

U.S. Hands Off Libya!

Victory to the Libyan People's Uprising!

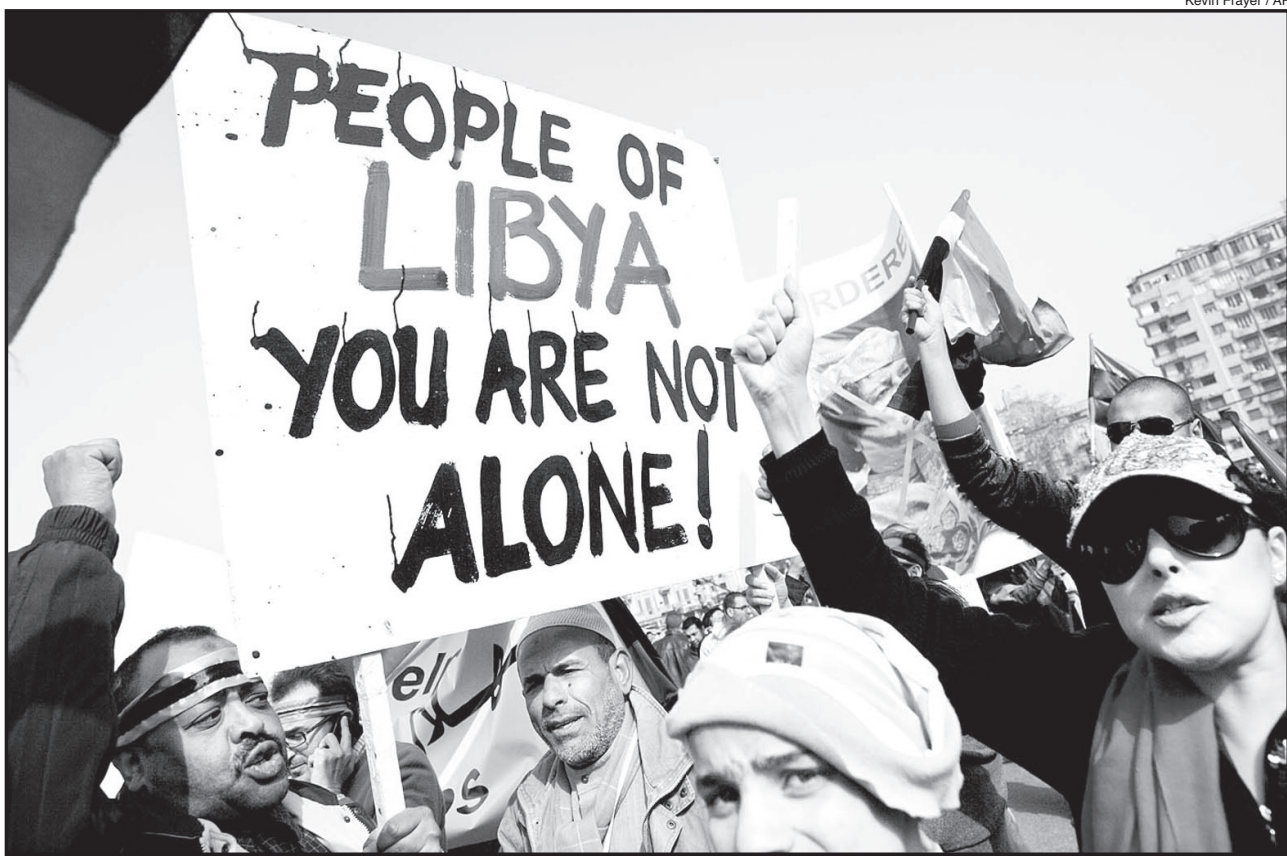
By ANDREW POLLACK

In late February the masses of Libya revolted against the regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi. As we go to press, the opposition controls the country's second largest city, Benghazi, and other cities in the oil-rich eastern part of the country as well as many towns in the west. Qaddafi maintains control in the capital, Tripoli, and is trying to retake other cities. Pro-Qaddafi army, militia, and mercenary units have inflicted high casualties on the civilian population—often using tanks and warplanes in their strikes.

The political character of the opposition seems to be as mixed as in other Arab countries in revolt. But whereas in Egypt and Tunisia the military forced out the dictators before a full-scale confrontation with enraged masses could begin—a confrontation that could have meant a split in the army and defection of soldiers to the revolution—in Libya significant sections of the military (and diplomatic) hierarchy split from Qaddafi almost immediately, sensing correctly that Qaddafi would not go so quietly.

In towns liberated from Qaddafi's regime, the same kind of self-organization by the masses seen in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and elsewhere is taking place, as people's committees have taken over provision of basic services and maintenance of order, including keeping oil flowing. A layer of middle-class professionals—doctors, lawyers, academics, etc.—appear to have appointed themselves heads of these committees and of a coordinating group called the Libyan National Council. Alongside them are military committees created by defecting officers.

Smelling a chance to intervene and set up a new puppet



Kevin Frayer / AP

(Above) Egyptians demonstrate in Cairo's Tahrir Sq. in solidarity with Libyan revolt, Feb. 25.

government, world powers got the UN Security Council to vote for sanctions against the regime, arranged for the International Criminal Court to indict Qaddafi (the same Court which has repeatedly refused to indict Zionist war criminals), and began threatening use of military force.

Within the resistance, defectors from Qaddafi's regime and the middle-class forces who have appointed themselves leaders are calling for Western intervention, most commonly in the form of "no-fly zones," while claiming to be opposed to the introduction of ground troops. The rank and file of the popular committees, in contrast, appear willing and eager to use their mass armed power to finish the battle with Qaddafi.

It is important to stand with the workers, peasants,

and youth of Libya in their fight to finish off the tyrannical, capitalist Qaddafi regime. We must also give them our political support in their fight against the quislings who would turn over Libya to imperialist intervention. Such pleas are sometimes made for "humanitarian" reasons (protecting refugees or preventing mass slaughter) and sometimes out of supposed military necessity—ignoring the ability of the armed masses to do the job.

Proof of the need to mobilize against intervention is manifold. U.S. warships are on the way, and Obama has

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April 9 & 10 antiwar rallies to express solidarity with Wisconsin workers

By CHRISTINE MARIE

"Stop the War on the Unions! Money for Jobs and Education, Not for War and Occupation!" So began a leaflet distributed by United National Antiwar Committee supporters at the Feb. 26 rally of 100,000 workers at the Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison.

UNAC team members traveled from Minneapolis, Virginia, and Vermont to display a 12-foot banner at the rally and distribute thousands of flyers for the April 9 national antiwar march in New York City. (A West Coast antiwar mobilization will take place in San Francisco on April 10.) While the demand to use the trillions spent on war to stop the cuts by state governments has not really been part of the dialogue in Wisconsin or other states, UNAC activists found that marchers were very open to the antiwar message.

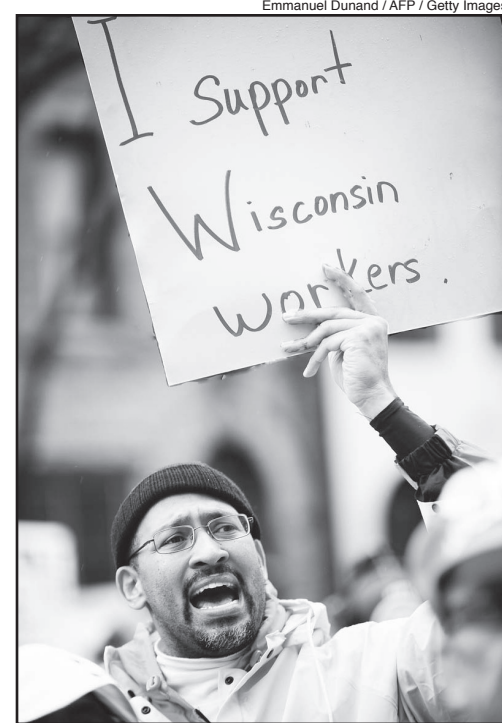
UNAC activists set up shop at a local union-friendly coffee house and got out a statement that argued: "A \$3.9 billion

budget deficit in Wisconsin was cited as the reason for attacking the public worker unions. That claim is phony. What Walker did not say was that Wisconsin taxpayers have been forced to pay billions to fund U.S.-led wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, send drones to Pakistan, support dictators and maintain more than 800 military bases worldwide costofwar.com. In addition, more billions have been given to the wealthy and powerful in massive bailouts and tax breaks."

Truly, the demand, "Money for Jobs, not for War!" has never been more appropriate or timely. According to UNAC team leader Phil Wilayto, everyone they met was very open to this message. "I don't know of anyone who got a negative comment," he said.

That working people are ever more open to the links between cuts in social services, attacks on living standards,

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Emmanuel Dunand / AFP / Getty Images

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Civil-liberties supporters hold conferences against FBI repression

By DAVID BERT

Joseph Ryan / special to Socialist Action

CHICAGO—Supporters of the 23 antiwar, international solidarity, and trade-union activists who have been subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury have continued to organize a broad defense against this government witch hunt. The 23 activists have been subpoenaed to answer questions related to solidarity trips they made to Palestine and Colombia.

U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald and the FBI have targeted the activists in an attempt to intimidate and criminalize all antiwar and international solidarity activism.

Over 800 people attended regional conferences in February in New York, Chicago, Oakland, and Chapel Hill, N.C., to organize the fightback against this attack on civil liberties and free speech. The subpoenaed activists reiterated their refusal to participate in the grand jury, and vowed to continue the fight.

In Oakland, Calif., on Feb. 12, Tom Burke, a leader of the Committee to Stop FBI Repression, told the crowd that the targeted activists were proud of their antiwar work and their efforts in solidarity with the Palestinian and Colombian people. In Chicago on Feb. 12, Jose Lopez, director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, told of his own experience before a grand jury and his refusal to participate, which resulted in a several-month prison sentence for contempt.

The Committee to Stop FBI repression has called a March 8 national call-in day. Organizers are asking supporters to call Attorney General Eric Holder, U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, and President Obama to demand an end to the grand jury. For the phone num-



(Photo) Jan. 25 rally in San Francisco against FBI harassment of antiwar activists.

bers, see www.stopfbi.net.

Meanwhile, at a March 4 press conference, attorneys for Mick Kelly announced plans to proceed with a lawsuit against police from an incident during the protests against the Republican National Convention in

the Twin Cities in 2008. Mick Kelly, who is one of the 23 subpoenaed activists, was shot by a police officer at close range in his stomach with a high velocity marking projectile.

The lawyers announced plans to subpoena "Karen Sullivan," an undercover FBI agent who infiltrated the Twin Cities antiwar movement for two years. Law enforcement failed to reveal the presence of an undercover agent in an earlier lawsuit.

Jess Sundin, one of the main organizers of the protest at the Republican Convention, a leader of the Twin Cities-based Minnesota Anti-War Committee, and one of the subpoenaed activists, stated, "There is a pattern of repression against antiwar activists before, during, and after the Republican National Convention. They sent in police agents to spy, and used violence on protesters at the RNC. To top it off, they continued their spying and raided our homes and office on Sept. 24, 2010. Many of us who organized the march at the RNC have received summons to appear in front of a Chicago grand jury. This is wrong, and we are pushing back." ■

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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!

SOCIALIST ACTION. Closing news date: March 6, 2011

Editor: Michael Schreiber International Editor: Gerry Foley Canada Editor: Barry Weisleder

Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. BOX 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — \$20. All other countries — \$30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor. It is printed by members of Local 583, Allied Printing Trades Council, San Francisco, Calif.

SOCIALIST ACTION

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Scapegoating of Muslims on the rise

By CHRISTINE MARIE

U.S. activists celebrated the revolts in North Africa, not only for their potential to free millions in the Arab world from U.S.-backed dictators, austerity, and repression but for their potential to roll back Islamophobia inside North America. Photos of the resurgent labor movement demonstrations in Wisconsin revealed that U.S. workers felt a new and deep bond with the Arab and Muslim masses fighting back against rulers trying to make them pay for the failures of the global capitalist system.

Pictures of Madison demonstrators' placards bearing slogans like "Egypt Had It Right!" have been passed around the internet as evidence that the attempts of U.S. rulers to whip up anti-Muslim and pro-war fervor face new obstacles. Nevertheless, the battle against the anti-Islamic efforts of Washington and its supporters is far from over.

On Feb. 13, a mob of around 200 right-wing extremists bullied the attendees arriving at a Yorba Linda, Calif., Islamic Council of North America fundraiser for women's shelters. The bigots were rallied by Villa Park city council member Deborah Pauly, who pointed to the Muslim families walking by and said, "That is pure and unadulterated evil!" She continued, to growing applause, "I know a lot of Marines who would be happy to send these terrorists to an early meeting in Paradise!" (See video via www.cair.com.)

