

Pittsburgh national antiwar conference demands 'Out Now!'

By JOE LOMBARDO and JEFF MACKLER

Over 250 antiwar activists from 26 states and the District of Columbia participated in the second national antiwar conference sponsored by the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations (NA), on July 10-12 in Pittsburgh. They were joined by two central leaders of the recent Guadeloupe general strike, a top Haitian trade-union official, Palestinian leaders, and several Canadian antiwar activists from Toronto and Vancouver.

Recent years have seen a major downturn in antiwar and other protest activities, and the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan continue to escalate despite majority opposition.

The glaring contradiction between the mass U.S. opposition to imperialist wars abroad and to the ever-deepening attacks on working people at home, on the one hand, and the absence of major challenges in the streets to impose the will of this majority, on the other, served as the backdrop to virtually all conference discussions and debates. How and when this logjam could be broken informed the major conference deliberations.

A July 23 Associated Press poll reported in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* noted that 63 percent are opposed to the U.S. war in Iraq and 53 percent opposed to the Afghanistan War. Pre-2008 election polls indicated that 83 percent believed that an Obama administration would withdraw most U.S. troops during his first term. That figure is now down to 68 percent, as more and more people are beginning to realize that the policies of the current government in Washington, hyperbole aside, differ little from those of the Bush administration.

Obama's military appointees in Iraq blatantly report that the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) accords signed last year regarding timetables for a U.S. withdrawal will be negated by joint U.S./Maliki government agreements to extend the stay of U.S. forces. Indeed, both Obama and Maliki, during the latter's recent visit to the United States, made it clear that U.S. troops, in varying forms, were expected to remain in Iraq indefinitely—the now well-understood prerequisite to maintaining the neo-colonial order. Suppression of the



Eros Hoagland / NY Times

popular opposition to the U.S. occupation by the majority of Iraqis—Shiite and Sunnis alike—can only be maintained by force and violence.

U.S. belligerency and saber-rattling in the region was further highlighted by a mid-July statement by Vice President Joseph Biden affirming that Israel had the "sovereign right" to bomb Iran should it feel its "national security" was threatened. This is not the first time that the U.S. has sanctioned—or better, orchestrated—Israeli bombing attacks on nuclear research facilities in the Middle East. Syria and Iraq have both been victims.

The larger than expected conference attendance, coming at a time when illusions in the Obama administration's "good intentions" still run high and when working people have suffered defeat after defeat without a significant concerted response, helped to raise the spirits of antiwar activists, who are far from dis-

(Above) U.S. Marines patrol in southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province, July 6. Thousands of Marines were recently sent to this Taliban stronghold.

counting the movement's potential. Indeed, it was clear to all that the U.S. is entering a period of more, not less, wars of plunder and occupation at the expense of oppressed people around the world and at the expense of American working people.

The conference was attended by leading representatives and/or activists of all of the national antiwar coalitions—ANSWER, UFPJ, World Can't Wait, International Action Center, Bail Out the People Coalition, and others. Participants came prepared to hammer out a plan of action aimed at achieving a greater degree of unity than in past years and at preparing for a resumption of the powerful massive mobilizations that can

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Israel becoming a pariah as atrocities come to light

By GERRY FOLEY

The Zionist regime continues to become more discredited and isolated internationally, as the new Israeli government adopts a more openly right-wing character. Israeli soldiers involved in the assault on Gaza have themselves denounced the indiscriminate terror inflicted on the entire Palestinian population of the area.

For example, a McClatchy news dispatch reported July 14: "Two soldiers from the Givati brigade who served in Zeitoun told the story of shooting an unarmed civilian without warning him. The elderly man was walking with a flashlight toward a building

where Israeli forces were taking cover. The Israeli officer in the house repeatedly ignored requests from other soldiers to fire warning shots as the man approached, the soldiers said. Instead, when he got within 20 yards of the soldiers, the commander ordered snipers to kill the man. The soldiers later confirmed that the man was unarmed.

"The soldiers told [us] that they were ordered to violate a code imposed by the Israeli Supreme Court itself: In the Ezbt Abd Rabbo neighborhood, Israeli combatants said they forced Palestinians to search homes for militants and enter buildings ahead of soldiers in direct violation of an Israeli Supreme Court ruling that bars fighters from us-

ing civilians as human shields.

"Sometimes a force would enter while placing rifle barrels on a civilian's shoulder, advancing into a house and using him as a human shield," said one Israeli soldier with the Golani Brigade. "Commanders said these were the instructions, and we had to do it."

The soldiers confirmed that white phosphorus shells were used against civilian targets. "According to the soldiers, the Israeli military fired white phosphorus mortars and artillery shells to set suspicious buildings ablaze and destroyed scores of Palestinian homes for questionable reasons. The white phosphorus supplied by the U.S. is supposed to be used to illuminate targets

or provide smoke cover for advancing troops. "Phosphorus was used as an igniter, simply to make it all go up in flames," one soldier said."

White phosphorus is an atrocious weapon when used against people. It can literally melt flesh. The most shocking photo from the Vietnam War, one that helped inspire the U.S. antiwar movement, was a picture of a young girl hideously mutilated by white phosphorus.

The Israeli soldiers described a deliberate policy of destroying buildings in Gaza—supposedly to prevent them from being used for launching small Qassam rockets into Israel. "In practi-

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Nada for Gaza: The McKinney Israel Trip



Cynthia McKinney, the outspoken former congresswoman and Green Party presidential candidate, recently got out of jail. Yeah. That's right. **Jail.**

It's possible that you had no idea she was in jail. That's because she was in detention for almost a week in Israel. Her offense? She accompanied a group from the Free Gaza Movement bringing medical supplies, olive trees, cement and children's toys to the beleaguered and occupied Palestinians in Gaza.

McKinney and 21 other people were blocked from landing on the Gazan coastline, and seized by the Israeli Navy, in what she called "an outrageous violation of international law." McKinney was part of an international humanitarian mission to

support an oppressed population—not with weapons but with toys and medicines—and was thrown into jail!

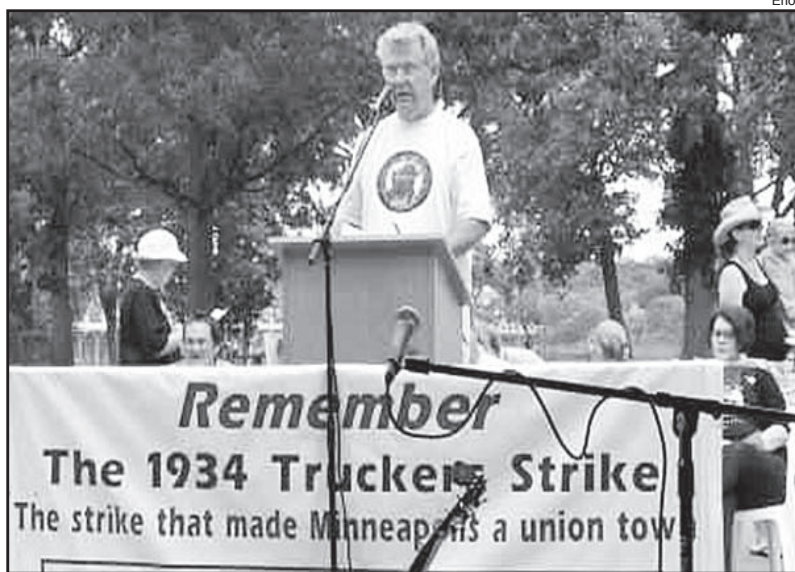
In a recent call, when I was told about this, I was quite surprised, for I hadn't heard or read a thing about it. A major U.S. ally, which receives more U.S. military aid than any other nation on earth, blithely tosses a former U.S. congressperson, a past presidential candidate, and a Black civil rights activist into a jail cell, and few major media sources deem it worthy of reportage!

Was the wall-to-wall Michael Jackson coverage too impenetrable?

According to a later published account (aired first on her MySpace page), McKinney wrote the following, shortly after her release: We were in international waters on a boat delivering humanitarian aid to people in Gaza when the Israeli Navy ships surrounded us and illegally threatened us, dismantled our navigation equipment boarded and confiscated the ship.... All of us on board were then taken off the ship and into custody, and brought into Israel and imprisoned" (*Philadelphia Tribune*, July 7, 2009).

Umph! Cynthia McKinney in jail—in Israel—for bringing medicine to the sick; for bringing toys to children; for bringing succor to the oppressed and occupied! (Oh! By the way, the name of that ship? It was the "Spirit of Humanity.") And it ain't news?

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Historic strike commemorated

The 1934 Teamsters strike in Minneapolis was one of the key events that led to the great labor battles that built the CIO in the late '30s. Significantly, the main leaders of the Minneapolis strike were revolutionary socialists, Trotskyists, to whom Socialist Action traces our roots.

On July 25-26, Minneapolis commemorated the strike with a street festival, an old-fashioned labor picnic, and other events. The free street festival took place near the warehouse district where striking workers and their allies had held off gangs of deputized strike-breakers 75 years ago.

The above photo shows Dave Riehle, a locomotive engineer for the Union Pacific and a local labor historian, speaking at the July 26 picnic in Minnehaha Park.

A few days earlier, Riehle and other participants in the commemorative events were interviewed in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* (July 19, 2009). "Today is starting to look more and more like the era the truck drivers were living in back in the 1930s," Riehle told the paper.

"The union movement learned then that you have to organize and get out on the streets if you want to change the relationships of the forces in society. Obama is not going to save the workers, just like FDR did not save them. Labor has never had a savior. If we are going to save ourselves, we have to do it ourselves." ■

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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(Left) Gary Tinney, outside his New Haven firehouse, is one of group of Black firefighters who say department discriminates against minorities.

Supreme Ct. ruling on firefighters a setback for affirmative action

By SEAN DEMPSEY

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—A serious blow to civil rights was dealt by the Supreme Court on the last day of its 2008 term, when in *Ricci v. DeStefano*, the Court ruled in favor of a group of white firefighters who claimed they were victims of “reverse racism” in the aftermath of their city’s promotional exams. The ruling implicitly calls the future of affirmative action into question, and marks a great setback for people of color and women in job hiring, advancement, and equality in the workplace.

The *Ricci v. DeStefano* case stems from the results of a 2003 promotional examination offered to firefighters of the New Haven Fire Department. The examinations, offered for advancement to captain and lieutenant, differed from previous tests in that they gave disproportionate weight to the written portion of the exam over the oral portion. Knowing full well the inequalities of the educational system that minorities are forced to face, the schema of using examinations that have little to nothing to do with aptitude has long been a favored tool of the employers for keeping minorities either outside of industry, or in the lowest paid positions within it.

While no explanation was given as to why this change was administered by the New Haven Fire Dept., the results paint a familiar picture: despite Black applicants having constituted 19 of the 77 firefighters who took the lieutenant exam, and eight of the 41 who took the captain exam, not a single African American scored high enough to be promoted. Additionally, only two of the 29 Latinos that took either test achieved scores that fit the promotional qualifications for advancement.

Because of the clear disparity of the test results, the city of New Haven became concerned that if it promoted the white firefighters on the basis of these results, it risked the possibility of being sued under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits workplace discrimination by requiring employers to remove the “artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary barriers” that have historically existed to keep people of color and women from gaining access, advancement, and equality in the workplace.

Perhaps cognizant of the degree to which the examinations fit the very mold of the language of Title VII, the city of New Haven decided to drop the results of the examination and abstained from making any promotions. In

turn, the city was hit by a lawsuit from 17 white firefighters, plus one Latino plaintiff, who claimed that the city had deliberately discriminated against them by not promoting them on the basis of the test. Known as the New Haven 20, their lawsuit challenged the very heart of Title VII, which not only allows but in fact *requires* the consideration of race to achieve and maintain diversity.

Despite the case having been rejected by two lower courts, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in a 5-4 decision, in favor of the white firefighters, thus throwing the future of Title VII into question.

