

World blasts Israel for murder of Gaza aid workers

**End the Israeli blockade of Gaza!
No U.S. aid to Israel!**

By THE EDITORS

In the pre-dawn hours of May 31, Israeli commandos deliberately murdered at least 16 and perhaps as many as 29 members of the Free Gaza Flotilla who were bringing aid to the besieged people of Gaza. The bulk of the deaths and injuries occurred on the largest ship, the Turkish-registered *Mavi Marmara*. Firing (with bullets paid for by U.S. tax dollars) began even before the commandos boarded the ships, and continued once these new pirates of the Mediterranean rappelled down from helicopters.

The overwhelming majority of the activists offered no resistance, yet were the targets of indiscriminate fire. Fifty to 60 were wounded badly enough to be put in hospital. Survivors among the over 700 flotilla participants from over 40 countries were detained in Israeli prisons, and all access to them by family, lawyers, and the media was barred.

On board the *Mavi Marmara* were hundreds of Turks organized by the Turkish charity IHH. Their involvement—and verbal expressions of support before and after the attack from the Turkish government—has had all the more impact given that Turkey has been one of Washington's staunchest allies in the Middle East, and has been on good diplomatic terms with Israel.

Every aspect of this operation was illegal under international law, starting from the fact that the blockade of Gaza itself is illegal. The 14 Zionist ships that carried the commandos attacked the flotilla in international waters more than 60 miles off the coast of Gaza.

Most importantly, the attack was part of a train of violent incidents since before Israel's founding designed to steal and hold on to land, and to terrorize, and if need be kill, those who resist.

A small minority of the activists, especially from among the Turks, tried to defend themselves and their fellow passengers (who included a mother with a one-year-old baby, and an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor). The only tools of self-defense available to them were kitchen knives and wooden sticks. Numerous international legal experts have stated unequivocally that they were entirely within their rights to do so against a vio-

lent, illegal boarding operation. Their resistance, however hopeless given the relationship of forces, inspired millions around the world.

Regardless of how many activists exercised their right to self-defense, the raid as a whole was carefully planned, and its operational details approved by Israel's political leadership, who knew that by beginning with

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Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images



Robyn Beck / AFP / Getty Images

Protests against Israeli murders of Gaza volunteers: (left) Washington, June 1; (rt.) Los Angeles, May 31.

Greek protests mark a new high in mass radicalization

By GERRY FOLEY

The furious and massive protests against draconian austerity plans in Greece undoubtedly represent the biggest social explosion in Western Europe since the French May-June revolutionary crisis of 1968.

Greece, of course, is a relatively small country. It accounts for only 2 percent of the GNP of the European Union. But given the fragility of the international credit bubble, the threatened bankruptcy of the Greek state was sufficient to send tremors through the entire international capitalist economy, and particularly the economy of the European Union, the world's second largest.

In a May 20 statement, the Greek section of the Fourth International, the worldwide grouping of revolutionary socialists supported by Socialist Action, noted: "For some months now, the economic crisis has impacted the social and political situation in Greece in an unprecedentedly violent way. At the very time when international ruling circles and the mass media



were systematically cultivating hopes about at least a weak recovery of the capitalist economy in 2010, the Greek drama suddenly demonstrated how fragile such hopes were.

"Even more glaringly, the Greek crisis demonstrated the absolute domination of finance capital, which dictates the guidelines of the government's policy on the basis of its immediate interests and thereby accelerates the blind rush of capitalism toward an uncontrolled swelling of the 'bubble' of state debt and a general world crisis."

The statement noted the extent of the worldwide financial crisis: "To bail out the banks over the past two years, unimaginable amounts have had to be diverted from the state budgets, in all, 25 percent of the world GNP—that is, 14 trillion dollars. And at the same time, state revenues have declined owing to the recession."

The European Union and the international capitalist financial institutions have imposed limits on the extent that states are allowed to resort to deficit financing. But the Greek crisis re-

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Korel Navarro / AP

(Left) Lori Berenson appears before Judge Jessica Leon in a Lima courtroom, May 25.

Lori Berenson is Free!

Socialist Action received the following letter from the parents of Lori Berenson, who has been in prison in Peru for 15 years, under arduous conditions, on charges of having aided a guerrilla group. Our newspaper and organization is proud to have played a part in the solidarity movement to obtain Lori's freedom.

Dear Friends and Supporters of Lori,

On May 25, 2010 a Peruvian judge, after carefully studying Lori's application for what in Peru is termed "conditional liberty" (parole), determined that Lori has earned her freedom. Lori and her son Salvador will be leaving prison in a few days and moving to an apartment in Lima.

Parole requires individuals to live within the city in which they were incarcerated (Lima, in Lori's case)—we do not know

if there are exceptions for foreigners or whether Lori will be permitted to travel to the US while on parole. Parole in Peru is based on good behavior, work and study. In September 2009 Lori officially filed her application under a Peruvian law which established eligibility after serving 75% of her 20-sentence, less time off for work and study.

Lori appeared before the judge in court on Monday, May 17th, for a hearing, defended by her husband, Anibal Apari Sanchez, a Lima lawyer and candidate for Mayor of Villa El Salvador, a suburb of Lima with over a half million inhabitants. Lori will be a single mom—Anibal and Lori are legally separated but remain friends and both share concerns for Salvador's proper upbringing.

Salvador, now an active one-year old boy, will certainly enjoy the opportunity to run around outside the confines of the prison. He is learning both English and Spanish but babbles continuously in "unknown tongue." He is a very happy child and loves to be with people.

We want to express our gratitude to all of you for your expressions of love and support all these years. You have truly sustained us through some very dark hours and the dawn of a new sunny day has arrived.

With appreciation, always.
Rhoda and Mark B.

Commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal

State Against People

There is, at the heart of American society, a profound disquiet about the overwhelming powers of government, one which waxes and wanes according to the felt needs of the time.

That's partly because, while we say the government was formed to support freedom, we know that this wasn't true. We know that the government was an instrument of despotic and tyrannical power—especially when it comes to Black people. This government began in slavery, not in freedom—unless one argues it was begun to protect freedom of some to enslave others.

Thomas Jefferson, in his "Notes On the State of Virginia," describing slavery, called it a system of "unremitting despotism." That he was, at once, an alleged freedom fighter and, an owner of several hundred slaves gives us some sense of the contradiction at the core of the United States.

Government then, and now, supports the efforts of the wealthy, at the expense of the many. It is an instrument of wealth and corporate power—period. Those who saw the quicksilver response to Wall Street's problems, and the half-hearted responses to the unemployed, the foreclosed, the hungry and the homeless should take that lesson to heart.

How else could any government support efforts like NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement), which destabilized millions of middle class workers (not to mention poor folks in Mexico), and please financial speculators and investors on Wall St.?

Former President Bill Clinton sold NAFTA like a carnival barker, and promised good jobs for all. It didn't exactly work out that way, did it?

The neo liberal project of globalization was never intended to provide good jobs—for anybody, but elites. It was designed to maximize corporate profits, unhindered by any government restraints.

The bubbling light crude poisoning the waters of the Gulf of Mexico—right now—is the direct result of neoliberal deregulation—which frees business to profit—but also to create multinational disasters. It's government in hock to capital, and capitalism run wild.

And while the media hypes about environmental damage to Louisiana, Texas or even Florida, have you noticed no one has even mentioned Mexico's east coast, or Cuba's west coast?

Globalization is here—and it ain't pretty. Only great and sustained struggle and resistance can change that tune.

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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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Action Proposal for United Antiwar Conference

S.F. Chronicle

Below we are reprinting the Action Proposal issued by the United National Antiwar Conference (UNAC) Planning Committee. The conference will take place in Albany, N.Y., July 23-25.

A brochure put out by the Planning Committee outlines the perspectives of the conference: "This conference will bring together antiwar and social justice activists from across the country to consider what we can do together to end the U.S. wars, occupations, bombing attacks, threats and interventions that are taking place in the Middle East and beyond. Attend and voice your opinion on where the antiwar movement is today and where we go from here.

"We demand the immediate and total withdrawal of U.S. military forces, mercenaries and contractors from Afghanistan and Iraq. Instead of trillions for wars and occupations, we demand those funds be spent for jobs, health care, education, the environment, infrastructure and other human needs, and that compensation be paid to the peoples whose countries the U.S. attacked and occupied for the loss of lives and massive destruction they suffered."

Any organization or individuals attending the UNAC conference may submit amendments to the Action Proposal, or alternative resolutions or proposals for action, to be discussed and voted on at the conference. For more information and instructions on how to submit an amendment or resolution, please see the UNAC website at www.nationalpeaceconference.org. E-mail UNAC2010@aol.com or UNAC at P.O. Box 21675, Cleveland, OH 44121.

UNAC Action Proposal submitted by conference co-sponsors

Part 1: Preface

The prerequisites for ending the U.S. wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and re-orienting the nation's priorities from empire building to solving the pressing needs at home are unity in action, massive mobilizations, inclusion of the broadest popular sectors of society, democratic functioning, and the construction of a mass social movement that operates independently of all political parties while seeking to influence their rank and file.

History has demonstrated time and again that the combination of these qualities coupled with an inclusive, collaborative and representative lead-

ership can change the course of history.

This was the case with the massive social movements that were constructed to end the Vietnam War, win formal civil rights for excluded races and peoples, advance the cause of women's equality, and challenge the prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people. It was the same unity in action that brought into being a massive trade union movement that challenged the previously dominant forces of the corporate elite and wrested unprecedented victories in the quality of life and culture for working people.

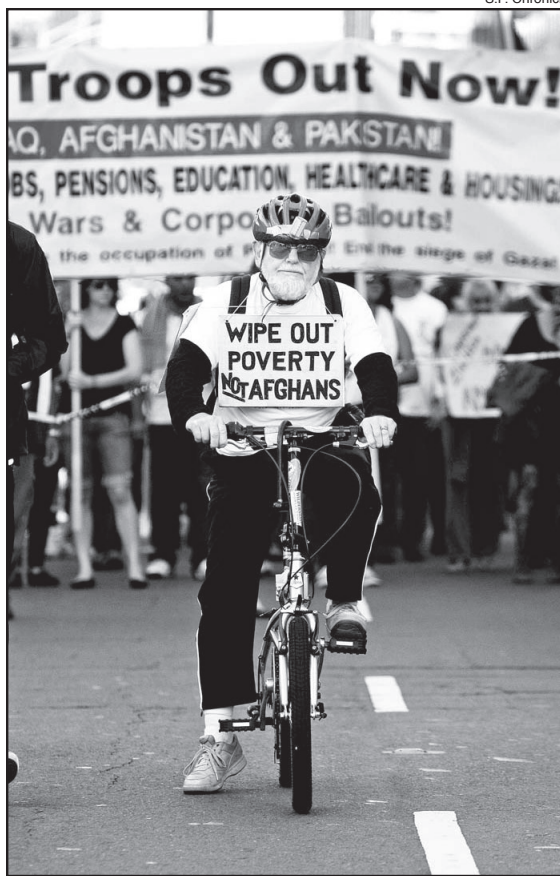
Today we face the challenge of perpetual wars abroad becoming part of our national culture as are unceasing attacks on the quality of life and the standard of living at home. We are witness to multi-trillion dollar bailouts of the same institutions that have brought grief and pain to countless millions and obliterated hard won social and economic gains that were a century and longer in the making.

Our youth are subject to an economic draft that places them in harm's way around the world where poor people fight for their right to self-determination and resist interventions for profit and plunder. Education budgets are slashed while pensions, health care, wages, union rights and civil liberties are under siege.

Trillions are expended to fund increasingly privatized wars fought in large part with mercenary armies and to maintain 865 military bases around the world. Meanwhile veterans -- first place in the statistics of the homeless and unemployed -- are compelled to fight for denied benefits to treat horrific diseases caused by U.S. biological and now radiation-emitting weapons of war while the people of destroyed nations suffer the same, but magnified, and long-term horrors. Moreover, they are subjected to successive incidents of grotesque and inhuman torture.

We are confronted with imperial wars over control of the very fossil fuel resources whose continued use threatens the future of all humankind.

Our love of humanity, opposition to expanding wars and occupations un-



leashed by the Pentagon, and respect for the right of self-determination for all peoples require that we demand of the U.S. government:

- The allocation of the trillions spent on wars and corporate bailouts to massive programs for jobs, education, health care, housing and the environment. Compensation to be paid to the peoples whose countries the U.S. attacked and occupied for the loss of lives and massive destruction they suffered.
- The immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. military bases from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Bring all the Troops and War Dollars Home Now!
- Reverse and end all foreclosures. Stop the government attacks on trade unions, civil and democratic rights, and immigrant communities.

Part 2: Proposals for United Actions

- Oct. 6 to 16, 2010: a period of local and regional protests across the country to mark the ninth year of the U.S. war on Afghanistan. Actions to include demonstrations, marches, vigils, teach-ins, solidarity, etc.
- Draft antiwar resolutions for city councils, town and village meetings and voter referendum ballot questions

linking astronomical war spending to denial of essential public services at home. Form broad local coalitions and/or networks to organize support for such resolutions and referendum campaigns. Model resolutions and ballot questions will be circulated for consideration of local groups.

- Mid-March, 2011: nationally coordinated teach-ins to mark the eighth year of the Iraq War and to prepare for bi-coastal spring demonstrations the following month.
- Bi-coastal mass spring mobilizations in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles on April 9, 2011. These will be accompanied by distinct and separate non-violent direct actions on the same day. A prime component of these mobilizations will be major efforts to include broad new forces from youth to veterans to trade unionists to civil and human rights groups to the Arab, Muslim and other oppressed communities to environmental organizations, social justice and faith-based groups. Veterans and military families will be key to these mobilizations with special efforts to organize this community to be the lead contingent.

- Select a week prior to or after the April actions for local lobbying of elected officials at a time when Congress is not in session. Lobbying to take multiple forms from meeting with local officials to protests at their offices and homes.
- National tours. Organize over a series of months nationally-coordinated tours of prominent speakers and local activists that link the demands for immediate withdrawal to the demands for funding social programs, as outlined above.
- In the event of an imminent U.S. government attack on Iran or such an attack, or a U.S.-backed Israeli attack against Iran, or any other major international crisis triggered by U.S. military action, UNAC will mount a rapid, broad and nationally coordinated protest by antiwar and social justice activists.
- Support actions aimed at dismantling the Cold War nuclear, biological and chemical delivery systems.
- Support actions, educational efforts and lobbying campaign to promote a transition to a sustainable peace economy. ■

... Gaza aid flotilla

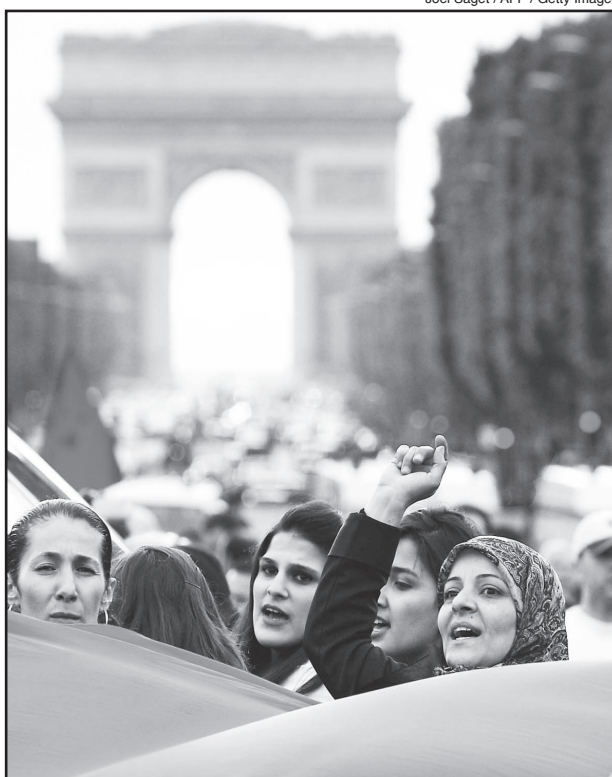
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gunfire rather than crowd dispersal techniques or negotiations, deaths were virtually inevitable.

The flotilla was carrying 10,000 tons of badly needed food, medicine, medical equipment, toys, workbooks, chocolate, as well as cement for the reconstruction of the thousands of homes destroyed in the attacks of 2008-2009. Every international aid agency has documented the continued deaths, malnutrition, homelessness, unemployment, and dependence on charity affecting the overwhelming majority of Gazans; yet their steadfastness has not wavered for one second. Gazans have said repeatedly that they welcome eagerly efforts like the flotilla even more because of the political solidarity it shows than for the material aid.

The response of the Zionist government was typically brazen and callous. The lies it spun to justify the murders were reminiscent of those used by the U.S. whenever it kills civilians in their beds in Afghanistan. Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon described the flotilla as "an armada of hate," and said its organizers had connections with Hamas and al-Qaeda. He made these assertions despite common knowledge that the overwhelming majority of participants were members of organizations that as a matter of tactics or principle or both believe only in nonviolent activism.