On Feb. 22, approximately 100 inter-faith opponents of the McCarthyite and anti-Muslim Congressional hearings scheduled this month by Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) were confronted at his office in Massapequa, Long Island, by an equal number of rightists shouting, "No Home-Grown Terrorism" and "We Support Peter King!" The Tea Party-type coalition was made up of some of the same groups that came together to stop the building of an Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero, and included extreme right-wing Zionist and Hindu organizations.

About 500 people participated in an important protest on March 6 in Times Square against the racist King hearings. The "Today, I am a Muslim, Too!" rally was initiated by 76 faith-based groups and was addressed by 25 prominent clerics, including Rabbi Michael Feinberg of the Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, the Rev. Michael Ellick of Judson Memorial Church, Rev. Michael Kinnamon of the National Council of Churches, Rev. Amandus J. Derr of St. Peter's Church,



Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP



Jessica Rinaldi / Reuters

(Above) March 6 interfaith rally in Times Square.
(Left) House Homeland Security chair Peter King.

and Dr. Peter Rubenstein of Central Synagogue.

Counter-protesters built a nearby action by claiming that Americans must defend the U.S. Constitution from sharia law. While claims that Muslims are plotting to impose sharia and the caliphate in the U.S. are absurd, these right-wing populist lunacies go hand in hand with a national campaign to facilitate the introduction in 15 states of legislation that would forbid state courts from considering Muslim community norms in child custody or prisoner rights cases. This legislative campaign is the brainchild of Arizona-based attorney, white supremacist, and anti-Semite David Yerushalmi.

A recent bill introduced in Tennessee, Senate Bill 1028, goes further, creating the crime of "material support" to Islamic law and making that crime punishable by 15 years in prison. The goal of the Tennessee bill seems to center on provisions that give the state attorney general the right to freeze the assets of groups that the state finds to be promoting sharia law. This would provide just one more tool to the war makers who want to demonize the major Muslim American charity and civil liberties organizations, state by state if necessary, as part of their broader campaign to prolong military intervention into the Middle East.

It is in this context that Rep. Peter King's Homeland Security Hearings on "radical Islam" are unfolding. The intent of the hearing, which opens on March 10, has become clearer to a broad range of Americans as King's roster of "expert" witnesses has come to light.

One of the first to be announced was Walid Phares, the head of the World Lebanese Organization, whose leaders are known to have committed torture and atrocities during the Lebanese civil war. Phares was a member of the right-wing Christian militia found responsible for carrying out the massacres at the Shabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in 1982.

Phares was dropped after a blast of negative publicity, but then the media reported that the Dutch anti-Islam propagandist Ayaan Ali Hirsi was scheduled to testify. Hirsi is known to have suggested that the U.S. Constitution be amended to allow discrimination against Muslims. And despite repeated challenges, King insists that over 80% of the mosques in the U.S. are dominated by "radical Islam."

The events in Egypt that have so inspired working people rising up to challenge cutbacks and job loss provide the perfect basis for building a powerful movement that can force an end to King's witch hunt. The April 9 and 10 national antiwar marches in New York and San Francisco, rallies at which the defense of Muslim civil liberties will be prominent, promise to be important rebukes to the Islamophobes.

The United National Antiwar Committee (www.un-peace.org) and the Muslim Peace Coalition (<http://muslimpeacecoalitionusa.yolasite.com/>), two of the central groups sponsoring the April demonstrations, urge all their supporters to immediately bring together Muslim civil liberties and antiwar activists in their areas, to mount united responses to the King hearings, and to use these efforts to build the national demonstrations. ■

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and the spending on wars abroad was evidenced by the endorsement of the April 9 demonstration by one of the most important unions in the Northeast and the largest single union in the country, SEIU 1199 United Healthcare Workers East. Union President George Gresham organized a presentation by Malik Mujahid of the Muslim Peace Coalition and Joe Lombardo of UNAC to the 200-person 1199 executive board on Feb. 18, and after deliberations the leadership body voted to endorse April 9 under the slogan, "Money for Jobs, Not War."

Gresham's group led the effort to initiate the Oct. 2 One Nation Rally in Washington, D.C., and it is hoped that his efforts will be the first of many more union efforts to build the spring antiwar marches.

The 1199 endorsement was one of a large number of supporters signing on to the April 9 and 10 demonstrations. In Northern California, SEIU Local 1021, with 25,000 members, voted for endorsement as well. In addition, New York State Peace Action, a group with more than 15 chapters, debated and approved support on Feb. 26. Overall, more than 500 organizations, national and grassroots, have signed on to build the spring actions.

The growing list of endorsers reflects the significant outreach underway. UNAC attendance continues at the numerous rallies sponsored by the communities of North Africans who have been mobilizing in solidarity with the revolt against the dictators.

Recognizing that any imperialist intervention into Libya would undoubtedly set the stage for more overt interference in all of the revolutions unfolding in the region, UNAC quickly issued the following statement: "At great risks to their lives, activists organizing to oppose oppressive, dictatorial regimes in the Middle East and North Africa have inspired us by their courage and determination. We ruefully

acknowledge past and continuing U.S. support for dictatorships and military rule in the region. We recognize that the U.S. has been directly involved in supplying weapons and other forms of support to regimes that have committed atrocious human rights abuses against civilians.

"Conscious of our responsibility to stop the United States from further manipulations that would interfere with movements on behalf of true democratic developments in other countries, UNAC calls for an immediate halt to U.S. intervention in regions and countries where mass mobilizations are challenging oppressive regimes."

"We have seen the horrific consequences of U.S./UN-imposed economic sanctions against Iraq, as well as the consequences of U.S./UN operation of "no-fly zones" over northern and southern Iraq, prior to the U.S. Shock and Awe attacks and invasion. We therefore oppose any form of U.S. military or economic intervention in Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia and other countries where movements are rising in opposition to dictatorships and military rule."

UNAC's quick response and carefully crafted statement undoubtedly contributed to the prompt and growing consensus among peace forces that a "no-fly zone" and other deadly measures could bring no genuine aid to the forces fighting for democracy and self-determination.

With the threats of intervention into Libya so palpable, it is easy to forget just how violent are the continued occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the drone and CIA attacks in Pakistan. We are now entering the 11th year of the occupation of Afghanistan, and last year alone over 700 invading soldiers and 10,000 Afghans died.

This situation demands that the entire antiwar movement use coming weeks to assure the largest turnout possible on April 9 and April 10. The April 9 New York City march and rally assembles at 12 noon in Union Square. The April 10 San Francisco march and rally assembles in Dolores Park at 11 a.m. For more information on the April demonstrations and how to get involved, see www.un-peace.org, (518) 227-6947. ■

Cracks in the Empire

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Despite what talking heads in corporate media proclaim, there hasn't been a revolution in the North African countries of Tunisia or Egypt, or the Persian Gulf's Bahrain. These have been rebellions. For revolutions transform whole societies—they just don't remove a few leaders.

That's why much of U.S. reporting is so misleading. They want to call it a revolution, applaud it, and freeze it, while their handpicked leaders or purchased armies seize the reins of power.

That said, isn't it curious that most of the countries where rebellions are most widespread are headed by presidents or princes who are U.S. allies? And these allies have used their armies and police to suppress their people, who oppose deeply unpopular policies of their rulers?

These rebellions pose serious challenges to the U.S. empire, for they threaten to dismantle the repressive regimes that undergird U.S. Middle East policy. They are still building, still emerging, across the entire region, and espousing a democracy that the U.S. neither wants nor truly supports.

Remember the indecision with which it initially faced Egyptian unrest? "Nonviolence on both sides?" When one side has tanks, guns, helicopter gun ships, and fighter jets, and the other side has—well, sticks—what can that mean? The U.S. wants quiet. Period.

For, if the choice is between democracy and stability, it'll opt for stability every time, for globalization requires stability, and globalization is the instrument of empire. Indeed, it is but another word for colonialism—the control of other states by a central, imperial state.

But this empire is also a debtor nation, which manufactures little, and has to beg abroad to pay its vast armies, and support its global apparatus. As colonies peel away, or are taken back by their people, the empire decays, first by inches, then by feet, and soon—by miles.

We may be witnessing the end of something huge.

— © MAJ 2011



(Left) Tens of thousands demonstrate in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, Libya, Feb. 25.

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declared that “all options are on the table.” U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Washington was “reaching out” to opposition groups and was prepared to offer “any kind of assistance.” Meanwhile, the British have already sent military “advisers” to work with opposition military leaders, NATO has instructed its member countries’ military leaders to prepare for “all eventualities,” and several European countries have already used their militaries for “rescue missions.”

Of course, there is hypocrisy in calling for a no-fly zone against Libya without asking why one is not imposed against the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan to prevent murderous bombings like the one that slaughtered nine children in the first week of March, one of hundreds of such atrocities.

Moreover, National Public Radio quoted a number of Benghazi residents saying they did not want foreign intervention, their correspondent reporting their desire to “get rid of Qaddafi finally themselves.” Numerous similar quotes have appeared in the media.

Evidence of the masses’ willingness to fight can be seen in the long lines of volunteers in Benghazi waiting to sign up, as well as the pitched battles, often victorious, fought by citizen militias to take and retake cities. Their courage and determination could be seen on March 4 when, despite the reign of terror, several hundred demonstrators gathered in Tajura, an area east of the capital still under Qaddafi’s control, and braved tear gas and live ammunition.

U.S. military officials themselves note that a no-fly zone would mean shooting down Libyan planes, bombing anti-aircraft sites, and putting ships and thousands of personnel in place as support. And such a zone would, as in Iraq, likely be a prelude to the introduction of ground troops who would—again, as in Iraq—guard oil fields while ignoring (or even taking part in) the massacres of civilians.

While the masses have expressed a desire to march on Tripoli—and residents in that city are awaiting a force that would give them the slightest window of opportunity to rise up and crush Qaddafi’s murderous forces—the defecting military officers hope to postpone a final confrontation with Qaddafi. Their plea for aid from the U.S. and Europe is a signal that they are ready to collaborate in setting up a new pro-Western regime, and that they dread the kind of radical demands being put forward by the masses throughout the Arab world.

A coalition of over 200 Arab non-governmental organizations and intellectuals has called for “immediate contingency plans for international intervention ... including a no-fly zone. ... The window of opportunity to prevent further atrocities from occurring is closing fast.” Some liberals in the West, such as Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, are counterposing to no-fly zones calls for armed UN “humanitarian missions”—despite the murderous, repressive record of just such a mission in recent years in Haiti.

In contrast, the United National Antiwar Committee issued a “Statement on U.S. Non-Intervention in Libya and Other Countries,” which declared: “UNAC calls for an immediate halt to U.S. intervention in regions and countries where mass mobilizations are challenging oppressive regimes. ... We therefore oppose any form of U.S. military or economic intervention in Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia and other countries where movements are rising in opposition to dictatorships

and military rule.”

Radical activist and author Arundhati Roy has noted that “those who really want to support the popular movement have to resolutely oppose sanctions (let’s not forget the slow genocides in Iraq in the name of ‘democracy’ and in Gaza right now); of course, we also have to fight any military intervention.”

Roy pointed out that “there are forces in Libya—as well as in Egypt and in Tunisia—who seek salvation in the West, but the main forces of the rebellion are the middle and lower classes, and they combine democratic demands with social and anti-imperialist demands. ... An alternative power seems to take shape in and around Benghazi. ... There is a chance to experiment with people’s power, and we have to support that.

“The Western media are hoping for a color revolution like those staged in eastern Europe, but the Arab world has been the victim of 150 years of brutal colonialism and neo-colonialism, permanent Israeli aggression, numerous U.S.-led wars, neoliberal pillage. ... A few rabid liberal democracy criers won’t be enough to turn around the legitimate hatred of the masses against the West which has been nurtured for generations.”

Such clarity is not universal, however, where some still have illusions fostered by Qaddafi’s anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist bombast. Numerous writers, both mainstream and alternative, have pointed to Qaddafi’s turn toward imperialism in recent years, his opening of the country’s economy to foreign capital and to IMF-dictated austerity programs and privatization, and his joining in the “War on Terror,” all accompanied by harsher repression to stifle dissent against this turn.

It must be noted, however, that even at the height of his supposed anti-imperialist policies, Libya remained a capitalist state. The rhetoric against imperialism, the money donated to Arab and other liberation groups, and the services granted to the masses from the country’s oil revenue were all doled out under conditions decided by Qaddafi and his regime, with no input from workers and peasants. Qaddafi’s nationalizations of foreign banks and oil companies no more made Libya a workers’ state than did similar measures in Egypt under Nasser or Iraq under Hussein.

Unfortunately, much of the left fell for his rhetoric, as they had—and still do—for other bourgeois populists in neocolonial countries.

