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State of Union doubletalk More for war, less for human needs

By LeiLani Dowell

President George Bush used both sides of his mouth during his annual State of the Union address on Jan. 23.

On one side, he attempted to assure the ruling class that he had their best interests in mind. On the other, he offered paltry and contradictory promises of “security” to working people in the United States, all in generalities and hyper-patriotic, “us against them” terms. The speech was designed to appear like Bush was conceding to the mass opposition that has been reflected on the streets and in the November elections; however, nothing in the content of his speech indicates that.

What was most obvious was that, despite this posturing, Bush has every intention to continue the hugely unpopular, illegal, and horrific war against the Iraqi people, sending even more troops and spending even more money on the endeavor. In a tired refrain, Bush urged that “America must not fail in Iraq, because ... the consequences of failure would be grievous and far-reaching.”

The first issue in Bush’s address was balancing the federal budget, which he declared would be done “without raising taxes.” No doubt this means what it has meant in the past—that the filthy rich will

continue receiving tax breaks while the rest of us have to pay for the war.

Incidentally, no mention was made during the 50-minute speech about the war budget. The next day, the chair of the House Budget Committee, Rep. John Spratt, announced that increasing costs for the Iraq war are likely to nullify improvements in the federal deficit that have been predicted by the Congressional Budget Office. The CBO claims that without increased war spending, the budget would reach a surplus by 2012, but only if Bush’s tax cuts—for the rich—are ended by the end of 2010. (Associated Press, Jan. 24)

As for the “war on terror,” Bush announced that “we must take the fight to the enemy.” This unveiled threat was directed at Iran, North Korea and Hezbollah, the leading group in Lebanon’s resistance movement. Bush declared the administration’s intention to “continue to speak out” against Cuba, when in reality the United States has imposed a blockade on the socialist country for the past 46 years and funded outright terrorist activities and organizations against it.

Progressives in the United States should also take serious note when an administration that has brought nothing but

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WW EDITORIAL

What will bring the troops home?

What will it take to end the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and bring the troops home?

Bush may up his “I feel your pain” rhetoric in response to his drop in the polls, but he has just restated his intention of “staying the course.” And to stop him will take more than “symbolic” votes by the Democrats, who now control Congress because the people want them to stop the war.

The U.S. and Britain, the current and former colonial powers, have no right to send their troops to the Middle East in the first place. This is pure imperialism, an attempt to conquer the area containing the richest concentration of valuable natural resources. The new Iraqi hydrocarbons law, drafted by U.S. “consultants,” proves what anti-war demonstrators have said all along—the supposed war on terror is really a war for the oil companies. Immense profits are involved.

The Iraqi people know this and are resisting with greater and greater success, even though the price they pay is horrendous.

Most in the Pentagon know the war in Iraq is lost, but the high stakes involved for U.S. capital keep them from calling it quits. The longer the troops stay, the worse it gets. But the corporate bosses who put this administration in power just won’t let them leave. So the vicious occupation goes on, resistance to foreign domination grows, and so does hatred for U.S. imperialism all over the world.

There are parallels to Vietnam. During the 1968 Tet Offensive, coordinated uprisings occurred all over the south, including in all the major cities. The preparations had been made right under the noses of the South Vietnamese puppet regime and the U.S. occupation forces.

This Jan. 22 in Iraq, an armored U.S. *Continued on page 10*

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Colonialism: the real 'Apocalypto'

By Leslie Feinberg

From Indigenous oral histories, passed down through millennia, to the hostile accounts kept by colonial record keepers, a great deal of evidence exists to show that sex/gender variance and homosexuality were part of the fabric of early cooperative societies in the Americas—from pole to pole.

What is significant about the abundant European colonial records—whether military, missionary or anthropological—is not their perception, objectivity or accuracy in describing life among the diverse Native societies in this hemisphere. It's that these observations by the Europeans and their reactions to homosexuality and gender/sex variance in Native cultures—reflected in terms like “devilish,” “sinful,” “perverted,” “abominable,” “unnatural,” “heinous,” “disgusting,” “lewd”—reveal how different were the societies they came from.

The “observed” were peoples who lived in societies that were either communal or were in the early stages of class division.

The “observers” came as military, commercial or intellectual servants of entrenched European ruling classes that were expanding beyond their own hemisphere to steal the golden fruits of the Native peoples' labor.

In Europe, where most communal lands had been seized by slave-owners and then feudal landlords, state laws and repression against same-sex love and sex/gender variance had been part of this centuries-old class warfare.

From south to north

Colonial observations about Indigenous societies in this hemisphere are copious. Those with imperial aspirations studied the peoples they sought to militarily conquer and enslave.

When a European colonial expedition in 1576 reached the lands of the Tupinamba people in what is now northeastern Brazil, they found female-bodied hunters and warriors who were accepted by the other Native men. Recalling the Greek Amazon warriors, the Europeans dubbed the river that flowed through that area the “River of the Amazons.”

Narrating his first trip down another river, now called the Mississippi, Jesuit Jacques Marquette described in the 17th century how, among the Illinois and Nadouessi, he found people who today would be referred to as Two-Spirit. Marquette wrote that they were “summoned to the Councils, and nothing can be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of Leading an Extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous—That is to say, for Spirits—or persons of Consequence.”

French missionary Joseph François Lafitau condemned the Two-Spirit people he found in societies along the western Great Lakes, Louisiana and Florida, but these Native peoples did not share his prejudice. He wrote in 1724 that “they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order.”

But in areas where ruling classes had emerged and consolidated their territory, sometimes after the violent overturn of neighboring communal societies, these attitudes had changed.

Historian Max Mejía wrote, “In the Aztec culture of pre-Hispanic Mexico, the dominant



A 1594 engraving of Balboa's Inquisition terror in Panama against homosexuality and gender/sex variance—in this case, being torn apart by dogs.

culture at the time the Spanish arrived, the treatment of sodomy was not exactly favorable. On the contrary, the Aztecs had very harsh laws against it, punishing the practice severely with public execution for those who were caught. Punishment affected mainly males, but women were not exempt.” (“Mexican Pink,” Different Rainbows, Gay Men's Press)

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas noted that among the Aztecs, “The man who dressed as a woman, or the woman found dressed with men's clothes, died because of this.”

“However,” Mejía explained, “there were exceptions to the Aztecs' rules against homosexuality. Most historians agree that the practice was tolerated when it took place in religious rituals.”

Mejía added, “[T]he Aztecs ruled over a vast array of peoples, who had different cultural histories. Several of these did not necessarily share the Aztecs' vision of homosexuality and its practice. Some even showed signs of singular tolerance towards it in their communities. One of these was the Zapotec culture, derived from the Mayans and located in what is now the state of Oaxaca.”

He emphasized, “[W]hat I am trying to show is that in pre-Hispanic Mexico, alongside the rigid Aztecs, there existed—and there exist still today—other, more flexible cultures more tolerant of homosexuality.”

The real “Apocalypto”

When it came to sexuality, Mejía stated: “[T]he Mayans had a more favorable view of diversity within the community, which suggests greater tolerance of homosexuality, above all when it concerned religious rituals and artistic practices.”

Recently, director Mel Gibson made a movie called “Apocalypto” about the Mayan empire, as experienced by a family from a nearby hunting-gathering society being chased by its warriors.

Gibson's movie ideologically serves those in the U.S. who yearn for a Fourth Reich,

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Rainbow Solidarity for Cuban 5 forms broad political arc

By Leslie Feinberg

Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five—initiated by U.S.-based lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other activists who are oppressed based on their sexuality, gender and/or sex—is widening its arc across this continent and around the world.

The five political prisoners are serving long sentences behind bars in federal penitentiaries in this country for the “crime” of trying to stop CIA-backed terrorists on U.S. soil from attacking Cuba.

Just two weeks after the first call went out on Jan. 7, Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five is shaping up to be a historic united front. It is cementing a broad political spectrum with the courage to demand: free the Five, defend Cuba’s right to self-

determination and sovereignty, lift the blockade and stop U.S.-instigated terror attacks on the island nation.

Several hundred individuals and organizations have already signed on to the call, posted on the www.freethethefive.org web site. Look for the rainbow.

Individuals and groups have responded from across the United States—southern Florida to the Pacific Northwest, San Diego to Maine.

International endorsements are already in from Mexico, Brazil, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Ireland, Wales, Italy, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Austria, Germany, Canada, Australia, Belgium, Portugal and Spain.

With the help of volunteers from around

the world, the introduction and call for Rainbow Solidarity to free the Cuban Five is posted online in Spanish, English, simplified and traditional Chinese, Farsi, Portuguese, Italian, French and German. More translations are in the works or planned, including a streaming video ASL (American Sign Language) translation.

Signers in recent days include the Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University, Taiwan, and its coordinator, Professor Josephine Ho; and New-York-based anti-imperialist activist Joo-Hyun Kang.

Kentucky, filmmaker and activist Sonja de Vries—director of the documentary “Gay Cuba”—signed on to the call.

Stephen Whittle, professor of equalities law and the British organization Press for Change at the School of Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, endorsed. So did Barbara Findlay, co-chair of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender

Issues Section, BC Branch, Canadian Bar Association; and Tami Starlight and the Vancouver-based organization she is director of—Trans Action Canada.

Brigitte Oftner, coordinator of the Austrian “Free the Five” committee, and Simon McGuinness, secretary of the “Free the Miami Five Campaign, Ireland,” strengthened the call with their endorsements and those of their organizations.

Rainbow Solidarity organizers stress that to make this call even more powerful, your signature is needed. To become a part of Rainbow Solidarity to Free the Cuban Five, sign on at: www.freethethefive.org/rainboweng.htm.

For ideas about how to deepen this initiative, email: rainbowsolidarity4cuban5@gmail.com

For more information about the case of the Cuban Five, visit freethethefive.org or freethethefive.org.

E-mail: lfeinberg@workers.org



Pickets confront anti-woman group



Supporters of women’s reproductive rights, including the right to abortions, rallied and marched in San Francisco on Jan. 20 in opposition to the anti-choice so-called “Walk for Life—West Coast” held here for the third consecutive year.

—Report & photo by Joan Marquardt

Anti-gay, anti-trans Inquisition

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much as Leni Riefenstahl’s films did for imperialist Nazi capital.

“Apocalypto,” which depicts the Mayans as inherently blood-thirsty, is being screened in the citadel of the most blood-thirsty imperialist power in history. It arrives in chain theaters in the U.S. at a time when Lou Dobbs and other white-supremacist propagandists are pitching classical fascist appeals to the middle-class in this country to view Mexican@immigrants as “the enemy within.”

It also airs as U.S. finance capital has unleashed its war machine to recolonize Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of a “war on terror.”

“Apocalypto” is pro-imperialist propaganda, making colonialism synonymous with salvation. The film ends with the Spanish fleet appearing on the horizon to save the day.

But when the lights come up, it is colonialism and imperialism that are the real historical “Apocalypots.”

Colonialism brings Inquisition

The patriarchs of colonial power violently restructured the Indigenous societies they militarily conquered—in economic organization, kinship, family/community organization, sexualities, gender and sex roles—in order to best facilitate their enslavement, exploitation and oppression.

