

A SOCIALIST ACTION

**Civilian deaths mount in
Afghanistan**

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U.S. / CANADA \$1

U.S. brokers sham accord at Copenhagen climate talks



John Spanner / NY Times

By CHRISTINE FRANK

Given the greatly lowered expectations thrust upon us by world leaders in advance, it came as no surprise that the outcome of the UN Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December did not include mandatory, binding, and enforceable greenhouse gas emission reductions. Thus, action was delayed once again.

With the U.S. yet to enact climate legislation in any form, Washington sent two top leaders at the last minute to orchestrate things in favor of globalized capital, which is bent upon maintaining its hydrocarbon-based economy. Secretary of State Clinton made an appearance to announce that rich nations would provide financial aid to poor ones to help them adapt to what is quickly becoming runaway climate change. This was despite the fact that leaders of the Global South, who have been demanding that the industrial North pay its climate debt, have made it clear they do not want charity but reparations for the damage done to their ecosystems, coastlines, islands, agriculture, water supplies, and human health caused by global warming.

President Obama, who managed to tear himself away from the escalation of the war in Afghanistan and Nobel Peace Prize festivities, finally appeared on the last day of deliberations. He announced that the U.S. would cut greenhouse gas emissions by a mere 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. This amounts to only a four percent reduction by the 1990 standards set by the rest of the world and shapes up poorly indeed next to the 40 percent called for by island nations, currently being inundated by rising sea levels and countries that are losing their alpine glaciers and fresh water supplies. He pretended to crack the whip to get delegates to act, but the effect was akin to 40 lashes with a wet noodle since little was accomplished in the way of solid climate mitigation or adaptation measures.

(Photo above) Climate protesters in central Copenhagen, Dec. 12.

After Obama and Clinton arrived, the situation in Copenhagen became increasingly more repressive and undemocratic. Accredited delegates from major NGOs were officially banned from the conference. With the exclusion of the vast majority of nations, a small group of about two dozen world leaders and their negotiators met behind closed doors on the final day of the two-week summit to cut a secret deal. Among the chosen were the representatives of China, India, South Africa, Brazil and Mexico, whose economies are on the rampage.

The measures they already had on the table were basically accepted, but are not impressive. China had pledged a 40 percent reduction by 2020 in the "energy intensity" of its economy, and India had aimed to reduce carbon emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 25 percent. These are only energy-efficiency measures, which will ultimately lead to greater energy use in the long run as these economies expand and grow.

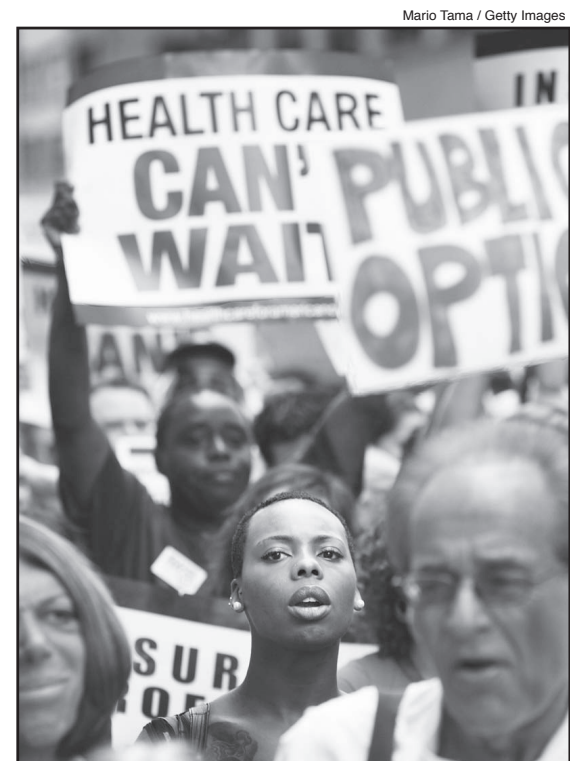
South Africa had promised to slow the growth of its emissions to 34 percent below the current annual rate. Little real progress is expected there since powerful transnational mining interests use most of the energy and release most of the pollution in that country.

In the meantime, the wealthy nations of the northern hemisphere will continue with various frauds and market-based solutions such as carbon trading and offsets that will merely create more fictitious capital for Goldman & Sachs and offer the illusion of cutting greenhouse gases.

As the planet continues to melt down, they will proliferate more so-called clean-development mechanisms such as destructive mega-dams and nuclear reactors that are dirty through and through, and phony efforts to save the rainforests that will lead to their decimation with sterile tree plantations. The ruling rich will try to get away with it, as the climate crisis deepens and the world's poor and oppressed bear the brunt of intensifying natural disasters.

The conference got off to a bad start when negotiations

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Mario Tama / Getty Images

Health 'reform' bill a bonanza for the insurance corps.

By ANDREW POLLACK

On Nov. 7 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a health-care "reform" bill whose central plank was a massive giveaway to private insurers. It included a "public option" plan that would compete in an insurance exchange dominated by the profiteers, and would cover only a fraction of the number projected in earlier versions of the bill.

On Christmas Eve the Senate passed its own bill, which pays even less lip service to reining in insurers' profiteering and patient dumping.

The final bill, after reconciliation between House and Senate versions, is certain to hew closely to the latter. CNN reported on Dec. 28 that House Democrats were already signaling they were ready to drop the public option, and in general to lean toward the Senate version, using as an excuse the fact that no Republicans had voted for the Senate bill, and that it had passed only after moderate Democrats succeeded in forcing more and more pro-insurer provisions into the bill.

The key supporters of a single-payer (Medicare for All) plan, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) and National Nurses United, issued press releases detailing the problems with the Senate bill (and corresponding problems in the House version). These include:

- Cuts of \$43 billion in Medicare payments to safety-net hospitals (i.e., the nonprofit institutions relied on disproportionately by the poor and/or

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Reformers win leadership of two Teamster local unions

By DAVID BERNT

On Jan. 1 two New York City Teamsters Locals will be headed by new reform leaderships. The two locals, Local 804 and 814, have voted in officers pledging to stop the concessions, corruption, and roll-over approach to bargaining that was the norm under the incumbents and is far too common in other locals and the International leadership of the Teamsters Union. They have both called for a new fightback approach based around mobilizing the rank and file, democratizing the union, and doing away with the bloated salaries and perks enjoyed by the old guard incumbents.

Both reform slates were inspired by rank-and-file organizing efforts against concessions negotiated by the incumbent leadership.

In Local 804, a 7000-member local of mostly UPS employees, workers organized a successful "Vote No" campaign against the UPS contract and local rider agreement, which included significant pension cuts and work-rule changes. When the ranks voted down their local rider, holding up the implementation of the entire national contract, the old guard was forced to return to the bargaining table and remove the worst of the concessions in order to secure passage.

Leaders of the "Vote No" campaign formed the 804 Members United Slate, an election slate of rank-and-file workers. The slate received 68% of the vote against the incumbents. The newly elected slate has pledged to implement a 10-point program to strengthen democracy and rank-and-file participation in the local, and negotiate stronger contracts and improve the local's pension fund. The new officers will reduce officer salaries by \$35,000 and eliminate 401K contributions for officers in order to restore financial health to the local.



The Local 804 victory is also very symbolic for the reform movement, as 804 was the home local of the first democratically elected International General President of the Teamsters, Ron Carey, who led the union in the 1990s and fought to transform the Teamsters from a corrupt mob-controlled union into a democratic member-run institution. Carey also led the historic 1997 national UPS strike, the largest and most militant strike in recent years, which resulted in a major victory for UPS workers and inspired workers throughout the country.

In Local 814, which includes commercial movers and auction house workers, the New Directions Slate won with 72% of the vote. Rank-and-file workers organized campaigns to fight concessionary contracts and exposed how the current administration bankrupted the local's pension and health funds. The New Directions Slate built the foundation of their campaign through a series of successful "Vote No" contract campaigns.

The issues affecting rank-and-file Teamsters in these

locals are the same ones that affect all Teamsters. Employers, whether profitable or not, are using the recession to pressure unions to accept concessions. Teamster employers have found union leaders on the other side of the bargaining tables far too willing to accept whatever they propose.

In the 12 years since Jimmy Hoffa Jr. was elected General President of the Teamsters, workers have witnessed their contracts weakened and their pension funds depleted, in some cases on the brink of collapse. Hoffa came to power promising to restore Teamster power; instead he has restored incompetence, corruption, bloated officer salaries (Hoffa himself pulled in \$383,132 last year), and inferior contracts.

The failures of the Hoffa administration are most glaring in the union's traditional core industry: freight trucking. The industry continues to be dominated by non-union companies and owner-operators. The few remaining Teamster shops in the industry have been pressured to accept concessions.

The last National Master Freight Agreement, negotiated in early 2008 before the recession when freight companies were reporting large profits, contained many concessions in work rules, outsourcing, and minimal wage and benefit packages.

Since the economic downturn, the trucking giant YRC has added insult to injury by twice demanding, with the support of Hoffa, the reopening of the NMFA to get further concessions. The 50,000 Teamsters were pressured by the International to accept first a 10% wage reduction and then, a few months later, a further 5% wage cut and an 18-month suspension of pension contributions.

While the national settlement was approved, a few YRC local subsidiaries rejected the concessions. Additionally, the ranks from Chicago area Teamsters Locals 705 and 710, who negotiate contracts separate from the NMFA, rejected the concessions. The officers of Local 705 have supported the YRC workers refusal of concessions, while Local 710 President Pat Flynn, an International VP and Hoffa lackey, has tried to convince workers in both locals to vote for concessions.

The workers have now rejected concessions multiple

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A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

We propose an EMERGENCY CONGRESS OF LABOR to discuss and take steps to implement the following demands —

- 1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers' committees.
- 2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.
- 3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.
- 4) Immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq & Afghanistan! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people's needs and to combat global warming.
- 5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to

55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.

6) To combat inflation: A sliding scale of wages and pensions that matches the rises in consumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.

7) Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimination; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orientation, skin color, or national origin.

8) Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transportation corporations and place them under the control of elected committees of workers.

9) To mobilize support for the demands it adopts, the EMERGENCY CONGRESS should organize ACTION COMMITTEES in every workplace and neighborhood threatened by the crisis. These committees can draw up more concrete demands than the ones outlined above.

10) To put all these measures into effect, we need a LABOR PARTY — based on a fighting union movement and all people who are oppressed and exploited. For a workers' government!

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Civilian casualties spiral as U.S. wages terror war in Afghanistan

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

This month, the first members of President Obama's call-up of 30,000 military reinforcements are being transported to Afghanistan. Foreign military strength in the country is scheduled to swell to about 140,000 troops by summer, including about 98,000 from the United States.

At the same time, Washington and its allies are expanding what can only be called a war of terror, in which alleged Islamic militants, and their families, are assassinated in their homes. Over a thousand civilians have lost their lives in Afghanistan and Pakistan due to U.S. drone missile raids.

A secret army of commandos, private "contractors," and CIA "Special Activities" operatives has been turned loose for assassinations and other armed forays against Islamist radicals in the region. These clandestine death squads began under President Bush, and Obama has increased their role in the region.

Such measures have yielded little success so far for the U.S.-led coalition against the Taliban and other resistance militia, and European governments are becoming increasingly wary of getting bogged down in the morass. As a result, the Afghanistan war and occupation is more and more becoming an American campaign—as it is in Iraq.

In response to Washington's urging or bullying, a few U.S. allies (including aspiring NATO members Ukraine, Georgia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) have promised to send a total of about 7000 more soldiers to Afghanistan. But these units will barely replace the troops from other countries that are being withdrawn.

The Afghan war is deeply unpopular among the European public; in response to antiwar pressure, the Netherlands will withdraw its 2200 troops this year. The Canadian government, likewise acceding to antiwar sentiment at home, has decided that its 2800 troops will be withdrawn in 2011.

Some military spokespeople have expressed optimism for the coming year, due mainly to the increased U.S. troop strength. Canada's top general in the field, Daniel Menard, boasted that with over 5000 Canadian and U.S. troops under his command, the Taliban insurgency would be "marginalized" in Kandahar province by Canada's 2011 pull-out date.

But Canada's chief of defense, Gen. Walter Natynczyk, was less ebullient in his predictions, conceding that 2009 had been a "rough year" in Afghanistan. He cited the corruption-marred presidential election in the summer, a rise in Taliban

attacks, and heightened allied casualties (Canwest New Service, Dec. 27, 2009).