In a message delivered during a press conference at the local NAACP headquarters, Lt. Gary Tinny, president of the New Haven Firebirds, a fraternal group for Black firefighters, said of the court ruling, “It’s going to set us back 45 years in encouraging fire departments to hire more Blacks, Hispanics, and women.”

In many respects, the fact that *Ricci v. DeStefano*’s beginnings are in a firehouse offers a poignant illustration of why affirmative action is so needed. For decades city fire departments have been almost the exclusive domain for whites. Labor Department statistics for 2007 indicate that of 288,000 firefighters in the country, 247,000 are white. Of this number, 82% are white men.

As the overwhelming majority of professional firefighters in the country are based in the cities, this often means that significantly white fire companies are not only *not* hiring from the unemployment-plagued communities of the most oppressed that they serve, but also that the relationship between the fire com-

panies and these communities is one of distrust and alienation.

This is certainly the case in New Haven, where nearly 40% of the population is African American and where the Latino population is rapidly growing, but where only 13 of 89 leadership positions in the New Haven Fire Department are currently filled by African Americans or Latinos.

As a matter of fact, this overwhelming degree of whiteness in the nation’s fire companies represents a figure that once was on the decline—in part a product of years of struggle by firefighters of color and women against hiring and promotional policies similar to those demonstrated in New Haven. These struggles began in the 1950s and ’60s in the civil rights movement, and were accomplished over the following decades through the implementation of court-ordered consent decrees in the major cities that extended the gains of affirmative action into what had historically been a virtually apartheid industry.

Unfortunately, these gains have eroded alongside other civil rights reforms, such as school integration, as many of the consent decrees have expired and the firehouses have rapidly returned to an almost all-white-male reserve.

It is in this regard that the Supreme Court’s most recent decision threatens to not so much put the brakes on integration, as to legally sanction an official return to segregation in not only the firehouses, but in virtually every industry in the nation. This rollback highlights the urgent need to wage battles in defense of affirmative action, and for

its extension. This urgency is illustrated by the potential weight of the *Ricci v. DeStefano* decision on the “reverse racism” cases being waged in both nearby Bridgeport and New York City—where just 3 percent of the city’s 11,000 firefighters are Black.

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s achieved majority support in the U.S. for the position that all people should have equal access to a job, public facilities, public education of equal quality, and the right to vote. The concept of affirmative action became the tool with which these ideas could actually be implemented.

Maintaining this support today means winning white workers to the realization that the horrors of the capitalist system that affect *all* workers—unemployment, taxes, social service cutbacks, and union busting—disproportionately affect people of color. This discrepancy can be seen in the Black infant mortality rate being 2.5 higher, underfunded inner city schools that are now *more* segregated than before the civil rights movement, and the prison-industrial complex—which under the Obama administration incarcerates a higher percentage of Black males than South Africa under apartheid.

It can be seen also in the official Black unemployment rate standing at 14.7 as compared to 8.7 for whites (with these figures taking into account only those currently filing for unemployment, not the long term chronic unemployment that has historically plagued the inner city ghettos), and by no means lastly, in the fact that Blacks earn on average only 70% of what white males earn.

Such discrepancies do not even speak for the centuries of enslavement, Jim Crow laws, and racist discrimination that have left Blacks at a disadvantage that makes the “equal playing field” invoked by the slander of “reverse racism” an utter deception. African Americans are by no means the only victims of such discrimination, as similar statistics can be found for women and for Latinos and other oppressed minorities.

But it isn’t white workers who gain from such “unearned privilege.” Only one class profits from unemployment, discrimination, and war: the ruling class. To better protect their profits, the capitalists utilize racism and sexism to keep the working class atomized, divided, and weak. When a capitalist pays a Black worker \$100 a week less than whites or a woman \$150 a week less than men, the added profit goes not into the pockets of white workers, but entirely into the pockets of the employers.

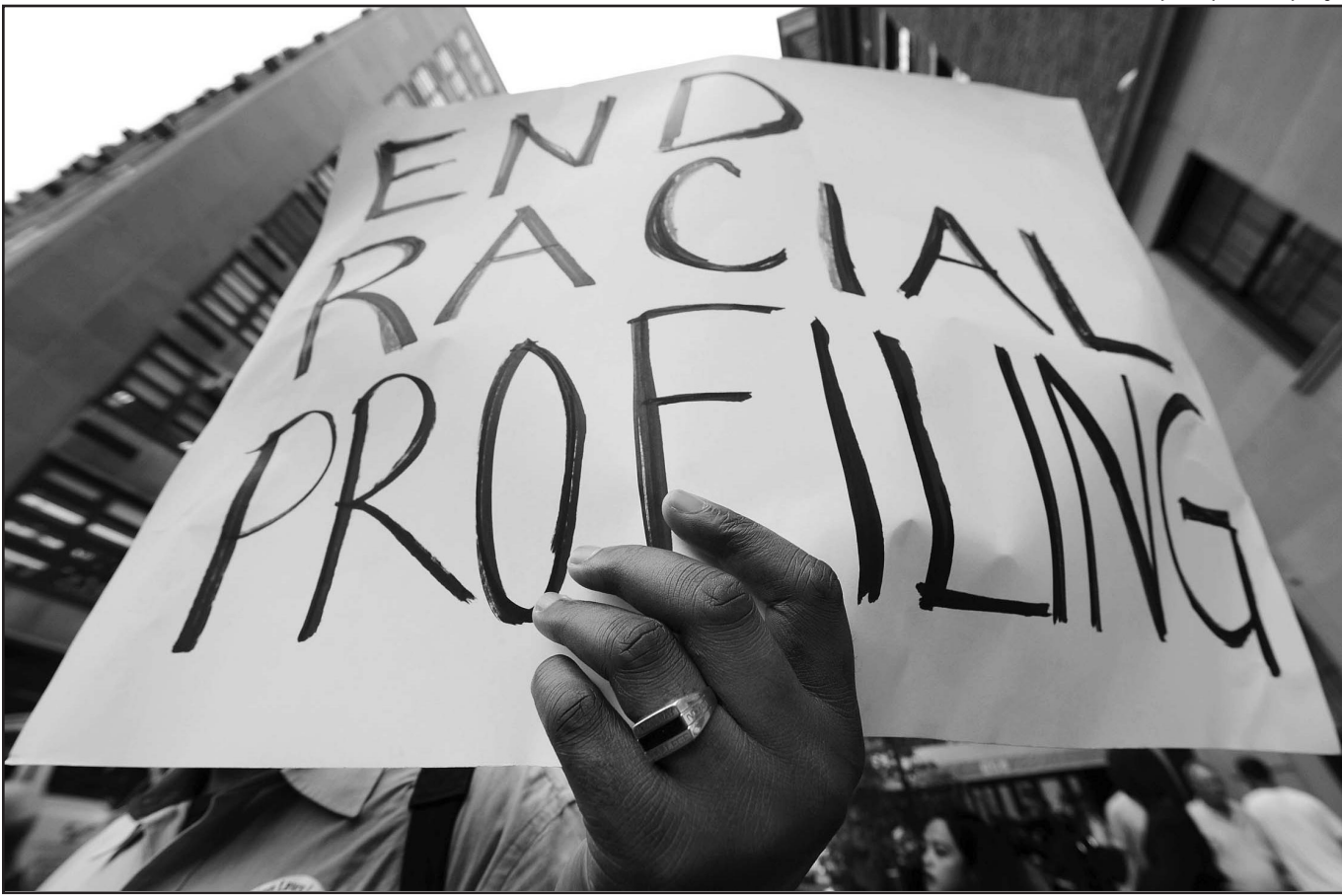
The lower wages paid to Blacks and women drive down the wages of *all* workers. And the ever declining, yet comparably higher living standards of white males under capitalism are but a fraction of the potential living standards that could be attained by all workers if they unite to fight against their common enemy, the capitalist class.

But it will take more than a defense of affirmative action to protect all workers from the capitalist onslaught driven by the economic crisis that is inherent in the system itself. Workers need a program for improving the conditions of the working class as a whole, a fighting program to force from the bosses full employment at union wages for all. This can be achieved by reducing the work week from 40 hours to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and by undertaking a massive program of useful public works.

Money for jobs, education, hospitals, housing, and public transportation—not for war! Break from the twin parties of capitalism—the Democrats and Republicans—the parties of the ruling rich who each fought tooth and nail against the civil rights movement, and who have been eroding its gains ever since! ■



Hundreds chanting, “Everybody in, nobody out!” gathered in Washington, DC, July 30 to demand passage of House Bill HR 676 for “single-payer” health care. HR 676, introduced by Rep. John Conyers, provides health care for everyone regardless of their ability to pay and is similar to the successful Medicare system. The U.S. is the only Western country to not have a government-run health-care system. Although 86 members of the House (Democrats) endorsed HR 676, only Congressman Conyers attended the rally. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders also attended. Thus far, discussion of single-payer health care has been virtually ignored by both major parties and the corporate media during the so-called House and Senate debate on health-care reform. Opinion polls, however, show that most working people support a government run, not-for-profit health-care system.



Professor Gates and the 'teachable moment'

By JOE AUCIELLO

"[I]t is sometimes necessary to remind ourselves of the distance from the classroom to the streets."

— Henry Louis Gates Jr., 1989

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—This city, home of Harvard University and M.I.T., is widely known as the "People's Republic of Cambridge"—even a local bar bears that name. Yet, the undeniably progressive nature of this majority white city with a Black mayor is not the entire story. Less understood is the fact that Cambridge is segregated. It is and has been a city of ethnic and racial enclaves, a place where a post-World War II Italian neighborhood eventually gives way to a West Indian one.

Of course, segregation by race is not legal, yet segregation by wealth and income serve the same purpose. A bird's eye view of the area would give the appearance that the city was still governed by Jim Crow laws.

This is the city that has drawn national attention after one of its more prominent citizens was handcuffed in his front yard. Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested because he flagrantly violated the spirit of Jim Crow, which dictates that, above all, Black people must know their place. As a Black man in a well-off white neighborhood, his very presence was suspect.

When Gates vigorously criticized a police officer, he committed no crime—except the unwritten one that demands deference to white authority.

On July 16, after a trip abroad, Gates returned to his home in the exclusive area around Harvard Square. He was confronted by a problem: His front door was stuck and would not open, requiring the use of a crowbar. Finally, he was able to gain entry into his house. But the door was not the only problem Gates would encounter that day.

According to the Associated Press account (July 21): "When the officers arrived, Gates was already inside and on the phone with the real estate company that manages the property. He had come in through the back door and shut off the alarm, he said.

"Police said Gates was arrested after he yelled at an officer, accused him of racial bias and refused to calm down after the officer demanded that Gates show him identification to prove he lived in the home.

"Gates's lawyer, fellow Harvard scholar Charles Ogle-tree, said his client showed his driver's license and Harvard ID—both with photos—and repeatedly asked for the name and badge number of the officer, who refused. He followed the officer onto the front porch as he left his house and was arrested there."

The police account, by Sgt. James Crowley, the arresting officer, differs on some key points. Crowley contends that Gates initially refused to provide any identification, but then showed a Harvard ID, which has no street address. In the police account, when Gates finally did hand over his driver's license, he demanded Crowley's name and badge number. Police claim Gates was belligerent and confrontational.

Further, Crowley wrote that he told Gates to step out of the house, and Gates shouted, "Yeah, I'll speak with your mama outside." Gates supposedly continued shouting at



Frank Franklin II / AP

Crowley, calling him a racist who treated Gates unjustly because he is a Black man. In a subsequent interview, Gates denied making these statements and said the police report was "full of this man's broad imagination." Nonetheless, Gates was arrested on charges of disorderly conduct.

Tapes of the 911 call do, in fact, contradict the police report and the initial news articles based on that report. The caller did not refer to Black men entering the property, as the police claim. Nor did the caller refer specifically to a breaking and entering taking place.

There are, though, no tapes of the verbal clash between Gates and Crowley. It is not possible to know exactly who said what—but the exact words are not important.

For the sake of argument, leave aside Gates's account and accept the police report. On that basis alone, it is clear that a satisfactory solution could readily have been achieved. The police needed to do no more than exercise proper professional judgment. They could simply have walked away.