Particularly disappointing is the role of Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortega, and Fidel Castro in their one-sided, if correct, denunciation of imperialism’s interests and intentions in this affair, while denying or ignoring Qaddafi’s repression and murders. Chavez even offered to mediate the dispute—an offer immediately rejected by the resistance. Numerous Latin American revolutionaries reacted with horror to the stances of these three leaders, worrying that the potential for solidarity between the masses of the Arab world and Latin America was being destroyed.

But the masses of Libya, as throughout the Arab world, have shown they no longer want or need help from condescending saviors (to borrow a phrase from “The Internationale”). Beside their willingness to fight arms in hand, the other major weapon the insurgents have is the deepening of their revolution, the development of a program that would make clear to the population in Tripoli that a mass rising against Qaddafi is worth risking, as it would bring political freedom, social justice, and far better economic conditions.

Such a program would necessarily seek to replace the capitalist economic system with one that serves the needs of the working people of Libya, and is controlled by them. And it would raise the call for a pan-Arab “Socialist United States” spanning the artificial

borders that the colonialists erected throughout the Middle East.

Real News Network quoted Benghazi residents celebrating “a new-found unity with Arab nations. They raised the flags of Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine.” Said one: “I’m proud to be an Arab. Lift your head up high! We are Arabs!” This is very significant for the rebels’ chance of success—and for the chance of victory in all the blossoming struggles.

Egyptians and Tunisians have been assisting the uprising, ferrying food and other aid across the borders, providing health care, helping the resistance get around the internet blackout, and sharing tactical advice on confronting repression.

This pan-Arab solidarity should serve as inspiration for an even more urgently needed type of solidarity—that with the hundreds of thousands of super-exploited workers and peasants of Chad and other African countries now in Libya. Used for years by Qaddafi as cheap labor and cannon fodder, they are now reportedly the victims of harassment and even murder by backward forces within the resistance, supposedly because they are being mistaken for mercenaries imported by Qaddafi.

These tragic events too can be traced back to Qaddafi’s divide-and-rule tactics, done at the behest of his new imperialist friends. Author Machetera of the Tlaxcala translation service noted that “in order to normalize relations with the European Union, Qaddafi became the guardian of concentration camps where thousands of Africans headed for Europe are held.”

Such Arab-African solidarity is especially possible given that revolts are happening right now in several sub-Saharan African countries. A revolutionary leadership must be forged in Libya that protects African workers in Libya, and at the same time fosters a unity of the Arab and African revolutions—the kind of unity demonstrated in theory and practice by the best of the Algerian revolutionaries in their struggle against French colonization.

The mass antiwar demonstrations on April 9 in New York City and April 10 in San Francisco are an opportunity to loudly raise the call against U.S. intervention in Libya and for self-determination by the Libyan people. “U.S. hands off Libya and the entire Middle East!” ■

The rest of the Arab nation steps forward

By ANDREW POLLACK

In the last month, the Arab revolution has spread to virtually every country in the region. In Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Djibouti, and even Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, repeated rallies ranging from hundreds to hundreds of thousands have occurred, met sometimes with murderous repression, sometimes with grudging and pathetic reforms. In several cases murders by the ruling regime have led protesters to drop their demands for constitutional monarchies and instead demand republics. Often there have been workers’ strikes; these are countries, let us not forget, with heroic histories of labor and radical organizing (see Fred Halliday’s “Arabia Without Sultans” for more on this).

The strategic importance of the revolts in the Gulf States is heightened by the presence in Bahrain, next to the Gulf’s strongest power, Saudi Arabia, of the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, a base that has been the launching pad for U.S. wars in the region. In many of these countries the same steps in self-organization taken by the masses in Cairo’s Tahrir Square have appeared.

Repeated mass protests have occurred even in U.S.-occupied Iraq, demanding services such as water and electricity. The murder by the regime of dozens, and the detention and torture of hundreds, during these protests was met with silence by an Obama administration too busy threatening war against Libya.

In Lebanon there were two days of protest for non-confessional government (the country’s election system guarantees wealthier Sunnis’ domination by allotting seats in parliament by religion, based on a census out of proportion to actual population figures).

The victories in Egypt and Tunisia have inspired Palestinians to step up their struggle. Rallies in solidarity with the Arab revolt and against the quisling Palestinian Authority have taken place in the face of vicious repression by the PA. In the United States, the U.S. Palestinian Community Network has launched a campaign, building on

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By ANDREW POLLACK

On Feb. 11 the masses of Egypt succeeded in driving Hosni Mubarak from office. After repeated mobilization of millions in Cairo and elsewhere, they had begun to march on state institutions in the capital (as had already happened in Suez and Alexandria). To forestall a split in the army, the military hierarchy pushed out Mubarak and declared themselves in control.

The masses celebrated with delirious joy the fall of the dictator, as did their compatriots and allies abroad. They proceeded immediately to mobilize to get rid of the Mubarak-appointed cabinet ministers and to demand from the military the fulfillment of their still unsatisfied program for freedom and social justice.

Workers in Egypt and in Tunisia are using the new space afforded them to continue to demand meaningful political change and to strike for their own economic needs, at company and industry level as well as nationwide.

Tunisians have continued to demonstrate and strike, forcing all the ministers of the ruling party, including the prime minister, to resign one by one in the weeks since Ben-Ali fled.

Alhem Belhadj, a Tunisian revolutionary socialist and member of the Ligue de la Gauche Ouvriere (Left Workers' League, LGO), which is part of the Jan. 14 Front uniting various left-wing groups, told *Green Left Weekly* that after the revolution, the police and militia of the former ruling party sought to destabilize the situation and create panic. So people organized themselves for self-defense: "Now we have Committees to Defend the Revolution. In a lot of regions, trade-union regional and local committees have emerged."

The post-Ben Ali regime, said Belhadj, "can't organize a constituent assembly. They can't provide social justice. So we are asking people to organize themselves to do these tasks. The LGO is sponsoring a conference of revolutionary organizations of the Arab region in Tunis in late March.

In Egypt, the masses forced the resignation of Ahmed Shafiq, the prime minister appointed by Mubarak. Western ruling classes and their media see hope in the new Egyptian regime for a "corruption-free" capitalism—ignoring the fact that the billions appropriated by Egypt's ruling class in recent years, as in the U.S., was traceable to the nor-

Egypt, Tunisia inspire struggles worldwide

Mohammed Abed / AFP / Getty Images



(Left) Egyptians celebrate on army tank after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Feb. 11.

population." To gain space to do so, "the Tunisian and Egyptian people must be able to count on the whole of the international labor movement, [and] on all the global justice movement."

The FI noted that the dynamic of these revolutions "will inevitably encourage the mobilizations of migrant communities from the Arab region, who are overexploited and oppressed in the advanced capitalist countries"—e.g., France and elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States, where FBI, grand jury, and Homeland Security repression of Palestinians, Yemenis, and other Arab and Muslim communities is rising.

The FI also pointed to the inspirational impact the Arab revolution would have on young workers in the imperialist core. We've seen this already in Wisconsin, but it is just as relevant for youth in Europe wondering what additional steps are necessary after repeated general strikes have yet to yield concrete gains.

The FI also spoke to the duty of workers in imperialist countries to support the right of new regimes in the Arab world to cancel debts owed to imperialist banks, the restitution of the goods and financial assets of the dictators, protection of the national sovereignty of the people against the pressures of international capitalism, etc. To achieve this, direct links with unions and other organizations in the Arab world must be established.

The confrontation with the military in Egypt and Tunisia has only been postponed, not avoided. To the extent that workers' self-organization flourishes and unifies before that final confrontation, the loss of life can be drastically minimized, especially since organized workers can win over the vast bulk of the soldiers. For this process to proceed, however, the creation of mass revolutionary parties with such a strategic perspective is essential. ■

mal functioning of capitalism, in this case under conditions of a declining capitalist system ridden with crisis, in which speculative capital became the favored means of enrichment in the absence of opportunities for investment in manufacturing and services. (See Timothy Mitchell's article for MERIP on this topic.)

The masses, in contrast, are demanding the renationalization of industries given away by Mubarak and his predecessor, Anwar Sadat. Already in 2009, workers on strike—such as at the Tanta Flax and Oil Company—were raising the need for workers' control to ensure that nationalization was not just a cover, as it had been in the past, for siphoning off revenue to the country's ruling class, both private investors and military businessmen.

The military hierarchy at first threatened to break strikes, but sensing their weakness, switched quickly to pleading with workers to stay on the job. Workers on strike since Mubarak's fall have often called for their comrades in other plants to form or revive Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which were set up during the uprising to protect workplaces and neighborhoods

against attacks by Mubarak's forces.

The new independent union federation issued a statement a week after Mubarak's fall that listed a series of demands—political, economic, and social—that would take forward this process of permanent revolution (see their statement below).

Bulletins by the Bureau of the Fourth International (FI) have echoed these demands, calling for rank-and-file committees to carry forward the struggle against the remnants of the old regime through a radical program of political and social demands.

To finish not just with ousted dictator Ben Ali but with his whole system, said the FI, "will require opening a process of free elections for a Constituent Assembly. This process must be based on the organization of committees, councils, coordination and popular councils that have emerged from the process if it is not to be confiscated by a new oligarchic regime.

"In this process, the anti-capitalists will defend the key demands of a program breaking with imperialism and capitalist logic. ... This is the program of a democratic government that would be at the service of the workers and the

Egyptian independent trade union declaration

Revolution, Freedom, Social Justice!
Cairo, Feb.19.

On heroes of the 25 January revolution! We, workers and trade unionists from different workplaces which have seen strikes, occupations, and demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of workers across Egypt during the current period, feel it is right to unite the demands of striking workers that they may become an integral part of the goals of our revolution, which the people of Egypt made, and for which the martyrs shed their blood.

We present to you a workers' program which brings together our just demands, in order to reaffirm the social aspect of this revolution and to prevent the revolution being taken away from [those] at its base who should be its beneficiaries. The workers' demands which we raised before the 25 January revolution and were part of the prelude to this glorious revolution are:

1) Raising the national minimum wage and pension, and a narrowing of the gap between minimum and maximum wages so that the maximum is no more than 15 times the minimum, in order to achieve the principle of social justice which the

revolution gave birth to; payment of unemployment benefits, and a regular increment which will increase with rising prices.

2) The freedom to organize independent trade unions without conditions or restrictions, and the protection of trade unions and their leaders.

3) The right of manual workers and clerical workers, peasant farmers and professionals, to job security and protection from dismissal. Temporary workers must be made permanent, and dismissed workers to be returned to their jobs. We must do away with all excuses for employing workers on temporary contracts.

4) Renationalization of all privatized enterprises and a complete stop to the infamous privatization program which wrecked our national economy under the defunct regime.

5) Complete removal of corrupt managers who were imposed on companies in order to run them down and sell them off.

6) Curbing the employment of consultants who are past the age of retirement and who eat up 3 billion of the national income, in order to open up employment opportunities for the young.

7) Return to the enforcement of price

controls on goods and services in order to keep prices down and not to burden the poor.

8) The right of Egyptian workers to strike, organize sit-ins, and demonstrate peacefully, including those striking now against the remnants of the failed regime, those who were imposed on their companies in order to run them down prior to a sell-off. It is our opinion that if this revolution does not lead to the fair distribution of wealth it is not worth anything. Freedoms are not complete without social freedoms. The right to vote is naturally dependent on the right to a loaf of bread.

9) Health care is a necessary condition for increasing production.

10) Dissolution of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which was one of the most important symbols of corruption under the defunct regime. Execution of the legal judgments issued against it and seizure of its financial assets and documents. Seizure of the assets of the leaders of the ETUF and its member unions and their investigation.

Signed: Employee of the Meteorological Office, Ahmad Kamal, Salah Health Technicians Union, Hossam Muhammad Abdallah Ali Nurse, Sayyida Al-Sayyid Muhammad Fayiz Al-Fayyum Sugar Re-

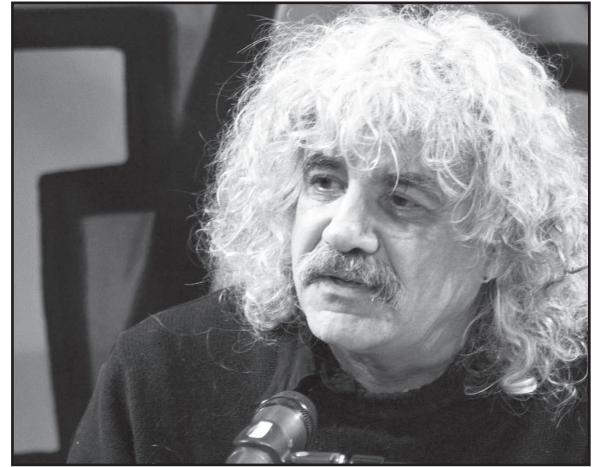
finery, Ashraf Abd al-Wanis Omar Effendi Department Store, Abd-al-Qadir Mansur Future Pipes Co, 6th October City, Hafiz Nagib Muhammad Egypt -Helwan Textiles Co., Muhammad Hassan Tora Cement, Mahmud Abd-al-Munsaf Al-Alwani Egyptian Commercial Pharmaceutical Co., Ali Mahmud Nagi Hawamidiyya Sugar Refinery.

