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WORKERS WORLD NEWSPAPER

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Best-kept secret of California fires

Heroic prisoners saved lives

'We save million-dollar homes for a dollar an hour'

By Preston Wood
Los Angeles

The raging wildfires that devastated Southern California for more than 10 days have finally subsided. A line of fire that extended from San Diego to Ventura County is under control. A break in the weather that brought rain and snow to the affected areas helped quell the deadly flames.

Who are the great unsung heroes who risked their lives to save homes and the lives of others? They are prisoner fire fighters. And they earned just \$1 an hour putting their lives on the line.

"We save million-dollar homes for a dollar an hour," said Ricky Frank, a fire fighter who is also a prisoner. (Associated Press, Nov. 3)

More than half of the state's 3,800 full-time wildfire fighters are prisoners. "We wouldn't be half the fire department we are now without them," said Karen Terill, forestry department spokesperson. "I could tell you stories that would bring tears to your eyes. These inmates, making a buck-an-hour, formed a human chain to get people down the hill. After all were safe, the hillside erupted in flame."

The 2,150 prisoners, who were jailed for non-violent offenses like drug possession and theft, also helped many homeowners save their prized possessions from burning buildings about to collapse.

The fires left 20 dead, destroyed more than 690,000 acres and left thousands homeless. Many people have fallen ill of smoke-related respiratory problems. The long-term effects of the fires on the environment and eco-systems of Southern California are still unknown, but are of great concern.

The deadly billows of smoke that blanketed Southern California have unleashed tons of pollutants into the atmosphere. Tons of copper, lead and zinc particles, plus pesticides, will eventually settle into the rivers, streams and the ocean, harming aquatic life and filtering gradually into the food chain. "Aside from the obvious effect on everyone's breathing, these toxic compounds fall out of the sky, wash down and affect aquatic life," said Keith D. Stozenbach, a UCLA professor of civil and environmental engineering. (Los Angeles Times, Nov. 2)

While fires are inevitable in the dry brush landscapes of Southern California, such loss of life and property could have been prevented.

As with every natural disaster, it is the people who suffer the consequences when corporate greed overrides public safety and security.

President George W. Bush has been pursuing legislation to help the timber companies reach deeper into public lands to steal from the rich publicly-owned forests in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, the huge fire danger in Southern California has been virtually ignored.

Of the \$53 million spent by the federal government for fire protection in 2003, only \$4 million went to the affected areas of Southern California. Of the 150,000 acres that the California Forestry and Fire Protection agency recommends burning out in pre-emptive fires, funds were available for only about 30,000 this year.

Months ago, the U.S. Forest Service ranked the current burn areas in Southern California as the most hazardous in the country. At the same time, various California state agencies went to

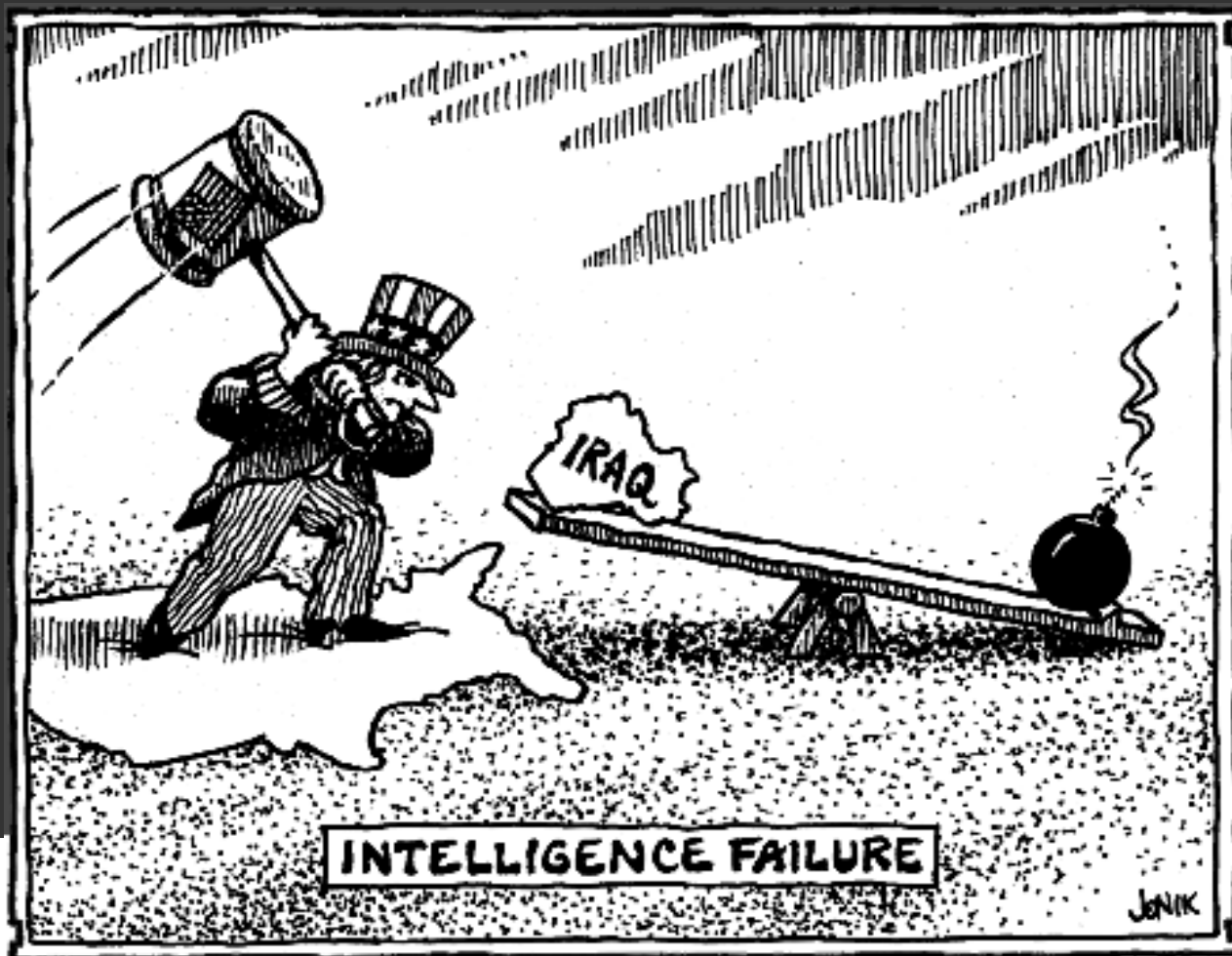
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Movement's answer: NOWHERE—BRING THEM HOME! —see centerfold

Anti-war forces support imprisoned Marine

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October 25, Washington D.C.

WW PHOTO: BILL HACKWELL

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SAN FRANCISCO

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Fri., Nov. 7
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Every Sunday

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Taking it to the troops

Anti-war forces support imprisoned Marine

By LeiLani Dowell

Political prisoner Stephen Funk, an openly gay Filipino in the Marine Corps Reserves who is currently incarcerated as a conscientious objector to the war in Iraq, continues to receive the support and attention of many and to speak out against the war from jail.

While Funk's case has been filtered out of the ruling-class media, support continues to grow within the progressive movement. An online petition created by the Support Network for an Armed Forces Union (SNAFU) has currently received more than 2,000 signatures. Calls have been received from as far away as Australia asking what activists can do to support his case, and pledging to get the word out.

About 150 lesbian, gay, bi and trans

activists converged on both coasts to march in Stephen Funk contingents at the Oct. 25 anti-war demonstrations in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

On Nov. 15, activists will converge at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, where Funk is being held, to support the young Marine and a call for clemency that his attorney will soon be filing on his behalf. They will be accompanying Gloria Pacis, Funk's mother, who has just completed a national speaking tour on his case. This call has been endorsed by organizations throughout the United States, from Hawaii to New Jersey.

On Sept. 6, Funk became the first resister known to be incarcerated during the war in Iraq. Funk had been active in the antiwar movement before his incarceration, speaking out publicly about the racism and homophobia that the U.S. mil-

itary cultivates and the manipulation that recruiters use to get people to sign up.

Although at least 50 more reservists face charges for refusing to report to duty, according to an Oct. 5 article in the New York Post, Funk was singled out as the first to be incarcerated. Many believe it was because of his vocal stance against the war as well as being openly gay.

However, Funk's incarceration has not stopped him from continuing to courageously speak out against the war, both through letters to people on the outside and to prisoners inside the brig. In a letter to the International Action Center, he wrote:

"Needless to say, I haven't been to a rally in a while and I'm going through withdrawal. But I'm making the best of my situation. I'm trying to educate other people here about a lot of political issues that the public misconceives most. The military

discourages individual thought, political ideas, and independence in general. ...

"I have met others here in the brig that feel like I do or at least know that something is wrong. I am trying to open people up to the idea that they have personal power and independence and they have a responsibility to do something good with it. That's my project while I'm incarcerated. ... The letters people are sending help in two ways; they help me feel less insulated and they help me convince other inmates that people like me are not alone or insane or wrong for having our convictions."

For more information on the Nov. 15 caravan or other ways to support Funk's case, contact International Action Center at (212) 633-6646 or SNAFU at (212) 802-4459, or email freestephen@join-snafu.org. □



Court refuses to hear evidence

Mumia activists again demand justice

By Betsey Piette
Philadelphia

In response to last month's Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling that turned down Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeals, supporters gathered outside the Federal Building here on Nov. 1 to demand justice and voice their outrage over the court decision.

Abu-Jamal is an African American journalist known as the "Voice of the Voiceless." He has been unjustly incarcerated since 1981, after being accused of killing a white police officer. He was sentenced to death after a completely biased trial, and has only been saved from execution by an international movement demanding justice in his case.

As passing cars responded to the "Honk for Mumia" signs held by protesters on street corners around Liberty Bell Plaza, pedestrians took flyers explaining the case and then stopped to listen to speakers calling for Abu-Jamal's freedom.