Even without the benefit of hindsight, it should have been clear at the time that no arrest was necessary. In fact, by Massachusetts law, "disorderly conduct" means someone is disturbing the normal functioning of the public or someone is trying to stir up the public to unlawful behavior. Gates did none of these things. His real offense was that he embarrassed a cop in front of a small crowd of on-lookers who had gathered at the scene. That is precisely what the police could not tolerate.

Local news outlets broadcast an interview with Sgt. Crowley in which he said that Gates acted "very peculiar—even more so now that I know how educated he is." Crowley's tone of voice in the interview suggests that he sincerely was confused by Gates' behavior.

Decades ago, Malcolm X noted that this confusion was in itself part of the problem. What Malcolm said of whites in general applies especially well to this one white cop: "The white man—give him his due—has an extraordinary intelligence, an extraordinary cleverness. ... But in the arena of dealing with human beings, the white man's working intelligence is hobbled. His intel-

ligence will fail him altogether if the humans happen to be non-white. The white man's emotions superseded his intelligence. He will commit against non-whites the most incredible spontaneous emotional acts, so psyche-deep is his 'white superiority' complex" ("The Autobiography of Malcolm X," p. 292).

That crippling of intelligence also affected at least one Black cop, Sgt. Leon Lashley, who was present during the arrest. He has publicly come to Sgt. Crowley's defense, saying that he supported Crowley 100 percent, thus proving that when push comes to shove, or when shouting leads to handcuffs, a blue uniform trumps Black experience.

Yet, in an implicit public rebuke of police behavior, the charges against Gates were dropped several days later. In a rare exception to its usual practice, Cambridge police officials called the arrest "regrettable and unfortunate."

But Gates' angry behavior was also an exception. Gates has never been a militant radical. A graduate of Yale, he became a professor at Cornell and Duke and was ultimately wooed by Harvard, where he has been the W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities and long-time chairman of the African-American Studies Department.

Opinion-making publications like the *New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books* open their pages to Gates, and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) presented his "Frontline" report: "The Two Nations of Black America" and the PBS series, "African American Lives." The famous Mr. Bartley's Burger Cottage in Harvard Square has even named a hamburger after him.

Professor and political activist Adolph Reed has in the past commented critically of Gates, writing that "he makes no pretense of being a conduit to some sort of grassroots black authenticity ... he is more actively concerned with articulating the voice of ... [a] self-consciously

petit-bourgeois centrism" ("What Are the Drums Saying, Booker?" in "Class Notes," pp. 85-86).

Why, then, would Gates behave so uncharacteristically and react so vehemently? The police admit they could not understand, but there is no riddle involved with this question. The answer is that Gates was subjected to a frontal assault on his dignity and self respect. He responded emotionally. He boiled over in a rage fueled by the personal insults and injuries of a lifetime. As he remarked in the introduction to one of his many books, "I'm not good at concealing my feelings" ("Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man").

Gates truly learned what he certainly knew well from both intellectual and personal experience. Despite advanced degrees and an elite social position, Gates was still vulnerable because he was still Black. The police could shake him down and put him in handcuffs any time they wanted.

Once again, Malcolm X explained these dynamics decades ago. Writing of a debate with an unnamed Black associate professor, Malcolm recalled demanding of him: "Do you know what white racists call black Ph.D's? He said something like, 'I believe that I happen not to be aware of that'—you know, one of these ultra-proper-talking Negroes. And I laid the word down on him, loud: 'Nigger!'" ("The Autobiography of Malcolm X," p. 310).

Sgt. Crowley did not use that word when he marched Professor Gates off to jail, but, then, he did not need to. The arrest spoke for itself. Throughout his ordeal, Gates knew just how he was being treated. In fact, he was treated the way local police routinely deal with Black males. Liberal Cambridge is no exception to the reality of racial profiling. In this city, as in much of America, Blacks are watched, stopped, harassed, and arrested more frequently than whites.

Police hostility does not align to class as it does to race. Police treat working-class whites with more respect, as full citizens, unlike their Black counterparts. A Black man, of whatever class, is more like a suspect who has not yet been apprehended.

A *New York Times*/CBS News poll from July 2008 revealed that 66 percent of Black men answered "yes" to the question: "Have you ever felt you were stopped by the police just because of your race or ethnic background?"

This is the reality that Gates encountered, a reality that, despite his expansive knowledge, still caught him unawares: "There are 1 million black men in the prison system, and on [July 16] I became one of them. I would sooner have believed the sky was going to fall from the heavens than I would have believed this could happen to me. It shouldn't have happened to me, and it shouldn't happen to anyone."

Of course, the police and Sgt. Crowley claim that "race played no factor" in the arrest. But who is to say that a middle-aged white man challenging the cops would not have been treated with more understanding and lenience?

Race certainly did play a role for Gates. He strongly protested against becoming one more statistic, one more victim, one more Black face with no identity, or with an identity that the police imposed on him. Gates' entire career and his numerous accomplishments were, at the moment of the

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... Israel

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cal terms, this meant taking a house that is not implicated in any way, that its single sin is the fact that it is situated on top of a hill in the Gaza Strip,' said one soldier. Of course, the more dwellings destroyed, the harder it is for Palestinians to continue to live in Gaza. And the Israeli long-term goal is to force the Palestinians to emigrate.

"In a personal talk with my battalion commander he mentioned this and said in a sort of sad half-smile, I think, that this is something that will eventually be added to 'my war crimes'" he added." The officer in question obviously knew what he was doing and he anticipated the consequences.

The soldiers' testimony was collected in a thick document accompanied by video clips. But the Israeli officials still tried to dismiss it. In the British *Guardian* of July 17, the organization that compiled the soldiers' testimony, an Israeli human rights organization called Breaking the Silence, responded that "it is somewhat difficult to provide the accusations that Breaking the Silence has conducted a biased investigation with a dignified reply, when the only official investigation of the events of Operation Cast Lead has been conducted by an organisation whose involvement in the operation is anything but minor—the IDF [Israeli Defense Force]."

The Israeli government has refused the request of the UN Human Rights Council to allow an investigation of the Gaza campaign.

The spokesman for Breaking the Silence, Oded Na'aman, commented in the *Guardian* on the attitude of the Israeli authorities: "Only the guilty turn their eyes away from their actions while filling the air with cries of their innocence."

On July 22, a petition signed by prominent intellectuals in Israel, including Amos Oz, one of the best known Israeli writers, demanded that the government accept an independent inquiry in the Gaza war atrocities: "We, citizens of the State of Israel, whose army is the IDF, demand to know the truth regarding the fighting carried out in our names, our money and at the price of danger to the lives of our loved ones," said the text of the petition., according to the liberal Zionist paper *Haaretz* of July 22.

The genocidal brutality of the Israeli



(Above) Palestinian women argue with Israeli soldier after having been denied access to their lands, near Hebron, July 19.

military forced even the government of Britain—the imperialist power that originally sponsored the establishment of a Zionist settlement in Palestine and the closest ally of the U.S., which is Israel's main supporter—to withdraw licenses for exporting military equipment to the Zionist state.

The current British regime is not a major military supplier of the Zionist state. But the symbolic value is considerable. It is an implicit rebuke to the U.S., which supplied the white phosphorous, and a barometer of Israel's growing international pariah status.

The root of the Zionist authorities' ruthlessness is that they generally consider all of Palestine as their land, which the Palestinian people have to be cleared from. The most concrete expression of this is their policy of supporting the extension of Zionist settlements throughout Palestine.

The settlement policy is becoming an acute embarrassment to the U.S. government, which is hoping to be able to sponsor some sort of deal with the Palestinians that would mitigate the opprobrium it suffers in the Muslim and third world in general because of its backing of the colonialist Zionist state.

The current White House, seeking to refurbish its image, has warned the Israelis to limit the settlements. *Haaretz*

of July 26 reported: "The U.S. administration has issued a stiff warning to Israel not to build in the area known as E-1, which lies between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim. Any change in the status quo in E-1 would be 'extremely damaging,' even 'corrosive,' the message said."

The Zionist rulers have wanted to carry out this extension for a long time but U.S. warnings have held them back. "The United States has always vehemently opposed this plan," *Haaretz* noted, "fearing it would deprive a future Palestinian state of territorial contiguity, cut the West Bank in two and sever East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank—all of which would thwart any hope of signing a final-status agreement and establishing a Palestinian state." Even the Bush administration opposed the project.

The new right-wing Israeli government pledged to finally do it. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed in the past to finally build the controversial E-1 housing project—as have several premiers before him, though none has done so due to American pressure. He opened his recent election campaign with a visit to Ma'aleh Adumim, in which he declared: 'I will link Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumim via the Mevasseret Adumim neighborhood, E-1. I want to

see one continuous string of built-up Jewish neighborhoods."

Of course, the U.S. has the power to force Netanyahu to comply. Israel is entirely dependent on U.S. aid. But the U.S. is in a bind. It needs Israel as its fortress in the Middle East, yet it also wants to limit the costs it has to pay in the Muslim world for supporting the Zionist state. This creates an eternal tug of war.

The Palestinians have never in the past gained substantially from the U.S. pressure on Israel. However, this tug of war is likely to become tenser as Israel becomes more isolated politically and the costs the U.S. has to pay for supporting it increase. This gives increasing leverage to democratic and progressive protests in the United States itself against U.S. complicity in the Zionist genocide. It is a new indication that eventually the Zionist project will prove inviable.

The only prospect for peace and prosperity for both the Jewish settler community and the Palestinians is the ending of the idea that a state can be maintained only for Jews. Jews and Palestinians have to be able to live in equality on the entire land of Palestine. ■

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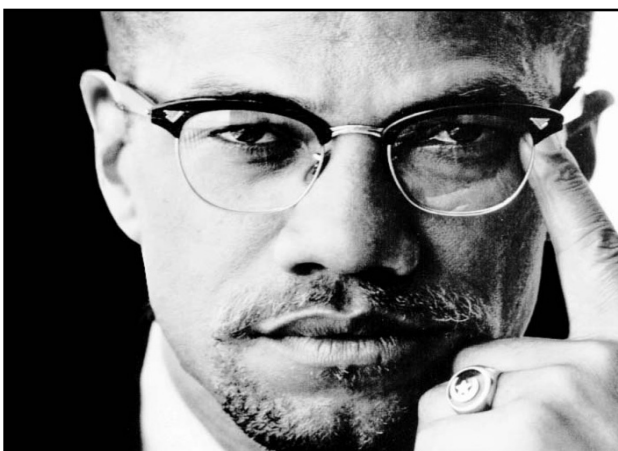
arrest, of no consequence. His social stature and personal sense of self, forged throughout a lifetime, were wiped away on a policeman's whim. To the cops, he was just an obnoxious, uppity Black man. For Gates the entire conflict was rooted in the history of race. How could it not be?

Coincidentally, on the day that Professor Gates was arrested, President Obama addressed the NAACP in a speech that stressed his by now familiar themes of uplift and opportunity. Speaking especially to the young, Obama said, "No one has written your destiny for you. Your destiny is in your hands... No excuses. No excuses. You get that education. All those hardships will just make you stronger, better able to compete. Yes, we can."

As the president spoke these words, he did not know that despite being educated at and teaching in the finest Ivy League institutions, Professor Gates was languishing in the Cambridge city jail.

Before long, news of the arrest reached the president. Obama publicly addressed the issue in response to a reporter's question at a press conference. Obama's first comments on the case were words of understanding and empathy for his "friend" Henry Gates and the realities of Black life in America: "... there is a long history in this country of African Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately. That's just a fact." The president also placed blame on the police for "acting stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home."

Statements this clear, simple, and honest could not stand. Shortly after Obama criticized the Cambridge cops, state and local police unions held their own news conference and returned fire. They demanded an apology from Obama and faulted Gates, as well as the state's African-American governor, who had suggested there could be a racial element to Gates' arrest. News stations throughout the country carried footage of the remarks made by the head of the police union: "The facts of this case suggest that the president



Malcolm X: Whites hobbled by "superiority complex."

used the right adjective [stupid] but directed it to the wrong party."

