back on K Street. The ruling class can go through them to get its legislation and its deals.

“The real conspiracy of both parties is that carried out against the interests of the working class and the oppressed, who should oppose the corrupt right-wing reactionaries without running into the arms of the Democrats. The latter are just more slick in the way they support capitalist exploitation.

“The Democrats have to fight the Republicans on grounds of corruption because they have no political program to help the masses. They are for the occupation in Iraq: ‘Stay the course’ is their motto. They voted for the right-wing, racist, anti-abortion, anti-worker, pro-big business John Roberts for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. They have done nothing to help the victims of Katrina and Rita. They just play politics and criticize.”

Settling for a more subtle and restrained form of corruption and corporate influence under the Democrats will not serve the interests of the working class and the oppressed. Only an independent political and mass organization for struggle can chart a way out of the present crisis. □

What made the Cuban Revolution unique

This article by Workers World founder Sam Marcy first appeared in the Feb. 17, 1994, issue of WW. It is slightly abridged here.

What has made the Cuban Revolution unique? Why is it such a beacon to the workers and oppressed masses, not only of Latin America and the Caribbean but around the world?

There have been many uprisings, guerrilla wars, progressive electoral victories and military coups in Latin America in the course of this century. But the triumph of Fidel Castro's guerrilla army over the Batista dictatorship did something that no previous struggle had accomplished.

It broke up the old state apparatus. The revolution did not merely change governing groups, as had happened so many times before. It unseated the bourgeoisie itself from its role as the ruling class by demolishing its instrument of rule, the bourgeois state.

It once again proved the monumental words of Karl Marx on the Paris Commune: that one of the fundamental characteristics of a change of class structures is the crushing of the old state apparatus and its replacement by a new state based on the popular consent of the masses.

This is what happened in Paris in 1871, when popular revolutionary committees took over the functions of government. Such committees of the urban masses had first appeared in the French Revolution of 1789, when the bourgeoisie had to call out the workers and artisans to be able to completely uproot the old feudal order. In 1871, the popular committees or communes appeared again, but this time they represented the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

In Cuba, the Committees in Defense of

the Revolution became the eyes and ears of the new class power and its most important line of defense against U.S. imperialist sabotage and invasion. The bourgeoisie especially scorned and maligned the CDRs because they were the living proof that a new type of state, based on the workers, had taken over in Cuba in 1959.

Political revolution in Mexico

It is instructive to compare this to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 which, for all its great achievements, did not go beyond progressive, bourgeois democratic reforms. It did, of course, expropriate the big land owners and distribute much of the land. This is a great revolutionary measure in the struggle against the big land holders, both feudal and capitalist. But it is not a socialist measure.

The history of peasant rebellions in both Europe and Latin America demonstrates that they ultimately deteriorate. The landlords eventually lay their hands again on the best and most fertile areas, and the struggle continues until another round of revolutionary peasant uprisings.

Peasant uprisings alone, even if they have some working-class support, do not abolish the basis of landlord and capitalist exploitation.

The Mexican Revolution was a political revolution that reformed the state. This explains why Mexico today, despite all its historically important great reforms, is a bourgeois country. Different groupings may hold the governing positions, even at the summits of power, but this does not change the class structure of society.

The imperialists themselves recognize that such reforms do not alter the character of their exploitation. They have cynically described their relations with Mexico in its revolutionary period as "continuing

to do business during alterations." Even when Mexico nationalized the lands of the foreign oil companies in the 1930s, its relationship with the U.S. continued more or less as before.

Why Cuban Revolution went further

The Cuban Revolution came more than 40 years after the Mexican Revolution. It came after the great October socialist revolution in Russia and the revolutions in China, Vietnam and Korea. The industrial development of Cuba was greatly advanced compared to some other areas of Latin America, despite the constraints imposed by imperialist control and ownership—and the poverty and underdevelopment of much of the countryside.

While Cuba had not reached the level of the European capitalist states, the objective basis for socialist revolution had matured there. It must always be remembered that Cuba lives in the shadow of U.S. finance capital, which until the revolution controlled its most important economic arteries.

Liberal writers in the U.S., some of them very well-meaning, spread confusion about the socialist revolution in Cuba. Some of it was actuated by friendly desires not to cast Cuba in communist revolutionary colors, for fear of giving aid to imperialism.

Projecting a moderate image of Cuba seemed necessary in order to withstand the utterly unprecedented vileness of the imperialist press and the increasingly shrill calls by the most extreme elements for intervention.

Many liberal and socialist elements in the U.S. closely studied the Cuban Revolution. Probably the best account was by Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy in the book "Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution" (Monthly Review Press, 1960). While the Cuban leaders at that time spoke of the revolution only in terms of specific reforms, Huberman and Sweezy had "no hesitation" in concluding that "the new Cuba is a socialist Cuba."

In the United States, the discussion of the class character of the Cuban Revolution came to a rather abrupt end when Comrade Fidel Castro, in a speech made just as CIA planes were bombing Cuba during the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, for the first time put it quite explicitly: "What the Yankee imperialists will not forgive is that we have made a socialist revolution right under their very noses."

Strong unions and Communist Party

It's important to note that before the rise of the 26th of July Movement that launched the revolutionary struggle for power, Cuba had for many years had a strong Communist Party and trade unions that survived years of repression. The early liberal and progressive literature in the United States about the Cuban Revolution often overlooked this. But objective and subjective conditions in Cuba had matured to the point where a strong Communist Party was possible.