Back in 2001, Federal Judge William H. Yohn had overturned Abu-Jamal's death sentence, but refused to hear evidence challenging his conviction. Despite Yohn's ruling, Abu-Jamal has remained on Pennsylvania's death row and is in danger of having his death sentence reinstated.

This Oct. 8, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court denied his legal appeal that would have allowed new evidence to be introduced, including a videotaped confession in which one Arnold Beverly said that he, not Abu-Jamal, had murdered officer Daniel Faulkner. In rejecting even viewing the Beverly confession, the court cited the "untimeliness" of the evidence proving Abu-Jamal's innocence, and cited Yohn's infamous 2001 decision that "innocence is no defense."

The Pennsylvania court also dismissed the testimony of Philadelphia court stenographer Terri Maurer Carter, who said she had overheard Mumia's original trial judge, Albert Sabo, state in relation to Mumia's case, "Yeah, and I'm going to help 'em fry the n****r."

While the court could not reject this evidence on the basis of "timeliness," it was

disregarded because the issue of Sabo's racist bias against Mumia, according to the court, had been previously raised and rejected—by the same court—and therefore this new evidence proving Sabo's bias was deemed to be a "reopening" of previous litigation.

Once again, one of the state's Supreme Court justices, Ronald Castile, who had been one of the original Philadelphia prosecutors in Mumia's case, refused to remove himself from the proceeding, despite a request from the defense that he do so.

Speakers at the Nov. 1 rally expressed outrage that the courts could rule "innocence is no defense" and refuse to hear evidence proving that a judge in a capital case had been not only racially biased against the defendant but clearly partial to the prosecution.

Following the rally, supporters gathered



WW PHOTO: BETSEY PIETTE

for a meeting to plan for activities in December and April in support of Abu-Jamal. For information, contact (215) 476-8812 or icffmaj@aol.com. □

NEW YORK

Meeting honors Panthers, Bukhari



Support for Panther 21, New York, 1969.

PHOTO: NEWSREEL.US

An overflow crowd attended a tribute on the 37th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party on Nov. 1 at the 1199/SEIU hall in mid-town Manhattan. The meeting paid special tribute to Safiya Bukhari, a former political

prisoner who passed away suddenly this past August. Bukhari was a leader of the Jericho Movement, which was founded in 1998 to bring international attention to and support for U.S. political prisoners. She was also a member of the Panthers

and the Black Liberation Army during the 1970s, as well as a co-founder of the New York Free Mumia Coalition.

The program included talks by former Panthers and younger members of the Black Panther Collective. Pam Africa, leader of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, spoke and an audiotaped tribute to Bukhari by Abu-Jamal was shown. A Peoples Video Network video honored the memory of Bukhari, along with other women political prisoners.

A statement by Workers World Party was read by a representative of the Black Panther Collective. It read in part, "We will always remember Safiya not only for her fighting spirit but also her deep understanding on why forging political unity and solidarity within the revolutionary movement are keys for building the mass struggle against capitalism and imperialism. ... Safiya Bukhari, presente."

—Monica Moorehead

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

More unions join fight to save health care

By John Beacham
Los Angeles

Labor struggles are raging throughout Southern California. Tens of thousands of workers—grocery clerks, transit mechanics and service employees—are locked in a battle to save their health care benefits, wages and more. In this time of huge corporate profits and massive unemployment, their bosses are shamelessly pushing for drastic across-the-board cuts.

For almost a month 70,000 grocery clerks in Southern California have faced off against three huge national supermarket chains. At stake is virtually everything that the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union has fought for in its more than 100 years of existence: health care benefits, pensions, good wages, union shops and more. You name it, the bosses are trying to take it away.

So far, to the delight of labor's friends everywhere, the UFCW has gained the upper hand in this crucial struggle. Communities all over Southern California are siding with the retail grocery workers. People are not crossing the picket lines. Vons, Ralphs and Albertsons—the three greedy supermarkets involved—have lost a combined \$131 million a week in sales.

On Friday, Oct. 31, the UFCW, in a coordinated action of all seven locals involved, took Ralphs' workers off the picket line and redeployed them at Vons and Albertsons. Over the weekend, Vons and Albertsons' sales dipped another 5 to 10 percent, according to the union. This drop can be directly attributed to the larger and more vibrant picket lines.

Unions announce national strike fund

From the start, the Greedy Three have insisted that they are willing to starve out these low-wage grocery employees and take whatever losses are necessary in order to drive future labor costs down. In response, on Oct. 30, the AFL-CIO announced a national strike fund to support the UFCW for the duration of the struggle.

Focusing on holding the line against the nationwide attack on all union members' health care benefits, President John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO, flanked by Service Employees International President

Andrew Stern and UFCW President Doug Dority, announced the fund. Sweeney said the corporations are "taking on every one of us ... who cares about America's families getting the health care they need at a price they can afford. These workers are not alone and have the full support of the entire union movement and our allies."

The national strike fund will cover all UFCW workers. Currently, 3,300 retail food workers from UFCW Local 440, which covers West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio, are on strike against Kroger, the same company that owns Ralphs. And, according to a Nov. 2 Associated Press article, "4,000 union workers at Kroger supermarkets across Indiana probably will strike after voting overwhelmingly Friday to reject a five-year contract offer from Kroger." In Arizona thousands of employees of Safeway—the company that owns Vons—and Kroger are also in a fight to save their health care benefits. UFCW Local 99 in Arizona is also preparing for the possibility of a strike.

Kroger, Safeway and Albertsons are three of the largest retail food corporations in the world. They have a combined 664,000 employees and make billions of dollars in profits each year. According to the UFCW, the Greedy Three's combined sales are rising at a rate 10 times that of the rise in health care costs. The supermarkets can more than afford to continue to pay for the health care benefits of their employees.

Health care benefits are also at issue in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority strike in Los Angeles. The MTA mechanics union—Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1277—has been working without a contract for 12 months. The board that oversees the MTA is asking its mechanics to increase their health care payments by more than 1,200 percent and to hand over control of the health care benefits fund to the MTA.

On Oct. 12, rejecting these demands, the mechanics went out on strike. The third-largest public transportation system in the country has been ground to a halt for almost four weeks now.

County workers resist takeaways

On Sept. 30, SEIU Local 660's contract with Los Angeles County expired. Local



660 has over 45,000 members. Using the county and state budget crises as an excuse, the county is demanding that the employees begin paying more for their health care benefits. Local 660 has proclaimed that it is "drawing the line" and will not submit to the takeaways. Over 2,000 members from SEIU, AFSCME, UFCW and other unions packed a weekly County Board of Supervisors meeting to demand that the county roll back its demands. More rallies are planned.

Private and public employers are crying all over Southern California—and all over the country—that tough economic times require employees to accept wage freezes, cuts in health care and much more. The bosses, whether they administer a public institution or run a private company, are trying to take money away from their employees by selling the idea to the people of the U.S. that health care is a luxury that workers ought to pay more for.

The U.S. is the richest country in the history of the world. All the mind-blowing wealth created by the U.S. off the backs of working people here and around the world flows directly into the pockets of monstrously huge corporations. In one way or another, some of that wealth should be used to pay for quality health care for everyone. And this is exactly what the UFCW and other unions are fighting for—the right to have free access to the wealth

created by their labor in order to have quality, affordable health care.

Ronaldo, a Ralphs meatcutter walking the picket line with his two teenage children at a Vons store in Los Angeles, put it this way: "I need to work. But if they raise my health care, my kids don't have medical benefits because I won't be able to afford them. I've worked hard for Ralphs. This isn't right."

The health care benefits that workers across this country currently have were won on the streets and at the bargaining tables of the past. Health care is simply another form of wages wrested from the bosses. It is not a luxury. It is a workers' right won in struggle against greedy corporations that only care about profit.

The UFCW, the AFL-CIO and other unions have begun to sketch the outlines of battle of an inevitably wider class struggle.

The ANSWER coalition in Los Angeles, in an effort to broaden community support for the fight of all unions to resist the attacks of large corporations on workers' health care benefits and all of labor's other historic gains, has initiated the Community Action Project to Support Labor (CAPSL). On Nov. 15, CAPSL will be kicking off a community food drive as part of a wide range of actions to do everything possible to make sure that the UFCW—and all other unions and working people—win the battle to save health care. □

Chaparral disaster Prisoners backbone of fire-fighting effort



Soledad prisoners in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Continued from page 1

Congress asking for \$120 million to finance the removal of dry brush and grasses, as well as dead pine trees destroyed by a massive infestation of bark beetles. These pleas were ignored by Congress, which was too busy approving Bush's war plans for Iraq.

Now, instead of rushing to meet the needs of thousands who have lost their homes, the Bush administration, with the full backing of multi-millionaire Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, is using the tragedy to promote his so-called Healthy Forests legislation.

This latest cynical exercise, which amounts to a giveaway of rich timber lands in the Pacific Northwest, does nothing to promote fire safety in Southern California. Peter Galvin of the Center for Biological Diversity described proponents of the leg-

islation as utterly shameless for exploiting the fire tragedy. Jay Watson of the Wilderness Society said, "It's searing in its ruthlessness and irresponsibility. The Healthy Forests initiative would have nothing to do with chaparral fires in Southern California, because no money is being made available to treat that or do brush removal near threatened communities." (Los Angeles Times, Oct. 29)

The fires have subsided, for now. While those whose economic policies allowed this disaster to happen are still in power, the prisoner fire fighters have been locked back in their cells.

Those who have lost their homes and everything in them are now staring at a Kafka-like bureaucratic nightmare created by insurance conglomerates that will do all they can to avoid paying out compensation. □

Whether an upturn or an uptick Economic news opens window for class struggle

By Leslie Feinberg

Workers and bosses alike are looking at the latest economic figures, trying to determine if they are favorable to their class interests. What the bosses care about is profits, profits, profits. Workers have been trying to defend their jobs and benefits, resisting demands for downsizing and givebacks.

Now comes news from the Commerce Department that the Gross Domestic Product spiked an estimated 7.2 percent in the quarter from July through September.

Is this a real upturn? Does it open a window of opportunity for workers to demand more jobs, better wages and health care instead of more concessions?