Obama quickly backtracked and claimed the regrettable incident was caused by "two good people," "two decent people," who both overreacted. He hoped the outcome would be "a teachable moment" that would result in greater understanding and unity.

Of course, it is reasonable to suppose that in 2012 candidate Obama will seek the endorsement of police unions, so he would want to erase what could become an embarrassing moment in a Republican attack ad. Caution is considered smart politics, so it was the president's first response that was the most surprising.

Obama, in his initial comments, unintentionally broke the bond he has labored to establish with white America. Obama's unspoken contract, based on his speeches and actions as candidate and now as president, is to speak about race in terms that will soothe the whites. Characteristically, he will use a phrase like "our troubled past" instead of "a legacy of slavery" or "a history of white racism." The difference is more significant than a simple "calibration of words."

Obama's more specific criticisms are directed to the Black community, stressing the need for more responsibility, better self-conduct, and more persistent personal initiative. To appear even-handed and thus soften the blow, these exhortations are coupled with vague references to vestiges of inequality in America at large.

By referring to racism in such nebulous terms, Obama allows whites considerable leeway in their attitudes and behavior. General and indefinite criticisms allow for specific rationalizations. Those whites who favor racial profiling, for instance, can take comfort in the thought that bigotry may exist, but surely it could not include them. Instead, racism is somewhere "out there," in "our troubled past," or in "society"—where no one is really at fault and where the police are always "just doing their job."

So, to be consistent, Obama had to replace his perceptive remarks with platitudinous ones. He was trying to dispel the suspicions of white Americans who know that John McCain and Sarah Palin would have stood tall in defense of the police. When the president of the United States is forced to backtrack from saying what he knows to be true, that verbal retreat is no small part of the "teachable moment" on race. The election of a Black president, for all its importance, did not usher in a transformed America that put racism in the past tense.

Professor Henry Gates and Sgt. Crowley may enjoy a cold beer with the president at a picnic table outside of the Oval Office. Such an event would not take place unless a positive public-relations outcome was scripted in advance. Larger outcomes—such as the future of Black people in America—are still to be determined.

The attention drawn to Gates does highlight some essential points: despite the victories of the civil rights movement, victories that helped to create the Black elite who Prof. Gates represents, Blacks continue to suffer for racial reasons, for being Black. Now, as before, the struggle against racial discrimination continues as a necessary component of the struggle against capitalism in America. ■

Obama orders 'softer' tactics in anti-immigrant crackdown

Gregory Bull / AP



(Left) U.S. border agent confronts two women from Oaxaca, Mexico, on the Arizona border.

By LISA LUINENBURG

Despite repeated postponements of critical meetings and only vague references to immigration reform since President Obama's inauguration in January, it seems that the debate over immigration policy is finally starting to heat up. Although the Obama administration has failed to lay out a specific timeline for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, the appointment of Janet Napolitano as the new head of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has signaled a tactical shift in dealing with ever-mounting problems surrounding the floundering U.S. immigration system.

Congress has recently moved on several new initiatives as well, including increased funding for building a physical wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, and expanded use of the E-verify system, which is used to check Social Security numbers of new workers against a massive government database.

But what is the meaning of this shift? Under the Bush administration, massive workplace raids seemed to be the standard. Plants were raided by ICE agents, and workers who were caught were shuffled through the national system of detention centers before being deported. Bush also supported increased funding for militarization of the border and more Border Patrol agents.

It is clear that the Obama administration is focusing more on employer sanctions, but what do these actually entail and what will be their effects, intended or otherwise, on the immigration system here in the U.S.? And, how do employer sanctions fit into the larger plan for immigration reform and the Democrats' strategy for pushing such legislation through Congress? The answer may surprise you. Let's take a deeper look.

First, it is clear from Representative Gutierrez's (D-IL) tour of immigration reform "pep rallies" earlier this year that the Democrats are gearing up to push the legislation through Congress (whenever it is brought to the table). In order to gain bipartisan support as well as support from large sections of the American public for their Comprehensive Immigration Reform proposal, the Democrats need to make it clear that they are "cracking down" on illegal immigration through the use of stricter (and supposedly more effective) enforcement measures.

These recent "tough stance" initiatives include even more militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, despite

the past failure of such measures to stem undocumented migration flows. Napolitano recently launched an initiative to send an additional 360 agents to the border, supposedly to help stem the flow of illegal drugs and weapons into Mexico (*The New York Times*, April 6, 2009). The U.S. Senate voted in early July to require actual fencing (as opposed to technological and vehicle barriers) along 700 miles of the border. This initiative passed as part of a debate on a \$42.9 billion measure to fund the DHS for the 2010 fiscal year.

However, similar initiatives in the past have failed to stem the flow of undocumented migration into the U.S., while non-governmental organizations like the Coalición de Derechos Humanos in Arizona have consistently documented increased deaths crossing the border as a result of the necessity to cross at more dangerous points. Both the SEIU and the AFL-CIO endorse increased border control measures as well.

Other "tough stance" initiatives include the expansion of 287(g), which deputizes local police departments to enforce immigration law, and Secure Communities, which will automatically check the immigration status of everyone in jail. On July 10, Napolitano announced that the DHS has granted 287(g) powers to 11 new jurisdictions. The Obama administration has pledged \$195 million over the next year towards expanding the Secure Communities program, "with an eye towards establishing it nationwide by late 2012, when it is projected to cost about \$1 billion a year" (*The New York Times*, July 26, 2009).

These expansions have already sparked heated debate. Both programs lack oversight and tend to encourage racial profiling and abuses, while breaking down trust between local police officers and immigrant communities. But these "tough stance" initiatives are only trade-offs to give the Democrats the bipartisan support they need to push through new enforcement-based legislation focusing on employer sanctions.

This brings us to our main point, which is the need for the new immigration reforms to appear more "humane." Increased use of so-called "employer sanctions," coupled with new "desktop raid" tactics, facilitate this shift in perspective.

In the past, large-scale workplace raids like those at the Swift meatpacking plant in Worthington, Minn., or at the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, left families torn apart and whole communities destroyed. Huge public outcry and mass protests in the wake of

these raids have left politicians gun shy. Even Gutierrez, in the midst of his vague and non-committal speech on Comprehensive Immigration Reform in Minneapolis in June, called for an end to the raids and deportations.

As part of the new tactical shift on immigration policy, the large-scale raids of the last few years have gradually given way to more small-scale home raids. These types of raids are more difficult to organize against and often pass under the public radar, receiving no media attention.

Appearing to crack down on employers also lends a softer face to raids. It makes reform look more humane and avoids political fallout and backlash from the public. Obama said in recent remarks that "the American people still want to see a solution in which we are ... cracking down on employers" (Office of the Press Secretary, June 25, 2009).

This will supposedly lead to new "softer" enforcement tactics in the future, such as the recent "automated raid" at Overhill Farms just outside of Los Angeles. According to the *Los Angeles Times* (June 12, 2009), "an Internal Revenue Service audit found that 260 workers had provided 'invalid or fraudulent' Social Security numbers." Although the IRS says that it does not mandate that employees be fired because of incorrect Social Security numbers, the company felt the pressure. On May 31, Overhill Farms decided to fire its 260 employees rather than risk prosecution under tax and immigration laws.

But these so-called "employer sanctions" in reality deeply affect workers and their families while employers tend to escape with a mere slap on the wrist. Although they have not at this time been deported, over 200 families affected by the Overhill raid were suddenly left without a source of income.

Silent raids still serve to terrorize the community. Victims of ICE agents and deportation centers in the aftermath of workplace raids have already been burned into the collective memory of the immigrant community. And it seems unlikely that the raids will stop any time soon. Operation Endgame, the program put in place to manage massive raids and deportations, is funded until 2012 (*Monthly Review*, January 2007).

The Overhill raid was just the first installment in a new government plan to utilize programs like E-Verify and I-9 audits. Both of these tools would require companies to check the social security numbers of new (and possibly even current employees) against a giant government database.

On July 1, Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) issued a statement on its website, saying that it was issuing Notices of Inspection (or I-9 audits) to 652 businesses nationwide. DHS Security Assistant Secretary for ICE John Morton said, "This nationwide effort is a first step in ICE's long-term strategy to address and deter illegal employment." The U.S. Senate has already given its approval to make the voluntary E-Verify program permanent.

Janet Napolitano announced on July 8 that she was endorsing a Bush administrative initiative that would make the E-Verify system mandatory for federal contractors and subcontractors. Mandatory use of E-Verify by government contractors would require some 170,000 companies to check the immigration status of new hires and potentially current employees as well (*The Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2009). This new rule will go into effect on Sept. 8.

On July 9, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a statement denouncing the Senate vote to pass an amendment by Senator David Vitter (R-LA). The Vitter amendment would require employers "to fire workers, including U.S. citizens, who are unable to resolve discrepancies in the Social Security records."

The ACLU said that this vote could overturn Obama's measure to rescind the infamously flawed Social Security no-match rule. The no-match rule required companies to issue notices to employees who were found to have a so-called "discrepancy" in the Social Security number they had given to the company when first hired.

The use of no-match letters under the Vitter amend-

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ment could result in the illegal firing of tens of thousands of legal U.S. citizens. This is because the Social Security database the government uses to check for discrepancies is rife with errors.

In 2007, a federal court blocked the use of the no-match rule as a result of a suit levied against the DHS by the ACLU, AFL-CIO, and the National Immigration Law Center. The ACLU states that "according to the Social Security Administration's own Inspector General, more than 70 percent of the discrepancies in the SSA database belong to U.S. citizens."

Despite these blatant flaws, it seems that the plan to use Social Security audits is steadily moving forward. American Apparel recently announced that some 1800 of its employees had been found to have Social Security discrepancies after a recent ICE audit (Reuters, July 2, 2009). This is the largest use of the new I-9 audit tactic to date, and only signals more to come.

The use of the new "automated" or "silent" raid tactic (as used in the Overhill Farm case) is an important part of the transition towards a national guest worker system. It allows employers to safely and quickly get rid of large numbers of undocumented employees while hiring new employees under the E-verify program (which automatically checks their Social Security numbers). Employers can therefore avoid any legal repercussions for themselves, while succumbing to increasing pressure (or even mandates) from the U.S. government to participate in employer sanction programs such as E-verify.

Participation in these programs makes it more difficult for employers to hire undocumented workers under the table in the future. If they want to continue to exploit cheap labor flows, their only option would be to participate in a national guest worker (or temporary work visa) program. It's already becoming clear that such a guest worker program will likely be included in any proposal for Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation that is brought to the negotiating table in coming months. Senator McCain (R-Ariz.) has been particularly adamant that Republicans will not back any immigration reform legislation that does not include some type of guest worker system (*The Hill*, June 25, 2009).

Plans for a guest worker system will likely include an independent commission to oversee labor flows. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win state on their websites that they support the use of such a commission.

Essentially, the labor commission would act to regulate the flow of temporary workers into the United States. If a company were short on workers (or just wanted a cheap and temporary source of labor) they could apply to the commission, which would grant them permission to bring in a certain number of foreign workers on temporary work visas. These workers would be highly subject to exploitation, because they would depend entirely on their employers for their work visas. Any complaints about wages or worker abuses could become deportable offenses.

A guest worker system would essentially be a legalized system of indentured servitude for foreign work-



ers, similar to the Bracero program which provided temporary agricultural workers from Mexico to the United States from 1942 to 1964. According to an article in *Monthly Review* (January 2007), "the bracero experience was characterized by poverty wages, substandard working conditions, social discrimination, and lack of even the most basic social services for braceros and their families." This program is essentially the historical and legal precedent for the guest worker system of labor exploitation currently in the works.

So in reality, employer sanctions are just one more part of the plan to ensure cheap and "legal" labor

The creation of a system for 'temporary' immigrant workers would only create a group of workers who are disposable and doomed to sell their labor for super-cheap wages.

flows to the U.S. made up of workers who are easily exploited. Analysts have already made it clear that the U.S. economy depends in large part on the cheap labor provided by the approximately 12 million undocumented workers who currently reside here in the United States.