A recent Canadian government report suggested that although there has been some progress in training Afghan National Army battalions, training the Afghan National Police has been an uphill battle: "The ANP suffers from frequent incidents of corruption, extortion and drug abuse; as well, poor pay, substandard equipment and targeted violence from insurgents."

Working with "friendly" Afghan soldiers and civilian collaborators presents the U.S. and European trainers with constant risks. For example, the suicide bomber who killed seven CIA agents on Dec. 30 at a base for coordinating drone missile attacks was reported to have been able to enter the base as a presumed CIA operative.

Anti-U.S. forces gain ground

Jonathan Burch, reporting for Reuters on Dec. 27, noted, "Foreign forces have only a year to turn the tide of the war in Afghanistan, and the Taliban have a shadow government in place that could run the country if the West fails, a senior NATO intelligence official said on Sunday. The official said that the Taliban has expanded its influence across Afghanistan and was now running a "full-fledged insurgency."

"Time is running out. We've got about a year to prove that our strategy can actually work. The Taliban has shadow governors in 33 out of the 34 provinces," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told a small group of reporters. "So he [the "Taliban," a catch-all term used to refer to a number of allied militias] has got a government-in-waiting. He has got ministers."

The NATO official said that the Taliban had found a successful weapon in roadside bombs; IED attacks rose from merely 81 in 2003 to 7200 last year. Twice as many U.S. soldiers died in Afghanistan in 2009 compared to 2008 (310 deaths compared to 155 the previous year), while fatalities among British soldiers more than doubled (106 last year compared to 51 in 2008). "This is not meant to be a joke," the official said, "but whoever is their logistics chief, you know, we oughta be taking lessons from them. Because that's pretty darn good ... for an enemy insurgent force to generate that kind of capability."

While the ground war appears to be at a stalemate, or worse, the U.S.-led coalition has ramped up its one-sided air war—though the spiraling civilian death toll has increased resentment against the presence of U.S. and NATO troops in the country. According to UN figures, 10 percent more civilians were killed during the first 10 months of 2009 than during the same period of the previous year.

In one of the most highly publicized recent massacres, operations by international forces in Kunar province on Dec. 19 killed 10 civilians, including eight young students. Popular outrage forced Afghan President Hamid Karzai to order

A secret army of commandos, private 'contractors,' and CIA operatives has been turned loose for assassinations and other armed forays. Obama has increased the role of these death squads in the region.

a probe into the circumstances of the attack. Barely three days later, however, at least four civilians were killed by NATO airstrikes in northern Baghlan province. The dead, according to Pajhwok Afghan News, included a father and his three sons who were caught while running to escape the bombardment.

Air attacks, chiefly by unmanned drones, have also raised the number of civilian casualties in the neighboring Tribal Territories of Pakistan. Seven U.S. missile attacks in December killed at least 44 people in the same area of North Waziristan, according to the liberal Pakistani journal, *Dawn*. U.S. and Pakistani authorities claim that the dead were all pro-Taliban and al-Qaida members, but this is unclear. The U.S. carried out over 50 airstrikes in Pakistan in 2009, and estimates of the number of Pakistani civilians killed by these attacks range from over 600 to as many as 1000 since August 2008.

Reports state that people of the region are panicked by the constant presence of drones overhead, often accompanied by higher-flying B-52 heavy bombers. At present, the B-52s are used to aid in surveillance—but they can also be lethal. During Desert Storm in Iraq, B-52s were responsible for 40 percent of all the bombs dropped by the U.S.

Secret assassination squads

In recent weeks, the U.S. media—including the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*—have reported on the increasing use of secretive Special Operations units in combat against Islamist forces. An article by Eric Schmitt in the Dec. 26 *Times* cited unnamed officials in stating that these units are being sent into areas to soften them up before the introduction of regular troops. Often they are assigned to assassinate insurgent leaders, a task they share with the CIA.

"The commandos, from the Army's Delta Force and the Navy's classified Seals units, have had success weakening the network

of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the strongest Taliban warrior in eastern Afghanistan, the officers said. ... Guided by intercepted cellphone communications, the American commandos have also killed some important Taliban operatives in Marja, the most fearsome Taliban stronghold in Helmand Province in the south." More than 1000 U.S. Marines, as well as Afghan and British forces, are being readied for a major confrontation in Marja early this year.

"American commanders in Afghanistan," *The Times* reported, "rely on the commando units to carry out some of the most complicated operations against militant leaders, and the missions are never publicly acknowledged. The commandos are the same elite forces that have been pursuing Osama bin Laden, captured Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003 and led the hunt that ended in 2006 in the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader in Iraq of the insurgent group Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia." The use of secret commando forces is due to be increased in the coming year, according to military officials.

Citing interviews with former "contractors" from Blackwater (now XE Services) and U.S. intelligence agents, *The New York Times* reported Dec. 11 that Blackwater employees "participated in some of the C.I.A.'s most sensitive activities—clandestine raids with agency officers against people suspected of being insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan and the transporting of detainees."

According to *The Times*, the Blackwater guards "were supposed to only provide perimeter security during raids, leaving it up to C.I.A. officers and Special Operations military personnel to capture or kill suspected insurgents." The newspaper added, "But in the chaos of operations, the roles of Blackwater, C.I.A. and military personnel sometimes merged." Blackwater was also employed to assist the CIA with the use of Predator drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Times article pointed out that the new details of Blackwater's activities come at a time when the House Intelligence Committee is investigating the company's role in the CIA's assassination program, and a federal grand jury in North Carolina is investigating a wide range of allegations of illegal activity by Blackwater and its personnel, including gun running to Iraq. But the tactics of the Afghan war, employing secret assassination squads and bombings that result in high civilian casualties, are not under review; the government's concern seems to be merely that these activities were taken over by a private company.

It is up to the American people, and those of other countries, to speak out against such barbarities—and against the Afghanistan war as a whole. An opportunity will come on March 20, when mass antiwar marches in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Los Angeles will take place. For more information on how to get involved, contact: National Assembly to End the Iraq & Afghanistan Wars & Occupations, www.natassembly.org. ■

(Photo left) Dec. 30 Kabul protests against U.S. air strike in Kunar province that killed 10 civilians.

(Right) U.S. Marines patrol Helmand province, southern Afghanistan, Dec. 12.



... 'Reform' bill

(continued from page 1)

uninsured), threatening the care of the 23 million who would remain uninsured. This problem will be exacerbated as the budget crisis facing states leads to more cuts in state aid to hospitals.

- The bill would not control costs, and its insurance "exchanges" would in fact increase waste, adding a new level of bureaucracy.

- A mandate to either purchase insurance or pay a penalty as high as 2.5% of one's income (the House version). In addition, between \$447 billion and \$605 billion in public dollars (Senate and House versions respectively) would be given to private insurers in the forms of subsidies to help people forced to buy insurance. Yet even with those subsidies, millions would be unable to afford insurance. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that a family of four with household income of \$54,000 would pay 17% of their income on health care.

The number of underinsured (i.e., those who can afford only barebones policies not covering many badly-needed services) and medical bankruptcies would increase. The least expensive plans would cover only 60% of necessary care, and patients would have to pay the balance. As costs continue to soar, more families would face co-payments and deductibles so high they would forego needed care. Insurers have already predicted that the cost of premiums would rise since they are being required to stop excluding pre-existing conditions and cancelling coverage for sick patients.

- The new 40% tax on "Cadillac" health plans would encourage employers to reduce benefits, shift costs to employees, promote high-deductible plans, and lead to more self-rationing of care and medical bankruptcies, especially as more plans are labeled "Cadillac" each year as costs rise. A survey in September found 30% of employers said they would reduce employment if their health costs go up, and 86% said they would pass the higher costs on to employees.

The tax would also hit hardest those already facing price discrimination by insurers, i.e., workers in firms that employ more women and older and sicker employees, and those in states with big cities that have higher costs—all of whom have "Cadillac" plans that are high cost only because insurers won't insure them without sky-high premiums. Within three years, the tax would apply to nearly 20% of all workers with employer-provided health coverage in the country.

The NNU added that the Senate amendment exempting certain "high risk" occupations from this tax covers only male-dominated occupations: mining, construction, police, and firefighting.

The *New York Times* op-ed columnist Bob Herbert noted that the legislators and insurers promoting this Cadillac tax are not just oblivious to suffering, but actually intend the tax to force people to forego health care or to pay more out-of-pocket: "The idea is that rather than fork over 40% in taxes on the amount by which policies exceed the threshold, employers (and individuals who purchase health insurance on their

own) will have little choice but to ratchet down the quality of their health plans.

"Proponents say this is a terrific way to hold down costs. If policyholders have to pay more out of their own pockets, they will be more careful—that is to say, more reluctant—to access health services." But many with serious illnesses will forego care, leading to much expensive treatment later—if it can be afforded at all.

- The bills' supposed protection against insurer denials and abuse are shot through with loopholes. There are supposedly bans on exclusion for pre-existing conditions and on cancellations for sickness. But insurers would be allowed to more than double charges to employees who fail "wellness" programs because they have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol readings, or other medical conditions.

Insurers may continue to rescind policies for "fraud or intentional misrepresentation"—the main pretext insurance companies now use to cancel coverage. Insurers would be permitted to sell policies "across state lines," using as a standard the state with the fewest regulatory protections for patients. And there would be minimal oversight of all these practices.

- The legislation protects pharmaceutical company profits and patents.

- The bills allow insurers to continue age discrimination. Older enrollees can be charged four times more than younger enrollees, and those with certain medical conditions will also be charged more.

- Enrollees would be required to prove citizenship in order to receive subsidies, and non-citizens would be required to bear the full cost of purchasing insurance.

- Reduced reproductive rights for women: The Stupak amendment to the House bill prohibits use of any public funds for abortion. The Senate version forces women to pay ahead of time into a separate fund connected to their plan. Given the unexpectedness of most unwanted pregnancies, this measure severely curtails the ability to use insurance to obtain an abortion. NOW said the Senate bill "amounts to a health insurance bill for half the population and a sweeping anti-abortion law for the rest of us."

- Funding for Medicare services provided by for-profit plans would be cut by \$43 billion. Supposedly designed to halt profiteering by the for-profits, these cuts will in fact enrage seniors who got a few sweeteners above and beyond traditional Medicare coverage to entice them into such plans—sweeteners that instead should have been expanded and extended to all seniors under public auspices.

PNHP had already denounced the House bill, calling it "a massive bailout of the profit-making health industries." The physicians' group called on Congress "to start from scratch. Improving and expanding Medicare to all would save over \$400 billion annually on insurance overhead and bureaucracy," enough to cover all the uninsured.

While noting that the Senate bill includes some "salutary provisions" like an expansion of Medicaid and increased funding for community clinics, it noted that these provisions had been the focus of earlier, separate legislation, and could be enacted on their own rather than being lumped into a pseudo-reform "designed to fail."

(Left) Sept. 22 picket line outside Blue Cross offices in San Francisco; part of a national day of protest against insurance giants and for significant health-care overhaul.

(Below) Obama speaks on health care, Sept. 12. His "reforms" offer little gain for working people.

Some liberal commentators claim the Senate bill is a flawed but necessary first step, citing the example of Social Security. But, replied PNHP, where Social Security established a public institution that grew over time, the Senate bill proscribes any such new public institution. "Social Security's first step was not a mandate that payroll taxes which fund pensions be turned over to Goldman Sachs!"

National Nurses United pointed out that "the bill seems more likely to be eroded, not improved, in future years," noting that all the compromises made this year were "to the right." PNHP and NNU pledged to continue the fight for single-payer.

Role of Democrats

Liberals directed their anger at "Blue Dog" Democrats for siding with Republicans in making the bills even more pro-insurer. But the most liberal Democrats, plus the "independent" and supposedly "socialist" Senator Bernie Sanders, played an even more insidious role in helping Obama put over his pro-insurer strategy.

Sanders—as well as Representative John Conyers, author of the most prominent single-payer bill, HR 676—voted in favor of the final bills in the Senate and House respectively. And although nearly 60 members of the House Progressive Caucus promised to vote against a bill without a "robust public option," virtually all of them are expected to end up voting for a reconciled bill with no public option, a coercive mandate, and a "Cadillac" tax.

Sanders also helped structure the last-minute pork-barreling that gave special favors to Senators who had threatened No votes. These deals came after a half-hearted attempt by Sanders to introduce his single-payer substitute amendment. In a parliamentary maneuver to kill the Democrats' main bill, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma demanded a full reading of the 770-page amendment before debate could proceed. Rather than take this opportunity to let the American people finally hear some details about single-payer, Sanders gave up after three hours and withdrew his amendment.