Mexico in 1910 did not have the conditions for the existence of a revolutionary working-class party. There were no communist parties yet in existence anywhere. Nor were conditions ripe for such a party. The party that came out of the Mexican Revolution was the Institutional Revolutionary Party, a bourgeois party that has ruled until the present day [1994].

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the first workers' state faced imperialist inter-

vention, civil war and isolation. One basic reason it was able to overcome all this, even after the failure of revolutions in Europe, was the enormous size of the country.

The Chinese revolution was less isolated because of the existence of the USSR. Nevertheless, no sooner had the Chinese Communists marched into Beijing in 1949 than the U.S. imperialists opened an attack right next door in Korea.

The French, meanwhile, opened an offensive in their former colony of Vietnam. And the British were fighting an insurgent movement in Malaya. For many years, it seemed as though China would be the target of an open imperialist war in Asia led by the U.S.

Until 1971, the U.S. and its imperialist allies on the United Nations Security Council prevented People's China from taking its rightful seat in the UN, and blocked diplomatic recognition of China by other capitalist countries.

So when the Cuban Revolution began to break the bonds of imperialism, the U.S. quickly moved to isolate this island of 10 million people. Washington thought the revolutionary government would not long survive an economic blockade coupled with military intervention.

It is an incontestable fact that without the very significant material, political and diplomatic support extended to Cuba by the Soviet Union, Cuba's position at that time would have been almost impossible. It took a nuclear confrontation to bring the U.S. military colossus to a rational temporary standoff in its struggle to overthrow the Cuban socialist government. The hearts and minds of the bulk of humanity during the entire course of the missile crisis were almost wholly on the side of Cuba and the USSR.

Attempts to isolate Cuba fail

The fact that the U.S. attempt to isolate Cuba has failed was confirmed once again in November [1994] when the UN General Assembly voted 88 to four for an end to the embargo. The three countries that voted with the U.S. were Paraguay, Israel and Albania. The U.S. imperialists could not even get one of their own imperialist allies on board, nor one country of any size.

Despite the attempts at isolation, Cuba is a most cosmopolitan place. It is constantly hosting international conferences and exhibits on science, technology and the arts. It has contacts with all the progressive movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranging across a broad political spectrum. All over the world, Cuba retains its diplomatic and political standing.

When President Fidel Castro travels anywhere in Latin America, the populace turns out to greet him.

Cuba is being hurt economically because of the vast array of U.S. forces against it. But it cannot be isolated politically.

Finally, resistance to imperialism's war against Cuba is rising inside the U.S. as never before. The old hate campaigns against Cuba are disintegrating, from Miami to New York to San Francisco.

The ice was first broken in January 1992, when a rally for Cuba in New York's spacious Jacob Javits Convention Center was filled to overflowing. The splendid turnout made a mockery of counter-revolutionary Cubans' threats to disrupt the rally.

Despite the 30-year U.S. effort to isolate Cuba diplomatically, economically and politically, the Cuban Revolution stands tall as an unconquerable fortress of the world revolution. And no force on the face of the earth will overturn it. □

During World Social Forum

Meet workers in Caracas and Bogotá

By Cheryl LaBash

The word is spreading about the changes going on in South America.

Even in the Bronx and Boston, low-income workers can feel it directly as they start to receive heating oil at reduced prices from Citgo Oil Co. of Venezuela. On campuses across the country students are forcing universities to stop using Coca-Cola products in solidarity with workers in Colombia.

Now there is a special opportunity to see these changes through the experiences of workers themselves in these two countries. People from the U.S. will see first-hand Latin America's workers in action to bring a just society—in Venezuela, where the government is supporting and legislating in favor of the workers, and in Colombia, where the workers are organizing despite terrible repression at the hands of their own government.

As 2006 dawns, U.S. workers are confronted with plant closings, layoffs and pay and benefit cuts, together with out-of-sight fuel and water bills. The experiences of workers in Venezuela, who are transforming their workplaces and society, and the struggles in Colombia can give us a fresh new view.

Join the U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange

delegation to Caracas, Venezuela, and Bogotá, Colombia. Not only will participants attend the sixth World Social Forum in Caracas, but they'll visit work sites there, too, as guests of the Venezuelan Trade Union Federation (UNT).

In Colombia, the SINALTRAINAL union, representing Coca-Cola and Nestlé workers, will host meetings with workers from those transnational corporations and with Untraflores—MPF, the union of the flower industry. Colombia is the second-largest flower exporter in the world after Holland. Its workforce, 70 percent poor and migrant women who work under extremely hazardous conditions, produces 78 percent of the flowers imported by the United States.

There will also be exchanges with the African-Colombian organization Negritudes and the Indigenous organization Kankuama OIK—Codacoop.

No other World Social Forum delegation offers this opportunity to engage and discuss with workers in these two countries. The trip leaves New York on Saturday, Jan. 21, and returns Sunday, Feb. 5. A nine-day option for only the World Social Forum is also available.

Contact the U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange at laborexchange@aol.com or (313) 561-8330.

Fresh from stunning election victory

Bolivia's new president visits Cuba

By Teresa Gutierrez

The New Year began with a development of the greatest importance for Latin America and for the class struggle: a visit by Evo Morales to revolutionary Cuba. It was the first trip abroad by the newly elected president of Bolivia. He went on New Year's Eve, just as Cubans were preparing to celebrate the anniversary of their socialist revolution.

Morales is the first Indigenous person to win the presidency in Bolivia, even though the majority of the people are Indigenous. He was elected on Dec. 18 with the largest vote for any president in decades.