Mejía stated that with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, “An absolutist discourse enveloped homosexuality in the concepts of ‘infamous sin,’ ‘sin against nature,’ corruption of the soul and alli-

ance with the devil. They punished the practice without distinctions, among both lay people and clerics.”

This religious ideology and the ethos of male supremacy, he said, corresponded to the war-driven European social order.

“Furthermore,” Mejía concludes, “the conquerors treated ‘sodomy’ as a special Indian sin and hunted it down and punished it as such on a grand scale. They orchestrated crusades like the Holy Inquisition, which began burning sodomites at the stake as a special occasion, as in the memorable auto-da-fé of San Lázaro in Mexico City.”

This bloody crusade of terror is confirmed in the colonizers’ own words.

Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima, wrote that during Vasco Núñez de Balboa’s incursion across Panama, he “saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard.”

When the Spanish invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, “[T]hey found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them.”

Native peoples throughout this hemisphere fought back.

Conquistador Nuño de Guzmán noted in 1530 after a battle that the last Indigenous person taken prisoner, who had “fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman.”

Next: *Colonialism, imperialism shackle Cuba.*

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Reproductive rights group fights racism & war

By Workers World Detroit bureau

Organizers Debbie Johnson and Kris Hamel of the Detroit Action Network For Reproductive Rights (DANFORR) spoke in mid-January at two important Detroit political events. The audiences applauded the DANFORR speakers’ working-class approach, which expressed the struggle for reproductive rights in the context of the civil rights movement and the struggle against U.S. wars.

On Jan. 15, over 1,500 people gathered for the fourth annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day rally and anti-war march at the Central United Methodist Church in downtown Detroit. Johnson, a DANFORR founding member and leader, addressed the post-march rally:

“We can no longer sit back and watch the slow destruction of our cities, our towns, our education system, suffering from insufficient funds—forced to close schools in this city especially—when the money for jobs, food, housing, education and health care is being flung into the abyss of wars of aggression, domination and occupation.

“We must demand that the deep pockets in Washington and the Pentagon, which open only for war and not for human needs, be re-purposed. Unless we begin to act, the economic war at home will continue to take lives. Whether due to homelessness, hunger, inadequate or no health care, it will be a dismal future for future generations.

“In response to these very same conditions in 1968, Dr. King said: ‘It is disgraceful that a Congress that can vote upwards to \$35 billion a year for a senseless immoral war in Vietnam cannot vote a weak \$2 billion to carry on our all-too-feeble efforts to bind up the wounds of our nation’s 35 million poor. This is nothing short of a Congress engaging in political guerilla warfare against the defenseless poor of our nation.’

“We must demand the mandate of November—No to war in Iraq and further death and destruction around the world. We must demand money for jobs and human needs, not for war!”

Roe v. Wade

Detroit NOW (National Organization for Women) organized a program Jan.

20 commemorating the 34th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion. It was held at the Swords Into Plowshares art gallery in downtown Detroit, and there DANFORR organizer Hamel spoke to a diverse crowd of pro-choice and women’s rights advocates on the state of the reproductive rights struggle and her organization’s work since its founding in May of 2006:

“The struggle for reproductive rights must have the overall demand of reproductive freedom for all women. This includes the right to decide if and when, and how many, children to have, and if you choose to have them, the right to raise them with everything they need for a decent and productive life as a human being. And that means having a job with good wages, health insurance, a place to live, enough money for heat and other utilities, good schools, nutritious food and all the other basics that should be a human right for everyone.

“Instead, Michigan has the highest child poverty rate in the country. Unemployment here is worse than in any other state except Mississippi. Public education, especially in Detroit, is woefully underfunded. Health care is but a dream for millions. Over 45,000 Detroit households have no drinking water. Foreclosures in Michigan lead the nation. And over 330,000 jobs in our state have been lost in the last several years alone.”

“Who does this impact the most? Women. Children. The poor. Working women with low incomes, women of color, those who struggle everyday to survive, really the majority of us.

“The November elections were considered a mandate by the people to stop the war in Iraq. What does this have to do with women? With the pro-choice struggle? With reproductive freedom for all women? It has everything to do with it because the money that is funding this vicious war and occupation comes directly from us. In Michigan, over \$9 billion in taxes have gone to the Iraq war so far, over \$600 million from the city of Detroit. We need to go to the Democrats and make them keep their election promises and fulfill their mandate from the people. Make them stop the war immediately and demand not one penny more for war!” □

To honor ML King and Cesar Chavez

Smithfield workers walk out, demand paid holiday

By Dante Strobino
Raleigh, N.C.

Over 500 first-shift workers at Smithfield's hog processing plant in Tar Heel, N.C. refused to attend work on Jan. 15 as a tactic in their struggle to win a paid holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chávez. Paid holidays on Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a benefit that many unions, in both the public and the private sector, have struggled for and won across the country, a benefit that many Southern workers are still fighting for.

After the bosses refused to accept their petition signed by thousands of workers a week earlier, workers decided to organize a work stoppage. Several attended work and walked out together, but given the intimidation faced on the job, most workers decided it would be easier to take the day off completely and withhold their labor by simply not showing up to work.

The workers had organized the petition drive with the help of organizers in the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

The First Baptist Church in Fayetteville hosted a packed service for striking workers and supporters. Johnnie Davis, a Smithfield worker for the past eight years, said it was

fitting to discuss workers' rights on King's holiday. "He died for the workers," Davis told the approximately 700 people gathered at the church. "He died for us."

Working people and unions from all over the state attended the service to support the striking workers. Sanitation workers from the newly formed Raleigh City Workers Union, UE Local 150, organized a delegation to go to Fayetteville to offer their solidarity.

Bosses spoke openly to the media stating that the day's work would go on without a kink. However, with a large proportion of the striking workers coming from the kill floor in a plant that processes 30,000 hogs per day, the daily activity slowed down significantly, impacting the owner's profits.

Attack on immigrant workers

Mostly African-American workers carried out the job action, with the participation of over a hundred Latin@ and a few white workers. This follows the huge work stoppage of Nov. 16, when more than 1,000 mostly Latin@ workers walked out when the company fired 50 workers whose immigration papers couldn't be cleared.

Smithfield bosses then reinstated the 50 workers, agreeing to give them



Cesar Chávez



Dr. Martin Luther King

60 days to verify their information. As of Jan. 20, this 60-day period is over and the bosses are now firing 20 immigrant workers per day until all are fired. The UFCW is fighting to secure these jobs and provide services to fired workers.

The immigrant struggle reached a peak with last May Day's Great American Boycott when millions of immigrant workers across the country walked out to support immigrant rights and to defeat the racist legislation pending in Washington. Organizers say that to win more secure immigrants and workers rights requires immigrant-friendly unions and workers organizations that can unite workers of all nationalities and citizenship status to fight back.

On Feb 3 and 4 a national conference in Los Angeles will discuss the Great American Boycott II for this coming May 1. The conference is being sponsored by the March 25th Coalition Los Angeles and many other organizations from wherever there are strong concentrations of immigrants. □

ON THE PICKETLINE

by Sue Davis

LA Times press operators unionize

"We finally got 'em. It took 40 years!" cheered Marty Keegan, Teamsters lead organizer. He was referring to the recent vote by Los Angeles Times' press operators. The Teamsters had tried six times between 1967 and 2002 to represent the workers. (Los Angeles Times, Jan. 7)

Though better benefits and higher wages are always in order, the main issue on the pressroom workers' agenda is job security. The current owner, the Tribune Co. of Chicago, began soliciting bids to sell the entire company on Jan. 17. Keegan hopes for a quick contract "because any new owner is going to want to know what the contract is going to look like."

Asian immigrants win \$2.5 million suit

On Jan. 11, a federal jury awarded \$2.5 million to 200 Chinese Daily News employees as part of a class-action lawsuit. The jury found that the newspaper failed to pay overtime and allow rest and meal breaks for non-managerial staff in the newsroom, advertising department and pressroom and for reporters and other hourly employees at its Monterey Park office. (Pasadena Star News, Jan. 11)

All the workers are first-generation immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and Vietnam.

"For new immigrants here, surviving is not easy," said plaintiff Lynne Wang, a former reporter who regularly worked 12-hour days six days a week. "We all [felt] very lucky to have a job, and we [didn't] know the law." The company told employees with timecards not to fill in more than eight hours a day and did not keep records of hours for reporters and salespeople.

"This [verdict] is important because foreign-based companies come here and do business, and a lot of their employees don't speak English," said plaintiff attorney Cornelia Dai. "They're taken advantage of." She added, "It is an important verdict as far as the message it sends to other employers." The Chinese Daily News has regional offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York.

Unions demand 'Bring the troops home'

On Jan. 10 at the same time President Bush was announcing the "surge," the United Association's Plumbers and Fitters Local 393 in San Jose, Calif., passed a resolution demanding an end to funding the war in Iraq. It stipulated that the only additional funds should be those used to bring the troops home and care for them here.

The resolution concluded, "We call upon the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council, the U.A. and others to join us in this resolve to Bring Our Troops Home Now; Money for People's Needs, Not War; Solidarity with Iraqi Workers."

On Jan. 12, the Auto Workers sent a letter signed by Alan Reuters, UAW legislative director, to all members of Congress expressing "strong [opposition] to this escalation of U.S. involvement in Iraq."

After pointing out many reasons the UAW opposed the war, the letter concluded: "The UAW urges Congress to exercise its constitutional responsibilities by rejecting this mistaken and counterproductive response to the situation in Iraq. Instead, we urge you to support measures that will decrease U.S. military involvement in Iraq and bring our troops home."

Defend the Family and Medical Leave Act!

As part of its ongoing maneuvers to strip workers of hard-won rights while bolstering big business, the Bush administration's Department of Labor has requested comments by the end of January about the "effectiveness" of the Family and Medical Leave Act. The FMLA has allowed an estimated 50 million

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Report zaps Con Ed for Queens power outage

By Mary Owen
Queens, N.Y.

Megabucks utility Con Edison's handling of the July 2006 Queens power outage was "a gross disservice to its customers" and the company management "failed or refused to comprehend the magnitude of the crisis," according to a Jan. 17 draft report by the New York State Public Service Commission.

During the July outage, community residents launched the Western Queens Power for the People (PFP) Campaign to fight for justice and full compensation for millions of dollars in damages and losses, including lost wages, that stemmed from the outage. PFP petitioned, held public meetings, mobilized in the community for a series of public hearings and joined the PSC investigation as an active party to represent community interests.

PFP's intervention had an impact. The state watchdog agency severely chastised Con Ed management for internal and external communications failures that left 174,000 Queens residents in working-class and immigrant communities—significantly more people than Con Ed admitted were affected—without

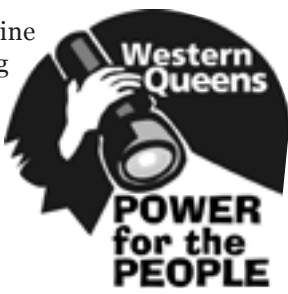
power for more than nine days during a scorching summer heat wave.

