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Enemigo de Hitler y organizador de obrer@s de hospitales **12**



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WORKERS WORLD NEWSPAPER
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Full rights for immigrants

Mass protests answer moves to criminalize undocumented workers

By Betsey Piette

A groundswell of protests involving millions of people, from Los Angeles to Boston, has resoundingly answered attempts to pass the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner-King bill, passed in December in the U.S. House of Representatives as HR 4437 and currently being debated in the Senate.

The estimated 11-12 million undocumented workers in the U.S. consider this bill an outrageous threat to criminalize them—and thus a declaration of war. The protests signal that immigrants form a powerful community that can fight back and that has allies.

“There has never been this kind of mobilization in the immigrant community ever. They have kicked the sleeping giant. It’s the beginning of a massive immigrant civil rights struggle”, said Joshua Hoyt, Executive Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, a 120-member coalition of organizations. (Los Angeles Times, March 26)

Upwards of 1 million workers, the vast majority from Latin America, flooded downtown **Los Angeles** on March 25 in one of the largest demonstrations ever held in that city. Organizers had expected around 15,000. The crush of people was so great that access to the parade route had to be closed even as buses were still arriving. The racist “Minutemen” have been active in the area, threatening people along the border, and momentum from that struggle helped bring many organizations together. The organizers have called for a follow-up boycott of work, school and shopping on May 1.

More than 150,000 had come out in **Chicago** two weeks earlier, starting the process, but the sea of people that filled the streets near Los Angeles City Hall inspired and gave courage to those protesting across the country. Immigrants and their supporters are making their voices heard as the debate on immigration “reform” heats up.

HR 4437 a provocation

HR 4437 treats undocumented workers as felons, subject not only to deportation but to prison time. It would levy huge fines

against employers who hire undocumented workers, classifying these employers as “alien smugglers.” HR 4437 would also crack down on religious and community groups who provide assistance for undocumented workers and their families.

Other repressive legislation that has been introduced in Congress proposes building a steel fence along the 700-mile U.S. and Mexican border and also handing Halliburton Corp. billions of dollars to build the equivalent of concentration camps to house detained undocumented workers.

Demonstrations have been reported in scores of cities and smaller towns, organized by coalitions of Latin@, Caribbean, Asian, Pacific Island and African immigrants, unions, churches and community groups opposed to this draconian legislation and similar measures being proposed in several states.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT BILLS

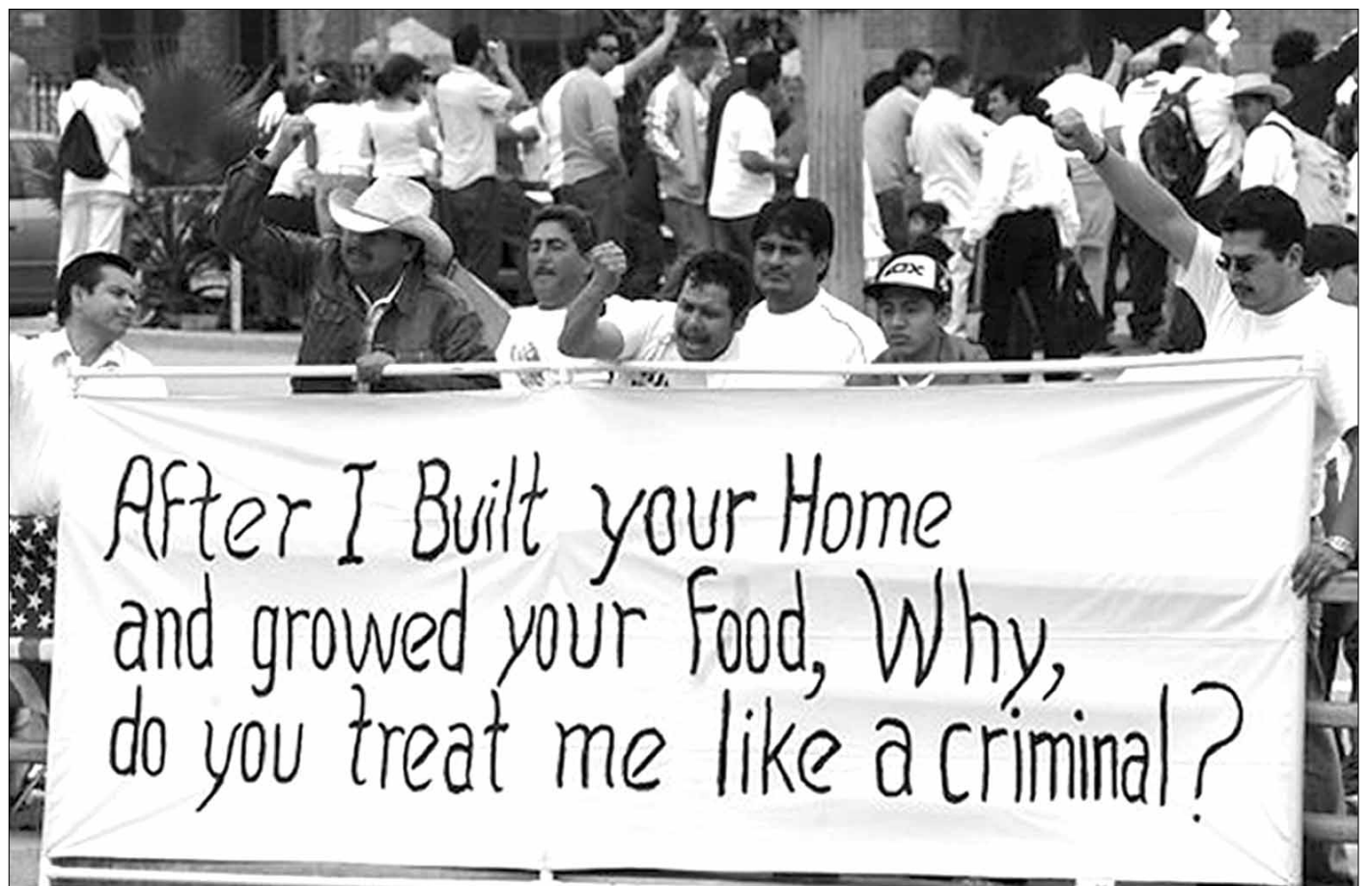
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In some areas, like **Boston**, where Service Employees and UNITE HERE unions as well as Jobs with Justice helped organize the action, European immigrant workers from Ireland and Poland also joined the march of 10,000. Boston’s Puerto Rican City Councilor Felix Arroyo told the crowd, “The more they try to divide us the more we will unite.”

In **Washington, D.C.**, where 40,000 rallied earlier in the month, 100 activists wore handcuffs at the Capitol at the start of the Senate hearings to protest the bill that would criminalize undocumented workers as well as those who provide them with aid or employment.

Tens of thousands rallied in **Milwaukee**, where dozens of businesses also closed in protest; in **Phoenix** 20,000 came out in the largest protest in that city’s history. On Sunday, immigrant rights demonstrations took place in **Cleveland** and **Columbus**, Ohio, with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee providing bus transportation from Toledo.

Over the weekend protests were held in **Dallas; Trenton, N.J.;**
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Los Angeles immigrants rights protest.

WW PHOTO: JULIA LARIVA

'Free our brothers and sisters'

Disabled protesters besiege Tennessee state capitol

By Lou Paulsen

More than 400 disabled activists from 40 states and the District of Columbia recently staged five days of militant action in Nashville, the capital of Tennessee and a national headquarters of for-profit health care. Mobilized by American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT), they demanded an end to policies that force elderly and disabled people to go into nursing homes for services that they should be receiving in their own homes.

On March 19, in front of media and federal officials, over 100 present and former residents of Tennessee nursing homes testified to the miserable and oppressive conditions they faced. "I swear to god it was like listening to people who just got out of prison," recalled Chicago ADAPT organizer Ed Hoffmans. Being institutionalized in Tennessee is so bad, and services outside nursing homes are so impossible to get, that activists have had to create strategies to help disabled people escape to other states—a system they call the Underground Railroad.

The next day, hundreds of protesters, many using wheelchairs, marched uphill in cold and wet weather to a rally at the War Memorial. They then blockaded several intersections around the Capitol building for over five hours, while also shutting down the exit from the parking garage. They chanted, "Just like a nursing home—you can't get out!" Sixty were arrested.

On March 21 they returned to the Capitol, rallying across the street and chanting steadily for two and a half hours. A delegation attempted to meet with Gov. Phil Bredesen. After being rebuffed, they blockaded Charlotte Avenue. Police arrested 44 and threatened them with a month in jail and a \$1,000 fine if they repeated their civil



PHOTO: TOM OLIN, ADAPT

"Our homes, not nursing homes."

disobedience action.

On the following day they held a long march through the city to the office of TennCare, the state Medicaid program, and then to the office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. They chanted, "Free our brothers, free our sisters, free our people now!"

Bredesen, a Democrat, consistently refuses to meet with disability activists. He is not a servant of the ruling class—he is a member of it. He made his \$100 million fortune in the health care industry, specifically the managed-care giants HealthAmerica and Coventry. Tennessee's Republican senator, majority leader Bill Frist, likewise made his fortune from the Tennessee-based Hospital Corporation of America.

Bredesen is a great believer in corporate medicine but not public health care. In February 2005, he told a national conference that Medicaid has "more in common with ... socialist economy than the commonsense business principles that do such a good job allocating resources efficiently in other parts of our American life."

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Mid-1960s gay activists target U.S. gov't

By Leslie Feinberg

In 1963, activist Franklin Kameny helped set up the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO). ECHO brought together the Washington, D.C., New York and Philadelphia branches of Mattachine, the New York branch of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Janus Society of Philadelphia. The coalition, meant to foster cooperation and to debate tactics, was also an attempt to form an activist network to the left of the accommodationist leaders of the homophile movement.

This more left-leaning activist current of primarily white gay men and lesbians was not revolutionary. But they were breaking away from the timid, class-collaborationist political approach of Mattachine and the DOB.

And they denounced the gay-bashing U.S. government when the media here attacked the Cuban Revolution on April 16, 1965, saying it was interning gays in labor camps.

Although some of these activists were imbued with anti-communism themselves, they immediately set up demonstrations in front of the White House and United Nations headquarters. The hypocrisy of the U.S. government crit-

Lavender & Red focuses on the relationship over more than a century between the liberation of oppressed sexualities, genders and sexes, and the communist movement.

You can read the entire, ongoing Workers World newspaper series by Leslie Feinberg online at www.workers.org. Stop and get a subscription while you're there!

icizing the Cuban Revolution was not lost on these activists. After all, it was the U.S. that had carried out the "Lavender Scare" as a Cold War bludgeon, unleashed state repression against lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and trans people, marginalized LGBT workers from the labor force, and pathologized sexual and gender variation as criminal and sick behavior.

It was a courageous move by these activists, still living in the chill of the Cold War, to face red-baiting for holding protests that turned Washington's charges against the Cuban Revolution back on the U.S. government.