Profiteers gleeful

In the days following passage of the Senate bill, shares of health-care company stocks soared. "Things have turned out pretty well for the industry," said one analyst. "In particular, all versions of a government-run health plan have largely been eliminated." What's more, a proposed \$6.7 billion industry tax is likely to be phased in only gradually beginning in 2011, which gives insurers time to raise prices.

PNHP columnist Don McCanne pointed out that even the requirement forcing insurers to hike the percent of revenues spent on actual care would not necessarily lead to provision of more needed (especially primary and preventive) care. The Senate bill would require insurers to spend at least 80% on medical care or "quality improvements," while the House bill specifies 85%.

Said McCanne: "But companies could game the system by broadly defining medical costs. And spending limits alone may not stop insurers from raising rates. When New York State tried to limit non-medical care spending, many insurers companies complied—but still instituted double-digit rate increases.

Furthermore, even this 80% or 85% leaves private insurers spending less on care and more on administration than does Medicare, and does nothing to end the huge administrative burden on physicians and hospitals forced to waste precious time and money interacting with hundreds of separate insurers.

But there's more, says McCanne: "By fixing the insurers' cut, they can no longer reach down into the funds allocated for patient care." Instead, "to increase their own net revenues they are highly incentivized to dramatically increase spending on health care! They will encourage every imaginable program that they can label as patient care: more expensive information technology systems, more costly high-tech services regardless of demonstrated value, higher-priced brand drugs instead of generics, six-figure biologics and cancer drugs, rewarding increased frequency and intensity of services, and, the clincher, blinders to the massive fraud that would be rewarded under this system!"

These are just the kind of escalating costs described earlier that make private insurance ever-more unaffordable.

On March 5 to 7, the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Healthcare will hold its next national meeting, at which National Nurses United will kick off a discussion of next steps in the fight for single-payer. Hopefully, that discussion will include ideas on breaking the Democratic Party influence that has to date kept unions from mobilizing in a serious way for genuine health-care reform. ■

Copenhagen is a turning point for the movement

By TERRY CONWAY and THOMAS EISLER

On Saturday, Dec. 12, 100,000 demonstrated in the streets of Copenhagen outside the COP 15 summit demanding urgent action against global warming—more than double the numbers that organizers had predicted or even dared expect. While of course a high percentage of demonstrators came from Denmark itself and from neighboring countries Sweden and Germany (where there is somewhat of a tradition of mobilizing for each other's events), this was a truly international demonstration.

One of the biggest delegations from outside Denmark was the 850-strong special train organized by the Belgian group, Climate Social Justice. It brought activists not only from Belgium but from France and Britain too, in an epic journey that took more than 12 hours each way but facilitated a broader participation—and more international discussion—than would otherwise have been possible.

While the delegations from the countries from the global South were necessarily smaller than those from Europe, their presence was warmly welcomed. The popular slogan of "Climate justice now!" was clearly seen by most protesters as meaning the leaders of the rich countries needed to listen to the demands of the global South—and was also seen as one of the essential demands of the day.

Indeed, the radicality of the slogans that dominated a mobilization that involved most of the large non-governmental organizations as well as more radical sections of the climate justice movement was noteworthy. The dominant placards on the march were those distributed by Greenpeace—though they didn't carry that organization's logo or reflect their politics! The organization conducted an unusual experiment and asked people to suggest slogans via their website and then produced the most popular. These included: "Nature does not compromise," "There is no planet B," "Bla Bla Bla ... Act now," "Change the politics, not the climate" and "Climate justice now!"

Political parties, trade unions, and peasants organizations were also present in this colorful, radical, and truly internationalist demonstration through the bitterly cold streets of Copenhagen to the fortress of the Bella Center, where the summit itself was taking place. If the majority of the official negotiators seemed to have no answers to the threat of climate chaos, those on the streets had many.

The repression of protesters by the police has become a big issue. During Saturday's march, almost 1000 demonstrators were encircled by the police and prevented from moving. Many had to wait up to five hours seated directly on the tarmac—hands on the back—before being taken to the detention center. All but a few of those arrested were released without charge within few hours.

Actions by a small group of "Black Block" supporters was used by the police as justification for their action. At the former Stock Exchange and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stones and firecrackers were thrown. But the police intervention happened almost 1 km. further along the route of the demonstration, making it completely arbitrary who was in fact detained. In the run-up to the summit, the Danish parliament had hastily approved the "Scoundrels Act," a package of new laws that include the right for the police to hold people for 12 hours (it was previously six) in preventive arrest without the right to appear before a judge.

The COP15 also became the occasion for the convergence of many thousands of grassroots activists to debate the challenges and solutions to global warming. The main center for the debates was the Peoples Climate Summit.

A common declaration was agreed upon (see www.kilaforum09.org). In the same way as the slogans of the demonstration, the declaration also poses a radical approach to climate change, as shown by its title System Change—Not Climate Change. It points toward the need for "a just and sustainable transition of our societies to



Attila Kisbenedek / AFP / Getty Images

(Left) Rally in Copenhagen, Dec. 12, to demand world leaders take necessary action to deal with climate change.

countries across the globe as the summit began on Dec. 5. But certainly the number of demonstrators on the streets of Copenhagen is a proof positive that it is possible to develop mass mobilizations on the issue of global warming.

Given that it was the largest demonstration on any question in Denmark for more than 20 years, it will undoubtedly give a massive boost to what has been up until now a relatively weak movement on the question of climate change in that country. Other demonstrations on this question have only involved a few hundred people.

But beyond this, at an international level it shows that there is a new movement being born and radicalized across the globe.

Naomi Klein, in an article for *The Nation* on Dec. 12 entitled "Copenhagen: Seattle Grows Up," makes many comparisons between the movement for climate justice and the battles against free trade symbolized by Seattle and what came after. But she also makes the crucial point that what weakened that movement was that while it was clear what it was against it was less sure what it was for. She is right. Climate justice activists are clear—there is an alternative and we are determined to build it! ■

This article is excerpted from International Viewpoint (IV) magazine. Terry Conway is an IV editor and a leading member of Socialist Resistance, British section of the Fourth International. Thomas Eisler is a leader of SAP, Danish section of the Fourth International.

a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all peoples and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to future generations." It takes a stance against market mechanisms such as carbon trading and offsetting and for at least a 40% reduction in emissions by the developed countries by 2020.

Inside the Bella Center, Hugo Chavez from Venezuela echoed much of what has been raised by the activists and saluted them for being on the streets. "If the climate were a bank, they would have bailed it out already" was one of his most pertinent comments, in a long and powerful speech that drew applause from many who heard it. The Bolivian delegation also made a strong and powerful intervention from the inside.

But it is what happened on Dec. 12 that sums up the real step change for the movement for climate justice. That mobilization itself was of course preceded by significant demonstrations in many individual cities and

Death squads unleashed in Honduras

By CLAY WADENA

The human-rights situation in Honduras is getting progressively worse, with reports detailing a right-wing offensive that includes not just harassment but kidnapping, torture, and murder. The international spotlight that shined on Honduras after the coup against democratically elected President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya has now disappeared, and the right wing that has traditionally controlled the country is now free to pursue leftists and pro-democracy activists without fear of bad press.

President Zelaya is still holed up in the Brazilian embassy while the coup-installed de facto government runs Honduras. The Brazilian government, which had sharp words for the U.S. government following the latter's support for the November presidential elections held under the coup, is now saying that it has found common ground with the United States and that Zelaya should leave the country.

The United States, for its part, has essentially supported the coup since its inception and played a most pernicious role.

The president-elect, Porfirio Lobo, is waiting to take power Jan. 27. In the meantime, the right-wing terror is in full effect, with those that supported the National Resistance Front (the leading group that coordinated strikes and protests) being targeted primarily.

The murders of resistance activists had begun after the coup took place, but the intensity since the election has increased substantially. The repression is similar to that seen historically across Latin America against activists, but its viciousness and the tacit U.S. compliance with that viciousness should evoke strong empathy and solidarity by human-rights supporters. ■

Six youths who had organized for the National Resistance Front were gunned down in Tegucigalpa (the capital city) on Dec. 7. A leading LGBT rights activist and National Resistance Front organizer, Walter Trochez, survived a kidnapping attempt and was later gunned down while walking home.

Carlos Turcios, vice-president of his local chapter of the Resistance Front, was kidnapped on Dec. 16, and his body was found the next day. His head and hands had been cut off. Santos Corrales Garcia, another organizer for the National Resistance Front, was "arrested" by men wearing government uniforms on Dec. 5. His body was later found also decapitated. These are only a few of the grisly murders that have taken place.

The National Resistance Front has made an effort to lay low, while planning a massive organizational effort in the upcoming year. The historically dominant right wing in the country (who put the coup into effect) is now attempting to silence all opposition through its use of terror and violence on the most committed and dedicated activists. They aim to instill fear in the resistance and stop any effort to change Honduran society into something that might represent the aspirations of the majority of poor and oppressed Hondurans (Honduras is the second poorest country in Central America).

The right-wing death squads will continue to pursue activists and militants across the country until Hondurans succeed in ridding themselves of the decrepit oligarchy—which stifles even the most tepid reforms (such as those enacted by Zelaya). And for those of us in the United States and around the world, it is essential to raise an outcry against these horrible human-rights abuses and to mobilize in solidarity actions with the Honduran people. ■

... Climate change

...(continued from page 1)

were suspended on the very first day after the delegates from the poorer G77 nations, led by Sudan, complained—and rightly so—that the richer ones would be wriggling out of their obligations to make drastic cuts in their carbon-dioxide emissions. The G77 and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), led by Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, denounced the COP 15 deal as a cop-out.

Evo Morales, indigenous president of Bolivia, placed the blame for the global ecological crisis squarely on the capitalist system—where it belongs. In an interview on "Democracy Now," he called for limiting global

temperature rise to one degree Celsius, and he was absolutely right to do so. We can cool down the planet if we draw down carbon by leaving all fossil fuels in the ground and by establishing a zero-growth, zero-waste, steady-state, green, sustainable democratically-planned socialist economy powered by genuinely clean energy.

The Danish government faithfully proved its subservience to the fossil-fuel industry, whose lobbyists were working overtime and calling the shots at the conference. The mass movement of thousands demanding climate action and justice in the streets of Copenhagen was met with brutal force by the Danish *politi*, who pepper sprayed, beat, and arrested protesters. Even accredited delegates were clubbed as they tried to leave the Bella Center.

Climate crisis activists are currently being held in jail, and there is an international campaign to win their release.

To their shame, reformist Greens and liberal think tanks, who are always willing to compromise and settle for the bare minimum, have hailed the Copenhagen climate accord as a step forward even though they admit it falls short of their expectations.

It is clear that despite the numerous actions that occurred around the world, the movement must involve the vast majority of toilers in each society on the planet who are committed to mobilizing ceaselessly if we are to wrest the productive forces away from the capitalist class and expropriate them for eco-friendly purposes. That is the only way we can possibly save Mother Earth from ecological collapse. ■

Two new Trotsky biographies: biased, inaccurate, superficial



By JOE AUCIELLO

Bertrand M. Patenaude, *"Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary"* (HarperCollins: New York, 2009), 370 pp., \$27.99. Robert Service, *"Trotsky: A Biography"* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2009), 600 pp., \$35.

George Breitman, editor of a multi-volume series of Leon Trotsky's uncollected works, once wrote a review with the title, "Two Worthless Biographies About Trotsky." That judgment, applied to these new biographies, would not be overly harsh; both books are worth less than readers might have hoped.

Robert Service, Professor of Russian History at Oxford, has written the definitive hostile biography of Trotsky; Bertrand M. Patenaude, a lecturer at Stanford University, has composed an apolitical narrative of Trotsky's last years. Both books lean heavily on the "Trotsky Collection," housed at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford. These include papers and letters from Trotsky's political followers as well as other biographers of Trotsky. They add some minor and occasionally interesting detail and color to an already familiar portrait.

Patenaude's book is something of an oddity. He has written a biography of a major historical figure, a symbol of revolutionary opposition to Stalinism, that exhibits little concern for political struggles or political theory. In fact, it seems almost perverse to criticize the book's shortcomings in political analysis since analysis of any kind makes up only a small fraction of the biography.