Numerous governments, both imperialist and neo-colonial, issued statements condemning the Israeli assault, a handful even recalling their ambassadors to Israel.



The U.S. Palestinian Community Network said the attack was "consistent with [Israel's] long history of disregard for non-Jewish human life," citing numerous massacres from 1948 until this year.

Al-Awda NY: the Palestine Right to Return Coalition noted that "some of the fallen had been resilient Palestinians, exiled by Zionist militias in 1948, withstand-

(Left) May 31 protest in Paris against Israeli attack.

ing Israeli massacres in Lebanon in 1982, attacked in 2006, and killed on the Aid Flotilla, determined to see Palestine again and be part of its liberation from Israeli Forces." The attack, said Al-Awda, was "part of the ongoing Israeli Zionist agenda to effect the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, beginning in the 1900s and continuing, with international complicity, today."

The attack also stands as more proof that the "peace process" is nothing more than a joint effort by the U.S., Israel, and the quisling Palestinian Authority to institutionalize Israeli apartheid in the entire land of historic Palestine and as an excuse to attack anyone resisting this project.

Mass protests broke out immediately around the world. The most common demands have been the immediate lifting of the siege; unconditional release of all members of the targeted flotilla, and publication of the names of the dead, injured, and detained; a war crimes tribunal; and, in the U.S., an end to all aid to Israel.

Two of the seven boats that were part of the flotilla remained at sea because of engine problems. On June 1 it was announced that one of them, the *Rachel Corrie*, was sailing on to Gaza, and that a second flotilla would sail in coming weeks. While continuing to organize protests against the murders, supporters of Palestine should participate in and defend every boat on its way to Gaza until the siege is broken!

For activists in the U.S., there is a unique opportunity to broaden and deepen support for these activities and the overall Palestine liberation struggle by attending the United National Antiwar Conference in Albany, N.Y., July 23-25. ■



(Left) Over 35,000 public workers rally against New Jersey budget cuts, May 22, outside State House in Trenton.

European debt crisis shatters promises of U.S. 'recovery'

By ANDREW POLLACK

The fears of bankers and investors over the shakiness of European public debts and deficits were mirrored in dire predictions in May about the fiscal health of the United States, as well as worries over the performance of the underlying real economy.

Spiegel Online warned that "the U.S. budget deficit has now reached \$1.6 trillion, or 10% of GDP [far higher than the Greek ratio]. The national debt is now over \$12 trillion and is forecast to expand to more than \$20 trillion by the end of the decade."

Fred Bergsten, director of the Peterson Institute, claimed: "If we don't correct the situation in the next five years, our worldwide position will be in jeopardy." (The Peterson Institute is the creation of billionaire Peter Peterson, whose campaign to eliminate Social Security and other government programs has a sympathetic ear in Barack Obama's White House, which has set up its own commission to propose drastic cuts.)

In March, rating agencies S&P's and Moody's warned that the U.S. perfect triple-A rating could be jeopardized if the country's financial situation didn't change drastically, and soon. *Spiegel* suggested a downgrading hasn't happened only for fear of the "incalculable consequences for the economy."

Joining the calls for U.S. austerity was *New York Times* business columnist David Leonhardt: "It's easy to look at the protesters and the politicians in Greece... and wonder why they don't get it. ... Yet in the back of your mind comes a nagging question: how different, really, is the U.S.?"

"Both countries have a bigger government than they're paying for. And politicians, spendthrift as some may be, are not the main source of the problem. We, the people, are."

Justifying his latest cuts, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger compared the situation to Europe, saying, "You see what is happening in Greece, you see what is happening in Ireland, you see what is happening now in Spain. We are left with nothing but tough choices."

The mainstream media has been rife with stories attacking supposedly spendthrift state governments that allegedly knuckled under to powerful public sector unions to promise outrageous pensions and overtime payments. The May 16 *Washington Post* applauded reversals to this alleged trend, which are gaining strength: i.e. curbing retirement benefits for new workers, raising employee contributions, increasing the retirement age, and/or making workers contribute more to their retirement health-care plans.

The harshest cuts for public workers have so far occurred in the education sector—the same sector that was the source of massive protests in California this spring. A total of 275,000 education jobs are expected to be cut in 2011. Meanwhile, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is trying to bust teachers' unions and gut contracts using testing regimens and charter schools.

But every type of social service is in jeopardy. One of the most heartrending incidents—and the clearest sign of the diseased nature of our system—is the case described in *The Times* of a 67-year-old woman with cerebral palsy who, because of state budget cuts, had her personal-care help cut to 28 hours. That meant she would get help for two hours in the morning and two hours at night. "If she needed to use the bathroom in between, she would sit in a soiled diaper."

The coming federal cuts to Medicaid and other social services described by *The New York Times* will mean many more such tragic stories. Rarely mentioned in stories hailing such cuts are the trillions wasted on war or bank bailouts—not to mention the systemic inevitability of capitalist crisis, which underlies today's fiscal difficulties.

Demands for cuts in the public sector will gain increasing force as the global economic crisis enters the "double dip" of the Great Recession, signs of which are proliferating. The rescue package led to a revival in global stock markets—for one day, Monday, May 10. By Tuesday, as awareness sank in that the package would solve few of the country's longer standing problems, the markets began a steady decline.

Since late April the Dow has declined more than 1000 points, or over 10%—a rate known as a market

"correction."

Adding to Wall Street's worries were predictions that new financial regulation "reform" measures would eat into their profits. A Goldman Sachs research report said the proposed legislation could reduce earnings at 28 of the biggest banks by more than 20%. However, once the Senate passed their version of the "reform," bankers breathed a collective sigh of relief at the weakness of the proposed bills.

The market correction came on the heels of the "flash crash" of May 6, in which the Dow dropped almost a thousand points in less than half an hour, with some stocks briefly losing as much as 99% of their value. There has still been no official admission of whether the steep drop was a technical "glitch" or overt manipulation or—most likely—a combination of the two. Even if the plunge turns out to have been purely technical, the possibility of another such event occurring in the midst of a market already terrified by real-world events is giving investors nightmares.

Meanwhile, indicators of the real economy parallel in their gloominess the stock exchange plunges. *The New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman noted that recent employment gains have brought back fewer than 500,000 of the more than 8 million jobs lost during the financial crisis.

The Conference Board's index of leading economic indicators dipped in April for the first time in over a year. The *Washington Post* reported on May 14 that "More people lost their homes to foreclosure in April as banks worked through a backlog of troubled borrowers. The number of homes repossessed was up 45% from a year before."

One housing analyst said, "We're adding foreclosures at a pace that foreclosure-prevention programs can't keep up with. If anything, we've pushed the problem into the future ... foreclosures will continue to be a drag on the economy for at least five years."

Meanwhile, Obama and Congressional Democrats are heading toward agreement on a pro-banker financial regulation "reform" package. Differences between Senate and House versions include how tightly derivatives should be regulated, and whether banks should be allowed to trade on their own account on such financial instruments. Not a word, though, about banning such purely speculative types of investments.

And mainstream commentators agree that even the light regulation likely to eventually pass will just inspire banks to find ways around its limitations by creating brand new financial instruments, setting up new dummy front corporations or divisions, new tax dodges, etc.

With Democrats in Washington united in their determination to make workers pay for the crisis, what's a labor movement to do? To start with, we can learn from our sisters and brothers in Greece, and take inspiration from the unity and militancy they've displayed.

One promising sign of possible new militancy, which builds on the mobilizations in California this spring, was the 35,000-strong Trenton rally by public workers against cuts in New Jersey on May 22.

The United National Antiwar Conference in July in Albany will discuss a nationwide campaign of teach-ins and advocacy for city council resolutions calling for less war spending and more money for jobs and benefits.

Clearly the time has come for more formal collaboration among public sector workers to plan joint resistance to attacks on them—and on the communities which they serve. ■

Greek workers pay for Europe's capitalist bail-out

By ANDREW POLLACK

Workers in Greece have launched repeated general strikes against the attempt by Europe's rulers to make them pay the price of the country's economic crisis, and have inspired workers throughout the continent—indeed, the world—facing similar attacks.

The price to be paid in return for the almost \$1 trillion package worked out by the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund to "save" Greece is draconian cuts in wages, pensions, jobs, and services.

Harvard historian Niall Ferguson made no bones about the motivation behind the "rescue": "This bailout wasn't done to help the Greeks; it was done to help the French and German banks."

A Federal Reserve official told Con-

gress that Europe's debt problems could cause a "significant external shock" to the U.S. economy and stall the supposed global recovery. Joining the bandwagon of those using the crisis as proof of the need for cutbacks at home, he said the experience of debt-stricken European countries is a reminder that "every country with sustained budget deficits and rising debt—including the U.S.—needs to act in a timely manner to put in place a credible program for sustainable fiscal policies."

Mainstream media were full of charts showing the debts and trading deficits of Greece with bigger Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal), which in turn are in even greater debt to the biggest economies on the continent, France and Germany. And U.S. banks hold nearly \$200 billion in the bank

debt of Spain, the country now in the sights of the world's bankers.

But even those calling for austerity acknowledge it will halt or reverse the alleged recovery from the Great Recession.

Some have challenged the supposed "fact" dictating austerity imposed on Greece: the country's alleged outsized deficit. Socialist Project author Ingo Schmidt pointed out that "public deficits between 12% and 13% of GDP in Britain and the U.S. are bad, they say, but not so bad that the austerity measures they consider appropriate can't be left to Number 10 Downing Street and the White House. But countries in southern Europe are labeled spendthrifts, and their deficits called a threat to private investments in government bonds and loans." Schmidt added that the spending

cuts being demanded would, instead of guaranteeing Greece's solvency, "lead to further

economic collapse."

Spiegel Online said the world financial crisis has entered a new phase: "Today, the world is no longer threatened by the debts of banks but by the debts of governments, including debts which were run up rescuing banks just a year ago. ... Can a crisis based on debt be solved with even more debt?"

David Wessel, in the Canadian leftist journal *The Bulletin*, also pointed to the recessionary impact of the rescue: "Can the world economy grow if everyone is trying simultaneously to cut government deficits and export more to pay the bills?" The last phrase is particularly telling, as few mainstream commentators trace the events back to the

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vealed that financial companies conspired with state governments to conceal the real extent of the budget shortfalls. The actual size of the Greek deficit was only publicly disclosed last October.

The Greek section's statement noted: "The alleged sudden realization by the Brussels bureaucracy of how 'unreliable' the official statistical data on the deficit were—that is, 12.7 percent of the GNP instead of the 4 percent the then government of Nea Dimokratia [the right-wing bourgeois party]—together with the relatively high overall public debt (123 percent of the GNP) gave the rating agencies the pretext to lower the country's credit rating.

"Of course, neither the extent of the [Greek] deficit nor of the state budget were higher than in other developed countries. In England the deficit was 13.1 percent, in Spain 11.4 percent, in France 8.7 percent. In Japan, the public debt amounts to 197 percent of GNP, in Italy 127 percent of GNP. And this to say nothing of the fact that Greece's total debt is insignificant in relation to that of the major countries."

The austerity package was imposed by the Brussels Commission of the European Union, in effect by Germany, the powerhouse of the European economy, which accounts for 27 percent of the European Union GNP by itself.

That situation exposed the basic contradiction of the European Union and its common currency, the euro. There is a huge unevenness between the economies of northern and southern Europe, and by joining the eurozone, poor countries like Greece in effect abandoned control of their fiscal policy. They cannot devalue their currencies to increase exports, as they would have in the past. In the language of the Bible, they have become "unequally yoked."

The statement of the Greek section noted: "The absence of a federated or united bourgeois European state that could direct public finances in a centralized way led to a sharpening of the inter-European capitalist contractions that arise from uneven development.

"This sharpening of the contradictions in the conditions of the crisis led to a further draining and depression of the weaker economies. The confusion and the panicky reaction of 'every man for himself' dominates at least in the short run in the enterprises and the command centers of the European governments.

"The ambitious long-range European perspectives, such as the boastful declarations about the vision of a united Europe with a king of bourgeois parliamentary institutions, seem to have vanished in thin air. Building a united European federal state has run up against the structure of the EU itself, in which no united bourgeoisie with a strong consciousness of its common interests exists."

An immediate effect of the crisis triggered by the Greek financial distress has been a drastic decline in confidence in the euro and a precipitous fall in its exchange value. The perspective of the euro rivaling the dollar as an international reserve currency is being seriously compromised. And the German head of government, Angela Merkel, has raised the alarm that if the euro falls, the European Union will also.

As a weak state, Greece has a long history of being dictated to by the larger European states. In its very origins as an independent state, an unpopular monarchy with a German royal family was imposed on it. Greece only managed to throw off the oppressive monarchy when it forced out the dictatorship of the colonels in the early 1970s.

At the time, the present ruling party, PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) was able to take office on a wave of radical nationalism, marginalizing the powerful and entrenched Greek Communist Party. The country's leading daily, *Eleftherotypia*, has recently contrasted the great hopes that the first PA-

... Greek protests mark new high in radicalization

Louisa Gouliamaki / AFP / Getty Images



(Above) Athens mass march, May 5. (Left) Pro-Communist Party workers at Athens rally on May 6.

SOK government inspired with its deep discrediting now as the government party that is implementing the austerity package imposed by the EU.

In this respect, there is an analogy with Latin America. When the Latin American military dictatorships gave way to parliamentary rule in the 1980s, there were similar hopes, which were soon dissipated by the right-wing economic offensive conducted by the so-called democratic governments. In Greece, as in Latin America, neoliberal recipes dominated in the post-dictatorial period, which have now been discredited in the eyes of the masses.

The Greek Communist Party is the heir of a cycle of civil wars following World War II, in which it had the support of the majority of working people but was betrayed by the Moscow leadership that it looked to, as well as by its own leaders who followed Moscow's line. It continues to be stronger relatively than any other Communist Party in Europe and has followed a line more to the left, at least verbally, than the others.

In the present situation, it has been trying to capture a radicalization that raises the possibility of a renewal of socialist aspirations among the masses. And on this basis, it is putting forward

a perspective of a renewal of the world Communist movement as the representative of a radicalization in response to the worldwide crisis of capitalism. This stance was publicized in the international press by pictures of Communist Party members holding up signs in the shadow of the Acropolis calling on the peoples of Europe to "rise up."

An article in the May 23 issue of *Rizospastis*, the CP paper, declares: "Today in the conditions of a counterrevolution, in a series of countries, the question is posed of building Marxist-Leninist Communist Parties from scratch, in others, their reorganization with a revolutionary orientation. In all countries, the necessity remains of building Communist Parties.

"Conditions are riper than ever for building independent organizations of Communists, for the existence of parties of parties of a new type, the expression of a renewal of revolutionary theory with the working class, which will base itself on the working class, the vanguard force of society, which will express its interests, focused on its historical mission."

In the May 22 issue of *Rizospastis*, a CP representative declared, "either the monopolies lose or the people lose;

there is no intermediate solution." The statements continued the old Stalinist references to "monopoly capitalism" (as opposed to capitalism in general) and suggested the old appeals to Greek nationalism. But in most cases, "victory of the people" was linked to socialism, and alliances with capitalist parties were rejected.

Despite its left stance and language, the Greek Communist Party has a heritage of bureaucracy and sectarianism, as well as the allegiance of an important part of the working class. The actual effect of its left positioning will have to be watched closely. But regardless of the real role played by the Greek CP, its raising the banner of revolutionary Marxism is undoubtedly an indication of the depth of the crisis and the dynamism of the radicalization it has produced in Greece.

In France, the mass demonstrations of May and June 1968 spontaneously raised the symbols and perspectives of socialism. After the illusions faded about the commitment of the CP to socialism, mass protests no longer spontaneously expressed socialist aspirations and tended to become apolitical.

The fact that the Greek CP is now raising the perspective of a renewal of revolutionary Marxism on an international scale may well express a new stage of radicalization in Europe and promote a further radicalization, over and above the concrete actions of the Communist Party.

Of course, the CP will mislead the masses and lead to new betrayals. But the radicalization could also help open the way for the rise of a new revolutionary leadership free from the bureaucratic degeneration of the Greek CP and its allies in other Stalinist formations, and which will offer genuine leadership to a working class in struggle. ■

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underlying crisis of profitability tied to global excess production capacity, which manifests itself in heightened trade tensions.

After the rescue was announced, *The Financial Times* stated, "It has belatedly dawned on Spaniards that the Iberian peninsula, not Greece, is the main target of the financial 'bazooka' unveiled by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund." Almost immediately, Spain's social democratic Prime Minister José Zapatero announced his own drastic attacks on Spanish workers, despite an official unemployment rate already over

20%. This didn't stop the IMF from issuing on May 24 what *The Wall Street Journal* called an "unusually blunt warning" that Spain must radically overhaul its labor laws, slash government pensions, and take other harsh measures.