Employers have traditionally hired undocumented workers under the table, paying them super cheap wages for long hours of labor. Workers under these conditions have little recourse to protect their rights as workers and as human beings. And the government's new emphasis on the use of employer sanctions are only helping facilitate the transition to a new form of legalized exploitation under a guest worker system.

Other pieces of the upcoming Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation, such as the "path to citizenship" that Obama so strongly supports also help to channel workers into a new guest worker system. The so-called "path to citizenship" would probably be pretty stringent.

The Comprehensive Enforcement and Immigration Reform Act of 2005 and the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 (both supported by Senator McCain) included requirements such as proficiency in the English language and a wait of at least five years for processing of visa applications. They also required people to "go to the back of the line," to go back to their country of origin, and to pay a \$2000 fine and thousands of dollars in back taxes. Although they were never passed, these bills were the predecessors for today's immigration reform legislation.

Furthermore, it is clear that employer sanctions and the guest worker programs that they support will be especially lucrative to big business (and especially devastating to immigrant families) in light of the severe economic depression we are currently slogging through. It just provides the ruling elite with one more tool to exploit cheap labor and keep their profit margins high (while ensuring their ultimate survival) during difficult financial times.

(Above) Workers march in Mexico City in April 2006 in solidarity with striking miners. U.S. immigration activists must solidarize with workers and peasants in Latin America increasingly impoverished by U.S. policies.

(Left) Thousands march in Los Angeles as part of April 2006 nationwide demonstrations against anti-immigrant legislation in Congress.

And most sadly, these new policies will only lead to increasing discrimination and racism against people of Hispanic descent. In a recent article (April 29), immigrant rights activist David Bacon reported that "four years after [the employer] sanctions began, the Government Accountability Office reported that 346,000 US employers applied immigration-verification requirements only to job applicants with a 'foreign' accent or appearance. Another 430,000 only hired US-born applicants."

The use of racist xenophobia against Latinos living in the U.S. only serves to divide the American working class. The creation of a national system for temporary workers would only serve to create a group of second-class and disposable workers doomed to sell their labor for super-cheap wages.

We must come to realize that denying labor rights and equitable wages to undocumented workers only drives down wages and working conditions for all Americans.

It is clear that the government is especially adept at using Orwellian doublespeak. Phrases such as "I-9 audits" or "employer sanctions" make new tactics appear softer while hiding the reality of their devastating effects on families and communities. We must not be fooled by this tactic, but instead must reclaim the language for ourselves. An automated raid is still a *raid*, no matter how silent!

But we must not be silent. It is crucial that labor groups, immigrant rights activists, and the immigrant community and its allies join together to prepare a response, defense, and alternative plan to the Obama administration's Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation. We must continue to oppose all government attacks on immigrants, while pressuring for a moratorium on raids and deportations and unconditional legalization for all undocumented people currently living in the United States.

It is also essential for us to study and recognize the roots of the immigration "problem" we face today. As David Bacon notes, "Employer sanctions have failed to reduce undocumented migration because NAFTA and globalization create huge migration pressure. ... Ismael Rojas, who arrived without papers, says, 'You can either abandon your children to make money to take care of them, or you can stay with your children and watch them live in misery. Poverty makes us leave our families.'"

Bacon helps us realize that unless we address the root causes of migration, more people will continue to come to the U.S. as a result of economic pressure and the lure of better wages. Only by changing U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and working to reduce poverty in that region can we truly protect peoples' indelible "right to stay at home."

So which path will we take in the coming months? Will we allow the government to continue to criminalize and persecute undocumented immigrants? Or will we join together to defend our common rights as workers like we did in the mass protests of 2006, raising our fists and shouting, "An injury to one is an injury to all!"



... National antiwar conference demands 'U.S. Troops Out Now!'

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begin to effectively challenge the U.S. warmakers.

Members and leaders of Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, Code Pink, American Friends Service Committee, Peace Action, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, US Labor Against the War, Pax Christi, the Iraq Moratorium, Progressive Democrats of America, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Green Party, and other national groups actively participated. Close to a dozen socialist organizations were also represented, as were scores of leading activists from local and regional antiwar organizations across the country.

The conference was held at La Roche College in Pittsburgh and was hosted by the peace committee of the Thomas Merton Center, the main peace and justice organization in the area. National antiwar leaders in attendance included Cindy Sheehan; Col. Ann Wright; Donna Dewitt, president of the South Carolina AFL-CIO; and long-time peace activist Molly Rush of the Plowshares 8, who is also a founding member of the Thomas Merton Center.

Keynote and featured rally speakers also included Michael McPhearson, executive director of Veterans for Peace and co-coordinator of UFPJ; Brian Becker, national coordinator, ANSWER Coalition (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism); Iraqi poet and National Assembly leader Zaineb Alani; National Assembly leader and unjustly disbarred human rights attorney Lynne Stewart; and Michael Zweig, an economics professor and leader of US Labor Against the War.

A special presentation by Elie Domota, general secretary of the General Union of Workers of Guadeloupe, brought down the house with thunderous applause when Domota described what a united workers' movement and 45-day general strike on the French-controlled Island of Guadeloupe had accomplished. The united mass movement there extracted major concessions from the island's ruling rich and from the French government. Representatives of the peace and labor movements from Canada and Haitian trade unionist Figolé St. Cyr, general secretary, Autonomous Confederation of Haitian Workers (CATH), were also active conference participants.

All those in attendance at this inclusive and open antiwar conference had voice and vote in all proceedings.

The main plenary sessions were dedicated to developing a united action proposal for the coming period and adopting a structure proposal for the National Assembly's functioning. A 14-person Administrative Body was elected to help lead the organization. This body is subordinate to the National Assembly's leading decision-making committee, the Continuations Body (CB), which includes representatives from all local and national organizations that agree to the Assembly's five points of unity. These are the construction of a democratic (one-person-one-vote), united, independent, mass action, and Out Now! antiwar movement. To date, 44 organizations are represented on this open-ended body.

The central objective of the National Assembly is building a U.S. antiwar movement, in all its diversity, united around specific mass actions. Mass action is seen by NA organizers as an indispensable weapon to win fundamental social change—and as a fundamental tactical and strategic organizing principle. It is based on the premise that the people of the world are fully capable of making their own history provided only that they are united, clearly focused, and organized independently of the institutions of the status quo.

Five Action Proposals were circulated prior to the conference to all participants. One, submitted by the National Assembly's CB leadership, had been discussed and debated for several months prior to the conference.

The remaining proposals came from writer/activist David Swanson, leader of the After Downing Street group; the World Can't Wait coalition; and a group of 9/11 truth activists who sought adoption of a proposal

supporting a New York City referendum for an independent 9/11 investigation.

Another proposal, submitted by the Bail Out the People Campaign, was withdrawn and later submitted for the consideration of the Assembly's post-conference CB meeting. All proposals were discussed and debated, and in the end, in the spirit of unity that prevailed throughout the conference, all of the resolutions, with the exception of the proposal from the 9/11 truth activists, were consolidated into a unified action proposal and unanimously approved.

The major difference in emphasis between all the proposals presented centered on whether the present movement was capable of organizing a major mass antiwar action today. Those who were skeptical about such a possibility preferred a weekday event, where the anticipated modest turnout would not highlight the movement's present limited organizing capacity. Those favoring a focus on Saturday, Oct. 17, eventually prevailed, albeit with a clear understanding that present conditions were not yet amenable to mobilizing the massive protests that marked the movement in its earlier stages.

October actions to highlight anniversaries

The Oct. 17 date was selected to mark the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the decision to go to war against Iraq as well as to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Vietnam Moratorium, the 1969 mobilization that drew hundreds of thousands into the streets to oppose the U.S. war against the people of that country. At the same time, however, virtually all present understood that posing modest weekday actions was not at all counterposed to efforts at larger mobilizations.

The NA call aimed at promoting and organizing a series of actions in September and October and a nationally coordinated mobilization next spring around the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Actions will take place in Pittsburgh during the Sept. 24-25 G-20 summit meeting of leaders of the world's most powerful industrialized nations. The conference voted to organize a National Assembly "Out Now!" antiwar contingent on Sept. 25. This day has been set aside by Pittsburgh G-20 organizers and NA supporters for a massive, peaceful, legal demonstration around the demand, "Money for Human Needs, Not War."

The National Assembly will urge that the Oct. 17 actions include the following demands:

- Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops, military personnel, bases, contractors, and mercenaries from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan!
- End U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine! End the siege against Gaza!
- U.S. hands off Iran and North Korea!
- Self-determination for all oppressed nations and peoples!
- End war crimes, including torture!

The Assembly will also support and endorse a two-week period of united actions, beginning Oct. 3 and culminating on Oct. 17. This includes Monday, Oct. 5, as the date for a national mass march and non-violent civil resistance at the U.S. House of Representatives office buildings and at the White House.

The NA's Action Program includes the organization of a national speaking tour, collaboration with other groups on organizing a week of student antiwar protests, and projected nationally coordinated mass actions in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Los Angeles in the spring of 2010. The NA is presently engaged in a campaign to win endorsements for Oct. 17.

Inspiring conference statements by leaders of the national antiwar groups and by participating rally and panelist speakers effectively promoted a new and welcome spirit of unity that few have witnessed in past years. The amended Action Program, was approved unanimously.

Eighteen workshops, organized in two sessions, saw many of the movement's most hotly debated issues



(Above) Conference Presiding Committee members (from left) Jeff Mackler, Donna DeWitt, Marilyn Levin, and Jerry Gordon.

discussed in civil tones. Workshops focused on the war's effect on the economy; women and war; students and youth; current developments in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Pakistan; lessons of the Vietnam War; immigrant rights/ICE raids; soldiers, veterans, and military families; Guadeloupe and Haiti; and more. The G-20 workshop saw some of the first organizing for the Sept. 24-25 Pittsburgh demonstrations.

A typical example of one of the many well-planned workshops was entitled, "Torture, Rendition, Detentions, Guantanamo and Wrongful Prosecutions: Holding Those Who Give the Orders Responsible." Presenters included Lynne Stewart; Jules Lobel, U.S. Center for Constitutional Rights litigator; Janet McMahon, managing editor, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*; David Swanson, cofounder of *After Downing Street*; and Katherine Hughes from the Dr. Dhafir defense committee in Syracuse.

Resolutions on Palestine, Haiti, Honduras

The conference approved by unanimous votes critical resolutions on Honduras, Palestine, and Haiti. The Honduras resolution demanded the immediate and unconditional return of deposed President Manuel Zelaya, and a U.S. Hands Off! policy.

The Palestine resolution demanded the immediate release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and supported the Palestinian right to self-determination. A Palestine Working Committee was also established "to help ensure that the antiwar movement stands in solidarity with the people of Palestine and integrates the issue of Palestine in the broader antiwar struggle."

The resolution continued, "The movement should promote efforts to break the siege of Gaza, oppose attacks and incursions in the occupied territories, actively support the call of the Palestine Civil Society movement for boycotts, divestments and sanctions, and call for an end to U.S. support for Israel's occupation of Palestine."

The resolution on Haiti demanded "... the immediate withdrawal of the 12,000 UN occupation troops from Haiti and the return of democracy, beginning with the return of all exiled political leaders, particularly Jean Bertrand Aristide."

The agenda featured a half-hour discussion and debate on the situation in Iran, wherein some 20 speakers in rapid succession expressed a broad range of often opposing views and opinions. It was clear that the vast differences expressed would not and could not result in a broadly accepted united agreement on whether the conference should stand in solidarity with the Iranian masses who rose to challenge the oppressive Iranian clerical corporate regime and threatened to go beyond the framework of the present repressive system itself.

Opponents of this position argued that the massive challenge to the "more progressive" regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was in large part orchestrated by or benefited U.S. imperialism. This was a point of view that allowed no common ground with these writers and many other conference participants. The sharp division made it clear that the conference was compelled to refrain from adopting any position on the internal politics of Iran.