The Commerce Department reported on Oct. 31 that in the third quarter consumer spending jumped 6.6 percent, a 15-year high. Business spending grew by 11.1 percent—the fastest rate since the first quarter of 2000. Exports were up 9.3 percent. All these figures, of course, may be adjusted later on.

Whether this is a genuine upturn or a mere economic uptick, the bosses will try to reap all the benefits. If the markets are expanding, they'll try to produce more with the same number of workers—or even with fewer. It will take a struggle by the workers to turn that around.

So far, the number of jobs has not significantly expanded. Even the big-business media, which report about how the “red-hot” economy “sizzled” and “scorched” in the third quarter, are quoting economists who call this a “jobless recovery.”

Jobless recovery: what an oxymoron.

Sony Corp. has just announced plans to eliminate 20,000 jobs worldwide.

Officially, 9 million people in this country are out of work and the unemployment rate is 6.1 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

However, the Labor Department announced that first-time claims for jobless benefits in the week ended Oct. 18 fell by 4,000 to 386,000. That can seem like good news. Capitalist economists and forecasters say that when the number of new applicants drops below 400,000, the overall tendency in employment may be either flattening out or looking up.

It's not such good news, however, for the 386,000 newly unemployed—roughly the population of Sacramento, Calif. And, ironically, the official unemployment rate may now be on the brink of an upswing, notes an Oct. 31 Wall Street Journal editorial, because news of an economic recovery motivates those who had given up looking for work to get back into the job search. After having dropped off the radar screens, they're then once again counted as unemployed.

Where will they find work?

Some 57,000 jobs were reportedly added to the economy in September, the first gain recorded in nine months, but manufacturing jobs continued to decline. Since January 2001, the national economy has lost somewhere between 2.6 million and more than 3 million jobs. Ohio lost nearly 67,000 non-farm jobs in 2002 alone. Has this industrial state now turned the corner? No, Ohio lost 22,000 more jobs from August to September—the period of the much-touted upturn. (New York Times, Oct. 31)

Economist David Leonhardt reminded readers in the Oct. 30 New York Times

business section that “In two other quarters since 2001, the economy expanded at least 4 percent, only to fall back into a slump that made companies reluctant to hire new workers and helped create the worst loss of jobs in 20 years.”

While many may eventually find work, they'll get less in their paychecks unless there's a big workers' struggle. Three years after being laid off, only one-third of those rehired have reached or exceeded their lost wage. (Louis Uchitelle in the New York Times, Nov. 2) And there's no figure for the underemployed, those 3-million-plus part-timers who can't find fulltime work.

Is the system working?

If you think the system is working, reads a popular bumper sticker, ask someone who isn't.

There's no indication that this upturn will alleviate the fierce capitalist competition that has been driving the scientific-technological revolution of the last few decades. Capital investment, desperate to turn a profit, continues to turn to “labor-saving devices” to reduce production costs—literally restructuring whole sectors of jobs out of existence. Hemorrhaging layoffs are a global phenomenon.

The White House, trying to make hay while the sun shines and with an eye to the coming election, claims that George W. Bush's tax cuts jump-started the economy by spurring consumer spending. The Democrats, naturally, are trying to rain on the Republicans' parade, answering that this was a one-time spurt. Many economists agree.

“This can't go on—in the long run, consumer spending can't outpace the growth in consumer income,” observed New York Times columnist Paul Krugman on Nov. 4. He concurs with the suggestion of Morgan Stanley's chief economist, Stephen Roach, that “much of last quarter's consumer splurge was ‘borrowed’ from the future: consumers took advantage of low-interest financing, cash from home financing and tax rebate checks to accelerate purchases they would otherwise have made later. If he's right, we'll see below-normal purchases and slower growth in the months ahead.”

And, Krugman concludes, unless jobs increase by more than 200,000 a month, consumer spending will eventually slide.

Consumer spending did slide 0.3 percent in September, the last month of the quarter. This was the largest monthly drop in a year. Disposable income dipped 1 percent in the same period.

Wall Street economist Alan Abelson noted that “the tax windfalls have pretty much been spent, the mortgage-refinancing well looks all but plumb dry. So, gaze fondly on that 7 percent-plus gain, you're not apt to see its like any time soon.” (Barrons, Nov. 3)

Auto sales accounted for 1.2 percentage points of the third-quarter gain. But, Abelson adds, “The ‘miracle’ that so awed economists of inventories shrinking even while the economy was sizzling has a rather mundane explanation, namely Detroit's giving away cars to clear its showrooms. As this perfervid effort waned in October, no accident that jalopy sales softened noticeably.” Sure enough, “U.S. auto sales stalled in October after a strong third quarter,” reported the Nov. 4 Wall Street Journal.

Champagne bottles stay corked

What does the money class think of all this? “The economy grew faster than it has in nearly 20 years, but investors shrugged,” the Oct. 31 Wall Street Journal concluded.

The overall market response to the announcement of the third quarter GDP rise was subdued, analysts said, because “it reflected past economic performance, and investors were not certain future growth would be as robust.” (New York Times, Oct. 31)

Some prominent Wall Street economists are “warning that the economy may be headed for a disappointment,” counsels the lead article in the Nov. 3 Wall Street Journal Money & Investing section. “And the doubters come from some of Wall Street's most prestigious brokerage firms: Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs.”

“To break the cycle” of recession, wrote Atlanta Journal-Constitution staff analyst Michael E. Kanell on Nov. 2, “companies must hire. And while many see improved sales, companies hold back on hiring because they are awash in uncertainty, said economist Campbell Harvey of Duke University's Fuqua School of Business.”

Monopoly: It's not a game

The same day that the third-quarter economic results were released, the Agriculture Department reported, for the third year in a row, an increase in the number of U.S. households experiencing hunger and those worried about being able to afford food. African American and Latino households and families headed by single mothers are most likely to go hungry.

How can that be? Supermarkets shelves are packed with food.

People are hungry because they can't afford to shop. And while small rebate checks and food kitchens can provide a little relief, the root of the problem is an unplanned, irrational capitalist economic system that is widening the chasm between wealth and poverty.

A stark example is life in the “capital of capital,” home to Wall Street: the average price of a Manhattan apartment is hurtling towards the million-dollar mark while 18 of every 100 New York City residents live officially below the poverty line.

When this profit-driven system is in its boom period, every capitalist is a marathon-runner trying to outrace the others in the rivalry to expand capital investment and profits. But as the competition grows more and more fierce, their success in forcing the working class to produce more goods in less time on a global scale leads to collapse.

The lion's share of the massive, congressionally approved tax cuts have gone into the already deep pockets of the already affluent. They exacerbated a budget deficit now as wide as the Grand Canyon: a projected \$374 billion this year alone.

The tax cuts for the rich have had a domino effect, sinking state and municipal budgets and leading to large-scale layoffs of state workers and widespread cuts in the services that make modern life possible.

And like an insatiable beast, capitalist global expansion for world markets and profits, which is underlying the imperialist war drive, is eating up the social wealth. That \$87.5 billion both parties in Congress just appropriated for the occu-

What would it take to win more jobs, hike wages and restore lost benefits?

pation of Iraq merely whets that appetite for empire. The money the government spent on so-called defense rocketed 45 percent in the second quarter of this year—a windfall for the military-industrial complex.

Bourgeois economists, even the skeptics, point to a growth in business investment in the third quarter. If it were sustained, it would represent an 11-percent annual rate. That's the question: Will it continue to grow?

What is clear is that the monopoly stage of capitalism continues to centralize and concentrate ownership and property in fewer and fewer hands. Bank of America, the country's third-largest bank, has just gobbled up FleetBoston Financial—the seventh-largest in the U.S.—for \$47 billion. But Bank of America stock prices choked, beset by worries that Fleet would be hard to swallow.

Anthem has announced its intention to buy WellPoint for \$16.4 billion, which would create the largest U.S. health-care company. And life-insurance giant Prudential is reportedly poised to close the deal to acquire Cigna Corp.'s retirement and investment-products division for about \$2 billion.

These and other mega-mergers create super monopolies that will try to raise productivity by intensifying exploitation, leading to lower wages, less benefits and continuing layoffs.

As anyone who has ever played the board game Monopoly knows, even if the banker doles out more paper money to players with no property, they'll just lose it when they go around the board again.

Class struggle is growing

But in real life, the monopoly stage of capitalism has also brought together a mighty, multi-national workforce that has muscle to flex. Struggle chapters in U.S. labor history point the way: the mass marches of unemployed workers and sit-down strikes in the 1930s; the demand for 40 hours pay for 30 hours work in the 1950s and 1960s.

Today there are signs of growing workers' struggle. Grocery workers are more than holding their own in a tenacious fight against the supermarket chains. There's a courageous and growing movement of immigrant workers—documented and undocumented. The lowest-paid New York restaurant workers are on strike against some of the most affluent employers in the city.

Workers are the wellspring of all profits. The wealth now being passed back and forth among investors in the stock market comes originally from the labor of millions. A rising market and news of higher profits—especially coming at a time of greater suffering among the workers and oppressed, whether in a soldier's uniform or a civilian job—can ignite both expectations and anger.

If, together with the most oppressed communities, labor closes its fist in the face of Corporate America and demands “Show us the money!,” jobs can be won, wages hiked and lost benefits restored. □

'Bring the troops home!'

Why it's the right slogan for anti-war movement

By Brian Becker

A political debate is raging among U.S. antiwar forces over the appropriate slogans for the movement today. At the Oct. 25 demonstration of 100,000 in Washington, D.C., the main slogan was "Bring the troops home now—end the occupation of Iraq." This slogan was agreed to by the two coalitions sponsoring the protest—Act Now to Stop War & End Racism and United for Peace & Justice. The ANSWER coalition has been using the slogan since the U.S. military conquest of Baghdad on April 9, 2003. UFPJ agreed to co-sponsor the demonstration with ANSWER under the slogan, although its member groups hold a variety of views on the issue of immediate withdrawal.