The PSC draft report said, "improvements needed at Con Edison are critical and substantial." It also called on PSC commissioners to schedule a hearing on the prudence of the

utility's actions, which could prevent Con Ed from making residents pay for outage-related upgrades through rate increases. It could instead force company stockholders—who just reaped fourth quarter profits—to absorb the financial costs.

PFP member Alice L. Tufel said the group felt "vindicated and gratified" by the PSC draft report, which disputed an earlier Con Ed report claiming the outage was caused by events beyond its control. (New York Times Jan. 19)

Instead, the PSC report put the blame squarely on Con Ed management. The "overriding cause" of the power outage, it said, was Con Ed's "failure to have previously addressed a multitude of issues associated with its operations, maintenance and oversight of the network" serving Western Queens.



www.powerforthepeople.info

As he did last July, when he flat out refused to come to Queens for the first four days of the power outage, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg again jumped in to defend Con Ed Chair Kevin M. Burke against calls for his resignation.

But for community residents and small mom-and-pop store owners, the real issue is making them whole after millions of dollars in nonfood losses that they have had to absorb, and giving them some assurance that this won't happen again.

"Replacing the leadership is necessary, but it's not enough," said Tufel. "Fundamental change is needed." (New York Times, Jan. 19)

As a party to the PSC investigation, PFP will be commenting on the draft report and continuing its fight for retroactive reimbursement for outage-related losses and damages. The group is also advocating an economic and public health impact study by an independent third party, and paid for by Con Ed, to assess the full extent of the losses (see www.powerforthepeople.info). □

Solidarity beats out racist border watch

For five weeks in a row, starting in December, racists from Border Watch protested against the Latin@ workers gathered at common pickup sites for day jobs in Houston. At first two Houston organizers, Juan Alvarez and Noemi Alvarez, showed up to support the workers. The next week, more Houstonians came out. By the fourth and fifth weeks the racists were numerically outnum-

bered and politically outdone as strong rallies with passionate speakers demonstrated that workers solidarity is live and outspoken in Houston.

The workers, predominantly from Mexico, were so encouraged by the outpouring of support that, as they waited for jobs, they started joining in the rallies, carrying signs and giving impromptu talks to the crowd. Several times cars,

filled with families with children who happened to be driving by, stopped and joined the rally.

On the sixth week, the racists never appeared. "This is a small victory in a big battle," said Cristobal Hinojosa, an organizer with Mexicans in Action. "The first few weeks, the workers were a little nervous. As soon as they saw support from the community, including African

Americans and whites, they were more courageous and started joining the counter protests with us."

One of the workers who spoke this past week told the crowd, "We are not criminals. We are not terrorists. We only want to work for our families." Activists plan to confront the Border Watch until they stop terrorizing workers in Houston.

—Gloria Rubac

Call to organize for May Day 2007

The following is a call for a national conference on Feb 3-4 in Los Angeles to organize the Great American Boycott II, which will be held on May 1. The call has been endorsed by immigrants and immigrant advocates, labor activists, students, anti-war activists and more. Visit www.march25coalition.org for more information.

On Election Day, Nov. 7, 2006, the Iraq war, corruption and a lack of immigration reform took center stage. The electorate spoke and the extreme right lost control of Congress; the Democrats are the new majority.

The correlation of forces has changed and there is a new political reality, but as history tells, the Democrats are part of the "Empire." They will not end the war. Corruption and record profits will continue to soar. An inclusive, pro-immigrant, non-corporate immigration reform will not be addressed unless we march and boycott as we did in 2006.

On May Day 2006 history was made. The world watched as millions marched and boycotted the economy. We shut down the economy in several key cities, states and border entries. In Los Angeles alone we shut down the ports, trucking, taxis, construction, public transportation, agriculture, gardening, home-care and day care work, small and chain restaurants and stores, factories, the garment and meat industries, offices, etc.

In the Midwest meatpacking and auto

parts plants were shut; in Florida, agriculture and construction. In El Paso, Texas, 40,000 migrant workers refused to cross the border. In New York; Chicago; San Francisco; Oakland, Calif.; Phoenix; Tucson, Ariz.; San Jose, Calif.; San Antonio; Orange County, Calif.; San Diego; and many other cities, the boycott succeeded. Students walked out, businesses closed and the people refused to buy. In Mexico, Central America and in many other countries U.S. corporations were targeted by millions of workers. It was truly a day without immigrants.

We have begun to debate and plan for a new round of protests and a nationwide boycott starting May 1. This time, we hope to protest not just one day, but more. Why? To assure the immigrant rights forces give voice to and empower the tens of millions of immigrants in the U.S., it is imperative to have broad-based representation

from all immigrant groups in order to move the immigration reform agenda: unconditional legalization for all immigrants. We represent the Central and South American, the Mexican, the South Asian, Pacific, East Asian, Caribbean and African immigrant communities, the undocumented Irish, Eastern European, Muslim and Middle Eastern immigrants, and stand with the Native Americans, the victims of Katrina, the women, youth, students, unionists, anti-war activists and clergy who are together demanding a better country where all can live decent lives, free of fear and deprivation.

To plan this effort, to decide the demands, the preparation and the plan of



March 25th Coalition sponsors National Conference on Feb 3 & 4 in Los Angeles to Organize The Great American Boycott II, May 1, 2007. The Conference will be held at Loyola Law School, located at 919 Albany St. in downtown Los Angeles, CA.

action, we are calling activists to a May Day Planning Conference in Los Angeles. We will assess what we have done, debate how to broaden the movement, educate ourselves on the situation facing us and democratically make decisions. We intend to put this effort in the context of the history of the immigrant and workers movements in this country, to link

it to allies internationally, and to address the root causes of mass migration in the policies of globalization. Join with us in this effort and make May Day another truly historical day. □

Boston forum hears what's behind immigration



Boston Workers World forum participants.

WW PHOTO: LIZ GREEN

Filipinos are the third biggest immigrant population in the United States. It is not that the United States has so many jobs, Ellorin said, but that people must earn dollars in order to survive. It is not just about themselves but "for their children to be able to eat three meals a day."

Filipino people working in the United States send home tens of millions of dollars every year.

Gutierrez pointed out that Filipino people were in the forefront of building the great immigrant-rights demonstrations in this country on May Day last year. She emphasized the need for everyone to be actively involved in supporting national actions on May Day 2007.

"Building May Day 2007 is a worldwide act of solidarity with all working people," she said.

Mahtowin Munro of United American Indians of New England chaired the forum and discussed the critical historical contributions of Filipino activists and trade unionists in this country. Other speakers included Jaime Moreno Jr. of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers, Sara Mokuria of the Hector Rivas Support Committee, and the Rev. Franklin Hobbs Director of HIV State of Emergency Committee.

—Workers World Boston bureau

Family & Medical Leave Act

Continued from page 4

workers to take unpaid leave to care for newborns and adopted children or deal with personal illness or sick family members for the past 14 years.

Given the type of issues raised by the Department of Labor, the Communication Workers warns in a Jan. 19 press release that many important benefits in FMLA are in jeopardy of being severely weakened or eliminated. For instance, the Department of Labor is looking to change criteria of who is entitled to take FMLA leave, of "serious health conditions" that qualify for FMLA protection or of medical certification requirements. The last change is designed to make it easier for employers to oppose an employee's doctor's recommendation.

In addition to soliciting comments from organizations, the Department of Labor has requested personal stories. The CWA suggests individuals write testimonials showing how FMLA helped them balance work and personal illness, provide for family health needs and keep their jobs. To find out more about this important campaign, go to www.cwa-union.org and click on the related item under What's New. To submit comments, go to www.cwa-union.org/action/fmla.html. □

Recently elected BAYAN USA Secretary General Bernadette Ellorin and Workers World secretariat member Teresa Gutierrez were featured speakers at the Jan. 20 Workers World Forum in Boston, "U.S. Imperialism and the War against Immigrants." The two had recently returned from a fact-finding delegation to the Philippines.

Many in the packed hall were learning for the first time about the history of the Filipino people's resistance against U.S. repression and domination, both in their home country and here in the United States. Ellorin said that 800 members of BAYAN have been murdered in the recent past by the government of Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a client of U.S. imperialism who is helping Bush carry out the so-called war against terror, in this case the war against the people of the Philippines.

BAYAN, Ellorin explained, is an alliance of progressive and communist organizations that successfully ousted the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Now various resistance movements in the country continue to fight both within a legal framework and through armed struggle.

The two keynote speakers emphasized the point, which was echoed during the discussion, that people leave their home countries to emigrate to the United States not because they want to change their surroundings, but because the economic devastation at home forces them out. U.S. imperialist penetration through banks and corporations creates this economic devastation.

Ellorin told the audience that most people in the Philippines are paid only \$1 a day. Three thousand people leave the islands every single day looking for work in other countries.

'Not one more penny for war'

Michigan anti-war movement confronts Sen. Carl Levin

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI) in Detroit, as well as anti-war organizations in Saginaw, Grand Rapids and Lansing, Mich., picketed the offices of Sen. Carl Levin, the Democratic chair of the Armed Services Committee on Jan. 19 to demand that he take action to take U.S. troops out of Iraq.

MECAWI organizer Jerry Goldberg told Workers World, "The demonstration against Senator Levin is the first action in a campaign we are launching, in conjunction with the national Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC), to demand that Congress, and especially the Democrats, live up to their Congressional mandate to end the war in Iraq. The way to do this is for Congress to immediately cut off all funds for the war and bring the troops home now.

"We are encouraged that this week two resolutions introduced into Congress, HR 455 and HR 508, move in that direction. HR 508, introduced by congresspersons

Woolsey, Barbara Lee and Maxine Waters, calls for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military contractors from Iraq within six months, and limits funding for the troops to bringing them home now."

Goldberg continued: "The war in Iraq has already cost the people of Michigan \$9.5 billion and the city of Detroit alone \$600 million in stolen tax revenues. We are demanding that those funds be allocated instead to meet the needs of the people of Michigan who are facing an unprecedented economic crisis."

A recent study by University of Michigan economists Joan Crary, George Fulton and Saul Hymans pointed out that Michigan has lost more than 336,000 jobs in the past six years and is expected to lose another 33,000 jobs in the next two years. That would make it the longest stretch of job loss in the state since the 1929 stock market crash. The U. of M. study assessed: "Michigan is being battered by one of the most tenacious economic storms ever confronted by its citizenry. ... At no time, or at least as far back as the records take us, has the state endured such a drawn-out disturbance."

The consequences of this massive job loss have been dire. Some 47,000 Detroit households have had their water cut off. Wayne County had the most foreclosed properties in the U.S. in the second quarter of 2006. Statewide, the number of homes in some stage of foreclosure tripled in September 2006 from a year earlier.

An Aug. 30, 2005, report from the Michigan League of Human Services indicated that in 2003-2004 child poverty in Michigan was suffered by 18 percent of the state's children. Some 48 percent of Detroit's children live in poverty. The state is facing an \$800 million budgetary shortfall and is projecting a \$224-per-student reduction in school aid at a time when Detroit is already shutting down 51 schools.