By unanimous agreement, however, the adopted Action Proposal approved the position that had been put forward by the CB, which opposed all U.S. sanctions against Iran and U.S. threats of intervention and war. A policy supporting the right of self-determination of the Iranian people and demanding, "U.S. Hands Off!" was also approved unanimously.

For further information and to endorse the Oct. 17 actions contact: natassembly.org and natassembly@aol.com. ■

By ZAINEB ALANI

Keynote Address delivered to the National Assembly antiwar conference Held July 10-12 in Pittsburgh.

On July 4 of this year, Vice President Biden celebrated American Independence Day in occupied Iraq, in one of the presidential palaces of the former regime, now an integral part of the U.S.-run "Green Zone." Four days earlier, PM Nouri Al-Maliki's U.S.-installed puppet government declared a "victory" signaled by the pullout of U.S. troops from major Iraqi cities, and the beginning of the "restoration of sovereignty."

Nothing could have been more hypocritical or comical.

When the late Robert McNamara paid a visit to the independent country of Vietnam that he had previously "sought to conquer" and failed, he said to their foreign minister, "We wanted to give you democracy." The reply was, "We wanted our independence first." Why do American policy-makers never learn from history?

I'm amazed by the number of Americans who are "hurt" that the Iraqis are celebrating U.S. troop withdrawal with no "word of thanks." The sad truth is that there is no withdrawal and there is *nothing* to thank for. For the Iraqis the list of war reparations is not one that the U.S. can dream to even begin to fulfill. How can you bring 1.2 million people back to life? How can you render 2 million war widows married wives again? And how can you give back a lost parent to 5 million Iraqi orphans?

The celebrations of "independence" in Iraq today are a circus where the primary clowns are the same thugs that count on U.S. presence to survive. And how can anyone question the status of continued U.S. military presence when the largest embassy in the world, the size of 80 football fields, lies in one of the most beautiful locations in the heart of Baghdad?

The current troop level dispels the myth of the "SOFA" agreement. Even after the June 30 deadline, 134,000 U.S. soldiers will be left behind. This number is reminiscent of troop levels in 2003, when the invasion began and before the so-called "Surge."

Further, and to take it straight from the horse's mouth, the first U.S. military commander in Iraq openly announces "a longer stay in Iraq for U.S. troops."

In fact, General Odierno insists, "It's not going to end, OK? There'll always be some sort of low-level insurgency in Iraq for the next 5, 10, 15 years..." If so, then what are we celebrating? And what form of "crystal ball" has Gen. Odierno, asserting that there will *always* be a need for U.S. troop presence? Unless, it's the world's second largest oil field.

To the average Iraqi citizen, and rightly so, the Americans are there for the oil, and the puppet-government with its "no-bid" to "selective-bid" oil contract policy is there to serve this very purpose. In fact, the common sentiment in Baghdad today is that we went from living under the rule of a tyrannical Ali Baba to that of 40-hundred ruling thieves.

According to Transparency International, Iraq is among one of the top countries showing the highest levels of perceived corruption. Jabbar Al-Luaibi, former head of the South Oil Company in Basrah, describes the process of the Iraqi's Oil Ministry of maintaining oil production records like "driving a car without any indicators on the dashboard."

In Iraq today, there is a detention nightmare, very much reminiscent of Abu-Ghraib under U.S. authority, and very similar to the type of torture chambers that this very occupation claimed to wage war against! Three hundred Iraqi detainees went into a hunger strike at the Risafa prison in mid-June. The world did not hear them. Never in the history of Iraq have there

Iraq today: 5 million orphans

Wathiq Khuzale / Getty Images



(Above) U.S. soldier guards recently re-opened elementary school north of Baghdad, March 2009.

been elections established on sectarian and ethnic platforms, thus further reinforcing the birth and growth of "militias," and paving the way to U.S.-backed mercenary groups. The concept is "foreign" in Iraq's modern history. Even when the people of Iraq voted, a large majority believed that by voting they were expediting the process of U.S. troop withdrawal. Sadly not.

The recent escalation of bombings in Iraq is *not* due to the temporary U.S. withdrawal from the major cities, but rather a statement against a continued foreign occupation. Bombings will continue as long as there is foreign presence on Iraqi soil.

The foremost expert on the logic of suicide terrorism, Robert Pape, states that it is *not* primarily motivated by fundamentalism but by the occupation. This motivation is further aggravated when there is a fundamental difference in faith and culture between the occupier and occupied people.

Today, Iraq is a nation of 2 million war widows, 5 million orphans, 2 million internally displaced, and 4 million refugees surviving under the meanest living conditions in neighboring countries, topping the UNHCR World Refugee Statistics for the region. Today 80% of Iraqis civilians have witnessed shootings, kidnappings, and killings (per UN statistics).

Refugees who have relocated to the U.S. find it extremely difficult to adapt to "normalcy." I teach English as a Second Language to refugees in Columbus, Ohio. The trauma these people have witnessed is unimaginable. There is not *one* family who has not suffered their child being kidnapped, or lost a loved one to sectarian "revenge" killings.

I have personally witnessed the struggle of a 10-year-old to adapt to a school system and the concept of normal life where people are not necessarily out there to "kill him!" Jewad, whose soccer ball rolled onto a corpse in a Baghdad dumpster when he was nine, can never look at a soccer ball the same way again. Needless to say, he now has no interest in any ballgame.

In neighboring countries where there is a huge Iraqi refugee population, there also exists a thriving sex trade, where the majority of the victims are female minors as young as 13 years old. The textbook term for this tragic phenomenon is "survival sex."

My cousin who is a refugee in Syria has been insulted time and time again, when the women in his family were referred to as "refugee sluts" despite the fact neither he nor his family had set foot in the red-light areas that the Syrian authorities have now turned into an

"unofficial" lucrative tourist attraction.

Unemployment rates in Iraq today fluctuate between 27-60% depending on the region and whether or not a curfew is in effect. Forty percent of Iraq's professionals and technocrats have left the country, 2000-plus physicians have been murdered since 2005, and the health infrastructure is in tatters. Disease is rampant, where approximately 10,000 are inflicted with cholera. AIDS, which was a not even significant statistic prior to the invasion, is now at 75,000 cases (WHO). Ten years ago, there were only 12 known cases.

Today Baghdad is a city of walls. Neighborhoods are segregated like never before and Baghdad is finally "ethnically segregated." The 2 million internally displaced have learned to adapt to their new "environment," but traveling from one neighborhood to another can still cost one his/her life if they do not carry an ID card.

My mother's childhood friend, who needed a kidney dialysis, died on the way to hospital because the ambulance was stopped multiple times between neighborhood checkpoints, with some delays amounting to over an hour. Even if he had made it to hospital, the possibility of his getting the appropriate treatment in a sanitary environment would have been negligible.

Three months before the invasion my mother underwent an angioplasty and despite the imposition of sanctions then and the lack of non-expired materials, her surgery was successful.

Early, this year, my brother's father-in-law had to be flown into neighboring Amman for the same treatment because the best Iraqi hospitals could not provide it. He could afford the flight; other Iraqis in his condition would just perish.

My own uncle, only six months ago, was wheeled out of an operation room three times because the dying hospital generators could not take care of the recurrent power outages. Power outages are still very frequent, with the population receiving only 50% of the power supply they used to have prior to the invasion.

Water, which was not potable prior to the invasion, is still dangerously contaminated in a lot of areas where people are dependant on well-water because the pipes that connect them to the general water network that was bombed during "shock and awe" have still not been repaired.

When I was growing up in Iraq, and up until the last day before the invasion, had I been able to visit, I would have been able to walk the streets dressed as I am now or drive my car in the streets

of Baghdad. I went to school and completed my graduate degree there; I was one of 12 women who graduated from my department in 1991.

Then, if I had wanted to pay a water bill, for instance, I would stand in a long line, but I would not have to bribe the clerk at the register to have my transaction completed. For every *single* government transaction today, you need to know somebody, and that somebody is dependent on your money to survive. Otherwise, you can consider it lost in red tape for up to six months!

When my mother ventured to renew her passport; she was given two choices—wait for eight months, or pay \$600 (U.S.) to have it delivered in two weeks. When I used to drive in Baghdad, I was rarely required to carry an ID. Today, if I don't, and I fall in the hands of the wrong militia, I'm potentially looking at a death sentence.

What caused this nightmare six years ago, and continues to cause it, has not and is not going away soon. The occupation seems to be there to stay, and the silence of the American people in the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis has left them confused and misguided as to what has brought about all this—namely, America's foreign wars and imperialism.

The Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani people cannot win against the American war machine. On their own, they are helpless. They have only one hope, *you*. We need to build a movement so strong that our voices are heard as *one*, so loud that we force the occupiers to leave the Middle East and elsewhere where they impose their colonial occupations and plunder the natural resources and wealth of weaker nations. American, Iraqi, Afghan, and Palestinian peoples are paying a dear price in blood and treasure for the continuation of these wars and occupations.

My hope is that this movement unites, that our minor differences are diminished by our bigger cause, and that this conference will pave the way for agreement on united actions in the months ahead that will tell the whole world when we hit the streets this fall, that we are raising high the banners of "Out Now!" "Out Now from Iraq!" "Out Now from Afghanistan!" "Out Now for Israeli Troops from Palestine!"

The world needs to know that the U.S. antiwar movement is not only alive and kicking, but is determined to end the nightmares in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Palestine. ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

It's time for the NDP to Put capitalism on trial

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Capitalism isn't working. The proof is overwhelming. Across Canada, 1.5 million are unemployed, not counting discouraged workers and the under-employed. The numbers are expected to rise well into 2010. The International Labour Organization warns that the number of jobless worldwide could reach 239 million this year, and that young people will be the hardest hit. The system's spin doctors are trying to fool the public by talking about 'recovery'. But when pressed, the big shots admit it is a 'jobless recovery'.

The failure of Canadian and global capitalism is evident in advancing climate change, impending environmental disaster, and the spread of drought and famine. It is apparent in the brutal imperial wars of occupation, in the growing gap between rich and poor, and in the assault on democratic rights wherever popular resistance takes to the streets.

Clearly, years of cuts, concessions, privatization, and tax breaks for giant corporations did nothing to solve the biggest problems facing society. They simply made the rich richer at the expense of workers. They emboldened the ruling elite to demand more, stimulated corruption in the highest places, and extended the life span of a dying, wasteful and outmoded system that puts profits before people every time.

Even if 'recovery' from the current world economic depression occurred tomorrow, the fact remains that *capitalism condemns humanity to recurring cycles of recession/depression*. It sentences us all to endless crippling wars, eco-disasters, glaring inequalities and obscene oppression.

So, why continue to make excuses for the system? Why continue to tinker with the mechanisms of a death machine? Why keep Capital on life support at the expense of Labour? As former NDP MP Svend Robinson famously said, "Capitalism is like a rabid dog that should be put down."

The time has come to stop scratching at the surface. We need to expose the fundamental flaws, the deep-rooted contradictions of the system, and to fight for a socialist alternative.

It's time for the NDP to put capitalism on trial.

That's the task facing delegates at the party's federal convention, Aug. 14-16, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

We can easily demonstrate that capitalism is killing the planet and its inhabitants in a multitude of nefarious ways, and that to survive the working class and its allies are compelled to replace the system root and branch. It's the truth that needs to be told, with the power to conquer misinformation and fear, and to give voice to millions.

The NDP can lead the fight for a future worthy of humanity, but not if its leaders mince words and make opportunistic concessions to the powers that be. NDP support in the 2008 election campaign peaked at 22 per cent, compared with 15 per cent now. The idea of entering a coalition government with the big business-controlled Liberal Party dealt a severe blow to the NDP's independence as a party of the working class. Since then, the party leadership has echoed the lame lamentations of the labour brass, when what is desperately needed, in addition to fixing E.I. and saving pensions, is a bold campaign to turn government bail-out money into public equity—towards the nationalization, under workers' and community control, of auto, steel, oil and the big banks.