When Patenaude does comment on the central focus of Trotsky's life—the revolutionary struggle for socialism—Patenaude presents a jumble of confusion or confines himself to snide remarks. Leaving aside the abundant examples of the latter, it would be useful to review how he treats an important political event.

Here, for instance, Patenaude explains the rapprochement between Lenin and Trotsky between the 1917 revolutions: "Trotsky remained one of Lenin's harshest critics until 1917. ... It was then, during the heady days between the February and October revolutions, that Trotsky embraced Bolshevism, recognizing that the Party machinery created by Lenin was the only vehicle capable of carrying out a socialist revolution in Russia. This was his Faustian pact. Lenin's part of the bargain was to endorse Trotsky's concept of the Russian Revolution, which provided the theoretical basis for the Bolshevik seizure of power" (p. 45).

The historical accuracy—and sense—of the analysis collapses under the weight of the ill-chosen literary metaphor. First, despite what Patenaude suggests, there was no "deal" between Lenin and Trotsky, nor could there have been since neither was in contact with the other. By April 1917 Lenin was already in Russia while Trotsky was being held prisoner in a Canadian concentration camp. Trotsky did not arrive until a month later. "And both of us," Trotsky wrote in his autobiography, "though we were writing in different parts of the world and were separated by an ocean, gave the same analysis and the same forecast" ("My Life," p. 329).

Second, a "Faustian pact" is a fatal bargain, a deal



Patenaude ignores the heart of Trotsky's work. When placing an emphasis on drama and narrative, he is actually describing the book he himself has written.

with the devil in which one gains life-long success only at the price of one's eternal soul. The metaphor is meant to imply that Trotsky was unknowingly complicit in his own assassination since he had helped to create the revolution that would ultimately lead to his 1940 murder in Mexico.

Such is the depth and quality of Patenaude's thinking. He is capable of delving no further into any of the issues and conflicts of Trotsky's life. In fact, the "Faustian" idea, shallow though it may be, is not even original with Patenaude (or Robert Service, whose book ends on a similar note). Another biographer of Trotsky, Dmitri Volkogonov, made the same point more than a decade earlier. Volkogonov quoted from Trotsky's "Terrorism and Communism" and claimed, "In these utterances we find an unexpected resonance between the victim and the murderer. The ideas of Bolshevik Jacobinism, so firmly implanted by Trotsky in the Russian revolution, had come back to strike at him with the force of a boomerang" ("Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary," p. 467).

Patenaude fares no better when he takes up one of Trotsky's most justifiably famous works, "The History of the Russian Revolution." Patenaude writes, "The 'History' is best appreciated as a work of literature. The narrative pulses with drama and coruscates throughout" (p. 179). He also informs readers that "Trotsky's 'History,' while free of jargon, is unmistakably the work of a Marxist historian" (p. 180).

Indeed, it is, and even a casual reader skimming the book would realize that, for all its literary qualities, "The History of the Russian Revolution" is most sig-

(Left) Soviet poster from 1918: Trotsky slays the forces of evil. (Right) Trotsky in 1920.

nificant for its blend of history and political theory, which includes an explanation of the law of uneven and combined development, permanent revolution, the theory of the vanguard party, the problem of nationalities, the "art of insurrection," and much more.

Patenaude, in his analysis, essentially ignores the heart of Trotsky's work. When placing an emphasis on drama and narrative, Patenaude is actually describing the book he himself has written.

Unfortunately, as he continues his comments on Trotsky's "History," Patenaude does venture upon a thought, though it is not his own. Why, Patenaude asks, does Trotsky downplay his own role in the Russian Revolution to Lenin's advantage? Why is it that Trotsky "deliberately places himself in Lenin's shadow?"

He then answers, "Trotsky idolized Lenin, and yet here his elevation of the Bolshevik leader was in part an act of self-aggrandizement. Trotsky's name was inseparably linked to Lenin's in the context of the Revolution. ... Thus, in exalting Lenin, he was by implication also lifting himself onto the pedestal" (p. 180). Mystery solved: Trotsky praises Lenin in order to praise Trotsky.

Of course, there is a chance—though Patenaude does not consider it—that Trotsky actually meant what he wrote. Trotsky's reasoning was clear and direct: Lenin was the founder and central leader of the Bolshevik Party. Without such an organization, the revolution could not have been accomplished. For all of Trotsky's skill as an orator and a mass agitator, he recognized that no such party could have been assembled from scratch during the tumultuous months of 1917. The revolutionary moment would have come and passed; counter-revolution would have triumphed.

Lenin's role was thus essential to the socialist victory. This fact alone—and not the twisted logic of "self-aggrandizement"—explains Trotsky's "elevation of the Bolshevik leader."

If Patenaude's argument is foolish, as indeed it is, an even greater folly is that he lifted it without attribution from Dmitri Volkogonov's biography. When Volkogonov wrote about Trotsky's "History of the Russian Revolution," he commented: "But, of course, in raising Lenin to the very summit of historical justification, Trotsky was surreptitiously also placing himself on the pedestal of history, since he had so often been named as the second man of the revolution" ("Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary," p. 433).

These few examples sum up the overall standard of Patenaude's political analysis, which at its best is merely adequate. In fairness, it should be said that he is capable of giving Wikipedia-quality accounts of significant topics, like Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. More often than not, though, Patenaude is simply out of his depth. Unfamiliarity with and incomprehension about Marxism, rounded out with a misplaced condescension, results in a flawed and superficial biography.

Much the same can be said of Robert Service's "Trotsky: A Biography," which, along with biographies of Stalin and Lenin, completes his Russian Revolution triptych. In the book's "Introduction," Service states that Trotsky's "portrait of his life and times involved many distortions—and these have clouded our understanding of Soviet communist history." Some of these supposed "distortions" occurred because "Trotsky found some of [his works] an embarrassment," and so he "kept a lot to himself when publishing his autobiography and releasing selections of documents. This book's purpose is to dig up the buried life" (p. 4).

Actually, the book's purpose—the metaphor is unavoidable—is to bury Trotsky once again, a task that bourgeois academics find themselves compelled to perform approximately every decade.

Service mocks the "Western political left" in the 1960s, a time when "Trotsky came into vogue, often among people who were untroubled by the desire to read what he had written and done" (p. 497). However, Service is even more forthcoming in an on-line interview with the Hoover Institution program, "Uncommon Knowledge." There Service says, "The idea that somehow a humane version of communism could have come out of Trotskyism is pure romanticism, but it appealed to people in the '60s and '70s who wanted just such a figure, someone who was standing outside

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all of the worries about the Vietnam war and who wanted to think there was a possibility that the USSR ... if it had been differently led in the 1920s, a different turn could have taken place."

Bury Trotsky, then, because he stands for the idea that socialism can create a better society and a world free of war, racism, and exploitation. These were the ideals that motivated militants in the 1960s, ideals that remain alive throughout the world today and continue to inspire a new generation. This is what Service would bury, if he could.

Service's central point is that Trotsky is Stalin minus the moustache and graced with a better literary style. Even the latter point is intended as a twofold criticism: first, Service complains that in the 1920s Trotsky spent too much time writing, thus allowing Stalin to maneuver successfully against him. So, Nero fiddled while Rome burned; Trotsky scribbled while the Revolution degenerated.

Second, Service claims that generations of readers and historians have been taken in by the grandness of Trotsky's prose, which only obscures the fundamentally totalitarian nature of his political life and his political theories ("he reveled in terror"). What's more, Service argues, a Trotsky in power would have been even more brutal than Stalin.

Service outlines his analysis in the "Introduction": "Trotsky's strategy for communist advance anyway had little to offer for the avoidance of an oppressive regime. His ideas and practices laid several foundation stones for the erection of the Stalinist political, economic, social and even cultural edifice. ... As for the charge that Stalin was an arch-bureaucrat, this was rich coming from an accuser who had delighted in unchecked administrative authority in the years of his pomp... [In "My Life," Trotsky wrote, "I felt the mechanics of power as an inescapable burden, rather than as a spiritual satisfaction," p. 582.] And if ever Trotsky had been the paramount leader instead of Stalin, the risks of a bloodbath in Europe would have been drastically increased" (p. 3). As Service said of Trotsky in an on-line interview, "He wasn't a good thing for anybody at any time."

In 500 pages of biography, Service does everything he possibly can to reinforce that biased judgment. It's a belief become obsession that turns Service into a shoddy historian. He seizes every possible opportunity to portray Trotsky negatively, even when the effort involves misreading, self-contradictions, unverified assumptions, and more.

Service's self-proclaimed task "to dig up the buried life" begins in the first chapter. There, Service writes, "As a Marxist he [Trotsky] was embarrassed about the wealth of his parents, and he never properly acknowledged their extraordinary qualities and achievements (p. 12). Actually, "as a Marxist," Trotsky knew that Marx's father was an attorney sufficiently well off to send his son Karl to university, where he obtained a Ph.D in philosophy. Engels, as is well known, came from a family of German capitalists and helped oversee the family's business interests in Manchester, England. Lenin's father was a government official, a director of primary schools whose place in the civil service hierarchy ultimately equaled the rank of a general. By comparison, Trotsky had no need to feel any such "embarrassment."

As for the family's achievements, Service claims that Trotsky "hugely understated the reality" when the truth is that Trotsky's father "dragged himself up the ladder of economic success" (p. 12). Yet, 12 pages later, Service quotes Trotsky discussing his father's business accounts and concluding with the observation that "my father slowly but doggedly kept climbing upwards," essentially the same concept in different words.

As the book continues, Service's political analysis and historical methodology do not improve. In Part Two, Trotsky has finally returned to Russia following the overthrow of Nicholas II and the end of the Romanov monarchy. The Provisional Government is in power along with workers' councils, or "soviets." Both Lenin and Trotsky opposed the Provisional Government and called for "All Power to the Soviets."

Service describes Trotsky's efforts: "Trotsky went around distilling enthusiasm for direct action. His printed articles did not spell out what he had in mind because he did not want to provide the Provisional Government with an excuse to take him into custody. When he got up on the platform it was a different matter. ... The regime he sought to establish would be dictatorial and violent: 'I tell you heads must roll, blood must flow. ... The strength of the French Revolution was in the machine that made the enemies of



(Left) Trotsky and family in exile in Alma Ata, 1928.

Service seizes every possible opportunity to portray Trotsky negatively, even when the effort involves misreading, self-contradictions, unverified assumptions, and more.

the people shorter by a head. This is a fine device. We must have it in every city.' Trotsky stood forth as a Jacobin of his time" (p. 172).

The import of this paragraph should not be lost on any reader. If the above account is accurate, then Trotsky had announced the beginning of the Red Terror or, at least, his fervent wish for it, years before the Terror actually commenced. No one, not Lenin, not even Stalin, made such statements. Trotsky would have "stood forth" not only "as a Jacobin of his time" but as the ideological father of the Red Terror.

This assertion, which defies reason and fact, is another example of Service's poor scholarship. Service would have it that Trotsky wrote one thing but said another. Yet Trotsky's speeches were written down, published, and later collected in book form as part of the documentary record of the Russian Revolution. The appearance of his speeches in newspapers could hardly have escaped him. Further, had the Provisional Government wished to arrest him (as, ultimately, it did), his speeches, heard by friends and enemies alike, would have been sufficient cause. Public speaking is not a particularly good way of hiding one's opinions.

A greater problem arises with the source of the quote from Trotsky. Service cites one source—only one—"Stormy Passage" by W. Woytinsky. No other eyewitness observer (a Nikolai Sukhanov or a John Reed, for instance) confirms this general idea, much less the specific quote itself. Is the source reliable? Service does not trouble himself to ask the question. Why bother, since it suits his purpose? So, Service tells the reader nothing about W. Woytinsky.

Trotsky, however, had written about him in the first volume of "The History of the Russian Revolution." There, Trotsky explains that Woytinsky quit the Bolshevik Party in March 1917 and joined the Mensheviks, who supported the Provisional Government and opposed the proletarian revolution in principle. As a Menshevik, Trotsky points out, Woytinsky "became, as was to be expected, a professional Bolshevik-eater." The English translation seems rather loose here, but the image of Woytinsky as a fierce factionalist emerges clearly enough.

A competent historian, one who felt a basic responsibility for honesty, would have made these facts clear. Service does not. Instead, he uses an unlikely quote from a single dubious source and, without investigation or comment, presents a doubtful statement as truth. As a Fellow of the British Academy and Professor of Russian History at Oxford University, Service would surely know the flaw in such a method.