Prior to the Oct. 25 demonstration, some groups in the movement opposed this orientation and called for changing the slogan from "Bring the troops home now" to "Turn over security and rebuilding to the UN." The rationale cited for the proposed change was that "Immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops would probably create chaos and anarchy, a situation even worse than what it is now."

The dispute over slogans reflects two completely different views on the political direction that needs to be taken by the global mass antiwar movement that has emerged in the last year. In essence, the dispute hinges on whether 1) modern war is the consequence of bad or mistaken policies by certain political leaders, or 2) it is the inevitable outgrowth of capitalism as it has evolved into a global system of imperialism.

Earlier debates

The debate is not really new and closely mirrors two earlier disputes over slogans that sharply divided the movement. Prior to the 1991 Gulf War the antiwar movement split into two sharply contentious coalitions. One coalition, led by Ramsey Clark and other leaders who later formed the International Action Center, condemned both the U.S.-sponsored war mobilization and the imposition of economic sanctions on Iraq. The other wing of the peace movement organized under the slogan, "Sanctions, not war."

The struggle between these two wings of the peace movement was very sharp at the time. The coalition led by Ramsey Clark and the IAC insisted that economic sanctions were not a benign alternative to war but an act of war. The analysis held that the U.S. was simply using the Iraq-Kuwait issue as a pretext for a long-planned U.S. military intervention whose goal was to both diminish Iraq as a regional power and permanently insert U.S. military forces in this oil-rich region.

The opposing coalition took the position that, unless the peace movement called for economic sanctions against Iraq, it would be open to the accusation that it was functioning as an apologist for Saddam Hussein's government and providing tacit consent to Iraq's takeover of Kuwait.

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 a similar, although less contentious, debate emerged over slogans and some of the same political forces were involved. This time some of the antiwar forces who a decade earlier had insisted on economic sanctions as an alternative to war called on



The Pentagon has now banned the news media from taking pictures like this. Death is bad for morale.

the Bush administration to "let the UN weapons inspections work" rather than race to war. Core to this argument was the fallacious assumption that the current crisis was caused by Iraq's weapons program.

By chanting "Let inspections work," they appeared to agree with Bush that Iraq was a real danger and thus must be disarmed. While agreeing with Bush's goal that "Iraq must be disarmed," these groups asserted that Bush was making a tactical error by resorting to military force rather than letting weapons inspectors find and destroy Iraq's weapons.

The ANSWER coalition thought it was ludicrous to agree with Bush's stated goal of disarming Iraq at the very moment that it was being surrounded by hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops poised to attack with the most advanced bombs and missiles. ANSWER asserted that the planned U.S. war was motivated by purely imperialist interests and had nothing to do with a supposed "danger" from Iraq.

It will remain one of the great ironies in military history that Iraq, under the demand of the UN weapons inspectors, was forced to publicly destroy—right on television—its own medium-range conventional missiles right up until the evening of March 19, when the country came under a destructive rain of terror from U.S. cruise missiles and bombs. And all in the name of disarmament, no less.

Under the circumstances of early 2003—and the looming invasion and aggression against Iraq—wouldn't it have been more appropriate for all forces in the peace movement in the United States to call for the disarming of the Pentagon, rather than Iraq?

U.S. out versus UN in

Now, during the U.S.-occupation phase of the struggle, the debate in the antiwar movement is around the slogan "Bring the troops home now." Instead of immediate withdrawal, others call for the United

Nations to take over the occupation as a transitional regime leading eventually to a sovereign government.

The core problem with "Turn over security and rebuilding to the UN" is that this demand stands in contrast to the fundamental right of the Iraqi people to determine their own destiny. Iraq has formally been a sovereign country for 80 years and a genuinely sovereign country for the last 45—since the Iraqi Revolution of 1958. Its sovereignty has been suspended only by an illegal invasion and occupation.

Those who advocate for a UN takeover of the occupation argue that without a "neutral" outside supervising force, and one that can provide reconstruction resources, Iraq will descend into further anarchy and chaos. This argument, however, which seems to be based on seeking the least bad of the available bad options, is premised on two false assumptions: 1) that the current United Nations can play an independent and progressive role in Iraq and, 2) that the Iraqi people would be content with something less than complete independence for their country.

It is the occupation by the U.S. and Britain—whose authority was entirely ratified on May 22 by UN Security Council Resolution 1483—that has led to a condition that they themselves call "chaos and anarchy." While Iraq was under Iraqi authority, this condition did not exist.

If the U.S. troops leave immediately and if sovereignty is returned to Iraq, a new government will take shape. No one knows for certain if there will be a struggle between contending factions in Iraq. This is certainly possible, given the "chaos and anarchy" created by the violent destruction inflicted by outside forces. But unless sovereignty is returned to Iraq, the current chaos and anarchy will inevitably continue.

Dennis Halliday's observations

Iraqis don't want foreign, imperial forces to become the arbiters of their polit-

By fully embracing the slogan 'Bring the troops home now, end the occupation of Iraq,' the antiwar movement affirms support for the basic right of self-determination for Iraq, while saying to U.S. soldiers: This is a rich man's war. Your lives and your dignity are too precious to be used as cannon fodder for imperialism.

ical and economic process, and have shown this with their actions. Some people in the United States may think that this is in the Iraqi people's best interest, but the Iraqi people do not agree with the implicit assumption that they are not "up to the task" of building an independent Iraq. In fact, the Iraqi people rightly believe that the foundation of this argument is based in conscious or unconscious paternalism and even racist stereotyping.

Nor do they agree that the record of the United Nations, as an institution, suggests that it has the interests of the Iraqi people as its first priority, particularly given the pressures applied to the UN by the United States.

This opinion is confirmed by the comments of Dennis Halliday, the former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. Following the first bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad in August—which killed 23 people, many of whom were Halliday's friends and colleagues—Halliday commented on the sharp difference in perception of the United Nations between Iraqis and people in the United States and other Western countries:

"The West sees the UN as a benign organization, but the sad reality in much of the world is that the UN is not seen as benign," Halliday said.

"In Iraq, the UN imposed sustained sanctions that probably killed up to 1 million people. Children were dying of malnutrition and water-borne diseases. The U.S. and U.K. bombed the infrastructure in 1991, destroying power, water and sewage systems against the Geneva Convention. It was a great crime against Iraq. Thirteen years of sanctions made it impossible for Iraq to repair the damage. That is why we have such tremendous resentment and anger against the UN in Iraq. There is a sense that the UN humiliated the Iraqi people and society. I would use the term genocide to define the use of sanctions against Iraq. Several million Iraqis are suffering cancers because of the use of depleted uranium shells. That's an atrocity. Can you imagine the bitterness from all of this?" (Sunday Herald, Aug. 24)

Why, then, would the Iraqi people agree, given the UN's record over the last 12 years, that it should be the institution to serve as the guarantor of a transition to renewed sovereign control?

Economic colonialism masked as reconstruction

The imperialist government of the United States certainly owes a debt to the Iraqi people. It should be forced to pay reparations for the death and destruction inflicted on the country. But that is not about to happen. On the contrary, under

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Dilemma for Bush & Pentagon

Where will troops come from?

By Fred Goldstein

The sharply rising level of Iraqi resistance to colonial occupation has re-raised the controversy in the U.S. ruling class over the number and type of troops it has deployed there. It has created a situation in which the Bush administration's electoral needs and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's doctrine of a "lean, mean military" are clashing with Washington's struggle to stem the growing tide of the resistance. It has also put a spotlight on the illusory doctrine of preemptive war to bring about so-called "regime change" and called into question the entire program of the neo-conservative empire builders.

In the space of a week, the al-Rashid hotel was shelled with rockets that narrowly missed Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz; the coalition's central compound was hit with mortar fire two days in a row; car bombs exploded at four police stations and the International Red Cross center in Baghdad; a hotel housing U.S. forces was attacked in Mosul; two judges working for the occupation were assassinated; and, in the biggest loss of life for U.S. troops since the war was declared over, a helicopter was shot down, killing 16 soldiers and wounding 20. In all, 23 U.S. soldiers were killed in the first four days of November, and mortar and rocket attacks are increasing in frequency, scope and accuracy.

In the wake of these developments, President George W. Bush has declared, "We will not run." By that he means that his administration will continue to shed the blood of U.S. soldiers, anti-colonial Iraqi resistance fighters and countless Iraqi civilians to make that country safe for a U.S. corporate takeover of its resources, above all its 110 billion barrels of proven oil reserves.

But the discontent of the people in the U.S. with the casualties and the economic impact of this military adventure are accumulating beneath the surface just as the presidential election season is nearing. Bush's poll numbers are dropping. So fearful are Bush and the Pentagon about the potential for mass disaffection over the war that Bush's handlers told him not to mention the downing of the helicopter in his speeches after the event. And the brass have forbidden the press to take any photos of flag-draped coffins being flown home.

The rush to 'Iraqification'

So in spite of his "We will not run" bravado, Bush is also sending signals of panic by rushing to "Iraqification" of the war, which he hopes will reduce U.S. casualties as the election nears. "In a way," wrote the Christian Science Monitor on Nov. 4, "it may now be a race against time: U.S. officials are moving as fast as they can to hand over responsibility for Iraq's security to the Iraqis themselves."

Right now the U.S. Central Command has only one strategy: send U.S. patrols to raid, capture and kill. This strategy of having its soldiers killing people at checkpoints and kicking down doors in the middle of the night has resulted in spreading hatred for the occupation. It has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of guerrilla attacks, growing organization of the resistance, and a steady increase in the number of U.S. casualties.

Thus, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, after meeting with Bush,

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and occupation head L. Paul Bremer III, agreed to speed up the incorporation of Iraqis into the occupation forces. There was some sort of agreement to consider bringing back elements of the Iraqi Army into the occupation apparatus. And a decision was made to emphasize the rapid "Iraqification" of the war as a new element in Bush's strategy.