Make Capital pay for a massive public works effort

The decision by New Democratic Party officials to feature Obama's director of communications, Anita Dunn, at the NDP federal convention, reveals a misconception. The Democratic Party, USA, is no friend of working people anywhere. The invitation to Dunn compromises the independence of the NDP from the corporate rulers on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. — B.W.



to convert to green energy, to repair roads, bridges, railways and ports, and to build social housing. That is the way to defend and expand employment, and to meet human needs by democratizing and planning the economy.

As the NDP Socialist Caucus has argued since its foundation in 1997, and which we re-state today with greater conviction than ever, *to survive the NDP must turn sharply to the left*. Increasingly, this is an argument for the survival and prosperity of humanity as a whole. If you agree, please join us in fighting for socialist policies.

Liberal-NDP coalition stinks in Toronto

Last winter there was much ado about the prospect of a Liberal-NDP coalition federal government. According to Conservatives, it would have violated democracy and bankrupted the state. According to NDP officials, it would have mitigated the economic crisis and provided a very progressive alternative to Harper. The truth is that both claims were wrong.

Do you want to know what a Liberal-NDP government would be like? Look no farther than the malodorous mess in Toronto. Among other things, the unholy alliance that governs Canada's biggest city allowed basic services to erode, gave the rich a tax holiday, provoked a civic workers' strike and led a frontal assault on labour's past gains.

Mayor David Miller, a former NDP member, backed by a coalition of Liberal and NDP city councillors, forced a strike on 30,000 inside and outside city workers—including ambulance, parks and recreation, child-care, water, welfare, and garbage-collection workers (see above photo). How? By trying to jam over 110 pages of labour concessions down their throats. The proposed take-aways included attacks on seniority rights, limits on transfer and promotion rights, a freeze on cost of living increases, a two-tier wage structure, and an end to banking sick days.

Over 70 per cent of the workforce, represented by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Locals 79 and 416, are women. The average annual income for city workers is \$40,000. None have severance pay. Most of them do not enjoy compensation at retirement for unused sick days -- the hot button issue that was disingenuously used to portray the municipal workers as 'privileged'.

The result of the strike, which ended on July 31 after 40 days, is a 6 per cent raise over three years, one more designated holiday, wage protection for any workers moved to a lower-rated position, pay for rest breaks missed (in courts, children's services and homes), improved vision care, and a long-term phase-out of the banked sick time (current full-time staff can continue to accrue sick days, or cash them in now, or have their sick days frozen, to draw upon as needed, with a buy-out at normal termination; no sick days banking for new hires, who gain a short-term disability plan).

In other words, CUPE members withstood most of the city's take-away demands, and traded off a conces-

sion for some small gains. It was a political defeat for Miller and his 'progressive' coalition, which alienated both Labour and the hard right wing. Could this fiasco, and the suffering inflicted on city workers and residents, have been avoided?

Toronto, like almost every other city, province, and central government in the capitalist world, is suffering a financial crisis. Toronto's chronic underfunding malaise was not born yesterday. Massive cuts in transfer payments to the provinces by Tory Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in the 1980s, were deepened and accelerated by the Chretien/Martin Liberals in the 1990s with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). Then the provinces off-loaded to their cities responsibility for infrastructure costs associated with airports, water, sewage, mass transportation, police, welfare, and more—but without the money or tax tools required to cope with it all.

So, cities had a huge expenditure problem. And they faced a choice: mobilize residents to fight the changes, or just comply with the neo-liberal corporate agenda.

How did Toronto politicians respond? They cut services, like street cleaning and snow removal, and limited public access to swimming pools, arenas, community centers, and libraries. They reduced water testing and park upgrades. City Council implemented a range of regressive, consumption-based flat taxes on all citizens, while at the same time reducing commercial property taxes, undervaluing business land assessments and providing major grants and financial assistance to business.

One of the flat taxes Miller instituted, under the provisions of the new City of Toronto Act 2006, is the Municipal Land Transfer Tax, which ranges from 0.5 per cent to 2 per cent of each sale price.

Another is the Personal Vehicle Ownership Tax, a registration fee, on top of the already-existing provincial registration fee.

The city gave generous property tax breaks to big business. These include subsidies, tax incentives, and/or deferrals for costly environmental clean-ups, such as for empty industrial lands ('brown-field remediation'), as well as tax incremental equivalent grants (TIEGs), which involve rebates and minimal property taxes for major commercial developers. Such tax giveaways cost the city billions of dollars in lost revenue. Meanwhile small homeowners and tenants face steeply rising taxes, rents, and fees—and public services continue to deteriorate.

The Toronto Board of Trade lobbies the city to contract-out more city services and work, and to privatize capital assets like Toronto Hydro, Enwave and the Toronto Parking Authority (worth over \$60 billion). But private services end up costing consumers more, and a one-time cash injection from an asset sale doesn't solve an ongoing under-funding crisis.

So the city turned to cutting its wage bill. It imposed an annual zero, 1, and 1 per cent raise on its non-union staff, and sought to limit unionized municipal workers to a similar increase, and to curtail their benefits to boot. City councillors take home over \$99,000 a year. They gave themselves a 2.4 per cent raise, and negotiated (or approved arbitrated) yearly increases of 3 per cent for police, firefighters, public housing, port, and parking authority workers.

Did David Miller target CUPE members to win brownie points with the provincial Liberals? Perhaps he has an eye on an Ontario cabinet position. Or perhaps this is just an inescapable consequence of his alliance with, and dependence upon, large corporate and financial interests.

Regardless, Miller's 'progressive coalition' of New Democrats and Liberals is following in the footsteps of 'third way' governments led by Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, and Bob Rae. It tries to make workers pay for the crises of capitalism that we did not cause. Moreover, Toronto city bosses are taking advantage of the current economic depression to weaken unions and further lower the standard of living of all working people.

Miller's Liberal-NDP coalition was backed by the Toronto and District Labour Council at the 2007 municipal election.

This is what you get when Labour subordinates its organization and interests to a capitalist coalition. While the NDP has committed many crimes when it held the reigns of government on its own, *the party can be held accountable by its Labour and popular base when the latter are organized to fight for a Workers' Agenda*. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, is accountable only to Bay Street.

For that reason it is crucial that working people break the NDP councillors from the Miller regime at Toronto City Hall, oppose an NDP alliance with any capitalist party, and fight for NDP governments committed to socialist policies at all levels. That is the perspective needed, combined with mass action, including sympathy strikes, in support of workers resisting concessions. That's how to defend Labour's gains and to make Capital pay for the crisis it created. ■

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"The Hurt Locker," a film directed by Karen Bigelow, written by Karen Bigelow and Mark Boal.

San Francisco filmmaker Karen Bigelow's latest film, "The Hurt Locker," takes place in 2004 in Baghdad. Her film sometimes has a cinema verité look; the hand-held camera is the viewpoint of a very scared and anxious soldier whose eyes flit from one object to another.

The film opens on the last 39 days of a U.S. Army bomb-squad unit's tour, made up of three guys whose job it is to defuse IEDs. Guy Pearce plays Sgt. Matt Thompson; Anthony Mackie is JT Sanborn; and Brian Geraghty is Owen Eldridge.

The squad works on scorching hot terrain and uses robots to analyze anything that could hide a bomb. When the 'bots malfunction, the team head, with the help of others members, dons a heavily padded outfit and a helmet to defuse the bomb manually. (The outfit makes him look like a deep-sea diver from a 1930s giant octopus horror film.)

U.S. soldiers backing up the squad point their guns and yell in English at Iraqi citizens to leave the area. Some men and boys go up to rooftops to watch; others peer from darkened windows. Are they just watching—or getting ready to detonate the bomb with a cell phone? There are many tense standoffs between the soldiers and Iraqis. In each, soldiers are at a loss as to what to do. They ask their superiors for clarification on the Rules of Engagement, yet no one seems to know exactly what they are.

Bigelow's story is told entirely from the soldiers' viewpoint. Every Iraqi is a threat, even friendly boys who only want to play soccer. No Iraqi is played sympathetically. The covered women are old and fat; they scream and rail in Arabic, flail their arms. Sneaky, suspicious-looking men lurk in doorways, hide in corners and spy from windows and rooftops, and one aims a video camera at Eldridge.

A robot breaks down; Thompson has to find and defuse the bomb manually. He fails. A somber scene follows depicting a large, white room containing rows and rows of white boxes sitting on tables, each representing a dead American soldier. A soldier opens the lid of one and tosses in Thompson's personal effects.

His replacement is hot-shot Sgt. William James (Jeremy Renner), who pisses off his comrades with his so-what-if-I-get-killed attitude. James is so sure of himself that at one bomb site, he sheds his padded protective gear and helmet, saying, "If I'm gonna die, I wanna be comfortable."

Sanborn wants to kill Iraqis if they don't obey orders. He sees Iraqis the way the military programs its soldiers to see them—they are all Hajis. He hates Iraq and the Hajis, evident in how Mackie delivers Sanborn's lines. Eldridge is the story's weakling, the scaredy-cat. He takes his troubles to Colonel John Cambridge (Christian Camargo), the company shrink. When Owen challenges his ability as a fellow soldier and Cambridge takes him up on it, you can see the outcome a mile away.

At one point, the three come up on employees from Blackwater (headed by Ralph Fiennes in a cameo role) whose truck has a flat. The scene takes place in the middle of nowhere. An ambush ensues. Director Bigelow takes her time here. We wait with the team as they try to spot snipers through telescopes. We see what the men see: underwater images created by heat waves of parched land and a small, squat concrete bunker, until a red sun goes down. The scene is heart stopping.

Much of the major media has praised the "realism" of this film. Screen writer Mark Boal (who also wrote "The Valley of Elah") had gone to Iraq on a writing assignment and so claims he knows how to portray the life. Still, some

The Rules of 'Disengagement'



elements don't ring true, particularly in the gung-ho and rather foolish actions of the James character.

Bigelow has included the obligatory scene of soldiers getting drunk and beating each other up to celebrate completing a task. The verbal racial tension that is established earlier erupts in this scene into violence when white guy James pins Sanborn, who is Black, beneath him and calls him "my bitch."

Eventually, their tour ends; the team is on their way home. Seeing hot-shot James push a shopping cart down an eerily empty supermarket aisle, to a sappy supermarket soundtrack, in front of an endless row of cereal boxes, you can feel his humiliation. He seems to be saying: "I almost lost my life a million times for this?"

Major critics liked this film, saying that, finally, after earlier films about the Iraq War (Gulf War included) were ig-

nored despite good reviews, "The Hurt Locker" will be the one to make it big at the box office. Possibly that's because it is tightly focused on three American soldiers and avoids taking a political stance.

Yet when seeing the conditions under which soldiers are expected to fight—faulty equipment, inadequate supplies, scarce ammunition, no real direction, and confusion—and when we see the results of the military's breaking down of the human soul, "The Hurt Locker" could be viewed as an antiwar film.

Watching it, one shouldn't forget that if it weren't for the U.S. rush to war, U.S. soldiers or those from our so-called Coalition Forces would never have had to be there, risking their lives. And the 5000-plus American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians would not have had to die. (Many are still dying every day.) ■

Mixed Gains in Canada's Summer of the Strike

Across Canada, resistance to the employers' agenda is visible in a growing number of disputes. Most are strikes against concessions demanded by bosses trying to take advantage of the global economic crisis. An exception was the two-day strike by 340 Via rail engineers that stopped passenger train service across Canada, July 24-26. The dispute is now going to binding arbitration by agreement of the parties.

About 3600 employees of Vale Inco, most of them at the company's flagship Sudbury nickel mines, walked off the job on July 13. According to United Steelworkers director Wayne Fraser, Vale Inco wants the elimination of bonuses to workers when the price of nickel is high, plus the imposition of an inferior pension plan for newly hired workers (with defined contributions, instead of defined benefits).

It is a battle over future profits for the Brazilian iron-ore giant Vale do Rio Doce, which bought Inco in 2006 for \$19.4 billion. Nickel soared above \$24 (U.S.) a pound in mid-2007, fell to \$5 (U.S.) pound in late 2008, but is rising again, reaching \$6.68 on July 13. The USWA's Fraser said that around \$7 a pound, the company is "going to make huge money."

