

A SOCIALIST ACTION

**Noted civil rights attorney
Lynne Stewart
is jailed.**

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Obama escalates Afghan war, calls for 30,000 more troops



Jose Luis Magana / AP

By **GERRY FOLEY**

Obama's muted but substantial escalation of the war in Afghanistan shows exactly why the decisive section of American big business decided to turn the helm of their system over to him. The new flavor is "Bush lite." That is, it is a continuation of the same policies that are characteristic of U.S. capitalism in decline but with an attempt to appear more flexible and collaborative with U.S. allies.

Obama's Afghanistan proposal displays some balancing between "progressives" and right-wingers in the U.S. The escalation will be less than the military commanders asked for and less than the right demands—but not much less.

And there is some window dressing about a timeline for the massive U.S. military intervention to end. But the time limit is vague, and it is not a great concession to admit that there has to be an end sometime to the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan.

Of course, the right wing is uneasy when there is even talk of an exit date. But a Florida Panhandle newspaper (the *News Herald* of Panama City, one of the most right-wing areas of the country), which opposed the setting of any time limit, noted in an editorial:

"Wednesday, both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified at a Senate hearing that the withdrawal target was, shall we say, flexible. Clinton said the administration is not 'locked in' to a 2011 exit, only that 'there can be the beginning of a responsible transition' by that date. Talk about soft-pedaling the situation. That's like saying you're prepared to start a

1,000-mile trek by taking one step forward."

Indeed! However, Afghanistan has hardly any long-term economic or strategic value to the United States, unless it eventually becomes host to a pipeline linking the Central Asian oil fields to Pakistan. But it seems that the oil companies have accepted that as a pretty remote prospect. In any case, the U.S. interest in Central Asian oil seems to be more political than economic—designed to prevent China from gaining access and more economic independence. That makes the scheme very speculative.

Pakistan, minus the mirage of an oil pipeline, does not have much strategic value to the U.S. That is why the U.S. put its relations with the country on the back burner after the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan was a useful pawn against an India that was neutralist and friendly to the Soviet Union. That situation has long since ceased to exist.

The U.S. covert intervention in Afghanistan when it was ruled by a pro-Soviet regime, which created the Jihadist threat, was an episode in the now bygone Cold War. Obama had to assure Pakistan that the U.S. would

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Tim Sloan / AFP / Getty Images



(Photo above) On Nov. 20, Navy team at Dover Airforce Base carries coffin of Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian Patton, killed in Iraq.

(Right) Antiwar protest at the White House on Oct. 5.



Outside UC Regents meeting, Nov. 18. / Davian Dovarganes / AP

UC students & workers protest fee hikes, layoffs

By **ROBERT SIMONS**

BERKELEY, Calif.—During Nov. 18, 19 and 20, the University of California system shook with one of the biggest strikes and mobilizations since the 1960s. The UC has been using California's budget cuts as an opportunity to break unions, fire labor activists, furlough professors, not re-hire lecturers, and increase student fees. The actions centered primarily on the UC Los Angeles and Berkeley campuses, but protests were also held at many of the other eight campuses.

Protests were organized to coincide with the UC Board of Regents' meeting in Los Angeles, directed at the UC's continued cutbacks and the threat of a 32% fee hike—bringing undergraduate fees to \$10,302.

Previously, on Sept. 24, 5000 people marched in Berkeley and several hundred at each of the other UC campuses. A statewide mobilizing conference to defend public education located on the UC Berkeley campus followed on Oct. 24, which attracted about 750 people from all sectors of public

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Climate change is on course for a 'worst-case' disaster

By CHRISTINE FRANK

According to a study released on Nov. 17 by 31 scientists of the Global Climate Project (G.C.P.), the world is on course for the worst-case scenario coming to fruition, with average global temperatures rising by up to *six degrees* Celsius by the end of the century. Temperature increases would be much greater in the upper latitudes and at the poles. In accordance with chief climatologist James Hansen's view, 3CTC maintains that a *two-degree* Celsius rise would be disastrous!

This trajectory has been set in motion because carbon dioxide emissions from capitalist industry, transport and relentless deforestation have increased dramatically since 2003. Since the economic downturn, the rate has slowed only slightly. Overall, the annual rate is threefold that of the 1990s. Between 2000 and 2008, global emissions rose an astounding 29%!

The team used satellite and national inventory data to track CO₂ emissions as well as models to estimate carbon sinks. It should be noted that this is hardly a radical group of scientists. The G.C.P. was set up by the UN to present information to world policy makers.

Almost all of the increase was due to the boom in the Chinese economy. The study also found that for the first time since the 1960s, the combustion of coal has overtaken the combustion of oil as the major fossil-fuel source of CO₂ emissions. Much of this coal was burned by China to manufacture cheap goods for the West.

Forty-five percent of Chinese emissions resulted from making products traded overseas for the voracious consumer societies of the Northern Hemisphere. China is thought by many to have overtaken the U.S. as the world's biggest carbon emitter. Clearly, the gross maldistribution of that country must halt; the only solution is for the developed nations to fundamentally change the priorities of their wasteful economies.



The portion of emitted CO₂ that remains in the atmosphere increased from 40% in 1990 to 45% in 2008. This indicates that Earth's carbon sinks are beginning to fail. The authors of the study say that there is now a cycle of positive feedbacks at work. Rising greenhouse gas concentrations are leading to rising temperatures and a corresponding rise in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and so on and so forth.

The lead author of the study, Corinne Le Quere, stated that "carbon-cycle climate feedback has already kicked in," and this feedback has the capacity to amplify global warming between 5 and 30 percent. Earth is headed toward complete climate chaos if carbon is not drawn down drastically and immediately.

Yet, we see nothing but procrastination on the part of government leaders and big polluters, who adamantly refuse to give up their hydrocarbon-based economy. Politicians, the heads of established environmental groups, and the media have all been trying to lower

the world's expectations as to the outcome of the final round of climate talks in Copenhagen, Denmark in December. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has stated that a binding agreement is no longer a realistic goal and one will not be signed next month.

Obama's climate czar, Carol Browner, made it clear last month that there will be no U.S. climate-protection legislation forthcoming this fall. Deputy Special Envoy on Climate Jonathan Pershing stated that Obama wants to turn Copenhagen into nothing more than "a framework for progress." Stephen Chu, Obama's Energy Secretary, recently commented that Copenhagen is "only one meeting. It's not the be all and end all."

In November, at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Singapore, world leaders decided to put off, once again, an agreement on binding emissions reductions. In a hastily organized unscheduled breakfast meeting, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, Danish prime minister and chair of the upcoming climate conference, pitched a deferral plan to reach a less specific "politically binding" agreement in Copenhagen and put off for another entire year a mandatory one to be formulated in Mexico City or Germany. Obama, Hu Jintao of China, and Kevin Rudd of Australia were among the 19 leaders who agreed to more foot dragging. This kind of delay will occur *ad infinitum* as the future steadily slips out of our grasp and the ruling rich race us toward climate catastrophe.

Since Kyoto, 1997, they've had *scores* of meetings in round after round of moribund negotiations with *zero* results. The conservative IPCC set weak targets to begin with and not one nation has met theirs other than to make fake claims to that effect. If they were true, there would be scientific evidence for greenhouse gas emissions going down rather than skyrocketing.

Although Obama will be attending the climate conference in Copenhagen, it will not be for the entire time. Apparently, he has better things to do, such as commit more troops to Afghanistan—"the Good War"—in order to gain control over the oil and natural gas reserves of Central Asia. For this reason, we must not only demand decisive action in Copenhagen but also an end to the ongoing Wars for Oil, the use of which got us into this mess in the first place. ■

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) Lynne Stewart speaks to supporters and the press in New York before her incarceration.

Lynne Stewart jailed; appeals court seeks extended sentence

By JEFF MACKLER

The Nov. 16 decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, to reject radical New York attorney Lynne Stewart's appeal of her 2005 frame-up conviction on five counts of aiding and abetting terrorism is a legal and political atrocity. The court's ruling is in line with the 9/11 witch-hunt "anti-terrorism" climate that has been orchestrated to stifle dissent, justify war and, in Stewart's words, "chill the defense bar." In interviews with the press, Stewart predicted that the ruling would set the stage for the upcoming U.S. prosecutions of Guantanamo prisoners.

The Second Circuit's virtually unprecedented decision to order the revocation of Stewart's bail and her immediate imprisonment took both her legal team, headed by Joshua Dratel, and federal district court officials by surprise since such orders are, as a rule, left to the district court judge—in this case John Koeltl, who presided over Stewart's jury trial and sentencing. It took three days of discussions, legal wrangles, and informal meetings until Stewart was finally ordered to report for incarceration. She and her supporters used the time to organize impressive send-off protest rallies in New York's Foley Square, as well as a series of press conferences and a major interview on Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now!"