On the Sunday talk shows the morning of Nov. 2, Rumsfeld surprised all the interviewers with the figure that 100,000 Iraqis are already serving in various security positions. And he coupled this with announcing that U.S. forces in Iraq have been reduced from 150,000 to 130,000. He then held out the prospect of bringing Iraqi participation up to 200,000 within a year—the implication being that U.S. forces could really begin coming home in large numbers.

Remembering 'Vietnamization,' ruling class is nervous

However, sections of the ruling class are being made nervous by this rush to "Iraqification." They cannot help but remember that Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the Vietnam War turned out to be a failure and accelerated the defeat of the 13-year U.S. adventure there. And the assessment that Iraqis may be used to combat the resistance, in particular the talk about reviving units of the Iraqi Army, has not inspired any confidence in the Bush strategy.

The Nov. 2 Washington Post wrote: "Two influential senators said yesterday the answer may be an increase in U.S. forces. Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.), the ranking minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on CBS's 'Face the Nation' that 'in the short term, we may need more American forces in there while we're training these people up.'"

Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), the committee chair, echoed Biden's comments on the same program.

The Post continued: "Blunting new calls from Capitol Hill to dispatch more U.S. troops, Rumsfeld said 'over 100,000' Iraqi forces had been trained to provide security and that the number would double by next September. Rumsfeld's number of Iraqi forces is 15,000 higher than the numbers provided by the U.S. occupation authority and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice in the past week, and it represents a 40-percent increase from administration estimates a month ago."

The Post further dashes any confidence in the Iraqi replacement program by not-

ing that "the administration has stressed a rapid 'Iraqification' of the security situation as attacks against U.S. targets have dramatically increased in recent weeks."

The Post, which has been a determined hawk on the war, was even more negative in its Nov. 4 editorial, "A Lonely Fight," which was primarily dedicated to pressing Bush to get the other imperialists involved and give up some Pentagon control. The Post regards "Iraqification" as a poor substitute. "The administration says the [military] help it was seeking from foreign governments will instead come from Iraqis. ... The new police and security forces have already come under a concentrated assault by ambush and car bomb—will their slight training and fragile morale prove adequate to withstand the pressure? If U.S. troops do not stay and fight with them, but instead are drawn down during an election year, that seems unlikely. Iraqi recruits also will want to know what they are fighting for. If the answer seems to be a dominating U.S. occupation regime," their commitment may wane.

U.S. spread thin

Edward Luttwak, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies—a major ruling-class think tank—was more concrete. In an Op Ed piece for the Nov. 4 New York Times, he wrote that, of the 133,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, only 56,000 are actually combat trained and only 28,000 are on patrol at any one time.

How can this number of troops, asks Luttwak, oversee frontiers, patrol rural terrain including vast oil fields, control inter-city roads, and protect American and coalition facilities. Even if they could, it still "leaves the question of how to police the squares, streets and alleys of Baghdad, with its six million inhabitants, not to mention Mosul with 1.7 million, Kirkus with 800,000, and Sunni towns like Falluja with its quarter-million restive residents." Luttwak concludes that the U.S. forces "are now so thinly spread that they cannot reliably protect even themselves ..." And he concludes that a lightly armed Iraqi security force has no chance of stopping the resistance.

Other commentaries are appearing in various elements of the capitalist press. Comparisons are being made with the Algerian war of liberation of 1954-62, when France sent hundreds of thousands of troops to hold onto its colony but was finally defeated. Other comparisons are made with the 30-year military campaign of the British in northern Ireland. They sent up to 35,000 troops to try to contain

Sections of the ruling class are beginning to worry that the Bush administration might have swung from triumphalism to panic in the wake of the latest guerrilla offensive. They know that 'Iraqification' is a losing strategy.

the Irish Republican Army—which had a base of half a million sympathetic people there. And many more allusions to Vietnam are appearing in the capitalist media.

Sections of the ruling class are beginning to worry that the Bush administration might have swung from triumphalism to panic in the wake of the latest guerrilla offensive. They know that "Iraqification" is a losing strategy. For the U.S. imperialist army to rest its hopes of victory on winning over sections of the very people against whom they have fought two wars and have subjected to 12 years of sanctions is a very risky business, to say the least.

It is a lot easier to get hungry Iraqis who have no jobs to sign up to keep civil order as local police than it will be to enlist masses of Iraqi soldiers to put down the resistance to the U.S. imperialist occupation of their country. And to the extent that they do sign up, it is another thing to keep them from turning their weapons against the occupiers.

Plan B: the draft

The Washington Post, the New York Times, and some members of the House and Senate are still demanding that the Bush administration enlist the support of the French, Germans and Russians by giving up some control and sharing the loot. They would much prefer to rely on imperialist troops, even if they are the troops of their rivals, than on the thin reed of Iraqi soldiers.

If they cannot enlist other imperialist troops, then they want preparations to be made to be able to send in more U.S. troops in an emergency, to try to push back the resistance, despite what it might do to Bush's reelection chances.

Another possibility the anti-war movement must be prepared for is a dramatic "emergency" manufactured in order to execute a major U.S. escalation of the war in Iraq or in the region—either against Syria or Iran—should the occupation reach a political/military crisis point.

In this regard, it should be noted that the Pentagon quietly placed a solicitation on one of its web sites, www.defendamerica.mil, soliciting volunteers for local draft boards all over the country. According to Dave Lindorff, writing in Salon.com on Nov. 3, "Not since the days of the Reagan administration in 1981 has the Defense Department made a push to fill out all 10,350 draft board positions and 11,070 appeals board slots."

While the Bush administration has not breathed a public word about this new appeal, the fact of the matter is that it is clearly setting the administrative apparatus in place to reinstitute the draft in the event of a military adventure. □



What does arrest of Russian billionaire signify?

By Deirdre Griswold

The richest person in Russia, Mikhail B. Khodorkovsky, has been arrested at gunpoint and sits in jail. Some \$14 billion worth of stocks he held in Yukos Oil—44 percent of all shares in the company—were initially frozen by government prosecutors.

The government of President Vladimir V. Putin has charged him with fraud, forgery and tax evasion dating from 1994 to 2001—roughly the period in which he evolved from being a moderately rich man to becoming the biggest oligarch in Russia.

The U.S. capitalist ruling class and its government, which have had a close relationship with Khodorkovsky, have been interceding on his behalf while at the same time not wanting to damage their relationship with Putin. The Wall Street Journal of Oct. 31 reported that “a senior Bush administration official placed a call to a counterpart in Moscow to inquire about the case earlier this week. Yesterday, a Yukos representative met at the White House with an official of the National Security Council. ...

“The U.S. Embassy in Moscow has had some strong words about Mr. Khodorkovsky’s jailing. But until now the White House has been eager to avoid public criticism of Mr. Putin ... President Bush values his personal relationship with the Russian leader. The administration also badly needs Russian support for its efforts to pressure North Korea and Iran to abandon their nuclear ambitions.”

The Journal discussed other factors that were holding Washington back. “Before Thursday, Washington officials said they weren’t sure if the jailing was a solitary, albeit politically motivated event, or a more serious assault on Russian capitalism. ...

“It raises a lot of worries that weren’t there 48 hours ago,” a U.S. official said. “But you still have to think about the whole relationship.”

Khodorkovsky had cultivated relations with top members of the U.S. oil-banking-government cabal.

An article in the Nov. 1 New York Times entitled “How Russian Oil Tycoon Courted Friends in U.S.” says he met last summer with Energy Secretary Spencer

Abraham; was at a dinner in Russia in September with former President George H.W. Bush; was close with the Carlyle Group, which had retained Bush Senior as an advisor until a few weeks ago; has been a Sun Valley guest of former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley, who advises the Open Russia Foundation, funded by Khodorkovsky; put former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on the board of the foundation; and has given large donations to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the American Enterprise Institute.

Yukos Oil had been in talks with Exxon-Mobil, which was reported to be considering buying a 40-percent stake in the company that could have cost as much as \$20 billion. (Wall Street Journal, Oct. 31)

ChevronTexaco is also reported to have been discussing making a major investment in Russian oil and gas through Yukos.

Now all of this is on hold. The giant U.S. and British oil monopolies are waiting to see if another shoe will drop.

Khodorkovsky is the personification of the free-wheeling capitalists who became super-rich almost overnight with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their immense wealth was stolen directly from the Soviet people, who had been the owners of the USSR’s natural resources and means of production.

When the industries, the mines, the oil wells, and the rest of the economy were opened up for privatization, who wound up in possession of it all? Not the workers and farmers, who had been promised a fair share of the wealth in this new capitalist “democracy.” Through every type of manipulation and fraud, the working people, the creators of all the wealth, were dispossessed and a handful of super-rich emerged in control of vast fortunes. Many of them were bankrolled from abroad. Yukos was the Russian stock most widely held among foreign investors.

Khodorkovsky was the biggest, and is now the sixth “oligarch” to have been taken down.

A weak bourgeois state

Khodorkovsky and the other billionaires who have fallen were not pulled

down by a workers’ uprising. The state that has moved against them came to power through a counter-revolution. But it is a state that has enormous contradictions. It is enforcing capitalist property rights every day, and in that sense is a bourgeois state. But the Russian bourgeoisie has always been weak in relation to Western imperialism—one of the reasons the workers and peasants were able to carry out a revolution in 1917.

Once the workers’ state and planned economy were demolished, Russia, as industrialized as it had become under the Soviet system, was in danger of being overrun and turned into a colony of Western monopoly capital. Conditions of life for the people worsened catastrophically. Whatever hope the masses may have had for a better life was completely shattered. Naked, vicious capitalism destroyed their job security, wrecked their medical system, forced women into prostitution and young people to go abroad for jobs, and threatened to sell off their natural resources to the highest bidder.

The process of capital investment from abroad to take over Russia’s resources, which was cautious at first, reached a gallop. “In the first half of this year,” wrote the Wall Street Journal on Oct. 31, “Russia reported a net inflow of capital for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union.” But then the Putin government became alarmed. “After the Yukos investigations began this summer, that trend reversed, with more than \$7 billion leaving the country in the third quarter.”