Morales is also expected to visit South Africa, China and Brazil. He is not planning to visit the United States.

Evo, as he is affectionately called by his supporters, will be inaugurated on Jan. 22.

Cuban President Fidel Castro said the election of Morales had "shaken the world."

The Cuban government placed a lot of importance on Morales's trip. A high-level delegation of Cubans took part in the meetings with the Bolivian president-elect. They included the president of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon; Carlos Lage, vice president of the Council of State; and Foreign Minister

Felipe Pérez Roque.

On the Bolivian side were 60 representatives, the largest delegation to accompany Morales abroad. They included a miner, who presented a miner's hat to President Castro. He immediately put it on his head, according to the Cuban daily Granma.

The miners of Bolivia have played a historic role in that country, leading some of the most important and fiercest struggles against oppression and exploitation. It was the struggle of the miners—who suffer intense hardship—that led to the Bolivian Revolution of 1952. Because of that revolution, the Indigenous people for the very first time won the right to vote in their own country.

Cooperation in health, education and sports

Presidents Castro and Morales immediately signed bilateral cooperation and solidarity agreements during the visit. The agreements, signed on Dec. 30, mainly cover health care, education and sports.

As a result of these agreements, Bolivians will now be receiving free eye care, with Cuba contributing equipment and specialists. Cuba is also offering 5,000 scholarships for Bolivians to become future doctors and specialists.

Cuba will assist in a national literacy

Evo Morales was propelled into office by the militant struggles of the Indigenous people.



campaign in Bolivia as well.

A perusal of pictures on the Internet shows many history-making photos of this important visit. They are historic because of the significance of the struggle now raging in Latin America.

The election of the first Indigenous person in Bolivia, and most important an Indigenous leader who is a socialist and an anti-imperialist on the side of the oppressed, has worldwide significance.

Evo Morales's orientation to Cuba shows that the popular movements in Latin America are gaining strength and are veering away from Washington. They are anti-imperialist and for self-determination.

Like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Cuba now has a good friend in Evo Morales of Bolivia—a friend whose priority is the people's needs, not imperialist greed.

For this, Bolivia and Venezuela, like Cuba, have earned the wrath of imperialism.

As Castro asked, "Will the U.S. government be offended if Cuba helps increase the life expectancy of Bolivians?"

This trip showed the unbreakable links between the peoples of Latin America and Cuba. Bolivia is the land where revolutionary leader Che Guevara, who was born in Argentina but fought in the Cuban Revolution, was killed by the CIA.

Morales stated in Cuba that his visit signified "one of two generations of struggle for dignity, a meeting of two revolutions. The struggle of the Cuban people and above all of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was not in vain. They left the seeds and now there are fruits, not just in Bolivia but throughout Latin America."

It surely was a nightmarish New Year for the imperialists in Washington, D.C. □

EVO MORALES:

'Our struggle is against U.S. imperialism'

Below is the text of a speech by Evo Morales to the "In Defense of Humanity" conference held in Mexico City on Dec. 24, 2003. Morales is now president-elect of Bolivia.

What happened these past days in Bolivia was a great revolt by those who have been oppressed for more than 500 years. The will of the people was imposed this September and October, and has begun to overcome the empire's cannons. We have lived for so many years through the confrontation of two cultures: the culture of life represented by the indigenous people, and the culture of death represented by the West. When we the indigenous people—together with the workers and even the businessmen of our country—fight for life and justice, the state responds with its "democratic rule of law."

What does the "rule of law" mean for indigenous people? For the poor, the marginalized, the excluded, the "rule of law" means the targeted assassinations and collective massacres that we have endured. Not just this September and October, but for many years, in which they have tried to impose policies of hunger and poverty on the Bolivian people. Above all, the "rule of law" means the accusations that we, the Quechuas, Aymaras and Guaranties of Bolivia keep hearing from our governments: that we are narcos, that we are anarchists. This uprising of the Bolivian people has been not only about gas and hydrocarbons, but an intersection of many issues: discrimination, marginalization, and most importantly, the failure of neoliberalism.

The cause of all these acts of bloodshed, and for the uprising of the Bolivian people, has a name: neoliberalism. With courage and defiance, we brought down

Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada—the symbol of neoliberalism in our country—on Oct. 17, the Bolivians' day of dignity and identity. We began to bring down the symbol of corruption and the political mafia.

And I want to tell you, compañeras and compañeros, how we have built the consciousness of the Bolivian people from the bottom up. How quickly the Bolivian people have reacted, have said— as Subcomandante Marcos says—Ya basta! Enough policies of hunger and misery.

For us, Oct. 17 is the beginning of a new phase of construction. Most importantly, we face the task of ending selfishness and individualism, and creating—from the rural campesino and indigenous communities to the urban slums—other forms of living, based on solidarity and mutual aid. We must think about how to redistribute the wealth that is concentrated among few hands. This is the great task we Bolivian people face after this great uprising.

It has been very important to organize and mobilize ourselves in a way based on transparency, honesty and control over our own organizations. And it has been important not only to organize but also to unite. Here we are now, united intellectuals in defense of humanity—I think we must have not only unity among the social movements, but also that we must coordinate with the intellectual movements. Every gathering, every event of this nature for us labor leaders who come from the social struggle, is a great lesson that allows us to exchange experiences and to keep strengthening our people and our grassroots organizations.

Thus, in Bolivia, our social movements, our intellectuals, our workers—even those political parties which support the popular struggle—joined together to drive out

Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Sadly, we paid the price with many of our lives, because the empire's arrogance and tyranny continue humiliating the Bolivian people.