Author John D'Emilio concluded, "Lest anyone mistake the event as an anti-Castro action, the pickets displayed signs that made their target clear: 'Fifteen Million

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WW CALENDAR

LOS ANGELES

Sat., April 15

'Finding Each Other on the Road to Freedom.' Minnie Bruce Pratt on Walking to New Orleans and reading from her book, *Walking Back Up Depot Street*. 4 p.m. At 5274 W Pico Blvd #203, L.A. For info (323) 936-7266.

Sat., April 22

Stop War on Iran Before it Starts: Hear Ardeshir Ommani, just returned from Iran, and Sara Flounders, initiator of the Stop War on Iran Campaign. 4 p.m. At 5274 W Pico Blvd #203, L.A. For info (323) 936-7266.

NEW YORK

Fri., March 31

Workers World Party Forum. "Immigrant rights & the class struggle today. Berta Joubert-Ceci, a Latina leader of WWP, will speak on the significance of the recent huge immigrant rights demonstrations for the class struggle here. Also: "French workers & students show the power of class solidarity." G. Dunkel, WW contributing editor, will report on the three-million-strong strike against anti-worker legislation. 7 p.m. (Dinner at 6:30 p.m.) At 55 W. 17 St., 5th Fl., Manhattan. For info phone (212) 627-2994.

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Benefit concert supports Somerville 5

By Gerry Scoppettuolo
Boston

Historic Hibernian Hall in Boston's Roxbury community rocked to hip hop sounds, dance and political poetry on March 25 for a benefit concert entitled "The Fight for Justice." Some 150 mostly African-American, Latin@ and Asian youth came out to support the Somerville 5 and raise funds for their legal defense.

The evening was an exuberant and defiant display of a community determined to fight back against police brutality and racial profiling. The Somerville 5 are five Black high school youth who were racially profiled, beaten and arrested by Medford, Mass., cops last April. They were framed and charged with numerous crimes.

Calvin Belfon, Jr., Isiah Anderson, Marquis Anderson and Earl Guerra, four of the Somerville 5, emceed the event. The benefit concert included local artists Reflect and Strengthen, United Roots, Optimus, Catch 22 and Trayce, Bamboo, Nucleus, DJ Metaphoric, Urban Essence and Cassandra Clark-Mazariegos, who organized and produced the entire event.

Rapper Optimus of Boston's popular hip hop group the Foundation, referring to the police crackdown on mostly Black youth, shouted from the stage, "Stop the occupations!"—including the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Imani Henry of the International Action Center took the stage and thanked the Somerville 5 for their courage. He linked their fight against racial profiling and police brutality to the growing movement of youth of color in oppressed communities opposing the war and budget cuts, declaring, "We don't have to be scared of the word 'revolutionary.'"

Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner, Bishop Filipe Teixeira of the Catholic Church of the Americas, and Minister Rodney X of the Nation of Islam were among those who took the stage to express solidarity and support. Bishop Teixeira told the audience that he had witnessed police brutality on the way to the concert: "I saw some young Cape Verdeans being stopped by the police. Some day America will change! If the new immigration law is passed, I could be jailed just for helping someone."

Calvin Belfon Sr., father of Calvin Jr. and of Cassius Belfon, the fifth defendant (who



WW PHOTO: LIZ GREEN

Four of Somerville 5 with friends on stage. Foreground from left: Marquis Anderson, Earl Guerra, a friend, Isiah Anderson and Calvin Belfon.

could not attend because he had broken his leg playing basketball that day), let the audience know the depth of his family's experience with the police: "What it took me 18 years to build up, it took those cops 10 minutes to tear down. We can stop racial profiling!"

Minister Rodney X of the Nation of Islam gave strong support to the youth, declaring,

"We know they are innocent. It is the police officers who committed the crime. If they were white they would have been treated differently."

The first Somerville 5 trial is docketed for May 15 in Cambridge, Mass. To reach the defense committee, contact iacoboston@iacoboston.org, (617) 522-5526. □

Black militant wins legal victory

By Larry Hales
Denver



Shareef Aleem

Black community activist Shareef Aleem went on trial in Denver on March 1, charged with second-degree aggravated assault on a cop, for which the minimum sentence is four years and maximum is 12 years in prison. The trial was of a fraudulent nature because Aleem was picked out of a crowded audience by cops while students were dissenting at a Feb. 3, 2005 public hearing

after being denied their right to speak in support of an embattled professor.

Aleem, the only Black man in the crowd, spoke up and was immediately set upon by the police. A videotape showed Aleem

never assaulted anyone but was pushed from behind and pulled down on top of the allegedly assaulted cop.

The trial ended in a hung jury on March 2. But Aleem was charged with contempt of court for refusing to take off a Tookie Williams T-shirt that included a photo of the former gang leader and Nobel Peace Prize nominee along with the words "Redemption" and "Should have been saved." Williams was executed at San Quentin on Dec. 13.

Aleem had worn a shirt the day before with the words "U.S. History 101" and depictions of lynchings of a legal and extralegal nature. The judge had asked Aleem to remove the shirt, which also included a photo of a white slave master, and Aleem complied.

The next day, one juror wore a Bob Marley shirt and another wore a NASCAR shirt. Presiding Judge Katherine Delgado did not address the Williams shirt that Aleem was wearing until the prosecution objected to it. Aleem asserted his right to express himself, refused to take off the T-shirt and was held in contempt for doing so.

The contempt of court trial was held on March 22. The judge interrupted Aleem's attorney, Mark Burton, when he tried to bring out the political issues in the case. The prosecuting attorney for the assault case appeared at the contempt of court hearing. Aleem's family says he sneered as Aleem was sentenced to 45 days in jail.

Immediately after the sentencing, families of victims of police brutality and Aleem's allies rushed to his defense and held a press conference to explain what had happened. They included the Denver International Action Center, members of Aurora Copwatch, Danon Gale—who was attacked by cops at a Chuck E Cheese restaurant while eating with his children on Feb. 27—and others.

Mark Burton filed for a stay in serving the sentence with the Colorado Supreme Court, which was granted pending an

appeal, but Aleem was not immediately released from jail. The Adams County prosecutor's office said the ruling was not in their computer system and that they had not received the paperwork. Aleem was not released until March 24.

Aleem, who recently helped chase racist Minutemen away from a rally for immigrants' rights, has reached out to another embattled Black activist, the Rev. Edward Pinkney of Benton Harbor, Mich., who is

also being attacked by the racist state on trumped-up charges. Both activists support one another's struggle.

Leaders like Pinkney and Aleem must be supported by the progressive movement, along with the right to self-determination for nationally oppressed peoples. This kind of political solidarity is necessary to help reinvigorate the struggle here and worldwide for socialism as imperialist military adventurism continues to fail. □

Gay activists

Continued from page 2

U.S. Homosexuals Protest Federal Treatment,' one placard read, while another charged that 'Cuba's Government Persecutes Homosexuals—U.S. Government Beat Them to It.'

(This series will take up the obstacles facing the Cuban Revolution, and its subsequent accomplishments, in more detail in the future.)

In May 1965, left-wing ECHO activists won their proposal to organize a series of picket lines in the spring and summer demanding gay rights. They chose as their targets the White House, Pentagon, State Department, Civil Service Commission and, on the Fourth of July, Philadelphia's Independence Hall.

Although the picket lines were tiny, these activists were brave. Homosexuality was still illegal and actively persecuted.

The boldness of public picketing made the demand for gay and lesbian rights hard to ignore. ABC-TV filmed the protest outside the White House on May 29. Local affiliates in nine states broadcast the footage. A report on the wire services was printed in papers in several U.S. cities. On the eve of the demonstration outside the State Department, a press reporter asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk about his department's policy towards homosexuality.

The full day of protest outside the Civil Service Commission forced its officials to finally agree to a meeting with gay activists.

Next: *Old guard Mattachine and DOB blamed bar crowd for drawing police violence.*

New York City

Mumia's lawyer gives update on case

Robert R. Bryan, a San Francisco-based lawyer and lead counsel for death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, spoke before a packed auditorium at Fordham University on March 21. Bryan presented a legal update on Abu-Jamal's current appeals, which are before the U.S. Court of Appeals Third Circuit based in Philadelphia. (Go to www.millions4mumia.org to read a Jan. 24, 2006, summary.)

This appeals petition raises specific issues that are critical to Mumia's struggle to ultimately gain his freedom, including the systematic, racist exclusion of Black jurors by the Philadelphia prosecution and racist comments made by the late Judge Albert Sabo against Abu-Jamal during the original trial in 1982. Sabo sat on the bench during the 1982 trial and the 1995-96 post-conviction relief hearing for Abu-Jamal.

A former Black Panther and award-winning journalist, Abu-Jamal was shot by police and then arrested on Dec. 9, 1981, for allegedly killing a white policeman in Philadelphia. A sham of a trial resulted in a first-degree murder conviction for Abu-Jamal on July 3, 1982. He has faced two death warrants, which were revoked due to mass pressure here and worldwide.

Bryan—along with Robert Meeropol, son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, communists who were executed by the U.S. government back in 1953—urged atti-

Mumia's
attorney
Robert R.
Bryan



vists from diverse political persuasions to unite to strengthen the support movement to fight for Abu-Jamal's freedom.

Author and attorney Brian Glick gave a brief history of Abu-Jamal's long-time revolutionary activism to illustrate that he is on death row for his political beliefs and not for the shooting. Mumia sent an audio-taped greeting to the meeting.

Deborah Small, a founder of Break the Chains: Communities of Color and also the War on Drugs organization, spoke on the relationship between the prison-industrial complex and U.S. drug laws that criminalize people of color and the poor.

The meeting was organized by the National Lawyers Guild's Fordham University Law School chapter and its national chapters. An interview with Bryan by WBAI's Ken Nash and Mimi Rosenberg can be heard at www.radio4all.net/proginfo.php?id=17281.

—Story & photo by Monica Moorehead

What workers can do

GM uses buyouts to eliminate jobs

By Jerry Goldberg
Detroit

General Motors announced on March 22 a historic "buyout" plan available to every one of its over 100,000 hourly workers, as well as thousands of Delphi workers. Delphi Automotive was formerly part of General Motors and was spun off in 1999. Approximately 50 percent of Delphi's business is supplying parts for GM auto production.

The GM plan is a key element in the company's designs to cut its U.S. hourly workforce by 30,000 jobs and for Delphi to reduce its hourly workforce from 34,000 workers to about 14,000.

It would offer \$35,000 to every GM worker currently eligible to retire under the UAW/GM "30 and out" plan, under which workers receive full pensions after working 30 years, regardless of age.

It would pay 60 percent of their wages to workers within three years of retirement who opted to leave the company now and who would be eligible to receive full retirement when they reached 30 years.

The plan also includes a \$140,000 buyout for workers with over 10 years' seniority who choose to leave the company now and who would forgo all benefits, except for their vested pension benefits. Workers with less than 10 years' seniority who chose to sever ties with the corporation would get \$70,000.