Some reports in Russian and U.S. newspapers link the Putin administration to another group of business people, rivals of Yukos who are centered in Petersburg. Their connections appear to be more to areas of energy exploitation that are still state-owned, like the pipelines that carry the oil, not to ports for export, but to industrial centers for Russia’s use. This grouping, however, also has many connections to U.S. and European oil companies.

The oil imperialists of the U.S. and Britain have a century of experience in



Russian oil workers.

dealing with bourgeois governments in countries that are trying to retain some independence. They know when to wheel and deal, when to flatter and when to threaten. But they are very nervous about what could happen down the road in Russia if there is no capitalist stability.

On Sept. 24, an article by Dmitry Slobodanuk in Pravda reporting on a U.S.-Russian energy summit in St. Petersburg concluded with this warning: “During the Russian-American energy summit the USA was also warned that the last resort may be used: it was said that the natural resources may be nationalized and all extracting companies will thus become sub-contractors of the government. One of the Russian experts say[s] that Vladimir Putin is deliberately running high political risks as he understands that America’s support will help him crush the oligarch elite once and for all and make his authority successive. However it should be mentioned here that Vladimir Putin will have to do it even if he doesn’t win approval of George W. Bush. The game is already on and the stakes are really very high.”

That was confirmed in the Wall Street Journal of Oct. 31. “Most foreign investors won’t read past the headlines and will see the renationalization of Russia, which is everyone’s worst fear,” commented William Browder, managing director of Hermitage Capital Management in Moscow, on Khodorkovsky’s arrest.

It’s an even greater fear among Russia’s robber barons, who know how they are regarded by the working people. “So far, this is just happening with Yukos, but it’s a trend, and without a doubt, it will continue,” said one powerful Russian businessman. “The thing that we forget,” he added, is that “we have a Communist populace.” (New York Times, Nov. 1) □

Strike in Israel against austerity

Labor resists demands of Zionist regime

By Leslie Feinberg

The Israeli labor federation Histadrut carried out a rolling public sector strike on Nov. 3.

The Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce, Manufacturers Association, Airports Authority, Banks Association and Port Authority had petitioned a labor court to block the planned strike. The court limited the planned work stoppage to four hours. So union leaders from different public sectors strategically staggered their four-hour walkouts for greatest impact.

And Amir Peretz, chairperson of Histadrut, rebuffed an appeal from Ariel Sharon to postpone the strike for two days until the prime minister returned from a three-day trip to Russia, where he met with President Vladimir Putin.

Once the work stoppage began, long

queues of cars lined up outside gas stations throughout Israel. Airports, seaports and border crossing were shut, stranding travelers. Business as usual came to a virtual halt across the settler state.

The Histadrut is protesting a government privatization campaign that includes plans to overhaul the state welfare system. The Israeli parliament has been debating the 2004 budget, which calls for more stringent austerity measures and spending cuts.

The Israeli economy reported one of the biggest budget deficits in its history this year. The crisis has been exacerbated by the fact that the Israeli apartheid occupation is in a perpetual state of warfare against the population of historic Palestine.

And the Zionist rulers are putting the burden of the crisis on Israeli workers, who they have tried to pit against the Palestinian people.

Official unemployment for Israelis is currently 11 percent—more than 250,000 workers. The National Insurance Institute published its annual survey on poverty in Israel days before the strike began. It revealed that tens of thousands of the elderly and children have become impoverished since the beginning of 2003. More than 1.6 million Israelis—20 percent of the population—are officially living below the poverty line.

Despite the millions of dollars that the U.S. pumps into Israel in aid every single day, the economy of the settler state has never been viable to stand on its own. And even being armed to the teeth by the Pentagon has not been able to shield the Israeli economy from the economic costs of three years of trying to crush the sustained and determined Palestinian uprising—the Intifada—against colonial occupation of their land.

Benjamin Netanyahu, now Israel’s finance minister, is the point man who is forcing this austerity plan on the workers and poor. His political career began when he was named Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, where he worked with Washington to oppose the many resolutions that condemned Israel for its suppression of the Palestinians. He went on to become Israel’s prime minister in 1996 as head of the right-wing Zionist Likud Party. He has long been recognized as an arch-enemy by the Palestinian people.

His role now is to make Israeli workers pay for their bosses’ costly expansionist schemes. Israel is very much a capitalist, class society, and Zionism is the political movement of the bourgeoisie. Hopefully, this situation will heighten not only class consciousness among Israeli workers but their solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian nation. □

Thousands battle police in Belgrade

Union workers demand gov't resign

By John Catalinotto

Ten thousand workers struck the Sartid steel complex in Smederevo, Serbia, on Oct. 14. Two weeks later, on Oct. 29, the largest workers' demonstration since the overthrow of the government of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000 marched on the Serb parliament in Belgrade. Thousands of demonstrators demanded an end to privatization of state-owned companies and the resignation of the government.

These two events, seemingly so far removed from here, impact directly on the lives of workers in the United States.

To understand this, it helps to know that the U.S. Steel Corporation had bought Sartid a month before the strike. Access to this technologically advanced plant and its 10,000 skilled workers cost the giant U.S. corporation a mere \$23 million, although Yugoslavia had invested \$1 billion in it from 1990 to 2000. The steel complex produces specialized steel that has buyers on the world market.

But the best part of it all—as the owners of U.S. Steel see it—is that these workers with more than 30 years experience receive the equivalent of \$159 per month. According to an article by Spomenka Deretic in the Oct. 17 issue of the Serb journal *Artel*, their pay is 33 Serbian dinars per hour, or about 65 cents. The union is asking for 55 dinars, or about \$1.10.

Deretic's article compares the low wages of the workers at Sartid with the higher wages paid at a U.S. Steel plant in nearby Slovakia—where workers get \$3.74 an hour—and with workers at U.S. Steel here, who are paid \$15 to \$25 per hour.

The strike—at least the first phase of it—lasted until Oct. 23, when negotiations started. What worker in the U.S. would not see this strike as completely justified?

Workers here might also be outraged that U.S. Steel could go into the Balkans or into Central Europe to find skilled, talented workers and force them to accept one-25th of what steel workers get here.



But it is harder to see the connection between those low wages and the so-called humanitarian war the U.S. and its NATO allies waged against Yugoslavia over four years ago. Or how that war allowed the privatization and sell-off of major Yugoslav industries.

Clinton's lie that this was a "humanitarian" war was as big as the Bush administration's tale that the invasion of Iraq has nothing to do with oil.

Before the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia and the overthrow of the government led by the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) the following year, the steel plant was off-limits to U.S. capital. Replacing that government with parties and individuals tied to Western governments and banking interests has opened up Yugoslav industry to the world, that is, to the imperialist world, to the same monopolies that control economic life in the West.

Before this happened, the Yugoslav state protected its workers against foreign capital. It also, in effect, protected U.S. workers from competition. At least no big U.S. corporation could just take over and

make decisions to fire workers in Serbia, then a part of Yugoslavia. The same was true in Slovakia, which before the 1990s was part of socialist Czechoslovakia.

The U.S. Steel purchase of Sartid is only one of 882 major purchases at low prices of Yugoslav industries by U.S. and West European capital. They paid \$1.4 billion in total to the regime, of which about 50 percent is from U.S. corporations. Less than 25 percent of these funds went to social benefits for the 110,000 workers, who in the former Yugoslavia were considered owners of the industries.

In most cases, the company taking over an industry savagely cut the work force. In some, they just stopped production entirely, to destroy competition with their other factories around the world. But Sartid's highly developed electronically run machines, especially its technology for finishing the steel, and its work force, made it a going concern.

Workers march on parliament

What also made Sartid remarkable is that the workers fought back. And they did

Belgrade workers fight slave wages.

so as workers in all of Serbia were preparing to battle the pro-NATO government.

On Oct. 29-31 thousands of workers protested before the parliament in Belgrade, called out by the Alliance of Independent Serbian Unions. Meanwhile Parliament was debating a no-confidence vote in the government. Many of the workers, including the miners, were from unions that in October 2000 had supported the parties now in office.

Police stopped buses filled with workers from arriving at the capital. On Oct. 30, they used teargas to break up the protest.

After three years of a post-Milosevic, pro-capitalist, pro-NATO government that is even promising to send troops to Iraq and is helping turn the former Yugoslavia into a colony of the West, the organized workers in Yugoslavia are showing resistance.

Meanwhile, Milosevic has been battling charges at The Hague, Netherlands, for alleged war crimes. He has represented himself before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which was organized by the same NATO countries that launched a brutal 78-day bombing campaign of that country. Many accounts assert that Milosevic's determined political defense and sharp cross-examinations have stymied the ICTY prosecutors. NATO's court has failed to prove its case.

In synch with the growing resistance inside Serbia, groups of emigrants from Yugoslavia plus European organizations that defend Milosevic will march on The Hague Nov. 8, demanding that the former Yugoslav president be released from prison and given two years to prepare his defense case.

They say that by standing steadfastly against the ICTY, countering all the lies told about Serb people, and straightening out the facts about NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia, Milosevic has been doing a service, not only to Serbia and Yugoslavia, but to the workers of the world and anyone fighting U.S. imperialism. □

BERLIN

100,000 march against cutbacks

By John Catalinotto

Tens of thousands of employed and unemployed workers marched through downtown Berlin Nov. 1 from Alexanderplatz to the Gendarmenmarkt to protest the government's plan to cut pensions, unemployment insurance and other social services. According to organizers, the crowd grew as it went through the city, almost doubling in size to over 100,000.

Like the general strike in Italy on Oct. 24, this was a strong response to the attempt by European Union bosses to cut workers' salaries and living conditions. The current attack is being directed especially against retired and unemployed workers, but all working people are hurt by the German government's so-called Agenda 2010.

All shades of the bourgeois political spectrum are carrying out this anti-worker attack. In Italy, it's the rightist government led by Premier Silvio Berlusconi. In Germany, it's being done by the alliance of the Social Democrats and the Green Party.

