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## Bosses to blame

# Murder in coal mine

By David Hoskins

The new year was marred by tragedy for the families of 13 West Virginia coal miners. On Jan. 2 an explosion trapped 13 workers underground in a mine in Sago, W.Va. One worker was killed instantly by the explosion. Twelve others attempted to shield themselves from the carbon monoxide by securing themselves behind a sheet of fabric.

Poor communications coupled with a lack of regard for the feelings of the miners' friends and families led company officials to prematurely declare that all twelve miners had survived. The tight-knit community's roller-coaster ride was about to get rockier as it was later communicated that only one coal miner made it out in critical condition. Eleven others died from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Community members expressed outrage at the false report of the miners' survival. Comments by Danielle Bennett, granddaughter of a deceased coal miner, are indicative of the hurt and confusion caused by the report - "I came down from Elkins to see my granddaddy," she said, "and now I find out my granddaddy is dead."

### Government & bosses knew: Sago mine not safe for workers

The Sago mine was non-union in a county where the main employers are Wal-Mart and the school system. Starting pay of \$15 to \$20 an hour made jobs at the mine attractive despite a history of unsafe working conditions.

The mine received 208 citations from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration in 2005. Citations included reprimands for excessive accumulation of inflammable materials such as coal dust. According to the AFL-CIO the mine only paid out \$24,000 in fines despite the disproportionate number of violations. The company's disregard for the health and safety of its workers resulted in the tragic loss of life in Sago.

United Mine Workers' president Cecil Roberts called for a state and federal investigation into the events surrounding the explosion and subsequent misreport that the miners had survived. Earl Casto, a former miner and cousin of one of the victims, said angrily, "If it'd been a union mine this never would have happened".

The mine is owned by the International Coal Group, which in turn is controlled by Wilbur Ross, a "distressed investor" and major contributor to the Democratic Party. Ross' other investments include the takeover of bankrupt Bethlehem and Weirton Steel. Distressed investing is the practice of buying financially troubled firms and forcing concessions upon employees in an attempt to make the company more valuable to shareholders. Such extreme cost-saving measures can result in cutting corners on training and safety practices and can lead to disaster.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration is promising a vigorous and impartial investigation. But it remains to be seen just how impartial such an investigation can be. The power that King Coal still wields over politicians is evident in the lax record of regulation.

The Bush administration's primary contribution to improving the working condition of coal miners has been to appoint energy industry hacks to political positions. Federal officials insist that the mine was appropriately regulated even as the administration proposes \$4.9 million in budget cuts from the mine safety agency. The agency's ability to fulfill its mandate has been further weakened by the attrition of 170 employees over the last five years.

The government may pretend to try to find out who is responsible for the miners' deaths, but the people of Sago are already fully aware who the guilty parties are. When word spread that only one miner had in fact survived, community members gathered at a local church reportedly yelled out that company officials were liars and hypocrites. Some workers vowed to return home to arm

Continued on page 4

## MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Martin Luther King Jr. said these words to striking Memphis sanitation workers the day before he was assassinated in April 1968. This Monday, Jan. 16, is Martin Luther King Day, a national holiday honoring the Civil Rights leader and the movement he led.

**W**e are saying that we are determined to be men. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And that we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers.... Now we're going to march again, and we've got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be.... and we've got to say to the nation we know it's coming out. For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.... we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point, in Memphis. And when we have our march, you need to be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together. ■



Martin Luther King Jr.'s last march, Sanitation Workers Strike. Memphis, March 28, 1968



South Asians protest racist DEA repression.

WW PHOTO: ALKA ROY

# DEA frames Georgia's South Asians

By Dianne Mathiowetz  
Decatur, Ga.

Several hundred protesters, mostly South Asian, rallied here Jan. 8 in a mall parking lot to denounce selective prosecution and racial profiling by federal authorities.

In June 2005, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) launched Operation Meth Merchant in several counties in north Georgia. The Agency used informants convicted of producing and selling methamphetamine (meth) to make purchases at convenience stores of the common, legal items used to make the drug. These ingredients include cold medications, matches, charcoal and anti-freeze. The white, English-speaking informants were promised reductions in their prison sentences if they assisted with the successful prosecution of store clerks and owners who sold them these items.

Although the number of convenience stores owned by South Asians in the north Georgia mountains is relatively small, it is these stores, not the large-scale, chain drug

stores, grocery stores or Wal-Marts that were targeted. Forty-four of the 49 people arrested in Operation Meth Merchant are South Asian, many with the last name Patel. Most of the cases rest on the testimony of a single informant.

Present at the rally were several Indian men and women who have been arrested and jailed for days on the basis of this informant's accusations.

McCracken Posten, a Ringgold, Ga., lawyer, described the cases of Shirak and Malvika Patel. The informant identified them as selling him cold medicine on specific days at a certain convenience store. However, Shirak was in India at the time on a month-long visit to family. Malvika is not the store clerk heard on the tape telling the undercover buyer that she can't sell him the number of bottles of cold medicine he asks for. At the exact time the informant claims Malvika Patel knowingly sold him cold medications for meth production, she was an hour away picking up her child from daycare. She has never

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**WW CALENDAR**

**NEW YORK**

**Fri., Jan. 6**  
Workers World Party Forum on the Middle East: Hear Joyce Chediak on "Munich"—What Steven Spielberg left out, and

Sara Flounders on the U.S. crisis in the Middle East. 7 p.m. (Dinner at 6:30)  
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**Leslie Feinberg's  
LAVENDER & RED**



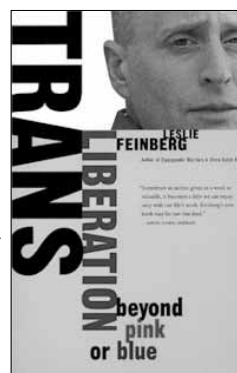
series, which explores the history of the socialist movement and the struggle for sexual & gender liberation, can be read online at [www.workers.org](http://www.workers.org).

**TRANS LIBERATION**

More exists among human beings than can be answered by the simplistic question I'm hit with every day of my life: "Are you a man or a woman?" — Leslie Feinberg

Trans Liberation is the phrase that has come to refer to all those who blur or bridge the boundary of the sex or gender expression they were assigned at birth: cross-dressers, transsexuals, intersex people, Two Spirits, bearded females, masculine females and feminine males, drag kings and drag queens. In this inspiring collection of speeches and new writing, Leslie Feinberg argues passionately for the acceptance of all trans peoples.

Order at [leftbooks.com](http://leftbooks.com) for a copy signed by the author



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# Protesters outshout racist Minutemen coast to coast

By Ruth Vela and Heather Cottin

On Jan. 7 in cities across the United States, hundreds of activists in dozens of demonstrations against the racist and xenophobic "Minutemen" shouted in Spanish and English, "The people united will never be defeated."

The reactionary Minutemen group had called for Jan. 7 "Stop the Invasion" actions against immigrant workers in 19 states. But they brought out far more opponents than supporters.

On Long Island, N.Y., eight Minutemen showed up at the Home Depot in Freeport. They carried signs calling the day laborers who gather at that location "illegal."

Organizers of the counter-protest from the Freeport Community Worklink Center had mobilized over the previous day-and-a-half. Fifty counter-protesters, including a dozen day laborers, gathered, chanting, "No human being is illegal." Their signs read: "Freeport Rejects Racism"—which drew supportive honks from passing motorists. Freeport is a community that is 68 percent people of color.

Mara, an activist with Long Island School of Americas Watch, was disgusted with the Minutemen: "They spend a lot of time talking about how these workers are 'illegal.' These hard-working men are just trying to make a living. Being without immigration documents is just a misdemeanor in the U.S. But these Minutemen don't really care about the law. Their cars are plastered all over with 'Support our troops' bumper stickers, so they favor the illegal and murderous war on Iraq!"

At one point three Minutemen drove to Freeport's legal shape-up site two blocks from Home Depot. They left quickly when the site's coordinator took their pictures



WW PHOTO: DAVID PEREZ

Immigrant workers and supporters confront Minutemen in Freeport, N.Y.

and ordered them off the premises.

Terrorizing Latino day laborers and harassing the contractors who employ them is a national Minutemen tactic.

"Who are those guys?" asked one contractor who drove by Home Depot looking for workers. Informed that the Minutemen have ties to known racist groups, he said, "Look, these immigrants are just workers who need work."

Elsewhere on Long Island, in Farmingville, about a dozen Minutemen faced 45 protesters. The anti-racists had been organized by the Workplace Project and the United Day Laborers office in Farmingville.

Carlos Canales, an organizer for the Workplace Project, said, "The Minutemen

say these workers don't pay taxes, but Illinois Rep. Luis Gutierrez has shown that immigrant workers contribute \$270 million into the U.S. economy yearly, and for their cheap labor receive no Social Security, unemployment or health benefits."

## California racists outnumbered

Vigilantes in California held their U.S. flags high and paraded their racist sentiments on cardboard on Jan. 7 in anti-immigrant demonstrations across the state. But the Minutemen were confronted and outnumbered at demonstrations in Santa Monica, Lake Forest, Laguna Beach, Glendale, El Cajon, and Rancho Cucamonga.

According to a statements released by the Minutemen, they planned their anti-undocumented demonstrations for day-labor centers or hardware/home repair stores where migrant workers gather in search of work.

Chris Newman of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network in California noted that the Minutemen were outnumbered everywhere by anti-racist supporters of Latino workers.

In El Cajon in East San Diego, as around the state, members of Gente Unida, the Organic Collective, the Brown Berets, and Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) outnumbered and outwitted the racist vigilantes and their supporters. People standing outside the store hoping for work included not only undocumented Mexicans but poor Black and white people as well.

In Chicago, there were 30 Minutemen and about 150 anti-racist counter demonstrators. (Chicago Tribune, Jan. 8)

In Denton, Texas, local supporters of the Latino day laborers stood in silent solidarity with the immigrant workers. Three times as many anti- Minutemen protesters showed up and carried signs calling Minutemen "Klansmen."

In Denver, some 200 anti-racists faced 15 Minutemen. (Denver Post Jan. 8)

Nadia Marin Molina, director of Long Island's Workplace Project, said of the overwhelming opposition to the Minutemen around the country: "This means that the Minutemen do not represent regular people. People don't want to support a vigilante group with ties to known white supremacists."

Vela reported from San Diego, Cottin from Freeport, N.Y.

## DEA frames Georgia's South Asians

Continued from page 2

even been in the store where the sale took place.

Yet despite the glaring inaccuracies of the informant's identification of them, it took months for the charges against Shirak and Malvika Patel to be dropped. In the meantime, their personal and business reputations were harmed, legal expenses mounted and their children and family suffered.

A key element of the government's evidence against the many immigrant clerks is that the undercover buyer used drug-related slang when making the purchases of these everyday products. Attorney Posten remarked that most people would not recognize these terms, much less people whose English was not fluent.

A few of the arrested clerks—when threatened with up to 25 years in federal prison, forfeiture of family stores and fines up to \$250,000—pled guilty to lesser charges. They now face deportation to India.

Trials for some of the others begin Jan. 10 in Rome, Ga. Rally participants were urged to pack the courtroom to show support for the defendants.