Meanwhile, Germany's ruling class, the main beneficiary of the "rescue" of Greece, is using the occasion to demand new austerity from its own working class. And the head of the Bank of England told the newly elected Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government that there could be no delay in implementing a deficit-reduction program.

Obama's top budget official sang the

same song, calling for action to cut the deficit or "wind up facing the sorts of choices that Greece now faces."

Statements by the Fourth International over the decades as successive stages of European unification have been attempted have shown that such efforts were designed to reinforce the dominance of the more developed countries while ratcheting down to a lower common level the living standards of the continent's workers.

The FI has called, in opposition to the bosses' Europe, for continent-wide mobilizations to raise all workers' pay, benefits, and rights, paid for at the bosses' expense—and ultimately for a United Socialist States of Europe. ■

Huge march in Phoenix for immigrant rights

By GEORGE SHRIVER

PHOENIX, Ariz.—The march and rally on May 29 was the expression of a genuine mass movement in opposition to racist laws recently passed by the Arizona state legislature, especially the racial-profiling law, SB (Senate Bill) 1070.

According to march organizers, as many as 100,000 turned out. (The Associated Press arrogantly and absurdly reported only “10,000 to 20,000.”) Two hours after the front of the march reached the Capitol, the last marchers were still arriving. As many as 60 solidarity actions took place elsewhere in the U.S. and other countries.

The crowd in Phoenix consisted mostly of working-class Latino families, from grandparents through mothers and fathers, and teenagers in large numbers, down to small children, even infants in strollers. This is an oppressed nationality fighting back against its oppression, but also an important section of the working class going into motion.

Despite a six-mile march under a hot sun, with temperatures near 100, people were in good spirits, proud, confident, unafraid, committed to the struggle no matter how long it might take. The atmosphere of solidarity was magnetic, full of promise for eventual victory and the overturn of the unacceptable racist laws.

The importance of defeating SB 1070 is highlighted by moves toward enacting similar laws in at least a dozen other states. Defeating the racists in Arizona will set them back nationwide.

Organizers of the march were the Phoenix-based immigrant-rights group Puente (puenteaz.org) and the National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON; see www.altoarizona.com). Among the speakers was a leader of a national organization of domestic workers, a young Latina woman from California, whose group is allied with, or similar to, NDLON, an AFL-CIO affiliate.

Speaker after speaker from other parts of the U.S. stressed their solidarity with Arizona’s people of color. Two Black Katrina survivors from New Orleans repeated, “We’ve got your back.” A Black min-



ister denounced discrimination because of skin color, harkening back to the civil rights movement. A delegation of original Freedom Summer participants from the 1960s was present, along with Black Americans for Just Immigration (BAJI) from Oakland, Calif.

The march was led by a contingent of indigenous people, including local communities in the Phoenix area—the Gila River Indians, Guadalupe Yaqui, Salt River Indians, Tohono O’odham, and others—who welcomed marchers from all over the United States to their land and showed strong solidarity with their embattled Latino brothers and Latina sisters.

Organized labor had a more noticeable presence than in most recent immigrant-rights demonstrations in Arizona, especially on the speaker’s stand. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka spoke at the rally, and was in Phoenix the night before the march to address a national gathering of the AFL-CIO affiliate, LCLAA (Labor Council for Latin American Advancement). Trumka urged local unions to get more involved in the fight against SB 1070. Among other unions represented at the May 29 mass action were the UFCW and the Laborers (LIUNA).

At rallies before and after the march, speakers denounced Obama’s sending of 1200 National Guard troops to the border, an action he brazenly took on the eve of the May 29 march. One speaker demanded, “Take back those troops and use the money for schools, and to support ethnic studies in Arizona schools.”

A racist law passed by the Arizona state legislature right after SB 1070 aims at ending the unique ethnic studies program in Tucson public schools, K-12. The program makes it possible for the majority of students, Latin@s, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, to learn about their own history and culture—something not provided for by “mainstream” textbooks and media.

Speakers also called for Obama to use the power of the federal government to overturn SB 1070—which he is very unlikely to do, in view of the anti-immigrant actions of his administration during its first year and a half. At least 5% more undocumented workers were deported in Obama’s first year than during Bush’s last year.

Under Obama’s appointee as head of “Homeland Security,” Janet Napolitano, former Democratic governor of Arizona

(who was just as anti-immigrant as the Republican sponsors of SB 1070), this administration has caused an unprecedented number, thousands and thousands, to be fired from their jobs through the enforcement of the anti-immigrant E-verify system. (See David Bacon’s recent article about E-verify firings on the website grassrootsimmigrantjusticenetwork.blogspot.com.)

Obama leaves little room for reformist hopes. The “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” he explicitly supports is the Schumer blueprint, recently repackaged as the “REPAIR” proposal, backed by Schumer and five other Democrat senators, including Majority Leader Harry Reid. (REPAIR stands for Real Enforcement with Practical Answers for Immigration Reform.)

The emphasis on enforcement is obvious in the proposal’s very name. Under the Schumer-REPAIR plan, only after an arduous, costly, and humiliating process, in which all undocumented immigrant workers would have to confess to having broken the law, pay heavy fines and taxes, and submit biometric identity data, could they then *go to the back of the line* to apply for legal permanent residency—and begin an uncertain wait of many, many more years. Essentially this means very little legalization, if any.

At the May 29 event speakers did call for “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” (CIR), but the dead-end nature of what Obama and the Senate Democrats are proposing makes it awkward and unrealistic to keep repeating the call for “CIR.” One speaker at the rally, union leader Eliseo Medina (of SEIU), seemed aware of the difficulty, especially in the face of that giant crowd demanding justice. So he added, “By comprehensive immigration reform I mean *legalization!*” But that’s not what Obama, Schumer, & Co. mean.

Some speakers called for getting out the vote in November, to defeat the racist Republicans who control the Arizona legislature. But there’s a problem. Most of the Democratic politicians can hardly be distinguished from the Republicans on the immigration issue (as on others). Former Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano is an example already mentioned. Another example is the current Democratic candidate for governor, Terry Goddard—a man who brought us the cruel prosecution against young immigrant workers at the Panda Express fast-food chain in Tucson a couple of years ago.

Goddard is currently attorney general of Arizona, and as such, he is defending SB 1070! He is in charge of defending Arizona against the many lawsuits that have been filed to overturn SB 1070. He also favors *more troops* to the U.S.-Mexico border. When Obama announced on May 26 that he was sending 1200 National Guard troops, Goddard was quoted by AP as saying: “the planned deployment was a good first step, but ... the president’s plan should evolve to include more troops and more authority.”

In this situation there is no way for the oppressed to win in the electoral arena. So the movement must continue in the streets, independent of the politicians, who are serving the interests of the employer class, the big corporations, the military-industrial-prison complex, and the “banksters.” These forces, who support racism to divide and weaken the working class, in fact control *both* parties, Republican and Democrat.

We need a political party of our own, a Partido de los Trabajadores, a Labor Party. Such a political movement, linked with the movement in the streets, could channel the energy of mass mobilization, of the oppressed fighting back against their oppression, so that their demands would in fact be carried out and their true interests be served. Then we would not hear complaints that Obama “broke his promises.” A party created and built by the workers themselves, funded and controlled by the rank and file, would *keep its promises*—or else!

Hutchinson for Congress in Connecticut!



(Left) Christopher Hutchinson speaks at Socialist Action (Canada) educational conference last month.

By CJ LaPOINTE and DANIEL ADAM

HARTFORD, Conn.—In March, Socialist Action launched a campaign for Congress in Connecticut’s first district. Candidate Christopher Hutchinson is an art teacher, a popular political cartoonist, an activist in the anti-war and immigrant-rights movements, and a member of Socialist Action.

This campaign does not seek to encourage workers to root from the sidelines for yet another white knight who promises to rescue them from the numerous crises created by capitalism. The campaign instead aims to expose the phony saviors thrown up by the parties of big business—the Democrats and Republicans—to expose the parasitic class they serve, and the system they defend. Most importantly, the campaign aspires to challenge working people to take political action in their own names and for their own interests; to create their own organizations and parties; and yes, to take the reins of society in their own hands and organize life based on human need instead of profit.

Teams go out every weekend and some weekdays to collect signatures to win ballot status for Hutchinson as a Socialist Action candidate. Just under 3000 valid signatures from registered voters are needed by Aug. 4 to attain this status. Petitioners have been consistently surprised and encouraged by the support they find for a socialist candidate. Offers to help volunteer are not infrequent.

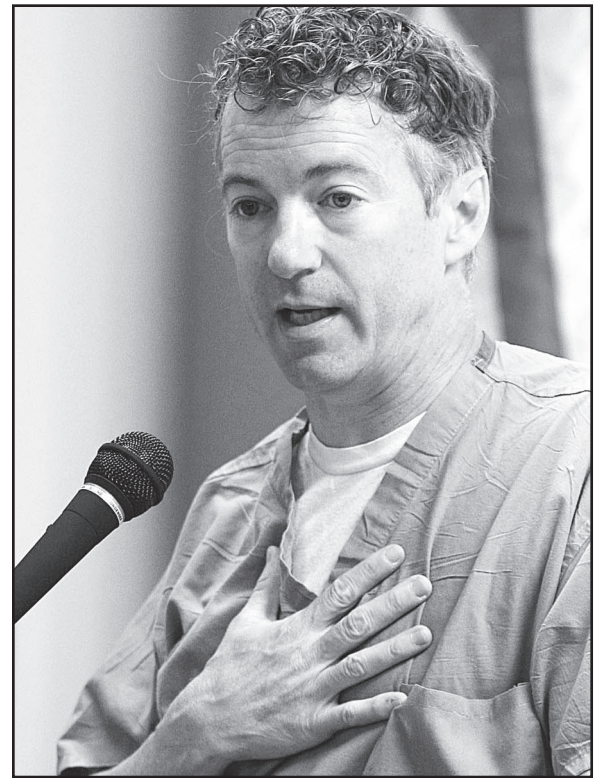
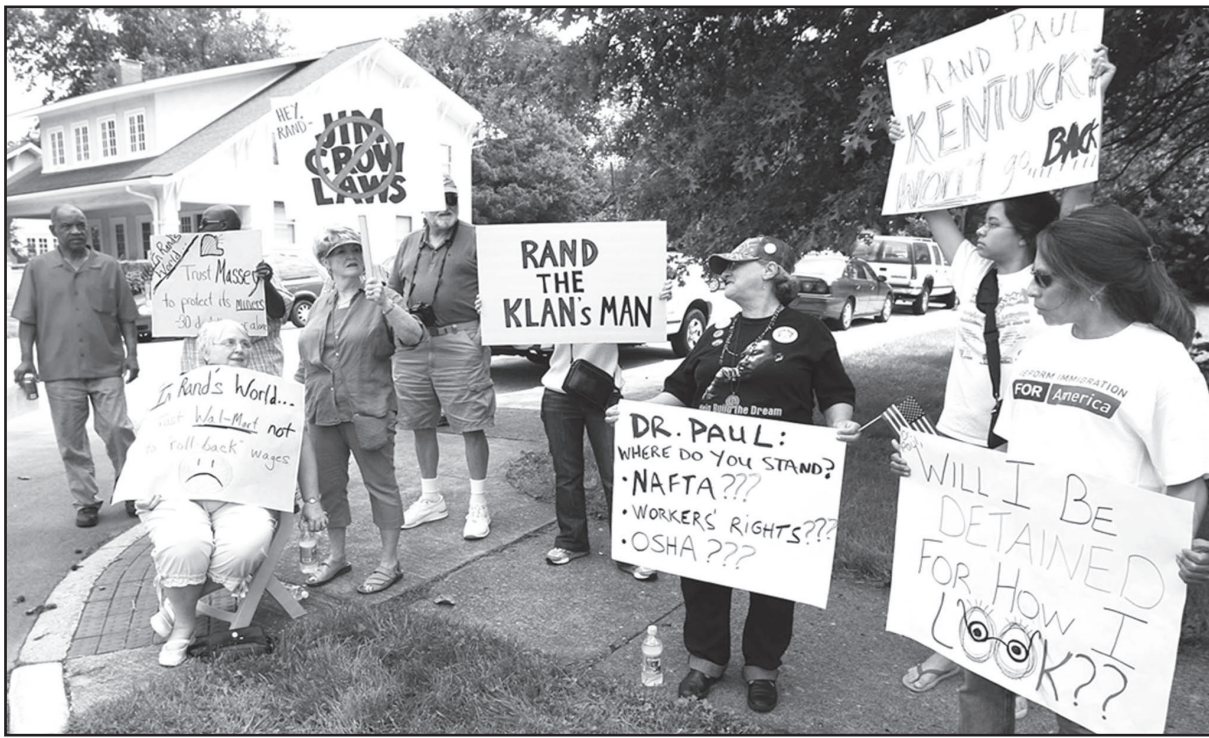
At a packed May 7 campaign dinner, Johanna Rivera, a student from Puerto Rico, told the crowd that she supports Hutchinson because Socialist Action understands that the struggles of students in the U.S. are linked with the struggles of students on strike in Puerto Rico.

Ryan Henowitz, a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, said that the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan are waged only in the interest of the U.S. ruling elite and that Chris Hutchinson is the only candidate who called for an immediate end to these wars. Student LGBTQ-rights leader Aaron McAuliffe enthusiastically urged a vote for Hutchinson and demonstrated how the movement for queer liberation and the movement to end the wars are inextricable.

Hutchinson then illustrated the interconnections between the struggles that working people wage all over the world. He argued that the rapid growth of unemployment has given corporations the leverage over their employees necessary to speed up production, and thereby increase work-place accidents, deaths, and disasters such as the explosions at the Massey Upper Branch mine and the Kleen energy plant in Middletown, Conn. He cited the BP oil spill as the most startling example of the profit-driven system in action today.

Other speakers that night included Laura Lockwood, a Hartford campus women’s center director and LGBTQ activist; Saeed Ahghari, an urgent care physician recently returned from Haiti; Frankie Acevedo, an immigrant-rights activist; and Marissa Janczewska, president of the Central Connecticut State University’s Youth for Socialist Action.

Chris Hutchinson has employed this campaign to help build and publicize working-class actions from Hartford to Washington, D.C., including marches to defend immigrant rights and the ongoing strike of 1199 workers in Connecticut to demand a better contract from Spectrum nursing homes. He will speak next at a forum organized to oppose the escalating assault on public education. To learn more or join the campaign effort go to www.votesocialistaction.org. ■



(Above) U.S. Senate candidate Rand Paul. (Left) Protesters outside Republican Party unity meeting in Frankfort, Ky., May 25.

Rand Paul and Tea Party on the rise

By MARC ROME

On March 19, libertarian and first-time candidate Rand Paul defeated the GOP establishment-backed Senate candidate, Trey Grayson, in the Kentucky primaries. Paul used his victory as a platform to deliver a message from the Tea Party, which fueled his campaign: "We have come to take our government back."

Before there was time to wonder what the Tea Party might do with state power, Paul appeared on national radio and television to support dismantling the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Only the "public sphere" and not private property, Paul said, ought to be covered by the law, a view he made public as early as 2002, long before the Tea Party became a force in society.

Paul's positions echo those of his father, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.), who cast the lone "nay" vote in the House commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. Father and son follow in the footsteps of Barry Goldwater, the racist Senator from Arizona who voted against the original historic legislation. Goldwater specifically opposed Title II and Title VII, arguing that the Constitution could not be interpreted to allow government regulation of private businesses.

Fox News, which has effectively become the official network of the Tea Party movement, rushed to Paul's defense on May 20. Fox commentator John Stossel gave a distilled version of the Tea Party view: "It's time now to repeal that part of the law because private businesses ought to get to discriminate. And I won't ever go to a place that's racist and I will tell everybody else not to and I'll speak against them. But it should be their right to be racist."

When the Tea Party isn't arguing for the right to be openly racist, they use code to hide their bigotry: "middle class," "family values," "taxpayers," "patriots," "law-abiding"—"terms which, although literally applicable to people of every ethnicity," writes Glenn Ford of the *Black Agenda Report*, "are understood to mean 'good white American citizens.'"

The Republican Party establishment seeks to harness this racist, white backlash that has grown since the election of the first Black president. "These [Tea Party members] are Americans who are concerned about the government and spending and debt, so we ought to be able to find a way to be responsive to them," said Sen. John Cornyn, chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. "I don't consider them outliers or unwelcome."

Generally speaking, both capitalist parties have been pulled further to the right by the Tea Party. Their mobilizations against "socialist" health care helped the Democrats pass a reactionary health-care bill without a single Republican vote. They've also created room in national politics for former Klansman David Duke, whose website announced that he is embarking "on an extended, year-long speaking tour across the United States to gauge support for a possible entry in the next race for President of the United States."