This plan would also apply to Delphi workers currently eligible for retirement. An additional 5,000 of Delphi's 24,000 UAW members would be offered the opportunity to return to the GM workforce.

What is behind this unprecedented buyout plan? How should it be viewed by class-conscious workers?

The announcement of this plan comes about one week before the March 31 deadline that Delphi Automotive announced for asking the bankruptcy court to overturn its contract with the Auto Workers union. Delphi went into bankruptcy in October 2005 after the UAW rejected its arrogant demands for a 63 percent wage cut for its hourly workforce and the right to eliminate jobs wholesale, close plants and fundamentally reduce the benefits the workers received.

Delphi uses bankruptcy to cut pay, benefits

The Delphi announcement galvanized a struggle against this blatant attempt to use the bankruptcy court to destroy the livelihoods of its 34,000 union members. The six Delphi unions formed a coalition called Mobilizing At Delphi that led significant demonstrations across the country.

Most important, a rank-and-file organization, Soldiers of Solidarity (SOS), was formed. SOS began organizing rank-and-file meetings in every city where Delphi had plants. It led a "work to rule" campaign in the shops, encouraging workers on the shop floor to hold the companies to every work and safety rule, which had the effect of slowing production. A well-publicized demonstration was held at the Detroit International Auto show in January.

This dynamic organizing by the Delphi workers and their supporters got the message across to Delphi: the workers were not going to sit back and allow their wages and living standards to be devastated without a fight. The message was out that if Delphi tried to impose a contract, the rank and file were prepared to strike.

The Delphi workers were actually in a good position for a strike, unlike many workers in a bankruptcy situation. A strike at Delphi would almost immediately shut down GM production. General Motors had just launched several new car models in a desperate attempt to regain market share, which had fallen to historic lows, in large part because GM had continued to produce almost nothing but gas-guzzling SUVs and trucks. General Motors feared that a strike at Delphi would cripple its new model launch and further weaken the competitive position of the corporation.

It was in this context that GM entered the negotiations between Delphi and the UAW and that the buyout agreement was reached. Significantly, there still is no agreement between Delphi and the UAW on a new contract, and Delphi has announced that it still plans to go forward with asking the bankruptcy court to throw out its current contract with the UAW.

On the one hand, this buyout agreement is a significant concession by GM to auto workers. GM is spending over \$2 billion to try to avoid what it viewed as a very real prospect of a strike that could have devastated the company. GM took the strike threat seriously, saw the rank-and-file anger that was brewing, and decided to cough up significant dollars to try to stem the tide. And certainly, for many workers who were already contemplating retirement, the extra dollars will be welcome.

But there is another side to this agreement between GM, Delphi and the UAW. It appears that rather than fight GM and Delphi's plans for massive job cuts, the UAW leadership has accepted the inevitability of wholesale job elimination by the two companies and opted to negotiate to soften the blow for the current workers rather than fight back. This amounts to a historic reversal for the union that could have devastat-

ing consequences for the future.

For one thing, these job cuts weaken the position of the union at the precise time that there is a move led by Delphi to fundamentally lower the wages and living standards of the union members. New hires at Delphi already work under a two-tier system, starting at \$14 an hour and maxing out at \$18. This compares with the \$26 an hour earned by current Delphi workers. The new hires have far fewer benefits as well. By cooperating with Delphi in eliminating the better-paid sector of the workforce, the UAW has weakened its own position of countering Delphi's attempt to impose these wage cuts on its entire workforce.

In addition, how secure will the retirees' pensions be when the number of workers contributing to the plan keeps being reduced? Under current law, if the pension funds go bankrupt, the pensions will be reduced and, most importantly, the retirees' health benefits will be eliminated.

Historically, the UAW leadership has understood that the union must fight not just for benefits for the current workers, but for the future workforce as well. For example, the movement for "30 and out" pensions was seen as a struggle to both shorten the working life for factory workers who perform hard labor and to open up jobs for new workers in the auto industry. The UAW was in the forefront of the movement for a shorter workweek and led strikes in the Big 3 in 1976 that won a once-a-month four-day workweek for five days' pay. This shorter workweek forced the automakers to hire tens of thousands of workers.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the UAW negotiated important programs to maintain employment levels in the face of corporate restructuring. One plan mandated that, for every two workers who retired, a worker had to be hired. The union also negotiated the Guaranteed Employment Numbers (GENs). This meant that during the course of the contract, a snapshot was taken of the employment level at each plant. The corporation had to maintain at least 95 of that level for the entire contract. The union also negotiated a moratorium on plant closings during the course of the union contract.

Significantly, these elements are still contained in UAW's contracts with GM, as well as with Ford and Chrysler. Unfortunately, the union leadership has ignored some of these provisions over the last few years and now is in a wholesale retreat from any demands to maintain the workforce levels mandated in the contracts it negotiated.

Jobs as a 'property right'

Commenting on GM's buyout announcement, labor relations professor Gary Chai-

son said that some autoworkers "almost see their job as a property right." (New York Times, March 22) In fact, this idea, that the workers have a property right to their jobs, was the very principle upon which the union was founded. The UAW was formed when the workers seized and occupied the plants in the famous "sit-in" strikes in Flint, Mich., in 1936-37.

The plants that GM and Delphi want to close are productive and modern facilities, most of which have been retooled in recent years. They are not obsolete and neither are the workers. It is the capitalist drive to maximize the rate of profit, fueled by new technology and globalization, that is behind their wholesale and irrational job elimination and wage cutting.

GM made huge profits until a few years ago, when sales plummeted primarily due to changes in the market brought on by (1) the overproduction of trucks and SUVs and (2) management ignoring the impact of high gas prices on the vehicles people might actually need. Now that sales are down, GM and Delphi management, and the Wall Street sharks behind them, see an opportunity to maximize the rate of profit by gutting the workers.

In this period, rather than buying into the big business ideology that downsizing, wage cutting and benefit elimination are inevitable, unions must advance their own program based on the needs of the workers, not the bosses. That program should assert that a job IS a property right of the workers, and that if the bosses won't run the plants, the workers must be ready to occupy them and run them ourselves to defend our property.

There is plenty of need for fuel-efficient and ecologically sensible cars, as well as mass transit. The workers should not abandon the jobs and the factories they built and maintained just because the bosses decide they are no longer "useful," that is, profitable enough.

The struggle between the autoworkers and GM and Delphi is far from over. The rank and file should demand that the UAW leadership enforce the provisions in the current contract to maintain jobs and not allow the wholesale gutting of the workforce. The rank and file must continue to prepare to fight back against Delphi's attempts to fundamentally lower their wages and benefits, which would be a precursor to similar cutbacks across the auto industry. Every progressive worker must be ready to lend solidarity and assistance in the struggle to come, because it will have consequences not just for autoworkers, but for the entire working class. □

Soldiers of Solidarity

UAW rank & file reach out to Delphi workers

By Martha Grevatt
Youngstown, Ohio

After four postponements, the management of Delphi Automotive has set March 30 as the day it will ask a federal bankruptcy court to throw out its union contracts. As workers face this latest deadline with anxiety and uncertainty, the rank-and-file group Soldiers of Solidarity continues to spread its in-plant resistance to Delphi's threats to slash wages, destroy pensions and health benefits.

Work-to-rule meetings in cities where



PHOTO: SOLDIERS OF SOLIDARITY
In Flint, Mich., home of the historic sit-downs.

Delphi operates have become magnets for militant worker-activists.

Close to a dozen SOS organizing sessions have taken place in Michigan, Ohio, New York and Indiana. Initiated by members of the United Auto Workers, these sessions are bringing in members of other unions that represent another 10,000 of the 34,000 Delphi workers in the

United States, including the International Union of Electrical Workers/Communication Workers of

America.

The process of building inter-union solidarity took a major step forward on March 26 with an SOS meeting here in Youngstown that drew many IUE/CWA members from the Delphi plant in Warren, Ohio. Many were former steelworkers who had witnessed the decimation of the Mahoning Valley by the steel barons in the 1980s and 1990s. Other workers who came to offer their support included letter carriers, bus drivers, government workers and retired and disabled workers—all with their own personal work-to-rule anecdotes about following the orders of typically incompetent bosses.

After strategizing around resisting concessions at Delphi, the other major topic of

discussion was the massive number of buyouts offered to GM and Delphi workers. Thousands of workers are being put in a position of either staying at GM/Delphi, where their future is uncertain, or taking a lump sum payment but giving up their health insurance.

"This is a rotten deal," stated SOS organizer Gregg Shotwell. "It is essentially anti-union. There isn't a comprehensive, collective agreement." Every worker is forced to make an individual decision.

The massive buyoff of workers one by one changes the contract. Workers should have the right to vote on it. Contractual changes include allowing the unlimited use by GM of temporary workers and eliminat-

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95 years after deadly fire:

Workers worldwide combat sweatshops

By Kathy Durkin
New York

Sophie Stoller was ill and did not go to work on March 25, 1911.

A momentous event took place that day—the worst industrial fire in New York history, in which 146 of her co-workers died. Sophie Stoller worked for the Triangle Shirtwaist Co.

Ninety-five years ago, the cry of “Fire!” rang out just minutes before the 5 p.m. closing time at the garment factory. On the top three floors of the Asch Building, 500 young people were working overtime that Saturday to add to the \$6 a week they earned sewing women’s shirts.

Terrified workers ran for the elevators and stairs; many were trapped by locked exits or doors that opened inward. Flammable materials were everywhere. Hundreds were saved by heroic elevator operators who transported them downstairs.

But when Fire Department hoses and ladders didn’t reach high enough, many workers fell, trying to leap to the ladders. Fire escapes collapsed under the weight of those waiting to be rescued. Many, desperately fleeing the flames and suffocation, jumped 100 feet and perished.

In minutes, 146 workers had died. Bodies were found trapped behind doors, on stairways and piled on the ground. Of the deceased, 123 were women and girls as young as 11 years old. Others were severely injured.

Sophie Stoller was my grandmother. I exist because she didn’t go to work that day.

Those who perished were immigrants, as she was. Many were her friends. The company’s owners and officers were all rescued.

This horrific fire was preventable. The factory doors were kept locked to tie workers ceaselessly to their sewing machines—a common garment industry practice. There were no sprinklers, usable emergency exits or fire escapes.

Triangle Shirtwaist was a typical profitable garment sweatshop. The grueling workweek was 84 to 100 hours. Like other sweatshop owners, the employers hired immigrants, mostly women and children, violating child labor laws. They were cheap labor and could be easily fired. The workers had to pay for their sewing supplies.

Sweatshop workers had begun in August of 1909 to stage walkouts and strikes to protest their exploitation and the lack of safety measures.

In the historic “Uprising of the 20,000,” garment workers had gone on strike from November 1909 to February 1910. Many were from the Triangle factory, notorious for its brutal conditions.