MECAWI is planning to picket Gov. Jennifer Granholm's State of the State address in Lansing on Feb. 6 and demand that the governor exercise her emergency powers to declare a State of Economic Disaster pursuant to MCL 30.401, et seq. This law gives the governor emergency powers to meet the crisis. MECAWI is demanding that the governor exercise her authority to

declare an immediate moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, utility shut-offs, school closings, plant shutdowns and lay-offs.

MECAWI points out that in the 1930s a moratorium prevented foreclosures for seven years during the depression. "While the moratorium is in effect, the people of Michigan will have time to go and stay in Washington and protest until the stolen war funding is restored to the state," said Goldberg.

For Feb. 17, at 1:00 p.m., MECAWI has announced a town hall meeting to take place at Central Methodist Church in downtown Detroit. The theme of the meeting is "Not one more penny for the war." Community members are being invited to bring the bills they can't pay to this meeting, and to testify on the economic effects of the Iraq war.

MECAWI is also organizing for the March 17, 2007, march on Washington to cut off the funding for war, bring the troops home now, and demand the billions in war spending be utilized instead to meet human needs at home.

For more information visit www.mecawi.org. □

People's Peace Conference: Newark leads on!

By Erik-Anders Nilsson
Newark, N.J.

On Jan. 20, Newark, N.J., hosted the inspiring, spirited "People's Peace Conference," officially titled, "The U.S. War in Iraq & Our Communities; Breaking the Silence: The Grassroots Speak."

Hundreds of activists of all ages and nationalities came out in the bitter cold to attend the free all-day conference, organized by longtime activist Larry Hamm and his organization, People's Organization for Progress.

More than 110 organizations and progressive politicians—the vast majority people and organizations of color—sponsored the event. These include the New Black Panther Party, New Jersey State Conference NAACP, People's Organization for Progress, Bethany Baptist Church, Irvington, N.J., Mayor Wayne Smith, Jersey City Peace Movement, Troops Out Now Coalition, New Jersey Solidarity - Activists for the Liberation of Palestine, National Action Network-NJ, WBAI Radio, City Belt magazine, and the



PHOTO:ERIK-ANDERS NILSSON
Amiri Baraka

Rutgers-Newark National Lawyers Guild.

The day began with speeches from Newark Teachers Association President Annette Alston, Association of Black Law Students President Darryl Scipio and the Rev. William Howard of Bethany Baptist Church.

Participants broke into workshops, and then returned to present resolutions and plans for future actions.

The afternoon session included dynamic talks from New Jersey Peace Action Director Madelyne Hoffman, POP's Larry Hamm and "Like It Is" television host and reporter Gil Noble.

Also in attendance were former Newark, N.J., Mayor Sharpe James, WBAI's Bernard White, Pam Africa, Troops Out Now Coalition's Larry Holmes, Dr. Leonard Jeffries and Assemblymember Craig Stanley.

Hamm said: "My personal message [to anti-war activists] would be that we have to do everything we can to bring this war to an end and redirect the resources being used for war to the needs of the masses of the people. People need affordable hous-

ing, jobs with a living wage, quality education ... and so much more.

"We have to do significant outreach to communities of color and involve them in the peace movement—not from a single perspective of the war, but to broaden our perspective so that people understand how this war is affecting their day-to-day lives."

International Action Center Co-Director Sara Flounders commented, "This conference, of an enormous number of community activists, shows the way to go." Regarding youth, Flounders urged more attention be paid to recruiting stations and schools.

Veterans for Peace organizer Michael Kramer said, "We call on people throughout New Jersey to look at their high schools and demand the ROTC get out and have the money be spent for educational opportunities."

More for war, less for hum

Continued from page 1

death, misery and suffering to the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond says it wants to "save the people of Darfur." He failed to mention Somalia, where it was acknowledged on Jan. 24 that U.S. Special Forces had just launched another attack.

Bush pushed for the strengthening of the No Child Left Behind Act, which has been criticized repeatedly by major teachers' unions such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. NCLB focuses narrowly on standardized testing at the expense of critical thinking skills, hasn't even been fully funded since its inception, and allows military recruiters access not only to educational facilities but to the contact information of every student who does not opt out.

The military recruiting aspect of NCLB fits in nicely with another of Bush's goals: increasing the size of the military by 92,000 over five years.

With regard to health care, Bush acknowledged that "government has an obligation to care for the elderly, the disabled and poor children," but added that "For all other Americans, private health

In a rousing speech, Amiri Baraka stated, "You cannot fight for peace unless you fight imperialism!" He explained that you can't fight racism without fighting imperialism, and observed that the U.S. military brought lynching to Baghdad: "We saw lynching in Mississippi, now we've got to see it in Baghdad."

Throughout the talks were calls to bring the troops home immediately, to impeach Bush and Cheney, to demand the Democrats stop being weak and evasive and end all funding for the wars, and to work to end militarism and imperialism.

Gil Noble declared, "A man dies when he does not stand up for what's right."

At the open microphone, one sister—noting the seriousness of the current national political climate and large number of activists gathered there—declared, "We're the ones we've been waiting for!" □

insurance is the best way to meet their needs." Yet it is precisely because the for-profit health care system is so inefficient and so expensive that 47 million people are now uninsured in this country. He has proposed a tax deduction for those who buy their own health insurance. It is doubtful that those who can't afford health care now will find it any more affordable under the Bush plan.

In an ominous threat to immigrants, Bush announced the doubling of the size of the Border Patrol and the funding of "new infrastructure and technology," saying that immigration laws would also be enforced at the work site—like the December military-style raids that occurred at the Swift and Co. meatpacking factories, which criminalized people based on skin color and separated children from their families. (Workers World, Dec. 21) Even as Bush was speaking, ICE was carrying out similar massive raids and deportations of undocumented workers in Southern California.

Bush urged a temporary worker program that would simply be a revisit of the Bracero Program, which stole money from immigrant workers through sav-



Help us send this new book to press in time for Black History Month

The popular "Marxism, Reparations and the Black Freedom Struggle" pamphlet will be expanded into a spine book with color plates in time for February's Black History Month, but we need your financial help to make it a reality.

Marxism, Reparations & the Black Freedom Struggle

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- Hurricane Katrina
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Funds are needed right away to help get this book published & distributed to high schools, college campuses, libraries, union halls and elsewhere.

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Naked colonialism

Iraq's new oil law: not even a fig leaf

By Deirdre Griswold

It hadn't even been seen by Iraqi legislators yet, but details of a new "Iraqi" hydrocarbons law, drafted in reality by U.S. contractors, were revealed Jan. 7 in the Independent, a major London newspaper that has been critical of the Iraq war.

Once information about the leaked document got out, it was condemned around the world as an unprecedented giveaway to the multinational oil companies—in particular, those based in the U.S. and Britain.

"Its provisions are a radical departure from the norm for developing countries," wrote the Independent. "[U]nder a system known as 'production-sharing agreements,' or PSAs, oil majors such as BP and Shell in Britain, and Exxon and Chevron in the U.S., would be able to sign deals of up to 30 years to extract Iraq's oil.

"PSAs allow a country to retain legal ownership of its oil, but give a share of profits to the international companies that invest in infrastructure and operation of the wells, pipelines and refineries. Their introduction would be a first for a major Middle Eastern oil producer. Saudi Arabia and Iran, the world's number one and two oil exporters, both tightly control their industries through state-owned companies with no appreciable foreign collaboration, as do most members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC."

Iraq has the third-largest proven oil reserves in the world.

The article quoted Greg Muttitt of Platform, a human rights and environmental group that monitors the oil industry. "He said the new legislation was drafted with the assistance of BearingPoint, an American consultancy firm hired by the U.S. government, which had a representative working in the American Embassy in Baghdad for several months."

Muttitt added: "Three outside groups have had far more opportunity to scrutinize this legislation than most Iraqis. The draft



went to the U.S. government and major oil companies in July, and to the International Monetary Fund in September. Last month I met a group of 20 Iraqi MPs in Jordan, and I asked them how many had seen the legislation. Only one had."

BearingPoint is based in McLean, Va., conveniently close to the CIA. Its most lucrative contracts come from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has provided funding cover for many CIA activities in the past. According to a Jan. 14 article in the Independent, "Across the world, BearingPoint has become, thanks to USAID funding, a part of the U.S. government's strategy of spreading free-market reforms to developing countries and America's allies."

The Center for Public Integrity says that, since 2003, BearingPoint has had a \$240 million contract with USAID to "facilitate Iraq's economic recovery." It has collected another \$100 million for its activities in Afghanistan. It also has won USAID contracts for post-war reconstruction in El Salvador, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

While the misery caused by war may put money in BearingPoint's pockets, it seems that the buck stops there.

A wrenching story about Afghanistan in the Washington Post on Jan. 22 described the death of a child in an unheated Kabul apartment. "It is a season of unrelenting harshness for tens of thousands of poor families, focused on the struggle to survive. People spend their days scrounging to buy a few chunks of coal or firewood. ... More than five years after the U.S.-led overthrow of Islamic Taliban rule and the advent of an internationally backed civilian government, the country is still so destitute and undeveloped that most inhabitants have no central heating, electricity or running water."

During the "recovery" in Iraq that BearingPoint is also being paid for, the population has shrunk by 10 percent. In addition to hundreds of thousands of deaths, almost 2 million Iraqis, unable to take it any more, have left their country. There are no jobs except in the army or police, electricity functions six hours a day and the majority don't even have clean water.

Now, the same company that gave us Iraq's "recovery" has drafted the law that would give the lion's share of Iraq's oil profits to the oil companies that dominate the U.S. government that started

the war that destroyed Iraq that led to BearingPoint's \$240 million contract.

News—or oil company's press release?

So far, the only mentions of the draft law in the U.S. corporate media read like an oil industry press release.

The Wall Street Journal, which has been trying to buck the tide of capitalist pessimism over the war, on Jan. 18 promised its readers lucrative profits ahead: "Iraq's long-awaited hydrocarbons law, which could attract huge investments from foreign oil companies, has been drafted and will be submitted to the cabinet for endorsement next week."

Their real message? "Stay the course! We can't afford to let this great prize slip through our fingers!"

Two days later the supposedly more liberal New York Times also tried to present the law as a positive development for Iraq, saying it "would distribute all revenues through the federal government and grant Baghdad wide powers in exploration, development and awarding major international contracts. ... The draft comes down firmly on the side of central oversight, a decision that advocates for Iraq's unity are likely to trumpet as a triumph."

So this is why more than half a million Iraqis and over 3,000 U.S. troops have died—so Iraq can have a central government that will distribute its oil earnings throughout the country? Anyone with a memory longer than last week will know that just such a central government existed in Iraq before the U.S. invasion.

To the victor belong the spoils. But the U.S./British occupation forces are far from victors. They are in a desperate and losing situation all over Iraq. Pushing through a humiliating law that is yet another assault on Iraqi sovereignty will only make it worse for them.

E-mail: dgriswold@workers.org

Sometime over the next two months Congress will vote on Bush's request for more than \$100-billion-plus for war. This time, we must force Congress to vote NO. It's time to move from protest to resistance.