Origins of the Tea Party

Among its constituent groups, the Tea Party movement has two major wings: Tea Party Patriots, which claims 15 million members, and Tea Party Nation. The latter group says it stands for "limited government, free speech, the 2nd Amendment, our military, secure borders and our country." It has announced a National Tea Party Unity Convention for this July in Las Vegas. Meanwhile, Tea Party Patriots describes its mission as, "fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets."

Mainstream media tends to portray them as "grassroots" formations spurred to action by the government-funded bank bailouts. But, behind the handmade signs and the 60,000 who descended on Washington D.C., on Sept. 12 last year—tens of thousands have participated in subsequent rallies throughout the country—is corporate funding and an ideology that combines racism with antipathy for the working class, and holds private property rights above all else.

Americans for Prosperity, who, for the past two years were central organizers of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies in Washington D.C., receives major funding from Koch Industries, a corporation with a multi-billion-dollar fortune derived from the oil industry.

FreedomWorks, a major Tea Party Patriots backer, went to bat for the health-industry profiteers while the debate raged over national health-care legislation. FreedomWorks is headed by Dick Armey, House Majority Leader during the "Republican Revolution" Congress of the 1990s, who is employed by a firm that lobbies on behalf of the health industry. Its website urged "grassroots" action against "socialized medicine," and the conspiracy theories it helped to spread—death panels and unplugging grandma—whipped the "grassroots" into a frenzy.

Their fury was aimed mostly at the Democratic Party and union-organized "Town Hall" health-care meetings. Right-wing mobs tried to break up the meetings, while right-wing shock jocks, Glenn Beck of Fox News, and Republican legislators cheered the attacks.

The vision for a Tea Party-like movement appeared in a 1992 essay, *Right-Wing Populism: A Strategy for the Paleo Movement*, authored by a close Ron Paul associate, Murray Rothbard. In the essay, according to *reason.com*, a libertarian website, Rothbard "pointed to David Duke and Joseph McCarthy as models for an 'Outreach to the Rednecks,' which would fashion a broad libertarian/paleoconservative [anticommunist/anti-imperialist] coalition by targeting the disaffected working and middle classes. ... They championed an open strategy of exploiting racial and class resentment to build this coalition...."

"Their populist outreach program centered on tax reduction, abolition of welfare, elimination of 'the entire civil rights structure, which tramples on the property rights of every [white] American,' and a police crackdown on street criminals. 'Cops must be unleashed,' Rothbard wrote, 'and allowed to administer instant punishment, subject of course to liability when they are in error.'"

Rothbard collaborated with Lew Rockwell, a fellow libertarian and, like him, a supporter of Pat Buchanan's 1992 presidential campaign. Together, they authored many articles that appeared in Ron Paul's magazines in the late 1980s and early 1990s—the *Ron Paul Political Report* and the *Ron Paul Survival Report*. *Reason.com* provided excerpts:

- "Order was only restored in L.A. when it came time for the blacks to pick up their welfare checks."
- "Martin Luther King 'seduced underage girls and boys.'"
- "Black protesters should gather 'at a food stamp bureau or a crack house' rather than the Statue of Liberty."
- "AIDS sufferers 'enjoy the attention and pity that comes with being sick.'"

Reason.com continues: "'State-enforced segregation,' Rockwell wrote, 'was wrong, but so is State-enforced integration. State-enforced segregation was not wrong because separateness is wrong, however. Wishing to associate with members of one's own race,

nationality, religion, class, sex, or even political party is a natural and normal human impulse."

Neo-fascist Pat Buchanan recently wrote an article, "Tea Party Tribe," in which he explained that the Tea Party has a strong "enthonationalist" drive, a "natural and normal and human impulse to associate with one's race." Put in other words: white-nationalism.

The Council of Conservative Citizens—the largest and most influential white nationalist group—has dozens of chapters nationally, many of which have organized Tea Parties. The Council's membership is secretive, but counts elected officials among its membership. This organization is the descendant of the White Citizens Council, who took on anti-segregationists in the 1960s. Their leadership considers the past year (since the election of Obama) as their most dramatic period of growth.

Racism doesn't just spring from the minds of bigots like Buchanan or the Council of Conservative Citizens. It is endemic to capitalism and is a major pillar propping up the system. By dividing workers along the artificial lines of race, the bosses thwart the unity required among working people to effectively challenge their common class oppressor.

Danger of fascism?

The backbone of fascism in Germany and Italy before World War II was the middle classes, victims of capitalist competition and the organization of credit. Today in the United States, likewise, a high percentage of those who identify with the Tea Party movement are disaffected layers of middle-class people (small business owners, small farmers, landlords), as distinguished from the working class.

Politico, an on-line political magazine, conducted a poll at this year's Tea Party Tax-Day rally in Washington, D.C., which determined that "29% are small-business owners." Judson Phillips, an organizer of the National Tea Party convention in Nashville in January, told *The Wall Street Journal* that "Tea Party rallies draw a lot of small businessmen and women frustrated at their own inability to get capital while big banks prosper, and thus inclined to think the deck is stacked against them."

Characteristic of fascist organizations in Italy and Germany before World War II was their financial support from big business. When the capitalist class is faced with a political and economic crisis that threatens the very foundations of its system, it may resort to full support to fascism in order to beat back the working class. Today, the Tea Party movement has the backing of at least one giant corporation in the United States, though the capitalists do not as yet have the need to fully unleash a mass fascist movement.

Yet far-right and incipient-fascist organizations have made gains in certain parts of the world. The British National Party, for example, has been polling nearly 20% of the vote. There is a neo-fascist movement among youth in Japan that is very much anti-China and anti-North Korea. And, anti-immigrant pogroms have sprung up across Italy.

The only way to fight what the Tea Party represents is to rebuild and strengthen the social movements against the war, for immigrant rights, for LGBT rights, for a reinvigorated labor movement, for women's liberation and for Black self-determination. At the same time, revolutionary socialists, like Socialist Action, have the vision and a program to challenge capitalism itself, the very system that is keeping the fascist threat alive and in reserve. Join us and fight back! ■

Gulf oil disaster is a crime against nature and humanity

By CHRISTINE FRANK

The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico will live in infamy as one of the worst industrial accidents and environmental catastrophes ever.

On the night of April 20, a massive bubble of highly compressed natural gas rushed from the wellhead up the riser and onto the platform. It was sucked into the diesel engines that powered the rig's electrical generator, causing a powerful explosion. Fire broke out, and the crew scrambled to evacuate.

Two days later, the semi-submersible floating drilling vessel sank to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, where it is lying in pieces. Its pipe was perforated in three places and hemorrhaging millions of cubic feet of methane and barrels of light crude. Now the oil slick is oozing across the Gulf of Mexico, polluting wildlife habitats and threatening the health, safety, and livelihoods of Gulf Coast residents.

Deepwater Horizon was not a producing well. Its purpose was to drill the borehole—the deepest ever—into a vast shale formation 13,000 feet beneath the seafloor of the Gulf of Mexico in preparation for oil and gas extraction. The wellhead was located at the very edge of a vast reservoir of methane and light crude, covering 25,000 square miles—almost the size of the Gulf basin itself.

We know from a CBS "60 Minutes" investigation that a month before the explosion, the Blowout Preventer (BOP) was seriously damaged by an operator error. A crew member on deck accidentally moved a joystick, applying hundreds of pounds of force while moving 15 feet of pipe through the BOP. This tore up the rubber gasket or "annular" that is required to seal the wellhead and prevent a blowout.

Torn up bits of annular coming up with the drilling muds were reported to a supervisor, who cavalierly dismissed it as inconsequential even though any pressure tests to be run on the BOP were going to be inaccurate as a result of the damage and a gross misjudgment would inevitably occur. Prior to the accident, the BOP also had a hydraulic leak and a weak battery. Plus, there had been a problem with one of its control pods.

BP was two weeks behind in its schedule because of a previous failed attempt to drill the well. Under capitalism, time is money so the crew was being forced to speed up and increase the rate of penetration.

The well was in its final phase of completion. The last segments of the concrete casing, which extends all the way down from the wellhead to the geologic formation, were to be placed by pumping down a cement slurry. That was the job of the subcontractor Halliburton. The last three sections were concrete plugs that would function as corks in the drilling column while awaiting another oil platform to take over the actual extraction process. The manager from Transocean, which owned the rig, wanted correctly to have the third plug put in place with the column full of heavy drilling muds to keep the oil and gas under high pressure properly contained below.

However, the manager from British Petroleum (BP), which leased the rig, insisted on doing it faster without the muds. As a result of this foolhardy shortcut, the bottom plug failed, the well kicked and a catastrophic blowout occurred. This was due primarily to the hubris of the oil industry in thinking that no back-up technology was required in case of blowout preventer failure.

Clearly, the two fateful decisions that were prompted by haste and corporate greed—to continue using a damaged BOP and to add the third plug without drilling muds—are proof of criminal negligence on the part of both Transocean and BP. This is especially true given what is at stake environmentally.

We were told repeatedly by BP, the government, and corporate media that only 5000 barrels or 210,000 gallons of oil have been spewing out daily. We now know from independent scientific measurements that the volume is much greater. The company has been lying all along in order to limit liability on the damages.

Since the cataclysm, we have witnessed numerous failed attempts to cap the gusher. It has become glaringly obvious that BP's engineers are completely out of their depth. This is because they arrogantly and falsely believed that a deepwater blowout could never occur.



Gerald Herbert / AP

The hurricane season begins in June. With the prospect of violent weather looming, this Grand Daddy of All Oil Spills could make Katrina look like a picnic.

Consequently, the Energy Giant didn't bother to invest in the development and testing of containment technologies that actually work. After all, it would have cut into their megaprofits, which stood at \$6 billion the first quarter of this year.

In order to prevent the slick from hitting coastal areas, BP has been spraying toxic dispersants to break up the oil into tiny droplets with the aid of wind and wave action. Once they are a digestible size, bacteria then consume them. By the last week of May, military cargo planes had flown some 192 missions, dropping a million gallons of chemicals and adding to the hydrocarbons that are already polluting the Gulf.

Dispersants contain a surfactant—a surface-active wetting agent that reduces the surface tension of the oil. Other chemical ingredients include contaminating detergents and solvents. The dispersant that was applied for several weeks to the surface and subsurface of the ocean is one of the most toxic ones available, yet the ever-subservient EPA gave the go ahead for its use despite a scientific report that warned of its detrimental effects on marine life in the benthic regions.

The chemical compounds in Corexit 9500 are the proprietary information of the manufacturer Nalco—part of the industry's Old Boys Network—so no one really knows exactly what they are. A giant experiment is being conducted on sea organisms, yet BP and the government are perfectly fine with the trade-off—sacrificing deep-sea to coastal life. Never mind what the chemicals will do to the fisheries.

Prompted by the strong objections of marine biologists and environmentalists, the EPA finally ordered BP to use a "less toxic" dispersant and to turn over the secret list of ingredients.

Because the oil and gas is shooting up through 5000

feet of salt water, the sea's water column is serving as a fractioning tower—just as in a refinery. As the oil moves upward through the different temperature and pressure gradients, some of it is dissolving in the salt water. Its more volatile fractions are evaporating at the surface. The warm surface water temperatures are aiding in a more rapid breakdown than in Prince William Sound, site of the *Exxon Valdez* disaster, where the temperatures were much colder.

The remaining oil is the heavy-fraction crude, which is sinking slowly and ending up as asphalt on the seafloor. Therefore, the surface slick is as little as 2% of the total volume. The stuff that floats to shore will cling to the vegetation and wildlife and embed into the beach sand and wetland soils, where it will poison the ecosystems for decades.

Also, reports coming from the NOAA research vessel *Pelican* indicate that there are enormous oil plumes in multiple layers of different thicknesses suspended at varying depths. The scientists believe that the dispersants may also be helping the oil to coagulate into these large plumes. The crew took readings of oxygen levels in the area and found that they have dropped by 30%. If they decline any further, marine organisms that cannot escape the anoxic conditions by swimming away will suffocate.

There are two possible causes of the oxygen depletion. First, the huge amount of methane that is being released from the well is using up the oxygen. After two weeks, methane degrades into carbon dioxide in an oxidation reaction. Oxygen is a friendly element that likes toglom onto others so the reaction makes for less dissolved oxygen in the water for marine organisms to breathe.

In addition, the *Pelican's* scientists believe that the dispersants may be speeding up the process of oxygen depletion as the microbes eat up more of the oil being made available to them. Dispersants are also food for microbes, and as they die and decompose, more of the oxygen is used up.

Unfortunately, NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenko cowardly disassociated herself from the *Pelican's* findings. NOAA issued a disclaimer in late May that characterized the information its own scientists had given to the media as "misleading, premature, and in some cases, inaccurate" and said the reduction in oxygen is not marked enough to be of concern. A University of Maryland biologist has disputed this, saying a 30% reduction would be "highly significant."

It did not take long after the blowout for the oil slick to make landfall. Glops and smears of oil have floated into the Louisiana bayous and onto the beaches of Mississippi, Alabama, and even Florida. As feared, a huge swirling eddy or "cyclone" from the Loop Current has now captured a gigantic tail from the southeastern portion of the slick, which is moving briskly toward the Florida Coast. It is only a matter of time before it's drawn through the Keys up the Atlantic Coast to contaminate beaches, estuaries, and fisheries there.

The hurricane season officially begins in June. If a major hurricane sweeps through the region, the combination of high winds, waves, and storm surges will push even more of the oil slick over the shelter islands and further inland up the bayous. With the prospect of violent weather looming, this Grand Daddy of All Oil Spills could make Katrina look like a picnic.

The ecological impact

The ecological impacts of this massive oil spill will be enormous. We are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. Scientists warn that the pollutants could remain for generations doing their dirty work as the contaminants bio-accumulate through the food web.

This is a critical time for the wildlife of the Gulf marine and coastal ecosystems. Sea mammals are breeding, fish and shellfish are spawning and birds are nesting. Thousands of creatures are migrating to the Gulf to reproduce or stopover on their traditional flyways to fuel up for the journey northward. Chemicals that kill eggs or offspring will affect the survival rates of

(continued on page 9)

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many species and decrease the region's biodiversity.

Swimming through the open-water habitat, are blue, fin and sei whales, dolphins and porpoises. As air-breathing mammals they must surface through the oily layers for air. Their bodies are not only being oiled, but they are breathing the noxious fumes, which will damage mucous membranes and airways, lead to infection and eventual death. The plankton that baleen-feeding whales eat will decline due to the contamination; there goes their food supply!

Five species of sea turtle must navigate contaminated waters to get to the beaches in Texas, Mexico, and Florida to lay eggs and launch the next generation. The slowly recovering Kemp's Ridley sea turtle will now be foraging on contaminated blue crabs and nesting on an oil-soaked Louisiana coast.

Critically imperiled due to overfishing, the Atlantic bluefin tuna are entering the only spawning ground for the western population. Oil is toxic to their eggs, which float near the surface, and to the young who shelter in the sargassum seaweed on which petroleum is collecting. Menhaden are essential to top predators such as sharks, tuna, swordfish, marine mammals, birds and humans. When they die of oil poisoning, the food chain will collapse.

The sea-grass beds in the near-shore areas provide food, shelter and nurseries for a multitude of marine life including sharks and the West Indian manatee. These gentle giants munch on the sea-grass and raise their young in the calm shallows. The oil will smother the vegetation, robbing them of their food source and coating their eyes and the sensory hairs on their noses, causing inflammation and infection.

Two giant human-made oyster reefs lie 500 meters out to sea, each 10 miles long being among the largest in the U.S. Coastal Louisiana produces 40% of the nation's oysters. As filter feeders, they ingest and concentrate pollutants in their systems at levels 1000 times higher than other species. Although the oyster beds will be closed to harvesting for human consumption, probably for years to come, wildlife will still be eating those from natural beds, so the oily contaminants will be concentrating up the food chain.

Now that a portion of the slick is headed toward Florida, the state's precious and already highly stressed coral reefs will be in danger. These rainforests of the ocean shelter a wide diversity of marine life that is in peril. There are 20 coastal wildlife refuges as well as pristine beaches in harm's way. They provide habitat for many endangered or recovering species. Marshes and estuaries are nesting and feeding areas for thousands of shorebirds and nurseries for fish and shellfish such as crabs, mussels, and shrimp.

Unlike the rock-strewn bay of Prince William Sound, which fell victim to the *Exxon Valdez* spill, BP's oil will cling to a sponge-like coast, entering the pores of the wetlands. Oil will contaminate sediments, poison wildlife and smother the vegetation. A die-off of plant life will lead to the further erosion and destruction of the natural storm-surge buffers that protect populated inland areas.

The Louisiana coast and wetlands have suffered more than their share of environmental insults. The over-engineering of the Mississippi River has disrupted its natural flow and silt deposition on the delta. Canals dredged by the petroleum industry have brought widespread destruction of the wetlands.

Oil and gas extraction have led to subsidence of the land, and rising sea levels due to climate change are inundating wetlands, which are sinking out of sight. As a result, saltwater intrusion has destroyed the protective cypress swamps and replaced brackish and freshwater wetlands with degraded saltwater marshes.