But Triangle’s owners were intransigent. They rebuffed demands for fire escapes and safe emergency exits. The devastating fire

The Triangle fire spurred on unionization of the garment industry, the struggle to win better working conditions and even the socialist movement.

and loss of life were the price the workers paid for their bosses’ greed.

And the owners escaped culpability. Though the surviving Triangle workers and strong public pressure demanded the indictment of the company’s owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, for responsibility in the workers’ deaths, they were not convicted of these crimes.

A jury of rich men

The all-male, wealthy jurors stood by their fellow manufacturers. Despite the testimony of over 100 witnesses, the jury acquitted the owners of manslaughter charges after less than two hours of deliberation.

When 23 families who lost loved ones sued the Triangle company, they received only \$75 each; that was deemed the value of a lost worker’s life. The employers, however, profited well from the disaster. They got \$60,000 in insurance benefits.

The Triangle fire exposed the horrors of capitalism and industrial greed for the world to see. It showed the callous attitude of the business owners toward their employees: they were the means to produce goods and create profits; their lives were insignificant.

And it proved how needed labor unions were to win any safety measures in the workplaces.

Unionization led to regulations

This event spurred on unionization of the garment industry, the struggle to win bet-



ter working conditions and even the socialist movement. Workers joined unions in droves, especially the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which fought for legal protections for workers. It led a march of 100,000 to demand safety legislation.

Rose Schneiderman of the ILGWU and Women’s Trade Union League said at a New York City memorial for the workers on April 2, 1911: “Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. ... it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement.”

Workers’ struggles and mass pressure did bring about New York State fire codes and protections, followed by city and federal regulations.

But now, nearly a century later, is capitalism any kinder? The opposite is true. Capitalist globalization has fueled worldwide the growth of brutal garment sweatshops, from Honduras to the Philippines. Many U.S.-based corporations make mega-profits by super-exploiting workers, mostly women and children, paying little, denying benefits, and flouting safety and health protections.

In the global economy, profits constantly trump workers’ safety.

U.S. companies, including Wal-Mart and The Gap, contract most of Bangladesh’s garment manufacturing. Wal-Mart profits

by paying workers there all of 9 cents an hour to make clothing for its stores. (USA Today, Aug. 14, 2001)

Much clothing is produced in death-traps without fire protection. In 2000, locked exits and other hazards caused 52 workers, including 10 children, to die in a fire near Dhaka at the Chowdhury Knitwear and Garment factory. Nearly 80 died in a similar fire this February at Chittagong’s KTS garment factory.

Sweatshops return here

Even within the U.S.—the richest country in the world—profit-hungry business owners, with government collusion, are trying to turn back decades of safety and health standards, including fire protection.

Half of clothing factories here are sweatshops, says the U.S. Department of Labor, which reports dangerous conditions at nearly all Los Angeles clothing factories. This impacts the youth, women, people of color and immigrants who toil inside them.

Safety measures are defied in other industries, too. A poultry factory fire in Hamlet, N.C., in 1991 killed 25 workers; as at Triangle, the exits had been locked or blocked.

For 15 years in the 1980s to 1990s, many Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club stores locked in workers at night without keys. They were threatened with termination if they used fire exits; sometimes those doors were chained shut. Even with medical emergencies, workers could not leave the facilities. (New York Times, Jan. 18, 2004)

Sophie Stoller was a fierce advocate for the working class. She would have supported the rights of all workers today to labor in safe workplaces, with decent pay and benefits, and the undisputed right to unionize. She staunchly believed a better world was possible, one without exploitation and oppression, based on equality and respect for all working people. □

WW interviews Fred Hampton Jr.

On March 19 Chairman Fred Hampton Jr. of the Prisoners of Conscience Committee was interviewed by Workers World reporter Eric Struch in Chicago. Following are excerpts. Go to www.workers.org to read more of the interview.

WW: In Cabrini-Green [Chicago public housing], the first thing that went on before they started knocking down any buildings was to put in a new police station. Is a struggle going on over gentrification on west Monroe right now?

Fred Hampton Jr.: That’s U.S. policy. You see it in Iraq, they placed the military there, they have to. The police are the front line. It’s what Minister Huey P. Newton said—they’re an occupying army in the community. This is what stops us from addressing the inadequate health care, lack of housing or snatching up of political prisoners. The police serve to instill fear and terror inside the community. The African Anti-Terrorism Bill includes language about land grab as opposed to gentrification. And again, the new housing the government has planned for our people, man, are penitentiaries and the graveyards. So even though they may come up with these sort of euphemisms, the Chicago 21 plan, Renaissance 2010, they’re going to phase out the community, phase out the people, get rid of education. What role the pigs play in the community has to be tied to the case of Michael Walker, who was gunned down Oct. 18, 2001, by a Chicago pig in Cabrini-Green. A lot of these cases are not just accidental.

Fred Hampton Jr. speaks at Mumia Abu-Jamal rally in February 2005.

PHOTO: INDYBAY.ORG

There has been a big controversy about renaming a

stretch of west Monroe St. after the Chairman of the Illinois branch of the Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton. A lot of the current coverage in the bourgeois media should be seen in the context of an effort by the cops to minimize the assassination of your father and Mark Clark and instead put the label of “violent” on the BPP.

You can’t talk about Chairman Fred without talking about the present incarceration of [POCC] Minister of Defense Aaron Patterson, who was locked down and beat up in the same courthouse that former Chairman of the BPP, Bobby Seale, was chained and gagged at, 38 years ago. Aaron



is facing life [in prison]. Former governor of Illinois George Ryan is on trial right now, they say for the license for bribes scandal. His wife has just acknowledged that he’s being tried because of the position her husband took about the death penalty. Aaron put out to the judge, Rebecca Paul Meyer, ‘You think it’s a coincidence that you got me and Governor Ryan’s case? It’s the same judge!’ She ran off the bench when Aaron put this out! Aaron came out [of death row] after 17 years, after being tortured. We need people to pack that courtroom on April 14, Judge Rebecca Paul Meyer, courtroom 2119, 219 S. Dearborn. The people need to support Aaron Patterson ‘cause Aaron Patterson supported the people. □

Delphi

Continued from page 4

ing the company’s obligation to hire one worker for every two that leave.

What to do? Rank-and-file activist Todd Jordan of Kokomo, Ind., said in a recent flier, “The model must be built in the spirit of the great general strikes and mass direct action of Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco in 1934, the great sit-down movement of 1936/37 and the great civil rights movement of the 1960s.”

“We have to make a lot of noise,” stated Shotwell. “Workers have power.”

SOS announced future meetings in Toledo and Detroit and plans to picket the Detroit Economic Club on April 3 when Delphi CEO “Steve” Miller will be giving the keynote address. □

Mass protests across U.S. demand Rights for immigrants, not criminalization

Continued from page 1

and **Sacramento** and **San Jose**, Calif., where a small rally spontaneously grew to a three-mile long walk. In **Charlotte**, N.C., some 7,000 people rallied in Marshall Park March 25, saying, "Don't make me a criminal." Some 700 also rallied in the small southern town of **Kernersville**, N.C.

In **San Francisco**, 20 immigrant rights advocates began their fifth day of a hunger strike in front of the Federal Building. In **Atlanta** hundreds of demonstrators converged on the steps of the State Capitol, while tens of thousands of workers stayed home from their jobs to protest a Georgia state bill that would deny services to undocumented adults.

Denver organizers say 150,000 came to the March 25 rally, many more than anticipated. They spontaneously turned it into a march that led into the downtown areas, filling up the streets for over half an hour.

In **New York City's** Manhattan bor-

ough, what began with around 300 people grew to 1,500 in a march three lanes wide and at least eight blocks long. Marchers chanted "La lucha obrera, no tiene fronteras" (There are no borders in the workers' struggle) and "Somos trabajadores, no somos criminales" (We are workers, not criminals). Across the East River in **Queens**, the U.S. county with immigrants from the greatest number of countries, hundreds packed a school auditorium to hear pro-immigrant speeches translated to English, Spanish, Bangla and Urdu.

Detroit police estimated that more than 50,000 people came out in that city. The mostly Latin@ throng was the largest political gathering in recent decades. Many businesses had to close as their employees took to the streets.

In addition, high school students in several major cities including **Detroit**, **Los Angeles**, and **Dallas** walked out of classes on March 27 to join in protests. Officials of

Huntington Park High School in L.A. locked the gates after classes started, but the students climbed over a chain-link fence to join marchers who were walking the streets and chanting.

In **Houston** as many as 10,000 students joined a protest March 25 to support the DREAM Act, which would give immigrant students, even those without documents, access to higher education and temporary residence with a path toward eventual citizenship. On March 27 hundreds more youths walked out of Eisenhower High School and marched 9 miles to an immigration office. The next day students walked out of other schools and, when some were arrested by sheriffs, the youths quickly organized defense committees.

Immigrant rights activists in **Philadelphia**, who had organized a Feb. 14 Day Without an Immigrant rally, held a press conference March 27 to announce plans for a National Day of Action for Immigrant

Rights on Monday, April 10. Protests are already scheduled for several major cities.

Over a week of demonstrations has led the Senate Judiciary Committee to amend the House bill by removing a provision to prosecute churches and charitable groups who provide assistance to undocumented workers. However, the Committee also approved an amendment that would more than double the current 11,300 Border Patrol agents, while doing nothing to stop the growth of the neofascist Minutemen.

This current anti-worker racist legislation is in reality directed against all workers, whether they are organized or unorganized, documented or undocumented. Like the late 1970's racist "get tough on crime" legislative craze in the post-Vietnam War period, which has led to the imprisonment of millions of workers and poor, predominantly people of color, the anti-immigration campaign pits worker against worker in an attempt to divert attention away from the growing economic crisis rocking the capitalist system, fueled by new, unprecedented military spending.

Working-class unity and solidarity are needed more than ever to fight against attempts by major companies like GM and Delphi to strip workers of their pensions and permanently lay off over 125,000; to oppose the genocidal war against Iraq being waged for the profits of oil monopolies; and to demand rights for the Katrina evacuees. To keep the workers from coming together, the bosses and their politicians are trying to place the blame for capitalism's crisis of overproduction on those workers they think are the least able to resist.

However, as the undocumented take a stand against these attacks, they are setting an example for workers everywhere to follow. The workers, united, can never be defeated!

John Parker, Arturo Pérez Saad, Bryan Pfeifer, Gloria Rubac, Larry Hales, Molly Owen, Kris Hamel, David Dixon and others contributed to this article.



Washington Heights, New York

WW PHOTO: ARTURO PÉREZ SAAD



Los Angeles

PHOTO: COCO



Phoenix



San Francisco

Draconian anti-immigrant bills outrage millions

By Arturo Pérez Saad & Heather Cottin

Congress is debating several anti-immigration bills, each of which is meant to stimulate anti-immigrant hysteria. The most draconian of these is the Sensenbrenner-King bill.