Sat • Feb • 17th
is
**NO more \$\$\$
for WAR DAY**

Local protests across the country to
**Demand that
Congress votes NO!
to more war funds
\$\$\$ for Jobs - Housing - Healthcare -
Education — not war!**

END THE OCCUPATION — BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW

February 17, National Day of Coordinated Protests across the country to demand that Congress vote no to any further request for funding of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Demonstrations, rallies, teach-ins, hearings, sit-ins and other forms of creative resistance are being planned — Many will be demonstrating at the local offices of members of Congress.

Organize a protest in your locality. To endorse or find out what's happening in your area on Feb. 17, contact us at www.TroopsOutNow.org, 212.633.6646

**TWO
UPCOMING DATES
you need to
know about**

MARCH 17

**March on the Pentagon
on the 4th anniversary of the war**

**Come to Washington—
be prepared to stay**

**Time to move from protest
to resistance — force Congress
to vote no to war funding**

- Immediate, unconditional, & complete withdrawal from Iraq—OUT NOW!
- End colonial occupation & imperialist aggression from Africa to Asia, from Iraq to Palestine, to Afghanistan, to Haiti, to the Philippines, to Puerto Rico
- No new wars against Iran, Syria, Somalia or North Korea
- Hands off Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Lebanon
- Solidarity with immigrant workers and Katrina survivors
- Stop the war at home • Stop racist police terror • Stop ICE raids
- Military recruiters out of our schools and communities
- No draft • Education, not war

The Troops Out Now Coalition is working with the ANSWER Coalition and other forces to build a march on the Pentagon for March 17.

For bus information contact us at:

www.TroopsOutNow.org 212.633.6646

an needs

ings account deductions, and was ended after massive human rights abuses were documented.

For Katrina survivors, he had no words at all. Another glaring omission about the "state of the union" was the state of police terror and the prison system, in a country that incarcerates more prisoners than any other in the world, and where cases of police killings and brutality against people of color and the poor have made recent headlines around the world.

Bush was decidedly speaking to the ruling class with his opening words: "We must have the will to face difficult challenges and determined enemies—and the wisdom to face them together."

However, the struggle for the global working class is no less than this—to unite in the struggle on many fronts against a common, determined enemy: U.S. imperialism.

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CHÁVEZ: 'Venezuela will take socialist path'

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

When Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez first declared he was a socialist during a news conference at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January of 2005, his announcement initiated a political chain reaction both in his country and internationally. The possibility of constructing and struggling for socialism became the focus of discussion for progressives and the excluded masses, particularly in Latin America, who lived in dire misery, victims of the U.S.-led neoliberal onslaught.

In Venezuela, health and education programs called *misiones*, or missions, established with the organizational help of socialist Cuba, have helped counteract capitalist propaganda aimed at demonizing socialism in general and that island nation in particular. The poorest sectors of the population, who had no access to education and health services before the Chávez government, now can easily discard anti-socialist propaganda. They no longer consider the system that has provided them with health care and literacy to be the evil that the imperialists wish to portray.

Since that January 2005, Chávez has said not only that he has become a socialist, but that the course of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution should lead away from capitalism and towards the development of a socialist society. When more than 67 percent of Venezuela's voting population reelected him last Dec. 3, he saw it as a mandate to take the path toward socialism.

But Chávez knows socialism cannot be built by decree. He has instead proposed the "National Project Simón Bolívar 2007-2021," a new phase of the Bolivarian Revolution that will take the path of trying to establish a socialist republic. The project is a comprehensive plan, sort of a "revolution within the revolution," sorely needed if the proposed path is to succeed.

The National Project includes a change of the government cabinet; a constitutional reform; enabling laws that strengthen the executive; the formation of a single party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV); and the nationalization of important sectors of the economy.

As progressive as all the missions are, they do not change the nature of the capi-

talist state. They are simply reforms that improve people's lives. The vast majority of the wealth and means of production are still in private hands. The opposition to Chávez, led by the oligarchy, with its racist, offensive and destabilizing media, along with the church hierarchy, are all aligned to U.S. corporate interests. Even though this opposition is weaker now, it remains a threat to the people.

The socialized and private systems operate side by side now. In health care, for example, the Barrio Adentro missions exist alongside private hospitals. In fact, the revolution developed the missions because the old medical system refused to offer free, quality health care in poor neighborhoods.

On Jan. 8, Chávez inaugurated a new cabinet. Out of 27 ministries, two were brand-new and 15 were to be headed by newly appointed ministers. Jose Vicente Rangel, who had been the vice president for eight years, was replaced and then thanked warmly by Chávez for his service. The new vice president is Jorge Rodríguez.

The replacements represent not just a change of ministers but a change in job description and direction. Even the names have been changed, so that the Ministry of Defense will now be called the People's Power of Defense, and similarly with other ministries. On inauguration day, Chávez told the new ministers they should "go to the streets, to the countryside" and "to go unannounced where a project is being developed, everywhere, at any time" in order to make sure that what was planned was actually taking place.

The idea is to battle corruption and inefficiency. He told them that from Thursdays through Sundays they will have to visit different parts of the country, and on Mondays he should receive a summary of those visits from the vice president.

In his most recent "Aló Presidente" program, on Jan. 21, Chávez spoke with Vice President Rodríguez, who was in the state of Delta Amacuro meeting with 275 Communal Councils and listening to the people's worries and complaints there.

Constitutional reform, enabling laws and nationalizations

Chávez said that to carry on this new phase of the revolution, the 1999 Constitution would have to be reformed.

In spite of the Constitution's very progressive nature, it still maintains remnants of the neoliberal Fourth Republic. For example, in the current Constitution are a set of capitalist commerce laws that prevent progressive, people-first programs and trade relations from being put into effect.

Chávez said: "That has to be thrown in the garbage and make way for a trade system for 21st century socialism. For example, all that was privatized must be nationalized. Let us recover the social ownership of the strategic means of production. ... The National Telephone Company, CANTV, let it be nationalized!"

The nationalizations, part and parcel of the New Enabling Laws (Leyes Habilitantes) that Chávez requested from the National Assembly (NA) and that are currently being discussed there, cover several sectors.

In telecommunications, Chávez wants to nationalize CANTV, where the U.S. giant Verizon holds 28.5 percent of the shares. CANTV is the only Venezuelan firm traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Venezuela intends to nationalize all power companies, including Electricidad de Caracas, which is owned by the Arlington, Va.-based AES Corp.

Two other sectors involved are the crude oil field in Orinoco Province, where U.S. companies hold a respectable share, and the mighty Central Bank that up to now has been an autonomous entity. With regard to the bank, Chávez revealed that it had put most of Venezuela's international reserves "in North American banks, and these in turn would lend us that money. They would pay 3 percent interest, and lend it to us at 8 percent and 10 percent interest. All the time it was like that, and nobody here knew it, only the elite who knew about business. ... The Bank of Venezuela cannot be autonomous."

Proposal for unified socialist party

Stating that a single party is necessary to lead the country towards the changes needed, Chávez proposed that all the parties that have backed the revolution should unite in one party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). "Not an alphabet soup," he said. There are upwards of 20 parties supporting the revolution, including the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), the Homeland for All (PPT) and the

Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR), Chávez's electoral party. Representatives of these parties have been participating in Chávez's government. For example, current Vice President Jorge Rodríguez is from the PCV.

This proposal is being discussed within all the parties. The PCV, for example, will hold its congress at the beginning of March to discuss the affiliation, since it would mean the dissolution of a party that has been in existence for more than 75 years. To that effect, the PCV had an interesting statement on its website, dated Jan. 22:

"Carlos Aquino, member of the Central Committee of the PCV, emphasized that the Communist Party is not an end in itself, because for the Marxists the revolutionary party is the means the working class can use for the taking of power, the revolution and the construction of socialism.

"To that matter he said: 'For the Communist, the abbreviation is not something that stifles us, undoubtedly we have a deep attachment and feeling of identification with that abbreviation [PCV] that for almost 76 years has been close to the struggles of the Venezuelan people, but it is not something that stifles or determines our participation in the formation of greater unity, one that contributes to the construction of socialism.'

Chávez's proposal for the PSUV is still in the works in terms of its detailed construction. But it is clear that the plan calls for the full participation of the masses. In his speech he stated, "I have been working a great deal on the model, how this united party is going to be formed: from the bases, elections from the bases! Nobody, nobody, will be a director or in command unless chosen from the bases."

When he refers to the bases, the masses, he is referring to the Communal Councils. These are neighborhood forms of organization that are meant to exercise People's Power from below. The Councils are elected by the Citizens' Assemblies, organizations of people living in a particular neighborhood who meet regularly to discuss and plan around the issues that involve their community.

Next: More on nationalization, the Five Motors of the Bolivarian Revolution, presidential elections for an indefinite term, international relations and the U.S. reaction.

Uribe regime exposed as

Colombia's paramilitary scandal grows

By David Hoskins

Salvatore Mancuso, a former top warlord of the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), has admitted in closed court testimony in Medellín that AUC death squads intimidated voters to cast ballots for right-wing President Álvaro Uribe in 2002.

Mancuso confessed to personally ordering a series of kidnappings, mass murders and targeted assassinations throughout his tenure as an AUC leader. The AUC was initially formed by wealthy landowners and their politico-military allies in order to suppress the people's progressive demands for real democracy and equitable land redistribution.

This confirmation of paramilitary collaboration in Uribe's victory has rattled

the government. The Uribe administration finds itself further entangled in a scandal engulfing the country involving links between paramilitaries and political figures.

Uribe is a close ally of the Bush administration. Under his regime Colombia has been the largest recipient of U.S. aid outside of the Middle East. Much of that aid is sent through Washington's Plan Colombia, which provides the government with military equipment to use against trade unionists and impoverished coca growers.

As Mancuso's trial progresses, the world is beginning to learn the extent of cooperation between the AUC and Colombia's military officers and politicians.

Mancuso admitted that he had coordinated with the former commander of

the army's Fourth Brigade, the late Gen. Alfonso Monosalva, to launch a 1997 operation in El Aro of Antioquia department that resulted in the deaths of 15 civilians.

Uribe is a former governor of Antioquia, where the AUC was able to secure its strongest grip over northern Colombia in the late 1990s. While he publicly denies charges that he cooperated with the AUC to win his 2002 election, Uribe has admitted to meeting with Mancuso on more than one occasion in the past.

The court proceedings have brought to light a signed agreement between Mancuso and 11 members of Congress, two provincial governors and five mayors from the Atlantic coast region. The agreement pledged cooperation between various levels of government and the AUC criminals. The politicians signing the document were

from a number of different political parties representing different forces in Colombia's ruling-class political spectrum.

In November the Colombian Supreme Court issued arrest warrants against two senators and a representative on charges of conspiring with AUC death squads to terrorize the civilian population into submission.

Sen. Alvaro Araujo, who is under investigation for ties with the AUC, is a brother of Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo—a high-ranking member of the Uribe administration's cabinet.

The news that Colombia's ruling class is willing to use force to affect the outcome of the electoral process may come as a surprise to some in the United States but it is certainly no shock to Colombia's workers

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Latin American forum says no to U.S. imperialism

By Heather Cottin
San Salvador, El Salvador

Left parties and organizations from all over Latin America and the Caribbean and their allies converged in San Salvador Jan. 12-15 for the Sao Paulo Forum XIII, an ongoing meeting whose first session was in Brazil in 1990.