Service's errors in logic and analysis extend to his discussion of Trotsky's writings and political activities. Worse, Service makes statements that are obviously misleading or wrong. Writing of Trotsky's, "Literature and Revolution," Service states, "Like

fellow communist leaders, Trotsky wanted a high culture subordinate to the party's purposes (p. 317). Actually, Trotsky says that for those artists who would at least accept the Russian Revolution, the policy of the Bolshevik Party should be "to allow them complete freedom of self-determination in the field of art." Even Bertrand Patenaude writes that Trotsky was Soviet Russia's "most effective advocate of freedom in the arts" (*Boston College Magazine*, Fall 2009, p. 45).

Service's more egregious offense is to cite Trotsky as the precursor to Stalinist policies in art—policies that would include the promotion of "right-thinking" mediocrities and heavy censorship, repression, imprisonment, and worse for authentic artists. Service's accusation is astonishing: "'Literature and Revolution' was essentially a work of political reductionism. When all is said and done, though, it was Trotsky who laid down the philosophical foundations for cultural Stalinism" (p. 318).

Apparently, the identity is founded on the argument that Trotsky wrote, however briefly and abstractly, in favor of censorship when the interests of the Revolution were at stake, and Stalin actually practiced censorship. Ergo, Trotsky is the true architect of "cultural Stalinism."

A pamphlet-length essay would be required to set the record aright, but let one instance suffice. In 1930, Trotsky referred to Isaac Babel, author of "Red Cavalry," as "the most talented of our younger writers" ("My Life," p. 361). Ten years later Stalin had Babel imprisoned, tortured, and shot. The manuscripts, documents, correspondence, etc. that were seized at the time of Babel's arrest have never been found. Everything essential is contained in this one example. The fate of Isaac Babel reveals, in the field of art and culture, the unbridgeable gap between Stalin and Trotsky.

At other times Service criticizes Trotsky for writing at all. Service complains that Trotsky "might have found more useful things to do" than write a book of reminiscence, "On Lenin," since "[t]he work scarcely justified the amount of creative energy he used up..." In the same paragraph Service says the composition of the book took only weeks, and it was "vivid and interesting" (p. 319). That alone would seem sufficient justification for a literary work, at least to a fair-minded critic.

Throughout Service's biography his hostility to Trotsky causes him to misinterpret facts or to try and cast them in the worst possible light. Consider, for example, how Service analyzes Trotsky's work with his co-thinkers. Service quotes from a 1929 letter Trotsky wrote to the Leninbund, the German Left Oppositionists: "As the Leninbund looks now, it will never guide the German proletariat, not even the vanguard of the vanguard. The Leninbund must restock its ideological armoury, and must accordingly recognize its rank and file. The first prerequisite of this is an ideological clarity of line."

Here is how Service interprets these three sentences: "This was Trotsky's way of attracting a following in Europe and North America. He was to be the sole leader. He laid down the line, and others were meant to follow without demur" (p. 391).

Service's comment is simply nonsense, if not slanderous. Nothing in the above lines suggests Trotsky as a "sole leader" or indicates a desire to become one. Even had he wanted to, there was no means by which Trotsky could impose his will on others. Further, one need only look at the "Writings" series in this period (published by Pathfinder Press) to see that a good deal of demurring between the Leninbund and Trotsky went on for years.

What's more, Trotsky wrote explicitly, "Of course, no one can dispute your right to have differences with the Russian Opposition in general or with Trotsky in particular. But this should be done clearly, precisely, and openly..." (from "Where Is the Leninbund Going?" in "Writings of Leon Trotsky [1929]," p. 307).

Service takes as his source a letter from Trotsky held in the Hoover Institute Archives. He complains, rightly, that "the English here is lumpy; I have reproduced the translation sent to the Communist League in the USA" (p. 548). But a better translation has been available since 1975, when the 1929 "Writings" was published. From this translation a reader learns that

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Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Ottawa is a culprit in Copenhagen climate fiasco

By BARRY WEISLEDER

For the Canadian government, the 12-day Copenhagen climate-change summit in December 2009 was a public relations disaster—deservedly so, as the Stephen Harper Tories slavishly followed Washington's lead, even trying to scupper the weak legacy of the Kyoto Accord.

Environmentalists at Copenhagen 'awarded' the daily Fossil of the Day to Canada, on its own, or as one of a group of countries, 10 times—more than any other state present.

Toronto Mayor David Miller, followed by Ontario and Quebec's representatives, condemned the Harper regime. A leaked cabinet document suggested the emissions from Alberta's oil sands would rise 165 per cent in the coming years. And an elaborate stunt by social media pranksters exposed Ottawa's perfidious position to the world media.

Still, Prime Minister Harper maintained that his government's insistence on 'realistic targets' was vindicated by the bargaining process at Copenhagen. The result, of course, was no enforceable agreement on emission reductions, and only offers of inadequate aid to less developed countries, to be meted out via imperialist financial institutions. It's a case of finding 'vindication' in an elite-crafted failure. Canada is the only country to ignore its international obligations under the previous Kyoto climate treaty. At Copenhagen it blocked all attempts to reach a new treaty to significantly cut carbon emissions.

"Canada is the dinosaur at these talks," said Canadian David Cadman, president of ICLEI, Local Governments for Sustainability, an international association of local governments that hosted a Mayor's Conference on climate change. "They are all about protecting Canada's fossil fuel sector instead of protecting the interests of the Canadian public," Cadman told TerraViva.

Canada is "throwing a spanner into

the works wherever it can", agreed Dale Marshall of the David Suzuki Foundation, a Canadian environmental group. "They are even blocking agreement on the use of 1990 as the base year," Marshall said in an interview. It's not hard to understand why. Not only are Canada's emissions 34 percent higher than the 1990 baseline and rapidly growing, its massive Alberta tar sands production is believed to be the world's biggest single industrial source of carbon emissions.

The emissions cut offered by Stephen Harper's government is just three percent under 1990 levels by 2020—less than the Kyoto obligation of cutting six percent by 2010. Scientists have repeatedly warned that to have any chance of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius (which is likely insufficient to avoid eco-catastrophe), industrialized countries must cut emissions 25 to 40 percent by 2020 compared to the baseline of 1990.

Canada also lobbied hard alongside the U.S. to abandon the Kyoto Protocol process entirely, to the outrage of developing countries. Ottawa expects them to make significant emissions reduction commitments despite Canada's unwillingness to live up to its legal obligations from 1997. The poorer countries, represented in a bloc known as the G77, want the Kyoto deal extended past its 2012 deadline. China, India, Brazil, and South Africa called on rich countries to take on targets under an extended Kyoto plan that would cut emissions by 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020.

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton said "despite the support of Canadians for a real plan to cut emissions, Harper has sided with the big polluters". He's right. Unfortunately, Layton's solution is a 'carbon trading' scheme, which the British environmentalist author of "Heat", George Monbiot, says is like the medieval Catholic Church selling indulgences. It might make some people feel better about their sins, but it won't reduce carbon emissions.

Representatives of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia hit the mark squarely when they argued at Copenhagen that the real obstacle to the cutting of emissions is the global capitalist system, which profits from the destruction of nature. Consider the scope and trajectory of the problem. How can a system that has consumed more resources

and energy in the last 50 years than all previous civilization be made to stabilize and reduce its rate of resource depletion and pollution emission? How can such a wasteful, poisonous and unequal economic system be compelled to introduce technologies, consumption patterns and radical income redistribution, without which sustainability is only a cruel joke?

The reason there is no capitalist solution to climate change is simple. Capitalism is made up of thousands of corporations, all competing for investment and profits. There is no "social interest" in capitalism—only separate interests. If a company decides to invest in cutting emissions, its profits will go down. Investors will move capital into more profitable investments. The 'green' company goes out of business. "Grow or die" is the motto of the private enterprise economy. Capitalist anarchy, its social irrationality, is not accidental.

It is not the product of a 'market failure'. It is the very nature of the beast.

The solution lies in the direction of less, not more reliance on the market. Society needs more social control, more economic democracy. Only public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy makes that possible.

The place to start is the energy industry: Nationalize Big Oil. Then make the corporations that produce greenhouse gases pay the full cost of cutting emissions, end all subsidies to fossil fuel producers, and re-direct the billions of dollars now being spent on wars and debt into public transit, into retrofitting homes and offices, and into renewable energy projects.

Changing from fossil fuels to other energy sources will require massive spending, which in the short run will be unprofitable. Carbon-emission reductions must be global. Air and water do not respect borders. Change must be all encompassing. In every economic sector, capital will resist. Only the expropriation of capital, followed by the institution of democratic economic planning by workers and communities, can overcome the anarchy of production under capitalism.

Revolutionary Cuba has shown that it is possible, even in a poor country suf-

fering under a 50-year embargo by the world's dominant power, and even after the loss of its major trade partner, to reduce the carbon footprint while defending and raising health and education levels for the population as a whole, and building an egalitarian and highly participatory society. A century ago the great socialist leader Rosa Luxemburg predicted the future for humanity would be "socialism or barbarism". In light of the fiasco at Copenhagen, and the deepening crisis of climate change, we are compelled to revise the slogan to read: "Eco-socialism or extinction".

Pension 'status quo' not an option — CLC

Pension plans and retirement savings have been hit hard by the downturn. The security of many Canadians is at risk. Some companies even want to cut defined benefit plans that employees paid into throughout their working lives. (That's a big issue in the United Steelworkers' strike at Vale Inco.)

People with Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and other private pensions that invested heavily in stock and financial markets have seen their investments lose much of their value. There is an urgent need to expand public pensions and reduce reliance on financial markets for economic security. Public pensions remain secure, but they replace only a modest share of previous work-related earnings.

In fact, 11 million Canadians (one-third of the total population) don't have a workplace pension. Some 1.6 million seniors qualify for Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) benefits (and therefore earn less than \$11,300 per year). Employers use bankruptcy courts to shirk their pension promises. In the Nortel bankruptcy case, retirees stand to lose a third of their pension incomes. Average fees gouge a third of workers' RRSP earnings.

Thus, pension reform is in the air. The New Democratic Party is pushing a Canadian Labour Congress plan. The federal Conservative minority government is resisting. The Liberal Opposition, following the lead of British Columbia and Alberta, wants a CPP supplement to which individuals could voluntarily contribute. The banks, fearing that a beefed up CPP will cut into their lucrative RRSP business, are notably hostile to the idea.

The CLC proposal asks the federal government to:

Phase in a doubling of payouts from the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and the Quebec Pension Plan (QPP). (The average CPP payout is about \$600 a month.)

Immediately increase by 15 per cent Old Age Security (OAS), which is about \$500 a month, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), which is about \$450 a month for all retirees.

Create a national pension insurance fund to ensure that workers' defined benefit pensions aren't at risk when employers go under or speculative bubbles go bust. (The United States has a pension guarantee fund covering up to about \$50,000 of pension income.)

Working people and nature are the source of all the wealth. It is appropriated by Capital. Workers shouldn't have to beg for crumbs in retirement. In the face of the economic crisis we did not cause, and the bail-out of banks and big businesses we did not approve, our demand is that, in addition to doubling the CPP and QPP, the OAS and GIS be increased sufficiently to ensure that no senior is condemned to subsist below the poverty line (approximately \$30,000 a year in large urban centres).

The federal and provincial Finance Ministers met in Whitehorse in December, and will meet again in May 2010. Several of them said there's nothing wrong with the existing pension set up.

So, it's time to start organizing. They need to hear the CLC's message amplified many fold: The pension status quo is not an option! ■

Political crisis boils over Afghan occupation

For the second year in a row, the Conservative minority government asked Governor-General Michaëlle Jean to prorogue, or suspend, Parliament for the winter months in order to avoid political accountability and a potential loss of office. Shamefully, the G-G agreed. Thus, all Bills in process were abandoned, and a new session will begin with a brand new budget on March 3.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's refusal to release documents that would shed light on Canadian Forces' handling of Afghan detainees was set to provoke a crisis on January 25, when the House of Commons was to return. On December 10, the Commons ordered the government to produce uncensored documents dealing with detainee transfers. But Harper refused, citing 'national security', troop safety, and relations with allies.

The former number-two Canadian diplomat in Afghanistan, Richard Colvin, raised concerns in 2006-2007 about prisoners being routinely beaten and tortured by Afghan authorities. So did the Red Cross, Britain, Netherlands, the media and human-rights groups. General Walter Natynczyk, Chief of Defence Staff, confirmed that Canadian troops did hand over a detainee in June 2006 to the Afghan police, who promptly beat him, until he was taken back into Canadian custody.