Several speakers at the protest explained how the so-called "war on drugs" started by President Richard Nixon in 1971 has been a war on communities of color. Billions of dollars have been spent

enforcing increasingly harsh drug laws, resulting in huge increases in the prison population. Of the estimated 14 million people in the U.S. who are drug users, the vast majority—approximately 10 million—are white. The overwhelming percentage of those convicted of drug offenses, however, are African-American and Latino. Money for rehabilitation and treatment programs and preventative education is routinely cut while repressive, often racist police tactics expand.

Deepali Gokhale, coordinator for the Racial Justice Campaign Against "Operation Meth Merchant" which organized the rally, pointed out that this type of racial profiling and selective prosecution is experienced by many others in U.S. society and she urged unity among immigrants and with other marginalized populations.

With fists in the air, the rally was punctuated with chants that translated to "against every injustice and oppression, we will fight."

Local media covered the protest, and newspapers throughout India reported on it.

The Campaign asks that letters demanding that the selective prosecutions be stopped be sent to David Nahmias, U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia, 75 Spring St. SW, Suite 600, Atlanta, Ga. 30303. □



WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

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**CHARLOTTE, N.C.**

# Sanitation workers fight back

By David Dixon  
Charlotte, N.C.

Some 50 sanitation workers employed by the city of Charlotte and their supporters protested and rallied at the City Council's bi-monthly "Citizens Forum" on Jan. 2.

They demanded union recognition—North Carolina state law does not allow collective bargaining rights for public employees. They spoke out against work speedups, disrespect on the job, low pay, scheduling problems, and—two of the most repressive violations of their rights—unsanitary working conditions and the firing of fellow-worker Cedric Williams for union activity.

Williams is a member of United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) Local 150, which organized the protest.

According to a report on UE's web site, "The workers, coordinated by UE Local 150, dominated the forum, hold-

ing signs and speaking out about the improper firing of UE brother Cedric Williams, an activist in the city's solid waste department who was fired for his union activism. To aggravate the matter, Williams was denied any kind of due process or a grievance procedure to challenge his firing."

The workers also complained that a manager threatened them in a meeting, saying that "Williams should be considered an example, and that union activity was illegal in North Carolina."

Referring to the unsanitary conditions, the site states: "One of the most troubling complaints was the lack of sanitary facilities in the workers' locker room. Workers say the toilets have been out of order for weeks, and the stench and leaking sewage have created a severe health problem." ([www.ranknfile-ue.org](http://www.ranknfile-ue.org))

The Charlotte Observer reports, "City Manager Pam Syfert said she could not comment on Williams' situation, because

it is a confidential personnel matter. As for the workers' larger complaints, Syfert said, she would await a report from solid waste director Wayman Pearson, who did not attend Monday night's open-forum council meeting."

Members of the public supported the workers as they rallied outside City Hall after the meeting. Over a dozen new members also joined UE Local 150 at that time.

The Charlotte sanitation workers are determined to fight back for their dignity and deserve the support of all progressives, locally and nationally. They are planning an action during the city's upcoming annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities and will continue the struggle to win their rights.

For information, contact Dennis Orten of UE Local 150 at (404) 538-8178. To sign an online petition supporting Charlotte's sanitation workers, go to [www.petitiononline.com/ue150/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/ue150/petition.html). □

# Coal bosses to blame in miners' deaths

Continued from page 1

themselves and exact justice against company officials.

The state's response to this crime against workers was not to mobilize the necessary forces to carry out a rescue operation or to arrest the corporate and government officials responsible for the killings. Instead extra police reinforcements were sent to occupy the town and intimidate the anguished families.

## History of struggle

The town of Sago is a post-boom Appalachian mining hamlet where many of the workers are second- and third-generation coal miners. Militant struggles with mine management and the police and government officials guilty of corporate collusion are nothing new to these workers. It has been a way of life in the region since the bloody West Virginia Coal Mine Wars of 1912-1921.

In fact the worst coal-mine disaster in U.S. history took place in 1907 at Monongah, W.Va. when 362 workers lost their lives in an explosion. A subsequent disaster over half a century later at Farmington, W.Va. claimed the lives of 78 workers. That disaster, and the struggle launched in its aftermath, compelled Congress to enact the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969.

Government and corporate collusion resulted in the regulatory inaction that allowed a mine with a string of violations involving poor ventila-



Miner David Lewis killed in disaster, above. Wife of miner, Samantha Lewis, left.

tion, inoperable machinery, and combustible materials like coal dust to operate and risk the lives of its workers despite the 1969 Act.

## Capitalism Indicted

As a result of this criminal negligence, twelve working class martyrs joined the ranks of their 100,000 coalmining brothers and sisters who have been killed since 1900.

The Sago tragedy, much like the

are the hallmark features of this system.

But the response by the suffering workers and oppressed people affected by all three of these crimes presages the inevitable coming struggle for liberation as Katrina survivors organize themselves and take the fight to the doorsteps of government officials, an heroic Iraqi resistance deals daily blows to U.S. and British imperialist occupation and Appalachian coal miners issue calls to arm themselves. □



Home of mine worker Randal McCloy, sole survivor.

# TWELVE MINERS DIDN'T HAVE TO DIE

**Corporate greed and Bush cutbacks killed them**

**Picket line for justice**

THURSDAY • NYC  
Jan. 12, 4 p.m.

At the offices of William L. Ross & Co.  
52nd St. and Lexington Ave. in Manhattan  
(Take the E or V train to Lexington Ave., or the 6 train to 51 St.)

## ON THE PICKET LINE

By Sue Davis

### Latest in NWA mechanics' strike

The union representing the mechanics (AMFA)—on strike at Northwest Airlines since Aug. 20—is sending out a letter to the thousands of unions around the country. In addition to asking for monetary contributions and help handing out flyers explaining the strike, the letter asks all unions to pledge to boycott Northwest Airlines.

In a related development, a hearing is scheduled Jan. 17 where it's highly likely that Northwest will request that a bankruptcy judge tear up all existing labor contracts and impose new ones. In a Jan. 6 story by WCCO-TV in Minnesota, it was reported that three other unions representing NWA ramp workers, flight attendants and pilots are all prepared to strike if the judge voids their contracts.

### Child care providers sign contract

Family child care providers in Illinois made headlines in April 2005 when they voted to join the Service Employees (SEIU). They did it again on Dec. 13 when they negotiated a contract that will set new standards for quality in-home child care services throughout the country.

The Local 880 contract includes significant improvements in three areas. Rates—now as low as \$9.48 per child per day—will increase an average of 35 percent over the three-year contract. This will be the providers' first rate increase in six years. It is designed to encourage providers to enter and stay in child care.

Providers will receive up to 20 percent extra pay if they enroll in additional training for early education. That too will encourage providers to enhance their skills in helping children achieve school readiness.

Thousands of providers will soon have access to affordable health care for the first time. The state has committed to a \$27 million investment in funding by the third year of the contract, and will work with the union to draw up the plan and set eligibility requirements.

The providers care for about 200,000 children in Illinois whose parents are eligible for child care assistance so they can work. A 2004 study of children whose mothers were in welfare-to-work programs concluded that the quality of care for young children had a "strong and consistent positive impact on child outcomes," including cognitive development and school readiness.

SEIU also reported that 10,000 family child care providers in Washington state voted to join the union in December.

### Calif. nurses win contact

Standing up to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's bullying tactics throughout 2005, the California Nurses Association finally negotiated a two-year contract for hundreds of nurses in the University of California system. The deal, approved by the nurses in mid-December, includes a wage increase, pension protections and a ban on mandatory overtime.

The nurses also won the right to form "life teams" or use lift devices to move heavy patients. But the issue of staffing ratios—one of the most contentious issues in the year-long struggle—was left unresolved. It will be settled by a so-called independent arbitrator who will make a binding, final decision. Such arbitrators usually find in favor of management.

But the nurses' struggle isn't over. The CNA and the university will soon have to reopen the contract to resolve retirement and health benefits issues.

Even though Schwarzenegger lost his battle against public employees in last November's special election, don't expect him to change his anti-labor tune in 2006. Eighteen of 21 bargaining units representing California's public employees will be in contract negotiations. □

## NEW ORLEANS

# People stop city from trashing Lower 9th

By LeiLani Dowell

In a blatant move to exclude poor and Black people from reconstruction plans four months after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans city officials are attempting to bulldoze the homes of the Lower Ninth Ward—a center of Black homeownership in the area, and also one of the poorest areas—even though many residents have been unable to return to the area since the hurricane struck.

A statement by the Common Ground collective describes the area: “The Lower Ninth Ward embodies the heart of a community that evolved from African American families over many generations, and residents share a devotion and pride in their homes and neighborhoods that is becoming more and more scarce across the country.”

On Jan. 5, community activists and lawyers with the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) protested the bulldozing plans at City Hall, then rushed to the scene of one such demolition in the Lower Ninth Ward. The PHRF had received a tip that city officials were pushing ahead with their plans to bulldoze—in violation of a temporary restraining order made Dec. 28 against the destruction of homes until a hearing in the Civil District Court. The quick response of the activists and lawyers forced the city to back off, halting the bulldozing for that day and agreeing to a meeting the next day before U.S.

District Judge Martin Feldman.

Lawyers with the PHRF filed a class-action lawsuit against the city in December, which moved into federal court this week. They assert in the lawsuit that the city would violate the right of due process by destroying property without notifying homeowners or seeking approval. The judge issued a temporary restraining order in response to this lawsuit, and the city has agreed not to demolish homes until a federal court hearing on Jan. 19.

Meanwhile, reacting to public outrage at its decisions, the city government continues to hem and haw about which homes it has set for demolition. Two weeks ago Chief Technology Officer Greg Meffert of the Department of Safety and Permits said that around 2,500 homes would be demolished within weeks. On Jan. 5, the city released a reduced list of 1,957 homes in imminent danger of collapse, yet that same day New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin told the press that the authorities planned on moving forward with demolition for less than 100 of those houses—“those that are wrecked, those that are severely damaged or in the public’s right of way.”

Meffert told the City Council that day that the number of homes was close to 120. According to the Times Picayune, “...After he spoke, Chief Deputy City Attorney Evelyn Pugh reminded the council that city law allows structures deemed in imminent danger of collapse to be torn down without consent or even notification

of the owner. A Nagin spokeswoman later also said the city does not need an owner’s permission to demolish some homes.”

The Times Picayune newspaper, which back in December requested the list that was only released Jan. 5, reported that city officials could not say which of the 1,957 homes were slated for removal.

## FEMA’s role in demolition

Part of the drive to demolish homes early, in complete disregard for the homeowners who have already suffered so much, lies in the hands of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which has set a deadline of June 30 for FEMA to pay for the total cost of debris removal.

The demolition of homes in one of the poorest areas of the city also comes at a time when state officials are openly stating that they will not focus their recovery efforts on those areas. A Jan. 6 New York Times article reports that “state officials are warning that some low-lying neighborhoods may not be eligible for federal rebuilding assistance.” The article quotes Sean Reilly of the Louisiana Recovery Authority as saying, “Someone has to be tough, to stand up, and to tell the truth. Every neighborhood in New Orleans will not be able to come back safe and viable. The LRA is speaking the truth with the money it controls.”

The Times article reports that last month the authority agreed not to spend money on rebuilding that does not con-

form to federal flood maps. Because of this, the cost for those in the lowest-lying areas to rebuild their homes—which would have to be built elevated above a flood level—would increase by tens of thousands of dollars, making it virtually impossible for low-income families to rebuild.