Omar Muhammad Abd-al-Aziz Egyptian Pharmaceuticals, Muhammad Galal Suez Fertilisers Co., Shazli Sawi Shazli Military Factory No.45, Muhammad Ibrahim Hassan Military Factory No. 999, Wasif Musa Wahba General Transport Authority, Gamil Fathi Hifni Cairo General Contractors, Adil Abd-al-Na'im Al-Qanah Rope Co., Port Sa'id, Ali Hassan Abu Aita Information Centre, Hind Abd-al-Gawad Ibrahim Information Centre, Hamada Abu-Zaid Information Centre, Muhammad Khairy Zaid General Authority for Cultural Centres, Hatim Salah Sayyid National Postal Authority, Muhammad Abd-al-Hakim International IbeX Co., Ahmad Islam Military Factory 99, Tariq Sayyid Mahmud Military Factory 999, Nabil Mahmud Trade unionist, Mahmud Shukri Military Factory 999.

Ahmad Faruq Military Factory 999, Osama Al-Sayyid Future Pipe Industries, Yasir Al-Sayyid Ibrahim Tannery workers, Mahmud Ali Ahmad Future Pipe Industries, Abd-al-Rasul Abd-al-Ghani Omar Effendi Department Store, Ali Al-Sayyid Property Tax Collectors (RETAU), Kamal Abu Aita Property Tax Collectors (RETAU), Ahmad Abd-al-Sabur Property Tax Collectors (RETAU), Salah Abd-al-Hamid Property Tax Collectors (RETAU), Mahmud Umar Worker, Khalid Galal Muhammad Petrotrade Co., Muhammad Zaki Isma'il Suez Canal Co., Saud Omar Suez Fertilizers Co., Kamal el-Banna

Socialist Action holds 14th national convention

Photos on this page: Julius Arscott / Socialist Action



By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

HARTFORD, Conn.—Socialist Action held its 14th national convention here over the weekend of Feb. 25-27. Delegates and observers at the enthusiastic gathering were greatly buoyed by the recent mass upsurge in the Middle East, Europe—and the United States.

Adam Ritscher, a Socialist Action member and Steelworkers union activist from Superior, Wisconsin, underlined the links between the struggles in this country and abroad when he addressed a Saturday night public rally at the convention site. “What began in the streets of North Africa,” Ritscher said, “has now spread to the Middle West. U.S. capitalism’s globe-trotting chickens have finally come home to roost.

“In many ways Egypt was the spark that ignited the dry, brittle grass of working-class discontent that has now started a raging fire and has come to engulf even the distant pasture lands of Wisconsin.

“As socialists we know how high the stakes are, and we know how huge are the tasks before us. Fortunately, we are part of a political current that has a long and proud history of building broad effective fightbacks—from the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strike to the United National Antiwar Committee of today. That’s why it’s no surprise that Socialist Action members are right in the thick of this, from Wisconsin to the solidarity protests that are taking place all over the nation.”

Joe Lombardo, co-coordinator of the United National Antiwar Committee, reported to the public rally that a team from UNAC had distributed 4000 flyers the previous day to protesters outside the Wisconsin capitol building in Madison. The flyers expressed solidarity with the Wisconsin workers, and publicized the April 9 antiwar demonstration that will take place in New York City, centering on the slogans: “Bring the War Dollars Home,” and “Bring the Troops Home Now.”

Other speakers at the rally included Glen Ford, *Black Agenda Report* and Black is Back coalition; Blanca Misse, Student Workers Action Team (University of California, Berkeley); Nellie Bailey, Harlem Tenants Council, Black is Back Coalition; Socialist Action National Secretary Jeff Mackler; Marilyn Levin, Boston United for Justice with Peace, co-coordinator, United National Antiwar Committee; and Socialist Action (Canada) Federal Secretary Barry Weisleder (all organizations listed for identification only). The meeting also received greetings via an international telecom hook-up from Vangelis Koutalis of OKDE/Spartakos, Greek section of the 4th International.

The convention capped a three-month written and oral discussion concerning the organization’s perspectives and key tasks. The discussion was open to participation by all Socialist Action members. Each branch then elected delegates to the convention, whose job it was to consider, debate, and approve Socialist Action’s policies for the coming period.

At the convention, in addition to the overall Political Report given by Adam Shils, reports were delivered on international perspectives (Gerry Foley), antiwar movement (Christine Marie), immigrant rights (Lisa Luinenburg), the revolt in the Middle East and North Africa (Andrew Pollack), Fourth International (Jeff Mackler), and organizing Socialist Action (Daniel Adam).

In his Political Report, Adam Shils described how



‘As socialists we know how high the stakes are ... Fortunately, we are part of a political current that has a long and proud history of building broad and effective fightbacks.’

the ruling-class campaign for “austerity” has moved to the center of U.S. politics. In order to maximize their profits, employers—and the governmental apparatus that they control—are attempting to shift the burden of the economic crisis more and more onto the backs of the workers.

Their measures include lowering wages, benefits, and pensions; greater use of temporary and part-time workers; speeding up the job while lowering safety and health conditions; cutting back on state and federal social spending; and reducing taxes and regulations (such as environmental standards) that impinge on the privileges of the ruling class.

The Obama administration is attempting to facilitate the overall attack on U.S. working people, under the guise of a need to prune down the budget. Socialist Action’s warnings during the elections concerning Obama and the Democratic Party, Shils said, have proven right on target, as the White House implements what it calls its “turn toward (big) business.”

At the same time, the Obama administration has undertaken heightened repressive measures, expanding its targets from people in the Muslim and Arab-American immigrant community to activists in the antiwar movement. A major purpose of the administration’s scapegoating attacks and its rollback of civil liberties, Shils said, has been to provide renewed impetus to the U.S. “war on terror” and its wars abroad.

Shils highlighted the working-class mobilization against the Wisconsin state government’s plans to break the public workers’ unions. He noted that the fightback against these measures quickly grew to a size and level of militancy that has been unprecedented in recent decades, and that it had gained vast support in solidarity demonstrations across the country. He cautioned, however, that the Wisconsin struggle was vulnerable to betrayal by the top labor officials and the

(Top row, from left) Speakers at public rally: Marilyn Levin, United National Anti-War Committee co-ordinator; Nellie Bailey, Harlem Tenants Council; Joe Lombardo, UNAC co-coordinator.

(Bottom row, from left) Adam Shils gives convention Political Report; Lisa Luinenburg gives Immigrant Rights Report.

Democratic Party. Indeed, the bureaucratic officialdom had already begun to offer concessions while the mobilization was still at its peak.

In his international report, Gerry Foley pointed out the mobilizations in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and other countries are capable of providing a lasting blow to neocolonialism in the Middle East. These explosions, he said, “show how quickly what appears to be a basically stable world order can begin to crumble.”

The misery caused by the current crisis of the capitalist system, Foley said, can open the gates for worldwide upsurges by the working class and oppressed masses. But history shows that the window of success for these struggles can be very short lasting; if the movement fails to take rapid and decisive measures to deal with the crisis, it can be defeated.

He pointed out that the democratic demands of the masses in the Middle East can be fully achieved only by breaking with the current economic and social system and building a movement for socialism. But despite the formation of popular committees of administration and armed struggle in those countries—especially in Libya—there is no immediate guarantee that the working class will be able to take overall leadership of the new movements and governments. This could lead to demoralization among the forces in struggle in the Middle East.

And that is also true in other countries in which social explosions have taken place, Foley noted. The lack of leadership has been made more glaring by the capitulation of social democratic parties (primarily in Europe) and the indecisiveness of left populist regimes (as in Venezuela and Bolivia). “The need for new socialist parties is a burning one, and we can even expect revolutionary groups that are now small to play a decisive role.”

Foley also noted that economic inequality has been growing quickly in China—which has become a potential powder keg.

He said that Socialist Action does not see the recent economic reforms in Cuba, which rely on limited market mechanisms, as reflecting a major orientation to

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By GLEN FORD

Glen Ford is editor of *Black Agenda Report* and a member of the *Black is Back* coalition. Following are portions of his presentation at the Feb. 26 public rally in Hartford, Conn., sponsored by *Socialist Action*.

U.S. unable to rely on military force in its quest for world dominance

Our world faces a multiple of overlapping and interconnected crises that can only be surmounted through socialism. Those crises become more acute each day, and they are the inevitable product of late-stage capitalism. These species-threatening crises—of which global warming is only one—are insoluble without the dismantling of capitalism, which creates these crises.

Standing in the way of the global transformation that humanity must achieve is the edifice of U.S. imperialism. It's an imperialism that is increasingly stripped down to its most raw and brutal elements—military force. Its options narrow, becoming fewer and fewer every day. That is the clearest sign of imperialism's weakness—that it cannot influence events decisively except by the use of raw force.

The United States constantly seeks to achieve what it calls full-spectrum dominance, in the military sense. Their reliance on the military, which is more expensive than all the rest of the militaries of the world combined, is necessitated by the inability of finance capital to play anything but a destructive role in the world today.

Finance capital, which rules in the United States, can only survive by rigging and distorting world markets. It has become a weight that suppresses the productive forces of the world, and from which other capitalist classes of the world recoil. It is a very inflexible instrument for global rule; it can't win hearts and minds. In fact, the developing world is compelled to form compacts among themselves to organize against U.S.-dominated finance capital. Dollar dominance is something to be feared, avoided, and overcome.

And so the imperialists are increasingly reliant on their weapons. But their weapons are failing them now as well. America's growing impotence to shape world events by non-military means is what drove the United States to roll the dice in 2003 with an offensive that was designed to project American power deep into the energy-producing regions of Asia. The Iraq invasion was to have been just the beginning of that offensive. The goal of the offensive was to neutralize Russia, and to potentially cut off Chinese access to oil and gas. It was also, of course, to restore the United States to a dictatorial position in the world. So they rolled the dice, and then they lost.



Julius Arcsott / Socialist Action

'The resurgence of Arab nationalism cannot help but deal a decisive blow to U.S. imperialism. ... Washington has no idea what to do about this. They have no viable options ... not in an Arab world in the fever of nationalism.'

They lost so catastrophically that the ruling finance capitalists were compelled to bankroll the elevation of a brand-new face—a brown face named Barack Obama. But, of course, that was just a face. And it's still the same moribund, increasingly desperate imperial system. It cannot bend the world to its will despite its huge war machine.

In the 21st century, U.S. imperialism can't even bend two of the poorest nations to its will—Afghanistan and Somalia. In Afghanistan a few tens of thousands of fighters have deadlocked the United States and its NATO allies. In Somalia only a few thousand Islamic fighters have the Americans and their proxies

stymied. And so we see that U.S. imperialism's position is eroding at an accelerating pace despite ever-increasing expenditures on weapons. They are in a much worse position than they were in 2003—when they rolled the dice and they lost.

And their economic position has been shattered by the financial meltdown of 2008. Virtually the entire world, including capitalist Europe, now views American capital as a menace to their societies.

And now comes a veritable apocalypse in the making. That apocalypse is the Arab reawakening. The resurgence of Arab nationalism cannot help but deal a decisive blow to U.S. imperialism. The reawakening will be played by fits and starts, and disappointments and tragedies—but it cannot be rolled back.

Libya may well be invaded and occupied by NATO; it could happen very soon. But that will not alter this huge new factor in the human struggle. The very geopolitical region where the United States targeted numerous countries for enslavement and invasion as part of its 2003 military offensive is now coming alive with Arab nationalist fervor. ...

Any rise in nationalism in that part of the world is a catastrophe for U.S. imperialism. U.S. imperialism is the enemy of all nationalisms except our own.

Its imperative is to crush all notions of national independence. Imperialism cultivates, and creates, and imposes on nations a class of people that are willing to sell out the national interest to imperial power. That, after all, is the whole point of the imperial project. Therefore, disaster looms for U.S. imperialism with the reawakening of Arab nationalism—and that is true even if the left plays a minor role in those various countries.

Washington has no idea what to do about this. They have no viable options. The occupation of Libya may happen, but it is not viable—not in an Arab world in the fever of nationalism. ■

... Convention

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the restoration of capitalism by the Cuban leadership. While there is always a danger that such measures could foster individualism in conflict with socialist principles, the establishment of new, privatized small concerns should help improve the lives of Cuban citizens in the immediate future.