They called this forum "A New Stage of the Struggle for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean." Over 500 delegates from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Guatemala, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Curacao, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico (including Oaxaca), Peru, Chile, and Colombia discussed the need to combat U.S. imperialism and neoliberalism, the "globalization" policies ravaging the Third World.

Outside the forum one could observe the impact of neoliberal policies. Salvadorans who work in factories called "maquilas," owned by capitalists in the imperialist countries (the U.S. and Western Europe) are paid \$4 a day. The rest survive on \$2 a day. People in the countryside have no running water, no clean water, no medical care or free schools.

Although the delegates had political differences, the theme of the four-day forum was unity and support for all the left parties and formations in the region.

The forum delegates were ebullient as Raphael Correa was about to be inaugurated as Ecuador's president, and Daniel Ortega, who had led Nicaragua during the

Sandinista period, had just been inaugurated Jan. 11. Ortega had announced then that Nicaragua was leaving the neoliberal Central American Free Trade Agreement and had signed the ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas) accords as Cuban Vice-President José Ramón Machado, Bolivia's President Evo Morales and Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez embraced him.

At the Sao Paulo Forum, the Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front of El Salvador (FMLN) General Coordinator Medardo González, said, "Today we are in position to affect the defeat of neoliberalism, and not just to defeat it, but to overcome it and to construct a new model for Latin America and the Caribbean."

The four major points of agreement, which were unanimously accepted on the last day of the conference, called for fundamental structural reforms that would improve society and the creation of an economic alternative to neoliberalism. They called for national sovereignty and cooperation among the people and countries of the region who embrace this project for continental integration.

Beyond this, the forum denounced U.S. imperialist doctrine, which promotes poverty, militarization and colonialism, especially in Puerto Rico and the other



Salvadoran crowd celebrates forum.

WW PHOTO: HEATHER COTTIN

the Caribbean.

Speakers from Germany, Italy, Norway, Catalonia and Portugal commended the unity apparent in the Latin American and Caribbean left. Speakers from Vietnam, Palestine and China spoke as well, all of them supporting unity against U.S. imperialism and Israeli Zionism, condemning the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and against the people of Lebanon.

In the amphitheatre on Jan. 14 the forum participants were greeted by thousands of FMLN activists bused in from all parts of El Salvador to celebrate the success of this new direction in Latin America. Signs supporting the Cuban, Venezuelan, Bolivian and Ecuadorian struggles were displayed among the FMLN banners in a sea of red shirts and banners.

They cheered their hearts out when Freddy Bernal, the mayor of Caracas, the Venezuelan capital, said: "If we don't take this road to socialism, the other is the road toward exclusion, death and misery. It is the road that the United States has forced us to walk on for so many years. There is now a change in Latin America, a change made by the left, and it represents a rebirth of hope for the people who never tire of the struggle." □

remaining ten colonies in the Caribbean. The final declaration called for genuine political, social and economic democracy, sustainable development and full equality for all human beings.

The women's caucus, made up of women from Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and North America, met to denounce imperialism's exploitation of women, in the maquilas, in the countryside and in the sex trade.

The women's final document stated categorically, "Capitalism cannot resolve the problems of humanity ... nor support the family. Capitalism humanizes neither men nor women." Their resolution said, "Socialism and democracy are possible only when women take an active part in taking decisions" in Latin America and

Solidarity requested in effort to extradite ex-president

By Mark Burton

The National Lawyers Guild sent a delegation to Bolivia this January to study the political and legal situation in this South American country, especially the legal and political issue of the extradition to Bolivia of the ex-president of Bolivia, Sánchez de Lozada, from the United States.

Continued from page 8
and farmers.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been waging an historic struggle for decades to protect poor and working Colombians against the violence of the capitalist state and the terror groups that do its extra-legal dirty work.

In 1985 FARC entered into a ceasefire as part of peace negotiations with former President Belisario Betancur. At that time FARC founded a political party called the Patriotic Union (UP). But UP candidates and activists, including hundreds who had been elected to office, were brutally murdered by an alliance of drug lords, paramilitary fighters and the Colombian military.

Attacks on UP officials contributed to the breakdown of peace talks and by 2002 the party had been decimated and legally disbanded.

The most recent scandal only proves what Colombian workers and farmers have known for years—there is no limit to the crimes and atrocities the Colombian ruling class will commit in order to maintain political power. This systematic repression made it impossible for the Colombian worker and farmer leaders to safely intervene in the political arena and many chose to wage instead a revolutionary resistance struggle, which is now led by FARC. □

The delegation met with the Comité Impulsor, a group of lawyers and activists working towards the extradition of their ex-president. Rogelio Mayta, the lead attorney, explained the historical background of the case for extradition.

President Sánchez was elected in 2002 with strong support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and influential circles in the United States. Sánchez immediately began implementing policies, such as privatization of national industries, as demanded by the IMF. In 2003, President Sánchez planned a massive sell-off of Bolivia's natural gas reserves to U.S. interests with the planned shipment to go through Chilean ports, which sparked protests and road blockades. Sánchez sent the army in to clear the blockades in a military operation that ended with the massacre of eight persons in the altiplano town of Serata.

Rather than quiet the protest, the government's actions provoked more strikes, blockades, protests and hunger strikes. These actions effectively blocked gas supplies from reaching the capital. By decree, Sánchez ordered his military to carry out actions against the Bolivian people, ostensibly to bring gas to the capital.

This decree unleashed a wave of military attacks against Bolivia's Indigenous community in September and October of 2003, and by the end of the military repression 67 people had been killed. The uprising continued with more intensity, and Sánchez was forced to flee the country. It is alleged that on his way to the U.S., Sánchez took \$1.5 million from the Bolivian Treasury.

Mayta highlighted the vast amount of work that has gone into the extradition proceedings, which included reviewing hundreds of documents, orders and

Relatives of victims of Bolivian ex-president demand his return.

PHOTO: MARK BURTON

decrees signed by Sánchez, and unclassified military documents. Over 100 witnesses have testified in court proceedings. As required under Bolivian law, two-thirds of the congress approved the indictment of Sánchez, showing the widespread support in Bolivia for his extradition. Bolivia is now working on a formal extradition request.

Meeting families of the victims

The delegation also had a tearful meeting with members of an association of people whose family members were killed during the Sánchez repression. One person described how her husband was shot while asleep in his house. The members of the association showed us the gravesites of their victimized family members and personally pointed out areas of their city where Bolivian troops massed against the local population.

Juan Patricio Quispe, who spoke for the committee, asked the delegation to take their stories back to the United States to help the campaign to extradite Sánchez. He emphasized that no amount of restitution will bring their loved ones back and that they want Sánchez to answer for his crimes in Bolivia.

The Bush administration has refused to serve notice of the extradition proceedings on Sánchez, and many Bolivians believe that only solidarity from people in the U.S. will force the Bush administration to comply with their extradition request. Mayta, of Comité Impulsor, explained that pow-



erful interests in the U.S. protect Sánchez as he has a close business and personal relationship with the Rockefeller family. Bill Clinton's campaign manager James Carville worked on Sánchez' election campaign and Sánchez currently confers with Greg Craig, who defended Clinton during the scandal involving Monica Lewinsky.

Bolivians also believe that there are political reasons for U.S. opposition to the extradition of Sánchez. The Morales government has insured that a great majority of the oil and gas revenue stays in the country for public benefit, and these revenues now go towards funding public schools and healthcare for children instead of to the transnational corporations. The government also has recently passed a land reform bill and there are plans to carry out some form of nationalization in the mining sector. Bolivians believe that the U.S. opposes these new developments and may try to stymie the extradition process to politically weaken the Morales government.

The Bolivian people are determined, however, that unlike the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, Sánchez de Lozada will not escape facing his people. The Bolivians are asking people in the U.S. for solidarity. The Bolivia Solidarity Network can be contacted at www.bolivasolidarity.org for more information.

Mark Burton was part of the National Lawyers Guild delegation to Bolivia.

What will bring the troops home?

Continued from page 1

SUV driven by Iraqis in U.S. uniforms penetrated multiple levels of security to enter a base in Karbala, a suburb of Baghdad. They “drove directly to a building housing security officials planning counter-insurgency activity. They opened fire on a meeting in progress, targeting only Americans. After 20 minutes of exchanged gunfire, the attackers got back in their SUV and drove away.” (commondreams.org) Five U.S. military planners were killed.

It confirmed what the commanders already knew—that anti-U.S. sentiment in Iraq is enormous; people wanting to drive out the occupiers are working in every sphere of life. Even the polls show that 80 percent of Iraqis want the U.S. troops out.

So what does it mean when both Republicans and Democrats say that a “stable Iraqi government” must be in place and the Iraqi army and police must take over the “war on terror” before the U.S. can withdraw completely?

The White House has already declared all Iraqi resisters to be terrorists. When the foreign troops are finally forced to withdraw, the puppets put in power by the U.S. will flee or be pulled down by the enraged populace. That’s what happens when colonial regimes are forced out—the collaborators are finished, and those who opposed them take charge.

Thus, to demand a “stable” gov-

ernment, by which the politicians really mean a pro-U.S. government, means the occupation troops will have to stay there indefinitely. The Iraqi people are not going to give up, just as the Palestinians have not given up and the Vietnamese never gave up.

This puts the Democrats who want to put conditions on ending the war in the same camp as those who hatched the invasion and lied to the people about it, from Bush on down. Their “symbolic” vote so far is just for show.

So who will stop the war? The people—here, inside the occupied countries and around the world. The U.S. soldiers who refuse to fight and thereby resist a chain of command that sends young workers to fight rich men’s wars. The civilians who disrupt military recruitment. The community groups that demand money for jobs, education, health care, aid to Katrina survivors and all the other human needs sorely neglected as hundreds of billions get poured down the rat hole of the war machine.

We can’t let up. After Jan. 27 will be nationally coordinated actions on Feb. 17—No More Money for War Day—that target the war budget. Then comes a March to the Pentagon on March 17, the fourth anniversary of the war. In between will be countless acts of protest and resistance on many, many fronts.

Let’s unite our forces to bring all the troops home—not next year or next decade but now! □

Workers v. bankers

People’s strike defies Lebanese regime

By Bill Cecil

Lebanon’s working class showed its power Jan. 23. It shut the country down.

Factories and transportation came to a halt as unorganized workers, youth and the unemployed joined union members in a general strike called by the National Opposition and the General Confederation of Labor. Masses of protesters blocked the country’s main roads and highways with concrete blocks and burning tires.

At least three people died in violent attacks by sectarian gangs organized by supporters of the U.S.-backed Siniora regime. Over 100 were injured, some by bullets. The strike united Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Maronite and Orthodox Christians, and Druze workers in defiance of the unconstitutional government’s attempts to provoke sectarian strife.

The strike paralyzed Beirut and was almost completely effective in the South, including the cities of Saida (Sidon) and Sour (Tyre), and in the Bekaa Valley. But it was also effective in parts of the North and the Shouf Mountains, where pro-regime parties have their social base.