The Gulf of Mexico is home to one of America's richest fishing grounds, which are now off limits for harvesting. Fishing fleets along with thousands of shrimpers, fishers and oystermen are sitting idle. The economic impacts to the industry and all those who work in it will be enormous.

Who's to blame?

To blame for this mess are the Carbon Barons and a corrupt and servile government. British Petroleum has one of the worst safety records due to its aggressive cost-cutting efforts, but all of the Energy Giants are equally as guilty. Just look at how many coal miners have died recently.

Lax safety practices at BP's Texas City refinery resulted in a deadly explosion that killed 15 workers and injured 170 others five years ago. The use of outdated equipment and overworked employees contributed to the blast. Since then, OSHA has found that the company has "willfully" failed to implement required safety measures at the plant, where workers are still being exposed to toxic emissions.

We now know from whistleblower Kenneth Abbot, a subcontractor to BP, that the *Atlantis* deepwater oil platform is functioning without proper operating instructions because the engineering documents have not been updated. Consequently, a dangerous opera-



(Above) Massive fire on April 22 following the explosion of the *Deepwater Horizon* drilling rig.

The planet is warming and Earth's natural systems are racing to the point of no return. ... We must leave all fossil fuels in the ground and launch a crash program of renewable wind and solar energy and clean mass transit.

tor error is inevitable, and it is only a matter of time before another disaster occurs.

The problem is that the Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS), which is riddled with corruption, has allowed the extraction industries to write their own operating and safety regulations, enabling them to literally get away with murder. What big corporation can we possibly trust to police itself?

Knowing how Exxon/Mobil wriggled out of paying for the clean-up and compensating for damages done to the Alaskan fisheries and people's health, activists are now demanding that British Petroleum's assets be frozen to ensure that BP—the Big Polluter—pays in full. They are right to do so since it was the taxpayers who largely footed the bill for the *Exxon Valdez* spill.

To avoid liability for the accident, the first thing BP did was to coerce the traumatized survivors of the *Deepwater Horizon* explosion into signing waivers, stating that they had suffered no injury and had no "first-hand or personal knowledge" of the incident. This was done after they'd drifted for hours in lifeboats. They were not allowed to see their families until they were thoroughly debriefed and were forbidden to speak to the media. This gives us an idea of the lengths to which the company will go to avoid payment and punishment for its crimes.

Regulation and reform are not the answer

There are over 3000 operating oils in the Gulf. The chances of another cataclysm are good. Plus, oil spills are routine. If they're drilling, they're spilling. As hydrocarbon reserves run out, they will dig and drill deeper and deeper increasing the risk of accident. More workers will die and more ecological devastation will occur. That is the nature of the fossil-fuel extraction process.

Any attempts at reforming the MMS, such as dividing its permitting and royalty-collection duties from its environmental review and enforcement duties, will not matter one jot. By and large, the Department of the

Interior and all of its agencies are committed to the exploitation of our natural resources, not their preservation or protection. That is because the big corporations see our dear Mother Earth as nothing but a mine of raw materials to be exploited for economic gain.

No matter how many commissions Obama assembles to study the accident, there will still be a white-wash of the affair. The freeze on offshore drilling will be only temporary. Six months from now, when the media furor has died down, the MMS once again will be granting permits to big polluters.

Obama's announcement on March 31 to expand offshore oil and gas drilling was dead serious. That is because his administration and the capitalist class it serves are bent on maintaining their fossil-fuel powered economy and have no intention of ever converting to renewable energy or clean-mass transit. They will continue with the madness of chasing after the last barrel of oil no matter what the costs to the environment, the climate, or human life.

Mainstream environmentalists, who say that we can continue to extract fossil-fuels, but "it must be done responsibly" (with more regulation) are themselves irresponsible. They insist that it not take place in "sensitive" areas—as if the entire planet is not sensitive.

The primary reason they still support hydrocarbon extraction, whether it's "clean coal" or the "responsible" hydrofracturing of natural gas, is that they are comfortable with the status quo and do not want to challenge capitalism—an outmoded social and economic system that is destroying our only home.

That is why it is absolutely essential that we build a class-conscious, class-struggle left wing of the environmental movement that is grassroots-based—a movement of workers, trade unionists and their allies in the communities of the oppressed nationalities, including Tribal Peoples. This movement must wage its struggle publicly, visibly, and in the streets while remaining independent of the two capitalist parties.

Regardless of what the deniers claim, the planet is still warming, its ice masses are melting and Earth's natural systems are racing toward the point of no return. To stabilize the climate, we must adopt a policy of zero greenhouse gas emissions from all sources to reduce equivalent CO2 concentrations to a safe 300-325 parts per million. The only way to do that is to leave all fossil fuels in the ground where Mother Nature put them and launch a crash program of renewable wind and solar energy and clean mass transit powered by the same means.

To accomplish this great undertaking will require the equivalent of a wartime mobilization, in which our entire society participates in the conversion to a democratically-planned, green, sustainable eco-socialist economy that puts planetary and human needs before profits. Anything short of that will mean the end of life as we know it. ■

As the Obama administration and BP scrambled to try to find a way to cap the monstrous oil gusher in the Gulf, the federal Minerals Management Service went back to its comfortable business as usual with the oil companies.

On June 2, the MMS granted a new drilling permit for Bandon Oil and Gas for a site about 50 miles off the Louisiana coast, south of Rockefeller State Refuge and Game Preserve, and about 115 feet under

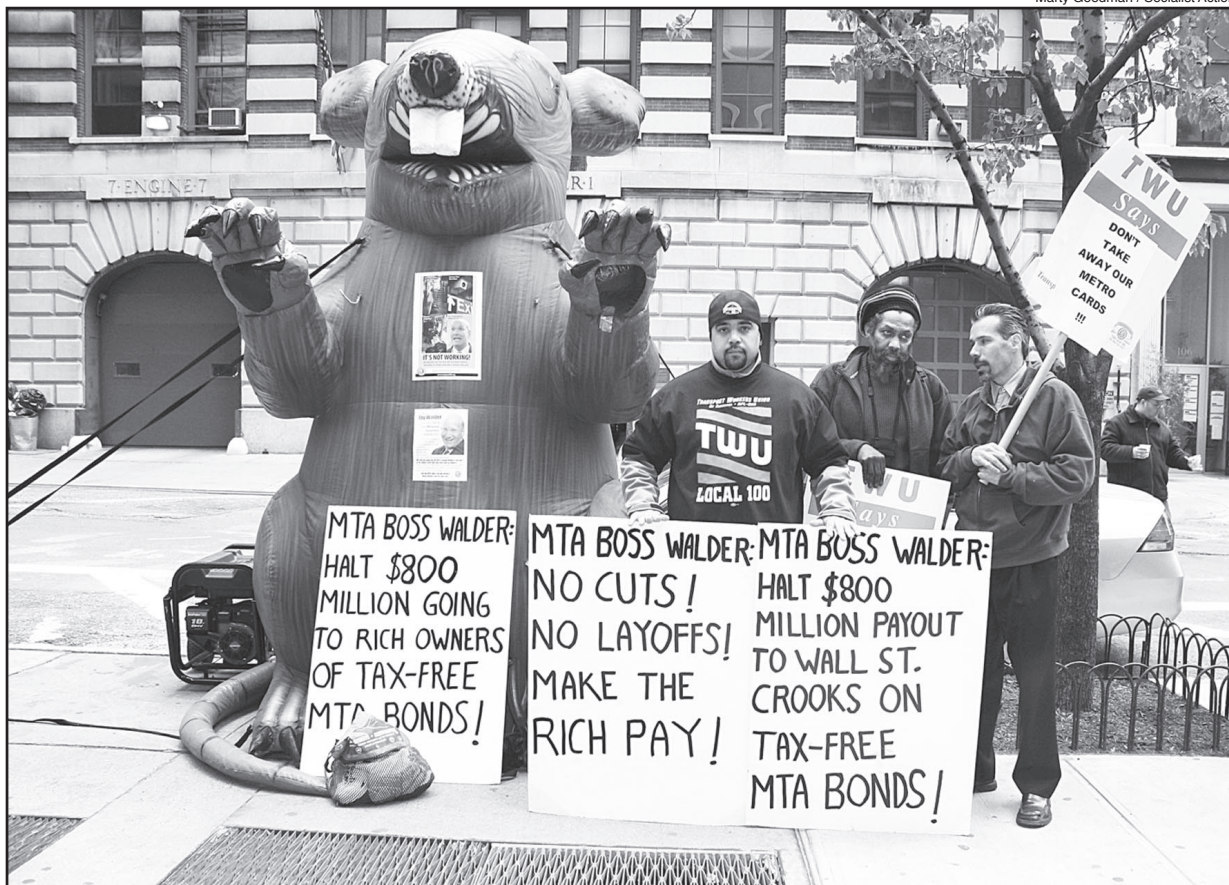
the surface of the ocean.

Although Obama recently extended a moratorium on deep-water drilling, he quietly allowed a three-week ban on wells in shallower water to expire.

"I'm outraged," Kieran Suckling, executive director for the Tucson, Ariz.,-based Center for Biological Diversity, said after an AP reporter told him of the new permit. "How is it that shallow water drilling suddenly became safe again?"

Capitalist crisis slams mass transit

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



By MARTY GOODMAN

NEW YORK—The capitalist financial meltdown has wrecked havoc on public transportation, slashing jobs and service to working people. Once again working people are being made to bear the brunt of a crisis caused by profit-crazed Wall Street crooks and the periodic crisis of capitalism.

Since the start of 2009, over 80% of mass transit systems are in financial crisis, and 84% have raised fares and/or cut service. Among the larger transit systems, 57% have laid-off workers, according to the union-funded Keep America Moving coalition.

The crisis is being exploited by transit officials who demand massive concessions from transit unions. In New York, Chicago and elsewhere, a vicious anti-union campaign has sought to portray transit workers as greedy and lazy. The attacks are directed primarily by Democratic Party administrations, including the state-run New York City subway and bus system. The choking of mass transit funding contrasts sharply with the trillions given Wall Street crooks by the Bush and Obama administrations and the uninterrupted funding of two unjust wars.

Sabrina Greenwood, a New York City subway station agent scheduled to be laid off in June, told *Socialist Action*, "I don't know how I'm going to feed my family of five. I'm a single mother. They're immoral. I left a good job federal job to come to the MTA [Metropolitan Transit Authority]. The way the economy is now, it's going to be hard to find a job. We need to keep up the fight [against] the MTA and Wall Street."

The lay offs and service cuts are directed at destroying the living standards of millions of workers, including being able to get to a job. Public transportation is also necessary to obtain health care, especially for seniors and the disabled. Hardest hit are the African American, Hispanic, and immigrant communities.

Many transit workers are from these communities.

In Chicago, there were more than 1000 transit layoffs at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) in February, some 10% of the workforce. Service was reduced on 119 bus routes and seven of eight rail lines. The cuts represent some 18% of service.

In New York City, dozens of bus and train routes are to be slashed or eliminated in June by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The MTA plans to lay off 1000 workers. In violation of a union-initiated court injunction, the MTA laid-off 260 subway station agents on May 11. Almost all were immigrant, African American, and Hispanic workers, who face near depression level unemployment in their communities.

The MTA is demanding that the Transport Workers Union Local 100, which represents 35,000 subway and bus workers, sacrifice a 3% contractual raise in 2011 to save jobs. So far, Local 100 has said no. Clearly, the attacks are intended by the MTA and New York's corporate elite to break the newly elected leadership of President John Samuelsen and the Take Back Our Union slate, which has promised to be more democratic and aggressive toward management.

The MTA has also threatened to eliminate free grade school passes, which has sparked organized student resistance.

Defunding mass transit

"Mass transit is a public service. And in this recession, the public sector has become the sacrificial lamb," said JP Patafio, a Brooklyn bus driver and director of Keep America Moving (KAM), a new reform coalition initiated by Local 100 and the Amalgamated Transit Union. In 2009, the federal transportation budget proposal in Congress was slashed from an inadequate \$12 billion to \$8 billion, with the active intervention of the new Obama administration.

Despite reform efforts, some 80% of federal trans-

portation funding is for highway construction and repair, not mass transit, benefiting the auto bosses and destroying the environment. The advocacy group Transit Riders for Public Transportation says that \$1 billion invested in mass transit will generate 30,000 jobs, 19% more than highway construction.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration cut operating funds for transit in cities over 200,000 and diverted it to highway projects. Presidents George Bush I and Bill Clinton maintained the cuts. Under Democrat Clinton all large urban systems lost operating funding in 1998. Following Washington's lead, city and state operating funds were also reduced.

In Chicago the CTA is claiming a \$300 million overall deficit. In New York City, reduced funding exacerbated by the economic downturn, has resulted in a \$800 million MTA deficit this year. Since the 1980s, the MTA budget has included massive debt to banks and the sale of tax-free MTA Bonds to the rich. In 10 years, the debt has doubled to \$30 billion in 2010.

The MTA payout on tax-free bonds alone—paid mostly by working class riders at the fare box—amounts to about \$800 million, the approximate size of this year's deficit!

Union bureaucrats lie down

In Chicago, rather than mobilizing for a fight, ATU Local 308 President Robert Kelly hit a new low when he said, "The ATU locals always understood, unfortunately, that our members would be laid off and our dispute was only about using seniority with the CTA to determine who would be laid off first."

In New York, a May 4 Transport Workers Union Local 100 rally emphasized the environmental need for "green jobs" and so-called "friends" in the Democratic Party, rather than a worker-based union battle against layoffs. The turnout May 4 was a modest but spirited demonstration of at most 1000 workers. A couple of hundred pushed aside police barricades to march on MTA headquarters where workers railed against layoffs during a brief rally.

The TWU is demanding that the MTA use 10% of supplemental federal funding for construction and repair and use it to save jobs, which is permitted under funding guidelines. Determined to destroy jobs and downsize, the MTA has refused.

The TWU is also supporting the "Public Transportation Preservation Act of 2010," which provides \$2 billion in funding for transit systems that could restore jobs—if its current language remains. Considering the recent health-care "reform" sellout by Democrats that's a tall order. Introduced by seven Democratic Senators on May 25, the bill may be scandalously attached to a war appropriations bill.

In New York City, where municipal unions face thousands of layoffs, the TWU's Station Division meetings, which represent some 5500 station agents, cleaners and others, has called for a united citywide mobilization of labor with the slogan, "No cuts! No layoffs!" In addition, Station Division voted several times for a local-wide emergency mass membership meeting. Thus far, the Local 100 leadership has not acted on either proposal.

Transit unions should revive the old union demand for a shorter workweek at no cut in pay or benefits. That would spread the available work around and provide jobs for all. It is urgent that transit workers organize mass mobilizations and prepare for strikes where possible. In December 2005, Local 100 struck and shut down New York City for two and a half days.

Key to a winning strategy is ending all reliance on the Democratic Party, the false friends of labor. ■

Reform caucus in teachers union run-off

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—The Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) slate in the Chicago Teachers Union has forced the incumbent United Progressive Caucus (UPC) into a run-off election for leadership of one of the largest teacher union locals in the country.

CORE was formed two years ago to fight back against the closing of neighborhood schools and the expansion of charter school that are the cornerstones of Mayor Daley's school transformation plan.

CORE came in a close second place in the first round of voting, getting 30% to the UPC's 31.9%, a difference of 500 votes out of over 19,000 cast. CORE has blasted the incumbent leadership for not taking a stand against the union-busting efforts of Mayor Daley and his lackey Chicago Public School CEO Ron Huberman.

Huberman replaced current U.S.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan who has adopted the Chicago model as national education policy.

Over the six-year term of UPC, 70 neighborhood schools have closed while 70 charter schools were opened, resulting in a 6000-member loss for the CTU. Teachers in closed schools are being fired with no due process and no response from their leadership.

As a rank-and-file caucus over the past two years, CORE has managed to stop the closings of 12 schools through the creation of the Grassroots Education Movement, a coalition of 14 community organizations and CORE. CORE and GEM have challenged every school closing by mobilizing for rallies and school board hearings.

CORE has also promised to not reopen the CTU contract, as demanded by Huberman. He had called for Chicago Teachers to give up a 4% wage increase in order

to plug a supposed \$600 million budget deficit—or else face massive layoffs and larger class sizes. CORE has noted that over \$250 million of property taxes are diverted from schools to Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts created by Mayor Daley, and over \$300 million per year is being diverted into charter schools.

CORE has filed a lawsuit demanding that the Board of Education open their books so teachers and community members can see the truth of the district's finances. On May 25, 5000 people marched against school budget cuts at a CORE-initiated rally.

Chicago teachers will vote on June 11 to decide the fate of the 30,000-member local for the next six years.

A victory for CORE would transform the battlefield for teachers, parents, and students as they struggle against the attacks on their schools and union. ■

ABF Teamsters Reject Give Backs

CHICAGO—Teamster members at ABF have voted down proposed concessions negotiated by the International leadership. The freight trucking company asked the Teamster leaders for concessions after competitor YRC successfully negotiated a combined 15% wage cut and 18-month freeze in pension contributions after threatening that the company would file for bankruptcy.