The biggest weakness of the Cuban revolutionary government, Foley said, is its lack of institutions allowing real workers' democracy. That makes it difficult to deal with incipient bureaucratization and demoralization. And it has also led to a depoliticalization of Cuban society, despite the mass enthusiasm that the Cuban Revolution has inspired.

In her antiwar report, Christine Marie pointed to the many positive opportunities to build a reinvigorated antiwar movement in this country—one that would be capable of building truly mass protests. The recent revolts in the Middle East and Northern Africa, she said, can aid the antiwar movement in gaining broad support.

"It is now much more difficult to avoid the truth," she said. "It is secular democracy and the agency of Arab working people that the U.S. ruling elite really fears. We can anticipate a real shift in understanding by millions of people in the United States. This shift, coming as it will in the midst of an unending economic crisis defined by unemployment, homelessness, untreated illness, and deepening alienation, most certainly lays the basis for revitalizing a movement against U.S. imperialist interventions abroad."

Jeff Mackler reported on the mid-February meeting in Europe of the International Committee (IC) of the Fourth International. The FI is the world socialist current (with sections in some 60 countries) with which *Socialist Action* maintains fraternal relations.

Mackler reviewed *Socialist Action's* perspectives on the major discussions and debates in the FI to-

day. He focused on the need for the Fourth International to build mass Leninist parties deeply rooted in today's unprecedented wave of general strikes and mass mobilizations, and in the emerging independent working-class councils and other fighting formations. Building mass Leninist parties at a time when the world capitalist crisis has brought millions into the streets to defend gains won in struggle decades ago, and in defense of fundamental democratic rights, is a prerequisite to forging a leadership capable of challenging capitalist prerogatives and chartering a course toward socialist revolution.

Mackler presented a critical assessment of the FI's present orientation to building vaguely defined "anti-capitalist" parties that lack clear revolutionary socialist perspectives. He criticized the tendency of these groupings to preference electoral alliances with non-revolutionary forces over united-front mass-action campaigns.

Mackler stressed the need for the FI to correct serious errors in regard to working-class independence, wherein a number of FI sections (in Brazil, Mexico, and other countries) supported and joined electoral campaigns with multi-class, pro-capitalist formations. These policies had disastrous results.

Daniel Adam noted in his organizational report that *Socialist Action* has grown steadily over the last few years, and increased its geographical spread—building new branches in Kentucky, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. SA is involved in a broad range of movement activities, and played a key role in helping to organize the United National Antiwar Committee.

Socialist Action's growth has been sparked by a new young generation of members, many of whom were elected to the incoming National Committee (the leadership body between conventions). Piper's report, and discussion from delegates, laid great stress on bolstering the political and theoretical education of all SA members; for that purpose, a comprehensive set of educational bulletins was proposed.

The convention approved a spring subscription drive for *Socialist Action* newspaper, beginning im-

mediately and ending on May 1. The basic yearly rate for subscriptions will remain at \$20, with a special introductory offer for new readers of \$5 for five months. The convention also approved a \$25,000 fund drive. This is necessitated by rising costs in our operations. For example, printing and postage costs for *Socialist Action* newspaper have risen tremendously in recent months. It is hoped that our regular readers will all contribute to the drive. ■

... The Arab nation

(continued from page 4)

the rising Arab revolt, calling for the abolition of the PA and the erection of genuinely representative institutions embracing Palestinians around the globe to lead the struggle. Palestinians are urging their Egyptian sisters and brothers to act now to demand the regime end its collaboration with Israel in the genocidal blockade of Gaza.

We can expect even more concrete solidarity and even coordination of protests across the Arab nation in coming weeks. But it is the task of revolutionaries to forge parties that can make sure this process occurs quickly and broadly enough to prevent the cooptation or crushing of these proliferating upsurges.

These revolutions will be completed when they find working-class leadership, and when they link up across the Arab nation as a whole. No one revolutionary success in any of the existing Arab countries can hold out for long against imperialist military might and economic and political subversion. But the linking of struggles under the leadership of the working class can secure victory—and inspire ongoing solidarity, and emulation, by workers in the imperialist heartlands. ■



(Left) Protesters face Iraqi police at Mosul rally against corruption and unemployment, Feb. 10.

Iraq protests met by police violence

By GERRY FOLEY

On Feb. 25, the protests against authoritarian rule that have swept the Middle East reached Iraq, a country that the United States has spent a trillion dollars on—and killed hundreds of thousands of people—under the pretext of bringing democracy. Revealingly, the protests in Iraq were met with police violence and intimidation comparable to that exercised by the discredited dictatorships in other Middle Eastern countries.

The Washington Post reported Feb. 26: “From the southern city of Basra to northern cities of Kurdistan, protesters demanded the simple dignities of adequate electricity, clean water and a decent job. As the day wore on, however, the demonstration grew violent when security forces deployed water cannons and sound bombs to disperse crowds. Iraqi military helicopters swooped toward the demonstrators in Baghdad, and soldiers fired into angry crowds in the protest here and in at least seven others across the country....

“Angry crowds seized a police station in Kirkuk, set fire to a provincial office in Mosul and rattled fences around the local governate offices in Tikrit, prompt-

ing security forces to open fire with live bullets, killing four people. Three people were killed in Kirkuk.

“Six people were killed in Fallujah and six others in Mosul, according to reports from officials and witnesses in at least seven protests. On Saturday, officials reported additional deaths: a 60-year old man in Fallujah; two people, including a 13-year old boy, in Qobaisa; and two in Ramadi, all in predominantly Sunni Anbar province.”

There were also clashes in Baghdad, where protesters tried to rush into the U.S.-fortified Green Zone in which the Maliki government shelters. The Feb. 25 *Los Angeles Times* quoted a bystander: “‘Most people want to get inside the Green Zone and ask [premier] Maliki where the country’s money is,’ said Adel, 33, a taxi driver who did not want to give his last name.”

The protesters were clearly a new force. They came out despite appeals to stay at home from the top Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Sistani, and even from the Islamist firebrand Muqtada al-Sadr. “The protests began with tumultuous calls for government reform, as about 1000 people shouted, waved flags and called out, ‘No, no to terrorists; no, no to Baathists; no, no to Maliki!’” (*The New York Times*, Feb. 25).

“By sundown in Baghdad on Friday, security forces were spraying water cannons and exploding sound bombs to disperse protesters, chasing several through streets and alleyways and killing at least three, according to a witness.” The article noted: “The reports attributed most casualties to security forces who opened fire.”

The government responded to the protests with a witch hunt worthy of the worst of the toppled dictatorships: “Iraqi security forces detained hundreds of people, including prominent journalists, artists and intellectuals, witnesses said Saturday, a day after nationwide demonstrations brought tens of thousands of Iraqis into the streets and ended with soldiers shooting into crowds.”

Arrested journalists told a horror story all too familiar in the Middle Eastern dictatorships: “Four journalists who had been released described being rounded up well after they had left a protest at Baghdad’s Tahrir Square. They said they were handcuffed, blindfolded, beaten and threatened. Ssairi and his three colleagues, one of whom had been on the radio speaking in support of protesters, said about a dozen soldiers stormed into a restaurant where they were eating dinner Friday afternoon and began beating them as other diners looked on in silence. They drove them to a side street and beat them again.

“Then, blindfolded, they were driven to the former Ministry of Defense building, which houses an intelligence unit of the Iraqi army’s 11th Division, they said. Hadi al-Mahdi, a theater director and radio anchor who has been calling for reform, said he was blindfolded and beaten repeatedly with sticks, boots and fists. One soldier put a stick into Hadi’s handcuffed hands and threatened to rape him with it, he said....

“Hadi said he was then taken to a detention cell, his blindfold off, where he said there were at least 300 people with black hoods over their heads, many groaning in bloody shirts.”

As in the other Middle Eastern states rocked by popular rebellions, the repression and intimidation failed to suppress the upsurge in Iraq. The upsurge scored important victories, although in accordance with the fragmented nature of the country they were scattered. *The New York Times* reported that “crowds forced the resignation of the governor in southern Basra and the entire city council in Fallujah. They also chased away the governor of Mosul, the brother of the speaker of parliament, who was there and fled, too.” ■

Behind the agony of Jamaica’s schools

By BARRY WEISLEDER

MONTEGO BAY, Jamaica—“Carib needs to reduce debt—IMF,” screams a headline in *The Gleaner* (Feb. 7, 2011). The Jamaican daily reports an International Monetary Fund spokesperson calling on “Caribbean countries, saddled with high debt levels and badly affected by the global economic crisis, ... to reduce debt and develop new sources of growth.” Good advice coming from the chief vampire of the world capitalist financial blood supply!

“While governments responded appropriately to the drop in tourism, trade, remittances and capital flows, they now face economic and social challenges...” Indeed, their people do, exacerbated by the sharp rise in food prices—which sparked the current uprisings against authoritarian rule in Tunisia, Egypt, and across the Arab world.

A major challenge is the steady disintegration of social infrastructure, with education at the head of the class. This is sadly the case in Jamaica, one of the world’s 13 most indebted nations (as a share of gross domestic product), five of which are now in the Caribbean.

High interest rate public-sector borrowing and the bail-out of the financial sector in the mid-1990s only deepened the morass of structural underdevelopment, rooted in centuries of mercantilism and the slave-based plantation system.

Successive governments did nothing to stem the out-outflow of profits from Jamaica’s economy. Manufacturing is marginal, and of the sweatshop type. The “service sector” predominates, now 60 per cent of the whole. Tourism accounts for 10 per cent of GDP, dominated by foreign-owned enterprises operating in the field.

Remittances amount to nearly 15 per

cent of GDP and exports of bauxite and alumina make up about 10%. Inflation is a staggering 13 per cent. Unemployment is 12.9 per cent officially, but over double that if discouraged and chronically underemployed workers are included. Violent gangs and the drug trade draw heavily from the huge pool of jobless youths.

Jamaica signed a \$1.27 billion, 27-month Standby Agreement with the International Monetary Fund for balance of payment support in February 2010. A matter of life and debt. The effect of social expenditure cuts, directly tied to IMF loan “conditionalities,” are occasionally featured in the media. In recent weeks the spotlight has been on public schools.

Merline Sewell-Sullivan is the principal at Kingston’s inner city Trench Town Primary School. She revealed to *The Gleaner* in late January why her school was the poorest performer in the 2009 national Grade Four Literacy Test, with a 64 per cent failure rate. Her students “sometimes ... come to school not eating anything the night before, much less breakfast.” Given limited resources, and thanks to the help of the Port Authority, they have a breakfast programme twice a week. The teachers come in early to prepare the meals.

“School-based literacy coordinator Janice Spencer-Francis said that most of the students do not even have books. In her grade-four class, only six of her 24 students have their prescribed books. “Most of our parents are single and are not working, and some have so many other children, they just can’t afford to buy the books. They live from hand to mouth.”

“As if those resource challenges were not enough, last October thieves broke into the school’s resource room and stole all their computer equipment with their software, learning programmes, lesson plans—everything that they struggled to

put together over the years.”

“Late and poor attendance is also a major factor,” *The Gleaner* reported. “When the morning bell rings at 8, more than half the school population has not reported to school. ‘Some of the students are so tired when they finally get here, because they had to catch water before coming to school,’ said Francis. ‘So many are hungry because they had nothing to eat. They just can’t perform under these conditions.’”

Potential for student achievement is real. Trench Town Primary won several awards in sports, academics, and environmental projects between 1995 and 2009. Even against all the odds, hope persists.

Esther Tyson, principal of Ardenne High School in Kingston, is the author of a stinging op-ed in *The Gleaner* (Feb. 6) that accuses the Jamaica Labour Party government, led by Bruce Golding, of deliberately “demoralising secondary-school principals.” “First, they implement a policy of free education for all up to secondary education, then ignore the economic cost of educating each child and send to the schools less funds than what is needed for running a school efficiently.”

“In the meantime, when the principals arrange with parents to pay additional fees to cover the cost of the quality education (required), the leader of the nation declares that these principals are ‘extortionists.’”

Tyson asks, how can the equivalent of Cdn. \$600 that the Ministry of Education gives each principal *annually* cover the cost of building maintenance, security, garbage disposal, graffiti clean-up, and replacement of damaged doors, locks, windows, grilles and furniture?

As the situation deteriorates, the government, which has yet to make good on wage improvements it negotiated with teachers over a year ago, seems keen

to stoke the flames of conflict between parents and administrators. At the same time, according to Tyson, educators “have to face the constant challenge of leading schools with children who are the product of an increasingly coarse, uncivil, violent, and lawless society.”

The affluent minority take refuge in private schools, which only accelerates the decline of the public system. Nearly 10 per cent of students attend private “prep” schools, where fees average \$1200 a year—well beyond the reach of most Jamaican parents.