Brandon Darby, Common Ground’s Ninth Ward Organizer, explains the reality of the situation in a Common Ground statement: “St. Bernard Parish is less than two miles away. Parts were damaged just a badly there as in the Lower Ninth. Why do the predominantly white communities get FEMA trailers and the freedom to decide what happens to their private property when the predominantly Black Lower Ninth residents have rich businessmen meeting about the future of their homes and communities?”

Community activists and lawyers are demanding that all residents receive notification of demolition, and that no demolition go forward unless residents give permission—“after they have had the opportunity to evaluate their properties and make decisions about how to proceed,” according to a PHRF statement.

Bill Quigley, a law professor at Loyola University who helped file the suit, expressed residents determination in the New-Standard: “If we lose in court, you know, people are not going to stop resisting. They’re going to try and stop the bulldozers by whatever means are necessary.” □

## NEW YORK

# Hurricane survivors win right to be heard

By Johnnie Stevens and Stephen Millies  
New York

“Nothing about us, without us, is for us” is the message that survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita took to the Rainbow/PUSH Wall Street Project Conference held here on Jan. 8. This gathering was called by the Rev. Jesse Jackson to discuss rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Elected officials and the acting FEMA director were expected to attend.

But no local evacuees were invited. “They said we could attend but we’d have to pay a fee of \$250 a day,” said Brandi Kilbourne, a New Orleans Katrina survivor and member of the NYC Solidarity Committee for Katrina/Rita Evacuees. Brandi Kilbourne, who has been living at the Apollo Hotel in Harlem, is one of 2,500 survivors living in New York City.

Rainbow/PUSH organizers finally agreed to admit survivors, waiving the \$250 fee. Rev. Jackson himself met with evacuees.

Wanting to voice their concerns, some 50 evacuees and supporters gathered outside the swanky Sheraton Hotel and Towers on the edge of the theater district to hold a media conference called by the NYC Solidarity Committee for Katrina/Rita Evacuees.

Under a giant green banner reading “Gulf Coast Survivors Demand Justice,” survivors told the media corps how utility services were actually being cut back in New Orleans, making it impossible for them to return. Construction jobs weren’t being offered to local residents, either.

Particularly outrageous was a tour bus service making money from visitors gawking at the devastated Ninth Ward.

Price gouging was denounced, which includes jacked-up rents. People also want a victims’ compensation fund established and transparency in the entire reconstruction process.

Several local TV stations covered this event, as well as the BBC. A posse of white cops tried to hassle participants but didn’t intimidate them. The Solidarity Committee kept the press conference going.

After the survivors were admitted, people at the protest said this was a victory, that the voice of survivors will be heard and that people will continue to fight for the right to return to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. □



Katrina survivors say: ‘Nothing about us, without us, is for us.’

WWW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN



MUMIA FROM DEATH ROW

Following are excerpts from a audio transcript:

**O**n a move! A few words in support of the efforts of Prison Radio and Noelle Hanrahan, its executive director, to raise funds to keep the wolf from the door. If you are a longtime listener to my commentaries, you have Prison Radio to thank for them.

In 1992, Prison Radio began recordings from the state dungeon at Huntingdon, Pa. If you walked in on us, you would have thought you were in the control booth of a funky radio station. We did good work together, so good in fact that NPR (National Public Radio) asked us to share our work with them, until they got scared off.

## ‘Nuff respect due to the diligent and very necessary work of Prison Radio!

The Prison Radio has done far more than pass me the mike. It has given us the haunted voices of jail juveniles, incarcerated kids, those who are truly rarely heard. It is also told the story of women behind bars, for example AIDS patients and survivors at the dungeon at Chowchilla, Calif.

[An interruption occurred during this taping with, “This call is from a correctional institution and is subject to monitoring and recording.”]

I guess you heard that. In short, Prison Radio has brought you the voices of those behind the walls—the fastest-growing public-housing development in America. For this and its other works, it deserves your generous financial support. Thanks. From Prison Radio, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal. (Visit [www.prisonradio.org](http://www.prisonradio.org)) □



# 'Recovery' brings more suffering

## Behind Bush's bluster, a bleak economy

By Fred Goldstein

The day after the December jobs report was issued by the Labor Department, President George W. Bush stood at the podium at the Chicago Economic Club. "The American economy heads into 2006 with a full head of steam. ... We're productive. We're innovative. We're entrepreneurial," he declared.

The basis for his carefully stage-managed excitement was thin to non-existent: a job gain of 108,000 for the month and a drop in the official unemployment rate from 5.0 percent to 4.9 percent.

In a move that had the Karl Rove touch, Bush sent Vice President Dick Cheney and a good chunk of his cabinet on the road to talk up the economy and try to make these anemic numbers look like a major turning point in the economy for 2006. Cheney went to a Harley-Davidson factory in Kansas City, Mo., Treasury Secretary John Snow to the New York Stock Exchange, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez to Louisville, Ky., Labor Secretary Elaine Chao to Baltimore and Energy Secretary Sam Bodman to Pittsburgh in a major effort to try to bring Bush's sinking poll numbers up.

Bush was pushed into motion by the latest Gallup poll, which found 63 percent of the population rates the economy fair-to-poor and 58 percent say that economic conditions are getting worse. So the roaring economy, as far as the majority of the population is concerned, is no more real than the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Of course, neither Bush nor his emissaries mentioned that the job-creation numbers were half what Wall Street economists had been predicting. Nor did they mention that it takes 150,000 new jobs per month just to keep up with population growth. And they did not confide that the entire unemployment number is understated because more and more people have given up looking for jobs and are not counted in the labor force, or are only able to find part-time work.

In the world of the working class, employed and unemployed—the people who create all the wealth and profit that is being disposed of by the brokers, bankers and bosses—the picture is not so rosy.

### No recovery for workers

Wages grew at 3.1 percent but inflation was 3.5 percent. This amounts to a general wage cut of 0.4 percent. Average weekly hours worked were down 0.2 percent to 33.7 hours and average weekly earnings were flat at \$550.66. (Los Angeles Times, Jan. 6) This does not take into account the hundreds of thousands of day laborers and other undocumented workers, who are underpaid and whose much lower wages go unreported.

Little to nothing was said in the capitalist press about the way racism and sexism are reflected in the statistics. Rarely cited from the Labor Department report for the month is the fact that African American unemployment is over twice that for white workers, 9.3 percent compared to 4.2 percent; Latino unemployment is 6.0 percent; and among women at least 20 years old, it is 8.5 percent. Teenage unemployment is 13.4 percent. There are no statistics on lesbian, gay, bi or trans unemployment.

Of course, even these official statistics are suspect, given the fact, for example, that half the African American men in New York's Harlem are known to be unemployed.

The masses of workers are hurting and not just because of one month of the capitalist economy. Here are some of the findings of the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank, as compiled by EPI President Lawrence Michel and Director Ross Eisenbrey and issued in a Dec. 21 release.

Inflation-adjusted wages are still below where they were at the start of the recovery in November 2001. Productivity, on the other hand, is up by 13.5 percent.

Wage growth has been short-

changed because 35 percent of the growth of total income has gone into corporate profits.

Median household income (inflation-adjusted) has fallen five years in a row; it was \$46,129 in 1999 and only \$44,389 in 2004. Thus, household income dropped on the average almost \$2,000.

Over the last four years the indebtedness of U.S. households has risen 35.7 percent, the highest level of debt in history, and now amounts to 115 percent of after-tax income. On average, people are paying 13.6 percent of their earnings in interest to banks and credit card companies to cover this debt.

The percent of the population that has a job has never recovered since the last recession and is still 1.3 percent lower than in March 2001. More than 3 million manufacturing jobs have been lost since January 2000.

The poverty rate rose from 11.3 percent of the population in 2000 to 12.7 percent in 2004 and the number of people living in poverty has increased by 5.4 million over that period. The poverty rate for children has gone from 16.2 percent in 2000 to 17.8 percent in 2004.

Household health-care costs rose between 43 and 45 percent from 2000 to 2003. Last year the percent of people with employer-provided health care fell for the fourth straight year. Nearly 3.7 million fewer people had health-care insurance in 2004 than in 2000.

According to Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research Educational Trust, since 2000 alone employers have raised the health-insurance premium their workers must pay by an average of 50 percent—or about \$1,000 per family. Only 63 percent of the working-age population has any health coverage at all, meaning that over a third of the working-age population, or about 45 million people, have

none. (Los Angeles Times, Oct. 10, 2004)

And while the bosses added 2 million jobs in the year 2005, they also laid off at least 1.56 million workers between January and November 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And this number is a gross underestimate. It only records layoffs involving 50 or more workers, who are out of work for 31 days or more, and relies completely on the bosses' testimony to the BLS.

### 'Recovery' for the rich

In the boardrooms, the executive suites and the country clubs there is a recovery, and no wonder. The Dow Jones stock average has finally risen to 11,000, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at 4.2 percent and, according to Paul Krugman's column in the Dec. 5 New York Times, profits have risen more than 50 percent since the last quarter of 2001 while wages and salaries went up 7 percent over the same period. This wage and salary number is distorted, however, because it includes the salaries of CEOs, high-paid executives and managers of all types. Average hourly earnings of non-supervisory workers, adjusted for inflation, are lower now than when the "recovery" began.

All talk of "strong performance" of the economy means little to the 35,000 GM workers facing layoffs at 10 plants or the 25,000 workers at Ford also facing pink slips. They and their families, as well as hundreds of thousands of people in the communities where the plants are located, are living in a state of anxiety and tension over the impending shutdowns. Both GM and Ford are on the brink of bankruptcy and may be looking to the bankruptcy courts to help bail them out in the same way the courts bailed out Delta Airlines. They are working with the Delphi auto parts corporation to try to break union contracts.

### IBM's assault on pensions

IBM announced in early January that it will freeze the \$48 billion pension fund for its 125,000 workers beginning in 2008 and push them into 401k plans.

Instead of being able to rely on fixed pension benefits, paid out by IBM based upon their years of service to the company—really, years of exploitation—the workers will have to contribute out of their own paychecks into funds that will be used by brokers to gamble on the stock market or be put into money-market accounts. And this at a time when market "fundamentals" are increasingly shaky.

IBM will make small contributions to the 401k plans, but they will be far below the fixed-benefit pension-fund contribution the company was paying. IBM expects to save \$450 million to \$500 million this year alone and up to \$3 billion from 2006 to 2010.

While corporations like Delta, Delphi and Bethlehem Steel have used the bankruptcy courts to get out of pension obligation to the workers, IBM is the first big corporation to just abandon its pension as a matter of policy on such a scale.

Of course, IBM is a non-union company and feels free to unilaterally dictate what amounts to a massive wage cut. Pension benefits are nothing but deferred wages, which the corporation is legally responsible to hold and protect for workers until they retire.

This frontal assault by IBM is likely to serve as a signal for other corporations to



WW PHOTOS: CHERYL LABASH

## Delphi workers protest over pensions, pay cuts

By Martha Grevatt

Hundreds of GM/Delphi workers and their supporters picketed Jan. 8 outside Detroit's Cobo Hall, site of the North American International Auto Show. Organized by the rank-and-file group Soldiers of Solidarity, the demonstration protested Delphi's threats to slash wages, benefits and pensions, and also eliminate most jobs for its 34,000 U.S. union employees. Defiant chants included, "We aren't tame, we aren't mild, we're the voice of the rank and file" and "GM/Delphi you should know, we won't be your PATCO."