But Ottawa continues to deny that a problem existed. Instead, the Tories attacked Colvin's credibility, made an issue of the Opposition's 'patriotism', and proceeded to boycott a special sitting of the Parliamentary committee

probing detainee abuse.

The question arises: Why are Harper and company being so pig-headed? The issue goes beyond parliamentary decorum, beyond the centralization of power in the PM's Office. The treatment of detainees has become a lightning rod for mass popular opposition to the war of occupation in Afghanistan. It highlights the nature of the corrupt regime of war lords and drug barons in Kabul which NATO, including Canada, sustains.

For the Canadian ruling class, the treatment of Afghans is far less important than the economics of energy pipelines and the politics of western domination of the Middle East and South Asia. Tory intransigence in Ottawa is proving to be a costly political impediment to the realization of larger imperialist foreign policy aims. A major section of the Canadian business elite would rather cut their losses in Afghanistan (where the 134th Canadian soldier died on Dec. 23), make a superficial concession to public opinion, and re-deploy troops to another theatre of neo-colonial occupation, like Haiti.

Setting aside all the hypocrisy about 'the rule of law', the supremacy of Parliament, and the promotion of 'democracy' abroad, the division of the rulers over the war is a good thing—and even better if it leads to an early exit from Afghanistan and an early end to the Harper government. But neither should be taken for granted, as the Tories seem as determined to tough it out, as they are to make working people pay for the economic crisis. — B.W.

Quebec Solidaire Opts for Independence & Sovereignty

By ROBBIE MAHOOD

MONTREAL—Quebec's small mass left-wing party, Quebec Solidaire (QS), held its fifth convention in a suburb of this city on Nov. 20-22. About 300 delegates and observers gathered to further a process of political clarification initiated by the leadership.

In 2008, QS managed to get one of its popular leaders, Amir Khadir, elected to Quebec's National Assembly. However, its vote across the province has yet to pass 5%, even if polls sometimes place it as high as 8%. The party has about 5000 members.

QS was formed in 2006, defining itself as "alter-mondialiste, féministe, écologique et de gauche", a party representing diverse social movements and dedicated to breaking the neoliberal straitjacket in Quebec politics. Anti-neoliberal, yes, but without an explicit working-class or socialist perspective, although several left-wing organizations were permitted to form political 'collectives' or tendencies within QS.

QS has a history of avoiding controversy in favour of lowest common denominator consensus. The leadership's improvised public pronouncements have often fallen far short of its own militants' expectations—for example, on the Afghan war or in response to community outrage at the police killing of a young man, Freddy Villanueva, in one of Montréal's immigrant neighbourhoods.

Highlighted at this convention were debates on the national question, and on secularism in relation to immigrant religious and cultural rights—issues that are controversial in Quebec politics as well as within QS.

Socialists in English-speaking Canada and the United States may question the obsession with the national question in Quebec, or wonder whether the Quebecois any longer suffer national oppression. After all, the national and class agitation of the 1960s and '70s led to significant advances for the francophone majority in Quebec. Two failed bids for independence in the referenda of 1980 and 1995 have led the sovereigntist movement, dominated by the bourgeois nationalist Parti Québécois, to an impasse. At present, sentiment for independence is at a rather low ebb. Should the struggle for an independent Quebec any longer occupy the place it once did in the strategic thinking of revolutionary socialists?

The view that independence is passé takes little cognizance of the national tensions that have been and continue to be a decisive factor in Canadian politics. Regardless of their views on independence (which fluctuate greatly depending on the conjuncture), the Quebecois have a more clearly defined national consciousness than ever before. The exercise of their national rights brings them continually up against the power of the Canadian state and constitution.

This is most clearly seen in struggles around language and culture but periodically broaches questions of economic control, defense of social programs, and participation in imperialist wars. This unresolved national problem continues to fester away at the heart of the Canadian federation, undermining the stability of class rule exercised by the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie and by its junior Quebec partner.

This is the context that impelled QS to adopt a more coherent position on this perennial question in Quebec politics. Up to this point, the party had defined itself as "sovereigntist", a term that leaves some ambiguity. After a vigorous debate over four competing options, delegates opted for the use of "independence or sovereignty" interchangeably, narrowly edging out those who argued for "independence" only. Two other choices, "sovereignty" only, and "neither independence nor sovereignty", were decisively rejected.

At the same time, the delegates recognized the sovereignty of "the ten Amerindian peoples and the Inuit people who also inhabit Quebec territory", affirming their right to self-determination whether through independence or in the form of self-government within Quebec. Delegates also repudiated the ethnic nationalism increasingly promoted by the Parti Québécois (PQ). For Quebec Solidaire, the Quebec nation is "ethnically and culturally diversified, with French as the common language", and the Quebecois are all those who "live in Quebec and participate in its life".

As for how to achieve independence, Quebec Solidaire proposes a democratic Constituent Assembly charged with conducting a vast consultative process on Quebec's "political and constitutional future and the values and political institutions pertaining to it." This exercise in popular sovereignty is in contrast to the narrow and elite-driven referendum strategy of the Parti Québécois (now placed in cold storage by the party brass until so-called 'winning conditions' reappear).

Anti-immigrant sentiment surfaced in a major way in the Quebec election of 2007 when the right wing populist party, Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), capitalized on latent hostility to cosmopolitan Montreal, especially to its Muslim and Hasidic Jewish minorities, to propel itself into official opposition status in the National Assembly. Subsequently, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission held public hearings on so-called 'reasonable accommodation' of new immigrants.

One of the major achievements of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" in the 1960s was ending the Catholic Church's control over education, health, and social services. The secularization of Quebec society enjoys overwhelming support in the population and is closely linked in the public's mind with advances in women's and to a lesser extent gay/lesbian rights. But these arguments for separation of church and state and against patriarchal oppression are now being recruited to a xenophobic campaign against religious or cultural minorities, targeting primarily traditionally attired Muslim women. Most recently, debate has erupted over whether public employees have the right to wear religiously identified clothing or symbols.

Delegates voted for a position that distinguishes between the state, which must be secular, and individuals, who have the right to express their religious beliefs. Government employees working with the public should be able to wear religious "insignia" provided they do not proselytize and are not as a result impeded in the performance of their duties. This position clearly distinguishes QS from the PQ, which is seeking a ban on religious apparel in the civil service akin to the coercive *laïcité* of France, where the hijab (head covering) has been prohibited in public schools.

QS marked a step forward at this convention in more clearly aligning itself with the perspective of Quebec independence, explicitly acknowledging the sovereignty of aboriginal peoples and rising to the defence of religious and cultural minorities. At the same time the party suffers from some important deficits.

In general, the positions adopted are premised on the future election of a QS government, lending them a rather abstract character (for example, the constituent assembly) or similarly, posing solutions in administrative terms, for example, qualifying the conditions under which a state employee would be allowed to display personal religious insignia.

Largely missing from this convention were resolutions that would orient QS to *organizing struggles that are immediate and pressing, both in the electoral and extra-parliamentary arenas*. One exception to this was the unanimous support given to a resolution in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle committing the party to help build the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against the Israeli state.

Indeed, there is a noticeable gap between QS's initial electoral success and its low or non-existent political profile on the streets and in the movements—ironic for a party formed in large measure by social activists. In this respect, the downturn in mass struggles in Quebec over the last five years has reinforced the party's electoral preoccupation. The risk is that with any resurgence of

mass mobilizations, QS will be a passive observer content to reap whatever benefits come its way in the polls.

Shifting to a stronger pro-independence stance may lead to a broader and more comprehensive programmatic debate on the measures needed to combat the twin economic and ecological crises. Demands to nationalize the banks, abrogate NAFTA, withdraw from NATO and NORAD, develop unemployment insurance to provide a living wage and re-train workers laid-off in the crisis, bring financially or ecologically bankrupt industries under public ownership and re-orient toward green production, defend public health care against Supreme Court authorized privatization—these and other anti-capitalist measures imply not only mass mobilization within Quebec but, more often than not, a confrontation and break with the federal Canadian state.

Various observers have noted that whatever its limitations, QS is a party in formation. One must be patient and allow time for deficiencies to be overcome. But political differentiation, suppressed for the most part up to now, is becoming more apparent. It would be naïve to overlook bureaucratic and reformist tendencies, nor should it be surprising given the relationship of political forces within QS since its founding and the impact of its modest electoral success.

The weakness of "class" politics in QS is a reflection of the society around it. Neither Social Democratic reformism nor Stalinism have ever established a significant presence in Quebec, a reality that brings with it mixed blessings. On the one hand, a labour movement renowned for its militancy has yet to assert itself as an independent political actor. On the other hand, there is an absence of hardened reformist currents exercising control over working-class politics.

QS's election campaigns have been endorsed by more radical elements in Quebec's labour movement, notably the Montreal central council of the Confederation des syndicats nationaux (CSN). But the relationship between the party and the unions is tentative at best.

Certainly, the working class has been given no particular strategic weight in the party's thinking. However, the notion that QS should limit itself to being the political voice of a coalition of movements dedicated to a more just and equitable society (superceding the struggle between social classes) is being undermined by the depth of the current crisis, which brings class contradictions in the broadest sense into greater relief.

This convention demonstrated that party militants are capable of vigorous debate and retain a certain independence from the leadership. The role of socialists within QS in advancing a class-struggle perspective around transitional anti-capitalist demands, such as those listed above, will be very important. To be sure, this task is not to be approached in a mechanical way from the stance of bringing received wisdom from outside, but rather in the context of discussions as they actually unfold within the ranks of the party. But it is a task that must surely be taken up. ■

Robbie Mahood is a federal steering-committee member of Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste. He was a Quebec Solidaire candidate in Mont-Royal.

... Teamsters

(continued from page 2)

times. Hoffa responded by abolishing the Chicago area locals' separate contracts and putting them under the NMFA, a move done under very shaky legal and bylaw precedent. Fearing legal challenges, Hoffa once again put the YRC proposed concessions to a vote at 705 and 710 on Dec. 9—and again workers rejected them.

At the Teamsters' largest employer, UPS, union members have faced production harassment, outsourcing, and contract violations with little to no response from the International. Despite making \$1.4 billion in profits in the first three quarters of this year, management at UPS has used the economic downturn as justification to speed up workers and violate their contract. Harassment by management of delivery drivers to meet production standards has been reported by drivers throughout the country.

UPS has also failed to live up to its commitment to create 20,000 full-time inside jobs, as mandated by the previous two contracts (these full-time inside jobs were won in the 1997 strike). Management in many UPS barns has instead eliminated existing full-time jobs and forced workers back to part-time work—in clear violation of the contract. The International has failed to fight for the many grievances filed on this issue in front of national panels, and has not initiated any type of response to this critical contract violation.

Many Teamsters are looking for an alternative to the overpaid, do-nothing leadership of Hoffa. Teamsters for a Democratic Union, a rank-and-file caucus inside the Teamsters, has launched a new campaign, Dump Hoffa (dumphoffa.org). While no candidate has been announced to oppose Hoffa in the 2011 international Teamster election, activists



Ron Carey, former UPS worker from Local 804, campaigns for Teamster presidency in 1990 on anti-corruption platform.

are getting the word out about Hoffa's failures as General President, and recruiting the rank-and-file members needed to bring about a change in the union.

Building a stronger Teamsters Union depends on the strength and participation of the membership. Only the members, fully participating and controlling their union, can improve the working conditions for themselves. The election of militant rank-and-file workers to the leadership posts of Locals 804 and 814 is an important step to creating a democratic fightback union. ■

Chavez calls for a Fifth International

By GERRY FOLEY

At the special congress of the Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in mid-November, accompanied by an international conclave of supposedly left parties, the president of Venezuela and the top leader of the party, Hugo Chavez, called for the formation of a Fifth International to unite left parties worldwide to fight international capitalism and struggle to replace it with socialism.

Chavez's declaration aroused interest among parties of Trotskyist origin and identification in particular because it recognized a historic place for the Fourth International. His argument that the only solution to the crisis of capitalism is its replacement by socialism, and that that required international unity of parties fighting for socialism, coincided with the historic positions of the Trotskyist movement.

Chavez called for a meeting of left parties in April to form the international socialist organization he proposed. An article on the Aporrea web page, a service initiated by forces of Trotskyist origin that supports the Chavez regime, declared that the Venezuelan president was now the recognized leader of the world left.