Drafted by two Republicans, this bill got enough Democratic votes to pass the House in December and is now before the Senate. Besides criminalizing the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States—mandating jail and deportation—it would even “make any relative, employer, coworker, clergyman, lawyer or friend of an undocumented immigrant into an ‘alien smuggler’ and a criminal.” (immigrationforum.org)

Blaming immigrants for economic problems, from unemployment to low wages, is not new. Since the founding of the United States, there has been a constant drumbeat of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Tennessee’s Bill Frist, Senate majority leader and an HMO robber baron who has been trying to privatize Medicare, has created an anti-immigration bill that would further militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, hire thousands more Border Patrol agents and build a huge fence along the U.S. southern border with Mexico.

A bill proposed by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas would empower state and local governments to prosecute undocumented immigrants, allowing the Department of Homeland Security to legalize vigilantism with a “Volunteer Border Marshal Program.”

Brent Wilkes, executive director of the League of United Latin American Citizens, called the Hutchison bill a sign of an immigrant-bashing spiral. “They’re getting more and more aggressive, more and more outrageous in the proposals. It’s like immigrants are all mass murderers,” he said. “You could turn the whole country into a police state and that still won’t solve the problem. People come here for jobs that are offered by American employers.”

By comparison, two other bills, the McCain-Kennedy bill and the Specter bill, are considered “liberal.” However, they describe the undocumented as “illegal aliens.” Their provisions limit immigrants’ right to settle legally and permanently in the United States.

The McCain-Kennedy bill, which is supported by some liberals, would create a new temporary visa category. In essence, it is a guest worker program—a warmed-over version of the failed and oppressive bracero program that forced so many Mexicans into poverty from 1942 to 1964. Under this act, any immigrants out of work for more than 45 days are subject to deportation.

Sen. Arlen Specter’s immigration-limitation bill is another guest worker plan, one that could make it much tougher for immigrants fighting deportation or refugees seeking asylum to press their case in a federal appeals court. It, too, has a 45-day limit on staying in the country without a job, with no provisions for retirement, pregnancy, downsizing, strikes or recession. The Specter bill would remove rights granted to immigrants by federal courts of appeals,

eroding the ability of people fighting deportation to be heard in the legal system. (Contra Costa Times, March 26). Specter’s bill also sets time limits on immigrants’ stay here and makes permanent residency an impossible dream for all but a very few.

Anti-immigrant groups such as the neocon NumbersUSA, the Hudson Institute and the Heartland Foundation are pushing the worst of these bills, while media from Time Magazine to Fox News conduct polls showing anti-immigrant sentiment increasing across the country.

This is a carefully orchestrated campaign to create xenophobia and worker disunity at a time when anger is growing over the hardships caused by capitalism. It is the big corporations that have been outsourcing jobs, reducing pensions and benefits and cutting wages; their paid-for politicians have diverted hundreds of billions from the public treasury into war while gutting social ser-

vices. Yet immigrant workers, who remain at the bottom of the ladder even as they contribute enormously to the economy, are being scapegoated for much of this.

The Filipino anti-imperialist group BAYAN says, “Low-income migrant populations are forced into a life of exploited undocumented status here in the U.S. because of a fiscal crisis made possible under the design of unjust and elitist global economic policies—policies authored by the U.S. corporate elite, enforced by the Bush administration and its U.S. puppet regimes in developing nations.”

But now millions of immigrants and their supporters are coming into the streets to fight this reactionary legislation and propaganda. While Congress conducts its sham debates, the largest working class immigrant movement in U.S. history is on the move. □



Dallas



Irving, Texas



Houston



Charlotte, N.C.



Detroit

WW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

PHOTO: MARISOL JIMENEZ MCGEE

'Walking to New Orleans'

Lessons from a historic march

From a talk given by Minnie Bruce Pratt at a Workers World Party meeting on March 24 in New York.

"Walking to New Orleans" [March 13 to 19] was significant because the two groups that organized the march have historically been pitted against each other in the U.S. South—the mostly white working-class veterans and relatives, represented by Veterans for Peace and Military Families Speak Out, and the mostly African-American community leaders responding to the government-induced Katrina catastrophe, represented by Saving Our Selves in Mobile and the People's Hurricane Relief Fund in New Orleans.

We heard from Katrina survivors—a Peruvian family being aided by the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance; we marched by tables of Mexican and Guatemalan male workers at lunch who waved to us; we heard how Vietnamese fishing people in Mobile were put out of work by the hurricane; in New Orleans, we—and especially the Vietnam vets!—were given a place to sleep by the Vietnamese community. And we heard how Jamaican and Haitian workers at the gigantic casinos along the Biloxi gulf shore were abandoned by their employers as the fury of the storm struck.

There were stretches of road where cars and trucks blared their horns in support of the march so incessantly that we couldn't hear each other chant. This happened in a region where that symbol of racism, the Confederate flag, has been replaced for the most part by the U.S. flag, which overt racists can hide behind in voicing their white supremacist views.

'Walking to New Orleans'

Hear the account from Minnie Bruce Pratt, holding newspaper, on www.workers.org.

You can subscribe to Workers World Newspaper online at www.workers.org or from:

Workers World
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The ruling class—from slave owners in the 18th century through steel mill owners in the 20th century—have tried to split the working class by instilling and fomenting racism within the white working class against African Americans and also immigrants of color in the U.S. South.

The South is being globalized, perhaps faster than any other part of the U.S. In the 1990s the South attracted more than half the foreign investment. One out of every eight workers in the South now gets her/his paycheck from a non-U.S. employer.

Most of the well-paying factory jobs are still going to white workers, and the bosses are still fighting to keep the region non-union. The U.S. South is the most militarized and the most dependent on military-related civilian jobs.

The following statistics include jobs, both military and civilian, in this very poor region:

- 42 percent of U.S. troops came from the South in 2002 (the region has just one-third of the country's population).



- The South accounts for seven of the 16 states where military recruiters enlisted the greatest share of 17- to 24-year-olds (and those seven states include Alabama and Louisiana).
- 51 percent of active-duty U.S. military personnel in the continental U.S. are stationed in the South.
- 38 percent of U.S. troops killed in Iraq and 47 percent killed in Afghanistan had been based in the South.
- 43 percent of prime military contracts from the Department of Defense went to the South in 2002, and 32 percent of those contracts in most of 2005. (Institute for Southern Studies)

In the 1980s, white supremacist David Duke tried to resuscitate the Ku Klux Klan in Slidell, La., as a well-educated, articulate, 20th-century hate group. Duke ran as a Republican for the Louisiana Senate in 1990. But before that, in 1981, Don Black, his right-hand man, put together in Slidell

a group of nine other neo-Nazis and Klansmen plotting to invade the Caribbean island of Dominica, overthrow its government, and turn it into a "white state."

We were greeted warmly in Slidell by young white male workers, Latino workers eating lunch, a young African-American male truck driver, older white couples and young white women in their cars. This warm response suggests that the double crisis generated by the ruling class through the war on Iraq and the re-doubled oppression of the working-class by way of the Katrina catastrophe has opened a possibility for working-class unity across national lines.

At the final rally in historic Congo Square in New Orleans, a speaker-phone broadcast included Fernando Suarez, whose son died in Iraq and who has become an outspoken critic of the war, especially the targeting of Latin@ and other youth of color by military recruiters.

Jeff, an Iraq War vet, a young white man in his 20s, a member of a Louisiana Army Reserves unit deployed to Iraq during the Katrina catastrophe, said, "When the disaster hit, I was serving a 13-month sentence in Iraq. There we drove trucks, cleaned up debris, established mortuaries for deaths caused because the U.S. made preemptive war against a sovereign country, against the U.N. Charter." Finally, he spoke of having seen an Iraqi woman lying dead, and how that was the turning point for him. He cried out, "I thought to myself, what if that were my mother lying there? My sister? What would I do? I would fight! I'd be a freedom fighter for my country! Here in the U.S. the Iraqis who fight are called terrorists. I call them freedom fighters." □

Media witch-hunts Barry Bonds

By Mike Gimbel

Barry Bonds is the greatest baseball player since Babe Ruth, yet the big business media are involved in a frenzied attack intended to demonize him. Why are they doing this instead of praising him for all his tremendous accomplishments?

There are many sports figures of all races that the big business media showers praise on. Some of those players who receive the praise are worthy of it, but many are not, and few if any of them can come remotely close to Bonds in terms of dominance in their sport.

What is it about Bonds that the big business media so dislike? They call Bonds "surlly." They might as well call him "uppity," but that term would reveal their racist and classist attitudes against so prominent a Black sports figure. It's one thing to be a "sports hero" who bows his head in respect to the media representatives of the ruling class. That "sports hero" will generate praise from them as a "model," to be followed with, "and a real good guy."



Barry Bonds

Bonds is paid millions of dollars each year, but the ruling class cannot tolerate even the smallest indication of rebelliousness or defiance, especially from so prominent a "hero" to so many youth. Sports, just like every other area of capitalist society, is run by millionaires and billionaires who cannot and will not tolerate having their "employees" talk back to them. It sets a bad example that many others may soon follow.

Rickey Henderson had one of the greatest careers in Major League Baseball history. Henderson, also a Black baseball player like Bonds, excelled in every area of offense and defense yet was continually dogged by attacks from the media. Unlike Bonds, there never once was any claim of using steroids against Henderson, yet he also was reviled even while he was breaking baseball record after record. What was Henderson's crime?

He, like Bonds, refused to bow his head to his "master" and was dubbed "surlly." He was often attacked for "lackadaisical defensive play" in the outfield, despite the fact that he was one of the truly great defensive outfielders of his day.

The sports reporters for the big business media are in no way different from the reporters on the so-called "hard news" side. They report to the same editorial staffs and the same media conglomerates. Bonds is being condemned in a witch-hunt atmosphere created by that same media. How is that different from what the media did in the run-up to the Iraq invasion? Where are the WMDs? Bonds has passed every single urine test.

Bonds has never been convicted of a single infraction, yet he is being convicted without a trial by the big business media in what can only be termed a lynch mob atmosphere. The same media that has lied about the war cannot be trusted to tell us the truth, even when it comes to sports. The ruling class propaganda doesn't disappear when you flip the pages from the front to the back of a newspaper. It's still the same editors and owners. They cannot and will not tolerate even the mildest defiance,

whether it comes from Black sports figures or Saddam Hussein.

Kansas City Star sportswriter Jason Whitlock stated on ESPN's Sports Reporters March 26 that Bonds is being witch-hunted because he is pursuing the home run record of Babe Ruth. By defending Barry Bonds we defend the right of every worker to "speak truth to power." Roger Clemens, one of the greatest pitchers in the history of the game, has also called the attacks on Bonds a "witch-hunt." Is that an indication of things to come from other players? We hope so! □

U.S. troops in Dominican Republic

By G. Dunkel

The United States hoped sending a heavily armed brigade of several thousand troops to Barahona, a small city on the southern coast of the Dominican Republic 50 miles from the Haitian border, would go unnoticed.