Stewart is currently at the Manhattan Correctional Center. Due to new regulations pertaining to overcrowded federal prisons, she may serve at least 10 months, if not all of her 28-month sentence there—unless the Second Circuit's efforts to extend her sentence are successful.

The court's decision affirmed all five conspiracy charges against Stewart. But its seething contempt for Koeltl's 28-month sentence, as opposed to the 30 years sought by government prosecutors, led the court to remand the issue of the length of the sentence to Koeltl with instructions that he consider whether Stewart had perjured herself during her court testimony. If so, the majority of the three-judge panel argued, her sentence should be extended.

The dissenting Judge Walker insisted that Stewart's 28-month sentence was "breathtakingly low" and "extraordinarily lenient," and therefore, "substantially unreasonable." He insisted, in the face of Supreme Court rulings that give federal judges wide discretion in sentencing, that it be vacated immediately as opposed to being referred back to Koeltl. Walker has called for an en banc hearing (a decision of all the Second Circuit judges) to consider his dissent.

Stewart's trial took place in the shadow of the post-9/11 prosecutions and mass arrests of some 2000 Muslim-Americans, whom the government sought to associate wholesale with terrorist activities based on their national origin and religious preference alone.

The charges against Stewart referred to the fact that she had issued two press releases on behalf of her client, Omar Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian cleric who she had defended against conspiracy charges of planning to blow up New York monuments. The Clinton administration's attorney general, Janet Reno, declined to prosecute Stewart for what was at that time (before 9/11) considered at worst a minor infringement of a Special Administrative Measure (SAM) prohibiting making defense clients' views known through press

releases or other such public vehicles.

Punishment for such violations, as was the case with Stewart initially, was usually limited to temporary cancellation of attorney-client visiting rights until a new SAM, with clear guidelines, was signed. But in the post-9/11 climate of endless wars abroad, the Patriot Act, and associated attacks on civil liberties at home, government officials sought to make an example of Stewart, an outspoken radical critic of U.S. policies. Her "minor infraction" was elevated to a major conspiracy.

Stewart's legal team in the Omar Abdel-Rahman case included former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and former American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee president and founder, Abdeen Jabarra. Sheik Omar, in Lynne's view, was an innocent victim of reactionary "conspiracy laws" aimed at political dissidents.

The two press releases issued by Stewart were published by the Reuters news agency. They asserted Sheik Omar's views on a cease-fire accord that his Egyptian co-thinkers had been considering scrapping in light of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's repeated violations, including the U.S.-backed Egyptian dictator's routine torture and murder of political prisoners and political opponents. His release affirmed, "I [Omar Abdel-Rahman] am not withdrawing my support of the cease-fire, I am merely questioning it and I am urging you, who are on the ground there to discuss it and to include everyone in your discussions as we always have done." The cease-fire remained intact and no one was harmed in any way as a result of the Sheik's press statement.

Still fighting, Lynne's attorneys asked the Second

Circuit for a delay of her incarceration so that Lynne could undergo a Dec. 6 surgery scheduled at Lenox Hill Hospital. Her request was denied. Lynne, a diabetic with hypertension and recovering from breast cancer, will now have her operation performed at a prison-administered facility. Her request that her M.D. daughter observe the operation was similarly denied.

Meanwhile, a new sentencing hearing before Judge Koeltl is scheduled for Dec. 2 at the Foley Square Federal Courthouse. Federal prosecutors are expected to ask for the maximum sentence possible. Also appearing in court will be Mohamed Yousry, Lynne's innocent co-defendant and translator. Koeltl was also ordered to reconsider Yousry's 20-month sentence. The prison term of a third defendant in Lynne's case, Ahmed Sattar, who was sentenced to 20-plus years, was not challenged.

One can only speculate as to whether Judge Koeltl will stand by his original sentence. If he does, government prosecutors are expected to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. They, and obviously the Second Circuit, are outraged that a "convicted terrorist" has been traversing the country for the past five years, free to champion her own cause and those of all others who suffer political repression. It was clear from Judge Koeltl's relatively short sentence and high praise of Lynne's record as an attorney and caring human being (a "credit to her profession," said Koeltl during the sentencing hearing) that he felt compelled to take his distance from the government's desire to put Lynne, 70, in prison for what would amount to the rest of her life.

Stewart will be appealing her conviction, as well as any lengthening of her sentence, to the U.S. Supreme Court. Her defense committee is being re-enforced, with fresh forces joining the effort to further expose the political nature of her frame-up.

Lynne's parting words brought tears of joy to her supporters at the final New York rally, where she was escorted to the courthouse for incarceration. She pointed to the urgency of winning Mumia Abu-Jamal's freedom and to fighting against new efforts toward Mumia's execution. She reminded her supporters of Joe Hill's admonition, "Don't Mourn! Organize!" Pam Africa, leader of the fight for Mumia's freedom, was present and prominent among Lynne's many supporters at this inspiring and tragic send-off of a fighter who is loved and admired by all who cherish justice and freedom.

The Nov. 21-22 meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations, of which Lynne has been an active member, unanimously approved a resolution condemning her persecution and incarceration.

Tax-deductible contributions can be made payable to: "National Lawyers Guild Foundation (memo box, 'Lynne Stewart defense') and mailed to: Lynne Stewart Defense Committee, 350 Broadway, Suite 700, New York, NY 10013. Lynne is an avid correspondent. She would like nothing more than to hear from friends and supporters. Write her at: Lynne Stewart 53504-054, MCC-NY, 150 Park Row, New York, N.Y. 10007. ■

Jeff Mackler is the West Coast coordinator of the Lynne Stewart Defense Committee

Bissell workers fight for their jobs

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—Seventy warehouse workers near Joliet, Ill., are fighting for their jobs after being fired en masse after the workers filed for union representation. The workers are employed in a warehouse owned by giant vacuum cleaner company Bissell Homecare.

Workers were fed up with their employer's violation of workers' rights. On Oct. 29 the workers informed the employer that they had joined the United Electrical Workers (UE). The workers also filed legal complaints and charges regarding violations of federal and state labor law including the Fair Labor Standards Act which governs minimum wage laws; the Day Labor And Temporary Services Act, an Illinois state law that regulates temporary employment agencies' the National Labor Relations Act, which includes workers right to union representation; and the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits racial discrimination.

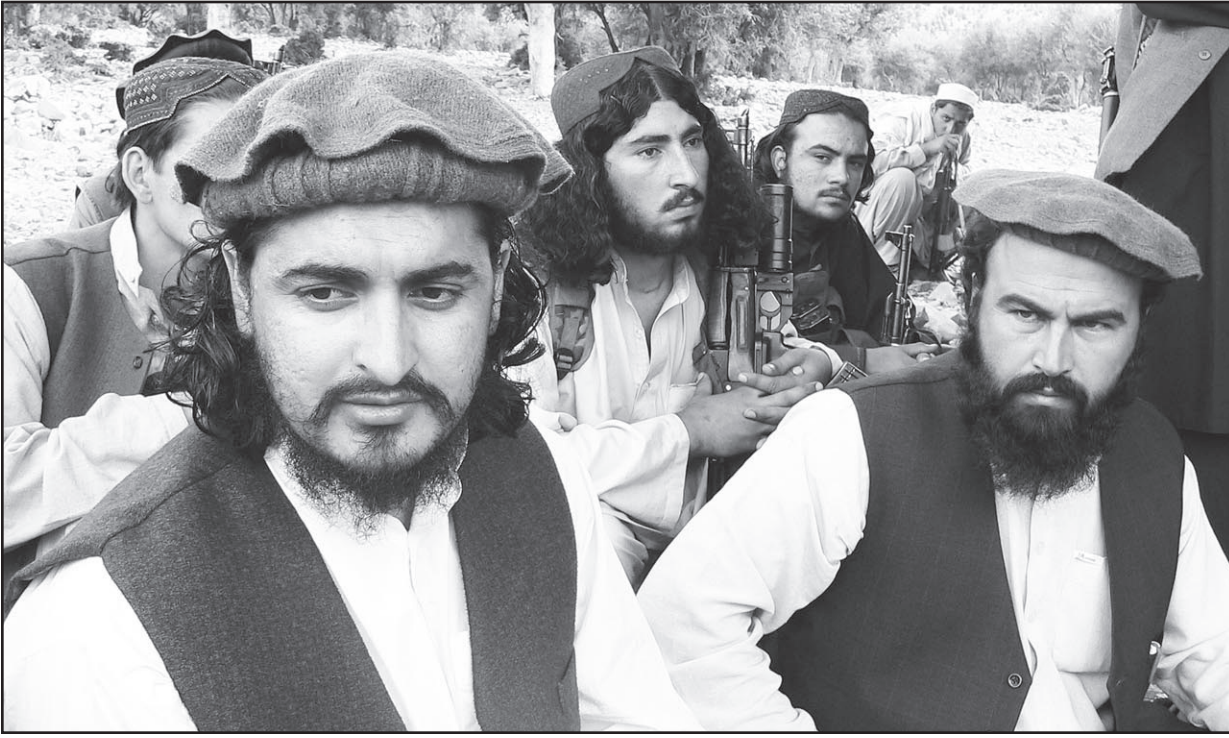
On Nov. 6 all 70 employees were fired in retaliation. The warehouse is managed by Maersk Distribution, and the workers themselves are employed through a temp agency called Roadlink. Bissell

warehouse workers and supporters, including workers from the successful Republic Windows and Doors factory occupation, held a rally outside the warehouse two days later, and UE and Warehouse Workers for Justice, a workers' rights center initiated by UE, have organized a letter writing campaign to both Bissell and Maersk demanding that the workers be rehired.