The air-controllers' union PATCO was smashed in the early 1980s in a vicious anti-union attack by the Ronald Reagan administration.

Police had the workers fenced off hundreds of feet from the convention center. When they blocked attempts by some protesters to march past Cobo Hall, the chant went up, "The criminals are in there." Earlier in the week a member of the SOS steering committee was harassed by the FBI.

While the militant protest was happening in Detroit, SOS also held a mobilizing meeting in Lockport, N.Y., site of a major Delphi plant. □

# ing for workers

try to get out of fixed pension benefit plans.

## Banks and Chapter 11 scam

According to Mark Ruetter, writing in the Oct. 23 Washington Post, "About 150 major corporations are now in some stage of bankruptcy reorganization, including four of the nation's leading airlines. As the prospect of other large enterprises taking a spin down Chapter 11 becomes more widely discussed in business circles ('maybes' on the list include such iconic names as General Motors and Ford), the tactics used in bankruptcy courts are shaking the very foundations of the American workplace."

Ruetter points out that while the new personal bankruptcy laws make it more difficult for individuals to declare bankruptcy and wipe out their mounting credit-card debt, amounting now to about \$800 billion, the bankruptcy courts are becoming a major instrument for the corporations to wipe out the rights of their workers.

The Chapter 11 scam is a conspiracy between the banks, the corporations and the courts against the working class. Delphi is a graphic illustration of this conspiracy. Just before Delphi declared bankruptcy, it not only had \$1.6 billion in cash on hand but had secured \$2 billion in loans and revolving credit from Citigroup and JP Morgan Chase bank.

The obvious question posed by Ruetter was, "If Delphi is so broke, with unsustainable wage costs and skyrocketing pension obligations, why are two of the nation's major banks offering to lend it money on excellent credit terms?"

"The answer: For the same reason that Bank of America, General Electric Capital Group, UBS Securities and ... 'vulture capitalists' have invested billions of dollars in supposedly tattered companies entering Chapter 11 since 2001. Investors can profit richly from the meltdown of established companies...."

By making big loans, these banks become protected creditors, whereas the workers are unprotected. The banks can work with the reorganizers and the courts to void labor contracts and get control over the cash flow of these companies while they are in bankruptcy—and then become key players once they emerge from Chapter 11.

## Global struggle for profits

These assaults upon the workers are driven by the lust for profit and the need of these giant transnational monopolies to position themselves for the vicious struggle being carried on for survival and dominance in the global markets. They are fighting each other to boost profitability, and they do it by attacking the workers. Bringing down wages, in whatever form—cutting pensions and health benefits or just plain wage cuts and layoffs—is the primary form in which capitalist corporations fight each other. They call it being "competitive."

It is not just the individual greed of the bosses that drives them to attack the workers. It is the profit system itself that drives the attacks. The scientific-technological revolution has accelerated the construction of a global network of capitalist production, with instant communication, cheap transportation, computerized control of production, ordering and shipping, and an advanced global division of labor in production and services.

Each advance in technology and organ-

ization increases the productivity of labor, or in Marxist terms, increases the rate of exploitation of labor and the potential profit of the bosses. But with each advance, more commodities must be sold at a profit. That means they must be produced in less time as workers work faster, harder and longer, either at new and expensive machines, in super-modern factories managed by computers, or in speeded-up poultry and meat packing plants, strip mines, fisheries and just about everywhere.

In the global struggle for profit, all labor processes—whether in hospitals, offices or fields—come under pressure as the bosses pit workers against workers.

## U.S. capitalism's crisis of overproduction

But in this process, the capitalist class increases its own crisis, the crisis of overproduction that it struggles to overcome. Each capitalist grouping's goal is to produce more, sell more and reduce or eliminate labor. This brings about an increasing crisis for the workers.

After the last four economic crises, during each recovery it has been harder and harder for the system to absorb and reemploy the workers. According to statistics compiled by the Economic Policy Institute, published on Jan. 6 in a document entitled "The Jobs Picture," the job growth figures over 49 months of each recovery have steadily diminished:

- March 1975 to April 1979: 16.7 percent,
- November 1982 to December 1986: 13.2 percent,
- March 1991 to April 1995: 7.8 percent,
- November 2001 to December 2005: 2.7 percent.

After each crisis it has become increasingly difficult to put workers back to work. With each crisis the giant corporations merge. They have "efficiency" layoffs. They make new investments in labor-saving machinery and technology to boost profitability. They build more and more powerful means of production.

And they must sell more and more commodities to recoup the cost of the expensive technology and plants and still have enough left over for the fabulous profits that they live for. The corporations run up

After each U.S. crisis it becomes harder for the capitalist system to reemploy workers.

RECOVERY	JOB GROWTH
1975-79	16.7 percent
1982-86	13.2 percent
1991-95	7.8 percent
2001-05	2.7 percent.

against capitalist overproduction again and again. And each time it is more difficult for them to make their profits.

To keep production going, they resort to credit, either from the federal government in the form of low interest rates or consumer credit. According to the Wall Street Journal of Jan. 10, consumer credit, not counting mortgages, now amounts to \$2.1 trillion.

In the sphere of production and exploitation, they outsource to low-wage areas, pit workers in other countries against workers in the U.S., and attack unions, wages, pensions and benefits.

Right now the corporations have accumulated vast profits that they cannot reinvest. U.S. corporations are rich with cash. According to the Wall Street Journal of Nov. 3, "World pension, insurance and mutual funds have \$46 trillion at their disposal, up almost a third from 2000. In the same period global central-bank reserves have doubled to \$4 trillion, and other gauges of available capital have risen as well."

The Journal points out that global investors are diving into a wide range of risky assets. All are speculative and almost none have anything to do with production of wealth. They buy financial instruments, fine art, real estate and real-estate backed debt, etc.

Of this wealth, some has only paper value, the rest is nothing more than profits taken out of the labor process, taken from the workers in the form of surplus value. It is being held because it cannot be profitably invested in production. The ever-growing constraints of the world market upon the increasingly productive economy of the U.S. and the entire world capitalist class, tend to restrict investment. This in turn leads to unemployment and increased exploitation in order to get more profits from the workers.

## Crisis at home, wars abroad

This global struggle for markets, resources and investment drives the bosses to war. That is what drove the Bush group to try to conquer the oil in Iraq. That is what is driving them to try to conquer Iran and North Korea, to threaten China,

to try to overthrow Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and to blockade Cuba.

Their foreign adventures are simply an extension of their vicious, racist, exploitative practices at home. The racism against Iraqis is just an example of the way racism and chauvinism in general have been used in the service of imperialist war, from the 1898 war with Spain when the U.S. took over the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico to the Vietnam War.

This situation cannot proceed in a straight line.

In fact, the Delphi workers are beginning to fight back against the attempt to drastically cut their wages and benefits under cover of the bankruptcy law.

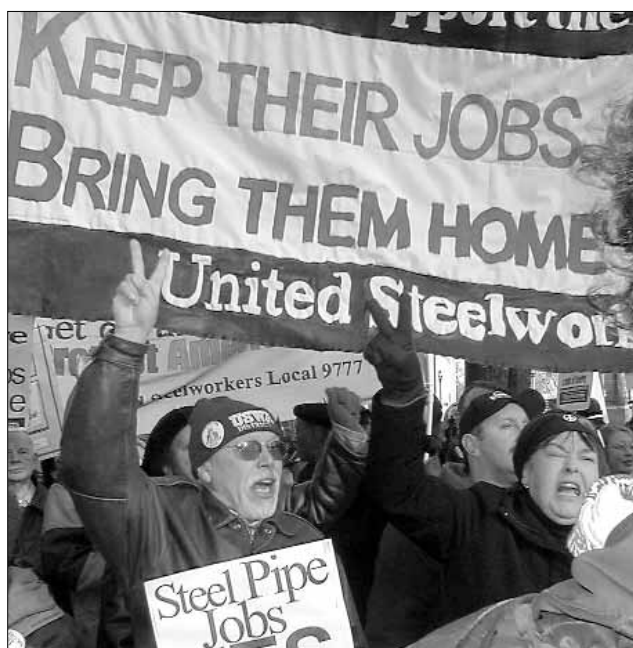
The Transport Workers Union in New York City took an historic stand against the very center of U.S. finance capital on Wall Street and walked off the job to stop an assault on their pensions and to fight for dignity. They stood up in the face of the no-strike Taylor Law, the bondholders of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, and a vicious anti-labor mayor and governor.

Janitors in Texas have recently organized in an unprecedented victory.

The capitalist class and its system have ensured more and greater class struggles to come. It is a revival of the working-class struggle that will push society forward.

U.S. bosses have had relative labor peace for several decades. But in their insatiable thirst for profit and their drive to overcome their crisis of overproduction they will inevitably awaken a response from the multinational working class in the direction of rebellion and the opening of a counteroffensive.

The contradiction between the vast socially operated world apparatus of coordinated production on the one hand and the private ownership of the world economy by a tiny group of corporate billionaires on the other can only be overcome through struggle. The means to produce all this great wealth has been built by the working class, not by the exploiters. The workers must take it over and use it not for private profit but for satisfying human need—for health care, housing, education, jobs and a decent life. That is the very essence of socialism. □



## Make steel, not war

Members of District 7 of the United Steelworkers of America from northwest Indiana join a 500-person demonstration against President George W. Bush, who was giving a speech at the Chicago Hilton on Jan. 6. Protesters called for Bush's impeachment and for an end to the war in Iraq.

—Story and photo by Lou Paulsen

# U.S. occupation's problems increase in Iraq

By G. Dunkel

Roadside bombs, bullets and a helicopter crash killed 17 U.S. troops and civilian officials in Iraq on the second weekend of 2006. Added to the 11 troops killed on the Thursday before the weekend started, this was one of the deadliest periods of the war for the U.S. military.

At least 130 Iraqis died in two suicide bomb attacks, one in Karbala against pilgrims and the other in Ramadi against 1,000 men lined up to be interviewed for the Iraqi police force. Even the Interior Ministry came under bomb attack.

The Pentagon hasn't announced yet whether the Black Hawk helicopter, carrying 12 people, which crashed on the night of Jan. 8 near embattled Tal Afar in northern Iraq, was shot down or crashed due to heavy weather. Helicopters are used to move people between bases in Iraq because the military has decided that travel by road is unsafe and is only to be undertaken by large, heavily guarded convoys.

At the start of the new year, the Pentagon and a number of press agencies announced Iraq casualty figures. They are daunting.

Agence France Press, compiling its figures from Pentagon News releases, announced that as of Jan. 8, over 2,200 U.S. troops had lost their lives. There is no official estimate of Iraqi casualties, military and civilian, but the Lancet, a prestigious British medical journal, estimated in October 2004 that 100,000

Iraqis had died up until then due to the war and occupation. Based on the Lancet figures, a number of analysts estimate the current casualty toll for Iraqis to be between 130,000 and 150,000, including combatants and civilians.

In addition, from Oct. 7, 2001, the official start of the Afghan war, until Jan. 1, 2006, the government reported that some 187 people from all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, plus four from the CIA, have died in the fighting there. The year 2005 was the deadliest yet, with 92 U.S. soldiers dying in intensified combat against a revived anti-occupation force, apparently led by the Taliban.