Returning to the blame-the-workers game, Education Minister Andrew Holness signalled last December that he was prepared to fire teachers whose students do poorly on standardized tests. Holness is also promoting ‘performance-based pay’ for teachers. Sound familiar?

Nadine Molloy Young, president of the Jamaican Teachers’ Association, returned the volley: abstract standards and performance-based pay cannot work (undesirable at any rate) in a system rife with gross inequalities. “You have 60 students in front of you, and with this comes students with different learning challenges,” Molloy Young explained.

So, think back to the IMF-induced cutbacks that robbed society of a decent present and future. For this situation, both the JLP regime and the once left-populist Peoples National Party of Portia Simpson-Miller share the blame. Those parties are just two capitalist peas in a pod—bereft of the radical solutions required.

But just 90 miles north of Jamaica, in Cuba, where insurgent workers and farmers seized national sovereignty in 1959 and expropriated capital in 1961, no child is a street beggar. Few if any are hungry, lack proper shoes, clothes, books, or miss school. Today, Cuba produces a surplus of doctors to heal victims of Third World social and natural disasters, while Jamaica still produces a surplus of agony. ■

By TYLER MACKINNON

HAMILTON, Ont.—On Jan. 29, up to 10,000 union members and supporters from across Ontario and Quebec gathered in front of Hamilton's City Hall in solidarity with the workers of U.S. Steel. The company locked out the already greatly reduced workforce of 900 on Nov. 7, 2010.

United States Steel Corporation, following its purchase of Stelco in 2007 for \$1 billion, reneged on its promise to retain jobs and benefit the local economy. Instead, workers have been treated to a vicious attack on their pensions, plus staff cuts. The bosses at U.S. Steel demand elimination of pension indexing (the provision that keeps pensions in pace with inflation) and insist that the existing pension plan be closed to new hires.

As in Sudbury, where Valle Inco forced nickel miners to strike for over a year against the company demand to turn pensions into a market investment rather than a guaranteed benefit, the corporate excuse for greed in Hamilton is the same: the Great Recession. Indeed, the attack on workers' pensions, including the federal government's refusal to enhance the grossly inadequate Canada Pension Plan for seniors, is a major element of the current capitalist austerity agenda.

This is a major issue for all workers. That is why thousands of autoworkers from Oshawa and Windsor, textile, construction, postal and mine workers, teachers and many others went to Hamilton to march on a very cold day in late January.

A number of community and socialist groups, including Socialist Action and Youth for Socialist Action, participated. Despite frigid temperatures and heavy snowfall, the atmosphere was electrifying. Thousands of people, in a sea of colourful flags and banners, came together to say to U.S. Steel that "you cannot take away workers' rights, you cannot lie, cheat and steal from steel workers and expect to get away with it."

The solidarity rally exceeded the capacity of the sound system; it was impossible to

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Thousands rally for locked-out Steelworkers in Hamilton

hear what the many speakers said. They included USW International President Leo Gerard, USW Local 1005 President Rolf Gerstenberger, Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti, local NDP MP Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain), NDP federal leader Jack Layton, Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath, Ontario Federation of Labour President Sid Ryan, and Hamilton Mayor Bob Bratina.

Many demonstrators carried picket signs that read, "Public Right Yes, Monopoly Right No" and "Hands Off our Pensions." As the mass of unionists and supporters marched through downtown Hamilton, the powerful chant, "When they say cut back, we say *fightback*," could be heard like the percussion section of an orchestra across the city.

Though the demonstration was a success, the battle is far from over. As the lock-out continues, Socialist Action will continue to rally support for the steelworkers, who have stood up to years of company threats and blackmail, including an earlier Stelco demand for a 20 per cent pay cut.

Steel making is essential to a modern economy, and it should serve the public interest. Ottawa has let that slide, not only when it gave Stelco \$100 million in 2005 for "re-structuring" but when it approved the U.S. Steel purchase of Stelco in 2007.

Enough is enough. Socialist Action campaigns for public ownership, under workers' and community control, of the steel industry. So, let's stand with the steelworkers, and show U.S. *Steal* where to go. ■

(Left) SA at Jan. 29 solidarity march for Steelworkers. Photo: John Wilson / Socialist Action



Fourth International: Climate chaos and the global ecological crisis

Below are major excerpts from a Feb. 23 statement approved by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The full statement appears at www.internationalviewpoint.org.

Since the World Congress of the Fourth International in February 2010, the consequences of climate chaos have become even more obvious. The worst floods in history in Pakistan, an intense heat wave and burning forests in Russia, chaos in Australia, floods in Sri Lanka, heavy rains and mud flows in Brazil—the summer of 2010 witnessed a record number of disasters caused by human-made climate change, or rather, by the capitalist mode of production.

What is more, the victims of those disasters are mainly the poor, women, and indigenous people—as in Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and more largely in the countries of the South.

The enormous oil spill in the Mexican gulf, caused by the greed of BP, new plans for exploiting shale gas in the never stopping race for fossil fuels and profits, clearly show that we are facing a growing ecological crisis....

We are faced with the reappearance of the food crisis which erupted in 2007-2008. This has led to a new increase in food prices and financial speculation on raw materials. This is one of the many causes of the explosion of the revolts and revolutionary process in the Arab world.

We support the struggles of peasant movements and rural communities against agribusiness and GMOs, in defense of local seeds and agro-ecological farming. We also support movements involved in local food production and distribution, including food production in urban "food

deserts" in the poor districts of cities in rich countries....

In 2009, greenhouse gas emissions amounted to a total of a little more than 48 billion tons. In order to keep global warming beneath the dangerous threshold of a 2°C rise, the peak of emissions must be reached in 2015 and emissions should diminish to 40-44 billion tons before 2020.

The climate plans of the developing countries are in line with the IPCC proposals but this is not the case for the rich developed countries! Japan, Russia, Canada are opposed to any extension of the Kyoto protocol beyond 2012.

The USA, which is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases per capita, and whose emissions increased by 30% between 1990 and 2005, has not adopted any plan for reductions. The "energy package" of the European Union is totally insufficient and continues to rely on market mechanisms, the promotion of agrofuels and nuclear energy, and the privatization of tropical forests.

Against the logic of speculation, privatization, and commodification of food, we must counterpose another logic—namely the defense of food sovereignty, regaining control over agricultural and food policies, keeping access to natural resources (water, seeds, land), and fighting against the multinationals and the international institutions as well as the governments who are their accomplices....

The members of the Fourth International will continue to work towards the building of a unitary mass campaign, together with the activists and the social movements, in the framework of the Climate and Social Justice campaign. This [is] in the perspective of the organization of counter-summits during the Durban (COP17) negotiations and at the summit of Rio 20+.

Only an ecosocialist and anti-capitalist alternative constitutes a real answer to this global crisis. ■

Gains and challenges for Queer Rights

By JOHN WILSON

TORONTO—Feb. 10 marked a signal victory for transgender rights when Bill C389 (barring discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression) passed third reading in the House of Commons. It next goes to the Senate. The bill, which amends the Canadian Human Rights Act, was sponsored by New Democratic Party Vancouver MP Bill Siksay.

Grassroots campaigning will be necessary to move the bill through the Senate before a federal election call, which could occur in March. Otherwise, dissolution of Parliament for an election would make it necessary to start the whole process again.

This victory may reinforce the impression that Canada is a kind of mecca for queer people in light of the many victories won in struggles over the years. But nothing could be further from the truth.

On the same day, a community meeting about numerous recent incidents of gay-bashing in Toronto's Church-Wellesley area, known locally as the Gay Village, drew upwards of 80 people to the 519 Church St. Community Centre. Testimonials of those present made clear that gay-bashing is far more common than most people may think.

Also clear is the fact that, despite anti-homophobia education efforts by the Toronto District School Board, homophobia is rampant in the school system. Young people at the meeting argued that educational efforts should start in elementary school, not just at the high school level. Just a short time ago, the Ontario Liberal (provincial) government retreated abjectly and totally from a proposed more progressive sex-education curriculum as soon as Christian fundamentalists and bigoted parents made noise, amplified of course by the corporate media.

In January, an 18-year-old Mexican high school student was deported, despite an impressive demonstration held on the day of the immigration board hearing. The protest included many of his fellow stu-

dents and an official of the Toronto District School Board. His sister, a lesbian, had been deported earlier. She is his care-giver. Her partner was murdered in Mexico in her younger brother's presence. Federal immigration department honchos refused them refugee status, despite the fact that their lives are in obvious danger in Mexico.

Also in January, an uproar developed when the Halton District Catholic School Board refused to allow the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) in its schools. Displaying the mentality of the board, Board Director Alice Anne Lemay stated at the time that "we don't have Nazi groups either." She emphasized that GSAs are contrary to church dogma.

Although the Catholic board did eventually rescind its decision, it is far from certain that a GSA actually will be allowed to form, despite impressive support organized by local students and their allies.

Casey Oraa, chair of Queer Ontario's Political Action Committee, pointed out that GSAs are encouraged, officially, by the Ministry of Education. He demanded that the ministry enforce its policy. "Denominational rights end where Human Rights begin. Period," Oraa wrote in a letter to the HDCSB.

Not surprisingly, the continuing public tax-dollar funding of Catholic Separate schools, given their opposition to the rights of queer students, is increasingly questioned and opposed by LGBT people. This is also the case inside the labour-based Ontario NDP. Ongoing efforts to change party policy in the direction of putting an end to public funding for any religious or private schools is spearheaded by the NDP Socialist Caucus.

So, while the victories gained for LGBT rights in Canada are impressive, enormous problems persist, and the struggle continues. Increasingly, people will begin to realize that the achievement of real liberation is organically incompatible with the present capitalist order, which perpetuates its outmoded rule by use of the old tactic "divide and conquer." ■



Even the Rain

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Even the Rain," directed by Icíar Bollaín, starring Gael García Bernal, Luis Tosar, and Juan Carlos Aduviri.

Film director Icíar Bollaín's "Even the Rain" ("También la lluvia") is a film within a film containing real history along with a political message. A film company, headed by director, Sebastián (Gael García Bernal) and producer, Costa, (Luis Tosar), are in Bolivia in 2000 to make a movie about Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus). Their film is based on a journal written by Father Bartolomé de Las Casas (Carlos Santos), who traveled with Colón; he wrote of his outrage at Columbus's and his minions' exploitation and enslavement of natives for their gold; beating and torturing them in their efforts to convert them to Christianity.

The filming is disrupted by Bolivian activists in Cochabamba protesting against the privatization of the municipal water supply, which was undertaken that year by an international consortium that included U.S. corporate giant Bechtel. The company had raised rates some 20 percent, and cut off water to households that were unable to pay.

The government, under pressure from the World Bank, installed locks on wells in which rainwater was collected. There are scenes showing people in long lines near the wells, carrying containers, waiting their turn, only to see uniformed men with guns, padlocking well covers.

Mass demonstrations and a four-day general strike shut down the city of Cochabamba. Soon the struggle

spread throughout Bolivia. President Hugo Banzer responded by declaring a state of siege. Protests were banned, and broken up by troops firing tear gas, rubber bullets, and finally live ammunition; labor and protest leaders were arrested in nighttime raids.

Bollaín includes archival film clips of the demonstrations and the deadly violence perpetrated against protesters by the Bolivian military and corporate-backed security forces. The film crew ends up experiencing some of the same conflicts as in Columbus's time regarding the working conditions and payment of the native extras.

At a "cattle-call" for extras, hundreds of Bolivians show up at a warehouse studio outside of Cochabamba. Costa and Sebastián choose only a few. A native, Daniel (a mesmerizing Juan Carlos Aduviri), there with his adolescent daughter, Belen (Milena Solis), becomes belligerent when he isn't selected. Costa and Sebastián confer; they decide to cast Daniel anyway because of his feral appearance and intensity. Daniel insists they cast his daughter as well.

Daniel ends up in a leading role as Hatuey, head of the native uprising against Columbus. Trouble begins when he either wouldn't show up for filming or was late, so the crew had to shoot around him. Costa and Sebastián discovered why when they catch him on TV—the protest is the subject of a news story. When they hired Daniel, they had no clue that he was the voice of the water-rights demonstrators.

What makes the film intriguing are the frames shown of the film the crew is shooting. Daniel as Hatuey, and others, in dramatic, intimidating native make-up, deal with an armed and armored, grizzled, Cristóbal Colón on horseback, with his equally attired men and Bartolomé looking on in horror. Milena Solis is excellent in this scene.

(Above) Children from Cochabamba cast as 15th-century native people in this film within a film.

(Left) Karra Elejalde accepts Goya award in Madrid, Feb. 13, for his role as Columbus in "Even the Rain."