But the progressive movement in the Dominican Republic held a series of demonstrations in late February exposing this potential threat to Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico, to the elections scheduled for Haiti and to progressives in the Dominican Republic itself.

The U.S. and the Dominican army put out the cover story that the U.S. troops were there to provide medical assistance. Oscar Moreta, a member of the Patriotic Anti-Imperialist Committee of Barahona, told the Cuban News Agency Prensa Latina, "Those of us who live in Barahona

have been able to confirm that they have tanks, armored vehicles, attack helicopters, radar and many weapons, and we understand that those are not things used to build clinics."

There are rumors circulating in Barahona that the troops are the advanced guard of an eventual 14,000, designed to pose a major threat to any U.S. opponents in the region.

Although René Préal is Haiti's president-elect, after a massive popular struggle, he can't take office until the Haitian parliament is seated. The second round of parliamentary elections is currently scheduled for April 21-23, which means that the votes won't be counted and the victors seated until some time in May.

The danger to Haiti is that the U.S. troops in Barahona could intervene against Préal, whom they see as an ally of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. □

Broad strike in France

3 million protest new anti-worker law

By G. Dunkel

Three million students, workers, many of whom first walked off their jobs, retired workers and supporters demonstrated on March 28 in every large city in France against a new anti-worker law. Known as the First Employment Contract (CPE), it is aimed at eliminating job protection for workers less than 26 years old.

According to union organizers, 2 million people marched in Paris, 250,000 in Marseille, 100,000 in Bordeaux, 30,000 in Rennes, 15,000 in Strasbourg, 10,000 in Lille and 40,000 in Toulouse.

Both police and the demonstrators estimated that the March 28 demonstrations were twice as large as earlier ones on March 18.

All the labor and student unions turned out. Many primary schools closed completely, with teachers, administrators, staff, parents and their children marching in the protests. Even employees in the private sector, who generally refrain from political protests, came out in large numbers.

The sharpest clashes between cops and protesters were reported in Grenoble, a university and research-oriented town, where cops used flash grenades and tear gas to disperse protesters. Cops also confronted demonstrators in Lille, Paris and Rennes, a very important rail center, when protesters occupied the main railroad station.

On the Paris Metro (subway), cops roughly searched the bags and clothes of young Black and North African youths who were headed towards the protest. Even with television news filming them, the police obviously tried to provoke the young people to do something to justify an arrest.

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, who designed the new law, pretended he was doing "business as usual" during the strike. He greeted King Juan Carlos of Spain, while asserting he was not going to withdraw the CPE but was "open to dialog."

De Villepin is growing increasingly isolated. Even his party rival, right-wing Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, suggested the law be withdrawn and negotiations begin. With workers and oppressed peoples uniting and growing angrier, it is possible a Constitutional Court decision March 30 will nullify the law.

Struggle on since February

Since February, a coalition of students and trade unions has confronted the French government, which is trying to make it easier for bosses to legally fire young workers.

Alternating "center-left" and conservative governments since 1977 have put the rights of French workers under attack.



Bordeaux

Despite this, 85 percent of all salaried French workers still have the right to dispute a firing before an elected local court. In fact, one of the most important functions of French unions is to provide workers representation before this court.

All major French trade union confederations have stuck together in demanding the repeal of the law authorizing the CPE. Student unions like UNEF and FIDL have gone further, demanding the resignation of De Villepin's center-right government.

Railroad workers in vanguard

All French-language media since late February have put the strike and the struggle against the CPE at the top of the news, focusing on two key areas: the attitudes of the workers on the French railroads (SNCF) and opinion in poor suburbs like Clichy-sous-Bois, where struggles of youth of North African and West African origin



Rennes



Lille

began in November 2005.

The railroad workers have offered the strongest, most class-conscious, union-led resistance to the French state over the past 20 years.

In an interview on French television, Elisabeth Beddad, a Black woman conductor on the TGV—France's premier high-speed train line—said she would strike on March 28 out of solidarity with the students and youth. "Workers at the SNCF are covered by a special labor code. But youth and students deserve justice and job security."

Jean-René Carcouet, a train operator, pointed out that in fighting to repeal the CPE, workers were fighting to protect their children and their future. Naturally, the television reporter found a worker who wasn't totally opposed to the CPE. "Let's try it out for six months or so" was his line. But the reporter couldn't find one SNCF worker who solidly supported the government.

The youth in Clichy-sous-Bois said that the protests in October and November were about local issues like police harassment, lack of respect and lack of a future. They said that the CPE was a national issue and that if it made it easier to hire disadvantaged youth, it also made it far easier to fire them. The mayors interviewed felt that the situation was very tense, but not yet out of control.

Students at the Alfred Nobel High School in Clichy-sous-Bois, a few hundred yards from where two students died in October, sparking two months of protests, were interviewed by the French newspaper La Croix. They were going to protest on March 28. They were not sure of the details of the CPE but were strongly against it. One of



Paris

them said it was "because it is unjust. For two years, they can decide to keep us or let us go. Me, I don't want to string together CPE jobs. I want to be hired permanently."

Identified only as Kader and Nabil, two jobless workers interviewed said they aren't covered by the CPE because they are over 26 years old. Nevertheless, Kader said, "Frankly, there's nothing to be gained with this kind of stuff. We are still losers. What the youth want is a real job."

Nabil was even more bitter. "For us to get a permanent job, we would have to lose our skin [color]. The only laws that apply to us are the penal code." Nabil is supported by statistics: a youth coming from the suburbs with a name that is not French is six times less likely to be hired than a youth not from the suburbs with a French name. (Le Monde Diplomatique, March 2006)

Statement after statement from anti-racist groups like SOS-Racisme, ATTAC and others make the same points as Kader and Nabil: The CPE is no solution for oppressed youth; it is a political trick, a trap, an empty promise. □

Hand of solidarity Black unionist to French workers

The following letter was written on March 21, 2006.

The Million Worker March Movement is hereby expressing its solidarity to the French youth and workers who have organized and mobilized in their own name. You are courageously protesting in the streets against the policy of allowing employers the right to fire young workers without cause within the first two years of employment.

The "First Employment Contract" law is clearly an attack not only on French youth but the entire working class. In fact, many of the French youth protesting are workers already, while the others represent the future French working class.

There are similarities with how the argument is framed in France, that this law will aid companies to bring down unemployment, and the argument in the U.S. regarding not raising the minimum wage: "We'll hire more of you if we can exploit you more."

In the U.S., an employer must show cause before firing a union worker only. Other workers must be able to prove discrimination to keep from being fired.

If this new law is permitted to stand, French workers can expect the further erosion of hard-fought worker rights.

I was a student activist at San Francisco State College in 1968 and participated in one of the longest student strikes in American history to establish a Black Studies Department and a School of Ethnic Studies, which still exist today.

The current struggle of the youth of France reminds me of the student activism at the Sorbonne in 1968. It is wonderful to see that the youth of France have not forgotten the history of activism and struggle of French youth and workers.

An injury to one is an injury to all,

Clarence Thomas

Former Secretary-Treasurer, ILWU Local 10
National Co-Chair, Million Worker March Movement



History's rebirth?

Over the past year the capitalist governments making up the European Union have opened a reactionary attack on the rights of communist organizations. This seemed somewhat surprising, given that 15 years ago the capitalists' most esteemed and highly paid philosophers declared that history had ended and the eternal reign of the free market had begun. The remaining communists were to be ridiculed, rather than repressed.

But in 2005 the Council of Europe decided to distort this history—the one that had “ended”—by declaring that the Soviet Union's Red Army, which stopped German imperialism at enormous sacrifice, was equally guilty with the Nazi leaders who launched World War II. That could make it illegal to fly the banners of communism as well as the hated swastika.

In addition, the government of the Czech Republic, now a mini-state well under the control of German and U.S. imperialism, found it imperative to try to outlaw the Communist Youth Union (KSM), since it dared to proclaim the existence of the class struggle.

And then the Danish state launched an attack on Danish communist organizations just at a time when these groups were exposing the reactionary role of the anti-Muslim caricatures and trying to mobilize solidarity with the oppressed Muslim immigrants. The government's excuse: the Danish communists—of different parties—all supported an appeal on the “Rebellion” website whose goal was to challenge national anti-terror legislation, the Danish equivalent of the Patriot Act. This appeal included a request to give financial support to the Colombian liberation army, FARC-EP, and the Palestinian liberation movement, PFLP.

All progressive people in the United States should defend the rights of the European communists to organize and struggle for their ideas. Communist

organizations in Europe have mounted a campaign to protect the rights of the KSM. (<http://4ksm.kke.gr>)

Anyone learning of this might also ask, why do European capitalists—and especially their right-wing, neoliberal parties—believe they now have to use police methods to stop the communists from organizing? What are they afraid of?

In 2005 there were electoral successes of the Communist Party in the Czech Republic and of the Portuguese CP, a party that openly aims for socialism and that improved its position in both local and national elections for the first time in decades. But these were just small signs of a turn. Do the capitalist parties anticipate a working-class resistance to their own merciless attack?

The signs are growing stronger. The youthful revolt in the oppressed suburbs of France was the earliest indication of real struggle.

Then, beginning in March, hundreds of thousands of German workers turned to the strike weapon. They have gone out sporadically, trying to defend the economic gains they made after World War II, which have been under relentless attack.

In Britain, on March 28, a strike of 1.5 million workers rejected a government plan to reduce pension benefits.

That British strike went almost unnoticed by the world media because, in nearby France, some 3 million students and workers half shut down the country and marched in every major city to defend the right to a job for young workers.

And now, across the Atlantic in the United States, the center of world imperialism, where history is not only supposed to be ended but buried, some millions of immigrant workers are standing up and flooding the streets.

Those who boasted of having buried communism really thought that was the end of the workers' struggle. They're wrong on both counts. □

Ukraine votes no to NATO

By Stephen Millies

Fifteen months after Ukraine's “orange revolution” made Viktor Yushchenko president, he has been humiliated in parliamentary elections held March 26. Early returns gave his party only 13 percent of the vote. Leading the polls was the “Party of Regions” of former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, who had been driven from office in 2004.

The 2004 “orange revolution” was as rotten as the 1980 “Reagan revolution.” It overturned the election of Yanukovich, who had been the overwhelming choice of the working class. The Bush administration and West European governments orchestrated and financed protests in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev.

Fifteen months of the so-called revolution was enough to send food prices soaring. Workers were fearful of losing their jobs after the Kryvorizhstal steel works were sold off to Mittal Steel, which in 2006 became the largest steel producer in the world. The same outfit, whose main office is in London, has also bought up Bethlehem Steel of the U.S. and left 95,000 retirees without health insurance.

No wonder the “Party of Regions,” whose opponents allowed these sell-offs, is getting 80 percent of the vote in the heavily industrialized Donbass area.

Yushchenko also wants Ukraine to join NATO. But the 48 million people who live there don't want their country to be a military launching pad against Russia.