While the casualty figures are important, but fluctuate with changes in tactics on both sides and the ebb and flow of combat, there is another statistic that continues to rise—the rate at which U.S. troops are wounded or injured in accidents.

According to the Pentagon, as of Jan. 3 some 16,329 troops had been wounded or injured since March 19, 2003, when the U.S. invasion began. Among them, 7,582 were so seriously hurt that the Pentagon listed them as "WIA Not RTD," which is its acronym for: Wounded in Action, not Returned to Duty. For most of the wounded in this category, their injuries are so severe that they will be crippled or impaired for the rest of their lives.

Besides the helicopter crash indicating that the U.S. forces in Iraq don't have the command of communications that is vital

to crush an insurgency, the up-tick in casualties and wounded that the U.S. has suffered since the election Dec. 15 indicates that the decline of these rates in December was due to a decision by a large part of the Iraqi resistance to calm down the conflict while the vote was taking place. And now the resistance has stepped up its attacks on U.S. and puppet troops.

While the U.S. is not facing imminent military defeat—far from that—it is clear that a decisive military victory is unattainable and the political and economic costs of its war in Iraq are growing. Two top economists—Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Blimes of Harvard—just released a report estimating the total costs of the war in Iraq will be over \$2 trillion. Every public opinion poll shows that doubts and outright opposition are growing among the U.S. population.

The New York Times published an article Jan. 7, asserting that the United States is conducting wide-ranging, exploratory talks with certain elements of the Iraqi resistance with the aim of splitting the Al Qaeda faction from the rest. This article was widely reproduced in the Arab and Asian press.

According to the Times, the U.S. is opening up contacts with the resistance, both on a face-to-face basis with local leaders and—through intermediaries—with national leaders. In addition, the occupation authorities also released Satam Quood, an associate of Saddam Hussein,

and twenty other major figures from the Baath Party, the former ruling party in Iraq. The Shiite-dominated government opposed this release.

That the U.S. government says it is negotiating with elements in the resistance indicates that at least some elements directing the U.S. occupation believe that the Pentagon and its Iraqi puppets have failed to win a military victory. The U.S. is thus in an untenable stalemate. These talks are Washington's admission of weakness, an admission that all the tremendous military force the U.S. can bring to bear is still not enough to crush the Iraqis.

The U.S. military, under extreme pressure from Congress, adopted a program to reimburse up to \$1,100 of the money families have spent on personal safety equipment, mainly body armor for soldiers sent to Iraq. The armed forces say they can't solve the bureaucratic problems involved in giving its soldiers all the protection the soldiers have asked for.

But the need to buy this armor and to spend a trillion or so tax dollars, the need to ensure the safety of U.S. troops and to end the slaughter of Iraqis in this war—all these difficult and complicated problems—could be relieved by the prompt and immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Iraq would still face major issues in reconstruction, rebuilding and fashioning a working society. But U.S. withdrawal would give the Iraqis a chance. □

## Marines persecute Vietnam-era war resister

**BULLETIN:**

**Texiero wins discharge**

According to media reports on Jan. 11, Maj. Gen. Bob Dickerson, commander at Camp Lejeune, N.C., has ordered a discharge for Jerry Texiero in lieu of a trial. Texiero is being moved from the brig to Camp Lejeune's Separation Barracks for processing out of the Marine Corps. He is expected to be released soon and to return to Florida.

By Dustin Langley

Forty years ago, Jerry Texiero refused to serve in an illegal war based on lies. In 1965, facing deployment to Vietnam, the 24-year-old Marine left Camp Pendleton and disappeared.

Last August, in what some see as an attempt to send a message to members of the armed forces serving in another illegal war, the Marine Corps arrested Texiero, now 65 years old, and charged him with desertion. The Marines are holding Texiero at the detention facility at Camp Lejeune, N.C. Since he has been in custody he has lost over 30 pounds and is now hav-

ing significant health problems.

Texiero, 65, was arrested in Tarpon Springs, Fla., and brought on Dec. 14 to Camp Lejeune. His lawyers, Tod Ensign, legal director of Citizen Soldier ([www.citizen-soldier.org](http://www.citizen-soldier.org)) and Louis P. Font, argue their client is being held unlawfully.

At a Jan. 4 news conference, his lawyers said that Texiero should be released because he is 10 years older than the 55-year-old maximum age for an enlisted, active-duty Marine.

"We say it's against statutory authority for them to hold Jerry," said Font. "They should release him immediately. He's in an environment for the young and vigorous when actually he's old and infirm."

The attorneys have filed a letter with Maj. Gen. Robert Dickerson, the commander of Marine Corps Installations East seeking Texiero's immediate release and discharge from the Marines.

If he is convicted of desertion in a court martial, he faces three years in a military jail.

Font and Ensign say that under international law Texiero had the right and obligation to leave because the Vietnam War was an illegal conflict.



Jerry Texiero

"Jerry Texiero had every right and duty to leave the military at that time," Font said. "He had a duty not to go because he was forced to participate in acts of war that are determined to be war crimes. That means he was authorized to leave."

**A message to today's troops?**

Ensign says that Texiero is being used as an example. "My own view is it's really sending a message to the troops in Iraq," Ensign said. "If you do not do what you are ordered to do or go where you are ordered to go, you will face unending pursuit and you'll be followed to your grave."

Ensign wrote to Camp Lejeune's commanding officer, Brig. Gen. Robert Dickerson, asking: "Why are scarce Marine resources being squandered on the prosecution of a senior citizen whose only 'crime' is refusing to fight a war that today is universally discredited? Or is the Corps warning Marines in Iraq that they will pursue deserters to the grave?"

In addition to charging Texiero with desertion, the Marines have launched a smear campaign in the media against him, leaking information from his personnel

file and charging him with larceny.

According to Ensign, "Lt. Col. Annita Best, Camp Lejeune's spokeswoman, illegally released confidential data taken from Cpl. Jerry Texiero's personnel file to at least two news reporters on Jan. 4, 2006. The federal Privacy Act of 1974 prohibits such disclosure without Texiero's consent.

"Colonel Best read an excerpt that appears to have been taken from Texiero's file to reporters from the Associated Press and the Raleigh News-Observer. According to their news accounts, she referred to a section of the file that discussed an alleged larceny of \$5,490 from a Marine Corps Post Exchange in California on July 14, 1965. The one-paragraph passage contains no corroborating evidence tying Texiero to the missing funds and recommends that the FBI be asked to search for evidence."

Tod Ensign and Louis Font have called for "an investigation by the Senate Armed Services Committee into official misconduct by the Camp Lejeune chain of command".

During the current war in Iraq, more than 600 soldiers have deserted to avoid participating in the criminal assault against the Iraqi people. During the Vietnam War, tens of thousands deserted, some fleeing to Canada, in opposition to the war. Inside the military, the GI movement, spearheaded by deserters and resisters in the army, played a contributing role in ending the Vietnam War. Their resistance - deserting, "fragging" (attacking) officers, forming GI unions - played havoc with military discipline and led Col. Robert D. Heinl, Jr. to write in 1971, "By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse." □



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# What is Paul Wolfowitz up to in Chad?

By Deirdre Griswold

Have you been wondering what Paul Wolfowitz might be up to in his new position as head of the World Bank?

Wolfowitz was nominated last year by George W. Bush to head the powerful financial institution, which lends billions of dollars to countries around the world. The European imperialists went along with the nomination. They get to pick the head of the equally powerful International Monetary Fund. The rest of the world has no say in either matter.

Wolfowitz's nomination was seen by a number of commentators as similar to when Robert McNamara, President Lyndon Johnson's secretary of defense and a leading architect of the Vietnam War, was moved over to the same position in 1968. Like Wolfowitz, McNamara was too closely associated with a costly and failing U.S. military adventure. So he was kicked upstairs to become president of the World Bank.

Before this job, Wolfowitz was not only deputy secretary of defense for four years under Donald Rumsfeld; he also was the leading ideologue of the neo-con grouping that came in with George W. Bush and proposed big plans to impose U.S. domination across the globe. After the downfall of the Soviet Union, Wolfowitz had written the infamous document on the New American Century, telling the rest of the world that from now on the U.S. would be calling all the shots. Central to this view was U.S. control over the Middle East and other oil-rich areas of the world.

As a member of the inner White House circle, he pushed hard to use 9/11 as an excuse to invade Iraq in a "preemptive" war, and predicted an easy victory for U.S. forces there. They would be welcomed as liberators, said Wolfowitz.

Together with Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, Wolfowitz then brought in U.S. corporations for the "reconstruction" of Iraq. Iraq is still in ruins, but these corporations have made out like bandits. The cost of the war has gone from a projected \$30 billion to \$233 billion, and now a new study by Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz predicts that it will cost \$2 TRILLION by the time it is over.

Do you suppose Wolfowitz's resume for the bank job claimed "fiscal responsibility"?

The resistance in Iraq against U.S. colonial occupation, the Pentagon's multiplying difficulties in recruiting enough troops for the war without resorting to forced conscription, and the accompanying dissatisfaction of the majority of the population at home with the war finally convinced Bush to get Wolfowitz out of the Washington spotlight.

## Leaning on impoverished Chad

So Wolfowitz was moved over to control the World Bank's billions. And he is now back in the news for having suspended loans to the sub-Saharan African country of Chad, one of the poorest nations in the world. The bank announced on Jan. 6 that it was withholding all new loans to Chad and was even suspending a \$124 million loan already set aside.

Most of the money was for an ongoing project to build an oil pipeline from Chad to Cameroon so Exxon-Mobil can exploit Chad's petroleum reserves. Shortly after Wolfowitz's confirmation, Daphne Eviatar had written prophetically that "Now, a leading architect of U.S. foreign policy

would be in a position to pressure the world's largest public financial institution to help pay for the exploration, drilling and transport of America's most coveted natural resource." (Salon, April 26, 2005)

So why is the money being frozen? Wolfowitz says it is because the Chad government doesn't want to spend enough of its oil earnings on alleviating poverty.

Incredible. How many times have we heard similar statements from the representatives of the rapacious imperialists who have sucked the wealth out of the colonized and neo-colonized parts of the world for centuries now? They exhibit no shame at all. Wringing their hands, they castigate Third World governments for not caring about their people—the way the imperialist bankers and industrialists do, of course.

Wolfowitz has seized on a law recently passed by Chad's parliament that would allow the government to dip into a \$30 million fund generated by the oil revenues. According to the World Bank, Chad had agreed to this fund, which sets aside 10 percent of its oil revenues in trust "for future generations," as a condition for getting the loans to build the pipeline. Under the new law, this money can now be used for current expenses.