It must be said, compañeras and compañeros, that we must serve the social and popular movements rather than the transnational corporations. I am new to politics; I had hated it and had been afraid of becoming a career politician. But I realized that politics had once been the science of serving the people, and that getting involved in politics is important if you want to help your people. By getting involved, I mean living for politics, rather than living off of politics. We have coordinated our struggles between the social movements and political parties, with the support of our academic institutions, in a way that has created a greater national consciousness. That is what made it possible for the people to rise up in these recent days.

When we speak of the "defense of humanity," as we do at this event, I think that this only happens by eliminating neoliberalism and imperialism. But I think that in this we are not so alone, because we see every day that anti-imperialist thinking is spreading, especially after Bush's bloody "intervention" policy in Iraq. Our way of organizing and uniting against the system, against the empire's aggression towards our people, is spreading, as are the strategies for creating and strengthening the power of the people.

'I believe only in the power of the people'

I believe only in the power of the people. That was my experience in my own region, a single province—the importance of local power. And now, with all that has

happened in Bolivia, I have seen the importance of the power of a whole people, of a whole nation. For those of us who believe it important to defend humanity, the best contribution we can make is to help create that popular power. This happens when we check our personal interests with those of the group. Sometimes, we commit to the social movements in order to win power. We need to be led by the people, not use or manipulate them.

We may have differences among our popular leaders—and it's true that we have them in Bolivia. But when the people are conscious, when the people know what needs to be done, any difference among the different local leaders ends. We've been making progress in this for a long time, so that our people are finally able to rise up, together.

What I want to tell you, compañeras and compañeros—what I dream of and what we as leaders from Bolivia dream of is that our task at this moment should be to strengthen anti-imperialist thinking. Some leaders are now talking about how we—the intellectuals, the social and political movements—can organize a great summit of people like Fidel, Chávez and Lula to say to everyone: "We are here, taking a stand against the aggression of U.S. imperialism."

A summit at which we are joined by compañera Rigoberta Menchú, by other social and labor leaders, great personalities like Pérez Ezquivel. A great summit to say to our people that we are together, united and defending humanity. We have no other choice, compañeros and compañeras—if we want to defend humanity we must change systems and this means overthrowing U.S. imperialism. □

From a spark to a wildfire

On Jan. 1, 1994, the world was awakened to a new era of struggle, personified by the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect between Mexico, the United States and Canada.

The Zapatistas—an army of people from the Indigenous community of Chiapas, Mexico—correctly predicted that NAFTA would be a catastrophe for working and poor people.

Under the euphemism of “free trade,” labor laws would be shaved down to the bone, virtually eliminating a minimum wage and creating a level of impunity for the bosses with regard to health codes and human rights abuses.

Farmers would see the value of their livelihood destroyed as cheap agricultural imports from subsidized U.S. agribusiness flooded the country. Lands once communally owned would be broken up and privatized for the benefit of multinational corporations.

The Zapatistas also expressed concern about the plight of Indigenous people throughout the country—who make up some 30 percent of the population and daily face repression, discrimination and substandard living conditions.

In the 12 years since that fateful day in 1994, the United States and the rest of the imperialist countries have continued their neoliberal attack on working and poor people throughout the world. The United States is desperately trying to impose the Free Trade Area of the Americas—which would amount to an extension of NAFTA throughout the entire Western Hemisphere. And yet, at every turn, this agreement is facing a wall of resistance.

Enter the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela, with a president of Indigenous heritage, Hugo Chávez Frías, at the helm. Chávez, with the undying support and collaboration of the people

of his country, is implementing a turnaround in Venezuela’s poverty, illiteracy, health care and more. Moreover, Venezuela has been a driving force in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an agreement based on cooperation and integration of the region rather than imperialist dominance.

When Chávez arrived last November at the Third Summit of the Americas at Mar del Plata, Argentina, with a shovel to symbolically bury the FTAA, he was accompanied by tens of thousands of FTAA protesters, as well as representatives of Cuba and other Latin American countries.

Most recently, the world has seen the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia, the first Indigenous president in a country with a 62 percent Indigenous population. Like Chávez, Morales has denounced the FTAA, calling it “an agreement to legalize the colonization of the Americas,” and has pledged his resistance to it.

In the Fifth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, released in July 1998, the EZLN stated, “We have seen men and women born in other lands join the fight for peace. We have seen some, in their own lands, start building the long bridge that says, ‘You are not alone.’ We have seen them take action and cry out their ‘Ya basta!’”

As we enter the new year, we commemorate the anniversary of a spark that still continues throughout Mexico, despite attempts to crush it, and a spark that has spread and continues to spread, like wildfire, throughout Latin America and the entire world. The imperialists are starting to tremble at the prospects of a fire they might not be able to contain, a fire that warms the hearts and provides fuel and energy to the rest of the world, the majority.

While one cannot predict the future of 2006, one thing is certain: the struggle against the FTAA, and capitalism as a whole, will continue. Happy New Year. □

Iraqi imprisoned by U.S. military: ‘Prisoners died under torture’

Continued from page 9

hands behind the back of the prisoners and then to the feet over a period of days, and putting them in a wooden cell within another small and dark hole.

There are several people who died under torture, among them Adel Al-Duri, who was more than 60 years old and who was a member of the leadership of the Ba’ath Party; Hamza Zubaidi, ex-prime minister, who was over 70 years of age; and Waddah Achajj, a secret service officer, who was about 58 years old.