Supporters of the workers held a rally outside of Bissell's headquarters in Grand Rapids, Mich. These actions have already had an impact. Feeling the pressure of the movement, Roadlink decided to continue to pay workers in accordance with the WARN act.

Warehouse Workers for Justice has launched a campaign to educate and assist workers in the massive warehouse districts in Chicago's suburbs. Like Bissell's warehouse, most of these facilities employ workers through temp agencies. Pay and working conditions are appalling.

A victory for the Bissell warehouse workers would be a major step forward for all warehouse workers in the Chicago area. For more information on the campaign and how to help visit www.warehouseworker.org. ■



(Photo) Pakistani Taliban head Hakimullah Mehsud (left) at meeting with media in South Waziristan tribal area, Oct. 4. Mehsud vowed retaliation for increasing U.S. drone attacks in the region.

... More troops to Afghanistan

(continued from page 1)

not forget it again, as it did after the end of the Afghan-Soviet war.

Obama's speech was carefully crafted to reassure the right wing, and for that it even drew praise from Republican heavy Karl Rove. But the president failed to mollify a lot of liberals and progressives. The outcries of betrayal of some of the liberal columnists on the *Huffington Post* are piteous to behold. Some of them complained that he chose West Point as the platform for his speech. But they were merely fooling themselves. To play to a right-wing audience, Obama needed to appeal specifically to the military chiefs.

One of the *Huffington* commentators, David Sirota, asked: "Where's the antiwar movement and the marches and the organizing and the protesting? Where are all those well-funded groups that protested George W. Bush's war policy? Or was all that really just about hating George Bush and embracing blind Partisan War Syndrome?"

The answer is that broad sections of the antiwar movement believed that Obama offered a change from the war policies of Bush and the neo-cons. He had such a different image and style from Bush. But then, lo and behold, he turned out to be just a bourgeois politician. Fooled again!

And like any of the second team of defenders of the capitalist system, liberals or Social Democrats, Obama, once in office, has to demonstrate to the ruling class that he is as devoted to their interests as their first team, the right wing. The liberals should really be angry at themselves for their gullibility, and not Obama.

One of the *Huffington Post* columnists, Robert Borsage, did point to the handwriting on the wall: "... his speech left me with a haunting foreboding. Surely this is the way that great imperial powers decline. Their soldiers police the ends of the earth. There is always another enemy, always a threat—sometimes imagined, often real—that must be faced. And meanwhile, the productive economy declines, the rich live increasingly off investments abroad, the poor depend on public sustenance, the middle declines. No battle is so costly that it cannot be afforded. ... The secret state expands. The country finds itself constantly at war."

This is, in fact, the general pattern of the decline of every empire in history, the capitalist empires of England, the Netherlands, and Portugal—like the slave empire of Rome. The features are apparent in the now obvious decline of American capitalism. Inevitably, the dynamic of empire comes into conflict with the needs of the survival of the empire itself. The American ruling class is plummeting from one disaster to another, unable to withdraw from its adventures.

Obama presented the Iraq war as a victory, although admittedly a costly one. In fact, after the expenditure of a trillion dollars, more than 4000 American lives, and the ruin of a country, the U.S. has scored no lasting political or economic gains and is likely to have worked against its own geopolitical ends by dumping Iraq into the lap of Iran. U.S. businesses and private armies like Blackwater (now "Xe") netted huge profits, but at the expense of the system on which they depend.

While the liberal and progressive commentators did not take up Obama's claims of U.S. "achievement" in Iraq, some of them did point out the obvious reasons why the escalation is not likely lead to any "achievement." The Afghan government in whose defense the U.S. is supposedly pouring out its treasure and the blood of its young adults is even more ineffectual than the U.S. client government in Iraq. It has virtually no political authority. Even the base it did have when the

U.S. intervention put it in office, the Northern Alliance, may now be crumbling.

The Taliban have been able to extend their operations to the north, threatening a new U.S. supply line (*The New York Times*, Nov. 27). Of course, the northern area to which the Taliban has expanded, Kunduz, is about half Pushtun, the ethnic base of the Taliban.

There is no indication yet that the ethnic groups that have been hostile to the Taliban—the Tadjiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Dari-speaking people—are now going over to the Taliban. But there are indications that the insurgency is becoming generally nationalist, anti-foreign. A series of interviews that *Newsweek* did with Taliban supporters showed that it was the U.S. occupation and the military means supporting it, air power, that revived the Taliban, after it had suffered a disastrous defeat when the U.S. first intervened.

A number of commentators pointed out that there is no reason to think that the Karzai government and its security forces will ever be self-sustaining. A case-hardened counter-revolutionary politician with East European sophistication, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was cited in a Dec. 3 article in the *Huffington Post* as saying: "To talk of an Afghan national army is to talk of something that is ultimately not possible." Brzezinski, a Polish anti-Communist émigré, was one of the strongest advocates of waging a covert war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

An article in the Dec. 3 British *Guardian* also noted doubts about the prospects of building an effective Afghan national army: "Sceptics point to desertion rates among army recruits of about 16%—one US estimate puts it as high as 25%—as evidence that the new Afghan army will not hold together. Defections by police recruits are said to be even higher..." The author, Simon Tisdall, noted that the Taliban has managed to infiltrate the police and that a Taliban mole killed five British soldiers.

Obama and the U.S. commanders are in fact talking about deals with local strongmen that will not go through the so-called Afghan national government. But the British military that fought in Afghanistan in the 19th century capsulized its experience with the nostrum that it is possible "to rent" but not "buy" Afghan tribal leaders—that is, they shift their deals depending on their convenience. Moreover, Afghanistan has a tradition of corrupt warlordism that makes deals with tribal leaders and local gangs more complicated and politically disruptive than it was in Iraq.

Also, such practices undermine the argument against the Taliban. For all its ruthlessness and theocratic dogmatism, the Taliban did offer a respite from factionalism and chronic civil war in most of the country.

Although Brzezinski expressed a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the Afghan government, he expressed an Old World realism in responding to accusations of its corruption: "Who are we to seriously be preaching [such] a crusade?" he asked. "We have a financial sector that is voraciously greedy and exploitative, to put it mildly. We have a Congress which is not immune to special interests. And we have an electoral system that is based largely on private donations which precipitate expectations of rewards. The notion of us going to the Afghans and preaching purity is comical. ... I think we should just quit that stuff."

Such frankness inadvertently points up the problem. The U.S. Afghan war is thieves dealing with thieves, and as the richest of thieves the U.S. and its private enterprise parasites are not necessarily the cleverest.

In the Nov. 30 issue of *The Nation*, Aran Roston revealed how the U.S. government transfers funds through a tangled network of private intermediar-

ies to the Taliban: "In this grotesque carnival, the US military's contractors are forced to pay suspected insurgents to protect American supply routes. It is an accepted fact of the military logistics operation in Afghanistan that the US government funds the very forces American troops are fighting. ... In fact, US military officials in Kabul estimate that a minimum of 10 percent of the Pentagon's logistics contracts—hundreds of millions of dollars—consists of payments to insurgents."

But the complications of this privatization go far beyond filling the enemy's coffers. The practice has also led the U.S. into a deep covert involvement in Pakistan, which could ultimately be a much bigger powder keg than Afghanistan. In its Nov. 23 issue, *The Nation* revealed that Blackwater, now "Xe Services" is carrying out an extensive covert operation within Pakistan that includes targeted assassinations and kidnappings.

The Nation offered some convincing testimony: "The source, who has worked on covert US military programs for years, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has direct knowledge of Blackwater's involvement. He spoke to *The Nation* on condition of anonymity because the program is classified. The source said that the program is so 'compartmentalized' that senior figures within the Obama administration and the US military chain of command may not be aware of its existence."

Or maybe they don't want to know. The article continued: "'This is a parallel operation to the CIA,' said the source. 'They are two separate beasts.' The program puts Blackwater at the epicenter of a US military operation within the borders of a nation against which the United States has not declared war—knowledge that could further strain the already tense relations between the United States and Pakistan."