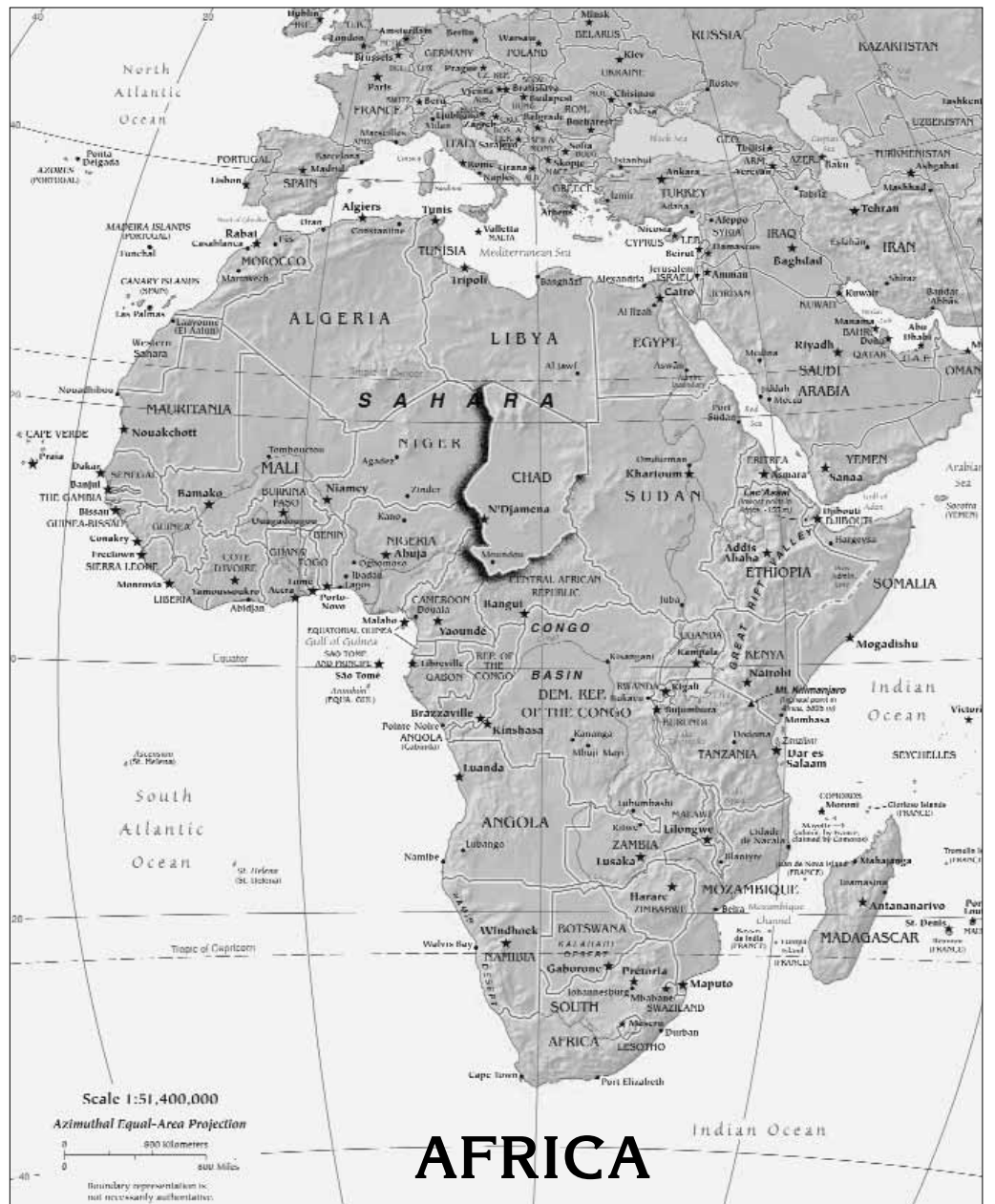
According to a Jan. 9 Reuters dispatch, "Among the world's five poorest countries, Chad regularly has difficulty paying its civil servants and regions in the east and south have had to absorb at least 240,000 refugees from neighboring Sudan and Central African Republic." There is fighting along its northern border, and its army is weak.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is building new military bases in Africa, particularly in areas where there is oil. The largest is in Sao Tome and Principe on the petroleum-rich Gulf of Guinea.

Obviously, Chad is strapped for cash, even though it has become an oil producer. Some members of its legislature, who voted for the new law 119 to 13, said that the terms demanded by the World Bank were a violation of their country's sovereignty.

The World Bank is not going to hold up the construction of the pipeline. That's not what ExxonMobil wants.

This move by Wolfowitz can only be



seen as pressure on the government of Chad to force it to do something it hasn't wanted to do. It may be some time before the real issues in this struggle are exposed. But one thing is for sure: it has nothing to do with the bank's concern for "future generations."

However, quite a few NGOs, which have tried to "reform" the bank by inserting language into its mission statement about alleviating poverty, are jumping on the bandwagon against Chad instead of exposing the real motives of Wolfowitz and the imperialist oil companies.

## 'A tool of U.S. policy'

Eric Toussaint of the Brussels-based Committee to Abolish the Third World Debt writes this about the World Bank:

"Contrary to popular wisdom, the World Bank's mission is not to reduce poverty in developing countries. Its mission, defined by the victors of WWII—notably the U.S. and Britain—was to assist in the reconstruction of Europe and, addi-

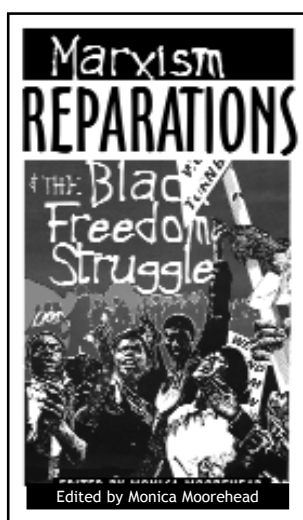
tionally, to facilitate growth in developing nations, many of which were still European colonies. It is this second mission that is referred to as 'development' and which has taken on greater importance over the years.

"During the first 20 years of its existence, more than 90 percent of the projects the World Bank funded were designed to improve communications infrastructure and facilitate the production of electricity. The money lent to developing nations went towards their purchase of goods and technologies from industrialized countries—what they needed, in short, to realize projects that allowed for an increase in exports from the South to the North. During this period, projects for education, health, access to clean drinking water and purification of sewer water received less than 5 percent of loan moneys.

"From its inception, the World Bank was a tool for American and Allied foreign policy. Countries that opposed their strategic interests were systematically refused loans from the World Bank and the IMF: Guatemala under J. Arbenz in 1954, Egypt under Nasser in 1955 and 1956, Indonesia under A. Sukarno from 1962-65, etc. Conversely, countries they considered allies received generous loans: the Congo under Mobutu, South Africa under Apartheid, Suharto's Indonesia from 1965 to 1998, Pinochet's Chile, the Philippines under Marcos, etc.

"In addition, the World Bank gave loans to countries the U.S. and its allies wanted to remove or distance from Soviet influence: Tito's Yugoslavia, India, Ceausescu's Romania, for example."

It's no coincidence that today a major architect of the Iraq war sits as head of the World Bank. His job there is just as bloody and imperialist as when he was working alongside Rumsfeld in the Pentagon. □



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## workers world editorial

# No to Alito

In the July 20, 2005, edition of Workers World, we wrote in this space that “it would have been hard for Bush to have found anyone more right-wing” than Judge John Roberts for his nomination to the Supreme Court. The track record of current Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito, however, proves that even Roberts’ appointment as chief justice wasn’t enough for Bush and his reactionary backers.

Here are just a few of the highlights in Alito’s career:

### • Reproductive rights

As a judge on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, he wrote a dissenting opinion in 1991 that a state can require women to notify their husbands before being allowed to have an abortion. He was alone on the court in this view. Earlier, as an attorney in the office of Ronald Reagan’s solicitor general, Alito had drafted a legal memo urging the Justice Department to chip away at abortion rights.

In the same memo he made a clear attack against birth control, writing that “certain methods of birth control are ‘abortifacients,’ i.e., that they do not prevent fertilization but terminate the development of the fetus after conception.”

### • Family and medical leave

Alito wrote the Third Circuit Court decision that Congress could not require state governments to comply with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, which requires employers to grant workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for immediate family members during birth, adoption or for a medical condition. This ruling was overturned three years later, based on deciding votes by Supreme Court Justices William Rehnquist and Sandra Day O’Connor—the very two that Roberts and potentially Alito will be replacing.

### • Police powers

While working in Reagan’s Justice Department, Alito issued a 1984 memo arguing that a Memphis police officer was justified in shooting in the back of the head an unarmed 15-year-old who was running away from police to avoid a burglary arrest. The memo asserted that

“the shooting can be justified as reasonable within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment.... A fleeing suspect in effect states to the police: ‘Kill me or let me escape the legal process, at least for now.’”

In *Doe v. Groody*, Alito argued that police were reasonable in assuming that a warrant issued to search the premises of a home and the body of one named person, a male, gave police the right to strip-search a woman and her 10-year-old daughter who were also at home when the warrant was executed.

In addition, Alito has written memos supporting government immunity from lawsuits challenging wiretapping in the name of national security. He was evasive when asked if he believed the president has the right to grant immunity from prosecution to those under his command who use torture. While saying that no one is “above the law,” he indicated that the constitutionality of a recent vote in Congress against torture has not yet been determined.

He has consistently argued against affirmative action, in support of dismissals of sex and race discrimination claims, and even has gone so far as to suggest that violence against women does not exist. He said during Senate hearings on Jan. 10 that he does not remember being a member of the Concerned Alumni of Princeton—an organization that resisted the admission of women and people of color to the school—even though he listed membership in the group on a 1985 job application.

Alito’s nomination has stirred up opposition from a wide variety of progressive and liberal groups. Most of the media, however, have presented this as a partisan struggle by Democrats trying to keep right-wing Republicans from packing the court. They avoid exposing the attack on people of color, women and workers in general that the nomination actually poses. The capitalist media are afraid of being accused of stirring up the opposition any further.

Not us. As we suggested during the Roberts nomination, “It will take an independent rank-and-file upsurge to put the brakes on the runaway right-wing train that is in control of the White House, Congress and the Supreme Court.” □

## OKINAWA

# U.S. sailor charged with murder

By Larry Hales

A U.S. sailor has confessed to robbing and killing 56-year-old Yoshie Sato, a Japanese woman on Okinawa. The U.S. Navy has not released the name of the sailor, who is 21 years old. Sato was found brutally beaten and later died from internal bleeding.

Under a U.S.-Japanese agreement, the U.S. military command was forced to hand over the sailor to Japanese custody. Washington is in a delicate position on the island, where there are nearly 20,000 U.S. troops, half the total number of U.S. troops occupying Japan, as the U.S. has done since the end of World War II in 1945.

There have been regular protests by the local population against the U.S. bases in Okinawa, the last one in December against U.S. plans to build a new naval base.

Ten years ago, protests ignited on the island after three U.S. military personnel raped a 12-year-old girl. There have been numerous incidents, ranging from robbery to rape and murder, at the hands of U.S. military personnel.

## Protest at Narita Airport

Demonstrators protested on Jan. 8 at Narita Airport against Tokyo’s decision to send the Eastern Army of Japan’s “Self-Defense Force” (SDF) to Iraq from that airfield. They also demanded a halt to construction, demanding that the authorities stop extending the interim runway to the north. The Sanrizuka-Shibayama United League against Narita Airport held the demonstration around the airport. At a post-demonstration rally, workers and students pledged to continue their struggle against the field.

After the demonstration, workers and students said they would continue to struggle against Narita Airport and against the warmaking administration of Japanese Premier Junichiro Koizumi.

*Report from the Anti-War Joint Action Committee in Japan*

The abuses by U.S. military forces, however, are small compared to the more than 100,000 civilian deaths suffered when the U.S. military invaded the island toward the end of the Pacific war. Those deaths can be attributed to the bloody imperialist battle over control of the sea that the U.S. waged with Imperial Japan in that brutal capitalist war.