Cristoból Colón, or the balding actor Antón—an old-timer and alcoholic, yet still able to hit his marks—is played by Karra Elejalde in a long, curly, grey wig. At times you're watching an entirely different film, which is a little disconcerting. At one point, Daniel stands up to the filmmakers, telling them that the women playing natives refuse to act out a horrific event with their infants, rather than have them fall into Columbus's hands, (which they actually, historically, did). He insists it's something they could not even dream of doing today. Sebastián cuts the scene.

Costa and Sebastián are dedicated filmmakers who sense their responsibility to the entire crew when things get hairy during the protests: shootings, bombings, people barricading roads, setting fire to corporate vehicles. Daniel is beaten and tossed in prison; payoffs are made in order for him to complete the film. Many in the crew beg the filmmakers to leave. Sebastián and Costa are torn. They want their film completed—yet their crew is in danger.

Costa's conscience kicks in when he learns that Daniel's daughter has been seriously wounded; he becomes an unwitting hero when he drives back into town through burning roadblocks and gunfire to help while the others make their way to safety.

Watching "Even the Rain," one sides with the people's struggle for water against the filmmakers' need to complete their film. A film can always be made; money may be lost, but losing one's right to safe, clean, free or low-cost water is death. ■

Theater — RU Rah-Rah?

By CLIFF CONNER

"After The Revolution," a play by Amy Herzog (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2010). Premier production: Playwrights Horizon, November-December 2010, Peter Jay Sharp Theater, New York; featuring Peter Friedman, Lois Smith, David Margulies, Mare Winningham and Katharine Powell. This review appeared on-line in the Jan. 17 edition of Swans.

Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? Or a Trotskyist or Maoist group, or any cadre organization dedicated to radically challenging the political status quo in the United States? If so, there's a good chance that your life experience has prepared you to appreciate the conflict that drives the plot of "After The Revolution." Otherwise, maybe not. How you understand any play depends greatly on who you are and what you've done in your life, but "After The Revolution" is more likely to be subjectively appreciated than most.

In addition to the characters on the stage, there are three ever-present ghosts hovering over this play, only one of which is fictional. That would be Joe Joseph, the deceased patriarch of a Brooklyn Jewish Communist Party family. The two non-fictional spirits might be thought of as the Ghost of Left-Wing Politics Past and the Ghost of Left-Wing Politics Present—Ju-

lius Rosenberg and Mumia Abu-Jamal, respectively.

The central protagonists are Joe Joseph's son Ben (Get it? "Ben Joseph": "Son of Joe"?), and Ben's daughter, Emma. Ben is a fierce defender of his late father's flame, and Emma, at the start of the play, is her daddy's girl all the way. Grandpa Joe had been a prime target of the McCarthyite witch-hunt, but he had emphatically defied congressional attempts to brand him a Soviet spy and had denied the charge to the end of his days.

Ben is a schoolteacher whose proletarian militancy has earned him the respect of his fellow teachers and the presidency of the local teachers' union chapter. He exhibits a great deal of personal charm, but it is coupled with a rather inflexible sort of ideological pugnacity. Although the term "political correctness" is (as someone once said) most often simply a right-wing sneer at acts of decency, Ben is a caricature of political correctness. He delights in greeting Hispanics with the few words of Spanish he knows and he seems to harbor hopes that at least one of his children might turn out to be gay. Emma says he once refused to buy her a Walkman unless she would call it a "Walkperson."

Emma is a talented and highly motivated radical activist who has built and led an influential human rights organization that she named, in honor of the grandfather she reveres, the Joe Joseph Fund. The primary focus of the Joe Joseph Fund is the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. She works around the clock to raise funds for Mumia's legal defense and to publicize the injustice of his having been sentenced to death by a racially biased judge after an



Cold War redbaiter Sen. Joe McCarthy.

egregiously unfair trial.

Although Emma is a red-diaper baby who idolizes her dad, she is of a younger generation of political activists who have become sensitized to the often patronizing attitudes of white radicals toward people of color. When Ben fawns over Emma's Hispanic boyfriend, Miguel, she later privately apologizes to Miguel for what she calls "the insidious brand of leftist racism in my family." Miguel, however, responds, "If every time a white person was nice to me, I thought it was racism, I'd lead a pretty dark life, Emma."

A much more serious generational divide appears when a newly published book presents undeniable evidence that Joe Joseph really had secretly passed information to the Soviet Union and that his sworn denials to the congressional committee had been false. Emma is crushed: Grandpa Joe is not a heroic victim of polit-

ical persecution but a nefarious spy, and a liar to boot? Her worldview has suddenly gone up in flames, but the older members of the family are far less affected, having not only assumed all along that Joe had been a spy, but finding that something to be quietly proud of.

Ben knew his daughter would be upset by the revelation, but he had hoped the shock would pass quickly and their lives would settle back into their previous routines. That was not to be. Emma is so distraught that she begins to question everything she had been doing in the name of her grandfather. If the sainted Joe Joseph had lied, and her father had hidden the truth from her all these years, how could she trust anyone any more? *Maybe Mumia really shot that cop after all!*

Emma's doubts paralyze her work on behalf of Mumia and embitter her relationship with her father and her grandmother Vera, Joe Joseph's widow. The elders try, to no avail, to explain the "context" of Grandpa Joe's actions -- and there is context aplenty -- but Emma is having none of it. Her grandpa spied and lied, and she finds that unforgivable. When told that Grandpa Joe's false testimony to Congress occurred just three weeks before the Rosenbergs' execution, Emma seems momentarily taken aback, but even that fails to dispel her sense of personal betrayal.

And thus the stage is set for the polarization of the audience's sympathies. Emma's moral absolutism will undoubtedly resonate with some, and others will find themselves more in tune with Ben and Vera's situational ethics. The beauty and subtlety of Amy Herzog's writing is that

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By WAYNE DELUCA

CAMDEN, N.J.—With states across the nation facing budget shortfalls and seeking to balance them on the backs of state workers, New Jersey governor Chris Christie has come into the national spotlight as a model for “tough-talking” state executives. Speculation abounds about Christie as a possible Republican candidate for president.

Since his election in 2009, Christie has welcomed confrontation with the state workers’ unions, particularly the New Jersey Education Association, and has played up his image as a “straight talker” willing to tackle budget deficits. His calls for reform have been on the cutting edge of the vicious right-wing assault on public education, calling for “merit pay,” attacking tenure, and systems of vouchers and charter schools that have been aimed squarely at destroying the power of one of labor’s remaining bastions.

The debate, and Christie’s position in it, have assumed national significance as his ally Scott Walker has made a frontal attack on the right of state employees in Wisconsin. There, the resistance of union workers has made the front pages and inspired protests in all 50 states, including a Feb. 25 rally of over 3000 at the New Jersey statehouse in Trenton.

For years, New Jersey governors—Democrats and Republicans alike—have held back the state’s contributions to employee pension funds, using the money for other projects, while employee contributions have been fully funded. This has forced an unnecessary crisis in these funds, and Christie is now using the promise of a partial state contribution as a bargaining chip to press teachers and other state work-

New Jersey: The new face of austerity

Mel Evans / AP



(Left) Gov. Chris Christie delivers N.J. State of the State address in Trenton, Jan. 11.

ers for further cutbacks.

State budget shortfalls cannot be taken outside of the context of ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan that funnel billions to defense contractors. In New Jersey, it is also impossible not to speak of Christie’s \$1 billion tax cut for the wealthiest 2% of citizens, while his property tax changes have actually raised taxes on the disabled, the elderly, and those making under \$75,000 per year.

Christie’s obstinacy goes beyond unions and has already managed to hurt the expansion of public transit. Last year he unilaterally killed a proposed commuter rail project between New Jersey and Manhattan that would have doubled the rail passengers into and out of the city, reducing auto traffic and creating

both short-term and long-term jobs.

He has also managed to outrage the state’s Black population. In 2010 Christie refused to reappoint the only Black member of the state Supreme Court. His selection panel for a replacement was headed by Peter Verniero, who as attorney general infamously failed to take steps to halt racial profiling by state police when the practice came to light in the 1990s. Unsurprisingly, they came up with a white Republican loyalist for the post.

Christie has all but thrown his hat into the ring for the Republican nomination for president next year. He is now making criticisms of Sarah Palin, a Tea Party favorite who has relatively few fans outside of those who think that Obama is some kind of socialist. But the real socialists understand that Obama too has no solution for the crisis except for further austerity. The agenda represented by the Chris Christies, Scott Walkers, and Sarah Palins of the world won’t be stopped by voting for another four years of Obama but by the working class declaring its independence from both capitalist parties and building its own party.

Workers from Egypt to Wisconsin have shown the clear way to resist Christie, his friend Walker, and the rest of the austerity measures and union-busting coming down the pike. Only mass action can save unions, beat austerity, and lead us on the road to a government run by and for working people. ■

Owners threaten football lock-out

By DAVID BERNT

Following a year of record-breaking TV ratings and team profits, one would expect the NFL to be basking in the glow of its emergence as the most popular sport in the United States. Instead, the cloud of an impending owners’ lockout of players looms over the 2011 season. The owners and the NFL Players Association are in contentious negotiations. As we go to press, talks have been extended until March 11.

While NFL owners collected over \$9 billion in revenues in 2010, an astonishing sum when considering the league and teams employ only 3500 full-time employees, they are asking for major concessions from the players. The NFL owners are asking players to give back an additional \$1 billion in shared revenue and for them to agree to extending the NFL season by an additional two games.

Currently, the NFL calculates team salary caps based on a share of total league revenue. Players receive 60% of revenue minus a deduction of \$1 billion off the top, which goes straight to the owners’ pockets. The NFL is demanding that players agree to a deduction of \$2 billion.

Owners have presented the extension of the NFL regular season to 18 games as a win-win for both sides, since revenues would increase even more as a result. Of course, it’s the players, not the owners, who would pay the consequences of the increased hits from two more games. Football is by nature a violent game, and the long-term

consequences of the repeated hard contact to the head endured by players is just beginning to be understood. In just one example of the several studies done on the effects on players’ health, a 2009 study commissioned by the NFL found that among former players Alzheimers and other memory-related diseases were 19 times the normal rate for men ages 30-49 than among the general population.

NFL players are highly paid entertainers by the standards of most working people, and media coverage tends to simplify the dispute as one between millionaires and billionaires. But a quick look behind the numbers shows that most NFL players have the same uncertainty and precariousness in their lives as most workers.

While the average NFL salary is \$1.8 million, less than a quarter of players make that much. More than half of NFL players earn salaries under \$1 million. For every story a sports fan reads of elite players signing contracts with bonuses in the tens of millions, there is the practice squad player making \$5200 a week for 17 weeks (with no benefits) hoping to make the team to collect the league minimum of \$295,000.

While all those dollar amounts are way beyond what any factory worker could dream of, consider that the average NFL career is merely three years. Within those three years, NFL players literally put their lives on the line to provide the entertainment that generates the \$9 billion.

While owners cry poverty, they are making billions on the backs and concussed brains of players. Like the bank-

ers and other corporate giants, they get a hefty hand out from taxpayers. In the past 20 years, NFL teams have received over \$7 billion in taxpayer subsidies to build or renovate stadiums, with the average team receiving 65% of its stadium financing through taxpayer subsidies.

NFL players have made connections between their own struggle and that of the broader labor movement. Several players on the Super Bowl Champion Green Bay Packers released a statement in support of the struggle of Wisconsin public workers.

Packers team captain Charles Woodson released a statement: “Thousands of dedicated Wisconsin public workers provide vital services for Wisconsin citizens. They are the teachers, nurses, and child-care workers who take care of us and our families. These hard-working people are under an unprecedented attack to take away their basic rights to have a voice and collectively bargain at work.

“It is an honor for me to play for the Super Bowl Champion Green Bay Packers and be a part of the Green Bay and Wisconsin communities. I am also honored as a member of the NFL Players Association to stand together with working families of Wisconsin and organized labor in their fight against this attempt to hurt them by targeting unions.”

Here’s the line-up: Billionaire owners who receive billions of dollars in taxpayer funding to showcase modern-day gladiators versus the gladiators themselves who risk their lives to provide us with world-class entertainment and who stand in solidarity with their fellow workers’ struggles against the bosses. Doesn’t sound like millionaires vs. billionaires to me. Which side are you on? ■

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she doesn’t give in to caricaturing either position.

Emma apparently feels that espionage is a moral evil *per se*, while Ben and Vera perceive it as a means to an end, with morality attaching to the end, not the means. If advancing the interests of the Soviet Union during World War II was a noble cause, then spying on its behalf could not be immoral. To Ben and Vera there can be no doubt that Joe Joseph, who would only tell them that he “did what he had to do,” did the right thing.

When Emma confronts Vera and asks her opinion of the new revelations, Vera simply replies, “Well, I’m not a rah-rah American, so . . .”

“What does that mean?” Emma demands.