The prisoners undergo an unimaginable hunger. They serve us a spoon of rice for each prisoner and between 20 and 30 grains of corn, in addition to a piece of meat. When they changed the menu they gave us three spoonfuls of macaroni. It has been one of the preoccupations of the prisoners, which is reflected in their letters directed to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Translated from Spanish and excerpted by John Catalinotto.

HAITI A SLAVE REVOLUTION

The Haitian Revolution is a singular event in history. Never before or since has an enslaved people risen up, broken their chains, and established a new state. Haiti was a beacon of hope and inspiration to the enslaved Africans of the United States.

Drawing from a wide range of authors, experts, and historical texts, this book reveals the intertwined relationship between the U.S. and Haiti, and the untold stories of the Haitian people’s resistance to the U.S. aggressions and occupations.

Includes Ramsey Clark, Edwidge Danicart, Frederick Douglass, Ben Dupuy, Paul Laraque, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Pat Chin, Greg Dunkel, Sara Flounders, Stan Goff, Kim Ives, Fleurimond Kerns, Maude Le Blanc, Sam Marcy, Franz Mendes & Steve Gillis, Felix Morriseau-Leroy and Johnnie Stevens.

Uproar as U.S. bans Cuban baseball team

By Mike Gimbel

The Bush administration’s attempt to bar Cuba from an international baseball tournament has ignited a world firestorm of criticism, much of it from sports professionals in the United States itself.

When the decision was made last July to drop baseball from the 2012 Olympic Games, Major League Baseball (MLB), the MLB Players Association (MLBPA) and the International Baseball Federation (IBF) decided to sponsor a 16-nation tournament. The tournament, called the World Baseball Classic (WBC), would take place every four years, like the Olympic Games.

One reason baseball was eliminated from the Olympic Games is because the games take place in August, in the middle of the MLB season, preventing the best players from participating. However, the MLB players would be able to participate in the WBC championship tournament because it is scheduled for March, during MLB’s spring-training season. The event’s locations are to include the U.S., Puerto Rico and Japan.

Cuba is the reigning Olympic champion and holds all the current titles in the International Baseball Federation in both senior and junior categories.

Last month, on Dec. 14, the Bush administration informed event organizers that Cuba would be denied permission to send a squad to participate in the tournament, which would begin in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and end in San Diego on March 18 and 20. Washington cited U.S. laws governing commercial transactions with Cuba. This action by the Bush administration has engendered worldwide outrage.

For 45 years, the U.S. government has imposed an economic blockade on Cuba, ever since the popular revolution that overthrew the dictatorship of U.S.-backed Fulgencio Batista and liberated the Cuban economy from the control of Wall Street. For several decades, the United Nations General Assembly has opposed the blockade every year by overwhelming votes. The only country to consistently vote with Washington is Israel, which gets its major funding, political and military support from the U.S.

Generally, the U.S. corporate media have approved of this illegal and imperialist campaign to economically strangle Cuba. But now many U.S. newspapers are denouncing the ban on Cuban participation in the games. They cite three reasons: banning the world champions would

make a farce out of the tournament; it could endanger the possibility of the U.S. hosting future Olympic Games, as other countries retaliate for this action; and it hurts the image of the U.S. at a time when it faces political problems over its occupation of Iraq and its failure to participate in international treaties on global warming and torture.

Peter Angelos, owner of the Baltimore Orioles MLB team, stated: “Once again, the U.S., this huge colossus, the strongest country in the world, is picking on this tiny little country of 11 million. And for what? For their participation in an international baseball event? That seems to me to make us look like the big, bad bully that our non-admirers say we look like.” (Baltimore Sun, Dec. 27)

U.S. Olympic Committee chair Peter Ueberroth called on the Bush administration to reverse the decision, stating: “It is important to any future bid city from the United States that this be reversed. It’s disappointing. This will impact IOC [International Olympic Committee] members negatively.”

This decision was particularly offensive to the people of Puerto Rico, who were given no say in the matter by Washington, confirming the island’s colonial status.

The president of Puerto Rico’s baseball federation, Israel Roldan, sent a letter to IBF President Aldo Notari stating: “It’s my duty to inform you that Puerto Rico withdraws its availability to serve as host and headquarters of the World Baseball Classic in the year 2006. The reason for this decision is that the Treasury Department of the United States government has announced that it will deny the corresponding permission in violation of the Olympic regulations guaranteeing Cuba’s participation in the aforementioned event.” Roldan said that what bothered and aggravated him was that the U.S. had initially told him that Cuba would be invited. (New York Daily News, Dec. 23)

In addition, over 100 members of the U.S. Congress have urged the Bush administration to reverse its decision.

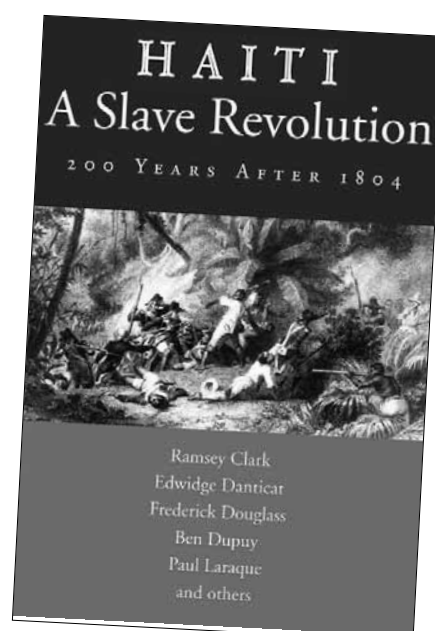
The U.S. said it was acting to prevent Cuba from earning any money off the event. The Cuban Baseball Federation responded with a proposal that any earnings from its participation be donated to Hurricane Katrina victims. It said that Cuba has never competed for money.