A coalition of the more progressive trade union locals with the anti-globalization organization ATTAC-Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in eastern Germany and sections of the peace movement called the Berlin action. Organizers expected 20,000 participants, and said they were surprised and excited when five times that number turned out.

Demonstrators held banners and posters and shouted slogans that called the government program "the greatest attack on the workers since the Second World War." While union banners filled the march, rank-and-file unionists were critical of the half-hearted effort that top union leaders had put into building the event. The union leadership is historically close to the ruling Social Democrats, just as the top leaders of the AFL-CIO in the United States are close to the Democratic Party.

Werner Halbauer of ATTAC-Germany told *Workers World* that "the top union leadership had practically given up the fightback against cuts in social programs over the summer," but that resistance was

stepped up in national unions representing service workers, metal workers and teachers, as well as in some local unions. "The mass of the demonstrators followed the local unions, coalitions and anti-globalization groups," Halbauer said.

Workers in most of Western Europe have enjoyed wage and benefit packages and social security programs much superior to those in the United States. Most of these were won during the time when the capitalist West was in sharp competition with socialist Eastern Europe.

Since the collapse of the East European workers' states in 1989, the capitalist class in Western Europe has opened an attack on workers' living standards. After chipping away at wages and company-paid benefits year by year, they are now getting the capitalist governments to cut social services and insurance. Pensions are under attack throughout Europe, leading to giant strikes and protests in France, Italy, Austria, Spain and Greece—and now Germany—with nothing settled as yet.

In an attempt to wring more profits from a highly productive labor force,



Seattle has come to Germany.

European capitalists want to push social benefits down to a U.S. level.

The struggle against social-service cutbacks will continue to be a major theme throughout the coming months in the European Union zone. As one speaker said from the podium in Berlin: "We are many, and we're coming back."

Halbauer, too, was optimistic regarding future developments. "We are experiencing in Germany the beginning of a new extraparliamentary movement," he said. "Seattle has finally come to Germany." □



Dean's racist ploy

Democratic presidential-hopeful Howard Dean, who many mistakenly view as anti-war and therefore more liberal, deserves to be denounced for the racist and craven statement he made in a Des Moines Register interview: "I still want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks." Later, at the "Rock the Vote" debate in Boston, he refused to retract or apologize for the remark.

Dean is no fool. He knows that the Confederate flag is the emblem of the slavocracy.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, another presidential candidate who also is an African American civil rights leader and whose campaign has been rendered virtually invisible by the corporate media, responded that the Confederate flag "is like the swastika to a Jewish person."

To whom was Dean appealing when he said, "We can't beat George Bush unless we appeal to a broad cross section of Democrats"? This is not just populist demagoguery. He is equating broadness with racism by bringing in the Confederate flag. He's not reaching out to white, working-class voters, he's reaching out to white racists.

Dean made a similar remark in February at a Democratic National Committee meeting. He was reportedly calling for the Democrats to reverse the Republican Southern strategy, launched in Richard Nixon's 1968 election campaign, that successfully broke up what had been the "Solid South" dominated by the Dixiecrats. Dean said then, "White folks in the South who drive pickups with Confederate flag decals on the back ought to be voting with us and

not them because their kids don't have health insurance, and their kids need better schools, too."

You would think from Dean's remarks that the civil rights struggle had never happened. As even Dean's rival for the nomination, Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, said, most white workers in the South are not running around with the Confederate flag these days. It is the emblem of conscious and deliberate racists, in both the North and South. The coalition of forces that fought to have the flag removed from the State House in South Carolina included whites as well as African Americans.

To pin this Klan emblem on Southern white workers is misleading. Isn't Dean really reaching out to the Southern racist ruling class that can trace its fortunes back to chattel slavery? Isn't he beseeching the Southern wealthy elite to come back to the Democratic Party once again?

If so, he's not the first liberal Democrat with national ambitions to seek a coalition with racists. That was the message that Jimmy Carter sent when he teamed up with arch-segregationist Lester Maddox in 1970 to run for governor and lieutenant governor, respectively, of Georgia. Ted Kennedy was sending the same message when he demonstratively met with George Wallace of Alabama in 1974 to see if he could get that racist's support for a presidential bid two years later. These capitalist politicians may talk about white men who drive beat-up pickup trucks, but they're really speaking to the chauffeured class that owns the industry and banking wealth—in both the South and the North. □

Organize Wal-Mart

If anything shows the AFL-CIO was right to mobilize immigrant workers last Oct. 4, it was the brutal government roundup of 250 janitors at Wal-Mart on Oct. 23. The giant retailer, which pays its own employees sweatshop wages, had contracted out its janitorial work to companies paying slave wages.

Workers from Poland, El Salvador, Russia, Mexico and the Czech Republic were paid under \$7 per hour with no special overtime pay for the seven days and 56 hours many were working each week. Of course they get no vacations, no health-care, no Social Security, and so on.

Now that Eastern Europe is capitalist, its economies have been taken over by Western banks and monopolies. They lay off half the work force, pay as little

as possible to those still working, and use the pool of unemployed they have created as pressure on the wages of workers here in the U.S. It's what U.S. monopolies have been doing in Latin America for a century. They lure unemployed workers from poorer countries oppressed by imperialism, making rosy promises which always sound better than being without work at home.

Whether we're talking about workers in a steel mill in Serbia, a textile mill in El Salvador, or those lured here to clean a warehouse or an office building, the big monopolies exploit them doubly and triply. The only way for U.S. labor to fight back against this relentless capitalist globalization is to help organize and support the struggle of immigrant workers. There are no borders in the workers' struggle. □

Why it's the right slogan for the

Continued from page 6

the guise of humanitarian reconstruction, all sectors of the resource-rich country of Iraq are now being opened up for the profit of corporate and banking interests, especially those from the United States. That's what this war was all about.

Ibrahim Bahr al-Uloom, who was educated in the U.S., worked for U.S. oil companies in Kuwait, and is described as a champion of foreign investment and privatization (Wall Street Journal, Sept. 25), announced last month that Baghdad welcomes proposals from foreign oil companies to develop Iraq's oil. He was immediately chosen by the U.S. overlord in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer III, to become Iraq's oil minister.

Hassan al-Musawi, an official with the U.S. hand-picked governing council, said oil companies from the U.S. may be given "preferential treatment in contract negotiations in a sign of gratitude" for having toppled the old government.

The state-owned oil and natural gas resources that allowed Iraqis to enjoy rapid social and economic development in the past are slated to be turned over to foreign oil companies. Their profits will not be used for the development of Iraq, but to reward investors back home.

Iraqi officials are now working with the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which helps promote U.S. investment overseas. U.S. taxpayers fund OPIC, which in turn provides loan guarantees to U.S. corporations so they cannot fail to benefit and profit from investments in foreign countries. This accelerates the tempo and pace of U.S. foreign investment in Iraq, even before the security situation has been resolved.

Using the OPIC loan guarantees as the ultimate cushion, the Bush administration is signaling U.S. corporations and the oil monopolies that "You can invest in Iraq right now, because, if the investment goes sour, U.S. taxpayers will bail you out." In short, the Bush administration is racing to reorganize the entire Iraqi economy, including the formerly state-run oil industry, prior to the creation of a politically "sovereign" Iraq.

The so-called transition period is nothing more than the de facto looting and plunder of Iraq by the U.S. Occupation Authority. This is no secret. Yet the UN Security Council, in the resolution adopted on May 22, gave the Occupation Authority full legal status and full control over the reorganization of Iraq's economy.

On the same day that the UN resolved to give the U.S. Occupation Authority full

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anti-war movement: 'Bring the troops home'

control over Iraq, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13303 that provides full immunity to all U.S. oil companies and other energy corporations investing in Iraqi oil. The order explains that U.S. oil companies must be exempt and given immunity from all lawsuits because any potential lawsuit "obstructs the orderly reconstruction of Iraq."

Iraq's constitution under the Baathist government insulated the country from some of the worst features of what is now called globalization. These constitutional measures are being scrapped by decree and edict under the new authority prior to the formation of a new government.

Under the previous constitution, foreign investment in Iraq was restricted to resident citizens of Arab countries. On Sept. 19, the Coalition Provisional Authority issued Order #39 that permits 100-percent foreign ownership and management in most Iraqi business entities.

On Sept. 21, Iraqi Minister of Finance Kamel Al-Gailani—also hand-picked by Bremer—announced that new foreign owners of Iraqi companies would be permitted "full remittance of profits, dividends, interest and royalties" to investors from their home countries. Instead of Iraq's wealth being used to finance domestic development, it will be sucked out by transnational corporations.

Foreign banks that were barred from Iraq will now be allowed to "enter Iraq as branches, subsidiaries," according to the Sept. 21 decree on finance reform. The decree also "permits six foreign banks to purchase up to 100 percent of local banks within the next five years."

These facts taken together should indicate that the U.S. occupation of Iraq cannot be compared in any way to a genuine humanitarian effort. What is happening, to be honest, is the economic recolonization of Iraq.

U.S. soldiers and their families, many of whom marched in Washington on Oct. 25, are coming into the anti-war movement because they now realize they have been lied to by the Bush administration. Many were willing to risk death and injury when they believed the president's assertion that Iraq posed a grave and imminent

danger to the people of the United States. Having learned that this was a lie, the idea of sacrificing even one more life becomes too much to bear.

Why should U.S. soldiers or any foreign soldiers be put in a situation where they must kill and be killed for a brazen colonial project? These soldiers want to come home, not tomorrow but today. The Iraqi people through myriad forms of resistance, both armed and peaceful, have shown they want the foreign occupation of their country to end now.

By fully embracing the slogan "Bring the troops home now, end the occupation of Iraq," the antiwar movement sends a message to both the Iraqi people and U.S. soldiers. It affirms support for the basic right of self-determination for Iraq, while saying to U.S. soldiers: This is a rich man's war. Your lives and your dignity are too precious to be used as cannon fodder for imperialism.

Becker is a member of the national steering committee of ANSWER.



Anti-war protest in Washington, D.C., Oct. 25.