Reports indicate that the Western powers are maneuvering to put the “gas princess,” Yulia Tymoshenko, back into the prime minister's office. Her party is getting the second-largest share of the votes just eight months after Yushchenko fired her.

Tymoshenko was president of the local equivalent of Enron—United Energy Systems (UES). The \$10 billion annual sales of UES provided Tymoshenko with a fleet of jet planes and she was named as an associate in a U.S. indictment for money laundering. But the Western media have canonized her as Ukraine's “Joan of Arc.”

Meanwhile, the European Union and the U.S. announced March 24 that they would impose travel sanctions against President Alexander Lukashenko and 50 other government officials in Belarus, a neighbor of Ukraine and also a former Soviet republic. The excuse for these sanctions is that Lukashenko's government dispersed protests in the Belarus capital of Minsk against his reelection. These protests had dwindled down to a couple hundred people in a country of nearly 10 million.

A Feb. 26 New York Times article admitted that the U.S. and European Union lavished millions of dollars on the Belarus forces opposed to Lukashenko, with the Bush administration spending \$11.8 million to “promote democracy” and other millions raised through groups like the quasi-governmental National Endowment for Democracy and the German organization, Media Consulta.

This “opposition” had called for protests on March 25 to mark the anniversary of a short-lived republic that was declared in 1918 at the end of World War I. None of the capitalist media in the West mentions that this 1918 “republic” was just a stooge regime for Kaiser Wilhelm's collapsing German empire.

It's appropriate that today's “opposition” would celebrate the 1918 republic, as these forces would turn their country over to German and U.S. capital if they got into power. Belarus authorities stopped these right-wingers from gathering strength.

The phony 1918 republic was replaced with a Belarus Soviet Republic of workers and peasants, which transformed Belarus into a modern industrialized country. During World War II, along with the other republics in the Soviet Union, Belarus helped defeat the Nazi invasion.

From 1835 to 1916, during czarist rule, only 244 books were published in the Belarusian language, which is not the same as Russian. From 1918 to 1966 alone, while Belarus was a socialist state and part of the USSR, over 18,000 book titles were published. □

Iraqi doctor moves So. Carolina audience

By David Dixon
Rock Hill, S.C.

An Iraqi doctor, Rashad Zidan, gave a powerful and thought-provoking presentation on the war in her country to a meeting of the American Association of University Women in this small college town on March 23.

Rashad, a pharmacist, works in Baghdad and Falluja with the Women and Knowledge Society to aid victims of war, especially orphans. She told how the Iraqi people have nothing against the people of the U.S.; their problem is with the U.S. government and its troops in their country.

The people of Iraq do not want a civil war, she said. Most people in Iraq are Muslims; Sunni and Shia people often intermarry. They do not hate or want to fight each other. The top religious leaders in Iraq have called for no civil war. But hostilities are being generated by the occupation forces.

Rashad spoke of the horrors of the invasion and occupation. Before the war, she lived a normal life with her husband and children and had her own pharmacy. Iraq was the most modern country in the Middle East, comparable to Western countries.

Now, she said, most children don't go to school, especially girls, for fear of violence. Women in Iraq must fight for the rights they once had before the occupation. American soldiers get drunk at night and go to Iraqis' houses, where they tell the men they want to “dance” with their daughters and wives.

In Baghdad, electric power lasts only one hour a day. Iraqis must wait four to five hours in line to buy gasoline at jacked-up prices while a sea of oil lies beneath their land. The whole infrastructure and all the government ministry buildings were intentionally destroyed and/or looted at the time of the U.S. invasion—except the Ministry of Oil.

There are not enough medicines in the hospitals. Doctors have had to perform surgery by candlelight. Many, many children have been made orphans by this criminal war and occupation.

Rashad showed photos of what the occupation really looks like. These photos are easy for anyone with internet access to find.

She stressed the responsibility of the people here doing everything in their power to end the occupation. She said we are the only ones who can end it. We must

tell the truth to everyone so that the U.S. government's lies are exposed.

Her presentation was filmed and will be aired on public access television.

Rashad is part of a delegation of Iraqi women touring the U.S. Two who were scheduled to come were denied visas by the

U.S. government because all their family members in Iraq had been killed. With twisted logic, Washington says these women might try to stay in the U.S., since they have no families to go back to. They had been killed by U.S. troops. □

Disabled activists besiege Tenn. State Capitol

Continued from page 2

Acting on these principles, he “solved” the budget problems of TennCare by throwing 330,000 poor and uninsurable people off the rolls. In response, activists occupied Bredesen's outer office from June 20 to Sept. 4, 2005. This 77-day sit-in is believed to be the longest ever at a U.S. State Capitol building.

According to ADAPT sources, 77 percent of all Medicaid funds in the U.S. are earmarked for nursing home care, meaning they mostly go to private businesses, leaving less than a quarter for home-based services. But in Tennessee the figure is 99 percent.

Contrary to the myth about capitalist

“efficiency,” home-based services would not only liberate the recipients but cost less per person. But they would mean less profit for the corporations, which view nursing homes as a gold mine, given the growing number of people who need assistive care due to disability or age.

Protesters called for the Tennessee legislature to pass the Community Choices Act, which would allow Medicaid funds to be paid to community providers of the recipient's choice.

More information, including photos and video clips, is available at www.adapt.org/freourpeople/aar/nash06/.

Attack on Baghdad mosque deepens anger at U.S.

By John Catalinotto

An attack on a Shiite mosque compound in Baghdad March 26 that left up to 37 people dead has sharpened a conflict between the U.S. occupation forces and groups that up to now have been the most reliable U.S. allies in the Iraqi government.

Lt. Col. Sean Swindell, commander of the U.S. unit that took part in the raid, claimed Iraqi soldiers were leading it and targeted an insurgent group's compound in northern Baghdad. (Washington Post, March 27)

In reaction to the raid, Baghdad governor Hussein al-Tahan said he would "cease all political and logistical cooperation with American forces" and that the U.S. Embassy and the Iraqi Defense Ministry should conduct an investigation, "but not the American military." Interior Minister Bayan Jabr Sulagh called the event an "unjustified aggression against the faithful as they prayed in a mosque." (Christian Science Monitor, March 27)

These differing versions come from forces that just recently were allied with the U.S. in the goal of setting up a government in Baghdad and crushing the Iraqi resistance. They indicate no solutions have been found to the problems facing the illegal U.S. occupation of Iraq.

Continuing armed clashes are possible between U.S. troops and the Shiite-based

Mahdi Army, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, who is now under attack in the U.S. corporate media.

On top of this, every day reports come in from the various regions of Iraq of dozens of bodies killed execution-style. Despite these reports, the U.S. authorities, from Gen. Peter Pace to President George W. Bush, continue to say that "civil war has been averted," and, in Bush's case, "We will complete this mission"—a big step down from his triumphant aircraft carrier speech on May 1, 2003, before a sign reading "Mission accomplished."

U.S. foments Iraqi differences

Under rules set up by the U.S./British occupation, elected and appointed posts in the national government are divided among three main regions determined by ethnic and/or religious differences: Kurds from the Northeast, Sunni Muslims from the Northwest and Center, and Shiites from the South. Baghdad, the capital, has people from all three of these groups, including a Shiite community of millions.

These occupation rules encourage organization along religious and ethnic lines and have helped lay the groundwork for the "civil war" everyone is discussing now.

The struggle, however, is not just over religion but division of the oil reserves located in the south and north.

According to reports from resistance groups, armed resistance to the occupation began in the mainly Sunni regions, among small units of both secular and religious organizations. Many of the fighters and unit leaders came from the disbanded Iraqi army. Until the December 2005 election, few organizations in these regions cooperated with the occupation. (Interview with Abdeljabbar al-Kubaysi in the Portuguese newspaper Avante, March 16.)

The leading coalition in the new elected government groups together three Shiite-based forces: the SCIRI, led by the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Dawa Party and the Mahdi Army. In the spring of 2004, Muqtada al-Sadr's forces were in open battle with the U.S. occupation, but last year they joined this coalition.

Washington's contradictions

These three Shiite forces have friendly relations with the Iranian government, which complicates their cooperation with the U.S. Lately Washington has stepped up its propaganda war against Iran and has even threatened military intervention there.

Some Shiite leaders also accused the Pentagon of conducting the March 26 raid on the mosque so it could "distance itself" from the Shiites, because the U.S. "feared that Iraq would be controlled exclusively by

Shiites, rather than shared with the Sunnis," reported Knight-Ridder on March 27.

The SCIRI and Dawa are conservative religious forces that have cooperated with the occupation since 2003; they and their militias are hostile to the Ba'ath party and other secular and Sunni-based organizations, and are suspected of carrying out assassinations of fellow Iraqis.

Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army gets its support from the poorer portion of Iraq's urban Shiite population and is strong in Baghdad. While it, too, is hostile to Ba'athists, it is also the quickest of the Shiite-based forces to focus blame on the U.S. occupation for Iraq's disaster.

The March 28 New York Times quotes a young Mahdi Army member, Katheer Abdulla Ridha, as saying: "We are ready to resist the Americans and strike their bases. The Sunnis have nothing to do with this, and we shouldn't accuse them of everything that's going on."

Put on trial at the behest of the occupation, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein recently shouted out in the courtroom an appeal to put aside their sectarian and ethnic differences and join to drive out the occupation. The court quickly silenced him. The Bush administration's worst nightmare is that all Iraqis, whether or not they follow Saddam Hussein, will unite to fight the occupation. □

In answer to 'Freedom House'

Koreans debunk U.S. scheme in Brussels

By Deirdre Griswold

Koreans are passionate about ending the division of their country and preventing it from becoming the scene of another U.S. war. They also are politically sophisticated and understand that reactionary agendas often come cloaked in liberal-sounding words.

So when South Koreans heard that a conference on "North Korean human rights" was being organized in Brussels by the U.S. organization Freedom House, they checked it out. And when they saw on Freedom House's web site that its work on Korea had received "generous funding from the U.S. State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor," they decided to act.

Workers World spoke with Yoomi Jeong of the Korea Truth Commission about what happened next.

"We heard that Freedom House was planning a conference on 'North Korean human rights' in Brussels toward the end of March and that some members of the European Council were holding a small forum," she said. "We knew from their previous actions that this was nothing more than demonizing the North Korean government.

"Human rights is a highly politicized issue that the U.S. has been using to undermine national sovereignty and prepare for future attacks on other nations. Look at what the U.S. did to Iraq, using the issues of human rights and weapons of mass destruction.

"In South Korea, when the movement for peace and reunification heard about these events, it decided to organize a special Korean Peace Brigade and asked for volunteers. Over 80 people signed up to go to Brussels at their own expense—students, housewives, farmers, workers, professionals and clergy.

"The brigade organized multiple events,

working with progressive Belgian organizations—especially the Workers Party of Belgium. We held our own international seminar to inform people in Europe about what is behind this 'North Korean human rights' scheme and the role of the U.S. government, which is putting \$20 million into conferences of this type around the world. We held cultural events and widespread leafleting at rush hours. Our events were cosponsored by the Korea Truth Commission and One Korea for Solidarity."