Progressive Venezuela has proposed moving some of the games to Caracas so that the Cuban team could participate. Venezuela also proposed that one semifinal game be moved to Caracas from San Diego and that the final game be moved from San Diego to Toronto.

The WBC organizers have appealed to the Bush administration to reverse the decision and reapplied to the U.S. Treasury Department for permission to allow Cuba to participate. Paul Archey, MLB senior vice president for international matters, said about Cuban participation: “They view themselves, rightfully so, as world champions and the Olympic champions. They want every opportunity to play in this tournament. They don’t want this to deny them.” (New York Times, Dec. 23)

The MLB website features a Dec. 19 article by Mike Bauman, a national columnist for the group, entitled, “Give baseball fans the gift of Cuba,” and subtitled: “For Christmas, I want Cuba to be allowed to play in the World Baseball Classic.”

The Toledo Blade of Dec. 28 said it all: “To have a ‘World’ Baseball Classic without the Cubans is simply absurd.” □



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Haitian election postponed again — no surprise

By G. Dunkel

Haiti's presidential election, originally scheduled for Jan. 9, has been postponed for the fourth time. This is no surprise.

For months it has been obvious that the voting lists, polling places and poll workers were not going to be ready; without them, no election could be held. Workers in charge of educating voters have not been paid for four months. (Haiti Press Network, Jan. 2)

When reports surfaced that many, if not most, of the 3.5 million biometric identification cards for voter eligibility were unusable, for a host of reasons, senior U.S. State Department officials and OAS and UN spokespersons lectured about the "need for democracy in Haiti." The current "leaders" in Haiti, installed by the U.S. and France, took these pronouncements for what they were—empty verbiage.

All the talk about the elections, all the campaigns and intricate maneuvers among the 35 candidates running for president cannot hide two stubborn facts.

The resistance to the U.S.-led coup on Feb. 29, 2004, that deposed elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide is still strong.

And the misery, hunger and suffering of the Haitian people are growing.

Resistance continues

Yusef Mubarak, a Jordanian soldier with Minustah—the United Nations occupation force in Haiti—was killed Dec. 24, the second member of Minustah to be killed that week. Earlier, Mark Bourque, a Canadian cop, was fatally shot in the head while driving in an armored car on National Route 1.

Ten members of Minustah—seven soldiers and three civilians—have been killed since the armed force entered Haiti 18 months ago.

While Minustah has carried out several major operations in Cité Soleil, a stronghold of supporters of kidnapped President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, it still has to vigorously patrol there.

In one operation there last summer the fighting lasted more than five hours; 70 people, mainly women and children, were killed. Chilean diplomat Juan Gabriel Valdes—special representative of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the civilian head of Minustah—had to reaffirm Minustah's capacity to maintain security

on Dec. 22 after four election officials had been kidnapped.

One leader of Aristide's Lavalas Party in Cité Soleil stated, "Minustah wants to destroy the masses of poor people to help the bourgeoisie."

While the leaders of Lavalas feel it is far too dangerous to call people into the streets in Haiti, a demonstration of 4,000 mostly Haitian people in Miami on Dec. 10 demanded the release of Father Gérard Jean-Juste, a major leader of Lavalas, who was arrested over a year ago in Haiti by masked soldiers and charged with importing arms, which he denies. (Newsday, Jan. 1)

Misery under occupation

The misery of Haiti can be summed up with a few of the World Bank's own figures.

Fifty-six percent of Haitians live on less than \$1 a day.

Ninety percent of the people in Port-au-Prince, the largest city in Haiti, are unemployed or underemployed. The overall figure for the whole country is 70 percent.

Only half of Haitians have access to clean drinking water.

Reports in both the Haitian and U.S. press are heart-rending. A single mother of five, injured in a UN attack, had to sell her house for \$125 to feed her children. A rice farmer who had no money for fertilizer or school for his children now faces having his harvest stolen by bandits paid by big landlords.

U.S. imperialism has tried to replace its direct intervention and its armed forces with a UN cover. Currently, a Brazilian general is in charge of Minustah's military wing and a Chilean diplomat handles the civilian side.

This arrangement was institutionalized by the UN Security Council and General Assembly on Dec. 20. A commission that includes five permanent members of the Security Council was established to "oversee peace-building in former conflict-stricken countries."

U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton, a thoroughgoing reactionary, supported the commission.

Some in the U.S. media are predicting that the UN will occupy Haiti for another five to 10 years. But the Haitian people continue to demonstrate that the occupation will be met with mass resistance. □

At U.S. base in Guantanamo

More prisoners join hunger strike

By Larry Hales

Some 84 prisoners at the prison camp on the U.S. Navy's base at Guantanamo Bay are now on a hunger strike. More than half of those refusing food joined the hunger strike on Dec. 25 as millions of people in the U.S. were feasting over the holidays. The prisoners are on the hunger strike to protest their indefinite detention and the inhumane treatment there.

There are about 500 inmates at the camp, all male. Many were captured in Afghanistan and some in Iraq. The U.S. has refused to label them prisoners, calling them instead "enemy combatants" and claiming they are not protected under the Geneva Conventions.

A ruling denying the prisoners protection under the Geneva Conventions was handed down unanimously by a three-judge panel and deprives them of due process. They are judged by military tribunals that are highly secretive.