The Pentagon has shielded its personnel around the world from being tried by foreign governments for crimes committed on foreign soil. In the Philippines, six U.S. Marines gang-raped a 22-year-old Filipino woman, but under the Visiting Forces Agreement signed by President Gloria Arroyo, the Marines have escaped being tried in Filipino courts despite huge protests. U.S. pilots whose plane sliced through a cable in the Italian mountains were tried in the U.S. and let off with a slap on the wrist, though 20 people died in the 1998 incident.

In Japan, the United States is wary of losing its junior capitalist partner during an increasing din from the Japanese people over U.S. bases, especially in Okinawa. Thousands protested after the rape of the 12 year old girl in 1995. These abusive occurrences have been frequent, from a military plane crash in 1950 that left 17 school children dead, to this recent attack, robbery and murder.

Some 10,000 Okinawans protested in Igei Park, Kin Town, Okinawa, on July 19 against increased military training with live ammunition at the U.S. Marine base at Camp Hansen, which is close to residential neighborhoods.

Washington is relying more on Tokyo, even going as far as trying to win Japan a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and seeking to have Japan forgo its “pacifist” constitution that limits the Japanese government’s ability to develop an aggressive military or to send troops overseas other than for defense.

The Bush administration last year signed a new military agreement with Japan identifying security in the Taiwan Strait as a “common strategic objective” between the U.S. and Japan. This pushed Japan to abandon decades of official pacifism by claiming a right to intervene in the Taiwan Strait.

Japan’s military role has greatly expanded, and this provocation under U.S. urging is aimed mainly at China and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea. U.S. capitalists are in economic and political competition with China despite that country’s opening to capitalist markets.

This need to maintain amicable relations with Japan has deterred the U.S. military authorities from insisting on the same sort of “extraterritoriality,” that is, to control the trial of its armed forces personnel in Japan. The Pentagon has in this case so far allowed this sailor to be tried under Japanese law, while it has refused to turn over military personnel that have committed crimes in other countries to the governments of those countries, from the Philippines to Italy. □

## Czech Communist youth under attack

Shown in the photo is a recent demonstration of the Communist Union of Youth in the Czech Republic (KSM) protesting the U.S. war against Iraq. The KSM is the youth organization of the Communist Party (KSCM), a party that won substantial representation in the last parliamentary election there. Last November the Czech

government threatened to make the KSM illegal, using both a technical and political excuse for the attack, including that the KSM wrote in a journal that it “struggles for the revolutionary overthrow of the

capitalist order by the masses of the working people.” The KSM considers this an attack on the pro-socialist forces in the Czech Republic and asks people internationally to send letters of protest to the

Czech government before a March 3 hearing. Messages can be sent by e-mail to stiznosti@mvcv.cz to register the protest, with a copy to international@ksm.cz.

—John Catalinotto



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# Behind Washington's new military strategy in Korea

Following is an abridged version of a talk by Yoomi Jeong, secretary general of the Korea Truth Commission, a guest speaker at a Jan. 6 Workers World Party forum in New York City.

The Korea Truth Commission held its second meeting last November in Shenyang, China. Due to the National Security Law (NSL) in South Korea, we couldn't meet earlier because of the possibility of arrest. In fact, the only South Korean representative who attended the first meeting was jailed after his return to Korea.

The NSL still is in place despite a tremendous struggle last winter, when over 1,000 people engaged in an indefinite hunger strike outside [South Korea's] National Assembly. However, since then the overall political climate has improved substantially, and over 20 representatives attended the November meeting from North and South Korea, the U.S., Japan and China.

The Korea Truth Commission has been one of the leading forces in the self-determination and reunification struggle. We helped to bring awareness of the U.S. role on the Korean peninsula, thus contributing to the struggle for self-determination and national sovereignty.

Our dual goals were 1) to uncover civilian massacres and bring justice and reparations to the victims, and 2) to advance self-determination and reunification.

In terms of self-determination, our focus has been on the removal of U.S. troops and the closing of U.S. bases.

The new U.S. military strategy that came after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center brought significant changes to the Korean peninsula, as well as north-east Asia.

Under the new U.S. scenario, South Korea becomes a forward base and staging ground for an invasion of China, and a logistical hub for U.S. wars fought overseas. The U.S. has kept its military in South Korea for the last 60 years on the pretext of defending South Korea against North Korea. However, according to the new plan, U.S. forces in Korea (USFK) are to become a forward deployment force to contain regional conflicts around the world, even if these regional conflicts might well be orchestrated by the U.S. government.

One obvious goal of this transformation is to contain China. The U.S. is attempting to deter the potential challenge to its hegemony in the region and are willing to protect U.S. interests by any means necessary, including preemptive nuclear strikes.

By 2008, the U.S. will relocate its largest base from Seoul and move the Second Division, which is now stationed along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), to Pyongtaek on the southwest coast. Osan airbase, located in Pyongtaek, will be a new military command center for northeast Asia and a key base for the U.S. Missile Defense System in East Asia.

This relocation will put U.S. troops outside the range of North Korean artillery.

Pyongtaek is equipped with a waterfront and an airport, allowing flexibility when deploying troops outside the Korean Peninsula. This minimizes U.S. risk in an offensive first strike against North Korea.

Also, Pyongtaek is strategically located to contain or attack China. The latest U.S. military build-up is particularly in the western region, at Suwon, Pyongtaek, Gunsan and Gwangju.

The expansion of the role of the USFK

to include the Asia-Pacific region implies that U.S. troops will be stationed in Korea indefinitely.

This military transformation heightens tensions against North Korea and China, increasing the chances of conflict. This instability and the threat of U.S. war prevent the peaceful unification of Korea as well as peaceful economic and security cooperation in Northeast Asia. We Koreans do not want to become a hostage to U.S. military aggression against other countries and its fight for global hegemony.

After years of struggle to stop crimes by the U.S. military and [win] just trials over such cases, more than 1,000 crimes are still committed [each year] by U.S. military forces against South Korean civilians; only 3.9 percent of these cases are tried in South Korean courts.

With the money allocated for the relocation of the U.S. forces and other assistance provided to U.S. military, we could provide free education to all college students or free medical service to our people.

Last year on May 15, thousands of people demonstrated for the closing of the Gwangju Patriot missile base; on July 10 a large national rally against the base expansion and relocation took place in Pyongtaek; on Aug. 15 a national rally in Seoul called for U.S. troops to get out of Korea; on Sept. 8 on the 60th anniversary of the U.S. occupation, a large demonstration took place in Incheon to demand the dismantling of the statue of Gen. Douglas MacArthur there; and on Nov. 18 a large demonstration took place to oppose a meeting of the [U.S.-dominated] Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group in Pusan.

On Jan. 3, farmers from Pyongtaek began a 33-city national tour. They are driving their tractors and visiting various cities demanding an end to the U.S. base expansion in their home town and U.S. troops out of Korea. Most participants are ordinary farmers, showing the level of political consciousness among the people.

Despite the people's opposition, the South Korean National Assembly extended for a year the dispatch of South Korean troops to Iraq—the third-largest contingent there.

The majority of South Koreans consider the U.S. the major stumbling block to peace and reunification and the U.S. threat of war on the Korean peninsula as real.

We are concerned that the hardliners of the U.S. will try anything to stall the progress of the six-party talks [between North and South Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan].

The major achievement of the six-party talks has been a Joint Statement of Principles signed on Sept. 19, 2005, in Beijing. It outlines the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the normalization of relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the U.S.

Before, the focus of the six-party talks was on the abandonment of the DPRK's nuclear program. Now it has changed to denuclearization of the whole peninsula, demanding accountability also from South Korea as well as the U.S.

However, the talks are now in a stalemate. The U.S. is trying to use charges of "counterfeiting" and "human rights" issues as a pretext to put the brakes on the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, and has imposed financial sanctions on North Korea.

Of all countries in the world, the U.S. has no right to raise the issue of human

The Korea Truth Commission has helped to bring awareness of the U.S. role on the Korean peninsula.

Our dual goals were:

- 1) to uncover civilian massacres and bring justice and reparations to the victims, and
- 2) to advance self-determination and reunification.

—Yoomi Jeong, secretary general of the Korea Truth Commission

WW PHOTO: G. DUNKEL



rights when it blatantly violates the human rights of its own peoples as well as people in other countries.

North Korea has lots of patience. It still wants to participate in the six-party talks for the sake of peace and stability on Korean peninsula, even though within one month of the Beijing Joint Statement, the U.S. announced that it has no intention to normalize relations, even if North Korea abandons its nuclear program.

Peace and stability on the Korean peninsula are not solely dependent on the U.S. but on all Koreans. That is why South Korea is beginning to voice "independent opinions" that at times place it at odds with U.S. foreign policy.

Also, inter-Korean reunification efforts have been improving substantially since the June Summit of 2000.

Inter-Korean trade doubled last year, totaling \$1.05 billion. South Korea is now North Korea's second-largest trading partner.

Since the June 2000 North-South Summit, North and South Korea have reconnected east and west coast railroads

and roads across the DMZ. In December of last year, the two Koreas established limited commercial telephone links for the first time, after 60 years of division.

There has been a tremendous increase in contacts of people, culture, sports, religion and others since the June Summit. And this year, a North-South joint collective farm will open in North Korea. North and South Korea will form a joint team at the 2008 Beijing Olympics for the first time since the division.

North and South Korea now hold ministerial-level meetings every three months. We forecast that there may be another heads-of-state meeting between North Korea and South Korea.

Against these reunification efforts, the U.S. ambassador to South Korea called North Korea a criminal regime and publicly supported regime change in the North. We promptly launched a movement to recall him.

For peace and stability, the U.S. must realize that it needs to respect the dignity and sovereignty of other nations and peoples. □

## Morales meets Mbeki in South Africa

By Prensa Latina

South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki congratulated in Johannesburg on Jan. 10 Bolivia's President-elect Evo Morales, describing his election as evidence of the continuing changes in Latin America. Morales is on an international tour.

"Your election as the president of Bolivia indicates that the tide of change continues to sweep through Latin America bringing with it the hope of political and economic transformation and development for your country and indeed the region as a whole," Mbeki said when receiving the leader of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS).

After conveying South Africa's support for the future MAS government, Mbeki said that Morales' election "brings with it the optimism and glad tidings that 2006 will also usher in the desired fundamental socio-economic changes that your country expects."

He stressed that the South African government and its people stood ready to continue working to advance the developmental agenda of the south in general and of Bolivia in particular.



President-elect Evo Morales and President Thabo Mbeki

Morales will be inaugurated as Bolivia's first indigenous president on Jan. 22. He's currently fulfilling an international tour that has already taken him to Cuba, Venezuela, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, China and now South Africa.

Morales is scheduled to visit Brazil and Argentina and is expected to meet with the presidents of Paraguay and Ecuador before he is sworn in as president. □



## Porqué la huelga de la TWU fue un evento histórico

Por Milt Neidenberg  
Nueva York

Por tres días en el mes de diciembre del año pasado, esta ciudad donde está el centro financiero imperialista del mundo, fue estremecida por la huelga de 34.000 trabajador@s del tránsito. Est@s trabajador@s de muchas nacionalidades, miembr@s de la Unión de Trabajadores del Transporte (Transport Workers Union) Local 100 que llevan a más de 7 millones de personas que viajan por el tren subterráneo y en autobuses hacia sus respectivos trabajos, paralizaron la ciudad del 20 al 22 de diciembre.