ABF asked for a 15% wage cut, which the company's 7000 Teamsters rejected by a vote of 56%-44% despite a "vote yes" campaign from the International. International VP and freight director Tyson Johnson's own home local, Local 745 in Dallas, rejected the deal.

Chicago-area Local 710 member told tdu.org, "Members didn't buy the warnings put out by management and people like Hoffa and Keegel. We know times are tough but it looks like the economy is turning around. Why give the company 15 percent of our hard-earned paycheck when they wouldn't even consider five percent raises in good times."

"Fair is fair and we're just tired of always being on the short end of the stick. Let them figure out a better way of shoring up the bottom line. Come back to us with a real plan."

— DAVE BERNT

By DAVE BERNT

Locked out miners in Boron, Calif., voted to accept a new contract on May 15, ending a 107-day lockout. The miners are employed by international conglomerate Rio Tinto, the world's fourth largest mining company.

In negotiations, Rio Tinto had demanded that the Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) accept a union-busting contract. Company proposals included an open shop, elimination of seniority, their right to cut pay at any time, their right to outsource any work, and converting full-time work into part-time. Workers refused and were locked out. The new contract beat back most of the concessions demanded by Rio Tinto.

The brave workers who stood up to Rio Tinto received the support of their community and broad sections of the labor movement. Thousands of Los Angeles area trade unionists mobilized in solidarity with the miners, and tens of thousands of dollars of food was donated.

Miners organized a food bank, and cash donations helped miners pay for medical care and bills to make it through the long battle. The ILWU organized a free clinic with volunteer doctors. The local credit union allowed the miners to miss payments on loans during the three-month period of the lock out.

The outpouring of support for the miners from both the Boron community and the labor movement was critical. The ILWU launched a corporate campaign against Rio Tinto, with solidarity actions occurring around the world.

The contract calls for a 2.5% annual raise and eliminates some of the worst of the company's proposals.

Rio Tinto miners settle after 107-day lock-out

However, the contract contains significant concessions, including giving newly hired workers a reduced defined benefit 401k pension plan. This two-tier pension risks dividing the work force in the future and gives management an extra incentive to get rid of higher seniority workers and replace them with "cheaper" new hires.

While the bravery and unity of the miners and their allies was an inspiring display of class solidarity, some labor activists are questioning the strategies used by the ILWU. Jack Heyman, a veteran labor activist and ILWU Local 10 member in Oakland, Calif., released a statement after the settlement was approved in which he questioned the strength of the settlement and the tactics of the ILWU leadership:

"Rio Tinto got what they wanted: gutting union seniority in promotions, hiring and training; the company can now contract out during busy periods; and members can't sue the company over work related issues. The National Labor Relations Board ruled that Rio Tinto had illegally locked out the miners. The company was liable for miners' back pay during the three-and-a-half month lockout, but it was given away to achieve a pact.

"In a change from the ILWU's militant history of organizing mass pickets on the docks against employer attacks, the present International leadership had opposed picketing by the miners and instead called for carrying American flags, demonstrating at the British consulate (Rio Tinto is British-owned) and lobbying

Rio Tinto shareholders."

This "public relations" strategy didn't use the ILWU's power on the docks and made it difficult to organize support actions there when the miners themselves weren't taking such basic protest actions. In any case, the longshoremen should never have handled the thousands (according to locked out Borax miners) of scab containers in the port of Los Angeles.

The Boron miners showed courage by standing up to one the largest corporations in the world and enduring over three months of being locked out. Such courage is an example for all workers to learn from and will need to be repeated in shops across the country if the labor movement is to advance in this difficult period. At the same time, the lesson of the Boron mine lock out is that courage and solidarity often are not enough. While the miners struggle was good enough to stop the worst of the concessions, it was not strong enough to resist significant givebacks to one of the richest companies in the world.

While corporate campaigns can be useful compliments to labor struggles, only economic action, as Heyman suggests, can force determined and financially powerful companies to agree to workers' demands. The great recession has put corporations on the offensive, seeking concessions and outright union busting from workers in every industry. In order to defend past gains and make advancements for workers, the ranks of the labor movement will have to rediscover the tactics that built their unions in the first place. ■

Labor Notes: 1200 meet to discuss 'rank-and-file recovery'

By BILL ONASCH

Pick any measure you want—union density; strike activity; concessionary contracts; stagnant, even declining real wages and benefits—they all point to one inescapable conclusion: the labor movement in the U.S. has sunk to its weakest in living memory and the end of its decline is nowhere in sight. But, in the midst of this gloomy recognition, the April 23-25 *Labor Notes* Conference—a biennial event for the past three decades—set a new attendance record.

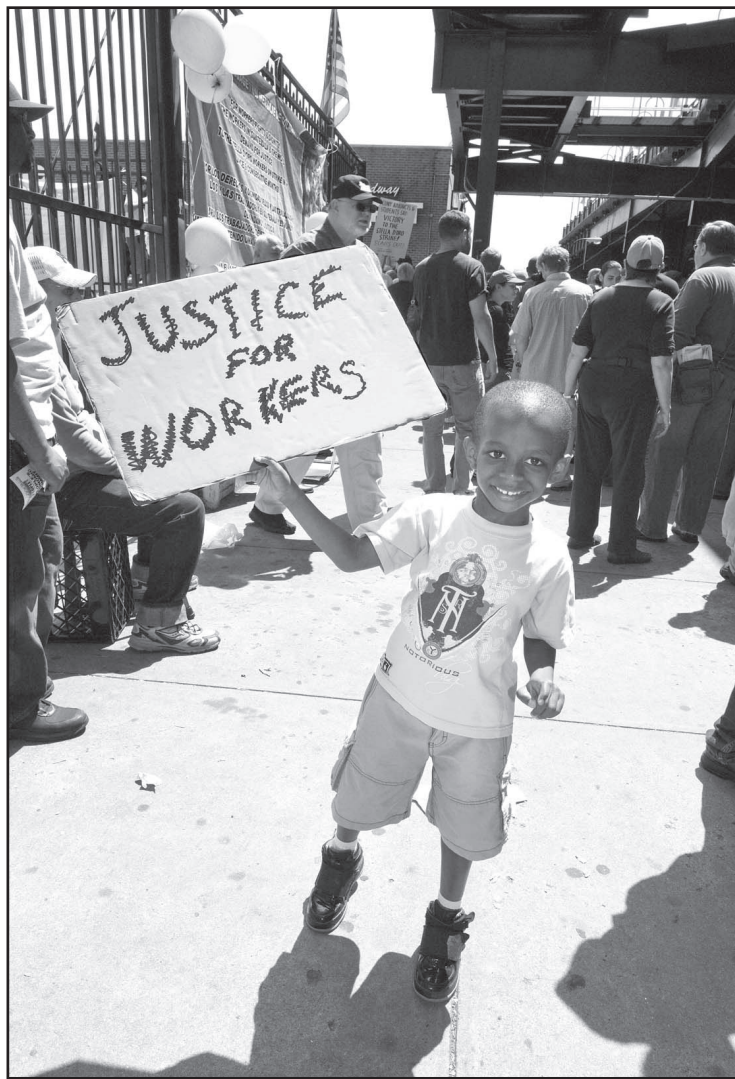
With a few honorable exceptions, most mainstream American unions do not offer any comparable venue for the their ranks to discuss strategy and tactics. Most top officials remain dedicated to the same old/same old of trying to work in "partnership" with the bosses.

While they are major campaign fund donors, the union heads have accepted their role as no more than glorified precinct captains, taking marching orders from their Democrat "friends." Implementation of this debilitating policy of class collaboration dominates most union gatherings from national conventions down to shop meetings in lunchrooms.

More than ever, the conference organized by the monthly publication *Labor Notes* stands in sharp contrast to these official union assemblies. There are no motions from a bureaucratically selected resolutions committee to be voted upon, no unopposed officers to be elected.

The biggest culture shock for unionists attending their first *LN* conference is always its democratic character. All working-class points of view are welcome, even encouraged, in the dozens of workshops and interest group meetings that comprise the bulk of conference proceedings.

While there are no formal action plans to be debated and voted—and so often ignored—the three days of discussion is not idle chit-chat. It is mainly about what



people have done, or hope to do. Not all contributions are of equal importance but collectively they add up to a pretty faithful picture of the current state of the working class.

Who were these 1200 participants? The gathering had a strong international flavor, with over 20 countries represented. For the most part they were rank-and-filers or shop stewards. But there were also a substantial number of union staffers and full-time elected officers, even a few national union officials.

Health-care workers in National Nurses United, National Union of Healthcare Workers, and SEIU were prominent. So were members of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the only significant rank-and-file national union caucus on the scene. There were fresh contingents from UNITE HERE. More teachers than ever, from both the NEA and AFT, were drawn to the conference.

The new leadership in Transport Workers Local 100, representing New York City transit workers was highly visible. And union stalwarts from the UE and Farm Labor Organizing Committee have never missed one of these conferences yet.

Since its founding in 1979, *Labor Notes*, and the schools and conferences they have offered, have centered on three major arenas of the class struggle: shop floor struggles in the workplace, strike solidarity, internal union democracy. Details of the conference agenda can be found online at www.labornotes.org/conference.

In addition, *Labor Notes* has effectively built many social campaigns launched from within the labor movement—including some going beyond their "core" perspective, such as the issue of immigration rights.

LN has been supportive of US Labor Against the War since that group was launched in 2003. *LN's* long relationship with the California Nurses Association, now part of National Nurses United, facilitated taking a positive stand on Canadian-style single-payer health-care reform. ■

Parts of this article originally appeared on www.kclabor.org/a_unique_worker_gathering.htm.

... Red Shirts regroup after massacre by Thai troops

(continued from page 16) when they would not accept his offer.

On May 19, when troops moved in on the protesters, which included the elderly and children, the leaders of the Red Shirts turned themselves in—though small pockets of Red Shirts attempted to resist. Government troops killed at least 80 protesters and injured over 2000 throughout the entire protest.

As the troops assaulted the protesting civilians, some demonstrators engaged in destruction of business and government property in Bangkok, burning the Thai stock exchange and Thailand's

biggest shopping mall. For these acts the entire Red Shirt movement is being branded as terrorists, and criminal charges are being used to cover up the political crackdown on dissent.

Most analysts agree that the situation in Thailand seems to have no reconciliation in sight. In a slap to the face of the pro-democracy protesters, current Prime Minister Abhisit on May 29 said it would be difficult to hold elections this year, saying that he would instead be sure to hold them by the end of his term in 2012. Meanwhile, the economic disparity that is widely acknowledged to be the heart of the social crisis has

not been addressed whatsoever.

Sa-at, a rice farmer quoted by *Time* magazine said, "The government has forced us to put down our hoses and pick up guns instead. The land will go up in flames."

With government repression tightening like a noose and no economic restructuring on the horizon, most analysts agree that the angry Red Shirts have only lost the battle but are here to stay. Fears have been raised by moderates in Thailand that in regions like Isaan (the home of communist guerrillas in the 1960s and '70s) the rural poor could turn to guerrilla war since

absolutely nothing is being done to address their grievances.

It remains to be seen what the Red Shirts' next move will be, or if the leaders of the movement can retain control of their angry rank-and-filers. But it is clear to everyone that the poor masses of Thailand have not spoken their last words. In their push for a more democratic and just society, they need international allies that will stand with them to the end.

Ultimately, to be successful in their struggle against the ruling elite and military, the Thai masses will need to look toward bringing to power a revolutionary socialist government, clearly representing the workers and peasants. ■

MOVE bombing: 25 years later



(Left) Ramona Africa, the lone adult survivor of the police bombing of the MOVE house (below), May 13, 1985.

By JOHN LESLIE

PHILADELPHIA—On May 13, 1985, the Philadelphia police department (PPD) dropped a bomb on a house occupied by members of the MOVE organization. It's the crime that city officials and the big business media want you to forget.

The 1985 bombing can't be understood without knowing the context of the ongoing police repression against MOVE. MOVE has been a target of police brutality and harassment from its inception as a radical "back-to-nature" group, founded in 1972 by John Africa. The infamous police commissioner, and later, mayor, Frank Rizzo, made attacks on radical groups, particularly Black radicals, a regular practice of the PPD.

In 1977, cops attacked MOVE members, kicking pregnant women and killing a small child. On Aug. 8, 1978, the 50-week long siege of the MOVE house in the Powelton Village neighborhood ended when cops fired hundreds of rounds into the house, and sprayed it with high-pressure fire hoses. Cops used tear gas to force men, women, and children from the house. Delbert Africa was severely beaten by cops as he tried to surrender. Cops later claimed that he had attacked them. The whole incident was caught on tape by local news programs.

Nine MOVE members were convicted of killing a cop, James Ramp, in spite of witnesses' accounts indicating that the cop had been killed by so-called "friendly fire." Within 24 hours of the 1978 attack, the city razed the houses with bulldozers, destroying any evidence that may have freed the MOVE 9. The surviving MOVE 9

members remain in prison.

It was after this attack that MOVE members moved to 6221 Osage Avenue and fortified the house there. Their uncompromising defense of their brothers and sisters in jail has helped insure the hostility of the Philadelphia cops and the city's political elite.

The newly elected Black mayor, W. Wilson Goode, promised action against MOVE. On the anniversary of the Powelton Village assault, Aug. 8, 1984, cops and fire trucks surrounded the house, but in the end backed down because of a lack of probable cause for an attack. The only crimes that MOVE members could be charged with were minor ones. What followed was months of surveillance and harassment by the cops. City officials upped the rhetoric, calling MOVE violent and "terrorists" in spite of the fact that none of these assertions could be proved.

Cops surrounded the house at 6221 Osage Ave. in West Philly on Mothers' Day, May 12, 1985, following alleged complaints by neighbors. The PPD had arrest warrants for four MOVE members, signed by Judge Lynne Abraham.

At dawn on May 13, cops forced the evacuation of the neighborhood and attacked the house. Police Commissioner Sambor, speaking over a bullhorn from the command post across the street, shouted, "Attention MOVE, this is America! You have to abide by the laws of the United States!"

Police using automatic weapons, including M-16s, seven Uzi sub-machine guns, two M-60 machine guns, two .50 calibre machine guns, and a 20 mm anti-tank gun, began firing more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition in 90 minutes. Fire trucks sprayed the house with 640,000 gallons of water, and assault teams using bombs blew holes in the common walls between the MOVE house and adjoining houses.

These bombs were powerful enough to blow the front off of the first floor of the house. The stated purpose of this assault was to allow the firing of tear gas into the house. In spite of all the gunfire, gas, and explosions, the cops failed to dislodge MOVE members from the house. A cop on the scene reported seeing one dead adult on the first floor.

During the attack, community members tried to appeal to Mayor Goode to stop the assault, pointing out that there were children inside the house. Goode told the media that he was prepared to resolve the MOVE problem "by any means necessary."

At 5:27 pm, a police helicopter dropped a bomb, made of the explosives C-4 and Tovex, on the roof of the house in order to get rid of what cops and the media term a "bunker." The "bunker" remained intact, but a fire broke out. On orders of Police Commissioner Gregore J. Sambor and Fire Commissioner William C. Richmond, the fire burned out of control for an hour before any attempt at fire suppression was made.

By 7 p.m., the MOVE members, having taken shelter in the basement, decided to try to exit through the garage into an alley in the rear. Police SWAT team members opened fire, driving them back inside. Police reported that "armed MOVE members" had come into the alley and opened fire on cops.

What really happened? According to the account of Birdie Africa (age 13 years) published in the book, "Attention Move! This is America!": "In addition to Ramona and himself, Frank James Africa, Conrad Hampton Africa and probably all five of the other children

had tried to get out but were forced by police gunfire back into the rear and garage area of the burning house." Birdie Africa also was quoted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on May 14, 1985, as saying, a MOVE adult had yelled to cops that "The kids are coming out!"

Birdie also told the investigative commission appointed by Mayor Goode that he had seen at least two of the children, Tree and Phil Africa, running down the alley towards Cobbs Creek Parkway. A Detective Stephenson wrote in his report of the events of that day that he saw bodies in the back yard of 6221 Osage Ave.

All the bodies of the dead were later recovered from the wreckage of the house, burned beyond recognition. This raises the question of whether the cops put the bodies back into the burning house to destroy evidence. Shotgun pellets and bullet fragments were discovered in the bodies of John Africa and Rhonda Africa, as well as one of the children, by a pathologist after cops had claimed that none of the dead had sustained gun shot wounds.

The result of this attack was the deaths of six adult members of MOVE, including founder John Africa, and five children. Sixty-one homes were destroyed and more than 250 people were left homeless. Not one of the cops or city officials who perpetrated this crime served a day in jail. One of the survivors, Ramona Africa, is the only person to serve any jail time in this whole catastrophe.