The number of prisoners participating in hunger strikes has fluctuated and peaked this year at 131. Now, the U.S. is saying that 32 of the prisoners are being force-fed through nasal tubes. The large feeding tubes, described as the thickness of a finger, are seen by the prisoners as objects of torture.

"They were forcibly shoved up the detainees' noses and down into their stomachs," lawyers for detainees reported to a federal judge in August. "No anesthesia or sedative was provided." One pris-

oner said a Navy doctor had put a tube in his nose and down his throat and "kept moving the tube up and down" until he finally "started violently throwing up blood." (Guardian [Britain], Oct. 21, 2005)

Their grievances are being ignored despite the growing world anger over the indefinite detention and abuse. Muslims the world over have been particularly outraged over reports of the desecration of the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an.

The prisoners' fate is still up in the air as the Bush administration looks to continue its racist "war against terror," which is nothing more than an imperialist attempt to grab the oil reserves in the

Middle East.

In its annual report last May, Amnesty International called for the shutting down of the prison because of the many human rights abuses at Guantanamo. The U.S., however, still continues to deny the humanity of the 500 prisoners on Guantanamo.

The U.S. has denigrated Amnesty International and other reports coming out about the abuses at Guantanamo Bay, going so far as to label some "absurd." But what is clearly absurd is the Bush administration's assertion that it is establishing democracy in the Middle East, especially as Washington is made to answer for the detentions at Guantanamo.

Chaplain James Yee, who was stationed at the Guantanamo prison camp, tried to speak out against the conditions there but was targeted by the military and vilified by the media. Yee spent months in a Navy brig. The military went to great lengths to demonize him, charging him with downloading pornography and with spying, but finally had to release him as it could produce no evidence to substantiate the trumped-up charges.

The imprisonment of the Muslim chaplain and the denigration of Amnesty International show to what lengths the Bush administration and the Pentagon are willing to go to maintain their secret prison on Guantanamo Bay. □

Okinawans protest new U.S. base



Residents of Nago City, Okinawa, protested Dec. 23 against U.S. plans to build a new military base in the waters near their city, according to Kikuchi Takao of the Anti-war Joint Action Committee of Japan. The occasion was the eighth anniversary of the passage of a referendum in which voters made it clear they wanted no part of any new U.S. base on Oura Bay.

The people took 56 boats out into the bay to protest U.S. and Japanese government plans to build the naval air station in the sea off Camp Schwab. This new base would be enor-



mous and include a runway, a naval port and an ammunition depot.

After the demonstration on the bay, they held a rally and expressed their determination to struggle throughout 2006 against the proposed base.

Sixty years after the end of World War II, the U.S. still has tens of thousands of troops in Japan, about half of them in Okinawa. The local people have protested the U.S. military presence many times, much as Puerto Ricans for years protested the U.S. base and bombing tests on the island of Vieques, which have been halted.

—John Catalinotto

No issue last week

No, your paper wasn't delayed in the mail. As per our usual holiday schedule, we skipped the issue of Workers World that would have been dated the first week in January. Sorry not to have warned you in advance.

BOLIVIA

Morales gana por amplio margen y promete cambios

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

Los indígenas de Bolivia, desposeídos y pobres, con mucho orgullo obtuvieron la presidencia de la nación por primera vez en la historia, el 18 de diciembre del 2005. Después de más de un siglo de su exclusión social y económica por las transnacionales estadounidenses en concierto con la oligarquía del país, Evo Morales del Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), fue elegido presidente. Morales, de la nación indígena Aymara ganó más del 50% de los votos. El conteo final al momento de este escrito no se sabe, pero con más del 85% de los votos contados, la victoria del MAS está asegurada.

El triunfo de Morales fue celebrado con gran júbilo por las masas bolivianas desde su ciudad de Cochabamba hasta El Alto, famoso bastión de resistencia contra el neoliberalismo. El Alto había sido proclamado capital de la Revolución Boliviana del siglo 21 durante las huelgas en junio que depusieron al entonces presidente Carlos Mesa.

En Cochabamba, los residentes advirtieron a los actuales oficiales del Parlamento que ellos querían a Morales para la gobernación y que no dejarían robarles la victoria del MAS. Gritaban, "Evo valiente, ya eres presidente."

Morales respondió al pueblo diciendo: "Gracias, batimos un récord. Ningún partido ganó con más del 51% de los votos. Ahora queda luchar por la Unión de Latinoamérica."

Esta victoria sucedió a pesar de que casi un millón de votantes, en su mayoría partidarios del MAS, fueron eliminados de las listas electorales. La Corte Nacional Electoral había ordenado que la gente que no votó en las elecciones regionales del 2004 debía ser borrada de la lista. Esto provocó manifestaciones y denuncias por miles de personas que se quejaron de que aunque habían votado, fueron eliminadas. Morales también protestó, diciendo, "En vez de depurar desde la Corte Electoral al pueblo boliviano, el pueblo boliviano debe depurar a los miembros de la Corte Nacional Electoral."

Esta contundente victoria y la gran asistencia a la votación, representan la determinación de los indígenas, quienes componen el 62% de la población, al igual que la del resto de las masas pobres y aún de un sector de la clase media que quiere un camino diferente para Bolivia y les gustaría ver una nación soberana libre del dominio extranjero.

El escrito boliviano, Alex Contreras Baspineiro, habló con este periódico, Mundo Obrero, después de las elecciones. Contreras Baspineiro dijo, "La sorpresa más grande en estas elecciones, para nosotros, fue que el MAS ganó más del 30% del apoyo en la región de Santa Cruz, donde se ha lanzado una campaña de miedo, extorsión y guerra sucia."