Blackwater operatives are generally former military specialists trained in the most sophisticated forms of murder, who collect huge bounties and live the lives of adventurers. It is hard for them to be invisible. And sooner or later, some of them are going to be caught, as four were in Falluja, where they were lynched by the local population. That incident led the U.S. forces to destroy the city, and the population is still suffering from the pollution caused by the weapons used.

If the U.S. Murder Inc. operations make messes in Pakistan, that will overshadow the worst that happened in Iraq. The Pakistani government is notoriously unstable and disrespected and there is abundant evidence of complicity with jihadists in the military and intelligence services.

At the moment, the big business press claims that a majority of Pakistanis support military operations against the Taliban. But that is a recent development, apparently owing to the Taliban's overreaching itself. Past polls showed that a majority of Pakistanis blamed the U.S. for the jihadist violence. And all observers attest to a high level of anti-Americanism in Pakistan.

Overall, the *Huffington Post* columnist's dire view of the writing on the wall looks credible. And when empires reach this stage of decay, it's difficult for the rulers to change course. In the American war effort there are just too many irresponsible private interests involved for the national administration to be able to defend the interests of the system as a whole effectively.

Moreover, the right-wing offensive that reached its peak under Bush has created a rabidly reactionary public opinion, the crazy one fourth of the U.S. population who will stand in the way of any intelligent maneuvering by the top leadership of U.S. capitalism.

The real rulers, unlike their right-wing fan club, are not ignorant or deluded. You cannot make huge fortunes without a certain grasp of reality. But maneuvers by the real rulers often create bitterness among the right. Look at the many statements by ex-military that the U.S. was not really defeated in Vietnam but that "weak-kneed politicians sold us out." There were similar statements in right-wing blogs and Tea-Party rallies that Obama would prove himself a traitor if he withdrew from Afghanistan short of "victory."

This out-of-control plunge into military adventures generates poisons that flow back into the American body politic itself. The only way that this process can be stopped is for the American people to take control of their country's future by mobilizing against the war intoxication. And they can do that only if they organize independently of the political parties controlled by capitalism and which serve capitalism.

The delusion that it was possible to turn the U.S. toward humane social values by supporting an apparently more liberal capitalist candidate for president has now been dramatically exposed. Hopefully, the lesson will sink in for those who genuinely want to stop the slaughter of the innocent and the waste of American lives—and those of soldiers from allied nations—and to pull the U.S. out of its slide into ruin. ■

BY JEFF MACKLER

President Barack Obama's nationally televised speech on Dec. 1 at the West Point Military Academy announcing that 30,000 more U.S. combat troops would be sent to Afghanistan served to open a small crack in the wall of deference to the president that has to date prevailed in the antiwar movement and limited its power. Obama's assertion that his troop surge, as with President Bush's Iraq surge before him, would be followed 18 months later with the "beginning" of a withdrawal of all U.S. troops, has been met with nearly unanimous opposition from antiwar activists.

"Surge" has become the polite code-word for mass slaughter—for the world's most powerful nation destroying one of the world's poorest. It is code for the use of super-technology and now 100,000 troops and additional mercenaries to continue an eight-year war against a few al-Qaida forces and a rag-tag group of Taliban fighters, whose growing support and control over large swaths of the country, despite their regressive social views, is directly proportional to the hatred of the Afghan people for the U.S. occupiers. Eighty-five percent of Afghans oppose the U.S. war and occupation.

Despite a gesture to his liberal supporters in rejecting an "opened-ended" commitment to Afghanistan and the corrupt Hamid Karzai government, Obama made clear that "conditions on the ground" would be the determining factor as to when or if the U.S. would withdraw.

Meanwhile, plans are underway to beef up CIA funding for covert actions in Pakistan and Afghanistan to locate "enemy" encampments and pass on the information to Nevada facilities that direct lethal Predator drone aircraft flying two miles above the earth to attack and destroy any target.

Obama's special diplomat for the region, Richard Holbrooke, similarly announced that the previously secret negotiations with the Taliban would now be placed on the front burner as part of the U.S. strategy to simultaneously negotiate and murder. From the beginning, the issue for U.S. imperialism has never been whether the Taliban—who the U.S. supported, financed, and armed in the past—must go but rather whether they would accede to U.S. demands for increased control and influence in Afghanistan.

The antiwar movement's response to Obama's escalation was immediate and angry, but far from what is needed to offer a decisive challenge to the U.S. war-makers. "Day After" protests were organized across the country, but their size and scope differed little from the Oct. 17 nationally coordinated protests that totaled 5000 in 54 cities—which had been initiated by the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occu-

U.S. antiwar movement protests Obama plan to escalate Afghan war



S.F. Chronicle

(Left) San Francisco protest was part of nationwide actions initiated by the National Assembly for Oct. 17.

pations. In San Francisco and Los Angeles some 300 mobilized on Dec. 2, the day after Obama's speech. Two New York City protests each drew some 150 activists; 200 took to the streets in Boston, with smaller numbers in most other cities.

A number of antiwar groups and activists have been shaken by Obama's Bush-like saber rattling. Some 34 of them were joined by major Out Now! coalitions and networks in drafting an effective open letter to Obama demanding an "end to the U.S. wars now" and expressing strong opposition to the U.S. escalation.

Similarly, some 100 activist groups and individuals set Dec. 12 as a protest in Washington, D.C.'s Lafayette Park. Their new coalition, End US Wars, states on its website, "It's high time Obama, Pelosi, and Reid heard a clear message from a resurgent antiwar movement demanding no escalation and an immediate pullout of all US forces from Afghanistan and Iraq, including an immediate halt to Predator drone attacks and CIA operations in the region. Come to the rally and let our voices be heard!" [emphasis in original].

The antiwar movement still has some ground to cover in order to close the gap between the mass majority antiwar sentiment and its expression in the streets. For the time being, lingering illusions in Obama combine with the hammer blows of the economic crisis to retard the movement's progress.

The same must be said for virtually ev-

ery social movement. The economic crisis has momentarily stunned large numbers of workers, who have yet to conclude that trillion-dollar war budgets and multi-trillion-dollar bank bailouts have been made at their expense, and must be challenged in the workplaces and streets of the nation. The present crop of labor misleaders, which is unmatched in its subservience to the boss class in the modern era, has contributed to the delay in class-struggle challenges to capital's deepening assault.

But even here important cracks are appearing that bode well for future mobilizations. "We need to stop the war in Afghanistan and focus the nation's attention on the fight for jobs, education, health care and pensions," said a November resolution approved by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO. Another, calling for a March on Washington for "Peace, Jobs and Health Care Justice," not war, was unanimously approved by the Troy, N.Y., Labor Council. The San Francisco Labor Council similarly called for a Solidarity Day III national labor mobilization linking the billions wasted on war to the need for a massive program for jobs, education, and health care.

The Nov. 21-22 San Francisco meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations was optimistic about prospects for a reversal of the present malaise. It approved an all-

out effort to build the bi-coastal Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Los Angeles antiwar protests called for March 20, the seventh anniversary of the Iraq War. The National Assembly will mobilize to demand "Close All Military Bases and Bring the Troops Home Now from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan!" as well as for its traditional demands opposing U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine and for massive funds for jobs, human needs and the environment.

In an effort to bring new forces into the movement, the National Assembly is organizing a campaign to win the broadest possible labor and student endorsement and support for March 20. The recent student strike at Berkeley and other University of California campuses makes it clear that many students understand the distorted priorities of a government that cuts billions from education while spending billions on war.

The National Assembly's "Call to Action," entitled "For a United Antiwar Movement to End the Wars Now," states, "We urge support [to March 20] for these critical demands: "Increase Spending by Hundreds of Billions for Jobs, Health Care, Education, Housing and the Environment! End U.S. Wars, Occupations and Corporate Bailouts Now and Use the Money to Meet Human Needs!" This sharp focus and linkage of the economic crisis to the government's obscene military spending is aimed at engaging labor and its allies as active participants in the March 20 mobilizations.

The March 20 actions were initiated by the ANSWER Coalition, which has urged other groups to issue their own mobilization calls. The National Assembly voted to use the opportunity to deepen its efforts to forge a democratic, united, mass action, "Out Now!" and independent movement, in which diverse antiwar components come together in periodic open conferences to decide the movement's strategy and tactics. As with the labor movement, the democratic participation of the antiwar movement's activist ranks is critical to their empowerment and to the emergence of a new generation of militant and experienced fighters.

For further information, contact the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations at: natassembly.org, natassembly@aol.com, (216) 736-4704. ■

... Student protest

(continued from page 1)

education, from K-12 through university level, from students to teachers to workers. The conference voted to build for the Nov. 18-20 actions as well as to unify with all sectors of public education on March 4 for a unified statewide strike/day of action.

The actions were a combination strike and student mobilization. On Nov. 18-19, UC Berkeley University Professional and Technical Employees Local 9119 went on strike, with locals from the AFT and Coalition of University Employees joining them.