WW PHOTO: BILL HACKWELL

WORKERS WORLD

55 West 17th Street, 5th Floor
New York, New York 10011

November 2003

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in a special National Conference on the weekend of December 6-7 in New York City. The theme of the conference is "Reviving the struggle for worldwide socialism."

The Conference on Socialism is sponsored by Workers World Party and will be held at Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium, which is at Amsterdam Avenue & West 65 Street, in Manhattan. The conference begins at 10 am on Saturday, with registration starting at 9 am.

This is a public conference open to all who are interested in participating in a dialogue on socialism and on the need to revive the socialist movement. The conference program will include invited guests as well as leaders of WWP. Speakers and workshop facilitators will represent national liberation movements and struggles against imperialism, repression and war and those involving labor, immigrants, prisoners, women, lesbian/gay/bi/trans, communities of color, youth, and more.

There has never been a better time to focus on strengthening our solidarity with the people of the world—from Iraq and Palestine, to Zimbabwe, Colombia, and the Philippines. The struggle against the war has brought more of us together, here and around the world, than at any time in history. Yet there is a hunger for something more, something that gives our protest, our thinking, our unity even greater purpose. Something that clarifies the issues and views that we advance.

What gives a greater purpose to our struggle is a passionate determination to replace the misery, deprivation, hopelessness and violence of capitalism with a socialist future. It is a conviction that revolutionary action by the international working class can put an end to capitalist oppression. The Conference on Socialism will examine revolutionary change in its relationship to every struggle. We hope that you will join us.

Register for the conference now. A special webpage has been set up for the conference. To access it, go to <http://www.workers.org> and click on the conference ad. This will take you to the conference page where you can get more information, view and print the flyer, and register for the conference.

Please help get out the word about this exciting conference. The outreach effort was launched at the massive October 25 anti-war marches in Washington and San Francisco, where nearly 10,000 flyers were distributed. The response was terrific, with many people signing up to attend. Please feel free to invite anyone you think would be interested in participating. If you have any questions, ideas, or suggestions about the conference, please call the New York office at 212-627-2994 or email us at conference@workers.org.

You can also assist by making a financial contribution. The expenses of hosting a conference of this scope in New York are considerable—from hall rental, to guest transportation and accommodations, to publicity. Your donation will contribute to the conference's success. Donations can be mailed to the address above. Donations can be made online at www.workers.org/orders.

Yours in the struggle,

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Postura de Mundo Obrero sobre los países socialistas

Este artículo fue escrito en respuesta a un lector británico, quien preguntó sobre la posición del partido Workers World/Mundo Obrero con respecto a los países socialistas.

Estimado Bertolt:

Acerca de su pregunta sobre si nuestro partido considera a la “ex Unión Soviética, los países de Europa Oriental antes de 1989, Corea del Norte, Cuba, etc. como países socialistas,” la respuesta es afirmativa. Pero déjeme elaborar.

Al comienzo del siglo 20, la implacable expansión del sistema capitalista generó guerras imperialistas, revoluciones socialistas y luchas de liberación nacional, como lo dijo Lenin. El período de transición del capitalismo al socialismo a escala mundial comenzó con la Revolución Rusa, pero ha tardado mucho más de lo que él y otros Marxistas esperaban, y ha visto graves retrocesos para el socialismo. Sin embargo, durante este período no ha aparecido un tercer sistema social ni tampoco una nueva clase propietaria en el mundo.

Nosotros ampliamente definimos como socialistas aquellos países donde el viejo estado explotador de clases fue destruido y los nuevos regímenes expropiaron los medios de producción y establecieron alguna forma de economía

planificada. Libre de la necesidad de obtener ganancias, el desarrollo económico podría ser reorganizado para satisfacer las necesidades humanas básicas. Esto generalmente ocurrió por medio de la intervención revolucionaria de las masas (URSS, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Corea y otros.) Sin embargo, en gran parte de la Europa Oriental, la destrucción de las estructuras del viejo estado resultó no por revolución de las masas sino por medio de una derrota militar de los regímenes burgueses fascistas por el Ejército Rojo Soviético a finales de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Ha habido otras revoluciones de gran significado que nosotros no caracterizamos como socialistas. Estas se han mantenido dentro del marco de las relaciones de propiedad capitalista pero han logrado mucha independencia del control imperialista-como ejemplo están las revoluciones nacionalistas de Irak y Libia.

Aquellos que argumentan que el crecimiento de la burocracia y la represión política en la URSS representaban una nueva forma de sociedad de clases no pueden explicar el porqué del colapso. La respuesta es que la burocracia no fue una nueva clase, sino un grupo privilegiado con dos caracteres. Por una parte fue un peso sobre el nuevo sistema socialista que luchaba por sobrevivir, pero por otra

organizó su economía en una época que hubo muchos logros extraordinarios para los obreros y los campesinos.

Por su economía planificada, la Unión Soviética pudo progresar de una sociedad casi analfabeta y semi-feudal a una potencia industrial de la era espacial, en solo dos generaciones, y a pesar de haber sufrido una inmensa destrucción durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Pero no pudo sostener su desarrollo socialista frente a la hostilidad del mundo burgués tanto fascista como “democrático”.

El grupo gobernante antes de Yeltsin no tenía ningún derecho especial sobre la propiedad en el sistema Soviético-o sea, este no era en ninguna forma la clase gobernante desde el punto de vista Marxista. Pero sí tuvo privilegios tanto legales como ilegales, que les separaron de las masas populares y les abrió el apetito a obtener la propiedad de los medios de producción que manejaban a muchos en sus filas. Los imperialistas alternadamente amenazaban a los líderes soviéticos con extinción nuclear y trataban de seducirles con promesas grandiosas. Una vez que el estado obrero fue desmantelado, a muchos miembros de esta capa de la sociedad soviética les fue fácil la transición hacia el capitalismo. Pero fue sólo entonces que ellos pudieron tomar posesión de las riquezas del país y aún así lo hicieron con trucos y tácticas de gangster.

Ellos habían sido miembros de un grupo que gozaba de privilegios dentro del estado obrero. Algunos entonces se convirtieron en miembros de la clase capitalista propietaria que ha usurpado a los obreros y re introducido las formas más viles de explotación.

La desarticulación del estado soviético y el pillaje de lo que había sido la propiedad social -mucho de esto hecho por los mismos imperialistas quienes habían enfocado toda su atención en su destrucción- le ha traído mucho sufrimiento a los trabajadores y ha resucitado los más terribles antagonismos nacionales, desmoronando asimismo a la unión. Todos los índices sociales comprueban cuán devastador ha sido este suceso.

También ha creado un gran sufrimiento para los países en vías de desarrollo que trataban de progresar económicamente y se beneficiaban de la existencia de un bloque socialista que mantenía a los ladrones imperialistas a distancia.

Nosotros nos sentimos totalmente reivindicados en haber sido partidarios consistentes de la URSS en contra de la intervención imperialista y la reacción interna, mientras hicimos advertencia tras advertencia sobre el peligro del crecimiento interno de elementos burgueses, y mantuvimos una línea independiente en relación a las políticas internacionales en muchos casos. Si revisa nuestro portal del Web: www.workers.org, va a encontrar un análisis comprehensivo de la URSS escrito por el fundador del Partido Mundo Obrero, Sam Marcy. En su libro “Perestroika: una crítica marxista”, por ejemplo, Marcy escribió:

“Desde el punto de vista administrativo, el estado soviético está en manos de

una vasta burocracia. Pero la propiedad de los medios de producción, que significa la gran mayoría de la riqueza del país incluso sus recursos naturales, pertenece legal e inequívocamente al pueblo -a la clase trabajadora, que es la abrumadora mayoría de la población. Los que están en el grupo gobernante son meramente los administradores del estado y de la propiedad del estado. ... La propiedad de los medios de producción en manos de la clase trabajadora es verdaderamente el factor sociológico más importante en la evaluación de la URSS como un estado obrero, o un estado socialista como está llamado en deferencia a las aspiraciones del pueblo”.

Eso fue escrito en 1989, antes de que la disolución del estado soviético resultara en la venta de todas las riquezas del pueblo.

Cada revolución socialista ha sido formada -y, en tal sentido, limitada- por las condiciones materiales y sociales heredadas del pasado y por la presencia de aliados a los que puede dirigirse o si está aislada en un mar lleno de estados capitalistas hostiles. Cualquier fallo subjetivo que uno pueda señalar fluye de estos hechos reales.

La caída de la Unión Soviética ha tenido un impacto profundo en los movimientos de la clase trabajadora y los movimientos de liberación nacional alrededor del mundo. Ha animado especialmente a los capitalistas monopolistas quienes ahora ostentan sus ambiciones imperialistas abiertamente. Pero no ha sido la negación en ninguna forma, de la relevancia de la lucha de clases. Y esta está aumentando de nuevo, impulsada por los requisitos insaciables de los capitalistas de extraer más plusvalía de los trabajadores, especialmente mientras la tecnología avanza y la competencia por los mercados se vuelve más viciosa.

Confiamos en que la lucha mundial por el socialismo tiene que resucitar, no solo en los países oprimidos sino especialmente en los centros imperialistas. Lo que necesitan los oprimidos alrededor del mundo para poder deshacerse de las cadenas, son movimientos fuertes de la clase trabajadora que puedan desafiar a los imperialistas en su propia casa -en las entrañas del monstruo, como dicen nuestros camaradas cubanos. Y eso va a pasar. La extensión de la globalización capitalista -el capital moviéndose a dónde los salarios son más bajos destruyendo a las economías locales, forzando a los campesinos y a los trabajadores de todo el Tercer Mundo a buscar empleos en los países imperialistas- hace más necesaria la solidaridad y la lucha de clase internacional para los trabajadores de todas las nacionalidades.

Vamos a luchar por el socialismo como queremos que sea, y como lo puede ser cuando el imperialismo sea derrotado, mientras, valoremos y aprendamos de las grandes luchas y sacrificios que se están dando alrededor del mundo.

Deirdre Griswold
Editora del Periódico Mundo Obrero (Workers World)

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