Santa Cruz, en las tierras bajas del este, es donde reside la oligarquía blanca aliada de los Estados Unidos. Es una región rica en gas natural. En años recientes, un movimiento secesionista que demanda

autonomía ha sido apoyado por la embajada de los EEUU y las compañías transnacionales.

Los votantes le dieron una bofetada al imperialismo al apoyar a Morales en vez de a los candidatos favoritos de los EEUU.

Los favoritos de Washington son diezmos

Morales, sin ningún título académico, ha sido representante en el Parlamento Nacional y organizador de cultivadores de coca. El favorito de Washington era Jorge Quiroga del partido Podemos, que fue el presidente de Bolivia durante el 2001-2002. Graduado de la Universidad A&M de Texas, y ex ejecutivo del IBM, Quiroga terminó segundo muy distante con alrededor de un 30 por ciento del voto. Su plataforma política estaba basada en el "libre comercio" como vía para eliminar la pobreza. Apoya el programa de erradicación de los cultivos de coca que han dejado a los campesinos indigentes.

El magnate del cemento Samuel Doria Medina, candidato del Partido de Unidad Nacional, y quien es también dueño de los restaurantes de la cadena Burger King en Bolivia, llegó en tercer lugar.

Morales hizo su campaña sobre tres puntos principales. El primero fue la nacionalización de las reservas bolivianas

de gas natural, las más grandes en Suramérica después de Venezuela.

El segundo es la convocación de una Asamblea Constitucional para refundar a Bolivia.

Y tercero, Morales se opone a las políticas neoliberales, incluyendo el programa de los EEUU para erradicar la coca en Bolivia. La hoja de coca ha sido utilizada por años por la población indígena como medicina tradicional y no es adictiva. También se vende para el uso en la composición de otras medicinas. Sólo se vuelve en droga peligrosa luego de que un proceso químico la convierte en cocaína.

El candidato a vicepresidente de Morales, Álvaro García Linera, públicamente ha explicado la posición del MAS: aumentar los castigos por el narcotráfico e involucrar a los mismos cultivadores de coca en combatir el narcotráfico, y terminar con las fumigaciones con químicos tóxicos para destruir los cultivos de coca.

Morales se opone al ALCA, el Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, la que considera "un acuerdo para legalizar la colonización de las Américas". Esto no ha sido recibido bien por Washington.

En el número de diciembre 15-21 del semanal Progreso, Saul Landau, escribe: "La posibilidad de que el líder campesino socialista Evo Morales sea el próximo

presidente de Bolivia molestó al Subsecretario Adjunto de Estado para Asuntos del Hemisferio Occidental, Charles Shapiro. 'No sería buena noticia para Washington ver que la beligerante combinación Cuba-Venezuela se convierta en trío', dijo en un correo electrónico a Andrés Oppenheimer de The Miami Herald (4 de diciembre de 2005)".

Varias declaraciones de funcionarios estadounidenses, incluyendo la secretaria de estado Condoleezza Rice, demuestran ya su hostilidad hacia el recién electo presidente boliviano. En una entrevista con CNN en español, Rice preguntó arrogante y ostentadamente, "¿el nuevo gobierno boliviano tendrá un comportamiento democrático? ¿Estará listo a tener buenas relaciones y mantener la ayuda económica que recibe?"

Morales ya ha recibido amenazas de muerte y está siendo satanizado cada vez más en los medios capitalistas. La edición del 20 de diciembre del Washington Post cita a Bernard Aronson, consultor internacional en Washington y ex-funcionario del departamento de estado, diciendo: "la antigua amenaza en América Latina era la de golpes militares. La nueva amenaza es la de democracias autoritarias, líderes que son electos y que luego usan el estado para reprimir a sus oponentes, forzando cambios sociales y quedándose en el poder. Esto es lo que está haciendo Chávez, y lo que no está haciendo Lula. La gran pregunta es, ¿cuál camino seguirá Evo Morales?"

El peligro imperialista transita por Latinoamérica, tratando de dar marcha atrás a la ola revolucionaria que se extiende por la región. Pero como lo ha probado la historia, la poderosa lucha de los pueblos por la justicia, contra el hambre, la miseria y la explotación capitalista a menudo es subestimada por los imperialistas, como lo atestigua la insurgencia iraquí.

Baspineiro concluyó diciendo "Sabemos que es un reto muy grande, estamos atravesando una coyuntura difícil en Bolivia, pero estamos esperanzados, fortalecidos y motivados para escribir esta página en la historia de nuestro país. Sabemos que va a ser una página muy difícil pero estamos convencidos de que Bolivia si no realiza cambios estructurales en los próximos meses, prácticamente está al borde del abismo."

"Y nosotros, con la mayoría aplastante que hemos obtenido en el día 18 de diciembre estamos convencidos de que vamos a tratar de plasmar desde el primer día de nuestro gobierno todo el programa que hemos presentado al país que esta resumido en 10 propuestas, de las cuales podemos destacar la nacionalización de los hidrocarburos, la asamblea constituyente, la autonomía para los pueblos, y también la abrogación del decreto supremo 21060 que es base del modelo neoliberal."

"Los bolivianos y las bolivianas han apostado por el cambio y la refundación de Bolivia. En ese sentido no podemos defraudar esta esperanza que no solo es nacional, sino continental en la construcción de la patria grande, pero también es mundial." □