On Nov. 18, UC Berkeley pickets arrived at 5 a.m., and 50 construction workers refused to cross the picket lines. A rally of 2500 was held at noon, and an energetic march proceeded through the city to Berkeley High School and Berkeley City College. In the evening, some protesters occupied an administrative building but were quickly removed by police.

On the 19th, pickets began at 5 a.m. again, but apparently management or union bureaucrats had intimidated the construction workers and they went to work. At noon the unions led a march around campus to various administrators' offices to demand meetings. Teach-ins had been organized that day by faculty and students, but the police shut down one of the spaces in which they were planned, thus blocking many of the

educational activities.

During the afternoon, word was received that the Board of Regents had voted to increase student fees. Anger and frustration spread rapidly. At an evening mass meeting, the majority of students voted to occupy campus buildings the next day—as had occurred in Los Angeles and Santa Cruz. A mass rally and march to the police station to denounce their violations of free speech was also planned.

On Friday, Nov. 20, militancy exploded. Some students began to occupy Wheeler Hall, one of the central buildings on campus. The cops were there at 6 a.m. and blocked off the vicinity with yellow tape. Three of the occupiers were arrested in the early morning, and two were beaten by the cops.

By 11 a.m., about 1000 angry students had massed around Wheeler Hall, effectively shutting down a whole section of the campus with their picket line. By noon, it was raining hard, but that didn't scare people away. Police from the cities of Berkeley and Oakland were brought in, as were Alameda County Sheriff deputies, all suited in riot gear and armed with batons, rubber bullets, plastic handcuffs, and tear gas.

Chants were spirited, including a very funny one directed at the riot cops: "You're sexy, you're cute, take off that riot suit!" as well as "No cuts, no fees, education should be free!" "Lay off Yudof [president of the UC]!" "UC regents, I see tyrants!" "Whose university? Our university!"

The 40 Wheeler Hall occupiers came up with four demands that were not the demands of the movement but ones they felt could be fulfilled by the Berkeley administration: Rehire the 38 laid-off AFSCME janitors, amnesty for the occupiers and others who were arrested during the protest, maintain the low-income housing in the Roachdale cooperative, and renew a storefront lease to immigrant-owned food vendors at the previous rate. The first demand illustrates the main strength of the movement right now: the strong unity forged between workers and students.

The police and the administration eventually realized that instead of dissipating, the crowd was actually growing. Throughout the day, thousands of students joined in the rally and denounced the administration and their police lackeys.

At about 8 p.m., the 40 occupiers began to be released, the police chief agreeing not to arrest them but "only" to issue misdemeanor trespassing citations for occupying a public building at their own school. None of the demands the occupiers had raised were met. However, as they exited the building in groups of three, they were greeted by huge cheers.

The demonstrations and strike are a direct challenge to the UC administration's privatization schemes (promising future fee hikes as collateral), as well as to the state of California's antisocial priorities in the face of the economic crisis. Students, workers, and teachers are determinedly fighting back. ■

Supreme Ct. refuses to hear Kevin Cooper's appeal

By REBECCA DORAN

On Nov. 30 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to consider the appeal of innocent San Quentin death-row inmate Kevin Cooper. The High Court reached its decision to reject Cooper's petition despite overwhelming evidence of a massive police frame-up—laid out in dramatic detail in an unprecedented 103-page dissenting opinion signed by five judges in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In a decision issued in May of this year to deny Cooper a rehearing of his case, the Ninth Circuit revealed that it was virtually split on the issue of Cooper's innocence. At least 11 judges in the Ninth Circuit voted to allow Cooper a rehearing, and five of those judges signed the 103-page dissent—which opened with the warning that "the State of California May Be About To Execute an Innocent Man."

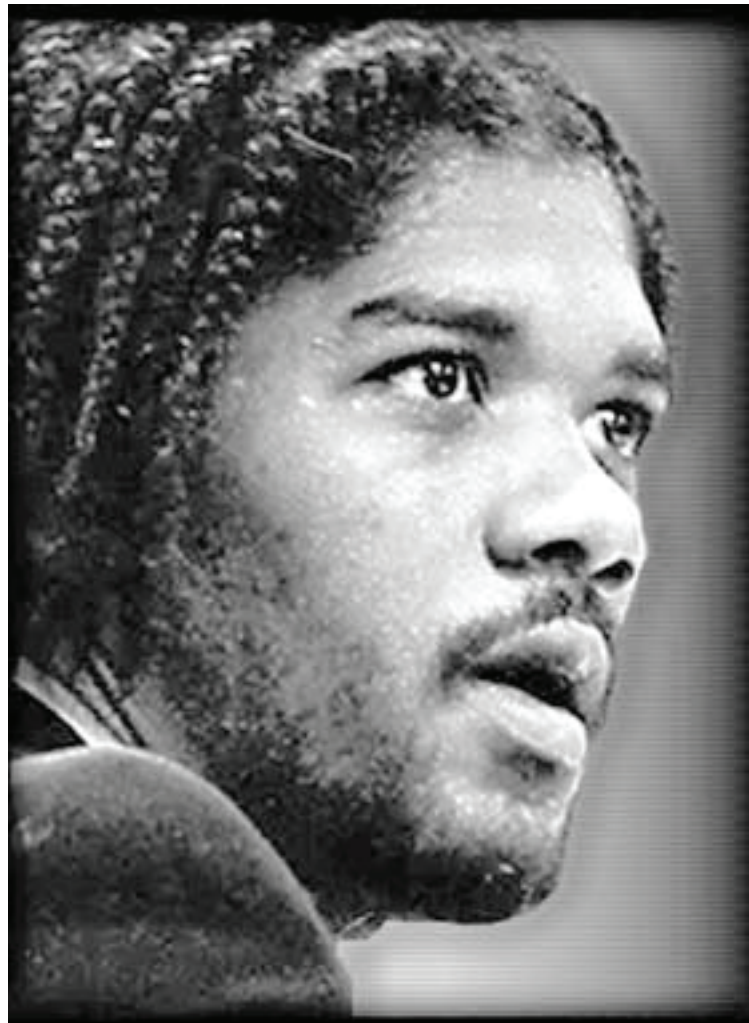
Along with Cooper's appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, California Attorneys for Criminal Justice, The Innocence Network, and the California Public Defenders Association filed amicus curiae, or "friend of the court" briefs on behalf of Cooper's mounting claims of innocence.

The rejection by the Supreme Court came as no surprise to anti-death-penalty activists. In April of this year, the same Court rejected the petition of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, ignoring its own historic decision in the 1986 case of *Batson v. Kentucky* that the systematic and racist exclusion of Blacks from juries voids all guilty verdicts and mandates a new trial.

In Cooper's case, the Supreme Court refused to address an alarming question that is being raised with growing frequency in the aftermath of the signing of former President Bill Clinton's Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA). Cooper's legal team challenged the court to consider: *is a person convicted of murder but later shown to be innocent eligible for execution?*

The court's decision to ignore this question lets stand the current unconstitutional federal AEDPA legislation—which dramatically restricts the right to habeas corpus for the sake of creating a more "effective" death-penalty system. That is, the AEDPA mandates that federal courts must grant a "presumption of correctness" to the factual findings of state courts, even if those findings were subsequently determined to be based on manufactured or otherwise fundamentally flawed "evidence."

Immediately following the Supreme Court decision, Cooper's legal team issued a press release vowing to continue to fight to prevent the execution, notwithstanding the Court's refusal to consider Cooper's appeal. Norman Hile, Cooper's lead attorney, urged any and all witnesses with information about the case to come forward: "Time is running out. Many witnesses have come forward with helpful evidence, but we now need more. Anyone with information about this case should examine their conscience and ask whether they are willing to let their silence contribute to the



In its opposition brief, the state of California struggled to deal with Kevin's actual innocence and the blatant violation of his civil rights

execution of a man for crimes he did not commit."

Hile also called on U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to investigate Cooper's case and the local prosecutorial and police misconduct. "Multiple witnesses have provided testimony suggesting that the police planted evidence against Kevin Cooper and destroyed evidence that demonstrated his innocence, and that local prosecutors violated Kevin Cooper's constitutional rights," Hile said. "We need a federal investigation to get to the bottom of this and stop the killing of an innocent man."

In its opposition brief to Kevin Cooper's petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, the state of California struggled to deal with the issue of Cooper's actual innocence and the blatant violation of his constitutional rights in regard to the withholding and tampering of evidence by the prosecution. The brief cites the California Supreme Court's 1991 opinion, which stated that the evidence of Cooper's guilt was "overwhelming." However, the 1991 opinion was published over a decade before Cooper's defense unearthed the new evidence that split the Ninth Circuit judges into a heated debate.

Cooper was convicted and sent to death row in 1985 for the 1983 San Bernardino County, Calif., slaying of the Ryen family and a young family friend. However, the lone surviving victim of the attack told police that three white men had committed the crimes. Kevin Cooper is Black.