François Sabado, a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International and an activist in the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France, wrote an article in the November edition of *International Viewpoint* magazine that welcomes Chavez's Fifth International call. Sabado states that the Fourth International has already formulated, on many occasions, its programmatic proposals around which revolutionary forces could unite. These include "an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist program of emergency demands, which starts from the demands and the social needs of the popular classes, proposes a new distribution of wealth, public and social appropriation of the key sectors of the economy, and leads on to the revolutionary transformation of society."

Sabado said that Chavez's call "creates the conditions for a new international discussion, indissociable from solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution."

However, if Chavez meant what he said or understood what he was calling for, he chose an odd venue for his call. The Caracas gathering of alleged left parties included the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, the main party in the lower house of the Mexican Congress), which has never been a socialist party and is no longer even a populist one. It also included the ruling Workers Party of Brazil, which has cast aside whatever socialist program it ever had and administers a neoliberal regime hardly different from its right-wing predecessor in government. In fact, according to the Argentine Trotskyist journal *Alternativa Socialista* (Dec.17), a representative of the PRI at the gathering interrupted Chavez and called on him to join the association of Christian Democratic parties to which the PRI is allied.

Alternativa Socialista wrote: "The context was not favorable. Most of the guests were more interested in making deals with the local 'boliburguesia' [businessmen who have profited from their relations with the Chavez government] or the very 'red' state bureaucracy than talking about internationals, much less hearing the names of Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Marx or Engels. ... The representatives of the PT [Workers Party] of Brazil declared that they preferred to stay in the framework of the Sao Paulo forum, a sort of regroupment of neoliberal Social Democrats. And the Latin American Communist Parties, with the exception of the Cuban one, which has not yet taken a position, defended their position of anti-imperialist united fronts, which have failed for decades. The CPs could not tolerate the recognition of the Fourth International..."



In the Dec. 4 issue of *Socialismo o Barbarie*, the magazine of the Nuevo MAS (New Movement Toward Socialism), another Argentine Trotskyist group, Claudio Tesla wrote: "You have to recognize that Chavez is a specialist in taking the content out of words, or directly turning fundamental concepts upside down. Thus, when he proclaimed the building of 'Twenty-first Century Socialism,' he immediately followed that by establishing that this peculiar 'socialism' was going to be built in collaboration with businessmen—that is, without expropriating the capitalists."

"Then when the working class began to raise demands and fight through trade unions independent of the government, he talked about forming 'workers councils.' Of course, these peculiar 'soviets' were not going to be democratic organs of the masses (like those in the Russian Revolution) but organizations of Chavistas to put an end to the problems caused by trade unions, especially, in the public or nationalized sector. After that the announcement that 'popular militias' were going to be formed had nothing to do with organizing a Red Guard, as in 1917, or the militias of other revolutions, as in Spain in 1936. They would be part of the armed forces for maintaining order."

Chavez's recognition of the Fourth International was not so surprising or reassuring to Trotskyists who remember that a former minister of labor in his government was of Trotskyist origin, and claimed to be a Trotskyist, but had to be dumped from the government in response to protests from workers who were infuriated by his support of a company against them (an Argentine-owned company backed by the Peronist government Chavez regarded as an ally).

However contradictory, nonetheless, Chavez's leftism has not been limited to words. There has been a slow process of radicalization of the regime and a series of nationalizations, which have grown over the past year. The most recent is the nationalization of some banks. But it was a symptomatic move in more ways than one. In the first place, it was long overdue. The Venezuelan banking sector is dominated by international trusts, although most of the deposits are government money deriving from the income of the nationalized oil industry.

The Economist, the leading magazine of the British capitalist class, reported

in its Dec. 10 issue: "Being rich is bad,' Hugo Chávez is wont to remark. But in the decade in which he has been Venezuela's president, some people with close ties to his regime have made fortunes. Now he seems to have lost patience with them. Over the past fortnight the government has shut down seven small banks and an insurance company and arrested several of their owners, accusing them of fraud and mismanagement. The president says this is part of a drive to root out corruption. Yet the scandal would seem to lead to the upper echelons of his government."

Chavez's move against some bankers (10 percent of the banking industry) touched off a panic in the sector, with bank shares falling precipitously. The rate of the national currency, the Bolivar, suffered a corresponding drop on the exchange market. Chavez moved quickly to reassure the bankers.

The Bloomberg press service reported Dec. 4: "Chavez said yesterday his government's investigation of banks is confined to a small group, not the entire sector, a day after threatening to seize financial institutions for failing to comply with regulations. The government took over four banks on Nov. 20. ... 'Chavez is saying I'm not going to nationalize the entire financial system, just the small fries,' said Kathryn Rooney, an emerging-markets analyst at Bulltuck Securities Corp. in Miami."

The Economist commented cynically that whatever the reason for Chavez's move against some relatively small banks, Chavez "has seized on the issue to assume one of his favourite roles, as scourge of the rich. He may yet turn this scandal to his political advantage."

After his threats to bankers, Chavez threatened the transnational car manufacturers that unless they produced "rustic" cars—that is, vehicles able to negotiate the country's largely rough

roads, and shared their technology with local companies, that he would nationalize them.

In its Dec. 25 issue, *Truth About Cars*, a magazine of the U.S. automotive industry, commented: "Their options are either to 'share their technology with local businesses' (a half-expropriation) or get out (a full expropriation.) Chavez usually doesn't do nationalizations in piecemeal fashion. He tends to nationalize whole industry sectors. The metals, cement, oil, coffee and electricity sectors are all being owned by the people of Venezuela, or Hugo Chavez, depending how one looks at it."

However, the magazine speculated that Chavez's objective was to replace Japanese and American carmakers with Chinese capitalist companies, in line with his project of making China the major consumer of Venezuelan oil, replacing the United States. *Truth About Cars* noted that Chavez has declared that China is his main strategic ally in the world, but thought that his perspective was illusory, given China's dependence on the American and Japanese market:

"The matters are being complicated by the US and Japan being major trading partners of China, and by GM and Toyota having major joint ventures in China and buying lots of parts from Chinese manufacturers. China will gladly buy Venezuela's oil and build them some ports to go with it. But they won't put their booming auto business at risk for some 100,000 'rustic' cars built in Venezuela."

Truth About Cars pointed out that in any case, the Venezuelan car workers were not likely to gain by having U.S. and Japanese bosses replaced by Chinese ones: "Should it really come to the Chinese taking over Venezuela's auto plants, then the workers may be in for a rude surprise. Chinese factory managers are not necessarily known for their subtle style when it comes to labor relations."

However, Chavez has not demonstrated an interest in defending workers' rights. He has also made a special alliance with Lukashenko, the dictator of Byelorussia, who crushed the Minsk subway workers strike and has fostered legislation that would abolish collective bargaining in principle. According to Lukashenko's law, the only contacts would be between individual workers and the boss.

It is also a contradiction for Chavez to say that he is for an international movement for socialism, when he makes special alliances with governments like Lukashenko's or Amadinejad's in Iran, which are violently reactionary, just because they are in conflict on one level or another with the United States.

Of course, Chavez has justification for seeking tactical alliances with third-world capitalist governments that are trying to win some maneuvering room from U.S. imperialism. The support of Lula's government was important to Chavez's survival when the Venezuelan capitalists tried to oust him with a lock-out of the oil industry, which they then controlled. Likewise, the very limited defense of Cuba's right to self-determination by the PRI government in Mexico helped to stave off a massive U.S. assault on the Cuban revolution.

But there has to be a clear separation between such tactical and diplomatic alliances and political alliances. Chavez can win no points with the Mexican rulers by appealing to them to join a world socialist movement. And he makes his appeal for a revolutionary socialist international appear ridiculous by appealing to parties like the Mexican PRI. ■

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U.S. MARINES VS. AVATARS

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Titanic" director James Cameron threw elements from a few CGI animated sci-fi/fantasy/action films into "Avatar," his latest multi-million-dollar vehicle. The result is a scenic delight. Moreover, it's obvious from the start that Cameron meant for "Avatar" to speak against U.S. exploitation of indigenous peoples and their lands for their natural resources. His anti-military viewpoint is also evident throughout.

It's 2154, and the Earth has been destroyed due to excessive consumption, climate change, and disease. But even without a home planet, the U.S. military is still in operation in space. On the moon Pandora, the U.S. discovers a needed mineral. A space station hovers over Pandora, replete with scientists conducting experiments, headed by cigarette-smoking Grace, played by Signoury Weaver, and Parker Selfridge (Giovanni Ribisi), a fanatical project manager.

The mining and exploration of Pandora is backed by the military—in this case Marines and paramilitary—with all their gun-bearing spaceships. Steven Lang is the top military operations commander, Colonel Miles Quaritch, who refers to his men as "meat."

We see shots of huge mining operations taking place on Pandora, with workers wearing oxygen masks, on a scale of destruction actually seen in coal and iron ore mining in the U.S. today. Monstrous dump trucks with wheels the size of 10-story buildings rumble down sliced-off mountaintops, on barren terraced areas.

There's no oxygen on Pandora, so in order to explore, scope out the situation, and befriend the beautiful, blue, 10-foot-tall, dreadlock-wearing Na'vi natives, human scouts must become Na'vi avatars. Transforming into an avatar is accomplished by climbing into a cyro tank, which is hooked up to lots of wires and

tubes to another tank containing a Na'vi body; once your human DNA is mixed with Na'vi, you then control it with your thoughts, while you remain in the tank. Your avatar is then transported to Pandora. If things start to go wrong, a scientist can just push a red "kill" button to wake you up.

Sam Worthington plays Jake Sully, a Marine who has lost his legs in the latest war. His brother had been killed in action and he wants to do right by him, so signs up to become an avatar. Someone jokes, as he rolls in on his wheelchair, "Oh, boy, meals on wheels." He is told that they are on Pandora to "win [the natives'] hearts and minds" and convince them that we mean them no harm, words that could have come directly from the mouth of Generals Petreus, McChrystal, and the top military brass before them.

Once on Pandora, Grace and her assistant, Norm (Joel Moore), as avatars themselves, guide avatar Jake through a colorful jungle wonderland of strange plants and animals. Jake, making full use of his new legs and body, takes off on his own and disappears. Night is falling. Concerned, Grace and Norm decide to leave him there. Here's where I sensed a plot loophole: Couldn't they have told someone on the space station to push the red button? But no, if Jake is worth his salt, he'll be fine and Cameron's story will move forward.

In a dramatic scene, Jake meets a female Na'vi (who looks like a blue Angelina Jolie), Neyriti (Zoe Saldana). She brings him home to tribal leaders, Mom and Dad (Wes Studi: immediately recognizable voice). Their ways are similar to those of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples who've lived off the land for centuries and feel a deep spiritual connection with their land and all living beings.

Jake soon comes to think that the Na'vi world is the true world and his world is built on lies. He begins



questioning Selfridge's and Quaritch's motives; he is derided for "going native" because he got a "piece of Na'vi tail." Still, Jake is a Marine and must do what he was trained to do—until . . .

An ancestral, spiritual, tree of life is threatened as it sits on the largest deposit of the mineral. Jake has failed to convince the Na'vi to move to another site, so Quaritch barks his orders. Jake, as his avatar, the Na'vi and all the mythical beasts and birds of the jungle retaliate, including dragons piloted by Na'vi. When Chacon in her airship sees she is killing innocent people, she echoes what many American soldiers who have served recently in Iraq and Afghanistan have said, openly, "This is not what I signed up for."

This is a film with strong pro-environment, antiwar, and anti-imperialism messages that I trust will not be lost on audiences who went to see it for its gorgeous animation; imaginative, sci-fi story; its inventiveness, and its out-of-this-world (no pun intended) 3D effects. Try to see it in an IMAX theater. ■

... Leon Trotsky

(continued from page 7)

Trotsky wanted the Leninbund to "rearm ideologically, and to rebuild [not 'recognize'] its ranks accordingly" ("Writings of Leon Trotsky [1929]," p. 249).

This series of mistakes, misinterpretations, and misreadings are only based on one paragraph, but this paragraph is no exception to the rule. Service cannot be trusted as a reliable source on matters large or small. Every chapter suffers from similar ignorance and teems with similar problems.

A multi-volume "Anti-Service" would have to be written to set matters right. Such a work would lack for no shortage of topics, including questions of Marxist theory for which Service has no aptitude. For instance, he fails to understand the significance and difference between Lenin's theory of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. "The differences, indeed," Service claims, "were detectable only with an ideological microscope" (p. 91).