Supporters of justice for those killed and for the survivors held several events in Philadelphia to mark the 25th anniversary. On May 12 at 9 a.m., attorneys for MOVE delivered murder charges against the officials involved in this crime to the court. In Pennsylvania, unlike some other states, private individuals have the right to bring criminal complaints in case the District Attorney fails or refuses to do so. Of course, no one should have any illusions that workers and the oppressed will get any real justice from capitalist courts.

Later that morning, lawyers and supporters, including Dr. Suzanne Ross of the New York Free Mumia Committee and Fred Hampton Jr., spoke at a press conference at the American Friends Service Committee. Attorneys for MOVE explained the basis for the legal case to the press. A rally was held in the evening at Philadelphia's African American History Museum.

The struggle to free the eight remaining members of the MOVE 9 continues. (One member of the MOVE 9, Merle Africa, died in prison in 1998.) In spite of the fact that MOVE 9 members have been model prisoners, they are being denied parole. The state is insisting that they admit guilt for the events of Aug. 8, 1978, before they can be granted freedom. This flies in the face of evidence that the police officer, Ramp, was killed by police gunfire and not by MOVE.

Support the movement to free the MOVE 9! Demand justice for those killed on May 13, 1985, and prosecute the real criminals! ■

Capitalist media hack job

On Friday, May 7, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a retrospective on the 25th anniversary of the MOVE bombing. The way it is written is such that it's really a justification of the MOVE bombing disguised as "impartial and balanced" journalism. The article makes numerous references to MOVE as a cult. The implication in a companion article by Monica Yant Kinney ("The Madness of MOVE Continues") is that MOVE murdered John Gilbride (ex-husband of a MOVE member)—even though the cops have never made a case against anyone.

Kinney writes that MOVE members are living high on the hog on their settlement money and that the children of MOVE are neglected and abused. The main article says that Mumia was an "acolyte" of John Africa.

The (not so) hidden message? That the members of MOVE and their supporters are all crazy, and hypocrites, and that the bombing of the MOVE house, while unfortunate, should be blamed on the "crazy cult," not on official misconduct. How easily and seamlessly our bourgeois press justifies the killing of people with a bomb and the burning of an entire neighborhood. In order to justify state murder of people you first have to demonize and objectify the victims. — JL

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By BARRY WEISLEDER

At least \$1 billion will be spent to 'protect' the top guns of global capitalism when the G8 meet on June 25 in Huntsville, Ontario, and at the G20 Summit on June 26-27 in Toronto. The security tab was boosted by an extra \$321 million for the RCMP, with another \$262 million going to the Public Safety department, and \$63 million more for National Defence.

The G20 includes: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, Britain and the United States, plus 'guest' countries Spain, Netherlands, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Malawi, and reps from the IMF, World Bank, OECD, the U.N. and the WTO.

The largest deployment of cops, security guards, spies, soldiers, and air force personnel for a major event in Canadian history will be augmented by an array of weapons, such as 'sound cannons' and electroshock tasers. The long-range acoustic devices (LRAD), used at last year's G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, emit ear-blasting sounds that exceed normal thresholds of pain. They can cause permanent hearing damage.

Protection of politicians from protesters (behind a three-meter-high security barricade that will envelop the downtown Toronto Convention Centre and business district) might not have come at such a high premium if the policies of the ruling-class henchmen were not so odious. Culpable indifference to climate change is just one example. While eco-catastrophe threatens the survival of species and civilization, the preoccupation of the capitalist elite is deficit reduction.

Recall that deficits and debt went through the roof when governments decided to bail out banks and giant companies. The latter fostered a credit balloon to

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Security trumps humanity at G20

paper-over the central contradiction of capitalism: the overproduction of useless and wasteful things.

Now the world's masses are saddled with the cost of the ensuing market crash. And to make matters worse, the G20 rulers aim to dismantle working-class rights and benefits won over a century of struggle.

According to an editorial in the May 24 *Toronto Star*, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which serves as a kind of secretariat for the G20, recommends a combination of the following measures: increase the age of retirement; de-fund medical treatments; freeze public-sector wages; introduce means-testing for all social programmes; cut back agricultural supports for farmers; increase value-added taxes (GST in Canada, HST in Ontario); hike gasoline taxes, and introduce a carbon tax on greenhouse gas emissions.

Capitalist politicians are, however, not interested in cutting the military, putting energy company mega-profits to work for conservation and green energy alternatives, nor in taxing the rich to support public health care, education, good nutrition, public trans-

portation and decent, affordable housing.

To the contrary, the Stephen Harper Conservative minority government in Ottawa is busy campaigning to block a special tax on financial speculation and 'excess' bank profits—even though such a tax is touted by European powers and Washington as a hedge against the next big bank meltdown.

In the first three months of 2010, Canada's five biggest banks reported profits of \$5.09 Billion – up 71 per cent from a year earlier. The last thing bankers want is for Ottawa to intervene because it might lead, heaven forbid, to spending their hoarded wealth (part of the surplus value massively expropriated from working people) on social needs.

But workers, students, women, aboriginal peoples, and seniors who take to the streets of Toronto in late June are sure to bring a different approach to matters of finance and the environment. Let the rulers tremble when the people chant: "System change, not climate change!" "Nationalize the banks, big oil and big business, under workers' control!"

Eco-socialism featured at Toronto conference



(At podium from left) Cuban Consul Gen. Jose Soberon, Socialist Action (Canada) Nat. Secretary Barry Weisleder, and Socialist Action (U.S.) leader Carl Sack. (Right) Troy Jackson, Toronto gay activist and singer.

The economic crises of capitalism are cyclical, but the current environmental crisis could be final. Only by means of public ownership under workers' and community control can society address both man-made ills, and be empowered to save life and civilization.

That was the message of "Socialism 2010: Socialism or Barbarism / Eco-Socialism or Extinction." Nearly 100 people gathered from across English Canada, Quebec and the United States for four days of lectures, debates, discussions, films, lunches and socials at OISE U of Toronto, hosted by Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste.

The eight conference sessions attracted on average 40 participants each, with 55 to 60 attending Thursday night's "Palestine, Afghanistan and Hai-

ti: Occupation and Resistance", and Friday evening's panel "From Copenhagen to Mexico City—the World at the Brink".

The Conservative federal government's racist 'security state' regulations nearly sabotaged the participation of the Socialist Unity League (LUS) of Mexico, co-sponsor with SA-USA of the international conference. LUS representative Linda Avila was denied a visitor's visa by the Canadian Embassy in Mexico, which demanded proof of ample personal wealth. Fortunately, thanks to an iPhone connection facilitated by a good friend of SA/LAS-Canada, LUS leader Jaime Gonzalez was able to deliver two excellent 15-minute presentations to the conference, live from Mexico City.

Passionate discussions, frequently punctuated by enthusiastic applause, were a mainstay of the conference. One presenter, legal assistant and gay-rights

activist Troy Jackson, actually sang the first part of his contribution. Others, like OCAP organizer John Clarke, employed a more traditional, but highly compelling form of discourse.

Sessions on "Women's Liberation Today", "Combating the Corporate Agenda—Jobs, Pensions and Poverty", "Dialectical Materialism—a philosophy for radical change", "The Malthus Myth: Population, Poverty and Climate Change", and "Civil Rights under Attack—Fight Back!" rounded out the exciting programme, against a backdrop of beautiful banners. Slogans affirming the rights of immigrant workers, women and youth, calling for union democracy and the fight for socialist policies in the labour-based New Democratic Party, and demanding "Solidarity, Not Charity, Never Occupation" for Haiti, festooned the hall.

Four new participants expressed interest in joining SA/LAS, which held its annual rank-and-file convention on the Sunday afternoon. SA-USA National Secretary Jeff Mackler, who was featured on two panels of the public conference, reported to the SA/LAS convention on the 16th World Congress of the Fourth International, the main organization of the world Trotskyist movement, which took place in Belgium in February.

SA/LAS-Canada, SA-USA and the LUS-Mexico pledged to issue a joint statement for Jobs, Justice and Eco-Socialism, to be published in English, French and Spanish, in conjunction with the mass protests slated for the G20 Summit in Toronto in late June. Can "Socialism 2011" in Toronto next May top this? Be sure not to miss it.

— BARRY WEISLEDER

Gay bureaucrats ban anti-Zionism from Toronto Pride

By JOHN WILSON

On the morning of May 26, about 150 people demonstrated at Toronto Pride's offices against the decision to ban any reference to Israeli apartheid at this year's annual Pride Parade, dyke march, and trans march. The parade, one of North America's largest in recent years, attracts over a million people, and is a major tourist event at the end of Pride Week, June 25 - July 4. Normally, the parade is held on the last Sunday in June; it was forced to move to July this year because of the G8-G20 summit.

The context of the demonstration was an outdoor press conference called by Pride corporate honchos to announce their wretched decision. The protest was an angry and spirited event called at very short notice by

Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA).

Chants included "Whose Pride? Our Pride! Queers Against Apartheid!", "Shame!", "Resign! Resign!", "Liar! Liar!" (directed particularly, but not exclusively at Genevieve D'Iorio, Pride co-chair, and Tracey Sandilands, the executive director), "Cowards! Cowards!" among others.

Chants and shouting (including, "Sell outs!") took place throughout the presentations. Cops were present, presumably called in by the bureaucrats to prevent community activists from stepping on the sacred grounds of Toronto Pride.

Many participants initially covered their mouths with tape or cloth and held up small signs saying "Free Speech." Yours truly had the impression that the Pride officials were unsettled by our presence and numbers.

Pride bureaucrats had previously floated a proposed regulation that would allow them to vet all signs in the parade. But after massive and voluble opposition in queer communities, they hastily retreated.

While there is a motion pending at Toronto City Hall by notoriously homophobic councillor Giorgio Mammoliti that calls for municipal funding for Pride to be cut, this motion has yet to be discussed, let alone voted on. Put another way, the city to date has taken NO decision. So the pro-Zionist bias of the Prideocrats is pretty obvious.

This will certainly not be the end of the matter. QuAIA spokesperson Elle Flanders declared that their contingent would march in the parade regardless, although declining at this time to give specifics. The turnout of this number of people at such short notice on a working day may be indicative of some revival of queer activism with a liberationist perspective in Toronto.

'Don't ask, don't tell' closets lesbian/gay war resisters in military

By AARON McAULIFFE

Following is a speech given in Hartford, Conn., at a May 7 fundraiser for the campaign of Socialist Action candidate for Congress Chris Hutchinson (see article on page 4). McAuliffe is a member of Youth for Socialist Action at Central Connecticut State University and a former vice president of the campus Gay-Straight Alliance.

On March 20, we protested in Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C., to demand an end to the wars and occupations. Two days prior, gay rights activists were using that very same space to call for the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Lt. Choi was scheduled to speak at a Human Rights Campaign rally being hosted by Kathy Griffin—do I need to say anymore about the political tone of this gathering? He gave a passionate and well-articulated speech, which you can find on YouTube, and hijacked the rally. Five hundred people left the HRC with him to go from "Freedom Plaza" in downtown D.C. to the White House, where Lt. Choi and his gay comrade Cpt. James Pietrangolo hand-cuffed themselves to the White House fence.

The Obama administration did not change the policy, so a month later they returned with four other service members to repeat that same action. Again, they were immediately arrested.

This past Sunday, Lt. Choi returned for a third time with hundreds of gay activists. This time, six service members chained themselves to the fence. The Secret Service kicked out the media, told everyone the park was closed, and arrested those who were chained to the fence.

Now, as a queer activist who has recently come out of the closet as "socialist-curious," I find this type of action both invigorating and inspiring! What is important to me about these demonstrations is that transgender, lesbian, and gay people that I know from Central and Southern CT State University went there.

For the first time, I am seeing friends who had all voted and avidly supported Obama commit direct action to protest policies that exist under his administration.

And we all know from personal experience how affirming and radical it is to be in the presence of a large number of people who are working towards a common goal. Finally, my people are overcoming the complacency of the Obama-effect! Similar to the experience of the African-American community, the Latino community and women's groups, many transgender, bisexual, lesbian, and gay activists were put into a sedated liberal trance in November of 2008.

Even this past January, when Obama point blank said that he would repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in his State of the

Union address, my queer friends and family got their hopes up again, thinking that this was the year when that equality could finally be won.

Now, let's take a pause here: How could any person with a clean conscience argue that seeking full-fledged participation in the world's largest imperialist and mass-murdering organization is in the pursuit of equal rights?

Why are gay activists campaigning for a "right" that would only allow them to engage in a racist and classist war against Muslim people both inside and outside of this country? This is a bit hypocritical, don't you think?

I say, not at all! It would be hypocritical only if you viewed participation in the U.S. military as a passive support of the war of terror on the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Only if you saw U.S. soldiers as mindless patriotic war robots and not as the vast reserve of exploited working-class labor that is disproportionately filled by Black and Latina women and men.

To paraphrase the rap philosopher Immortal Technique: *We DIE in wars. We don't get the contracts to make money off 'em afterwards! We don't get weapons contracts. We don't get cheap labor for our companies—we ARE cheap labor, people!*

Let's not forget that the GI resistance was how the war in Vietnam finally ended. Of course, antiwar demonstrations back home in the States helped support

this effort, but, ultimately, what ended the war was soldiers laying down their guns and refusing to fight a false enemy.

Today, the Iraq Veterans Against the War and other war resisters lead a similar movement, but heterosexual women and men cannot lead this battle alone. An injury to one is an injury to all! Queer issues affect everybody. We're the only minority who can be anybody. Our demands for peace must include an end to any type of employment discrimination that prohibits war resisters from carrying out their duty as such.

How can gay soldiers feel safe to protest these unjust and racist wars as freely as their heterosexual counterparts do if they can be fired at any minute once their true sexual identity comes to light? "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is politically crippling to lesbian and gay GIs who want to dismantle the war machine.

It is for these reasons and many more that I support having a socialist candidate for the U.S. Congress. And not just any socialist, but Chris Hutchinson of Socialist Action! He's got the backs of the war resisters and the gays and any community whose rights are being trampled on by capitalism and greed in this world. Through political discussions with Chris and his comrades, I have become more enlightened about how working-class and antiwar issues greatly impact my queer community and vice versa. Together, we will be an unstoppable force! ■

Anishinaabeg prepare for long, hot summer in their treaty rights battle with Minnesota

By JEFF ARMSTRONG

FARGO, N.D.—Nearly 200 members and supporters of the indigenous Anishinaabeg nation gathered on the shores of Lake Bemidji in northern Minnesota on May 14 to assert their treaty rights under U.S. and international law to hunt, fish, and gather wild rice free of state regulation. While generations of Anishinaabeg (referred to in treaties as Chippewa) have exercised their treaty rights covertly on an individual basis, last month's protest fish-in was the first major collective action in nearly 20 years.

Defying threats of arrest by the state DNR, warnings of a white backlash in the local media, and attempts by some tribal officials to derail the event, several boatloads of Anishinaabeg set nets in the off-reservation lake, while others cast lines from the shore on the day preceding the state fishing opener. The DNR avoided open confrontation, seizing nets and fish but not boats and automobiles, a common practice of state conservation officers in the past.

Netting citations were referred to the Beltrami County Attorney for possible prosecution on gross misdemeanor charges, which have yet to be filed as *Socialist Action* goes to press.

Aaron White Sr., who was invited to the event by an elder and emerged as a leader on the shore and on the lake, noted the importance of collective action. "It takes more than one person to say this is wrong, this is not right," said White. "We are the people. If we're not the people, we're nobody, we're one single individual out here. If there weren't all this press out here, all this radio and TV, I'd be sitting in jail. They'd have pulled me out of the boat right there and put me into jail."

Media attention notwithstanding, however, White said a DNR agent pulled out a knife and cut the net away from him inches away from his fingers when he refused to immediately relinquish it.

Treaty rights activists maintain that the state has no legal leg to stand on, but rather is continuing a long pattern of harassment and intimidation. While the Anishinaabeg have clearly outlined their position on the issue, supported by a 35-page legal analysis by law school professor and National Lawyers Guild member Peter Erlinder, the state has yet to issue even a sketchy counterargument.

In recent years, the state has aggressively enforced its conservation laws against the Anishinaabeg in the ceded territories but dropped charges when the de-



Jeff Armstrong / Socialist Action

fendants asserted their treaty rights.

"They haul 'em into court and they drop charges. That's harassment," said Bob Shimek, an organizer of the event. "The United States Supreme Court has already ruled on the treaty rights in the 1855 ceded territory. I don't know what the state of Minnesota doesn't understand. It's right there in black and white." Bemidji ACLU activist Audrey Thayer said pro-bono lawyers are on hand to represent anticipated defendants in the case.

The Anishinaabeg claim their rights under an 1855 treaty with the U.S. government that opened the door to white settlement in northern Minnesota. Minnesota officials have long contended that the 1855 treaty implicitly relinquished Anishinaabe hunting and fishing rights, but that argument was blown out of the water by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs* in 1999. The court in that case specifically ruled that the 1855 treaty did not surrender any treaty rights.