Two witnesses told police that they had seen three young men driving the victims' station wagon away from the scene of the crime, but the prosecution suppressed this information and argued that Kevin Cooper murdered the family to steal their car. It should be noted that a hotel register recorded that Cooper was in Tijuana, Mexico, at a time that would have been impossible had he committed the California murders.

The 103-page dissent published by the five Ninth Circuit judges on May 11 (www.ca9.uscourts.gov/dastore/opinions/2009/05/1105-990040.pdf) exposes countless more instances where police and prosecutors created, destroyed, or tampered with evi-

dence to create and uphold a case against Kevin Cooper. The excerpts below reveal the tone of the argument presented by the dissenting judges that Cooper deserves a fair hearing in the courts.

- In regard to crucial DNA testing the Ninth Circuit had directed a lower court to perform: "There is no way to say this politely. The district court failed to provide Cooper a fair hearing and flouted our direction to perform the two tests. As will be described in greater detail below, the district court impeded and obstructed Cooper's attorneys at every turn as they sought to develop the record. The court imposed unreasonable conditions on the testing the en banc court directed; refused discovery that should have been available as a matter of course; limited testimony that should not have been limited; and found facts unreasonably, based on a truncated and distorted record."

- In regard to evidence tampering: "A single drop of blood in the hallway outside the Ryen master bathroom—several feet away from any of the victims—had characteristics consistent with Cooper's genetic profile and inconsistent with the victims'. The crime lab conducted serological testing of this blood drop (entered into evidence as A-41) under suspicious circumstances.

"The criminologist who conducted the testing arrived at one result, and then altered his records to show a different result that conformed to Cooper's known blood characteristics. The drop of blood has a history of being 'consumed' during testing and then inexplicably reappearing in different form for further testing when such testing would prove useful to the prosecution."

A tan blood-spattered t-shirt was found near the crime scene. Prosecutors claim the shirt tested positive for Cooper's blood, but the district court refused to allow Cooper's legal team to participate in the DNA testing protocol, and refused the defense to even see the garment.

Cooper pursued the issue and demanded testing for a preservative that would prove the blood came directly from a test tube and was planted on the shirt. Cooper's argument pointed to the fact that the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department collected a vial of his blood shortly after his arrest and that his blood was not originally found on the garment in the initial investigation.

The court allowed the testing, but to the state's dismay, its lab arrived at the conclusion that the stain contained a highly elevated level of EDTA, the preservative used in test tubes for the storage of blood. This was a short-lived victory for the defense, however, because the district court allowed the state to withdraw this damning evidence on the grounds that the lab had somehow become contaminated during the testing, making the results unreliable.

Cooper's legal team was barred from inquiring how the testing area had become contaminated, and the issue was closed by the district court.

Cooper supporters point with rage to the fact that Deputy William Baird, the manager of the lab that conducted the investigation against Cooper, provided critical evidence at trial that connected Cooper to the murder scene. However, Deputy Baird lied on the stand and admitted to coercing another witness so they could "shut down certain defenses." Soon after Cooper's trial, Baird was caught stealing heroin from the evidence locker at the Crime Laboratory. He stole the heroin both for his personal use and to sell to drug dealers.

Kevin Cooper is in grave danger of execution based on evidence that has been manufactured and manipulated by racist officials from the local level all the way up through the district courts. Executions in California have been under moratorium since early 2006 to allow prison officials time to tighten their execution protocol in an effort to end arguments that death by lethal injection is cruel and unusual punishment. However, officials in California have made it clear that they intend to issue a death warrant and execute Kevin Cooper as soon as the moratorium is lifted.

We cannot allow this to happen! The struggle to free Kevin Cooper and end the death penalty should move back into the streets! There is no time to waste. Kevin Cooper is staying positive, and his supporters need to do the same while keeping in mind that victories can be won even in the darkest of times. Kevin Cooper's freedom can still be gained, but it will take an organized effort by Cooper supporters and death-penalty abolitionists everywhere. ■

Contact Rebecca Doran at (415) 264-6622 or rebecca.doran@yahoo.com to get involved immediately.

Solidarity with Mexican workers

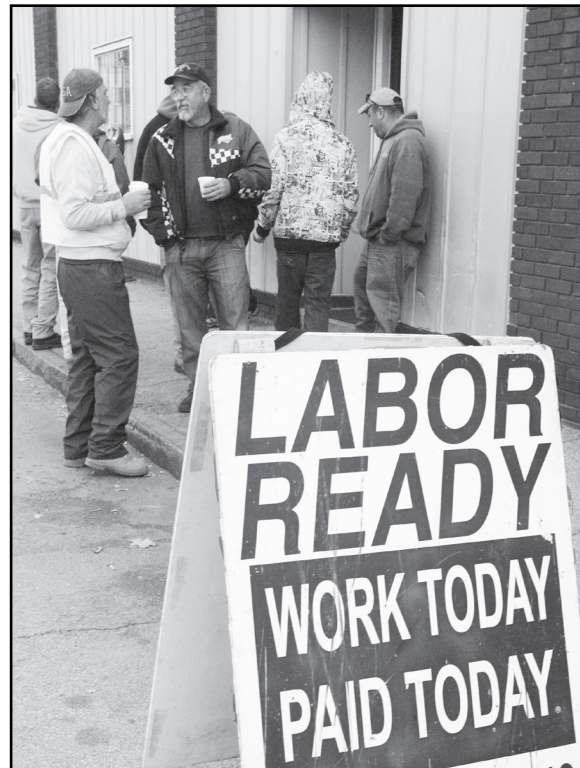
On Oct. 10, Mexican police and army units occupied the installations of Luz y Fuerza del Centro, which provides electric service to Central Mexico, and ordered its "extinction." Some 44,000 workers were left unemployed.

The pretext is that the enterprise is ineffective or insolvent—caused by the government for years, but with the real goal of destroying the Mexican Electricians Union (SME) and to advance privatization of the electric industry. A huge demonstration of popular support for SME, in which more than 350,000 people participated, was held Oct. 15. The National Civic Strike, carried out on Nov. 11, involved about 2 million people.

The regime seems prepared for repression. The SME is calling on defenders of labor and human rights to participate in an International Day of Solidarity with the SME on Dec. 3, performing protest acts in Mexico's embassies in each country.

Join U.S. and Canadian trade unions coming to Mexico to observe in early December, or instead come Dec. 14—SME's 95th anniversary, when there will be activities of great importance.

The union is asking for financial contributions. Contact: Fernando Amezcua, SME Relations Secretary, samezcua@fsmemex.org. ■



Obama and Congress softpedal jobs crisis while bankrolling big corporations

By ANDREW POLLACK

As we go to press, U.S. job loss figures for November have just been released. The official unemployment rate remains basically unchanged at 10 percent, with jobs still being lost in construction, manufacturing and information, while temporary help services and health care added jobs. This still leaves the economy down eight million jobs since December 2007. When those who have stopped looking for work are included, the rate is over 17%.

Consumer spending remains stagnant. Decreasing revenues are leading to more and more state and municipal budget crises, and new waves of service cuts and layoffs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported in November that the number of Americans who lack dependable access to adequate food shot up last year to 49 million. Tens of thousands of immigrant workers are being fired as Obama steps up ICE enforcement.

Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke told Congress recently that the most likely scenario would be "a slow recovery with no job growth." Yet Democrats in the White House and in Congress are recreating on the jobs front their approach toward health care: keep shoveling money to the rich and corporations to create incentives for them to solve the problem. That approach was a key part of last February's stimulus package, as well as of a recently passed bill to extend unemployment benefits, which gave away tens of billions of dollars in tax rebates to businesses, four times the amount spent on the ostensible purpose of the bill.

Economists have begun to express worry about what will keep the economy afloat now that the brief and slight impact of Obama's stimulus is largely over. The economists' worries include a rise in prime mortgage delinquencies, which now outnumber those on the subprime mortgages that fueled the first stage of the crisis. *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Nov. 24 that one fourth of homeowners owe more on their homes than they are worth, which will mean more foreclosures and further declines in home purchases and construction.

The Los Angeles Times called pay cuts "the new normal," predicting that "for years to come, there [will be] masses of people willing to do what you do—but for much less." The paper said pay and benefit cuts are an "inevitable effect of massive job losses and plunges in consumer and business spending." "Never has business shed so many workers so fast, so many people failed to find work who are looking for work, and so many dropped out of the labor force," said Allen Sinai, head of Decision Economics.

AFL-CIO jobs plan

Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO and generally a faithful Obama ally, announced a jobs program on Nov. 17 that was cosponsored by the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, the Center for Community Change, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. The program includes five planks: (1) Extend unemployment benefits and other assistance for jobless workers; (2) rebuild America's schools, roads, and energy systems; 3) increase aid to state and local governments to maintain vital services; (4) put people to work restoring our environment, pro-

viding child care and tutoring, cleaning up abandoned houses and more; (5) put Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) funds to work for small and medium-size businesses.