To "The Revolution Betrayed," one of Trotsky's ma-

ior works, a systematic critique of the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy, Service devotes only two paragraphs. Ultimately, he believes the work was written for personal and psychological reasons: "At some unconscious level he [Trotsky] seemingly needed the reassurance that great historical forces and not an individual adversary of comparable talent had brought about his defeat" (p. 457).

But in a speech written in the year that "The Revolution Betrayed" was published, Trotsky offered, contrary to the amateur psychoanalysts of the future, a Marxist analysis: "It is absurd to explain such a furious struggle by personal motives. It is a question not only of political programmes, but also of different social interests, which clash in an increasingly hostile fashion" ("I Stake My Life!").

Only someone without interest in Marxism could make the kind of "absurd" (using Trotsky's word) comments cited in the above paragraphs. It is not a question of disagreement, for then Service would have developed a rebuttal to the opinions of his subject. He does not even try. Marxist ideas, when they are considered at all, are treated superficially or dismissed out of hand.



Of course, someone so ill equipped in the field of Marxism ought not to be writing major biographies of Marxists. It is equally obvious that someone who says Trotsky would have been better off if he had died in the 1930s before he had written works like "The Revolution Betrayed," as Service claimed in the on-line "Uncommon Knowledge" interview, perhaps ought not to be writing a biography of Trotsky.

Robert Service not only dismisses Marxism, and not only continually insults Trotsky; he continually insults his readers. Every chapter delivers an affront to logic, common sense, historical fact, or scholarly standards. Slanders and smears are his stock-in-trade.

A knowledgeable reader is at first startled, then disgusted, and, finally, morbidly curious. Reading the biography becomes a kind of bizarre game in which the reader tries to anticipate just what kind of bias-driven stupidity will appear on the next page or two. But, before long, even this perverse pleasure fades, and every page turned comes to feel like a drop of hot motor oil on an open eye.

Biography goes only so far and is only of so much importance. So, yes, LT was cantankerous, difficult, and overly libidinous. He was easily roused to anger when his fundamental beliefs were challenged. He could be brutally demanding of intimates and family and could speak cruelly to his wife. He found rest and relaxation through vigorous outdoor exercise but seemed always to have a pen in his hand. So on and so forth.

What matters, though, is that the LT of the preceding paragraph—actually, Leo Tolstoy—is the author of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina." The episodic details of his life matter little when compared to the permanent achievement of his life's work. The same is true for Leon Trotsky, author of "The Permanent Revolution," "The History of the Russian Revolution," and "The Revolution Betrayed." His life's work will far outlast this work of his life. ■

Hal Verb 1931-2009

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Harold (Hal) Verb, an occasional writer on historical subjects for *Socialist Action* newspaper, passed away at the Veteran's Hospital in San Francisco on Dec 4. Hal was a committed revolutionary socialist and an activist in a number of social causes, as well as being a "pioneer atheist" in the San Francisco area.

Hal Verb was born in Philadelphia on April 14, 1931. Following the Cuban Revolution, he became active in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and joined the Socialist Workers Party. He moved to San Francisco in 1962 and worked at various jobs, including as a printer and independent bookseller, while participating in the movement against the Vietnam War.

Hal was an astute reader of American history. He was convinced from his research into the John F. Kennedy assassination that Kennedy had been murdered as part of a conspiracy, and that Lee Harvey Oswald had been employed as a government agent. Hal frequently addressed that issue as a public speaker and writer.

Hal Verb became a supporter of Socialist Action after its formation in the 1980s. He frequently participated in events sponsored by the San Francisco Socialist Action branch, though his deteriorating health made such activity difficult in later years. He suffered from Marfan's Syndrome, which leads to progressive

muscular degeneration.

Don Havis, a member of the San Francisco Atheists, writes that "Mr. Verb reported in his autobiography that he became completely convinced that atheism was the conclusion that made sense to him in 1948 or '49, when he read about it in the so-called 'Little Blue Books' published by Emanuel Haldeman-Julius. (E.H.J.) was a well-known atheist and socialist who published his inexpensive and popular little booklets from 1919 to 1955.) He ordered some of these books at that time, and then began collecting them in about 1950, which he continued all of his life—particularly trying to find the rare very early ones. Hal amassed one of the largest collections of 'Little Blue Books' and 'Big Blue Books' in the United States. His collection of thousands of these books is now housed in the Freethought Library at the Center For Inquiry in Amherst, N.Y."

Havis continues, "Hal Verb was a very active atheist and socialist all of his life—very much dedicated to the social causes of equality and liberty and rational thought. Let us hope that we in the San Francisco Atheists, as well as other broader-based rational organizations, will continue the sort of activism that Hal Verb embodied."

We in Socialist Action likewise salute our comrade Hal. We are confident that his work will live on with future generations. ■

Activists try to break through Israeli-Egyptian siege of Gaza

By ANDREW POLLACK

At year's end almost 1400 activists from 43 countries gathered in Cairo with the intention of marching on the border with Gaza to try to break Israel's genocidal siege. Timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of Israel's massacres, the Gaza Freedom March (GFM) sought to draw attention to the continuing trauma, hunger, unemployment, and homelessness facing Palestinians in Gaza. At the same time, George Galloway's third Viva Palestina convoy was wending its way toward Gaza.

Almost no rebuilding of the thousands of homes, schools, and hospitals flattened by U.S.-paid-for bombs and missiles has been possible because of the blockade. Now even the tunnels from Egypt, an essential lifeline, are threatened with closure by an underground wall being financed and designed by the U.S.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak announced just days before delegates began arriving in Cairo that the march would not be allowed to go forward, citing ongoing tensions at the border. When GFM delegates arrived in Cairo, the government began constant harassment and repression to make clear they were serious about blocking the march. After initial skirmishes on Dec. 27 and Dec. 28, protests began in full force to demand the march be allowed to proceed.

On Dec. 29, several hundred French activists took over the street in front of the French embassy, stopping traffic for hours. Meanwhile, Egyptian cops encircled 600 marchers in front of the UN building. Later that day, U.S. marchers went to the U.S. embassy to seek aid in their efforts to reach Gaza, but the embassy called Egyptian cops to have them dispersed. Responding to the obstruction and repression, a group including 85-year-old Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein began a hunger strike.

Meanwhile, the GFM Steering Committee was negotiating with authorities. South African GFM organizer Sayed Dhansay wrote in the *Electronic Intifada* that organizers informed marchers that an agreement had been reached allowing 100 of them to go to Gaza. The Egyptian government had even demanded they declare their purpose to be humanitarian, not political. Delegations from South Africa, France, Canada, and Sweden—and a section of the U.S. delegation—rejected the agreement, “refus[ing] to legitimize the policy of occasionally allowing small aid convoys in.”

Hedy Epstein arrived and announced her rejection of a slot on the bus, saying, “1400 Palestinians were killed in the massacre last year, and all 1400 of us need to go.” Hearing these statements, some of the 100 got off the buses. In the end, 87 people did go to Rafah, but said they did so in their individual capacities to meet family members and bring aid.

The GFM Steering Committee then issued a press release announcing, “we flatly reject Egypt’s offer of a token gesture. We refuse to whitewash the siege.” They admitted their earlier decision had been a mistake, and pointed out that actions in Cairo were “reaching new audiences.”

This effect was documented by Chris Hutchinson, GFM delegate and Socialist Action member, who wrote on his blog: “Our actions have gotten considerable coverage, and people throughout the city are aware of what is happening.” Hutchinson wrote that marchers were having an impact on the people of Cairo, even among security forces. “I was shocked to see how many officers were showing solidarity. ... Some even cried. Even police clapped and chanted along with protesters: ‘hurriya li Gaza’ (Freedom for Gaza).”

“Workers in a restaurant say all they can do is pray for the freedom of Palestinians due to heavy repression. ... Everywhere we went people would ask, ‘Are you here for Gaza?’”

He also paid tribute to the militancy and organizing of the French marchers, saying that they “had the strongest abilities and ideas when it came to tactics and strategy. Each day the camp looked more and more like a structured community with new banners, media board, sharing of resources, and frequent marches and chants.

“It was impossible not to leave with a heavy heart and inspiration from the clarity of their actions and democratic decision-making process.” The latter was in the face of government actions that meant that for the GFM in general “organization is nearly impossible as the government has revoked permits for mass meetings.”

Last tango in Cairo

On Dec. 31, which was to have been the day for marchers to arrive at the border, hundreds instead converged on central Cairo. Those able to escape po-



Alaa al-Marjani / AP

Where ever we went (in Cairo), people would ask, 'Are you here for Gaza?'

— Christopher Hutchinson

lice barricades around their hotels traveled to the gathering point in small groups. At a secret signal they swarmed together and began marching, stopping traffic for 45 minutes.

When riot police encircled them, Marchers sat on the ground. Police beat, kicked, and pulled them by the hair to get them out of the road. There were broken ribs, bloody noses, cuts and bruises, and destroyed cameras. After a verbal confrontation with police at a separate location, one French marcher, Marie Renee, died of a heart attack. After being pushed off the road, the protest continued for the rest of the day.

Commenting on their overall impact, Hutchinson wrote: “Our actions in Cairo can only provide cover for the workers and students to join these protests. As one student stated, ‘although the people want Gaza free, they are afraid of the government.’ For the few Egyptians and Palestinians who braved the heavy hand of the law to join us, it was a chance to express their anger toward both the government of Mubarak and the policies of the U.S.

“While we never made it to Gaza ... we forged international alliances and created a space where the millions of people of Cairo could feel comfortable cheering and waving in solidarity with Palestinians.”

Meanwhile, at the Gaza border, Palestinians were gathering. Hamas allowed only 6000 to rally, citing security concerns—although clearly the real reason was Hamas’s own disinterest in independent mobilization by the Palestinian masses. At the same time, the Viva Palestina convoy was stranded in Jordan after the Egyptian government had refused permission for its trucks carrying medical supplies to make a four-hour trip over land and insisted it take a long detour by sea.

How will the siege be broken?

As its concluding act, the GFM issued a “Cairo Declaration,” initiated by South African trade unionists on the March. The declaration denounces not only the siege of Gaza, but a broad spectrum of abuses and atrocities by Israel, as well as “the Zionist ideology which underpins Israel.” It calls for “a global, mass, democratic anti-apartheid movement to work in full consultation with Palestinian civil society to implement the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).” Among the steps proposed toward that end are:

- A speaking tour by Palestinian and South African unionists and other activists;
- Participation in Israeli Apartheid Week;
- A unified approach to the boycott involving consumers, workers and their unions in retail, warehousing, and transportation;
- Divestment of union and other pension funds from companies implicated in the occupation and/or Israeli military industries;
- Legal actions targeting external recruitment of sol-



Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

(Above) Gaza marchers, including Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein (ctr.) rally in Cairo, Dec. 29. (Below) Close to 1000 rallied in solidarity with Gaza marchers, Dec. 27, in New York.

diers to serve in the Israeli military, and the prosecution of Israeli war criminals; support for the Goldstone Report.

Said Greg Dropkin in introducing the declaration: “We don’t just want to tell people, ‘don’t buy Israeli vegetables’; we want to go to the workers selling these vegetables ... to people running the warehouses where they’re stored [and] people transporting them.”

Another sign that the momentum generated by the GFM will continue is the statement issued by the US Palestinian Community Network. It noted that the siege is “in violation of the wishes of [the Egyptian] people,” who have a proud history of support for the Palestinian people “and led the Arab nation to confront colonization and economic domination.”

USPCN called on Egypt to allow in the marchers as well as participants in the VP convoy; to end its siege of Gaza; and to scuttle the “Wall of Shame” (the new underground wall). In this effort they will certainly find support among the thousands who demonstrated in dozens of cities around the world to mark the anniversary of the massacre and in support of the GFM. One of the most vibrant was the march on Dec. 27 of almost a thousand in New York City, organized by Al-Awda NY and local Arab community groups.

During the attacks last year we noted the massive protests in Arab nations and predominantly Muslim countries. We wrote in the January 2009 issue of this newspaper: “A universal target of ire at these rallies has been the Egyptian regime for its collaboration with the Israeli blockade and attacks.”

A year earlier, Palestinian militants blew open a breach in the Egyptian wall, soon widened by the masses of Gaza. This time the GFM used the (slightly) higher visibility of non-Palestinians in the media to try to tip the scales in favor of Palestinians’ own actions.

In the end it is those actions—and support from the Arab masses—that will not only end the siege but lead to the complete liberation of Palestine and the Arab nation as a whole. A greatly expanded international solidarity movement like the one envisioned in the Cairo Declaration can serve as an important means of support for such struggles. ■