“Just that I’m not a rah-rah American. If I were a rah-rah American I would see it one way, but I’m not, so I don’t.”

But Emma prattles on about “the ethics of spying,” prompting her grandmother, exasperated, to tell her: “Listen, Joe was a member of the Communist Party, you know that. Anybody with a beating heart and half a brain was back then.” Emma’s generation can’t understand that, Vera says, because most young peo-

ple nowadays are simply apathetic.

Furthermore, she continues, Joe Joseph’s allegiance was not to the U.S. government, nor should it have been. “The Russians were really the ones fighting the war, not us, and some people were very happy to sit back and let them die, even some people in the party, and some people like your grandfather were not. You’re talking about ethics, well those were his ethics, not to turn his back on his comrades who were fighting fascism.”

Emma tries to regain the moral high ground by enumerating Stalin’s many crimes, but her grandmother cuts her off and ends the argument: “Well the question is which side are you on, that’s the question.”

In the end, Emma resigns as director of the Joe Joseph fund. Vera tells her that her action is the moral equivalent of what cowardly people did when called to testify before the McCarthyite committee: “Listen, what you’ve done here, my darling, is you’ve named your grandfather’s name. That’s what it amounts to.”

And although the playwright never explicitly reveals which side she herself is on, I—not being a rah-rah American myself—was pleased that she gave Vera the last word. ■

... Wisconsin

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tributed freely by local vendors who received donations from around the world. In the center of the massive rotunda, surrounded by a diverse crowd, young people hold court with a bullhorn, offering an open mike for speeches and leading chants and songs that reverberated throughout the building.

Hundreds of cops stationed within and around the Capitol have taken a non-confrontational stance, engaging in discussion with protesters and amongst each other, and in many cases expressing solidarity with the protesters. But aside from refusing to evict protesters in a one-night show of support, the cops have done their jobs for the Department of Administration by restricting access to the building and ejecting the remaining occupiers after the court order.

Socialist Action calls for uncompromising solidarity with public workers in Wisconsin, Ohio, and elsewhere. The unions and their allies must stand firm against any concessions or cutbacks. It would be unconscionable not to also support low-income workers, the children of workers, the unemployed, the ill, and minorities who

are impacted disproportionately by these neoliberal budget austerity measures. All working people have a stake in this fight. We need to say to the ruling class: we did not create the budget “crisis,” and we refuse to have the budget balanced on our backs!

To win, workers need to plan and organize the fightback through democratic assemblies of the rank-and-file. The call for a general strike should be fully supported, and extended beyond public employees to the private sector, where workers have suffered even more egregious wage and benefit rollbacks. Unions should be using the protests to gain momentum in a vast drive to recruit new members and organize new locals throughout the country.

The labor movement should call a Emergency Congress of Labor to map out a fighting strategy on a national scale and organize the struggle against capitalism’s accelerating war on working people.

The working class cannot rely on the Democratic Party, bought and paid for by the business elite, to represent our interests. We need to found a new labor party based in democratized unions. United, labor has the power to reverse the massive rollback of our rights demanded by the capitalists to protect their profit margins. Solidarity forever! An injury to one is an injury to all! ■

Massive Wisconsin uprising fights all-out assault on unions

By CARL SACKS

Tens of thousands of workers, students, and their allies have been protesting throughout Wisconsin every day since Sunday, Feb. 20, to save their benefits and collective bargaining rights. There were monster rallies at the Capitol in Madison of 65,000 on Feb. 19 and 100,000 on Feb. 26, the largest protests there since the Vietnam war era.

Schools have closed due to teacher absences and student walkouts, firefighters and prison guards have taken off work despite threats of mass firing, and some unions have called for a general strike if Gov. Scott Walker and the Republican-controlled legislature do not back down on their concession demands. "We're ground zero for the United States right now. ... We're here for Wisconsin, but in many ways we're here for the entire United States, for all the workers," said one protester, a teacher at Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville.

Solidarity protests have spread around the country. In Ohio, there have been ongoing protests around the state over Senate Bill 5, which would bar the right to strike for public employees, end collective bargaining over benefits, and do away with step-based pay increases. On Tuesday, March 1, many took off work to attend an anti-bill rally of over 20,000 at the state house in Columbus. A repeat protest is planned for March 8.

The Wisconsin uprising began after the state's new governor, Republican Scott Walker, issued a sweeping assault on public-sector workers. Calling legislation he introduced on Feb. 18 a "budget repair bill," Walker sought to outlaw collective bargaining by 225,000 state and local government workers on everything but wage increases, which would in turn be limited by the Consumer Price Index.

The bill would also double public workers' paycheck deductions to their health plans, to 12 percent, and raise deductions to pensions from near nothing to 5.8 percent. Tax.com reporter David Cay Johnston has pointed out that while mainstream media usually parrot Walker's claim that state workers would "contribute more" to their benefits, this in fact represents an eight percent *pay cut*, because the health and pension benefits are a form of deferred payment in lieu of cash wages, part of an overall compensation package negotiated through collective bargaining.

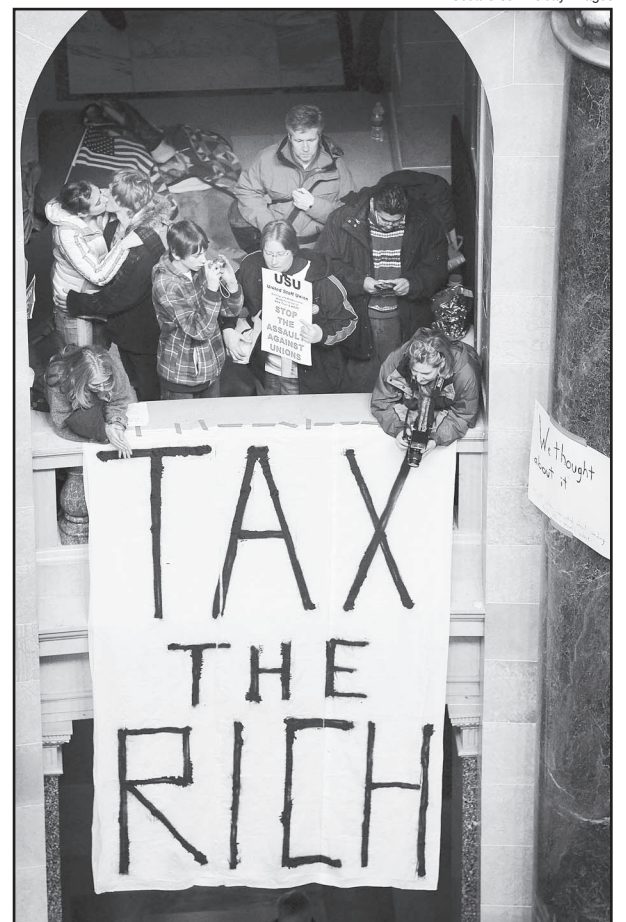
Walker has absurdly called the bill's attacks on workers "modest," claiming that the state is "broke" with a \$3.6 billion budget deficit, and that greedy public-sector workers have better pay and benefits than their private-sector counterparts. But a study by the Economic Policy Institute put the lie to these claims, showing that public workers in Wisconsin are paid at least 4.8% less than comparable employees of private businesses. Additionally, the new legislature and governor have already given away more than the anti-worker bill's \$137 million-a-year savings in tax breaks to the wealthy. *Huffington Post* blogger Robert Greenwald pointed out that the state would save over 10 times that amount by bringing all U.S. troops home from Afghanistan.

Included in the bill's austerity measures are massive cuts to public schools, state colleges and universities, and BadgerCare, the state health insurance program for low-income workers and the poor. It includes a racist provision to exclude undocumented workers from BadgerCare.

The new state budget unveiled on March 1 goes further yet, cutting \$834 million over two years from public schools, privatizing the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and curtailing welfare programs, while at the same time exempting in-state businesses completely from capital gains taxes. Some school districts have sent their entire staffs layoff notices, and could shut down completely.

The unions were pushed to respond from the start by their rank-and-file members. The protests began as union-sponsored "Lobby Days" on Feb. 14, but quickly turned into mass action as thousands descended on the Capitol, and rank-and-file workers initiated job actions. Dozens of school districts, including the state's largest, Madison and Milwaukee, shut down for multiple days due to "sick-outs" by teachers, despite some districts' threats of mass firings. Thousands of high school and college students from around the state have held walkouts.

In announcing the bill, Walker threatened to use the National Guard as strike-breakers should there be any



(Above) Protesters occupy Wisconsin Capitol. (Left) Rally in Green Bay, Wis., Feb. 16.

Workers cannot rely on the Democratic Party, bought and paid for by the business elite. We need a Labor Party, based on revitalized, democratic and fighting unions.

disruptions to public services, such as action by prison guards. But hundreds of prison guards have taken off work to march on the Capitol anyway. Hundreds of firefighters, who were exempted from the bill along with cops in a divide-and-conquer bid, have marched in uniform almost daily, while police unions have released statements against the bill and in solidarity with protesters.

Wisconsin Education Association Council president Mary Bell ordered teachers back to work on Feb. 22. But teachers have continued to lead many of the week-day rallies, marches, and other support actions. (Bell recently did an about-face on upholding teachers' bargaining rights with a sellout proposal for "school reform" that includes "performance-based" teacher pay and promotion, a giveaway to the right.)

Bell's politics are typical of state union leaders, who have bargained with Democratic legislators and sought compromise on basic principles at every turn. In the first week of protest, all of the unions representing public workers announced a closed-door agreement with the Democrats to accept the eight-percent pay and benefit cut in exchange for keeping their collective bargaining rights. Union brass and Democrats alike have since touted the unions' willingness to "sacrifice" their members' wages and benefits in order to "help fix" a manufactured crisis as proof that Walker's purpose is union busting.

It turns out that no such proof was needed. On Feb. 23, Walker was caught by a prank phone caller bragging about his union-busting plans, which he likened to Ronald Reagan's crushing of the 1981 air-traffic controller's strike. The caller, on-line journalist Ian Murphy, pretended to be David Koch, one of the billionaire industrialist brothers who have bankrolled the Tea Party and gave \$43,000 to Walker's election campaign.

Unions and their supporters launched recall petition drives against eight Republican state senators, which could serve to take energy off the streets and put it back into business-controlled election politics. Five Democrats also face recall petitions from Walker supporters.

For their part, 14 state Senate Democrats left Wisconsin on Feb. 17 to deny the quorum needed to debate the bill. Under pressure from the mass protest,

they continue to defy orders of the Republican majority to return. But Sen. Bob Jauch, considered a spokesperson for the 14, indicated in a Mar. 4 interview with the *Duluth News Tribune* that they would take the first possible face-saving exit without holding onto bargaining rights. "If people want to restore collective bargaining to the way it was, they'll be disappointed. I can't do that. ... The bill will pass. We've always known that," Jauch said.

In praising the 14, the union brass seem plenty willing to forget that two Senate Democrats, Jeff Plale and former majority leader Russ Decker, voted against ratifying already-negotiated public worker contracts in December, paving the way for Walker's attempt at union-busting.

The majority of protesters have so far adopted the official line embodied in the chant, "It's not about the money, it's about rights!" But at the same time, rank-and-file members and non-union workers recognize that they are victims of a one-sided class war. Madison's weekly *Isthmus* newspaper captured the bill's economic impact in the words of Ramona Tenosorio, a UW-Milwaukee graduate student and union member in the Teaching Assistant Association: "I make less than \$20,000 a year supporting a family of six. ... These cuts would cause devastation for my family."

While the state-level union brass try to reign in the fightback to stay cozy with the Democrats, a number of locals and groups are organizing to push for more militancy. Madison's AFL-CIO labor federation, the South Central Labor Council, passed a resolution to endorse and prepare their memberships for a general strike as well as affirm their opposition to "all provisions contained in Walker's 'budget repair bill.'"

On March 3, the Kill the Whole Bill Coalition held a jazz funeral-style protest at the Capitol against concessions. "No Concessions" organizing meetings have been called by National Nurses United under the theme expressed by AFSCME member Andy Heidt: "100,000 people do not need to beg."

Young people have been crucial to the struggle, pushing resistance to "business as usual." Students turned a Feb. 15 late-night hearing on the bill into a sleepover, which continued as an 18-day occupation of the Capitol. Protesters organized teams for food and supply distribution, medical needs, and information distribution. The building was finally cleared by court order after the sleepers were isolated from fellow protesters by an illegal administrative order restricting public access to the building.

As of this writing, daytime access to the Capitol has been restored, though under heavy guard by cops with metal detectors. The walls and pillars on three floors of the building remain plastered with colorful banners (including a giant "Kill the WHOLE Bill!"), homemade signs with creative slogans, statements of solidarity, fliers for forums and meetings. Food is plentiful, dis-

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