But even those modest requests have been rejected by Obama. While some Democrats in Congress, like the AFL-CIO, want to use a portion of TARP funds to help small businesses get credit, or to help homeowners with mortgages and to pay for infrastructure, Obama is considering putting those funds toward reducing the deficit.

In his article "White House Plans Sham Jobs Forum," Black Agenda Report's Glen Ford wrote: "Civil rights and labor leaders seem not to understand that their president is philosophically opposed to programs that might directly impact on Black unemployment. The administration is determined to keep spending down, now that Wall Street has already gotten its trillions."

But, said Ford, civil rights and labor leaders "chose to pretend they hadn't gotten the drift. Diehard Obamites still cling to the notion that the president secretly longs to be forced to come to the aid of workers and people of color. If they beg respectfully enough it is believed that the president will hear the voices of his better angels." Proving Ford's point, Hilary Shelton of the NAACP said: "We're not so much trying to convince him [Obama] to do something he doesn't want to do, but urging him to move forward on an issue we have agreement on."

Ford's observations were echoed by *The Wall Street Journal*, which said Obama was "keen to avoid measures suggestive of a second, big-ticket stimulus" and that he was "hamstrung by the nation's \$1.4 trillion deficit and his pledge not to raise taxes on middle-class Americans." The Nov. 23 *New York Times* claimed that "Treasury officials face a trifecta of headaches: a mountain of new debt, a balloon of short-term borrowings that come due in the months ahead, and interest rates sure to climb back to normal as soon as the Federal Reserve decides the emergency has passed.

"The White House estimates the tab for servicing the national debt will exceed \$700 billion a year in 2019, up from \$202 billion this year. Other forecasters say the figure could be much higher. An additional \$500 billion a year in interest expense would total more than the combined federal budgets this year for education, energy, homeland security and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."

"Scare stories from Wall Street"

But the very same day, Paul Krugman, *The Times* op-ed economics columnist, downplayed the effects of the deficit in his story, "The Phantom Menace," stating: "Obama ha[s] been intimidated by scare stories from Wall Street." In fact, he noted, "the big risk to recovery comes from the inadequacy of government efforts: the stimulus was too small, and it will fade out next year, while high unemployment is undermining consumer and business confidence. ... But instead, Obama is lending his voice to those who say we can't create more jobs. And a report suggests that deficit reduction, not job creation, will be the centerpiece of his State of the Union address.

"The concerns Obama expressed become comprehensible if he's getting his views from Wall Street,"

Photos: U.S. workers wait in line for jobs. (Left) Job applicants at a restaurant in Detroit. (Right) Casual work seekers in New Hampshire.

Krugman stated. "Budget deficits will lead to a collapse in investor confidence, and rates will soar. ... It's this claim that Obama has echoed.

We would add the observation that all the figures being so casually thrown to deny the possibility of job creation represent artificial values with their origins in speculative capital. The alleged debts created by lowered interest rates and increased borrowing could be wiped off the books as easily as the trillions that were forgiven the biggest banks and corporations earlier this year. Just this month, as financial regulation "reform" was being debated once again, there were reminders of equally huge sums wiped off the books of banks owing money to failed insurer AIG.

And workers are supposed to accept austerity to pay for such artificially concocted swindles?

Glen Ford's predictions about Obama's "sham jobs forum" were more than borne out. At the Dec. 3 meeting of 130 business executives, union heads and economists, said *The New York Times*, Obama "offered no promise that he could do much to bring unemployment down quickly. While 'he would entertain 'every demonstrably good idea' for creating jobs, he cautioned that 'our resources are limited.'"

And what resources are available would not go primarily to public-works jobs, but rather to tax breaks and job-creation subsidies for business. Said Obama: "While I believe the government has a critical role in creating the conditions for economic growth, ultimately true economic recovery is only going to come from the private sector." Obama, said the *Washington Post*, "repeatedly returned to his point that the ability of the government to spur job creation is limited."

A Workers' Jobs Program

Clearly, workers need our own program for job creation. We cannot peg our demands to what is deemed "possible" in bourgeois political terms, or to what might be "realistic" according to the dictates of the ruling class and its market mechanisms. We start from the standpoint that every worker should have a full-time job at union wages. We say that every service that a given community decides it needs should be fully funded at amounts voted on by that community.

And, in contrast to our petty-minded "leaders," we think big: We say that such decisions must be aggregated nationally, even internationally, and democratically voted on as part of a plan for allocating funds to provide all the jobs and services needed. Of course, only a revitalized labor movement, in collaboration with revitalized movements of women, oppressed nationalities, fighters against war, etc., can make such big ideas part of the common currency of U.S. political debate.

Recent militant struggles by U.S. workers show there are some signs, however modest, that fertile ground may soon be discovered for planting these ideas. We refer to the September and November student/labor strikes against fee hikes and layoffs at California universities; the militant victory by striking graduate students at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign; the prevention of health-care givebacks by a 10-week Chicago Teamster strike; walkouts among California hotel workers; struggles of warehouse workers led by the UE in Chicago; and the unexpected rejection by Ford workers of yet another concessionary contract.

It is from among leaders of such struggles, as well as those leading fights against foreclosures and other battles of the oppressed, that the beginnings of a class-wide fight for jobs will be found. ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Afghanistan torture scandal nails Tory cover-up

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The scandal arising from Ottawa's attempt to cover up alleged war crimes by Canadian Forces in Afghanistan is another nail in the coffin of the imperialist occupation. It may even deprive the Tories of a majority government at the next election.

According to an Angus Reid opinion poll, conducted Nov. 24-25, 49 per cent of Canadians believe the testimony of Ottawa's former number-two diplomat in Afghanistan, Richard Colvin. He told a parliamentary committee that he had repeatedly warned the Conservative government that Canadian Forces had turned over captured Afghan combatants to systematic torture at the hands of Afghan authorities. While 41 per cent of those polled said they were not sure who to believe, only 10 per cent said they believed government ministers.

Under international law, soldiers cannot hand over enemy combatants knowing they are likely to be tortured. It is a war crime to do so. Rather than bite the bullet, the Stephen Harper Conservatives proceeded to deny that they knew anything untoward was happening to Afghan detainees. Heightening concern is the fact that, apart from captured national resistance fighters, some prisoners are non-combatant farmers and townspeople caught up in the fighting in Kandahar province. Ottawa has 2800 soldiers operating mostly in that area as part of the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan under the banner of NATO.

Tory federal Defence Minister Peter MacKay attacked the credibility of Richard Colvin, who is presently a top intelligence officer at the Canadian embassy in Washington, D.C. The government trotted out as star witnesses three generals, plus Canada's ambassador to China, David Mulroney. Mulroney was Colvin's former boss in Afghanistan. The four denied Colvin's claim that he had warned about detainee torture back in 2006-7, and disputed that there is any factual basis to the accusations of systematic torture by the Kabul regime.

But the government has a big problem—actually several. First, the memos

sent by Colvin to Ottawa and the Canadian Forces high command, memos the government refuses to show to Parliament's Standing Committee on National Defence, have been leaked to the media. Second, not only do they show a steady stream of warnings to officials, they show that Colvin was quoting the International Committee of the Red Cross as a source. Moreover, according to Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh, there is "a compelling body of evidence on the risk of torture in Afghan jails" coming from the U.S. State Department, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and others.

The AIHRC reported in April 2009 that iron rods, electric shocks and beatings were the preferred method of torture, most often done to extract a confession. It indicated that cruel and degrading treatment is "common in the majority of law enforcement institutions (in Afghanistan), and at least 98.5 per cent of interviewed victims have been tortured." Evidently, those are the 'values' promoted by the foreign occupying powers, including Canada.

False indignation aside, in this matter the Liberal Opposition does not have clean hands. The Liberal government of successive Prime Ministers Jean Chretien and Paul Martin approved the military intervention, the ongoing occupation, the propping up of the corrupt and repressive regime of Hamid Karzai, and signed the protocols governing the handing over detainees to the tender mercies of NATO's client government of drug and warlords in Kabul.

This episode is a fitting climax to a failed imperialist venture—one in which Ottawa is a junior partner, hoping to reserve for the Canadian business elite a piece of the pipeline action that would flow Caspian oil and gas through Kanda-

har to western tankers at Indian Ocean ports.

U.S. President Barak Obama is sending tens of thousands more troops to the area, so the quagmire will deepen and sadly many more lives will be submerged in it. But the signs of disengagement, due to popular disgust with the costly and futile occupation, are widely evident.

In Germany, the third-biggest troop contributor after the U.S. and Britain, public support for the war has plummeted. And in Britain, which has pledged additional forces, an overwhelming 70 per cent favour early troop withdrawal, in the latest polls. Like Canada, the Netherlands is planning a pullout. Increasingly, many of the 43 countries that remain in Afghanistan constitute a coalition of the unwilling.