En la cúspide de la temporada de compras navideñas, ell@s paralizaron a la comunidad corporativa y empresarial. Wall Street estimó las pérdidas en miles de millones de dólares por día. El alcalde multimillonario, Michael Bloomberg admitió que la huelga le costó a la ciudad más de \$400 millones por día en horas extras para los oficiales de la policía y en ingresos perdidos.

### Justicia esclavista

L@s miembros del sindicato, en su mayoría africano-americanos y latinos, han sido mal tratados por muchos años. Estaban luchando mucho más que por un contrato decente. Luchaban por la dignidad y el respeto.

En una entrevista con el periódico más importante de la población negra en Nueva York, el presidente del sindicato TWU, Roger Toussaint, oriundo de Trinidad, describió el asalto racista en contra del sindicato y sus miembr@s: “El problema cultural es lo que llamamos una mentalidad de justicia esclavista. ...No es raro para nosotros recibir 16.000 notificaciones disciplinarias en un año. ...Hay instalaciones sanitarias inadecuadas y poco tiempo para ir al baño. Algun@s conductores, hombres y mujeres, cuando no encuentran una tienda donde puedan ir a hacer sus necesidades, han tenido que dominar el arte de hacer sus necesidades en un vaso cuando la situación lo amerita.” (Amsterdam News, Dec. 8.)

Durante la huelga el Alcalde Bloomberg describió a Toussaint y sus miembros como unos maleantes, avaros y egoístas. Y esto lo dice un alcalde que ni siquiera se ha molestado en mudarse a la Mansión Gracie, sino que continúa viviendo en su casa de 5 pisos, y 7.000 pies cuadrados, la cual salió en la lista de las “400 Casas de Multimillonarios” de la revista Forbes.

Por décadas, la Mansión Gracie, con sus 11 acres de terreno en medio de la ciudad, era un incentivo lujoso para los alcaldes de Nueva York.

Bloomberg gastó \$75 millones de dólares en las primeras elecciones y más de \$77 millones en las segundas. Esto dejó una marca casi invisible en su fortuna. Él gastó \$103 dólares por cada voto que recibió—un gasto muy apreciado para él y su clase.

### Contra una ley injusta

El sindicato se enfrentaba a la ley Taylor, que prohíbe la huelga de trabajadores del sector público en el estado de Nueva York. El primer día, un juez estatal impuso una multa de \$1 millón de dólares

por día a la unión y dos días de pago a los trabajadores por cada día de huelga. Los patronos se sintieron optimistas y creyeron que esto rompería la huelga. Toussaint y su comité negociador tendrían que aceptar. Los periódicos capitalistas y la televisión se burlaban diciendo que Toussaint estaba arrinconado.

Falso. El invocó a una autoridad moral mucho más alta contra una ley injusta. El citó a Rosa Parks, cuyo valor al romper las leyes de segregación hace 50 años comenzó el movimiento de los Derechos Civiles.

La Autoridad Metropolitana del Transporte, dirigida por Peter Kalikow, un multimillonario de bienes raíces, también estaba convencida de que obtendría un contrato barato. El presidente de la junta de la AMT es postulado por el Gobernador George Pataki, quien controla directamente a seis de los catorce votos en la junta. El Alcalde Bloomberg tiene influencia sobre el resto de los votos. Ambos políticos son grandes partidarios de los banqueros, los grandes accionistas y los contratistas ricos quienes se benefician de los \$10 mil millones de dólares del presupuesto de la AMT. Como buitres, ellos sacan las riquezas de la corporación de tránsito a través de las exorbitantes tasas de interés y las conversiones de los bonos bancarios.

En la entrevista en el Amsterdam News, Toussaint describió las manipulaciones financieras de la MTA. Él le recordó al público que: “La MTA estuvo reportando un déficit hace alrededor de un año, ahora están reportando un superávit de más de \$1 mil millones. ... Entonces, en vez de utilizar este superávit para evitar un aumento en las tarifas... ó en vez de guardar una porción de éste para tratar con nuestro contrato laboral que aún no se ha pagado, están buscando en todas las otras direcciones. Esto no es correcto”.

Cuando comenzaron las negociaciones el 7 de diciembre, la oferta de la MTA era insultante: un incremento salarial de un 2 por ciento en dos años, y el segundo año dependiendo de que se extiendan los castigos disciplinarios contra miembr@s que toman “demasiado” tiempo por ausencias certificadas médicamente; forzando a l@s nuev@s emplead@s a pagar un 2 por ciento de sus salarios para un plan de jubilación; y extendiendo la edad de jubilación a 62 años después de 30 años de servicio. Actualmente l@s trabajador@s pueden jubilarse a los 55 años de edad después de trabajar por 25 años.

La MTA también demandó la fusión de las categorías laborales de conserje, agente de la estación y asistente en los autobuses. L@s conductor@s e ingenier@s de tránsito se fusionarían, resultando en una sola persona operando el tren. En un momento cuando much@s pasaj@s están utilizando el transporte público, estas demandas eliminarían trabajos y crearían un sistema de transporte inseguro.

La MTA demandó concesiones en los salarios, en la jubilación, en el cuidado de salud y en las condiciones de trabajo para l@s nuev@s emplead@s —un sistema de dos niveles que se ha vuelto en un arma poderosa comúnmente usada contra el movimiento sindical que en general no ha luchado contra estas cuestiones tan críti-

cas. El sindicato estuvo luchando una batalla cuesta arriba.

Toussaint caracterizó a las propuestas como un insulto. Tres días después, el 10 de diciembre, miles de miembros convergieron en el enorme Centro de Convenciones Javits en el centro de Manhattan y abrumadoramente autorizaron una huelga. Durante los próximos 10 días hasta el primer día de la huelga a través de la ciudad el 20 de diciembre, la membresía multinacional fue movilizada para luchar.

Organizaron mítines y manifestaciones masivas y militantes. Organizaron piquetes informativos y planearon acciones en el trabajo “trabaje-según-las-reglas” para forzar a la MTA a mejorar la oferta. Postergaron la huelga de la fecha del 15 de diciembre cuando expiró el contrato, en consideración de los 7 millones de pasajeros de los trenes subterráneos y autobuses, con la esperanza de que la MTA actuara razonablemente. Pero esto no ocurrió.

El 20 de diciembre, después de una huelga de más de 700 conductores de autobuses que aún no trabajaban bajo el control de la MTA y que no habían tenido un contrato por casi tres años, los 34.000 trabajador@s de tránsito desencadenaron su poder y paralizaron la ciudad. Fue un tremendo acto de desafío. Su propio sindicato internacional, TWU, los traicionó al denunciar la huelga. Los líderes sindicales nacionales como el presidente de la AFL-CIO John Sweeney, el líder de “Cambiar para Ganar” Andy Stern, y el presidente de los Teamsters (camioneros) James Hoffa, no dieron señales de vida.

### Solidaridad y opresión nacional

Este sindicato multinacional se ganó la admiración y la simpatía de la gente negra, latina y de otras nacionalidades oprimidas en esta diversa ciudad. Est@s trabajador@s identificaron su propia opresión con la lucha del TWU, a pesar de que la huelga creó grandes obstáculos para ell@s llegar a sus trabajos. L@s trabajador@s blanc@s, enojad@s con los ricos y poderosos también apoyaron a la huelga.

La clase dominante prestó atención a esta solidaridad y a cómo l@s trabajador@s del transporte público se mantuvieron fuertes. Dos días después, llamaron a los mediadores. Un acuerdo tentativo fue concluido el día siguiente, terminando la huelga. Las propuestas estaban lejos de las que la MTA llamó originalmente su oferta final.

El Local 100 de la TWU estudió los beneficios de esta propuesta comparándolos con la oferta del contrato que la MTA propuso al principio. Los puntos salientes eran un contrato de 37 meses sin los diferenciales de pensión ni el plan divisivo de dos niveles para l@s trabajador@s nuev@s. Much@s trabajado@s recibirán un reembolso del dinero que ya habían contribuido al plan de pensión—una cantidad de \$8.000-\$14.000 para unos 20.000 miembros—y l@s que toman cursos tecnológicos o universitarios recibirían subsidios. Ganaron un día feriado pagado en el cumpleaños del Dr. Martin Luther King y otros beneficios, también un aumento de sueldo del 10,5 por ciento por la duración del acuerdo. “Broadbanding”, la práctica brutal de intensificar la productividad a expensas de eliminar empleos en

autobuses y metro, fue quitada de las negociaciones.

De igual importancia fueron los resultados en la búsqueda por dignidad y respeto. La MTA estuvo de acuerdo en reducir suspensiones pre-disciplinarias e incluyó a un tercer participante independiente para revisar la estructura de las prácticas racistas de la “plantación cultural” de la MTA. Y como gran adelanto, ofrece licencia de maternidad pagada por primera vez en la historia de contratos de la unión con la MTA.

El contrato incluyó una concesión de parte del sindicato—una contribución pagada por los miembros del 1,5 por ciento de su sueldo para beneficios de salud. Pero recibieron cobertura médica por vida y la eliminación del deducible para recetas médicas para miembros jubilad@s.

La huelga de tres días expuso las divisiones de las fuerzas de clase y raza entre el sindicato multinacional de tránsito y la fraternidad corporativa/banquera de la MTA. Para servir los intereses de su clase, no hay contratos ni reglas que no pueden romper.

La MTA estaba furiosa porque el sindicato se negó a estar restringido por la arbitración obligatoria, la cuál hubiera llevado el poder de hacer decisiones de las manos de la base del sindicato bajo la Ley Taylor. El Gobernador Pataki había jurado que no habría negociaciones hasta que la TWU regresara a trabajar—más tarde él tuvo que comerse esas amargas palabras.

No hay nada como la furia de los ricos y poderosos cuando están derrocados. Estaban encolerizados porque este sindicato, que rompió con su Ley Taylor represiva, pudiera ganar un contrato decente.

No fue suficiente para esta camarilla rica y avara, que castigara al sindicato con una multa de \$3 millones y que cobrara a l@s miembros el pago de dos días por cada día de huelga. El Gobernador Pataki y la MTA ahora están amenazando con rechazar el acuerdo sobre el pago retroactivo para miles de jubilad@s y quitar el derecho del sindicato a los débitos de sus miembros pagados automáticamente de sus cheques—algo que significa la seguridad financiera del sindicato. El sindicato está amenazando posponer el voto de ratificación hasta que el contrato sea honrado. Las líneas de clase y raza están siendo demarcadas otra vez.

La huelga de tránsito de tres días desencadenó un poder increíble que sacudió a la clase dominante. Ésta quedó vulnerable por el momento oportuno de la huelga y la voluntad firme de l@s 34.000 trabajador@s de tránsito.

La huelga va a resonar mucho más allá de esta ciudad, especialmente entre l@s trabajador@s más oprimid@s y peor pagad@s—incluyendo a muchas mujeres y much@s inmigrantes—que sufren de indignidades y privaciones intensas. A causa de la huelga, el local 100 de la TWU y sus líderes salieron más fuertes, y con un contrato con el cual pueden vivir, y con su dignidad intacta. Considerando que este éxito ha resultado durante el ataque más implacable y largo contra el movimiento sindicalista, ésta fue la acción mejor y más grande que ha pasado desde hace años. Eso la convierte en un suceso histórico. □