Meanwhile, a 93 per cent strike mandate, and a vigorous public ("Our Communities Need Good Jobs") campaign, achieved victory for 7000 Liquor Control Board of Ontario workers represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union (OPSEU) in mid-July. LCBO management proposed to take away job security (by 'temporarily' laying off full-time workers during slow periods) and to continue to 'casualize' jobs by creating a two-tier system of part-time workers with no benefits. Not only did the bosses back down, but they promised to create more full-time positions at the 610 LCBO outlets across Ontario, give benefits to part-timers, and provide the same 3 per cent annual wage increase won by Ontario Public Service workers last year.

But lack of struggle often produces the opposite results. Some 450 *Globe and Mail* newspaper employees, members of CEP Local 87-M, ratified a concessionary deal that averted a strike on July 2. The new contract imposes a two-year wage freeze, followed by increases of 2, 2.5, and 2.5 per cent through to June 2014. New employees will have to join a defined contribution retirement plan instead of the existing defined benefit pension plan. The union did stop the lengthening of the work week, restrictions on outside activities, and the weakening of job-security language.

So the pattern in the Summer of the Strike tends to show that it pays to fight back. — BARRY WEISLEDER

... Gaza convoy

(continued from page 12)

free people, for every single human being. All of Israel is said to suffer so much from one prisoner [Gilad Shalit, an armed soldier riding on a tank, in contrast to the 11,000 Palestinians jailed for alleged participation in civilian political activities]. What about us? This child whose hand I'm holding has never seen his father, but we are people of peace."

Three little girls spoke about losing 29 immediate family members. Said a 10-year-old: "What is my fault? They killed my parents, but what did I do to them? My life was beautiful and peaceful. But after what they did, I will never ever feel that passion again, to just seek a hug from my parents. And I will never forgive them, because they took the most precious thing in my life."

Gazans welcomed the convoy not primarily for the aid brought, important as that was, but for the political statement of solidarity made by the attempt. As VPUS delegate Soozy Duncan reported in *The Independent*, "Bringing medical aid was only one of VP's stated purposes. The convoy also sought to learn and share the stories of the Gazans who have lived under 61 years of occupation and the severe assault from December to January."

Despite verbal squabbles over settlement expansion, Washington is clearly backing Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to continue the siege, the land thefts, and the denial of the right to return—using as a cover an IMF-style "development" of the economy of the West Bank, integrating isolated segments of it further, *a la* Egypt, into the world capitalist order, at the expense of Palestinian workers, peasants, and refugees.

Resistance to these plans was evident not only in Gaza, but also among the people of Egypt, in contrast to the regime imposed on them. Wrote the Abi Saabs, "The people of Egypt remain a breath of fresh air with their support and positive attitude towards our mission and convoy to Gaza."

"Walking down the streets of Giza, with our Al-Awda 'Falasteen' shirts, we are constantly being stopped by pedestrians who want to greet us and tell us how much they love Palestine. People began screaming 'We Love Palestine!' One man stopped us and said every time he prays, the first thing he prays for is Palestine. Most of the people we have come across don't support the actions of the Egyptian government, and are so appreciative and grateful for our mission."

Ironically, this support of working-class Egyptians for the convoy was being expressed at the very same time at an event of potentially historic proportions occurring in Cairo, an event displaying the strength of the social force that could re-galvanize the masses of Palestine and the rest of the Arab world in their efforts to break imperialism and Zionism's hold on the region. Hundreds of workers on strike for 41 days against

the Tanta Flax and Oil Company met in Cairo on July 10. They demanded the nationalization of their factory, privatized four years ago, threatening to take it over if the government didn't intervene on behalf of the strikers. Some speakers went even further and demanded an end to the government's entire policy of privatization.

Said one: "If we succeed in Tanta Flax, this will be the end of privatization in Egypt. All companies will follow suit and strike. Our fight is for the workers of all Egypt"—and, we would add, given Egypt's key role in supporting Israel, by extension for the Arab people as a whole.

Galloway has announced that he intends to lead caravans this year from Venezuela (with the participation of Hugo Chavez), France, and Moscow, as well as a joint U.K.-U.S. convoy in December to commemorate the first anniversary of Israel's attack. These convoys can be part of a broader effort to expand the growing movement in solidarity with Palestine.

This movement in turn can provide support for a growing resistance by Palestinians themselves. As stated at the report-back forum mentioned above, that resistance will be built on the principles, in the words of Lamis Deek, a leader of Al-Awda-NY and the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, that "Jerusalem must be the capital of Palestine; rejection of Zionism as racist colonialism; and return of all refugees to their original homes and lands."

Dos, Tres, Muchos Convoys! Viva Palestina! ■

Medical aid convoy breaks Gaza blockade despite Israeli, Egyptian harassment

Yasser Saymeh / AFP / Getty Images



Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



By ANDREW POLLACK

On July 4 over 80 supporters of Palestinian liberation left JFK Airport in New York to join what would end up being a delegation of over 200 in the Viva Palestina-United States (VPUS) convoy to Gaza. Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Latin@s, Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and whites embarked on a trip to bring medical aid as part of the broader goal of breaking Israel's genocidal siege.

The first Viva Palestina convoy left from London in March and drove across Europe and North Africa to Gaza. It was initiated by Respect Member of the British Parliament George Galloway.

This second convoy carried wheelchairs, walkers, medicine, and other health-care supplies. The material is needed both because of the barbaric attacks by Israel on Gaza at the beginning of the year, destroying hospitals and clinics and leaving tens of thousands wounded, and because of the siege which has starved the area of such supplies.

What's more, the siege has left two-thirds of Gaza's population, of which half are children, "food insecure," and UNICEF has said over 10% of Gaza's children have stunted growth due to malnutrition, all of which creates an even direr need for medical aid.

Convoy delegates flew first to Cairo to pick up supplies previously purchased and to buy more. Those who had never been to Egypt were stunned by the devastating poverty, the unpaved filthy streets, open sewage, and adults and children sleeping in the streets. One delegate wrote in a blog that perhaps a convoy was needed to aid Cairo.

Of course, the poverty suffered by Egypt's workers and peasants are the product of its government's subservience to the U.S. and Israel, including helping Israel enforce the siege. In return, it has been allowed entry into the "free market" of neoliberal globalization, allowing its ruling class to prosper while previously won gains of its workers and poor peasants have been eliminated.

Soon delegates would see even worse conditions in Gaza. But first they had to overcome a succession of bureaucratic obstacles thrown up by the governments of Egypt and the United States.

The initial plan was to spend about a week in Cairo gathering supplies and four days in Gaza distributing them and talking to people. But in the end Egypt threw up one barrier after another until only one day was left to spend in Gaza before most delegates had to return home—and Egypt threatened those staying more than one day with being stuck in Gaza for weeks or even months until the next general border crossing, which would occur at the whim of the regime.

Before arriving in Cairo, VP organizers had obtained travel permits and provided Egyptian and U.S. government officials with every single document requested, detailing who was on the convoy and what they would be bringing into Gaza. Egypt repeatedly claimed not to have received these documents, and then demanded even more.

In the end, the convoy was barred from taking into Gaza 47 trucks, vans, and cars purchased at the request of hospitals and social service organizations in

Delegates heard stories of cold-blooded murders of civilians by Zionist soldiers. But they were equally impressed by the determination of Gazans to continue resisting.

Gaza, and only two ambulances and the medical aid were allowed in—still a big victory.

Standoff at Salaam Bridge

The first contingent of the convoy attempted to cross the Salaam (Peace) Bridge to the Sinai peninsula on July 11, but were stopped by Egyptian security. Among those at the bridge were Dahlia and Dima Abi Saab of Al-Awda-NY (the Palestine Right to Return Coalition), a group whose organizing was key to the convoy's success. They described in a blog entry how the four buses were ordered to the side of the road and passengers ordered to write their names and passport numbers down, despite Cairo already having this information.

Two hours later they were ordered back to Cairo, but delegates refused. While waiting they did debka (a traditional Palestinian dance) and played soccer, "to show the cops that our spirits would not be broken."

Then trickery was attempted, with a security official telling everyone to get on the bus because they were being allowed to cross the bridge. But a VPer who overheard security officials telling drivers to pretend they were heading toward the border but then return to Cairo alerted delegates. The buses were emptied, and delegates held hands as they ringed the buses to prevent their departure. Delegates didn't even flinch when security ordered the drivers to run them over.

Twelve hours later, the contingent decided to return to Cairo to fill out the newly-demanded paperwork. This included an affidavit to be filled out at the U.S. embassy, never required of any other aid trips to Gaza, which absolved Washington of any responsibility for the safety of its own citizens while they were in Gaza and relinquishing all rights to call on U.S. consular services for aid. The Abi Saab sisters noted that the U.S. government "will, however, provide the state of Israel billions of dollars annually and weapons to be dropped on the children of the Gaza Strip."

In the name of the delegation as a whole, New York City Councilperson Charles Barron and former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney called on Obama to force Egypt to end the delays, citing Obama's own rhetoric in his speech in Cairo about a "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza and his saying the siege should be eased. Of course, Obama ignored their plea. (McKinney had joined the convoy after being released from an Israeli prison, where she had been taken after being abducted in an act of piracy in international waters, along with 21 other passengers on a Free Gaza Movement boat.)

To protest the harassment and delays, VPUS supporters back in the States organized emergency demonstrations at Egyptian consulates in the U.S., and flooded Washington with e-mails, calls, and faxes. In the midst

(Above) British MP George Galloway (rt.) with other Viva Palestina members at JFK airport, July 4, as convoy embarks from the United States.

(Left) Palestinian boy is treated for burns at Gaza hospital, Jan. 12. Doctors said burns were caused by Israeli use of white phosphorous bombs.

of all these delays, Egypt allowed Zionist warships to travel through the Suez Canal as part of maneuvers for a possible attack on Iran.

24 Hours in Gaza

Once in Gaza, delegates were shocked at the destruction and physical and psychological damage they observed, even though their mission was motivated by awareness of the impact of Israel's barbarism. Said one doctor, "We have so many children suffering from psychological pains. Whenever they hear a loud noise, they cry out, 'A bomb! A bomb!' and start crying."

Delegates heard stories of cold-blooded murders of civilians by Zionist soldiers. But they were equally impressed by the determination of Gazans to continue resisting. As New York delegate Bill Doares stated in a report-back forum, the sign on the border should read "Welcome to Gaza, Land of Dignity and Resistance." Delegates were inspired, said Bill, "to see no Israeli soldiers, no settlers from Long Island, no checkpoints, and weapons only in Palestinian hands."

With Israel having destroyed Gaza's power plants, lighting depends on fuel-fed generators. But delegates saw graffiti with a painting of a hand, holding a heart with the colors of the Palestinian flag, with wires and lightning bolts issuing from it, and underneath the words, "Gaza runs on the electricity in the hearts of all Palestinians."

Grffiti expressing such resilience could be found on almost every building, including "Steadfast, We Will Not Give Up Despite the Siege," "Jerusalem Will Always be the Capital of Palestine," and "Resistance and Struggle is the Way to Victory."

Convoy participants included Palestinians living in the U.S. who had been prevented from entering Gaza for years, despite having family members there. One delegate was a doctor who had hoped to bring out his three young children, who had been trapped there despite having U.S. passports for five years. His efforts were blocked by Egypt.

Delegates noted that the "inmates" of the world's largest open-air prison did everything in their power to accommodate them and to boost their spirits, to encourage them not to cry but to continue to support those resisting.

After seeing Al Quds Hospital, once one of Gaza City's foremost medical facilities, but whose floors were blown out by mortar fire (and can't be reconstructed due to the siege), the convoy went to Al Shifa Hospital to deliver the bulk of the aid. At a press conference there, Barron announced, "After much duress, we've broken the siege. Mission accomplished!"

At the Ministry of Detainees, delegates wept as they heard stories of families of detainees and the slain. Said one, "This is land that is for all prisoners, for all

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