The Korean Peace Brigade that went to Belgium was joined by South Koreans from the U.S. and Europe. All spoke out on behalf of a reunified Korea. They held meetings with members of the European Parliament—which last year had passed a resolution denouncing North Korea, "based, we believe, on distortions and manipulation," says Jeong.

The Koreans held a demonstration in front of the U.S. Embassy, holding up signs saying "No war, no Bush" on one side and on the other "One Korea, by Koreans, for Koreans." They got "tremendous support" from the people going by, said Jeong, but no one from the embassy would come out to speak to them.

These events were "a tremendous opportunity, especially for young Koreans, to be empowered by their work and by the responses they got from European people," Jeong says.

If Freedom House is truly concerned about human rights for the Korean people, she says, they should appeal to their government to end its economic sanctions on North Korea and its war exercises simulating an attack on that country—like the "Fool Eagle" exercises going on right now.

"Human rights have to be discussed in the larger context," Jeong insists, "of achieving peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula. The U.S. still refuses to even discuss a peace treaty, more than 50



PHOTOS: TONGIL NEWS

Korean Peace Brigade pickets U.S. Embassy in Brussels.

years after the Korean War. Instead, it is trying to elevate the human rights issue to a crisis level.

"This correlates directly to inter-Korean cooperation. As the north and south come together, building joint collaboration in the economy and politics, we've seen increased attacks on North Korea by the U.S. government." □



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JOHN BLACK 1921-2006

Enemigo de Hitler y organizador de obrer@s de hospitales

Por Deirdre Griswold

John Black, que murió el 7 de marzo a la edad de 85 años, fue una persona muy conocida dentro del amplio espacio del movimiento progresista, no solo en los Estados Unidos, sino en el mundo entero.

Cuando él se unió a Sam Marcy y a otr@s compañer@s en la fundación del partido Workers World/Mundo Obrero en 1959, trajo consigo sus experiencias obtenidas cuando colaboraba con el movimiento antifascista clandestino en Alemania siendo apenas un adolescente. También ya era veterano en la lucha para obtener mejores salarios y beneficios para l@s trabajador@s remunerad@s aquí en los EEUU.

John continuó la lucha hasta llegar a ser un líder en la organización de l@s trabajador@s de la salud a la vez que públicamente se oponía a las intervenciones imperialistas de los Estados Unidos y se hizo amigo de los países socialistas como Cuba y la República Democrática Alemana.

Él era franco y honesto hasta el desconcierto. Su costumbre de mirar fija e inquisitivamente agradaba a sus amigos y desarmaba a sus adversarios. Sabía mucho, pasó por mucho y utilizó sus habilidades muy efectivamente tanto en las líneas de protesta como en las negociaciones con los patronos en los hospitales.

El padre de John era un negociante tejano que trabajó en Berlín y se casó con una mujer alemana. Su hijo creció allá durante los turbulentos años que siguieron a la Primera Guerra Mundial, cuando las duras medidas de reparación impuestas sobre Alemania por los aliados victoriosos, incrementaron el caos y el sufrimiento masivo. Millones de trabajador@s se unieron al partido Comunista y al Socialista. La clase media también estaba en crisis y en búsqueda de un líder.

Cuando la Depresión mundial comenzó de lleno y millones de alemanes estaban totalmente destituidos, el Partido Nazi ya estaba usando la demagogia antisemita y anticapitalista para atraer a los arruinados y desposeídos, pero secretamente estaba recibiendo fondos de capitanes de industrias tales como Fritz von Thyssen y Alfred Krupp.

El fanatismo de Hitler contra el comunismo y el odio contra los judíos también atrajo el financiamiento de multimillonarios de los Estados Unidos como Henry Ford de la Ford Motor Co. e Irene du Pont, cabecilla entonces de la General Motors. Ellos querían que Estados Unidos se uniera a Alemania en contra de la Unión Soviética esperando que salieran de esa guerra contratos multimillonarios para vender sus vehículos.

La Union Banking Corp. y la WA Harriman & Co. también estaban entre las firmas estadounidenses asociadas a Hitler. El bisabuelo y el abuelo de George W. Bush

respectivamente, fueron oficiales ejecutivos de estas dos compañías.

Los padres de John eran conservadores, pero él admiraba al jardinero de la familia quien como muchos trabajadores, era comunista. Ya para su adolescencia, John estaba activo en el movimiento clandestino contra el fascismo, imprimiendo volantes en el sótano con una máquina reproductora manual.

Sus padres enviaron al joven rebelde a una escuela Huguenot donde algunos de los futuros líderes estaban siendo preparados para dirigir Alemania. Al poco tiempo fue expulsado, junto a otros estudiantes izquierdistas. Años después, aquellos que habían sobrevivido la guerra recibieron una recompensa de \$10.000 cada uno. John donó su parte al fondo de defensa de Mae Mallory —una nacionalista neoyorquina negra encarcelada por apoyar gente que se había defendido contra el Ku Klux Klan en el estado de Carolina del Norte

Parte de su trabajo en la resistencia incluía esquiar por áreas montañosas de la frontera entrando y saliendo por áreas sin vigilancia, cargando documentos y materiales valiosos. Un día dejó su casa porque su madre amenazó llamar a la policía. La policía lo cogió una vez y lo llevaron a los cuarteles de la GESTAPO. En conversaciones posteriores con camaradas, él narró haber visitado un edificio gubernamental en la República Democrática de Alemania y haberse dado cuenta de que era el mismo edificio usado por la GESTAPO y que en una de las paredes, su “sangre había sido cubierta con pintura”.

Antes de cumplir los 18 años de edad, se fue de Alemania para evitar ser reclutado o enjuiciado y llegó a Inglaterra, donde colaboró por un tiempo con el Partido Comunista. Por su perspectiva de crítica de la situación política en Alemania, fue acusado de ser trotskista. Indignado, leyó algunas escrituras de Trotsky para refutar a sus acusadores, pero se sorprendió al descubrir que estaba de acuerdo con las posiciones generales de Trotsky.

El padre de John le había registrado como ciudadano de los EEUU, y en 1940 a la edad de 19 años, se fue a Nueva York. Trabajó en un restaurante y luego en una fábrica de cartón, donde la mayoría de l@s trabajador@s eran mujeres inmigrantes mal remuneradas. Allí conoció a Sam Marcy y Dorothy Ballan, líderes de muchas luchas militantes organizadas por el sindicato de trabajador@s de fábricas de cartón.

Como ell@s, se hizo miembro del Partido Socialista de Trabajadores (SWP por las siglas en inglés) y creía que proseguir la lucha de clases, no sucumbiendo al patriotismo burgués durante la segunda guerra mundial imperialista, era la manera de derrotar al fascismo y la ultra derecha.

Una vez que comenzó la Guerra Fría, sin



John Black

embargo, la tendencia de Marcy discrepó del liderato del SWP sobre muchas cuestiones mundiales. Marcy, y su cercano colaborador Vince Copeland, argumentaron en el Comité Nacional la necesidad de apoyar fuertemente las revoluciones china, coreana y vietnamita y defender el campo socialista, que estaba siendo asediado, especialmente en Europa del Este. Estas diferencias condujeron a que el grupo se separara del SWP y se fundara el Partido Mundo Obrero (Workers World Party) en 1959.

Para ese entonces, John Black estaba en la ciudad de Buffalo en Nueva York trabajando en un hospital. Al poco tiempo se casó con Bernice Bates, miembro de un grupo de teatro de la comunidad negra. Para el 1961 estaba trabajando con la Local 1199 organizando trabajador@s de hospital y del cuidado de la salud.

John y Bernice se mudaron varias veces al crecer la familia y porque el trabajo de John lo llevaba a montar campañas de organización en la Ciudad de Nueva York, en Nueva Jersey y en Pensilvania. Eventualmente, se convirtió en el primer presidente del Distrito 1199P, que representaba a emplead@s de hospitales y de hogares de ancianos en Pensilvania.

En una historia oral, Moe Foner, fundador del sindicato de trabajador@s de hospital, narró cómo una huelga en el Hospital Lawrence en Bronxville, NY, llegó a un acuerdo luego de que una fotografía que mostraba a John Black y a otros piqueteros siendo golpead@s por la policía que invadía el hospital, apareció en la portada del New York Times al día siguiente.

Bernice Black recuerda bien esa huelga. “Ossie Davis estaba en la línea de piquete, llevando a nuestro hijo Doug. Estudiantes del Sarah Lawrence College trajeron bizcochos de baba au rhum y otras golosinas para l@s huelguistas.” William Lawrence había fundado tanto el hospital como la prestigiosa universidad de mujeres.

Los líderes de la 1199 consideraban el organizar a trabajador@s dietétic@s, de lavandería y conserjes como parte de la lucha por los derechos civiles ya que la mayoría eran personas de color a quienes pagaban sueldos miserables. Malcolm X habló varias veces en apoyo a la campaña.

Con el tiempo la familia se radicó en State College, Pa., donde John trabajó con la organización Estudiantes y Jóvenes Contra el Racismo en campaña por la libertad del periodista revolucionario afroamericano Mumia Abu-Jamal. En su libro “En Vivo desde el corredor de la muerte, “Mumia reconoce el apoyo incansable de John Black. John también trabajó con l@s estudiantes en el programa semanal, “Perspectiva desde la izquierda,” transmitido por la estación de radio de la universidad de Penn State.

Siendo líder sindical, participó en delegaciones que viajaron a la Unión Soviética, la República Democrática Alemana, y a Bulgaria para contrarrestar el anticomunismo virulento creado por la Guerra Fría.

Aún después de jubilarse en 1986, John siguió viajando a países satanizados por el gobierno estadounidense. Desafió la prohibición de viajar a Cuba y visitó ese país en 1998 y 1999. En el 2000, fue a Irak con una delegación de solidaridad encabezada por Ramsey Clark para ver y regresar con información sobre las sanciones devastadoras impuestas sobre Irak, las cuáles fueron preludio del ataque militar contra ese país. Mientras se encontraba regresando de ese viaje, sufrió un ataque cardiaco. Un grupo de médic@s que había estado en Irak para evaluar sus necesidades médicas, le salvó la vida usando nitroglicerina.

A pesar de su precaria salud, John continuó con su agitación política y su interés en la historia revolucionaria. Al morir, él todavía estaba haciendo investigaciones sobre dos de sus tópicos favoritos: el Illuminati, un movimiento que fue precursor de la Revolución Francesa de 1789, y

sobre la vida de Tan Malaka, fundador del Partido Comunista de Indonesia.

A John Black le sobreviven su esposa Bernice, sus hij@s Mack, Douglass y Jennifer, y dos nietos, Shango y Zoe. Un homenaje tendrá lugar el primero de mayo en el Friends Meeting House en State College, Pa. □

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