The strikers are protesting an “economic reform plan” the Siniora government wants to impose on Lebanon. The plan includes social service cuts, privatization of electricity and telecommunications, and a huge sales tax.

The regime is trying to please international bankers and Western governments that are holding a conference on Lebanon’s \$45 billion debt in Paris later this week. U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said the conference would be a “huge show of support” for the Siniora regime.

The labor movement supports the National Opposition movement’s demand for a representative national unity government and early elections. Nearly half of Lebanon’s population joined in opposition demonstrations in Beirut in December. Since then, Opposition supporters have been camped in a tent city in central Beirut’s two main squares.

On Jan. 22, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, general secretary of Hezbollah, a leading opposition party, called on all Lebanese to take part in the strike. He accused the regime of

trying to retain power by provoking Sunni-Shiite civil war. Hezbollah is based among Shiite Muslims, Lebanon’s largest and poorest group. But it has wide popular support because its forces defended Lebanon against last summer’s U.S.-funded Israeli invasion.

On the evening of Jan. 23 Gen. Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, another leading Opposition party, declared the strike a success. He said the Opposition would soon announce the next steps in its campaign for democracy. People’s Movement leader Najah Wakim also hailed the strike as a success and said the movement would not retreat in the face of the regime’s threats of violence.

Leaks have revealed the Siniora regime encouraged the 2006 Israeli attack in hopes of destroying the Lebanese Opposition. Israel’s defeat caused Israeli army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz to resign last week.

Lebanon’s workers are defying not only the Siniora regime but also its masters in Washington and on Wall Street. The U.S. corporate media gives little coverage to the people’s struggle in Lebanon—it challenges the racist stereotypes of the Arab world they spoon-feed people in the U.S. But events there are of grave concern to the oil company government in Washington.

In December the Bush regime directed the CIA to launch operations against Hezbollah. The Pentagon has been arming and building up Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces, which are controlled by Siniora. The Siniora government has been afraid to use the regular army to attack the Opposition, which represents the majority of Lebanese.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Burns reiterated U.S. support for the Siniora government against the Lebanese people’s movement. For Washington, support for Siniora is not only a matter of imposing pro-Wall Street economic policies on Lebanon. It sees a national unity government in Lebanon as an obstacle to its plans to launch war against Iran and Syria.

The White House, the Pentagon and Wall Street are clear whose side they are on. Labor, anti-racist and anti-war forces in the U.S. should stand in solidarity with the people of Lebanon against the Bush regime’s attempts to crush their struggle. □

Campaign to aid Palestinians

By Bob McCubbin
Carlsbad, Calif.

The West Coast Refugee Support Committee of Al-Awda—Palestine Right to Return Coalition hosted a meeting at the new North San Diego County Al-Awda office to alert the Southern California community to the current situation of Palestinians in Iraq.

Al-Awda leader Zahi Damuni opened the meeting with a short history of how some of the 750,000 Palestinians who were driven east out of their homeland by the Zionists in 1948 eventually ended up in Baghdad, Iraq. These refugees were never officially recognized by the U.N., so their exact number is not known, but it is estimated to be about 34,000.

Now, with the violence in Baghdad making life there intolerable, many Palestinians have joined the flight of Iraqis from that U.S.-occupied city. But unlike the Iraqi refugees, the Palestinians have no passports. As a consequence, large numbers of them have been detained and confined in mid-desert refugee camps at the border with Syria. Some have been living in the hellish conditions of these camps since the U.S. invasion began four years ago.

The populations of these camps include large numbers of men women and children. Medical care for serious illnesses or injuries is largely unavailable. Food supplies are barely adequate. The violence and destruction that the children have experienced mean that many of them are in need of professional psychological care. This care is totally unavailable to them.

A 20-minute video, Nowhere to Flee, provided the meeting with interviews of residents of the camps. Camp residents related, in shocking detail, the horrors they had personally witnessed or suffered and the nightmarish conditions of their present lives. One resident commented, “[This camp] is a graveyard for the living.”

The meeting concluded with an animated discussion of how to help the refugees. Already the Refugee Support Committee has received a response from the Syrian government that it has plans to provide land to build homes for the refugees.

Damuni reminded the audience that the refugees want not just liberation from the camp confinement, but the freedom to go back to their homes ... in Palestine!

For more information on this campaign, visit www.al-awdasandiego.org.



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PHILIPPINES

Detained labor leader says 'We will win'

By Dianne Mathiowetz

Under the guise of supporting the Bush administration's "war on terror," the ruling elite of the Philippines is conducting a vicious and deadly attack on all voices calling for economic and social justice in that country where most people live in desperate poverty.

The government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo stands accused internationally of complicity in the deaths and "disappearances" of hundreds of trade unionists, peasant leaders, human-rights lawyers, women's-rights advocates, youth and urban poor organizers and indigenous activists.

For example, from January to November 2006, paramilitary death squads or Philippine armed forces murdered at least 185 progressives from various movements and organizations. There have been more than 800 political killings during Macapagal-Arroyo's five years in office.

The level of repression is similar to the reign of terror experienced under the brutal, corrupt U.S.-backed regime of Ferdinand Marcos—which was brought down in 1986 by a massive popular resistance and armed struggle.

Arroyo is seen as a willing collaborator with international capital and a servant to U.S. militarism as she seeks to expand the entry of foreign business interests into all areas of the Filipino economy and to reintroduce large numbers of U.S. troops onto Philippine soil.

These violations of provisions enshrined in the 1986 post-Marcos Constitution have created a tremendous outpouring of dissent throughout the Philippines, expressed through many strikes and job actions, demonstrations, land seizures, and continued armed resistance.

It is in the context of this explosive political situation that the arrest and detention of famed Philippine labor leader Crispin Beltran took place on Feb. 25, 2006.

Beltran, known throughout the country as Ka Bel, is highly respected for his more than 50 years of dedication to the interests of poor and working people.

Imprisoned and tortured under the Marcos regime, he served as chair of Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) or May 1st Movement from 1986 to 2001 after the brutal assassination of his predecessor. During the years of the Marcos dictatorship, when strikes were illegal and unions considered "subversive," the KMU stood as the champion of workers. It has grown to have tens of thousands of members in many sectors, particularly at factories and plantations owned by foreign corporations.

Ka Bel was elected to the Philippines House of Representatives in 2001. He promptly introduced various pieces of progressive legislation, including a bill to increase wages for workers. He openly challenged the fraudulent results of the 2004 presidential election of Macapagal-Arroyo and exposed her corruption-ridden government's pro-business, anti-worker policies.



On the day before 20th anniversary celebrations marking the "People's Power Uprising" that drove out Marcos, celebrations expected to draw millions of people across the country, Arroyo claimed that people were plotting a military coup against her. That day, Feb. 24, 2006, she declared a "State of National Emergency," banning all demonstrations and public gatherings and permitting the roundup of activists.

The next day, Crispin Beltran was arrested. He was charged with treason and sedition for allegedly conspiring with disgruntled elements of the military to overthrow her government.

When it became clear that these charges were unsubstantiated, especially since no military officers were similarly charged, the government substituted a decades-old warrant issued during the Marcos era to keep Beltran incarcerated.

Although the Corazon Aquino government—the one that followed Marcos—had already dismissed these old charges and a March 2006 ruling by the Philippines Supreme Court had declared all arrests made under the phony "State of National Emergency" to be unconstitutional, Ka Bel is still in detention.

The 74-year-old activist suffers from ill health. He is currently under guard at a hospital in Manila.

When two members of an International Action Center delegation met with him for more than two hours on Dec. 18, 2006, Ka Bel reached across the bed to shake hands and warmly greeted the U.S. activists as if they were lifelong friends. He spoke a while and then asked for questions. He had the history of the Philippines at his fingertips. He could sketch out the relations between the classes and the role of U.S. imperialism so that anyone could follow. It was easy to see why he was a hero to millions of workers and farmers.

His legislation to raise wages passed the House of Representatives in December 2006 and is now awaiting action in the Senate.

Demands for his immediate release have come from organizations and individuals around the world.

To support freedom for Crispin Beltran (Ka Bel), his supporters ask people to please write to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at Malacanang Palace, JP Laurel St, San Miguel, Manila, Philippines or e-mail corres@op.gov.ph.

Ka Bel maintains an optimistic and determined spirit, declaring his firm conviction to visitors that the people, the toiling masses of the Philippines will win.

The writer was part of an International Action Center delegation that met with Crispin Beltran for several hours last Dec. 18.

Guinea gov't fires on workers general strike

By G. Dunkel

Workers in Guinea (Conakry) went out on an unlimited general strike Jan. 10 with strong popular support. The workers are demanding that Lansana Conté, the president who came to power in 1984 through a coup and who suffers from diabetes, step down because of "ill health." They also protest Conté's ordering the release of two prominent business executives who are his friends from jail on corruption charges. The unions want the endemic corruption and thievery of public funds ended, and the prices of gasoline and basic necessities reduced.

On Jan. 22, troops fired on the strikers and protesters, killing at least 17 people, according to Reuters.

The two people released after 10 days in jail are Mamadou Sylla, the head of the Organization of Employers, and Fodé Soumah, vice-governor of the Central Bank from 1994 to 2004, who were charged with stealing 2 million euros.

Moktar Ba, a reporter for Radio France International in Conakry, the capital of Guinea, says the real reason for the general strike is the people's growing misery. Most people survive on less than \$1 a day—even though Guinea is the world's second biggest producer of bauxite, the source of aluminum, and possesses about one-third of the world's reserves. It also is a major producer of gold.

The union movement called two widely followed general strikes last year.

The strike closed Sangaredi, the main site for the extraction of bauxite, which belongs to the Bauxite Company of Guinea (CBG), a joint venture of a Guinean state-held company with Alcoa, the U.S. transnational and Alcan, the other world producer of aluminum, which is based in Canada. The two transnational corpora-

tions hold a 51-percent stake in the CBG.

To begin the strike, unionists just went into the mine and asked the workers there to shut it down. "The union members came and called on everyone in the offices to leave ... they said if there's no agreement between the state and the unions, the whole chain of production will be halted from Thursday [Jan. 11] onwards," a senior CBG official told Reuters.

The port through which the bauxite is exported is also closed, according to the Mining Journal.

Reuters reported that the price of bauxite on the world's commodity exchanges jumped from \$220 a ton to \$250 to \$280 a ton, but the feeling of the markets was that the supply disruption wouldn't last long.

According to Habibou Bangré, writing in the online newspaper *Afric*, President Conté met with Dr. Ibrahima Fofana, the secretary general of the Guinean Workers Union (UTG), Rabiou Serah Diallo, secretary general of the National Confederation of Guinean Workers (CNTG), and some other community and labor leaders during the first week of the strike.

"Instead of negotiating, Conté threatened to do them harm, to beat them, to kill them," a member of the Nation Council of



A blog from Guinea (<http://www.observeur-guinee.com/>) has a number of appeals to the army and the cops not to fire on the people and is calling for the people to fraternize with the soldiers and explain the reasons for the protests.