A Wilder Research study last year found that 88% of Native reservation residents strongly agree that federal recognition of treaty rights is important, while 12% agree less strongly. More surprisingly, however, 65% of their non-Native neighbors agree, though only 21% agree strongly. This trend was reflected in the fact that anti-treaty activists, who largely remained silent, were far outnumbered by non-Natives who came to the rally in solidarity with the Anishinaabeg.

Treaty rights protesters who held signs and banners along a busy road into town similarly reported that they received far more honks of support than expres-

sions of racism in a town not noted for harmonious race relations.

While a growing number of non-Natives may be willing to come to terms with history, some tribal officials seem to possess an institutional instinct for accommodation. White Earth Reservation Business Committee chair Erma Vizenor and Leech Lake secretary-treasurer Mike Bongo quickly sought to break up tribal unity on the issue and cancel the May 14 action when it received unexpected media attention. Vizenor, who is the subject of a recall petition on her reservation for opening enrollment to non-Natives and "establishing an unconstitutional and illegal court system" and police force, may have been courting state political support to prop up an increasingly repressive reservation regime.

Bongo, who is a longshot for reelection in a tribal vote this month, may have been grasping for a polarizing issue against popular tribal chairman Archie LaRose, whose family has been at the forefront of decades of struggle against state jurisdiction and tribal complicity. But Bongo is unlikely to find many takers, as the Anishinaabeg appear determined to remake history in their favor.

Curtis Buckanaga said a new generation of leaders is emerging to challenge the status quo on and off the reservations, calling for the formation of an indigenous political party. "They're not beating up on the same old Indians. We're young, we're the new life of this struggle. In 1934 they robbed us of our traditional governments and replaced [them] with the [Indian] Reorganization Act. They gave us to the vulnerabilities of the Democratic Party," said Buckanaga. "[Tribal leaders] are not even standing up for us. They're sitting down and nodding their heads with the white guys."

The simmering conflict over treaty rights with the state also has political implications for Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who has been mentioned as a potential presidential nominee for the Republican Party. Pawlenty has taken a strong stance against Native sovereignty, which may serve him politically at the state level, but he clearly does not want to be in the center of a nationally publicized racial conflict of the sort that took place in Wisconsin in the 1980s, after the Anishinaabeg prevailed in federal court with the *Voigt* decision.

Predicting a "long, hot summer," American Indian Movement activist Dennis Banks pointed to the fundamental inequity of the fact that non-Natives can fish on his home reservation with a state license and without being subject to tribal jurisdiction, yet he is subject to state criminal penalties for fishing on state land with a reservation license, despite treaty rights more than 150 years old. "You've seen today these people confiscating our nets, citing people, threatening them with jail, but when people come and fish in our lakes, we cannot impound their boats, we cannot confiscate their cars or their trailers," said Banks. ■

FILMS

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Casino Jack and the United States of Money," a documentary film, written and directed by Alex Gibney.

Director Alex Gibney's documentary, "Casino Jack and the United States of Money," could be overwhelming if it weren't riveting. He incorporates an extensive library of archival film footage and stills, employing actors (or their voice: Stanley Tucci as Abramoff, in some instances), along with interviews. His film is about former lobbyist Jack Abramoff's trajectory from high-school heart throb to convicted felon.

"Casino" begins with a shot of Abramoff (playing himself), sporting a black overcoat and Fedora as he perp-marched to his sentencing in March 2006. When questioned by senators in hearings, he'd respond in the vernacular of a Michael Corleone from "The Godfather."

Born in New Jersey in 1959 to a wealthy, secular Jewish couple, Abramoff is shown in stills as a cute child with a mop of dark curls. Later, in high school, he starred as a jock. After graduating, inspired by the film "Fiddler on the Roof," he became an Orthodox Jew.

The film follows him to college where he joined the College Republicans, who were influenced by boyish, conservative Christian Ralph Reed (as himself). Gibney shows that Reed needed Jack to lobby the members of the Reagan administration who could help him with his causes.

Reed's views on the Contras in Nicaragua were intractable. Archival footage shows the College Repubs in that country. There are clips of Abramoff and his minions hanging with the UNITA guerrilla forces in Jamba, Angola. UNITA was receiving covert aid from the Reagan administration as well as from apartheid South Africa and was known to kidnap children to train as guerrillas.

The film reveals that Jack convinced the organization Citizens for America to contribute funds for guns, but the money stopped when the CFA decided he'd spent unwisely, thus ending his involvement.

Still, Abramoff got the idea from his Angola escapades for the movie he wrote and produced, "Red Scorpion," which starred strong man Dolph Lundgren as a KGB operative and Al White as a figure based on UNITA warlord Jonas Savimbi. Jack then spent 10 years in Hollywood as a producer of action films.

Reed wrote to his contacts, "Abramoff is arguably the most influential and effective GOP lobbyist in congress. I share several clients with him and have yet to see him lose a battle. He also is very close to [Congress-

HOW 'DEMOCRACY' WORKS



(Left) Jack Abramoff outside federal courthouse in Washington, Jan. 2, 2006.

man Tom] DeLay." As another Abramoff lackey stated, "He could charm a dog off a meat truck."

"Casino" gives an exhausting account of how Jack and his pal, Tom DeLay (as himself), manipulated senators, congresspersons, and heads of corporations, duping them into forking over millions, promising to deliver, bribing them with the high life: entertaining in private sports arena sky-boxes, putting them up in luxury hotels, taking them on exotic cruises and golfing junkets to Scotland. Once the requisite payments were made, they would skim off millions for themselves.

The worst of the Abramoff scams were the clothing factories in the Northern Mariana Islands (a U.S. colonial possession) and his ripping off U.S. Indian casino owners. In the Marianas, U.S. labor rules and minimum wage laws don't apply, yet goods bear the "Made in USA" label. Through videos provided by undercover investigators, Gibney reveals the sweat-shop conditions there.

Gibney narrates that workers paid "recruiters" thousands of dollars for a job, which owners lent them.

Workers were to pay it back out of their dollar a day salaries; they became, in effect, indentured slaves.

Jack and Tom built an upscale resort on the island. Villages became rife with tawdry bars and the sex trade. A newly elected Commonwealth governor closed the factories; production moved to China and Taiwan, leaving a ruined populace in its wake, but Abramoff's honchos eventually bribed the governor to reopen.

Director Gibney showed footage of Abramoff and DeLay playing the Indian casinos against one another. In e-mails that surfaced, Abramoff refers to Native Americans as "troglodytes" and "monkeys." They hired Reed's think-tank Century Strategies to wage a campaign to get anti-gambling laws on local ballots, resulting in shutdowns of the casinos. They'd then advise the tribe to pay them to lobby for their reopening.

In the film, C-Span footage shows the hearings run by Sen. John McCain (R.). A tribal leader states that he paid Abramoff and DeLay \$3.2 million (total payoffs would amount to \$82 million).

Director Gibney included brief touches on every pie Abramoff and DeLay had their greedy fingers in: A Russian energy company, Internet gambling, the governments of Malaysia and Sudan; an Israeli telecommunications firm in which (convicted) Senator Bob Ney (R.) was involved, and the Bush 2 administration. "W" claimed he'd never met Abramoff, yet there's a photo of the two of them together.

In 2005, DeLay was indicted by a Texas grand jury on criminal charges. He denied the charges, pleading "not guilty." Republican Conference rules forced him to resign from his position as Majority Leader. The case never went before a jury.

In early March 2005, word was leaked to the *Washington Post's* Susan Schmidt about Abramoff's rackets. Her article appeared the next day, above the fold, marking his end. He was convicted of conspiracy, tax evasion, and mail fraud. Now in a prison outside of D.C., he is due to be released in December.

Regardless of the hearings, the jail time, nothing will change. If anything, things will most likely get worse now that, in January, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations can contribute unlimited funds to political ads for election campaigns.

DeLay was last seen as a contestant on the reality show, "Dancing with the Stars," but dropped out due to stress fractures on his feet. Gibney ends his film with a clip of DeLay in a brown velvet vest and flared pants dancing the cha cha with partner Cheryl Burke to "Wild Thing." Indeed. ■

... Obama & Afghanistan

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"The father's eyes reddened with tears as he hefted an English textbook that had belonged to his ninth-grade son, Habibuddin. The boy, along with eight other people, was shot dead this month when American special-operations forces swooped down on the family's remote mud-brick compound in the dead of night.

"There were no Talibs here—none," Rafiuddin Kushkaki, the owner of the sun-yellowed wheat fields ringing the rural compound, declared in a defiant voice that trailed off into a sob. "Someone tricked the Americans. They made a mistake."

The "special-ops" units are notorious in the military for making "mistakes." The regular troops hate them because they are convinced that they create messes that have to be cleaned up by the ordinary soldiers. There have been enough atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan by regular troops but increasing use of "special ops" will almost certainly lead to a multiplication of atrocities, with even less accountability than there is for the regular forces. And the direction that the U.S. operations are heading in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is clearly more "special ops," both by U.S. government forces and the mercenary corporations fed from the U.S. Treasury.

The *New York Times* obtained a secret order by General Petraeus from last September. It reported: "The top American commander in the Middle East has or-

dered a broad expansion of clandestine military activity in an effort to disrupt militant groups or counter threats in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and other countries in the region, according to defense officials and military documents."

The article noted that the document did not authorize any specific strikes. But the implication certainly was that it was authorizing and expanding clandestine military action. *The Times* went on to point out: "Unlike covert actions undertaken by the C.I.A., such clandestine activity does not require the president's approval or regular reports to Congress...."

In the May 25 *Nation*, Jeremy Scahill reported: "The United States military is in the process of taking bids from private war contractors to secure and ship massive amounts of US military equipment through sensitive areas of Pakistan into Afghanistan where it will then be distributed to various US Forward Operating Bases and other facilities."

The terms of the contract being offered stipulate that the companies bidding on it must accept responsibility for defending the shipments, including intelligence operations (which could include allegedly preventative strikes).

Scahill continued: "Perhaps most striking about this US military contract solicitation is the admission by the military that contractors are being used for shipping and guarding military hardware as a run-around to the current official policy of the US and Pakistan governments that the US military does not conduct operations in Pakistan.



Tyler Hicks / NY Times

(Above) U.S. soldier patrols a road near Marjah.

"Due to current limitations on having US military presence in Pakistan and threat levels precluding US Military active involvement with the contractor 'outside the wire' in Afghanistan, the contractor must be proactive at identifying appropriate methods for obtaining the necessary in-transit visibility information, according to the contract solicitation."

In all, it is clear that the U.S. government is expanding clandestine military operations over an entire region and intensifying them, and thus that the U.S. is being dragged in an escalating war of an unforeseeable scope. Moreover, it is just as clear that extent of these operations is being concealed from the American public and further and further removed from any possible democratic accountability through the use of private mercenary

companies.

The dangers of this process are obvious. The American public dare not be passive in the face of them. It is essential to expose them as widely as possible and to protest in the streets against them.

And to be effective, mass protests in the United States have to be independent of the Democratic Party, whose administration is not only continuing the war policies of its avowedly neoliberal predecessor but escalating them, just as it is continuing and deepening the turn to mercenary "murder for profit" corporations to do the dirty work of the big corporations, which are the only ones that profit from them. ■

Obama's Afghanistan policy — Incoherent or perverse?

By GERRY FOLEY

There is still no evidence that the U.S. government has any perspective of either withdrawing from Afghanistan or achieving its stated objectives there. The May 25 issue of the *Huffington Post* carried an article reporting an analysis by the well known—and by no means left—journalist, Andrew Sullivan, which argued that Obama's policy is "incoherent."

"He [Sullivan] was responding to Gen. Stanley McChrystal's thus far unsuccessful attempts to secure the town of Marjah in Helmand Province. Earlier this year, McChrystal tried to stamp out Afghan insurgents based in the town and immediately install a new local government, boasting, 'We've got a government in a box, ready to roll in.'

"But insurgents remain active in Marjah, undermining McChrystal's attempts to gain the confidence of the people living there. One tribal leader told *Wired* that in Marjah, by day there is government, by night it's the Taliban [in control]. Earlier this week, McChrystal admitted the Marjah operation was failing, calling it a 'bleeding ulcer.'"

The operation in Marjah, a small area, was supposed to be a test for a major U.S.-led offensive against the Taliban in Kandahar, the country's second largest city. But it is clear that the test was a failure. What conclusion has the U.S. government taken from that?

Moreover, the U.S. forces' slaughter of Afghan civilians is becoming more and more of an international scandal. It is notorious now that it is provoking increasing hatred of the foreign interventionist forces among the Afghan people.

The Economist, the most prestigious journal of British big business, reported in its May 27 issue: "The nightmare began with gunfire. Residents of this poor village in eastern Afghanistan were jolted awake by what sounded like shooting from their guards at thieves outside their compound. Moments later, they say, soldiers spilled over the walls in a flurry of grenades and bullets that left at least eight people dead, including a father and his four sons. The American army said the raid's targets were militants, including a Taliban sub-commander, who was killed. Two insurgents were captured, it said, along with automatic rifles and 'communications equipment.'"

The local people told a very different story. "Within hours a mob of hundreds of neighbours and relations filled the streets, wielding torches and throwing stones, to chants of 'Death to America' and 'Long Live the Taliban.' Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's president, and Gul Agha Sherzai, a former warlord from Kandahar who now governs Nangarhar province, were similarly cursed. Some protesters smashed windows in an attempt to storm local-government offices. The police



(Above) Taliban fighters on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (2001 file photo).

The U.S. slaughter of civilians, shrugged off as 'mistakes,' is provoking increasing hatred among the Afghan people of foreign forces intervening in their country.

shot back, killing at least one more person."

This continues a pattern that became obvious in Iraq. The U.S. military would announce that it had carried out a brilliant operation dealing a powerful blow at the insurgency. And the local people would say that they killed some children and old women.

The U.S. military command has announced some measures to try to limit civilian casualties. But *The Economist* pointed out that they "do not apply to

special-forces units. Engaged in 'black' operations to disrupt the Taliban leadership structure, they worry consultation might jeopardise their campaign.

"Dozens of commanders are said to have been captured or killed ahead of a southern offensive soon to be mounted around Kandahar. But the tactical impact of their operations has to be weighed against the cost fatal mistakes exact in local goodwill."

The cost of such "mistakes" is still greater because such special-op raids are being carried out not only in areas controlled by the Taliban but in quiet areas firmly in control of the U.S. client government—such as Koshkaky, a town near Jalalabad. An *Economist* reporter talked to local people: "A neighbour of the victims in Koshkaky speaks for many: 'If the Americans do this again, we are ready to shed our blood against them. We would rather die than sit by and do nothing.'"

The *Los Angeles Times* of May 24 reported another tragedy resulting from U.S. special ops night raid:

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Red Shirts regroup after massacre by Thai troops

By CLAY WADENA

As this article goes to press, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of Thailand has announced the end of the curfew in place in Bangkok and 23 other provinces. The curfew was called because of a nine-week rally in Bangkok by the rural and urban poor who make up the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (commonly referred to as the "Red Shirts").

While the curfew is indeed being eliminated, and foreign governments have scaled down their travel alerts for Thailand, the Thai government has left in place the emergency laws decreed in early April (when the protest began) that gives the army broader powers, suspends certain civil liberties, bans public gatherings of more than five people, and censors media deemed to "cause panic."

Many Red Shirt leaders languish in prison, facing possible death with no bail. Meanwhile, the Thai government just declared the closure of four publications that it linked to the protests and asked Interpol to help it locate and seize former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whom they accuse of terrorism in connection with the protests.



(Left) Thai soldiers fire on protesters encamped in central Bangkok, May 19.

The millionaire former prime minister, who was overthrown in a bloodless coup carried out in 2006 by Thailand's military and elite, had become a symbol for the pro-democracy Red Shirt movement.

The Red Shirts attracted a mass following of people fed up with repeated

military coups and the wide gap between the rich and poor of Thailand. Impoverished rural people have been noted to be the backbone of the movement; this sector also yearns for a land reform to help make ends meet.

Former Prime Minister Thaksin, in what he represents to the multi-class

Red Shirt movement, resembles in many ways deposed President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras. Both leaders were very wealthy themselves, but when they came to power pursued mild populist agendas that began to threaten the rigid social hierarchies that exist in both Honduras and Thailand.

Because they pursued populist causes and were overthrown by military coups, the rural poor in both countries rallied in huge mobilizations that challenged the coup-makers and expressed support for a more equal and just society. In both instances the demands raised by protesters went beyond support for the deposed leaders, even though they remain major symbols of these respective movements.

The rally in Bangkok by the Red Shirts was essentially an occupation of a portion of the business district. The main demand was for the current prime minister to immediately call new elections. But Prime Minister Abhisit offered to call elections only in November and eventually sent in heavily armed troops to disperse the peaceful protesters

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