The latest communiqué (no. 33) from the joint committee coordinating the general strike makes it clear that the labor movement intends as of Jan. 22 to continue the struggle: "We are not going to back down after so many deaths. We are not going to hesitate when the international community is mobilizing to aid us.

We must carry on to the end.

"We congratulate and encourage the Guinean people, particularly the youth, and bow sincerely to the memory of the martyrs fallen under the bullets of the forces of order, and reassure them that their sacrifice will not be in vain. There will be a massive march Monday, Jan. 22, in Conakry beginning at 9 a.m."

The communiqué goes on to call on the regional committees and union confederations to hold marches at the same time.

It ends with: "Stay strong! The strike will continue until total victory. Let us mobilize together to save our country from its peril." □

Civil Society who was present told Bangré. According to Fofana's report of the meeting, the president said: "I am considering having all of you killed. I have already killed, I am still capable of killing but I do not know when I am going to do it."

Over the 10 days of the strike, the cops and the army have broken up various marches and demonstrations throughout the country with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. Around 20 people have been killed, and according to the RFI, hundreds have been arrested. Still the head cops have been saying that they have been acting to protect the demonstrators against counter-protesters.

¡Proletarios y oprimidos de todos los países, uníos!

La armada naval se prepara

La pandilla de Bush va hacia una guerra contra Irán

Por Sara Flounders

Frente al creciente desastre de la ocupación de Irak por los Estados Unidos, la administración de Bush se está movilizándose hacia otra aventura—una guerra contra Irán.

El posicionamiento de un segundo portaaviones, con sus destructores, submarinos, misiles y aviones de combate en el Golfo, junto con el nombramiento del Almirante William Fallon de la Armada Naval para reemplazar al General del ejército John Abizaid como cabecilla del Comando Central, son señas ominosas de los planes del Pentágono.

Este desplazamiento de equipos mortales y este cambio de comando no tienen relevancia para la lucha contra los insurgentes iraquíes en las calles de Bagdad o Faluya.

Un paquete de sanciones opresivas contra Irán demandadas por Washington que han sido aprobadas por el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, parece ser parte de las preparaciones de guerra, al igual que las pasadas resoluciones de la ONU contra Irak sirvieron para crear una atmósfera de guerra.

El discurso de George W. Bush el 10 de enero explicando su nueva estrategia para Irak directamente amenazó a Siria e Irán. Bush acusó a ambos países de no hacer lo suficiente para evitar que los insurgentes cruzaran la frontera hacia Irak y además les acusó de proveer armas y personal para ayudar a la insurgencia.

Casi inmediatamente después del discurso de Bush, ocurrió el primer acto de su nueva estrategia. Esta fue el provocador allanamiento de las oficinas consulares de Irán y la captura de los oficiales diplomáticos en la ciudad iraquí de Irbil. Las leyes internacionales dictan que cualquier ataque contra el cuerpo diplomático y sus oficinas sea considerado como un acto de guerra.

Al día siguiente, en vez de culpar a oficiales menores, la Secretaria del Estado Condoleezza Rice intensificó la ofensiva, incitando a Irán al declarar que la decisión vino directamente del presidente.

Más y más en Washington y en la prensa capitalista ha salido a relucir especulaciones sobre si el alarde sobre el incremento de las tropas estadounidenses hacia Irak es en realidad una distracción de los planes para poder así lanzar una guerra nueva y más extensa.

Se revelan los planes de guerra

El periódico con base en Kuwait, Arab Times, publicó un reporte el 14 de enero en el cual dice que el ejército estadounidense planea un ataque militar contra Irán antes de abril del 2007.

El reporte escrito por el editor ejecutivo Ahmed al-Jarallah, dijo que el ataque contra Irán estaría dirigido contra las

instalaciones petroleras y nucleares y que sería lanzado desde los barcos de guerra, mientras que a la vez proyectiles “Patriot” supuestamente custodiarían a todos los países árabes en el golfo.

El reporte dijo que la administración de Bush cree que un ataque contra Irán crearía un nuevo balance de poder en la región. Agregó que Bush recientemente tuvo una reunión con el Vicepresidente Dick Cheney, el Secretario de Defensa Robert Gates, la Secretaria de Estado Condoleezza Rice y otros oficiales de la Casa Blanca donde discutieron en detalle el plan de ataque contra Irán.

El reporte del Arab Times fue circulado por la prensa china, los periódicos Xinhua News y China Daily.

Otros medios de comunicación y “blogs” tuvieron reportes similares. Steve Clemons, socio principal y director del Programa de Estrategia Americana en la Fundación Nueva América y editor del blog político La Nota de Washington, escribió que, “los círculos de inteligencia, militares y de asuntos internacionales de Washington están hoy muy ocupados con especulaciones de que el presidente, ayer o en días recientes, envió una orden secreta al secretario de defensa y al director de la CIA para que se lancen operaciones militares contra Siria e Irán.

“El presidente puede haber comenzado una guerra nueva, secreta e informal contra Siria e Irán sin el consentimiento del Congreso o sin ningún diálogo con el país.

“Algunos están insinuando que el ataque contra el consulado puede haber sido diseñado con el intento de provocar una respuesta militar desde Irán y así generar un casus belli para más acción americana”.

Algunos analistas en Washington consideraron el discurso de Bush como una amenaza disfrazada reclamando el derecho para conducir incursiones a través de las fronteras de Irak con Siria e Irán. “Hay un elemento ominoso aquí”, dijo William Arkin del periódico Washington Post. “Cuando el presidente juró ‘andar en busca de redes que apoyan a nuestros enemigos en Irak y destruirlos’, para mí esto significa una amenaza de ataques contra objetivos en estos dos países”.

Comparaciones con la Guerra de Vietnam

Una sección importante de la clase dominante y el establecimiento político está muy preocupada de que las acciones de Bush solo van a servir para aumentar el desastre para el imperialismo estadounidense, pero no tienen un programa alternativo. La política de Bush es el polo contrario de las recomendaciones del Grupo bipartidista de Estudio sobre Irak de Baker y Hamilton que había abogado a favor de rescatar una guerra perdida y desesperada, con aperturas diplomáticas

a Irán y Siria.

Las especulaciones en los medios de comunicación de Washington sobre los planes para desatar una guerra contra Irán se volvieron en tema de debate público cuando el Senador Joseph Biden, el nuevo presidente del Comité de Asuntos Extranjeros del Senado, dijo a la Secretaria de Estado Rice durante una vista sobre Irak el 11 de enero, “Yo creo que la autorización actual otorgando al presidente el uso de fuerza en Irak no incluye eso [un ataque contra Irán] y él sí necesita autorización congresional para hacer eso”.

Rice no excluyó el entrar en Irán ni presentó una posición sobre si la administración necesitaría aprobación congresional o no.

El Senador Chuck Hagel, Republicano y veterano de Vietnam, dijo a Rice, “Nadie en nuestro gobierno puede sentarse aquí hoy y decir al pueblo americano que no vamos a entrar en combate tras sus fronteras con Irak y Siria.

“Cuando nuestro gobierno mintió al pueblo americano y dijo, ‘No vamos a cruzar la frontera con Camboya’ de hecho lo hicimos”, dijo Hagel, refiriéndose a la Guerra de Vietnam. “Entonces, Sra. Secretaria, cuando usted inicia la clase de política de la cual el presidente está hablando aquí, es muy, muy peligroso”.

En el programa televisivo “Esta Semana” del canal ABC el 14 de enero, el Consejero de Seguridad Nacional de Bush, Stephen Hadley rehusó excluir la posibilidad de un ataque contra Irán o decir si estuvo de acuerdo con la posición de Biden y Hagel sobre la autorización congresional.

El peligro no es solamente que el Pentágono vaya a incitar o provocar para que Irán responda militarmente. Hay una creciente posibilidad de que se monte un pretexto semejante al incidente fraudulento del Golfo de Tonkin en Vietnam. En 1964 un presunto ataque sobre buques de guerra estadounidenses por una lancha torpedera de motor vietnamita fue usado por el Presidente Lyndon Johnson para demandar del Congreso la autorización para expandir la guerra en Vietnam.

El 14 de enero, mientras se intensifican las tensiones, la agencia de noticias Xinhua publicó una declaración oficial por la agencia local de noticias Fars en Irán negando reportes de que la armada iraní había estado en conflicto con buques de guerra estadounidenses en la región del Golfo.

Un oficial superior de Hormuzgan, provincia sureña iraní, llamó tales rumores “guerra psicológica” contra Irán emprendida por sus enemigos. Muchos suscriptores de teléfono celular habían recibido mensajes espurios sobre un conflicto militar entre buques de guerra iraníes y estadounidenses en los mares del Golfo.

10.000 objetivos en Irán

Para mediados de enero, los Estados Unidos ya había desplegado dos grupos de portaaviones al Golfo Pérsico. Cada portaavión lleva más de 80 vehículos aéreos de combate, incluyendo F/A-18 Hornets, F-14 Tomcats, SH-60 Seahawks, S-3B Vikings, E-2C Hawkeyes y EA-6B Prowlers, capaces de hacer más de 150 ataques aéreos al día. Además, cada grupo de portaaviones incluye cohetes teledirigidos, fragatas rápidas, destructores de cohetes teledirigidos y submarinos, todos equipados con cohetes “Tomahawk”.

El periódico Guardian en Londres describió el 15 de enero los planes de guerra que el Control Central ha desarrollado. El Pentágono tiene planes de atacar a más de 10.000 objetivos el primer día de una guerra. “No estará limitado a ataques sobre unas pocas fábricas de armas,” dice el Guardian. Los planificadores del Control Central y el Control Estratégico han estado identificando objetivos, estimando cantidades de armas y trabajando en la logística para un ataque por más de un año.

Las guerras estadounidenses contra Irak han resultado en la muerte de más de 2 millones de iraquíes y devastación en el que fue el país más moderno y desarrollado de la región. Sus planes para Irán son igualmente horribles.

La política estadounidense ha sido hostil a la soberanía y al desarrollo de esta rica región. El pueblo iraní nunca se olvidará de los 25 años de dictadura brutal bajo el Sha, instalado por la CIA después del derrocamiento del gobierno de Mossadegh que había sido elegido democráticamente.

Crisis para colaboradores estadounidenses

Los ataques y el peligro de una guerra ampliada han creado una crisis para las dos fuerzas títeres kurda y chiíta en Irak. El Ministro del Exterior iraquí Hoshyar Zebari, un kurdo, hizo un llamado para la liberación de los diplomáticos iraníes retenidos en Irbil. Él dijo que ellos habían estado trabajando en una oficina de coordinación que daba permisos para viajar a la población local y que la oficina funcionaba por muchos años con la aprobación de las autoridades regionales kurdas y con el conocimiento del gobierno iraquí.

En un segundo ataque estadounidense más tarde ese día, tropas estadounidenses trataron de secuestrar a más iraníes dentro del perímetro del aeropuerto de Irbil, pero fueron rodeados por tropas kurdas peshmergas. Casi brota un conflicto armado allí.

El miedo más grande de los colaboradores de los Estados Unidos y los regímenes corruptos que no gozan de popularidad en la región es que una guerra extensa podría traer su ruina total. □