A public judicial enquiry into the torture and cover-up scandal, which the New Democratic Party is demanding, will apply some heat on the Conservative minority government. Mass anti-war protest actions in the streets will do more so. Mobilizing now against the governing liars and warmongers will shorten the duration of the war, and could help to deprive the Tories of a majority in the next federal election. ■

Toronto Trotsky School shows SA growth



Socialist Action (Canada) National Secretary Barry Weisleder speaks at Toronto's Trotsky School.

The second annual Toronto Socialist Action "Trotsky School", held Nov. 20-21 at the University of Toronto, was about 50% bigger and even more exciting than the first edition. Under the theme "Education for Activists", the topics included: "Rosa Luxemburg, a revolutionary for the 21st century", "Is Fascism on the rise in America?", "Permanent Revolution, Stalinism and the Transitional Program", and "The Jobless Recovery, and other absurdities of the capitalist economy".

Attendance at the four sessions ranged from 22 to 37 people, with 50 participating overall during the course of the two days. A high school student and a retired worker applied to join SA, and several others drew closer to our party.

Socialist Action Treasurer Elizabeth Byce welcomed everyone and got the conference off to a rousing start on Friday evening, followed by a superb presentation on 'Red Rosa' by leading SA-USA comrade Adam Shils from Chicago. On Saturday morning, Shils spoke about the clash over Medicare and the state of the U.S. labour and progressive movements. The lunch break featured a film produced by the Fourth International in 1990 titled "Workers of all lands, unite!"

In the afternoon, this writer addressed the question of revolutionary strategy, and Toronto SA executive member Julius Arscott brought the economic crisis, and the false claims of a

capitalist re-bounce, back down to earth. The SA literature table was a hub of activity where over \$110 was spent for books, booklets, and political buttons.

That same weekend, Socialist Action members sold 50 SA newspapers to delegates registering for the Ontario Federation of Labour Convention at the Sheraton Centre (where another 20 papers were subsequently sold).

Already in the planning stages is "Socialism 2010", the annual four-day international educational conference that will take place at U. of Toronto, May 20-23. Please mark your calendar now, send us your ideas about speakers and topics, and get ready to have a great time. ■

OFL convention: Samuelson passes featherduster to Ryan

Despite dire threats to public services and jobs, and the tightening noose of labour concessions, it appears to be mostly business as usual for a major component of the workers' movement in English Canada—with only the faintest hint of a much-needed change of direction.

Nearly 1000 delegates to the tenth biennial convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour, whose affiliates encompass over 700,000 public and private sector unionized workers, gathered for a five-day lacklustre talk fest that acclaimed two new OFL executive officers, and re-cycled some 'progressive' policies.

Wayne Samuelson, who for 12 years spoke with a loud voice but carried a featherduster, did not seek re-election as OFL President. He passed the baton to Sid Ryan, Canadian Union of Public Employees' (CUPE) Ontario president since 1992. Ryan is portrayed in the corporate media as "controversial" and "a polarizing figure" for his outspoken opposition to labour concessions and his solidarity with oppressed nationalities, including Palestinian victims of Israeli apartheid.

Steelworker Marie Kelley was acclaimed to the position of secretary-treasurer. She takes over from Irene Harris, who also served as an OFL executive officer for

12 years, the first eight as executive vice-president. Re-elected vice-president was Terry Downey, who was an OPSEU executive board member and regional vice-president before her first OFL term in 2005.

Samuelson presided over the untimely termination of the Ontario Days of Action, combined with the unfulfilled 1997 OFL mandate for a province-wide strike to halt the Conservative Mike Harris government's vicious anti-worker offensive. That default led to a lack of effective OFL response to the hundreds of millions of dollars in education cuts; the undermining of public health care (especially home care); de-regulation of environmental and work place standards; additional anti-labour laws, anti-human rights rules (criminalizing beggars), and a big push of 'Work Fare' slavery into the private sector.

The 57-year old Ryan tried immediately to assuage concerns at the Ontario legislature. He said he "comes to Queen's Park in peace" and seeks to work with the Liberal government to build a green economy and repair the gutted manufacturing sector. In a bid to hasten the Canadian Auto Workers' return to the OFL, Ryan softened his criticism of CAW concessions to the Big Three. To some, these words and gestures appear to be

solely tactical. But the policies approved by the convention do not veer off this course.

No notice was served on the Liberal provincial government that any step in the direction of slashing public services and jobs, that any targeting of OPSEU, CUPE, teachers or nurses, would provoke an Ontario-wide shutdown. Instead, the OFL proposes a mild "sustainable jobs strategy" that leaves all power in the hands of crisis-wracked, profit-mad big business. There is not even a hint that a shift to 'green energy' requires nationalization of Big Oil and the entire energy sector to harness the necessary resources for green conversion.

Ryan campaigned on a three-plank platform of a 'new economy', labour unity, and social solidarity. It remains to be seen whether he will go beyond policy studies, roundtable talks with experts, and the lobbying of bourgeois politicians. Ryan's background as a militant Irish working-class immigrant to Canada, and a stalwart of the Ontario Days of Action, could serve him well, if he so chooses. But no one can substitute for a militant mass movement—which OFL policies have served to quell over time. The challenge (and urgent need) at this time of economic crisis and employer offensive is to build that movement in the only way possible—that is, with a class-struggle programme, from the bottom up. ■

The **Black is Back** march and rally in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 7 was a step forward for the Black liberation movement and for all antiracist activists. The significance of this demonstration is not in the number of people who attended, but in the program and slogans it put forward—for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, reparations for slavery, universal health care, etc.

The rally drew a crowd of several hundred to Malcolm X Park to hear speakers such as Glen Ford of the *Black Agenda Report*; antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan; Pam Africa, leader of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Larry Hamm of the Newark, N.J.-based People's Organization for Progress; and chair of the African People's Socialist Party, Omali Yeshitela.

All of the speakers condemned the Obama administration for continuing the war policies of Bush and for ignoring policies that favor the Black community or working people in general. Many expressed their anger that they had supported him, only to be let down by his political inaction. Another theme addressed by speakers was the continuing role that racism against oppressed nationalities plays in U.S. society—in spite of the myth of a "post-racial" America supposedly made possible by the election of the first Black president.

Below are excerpts of the speech by Glen Ford, executive director of the *Black Agenda Report*, to the *Black is Back* rally. Transcription is by Marty Goodman.

By GLEN FORD

The way that America has treated us, has cheated us, has made us suspicious of everything that the rulers do and everything that the rulers say. [We] have a healthy disbelief, a wise disbelief. We didn't believe that they really meant what white settlers said. Because our lives as slaves showed us that they were liars and we have not trusted them ever since. So we have a skepticism of the motives of the rulers of society. That is our great asset. We don't trust a word out of their mouths. We know what has been done and what continues to be done to us ... by them. That's why Black America has always been at the forefront of social justice, at the forefront of peace, because we can't live without peace and social justice.

Our opposition to American aggression abroad has been documented ever since they've been keeping track of Black public opinion. We have always been on the human side of the equation. The most dramatic evidence of that in my recent memory came in February 2003; that was about six weeks before the invasion of Iraq. The Zogby polling organization posed this question: would you favor an invasion of Iraq if it would result in the death of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians.

In answer to that question a strong majority of white men said yes, we would be in favor of that invasion; bring it on, we don't care about the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians. One third of white women thought that it was all right to slaughter thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children. But Black Americans answered that same question from a diametrically opposed viewpoint. Only 7% of African Americans favored invading Iraq if it would result in the death of thousands of men, women, and children out of uniform.

And that's not because Black people are smarter than white people or anybody else in this country. It's because we know what it feels like, what it looks like, to be on the other side of the gun. We have a righteous skepticism about the motives of this country's rulers.

Glen Ford at Black is Back rally: 'Black America has always been at the forefront of social justice'



Glen Ford of *Black Agenda Report* speaks at Nov. 7 *Black is Back* rally in Washington, D.C.

That's what sets us apart in the United States. It is one of our great strengths.

And we have consistently stood, until recently, stood strong on the side of peace and social justice—until we got confused. We got confused when we learned that there was a possibility that that house down the street might be occupied by a Black man and that blew our collective minds. It made us lose our righteous distrust, our righteous skepticism.

Some of us went out of our minds and started thinking that we were the man. And we collectively became neutered. We became passive. We were neutralized as a political people. And all of a sudden war was all right because a Black said it was a necessary war, and we went along with that. All of a sudden it was cool to give the wealth of the whole country away to the banker class because a Black man was signing the check.

When Barack Obama became a viable candidate for the presidency, we collapsed politically and started worshipping the ground that he walked on. Not all of us, but too many of us started doing that and treating him like an idol and an icon. When Black people collapse there can be no progressive movement in the United States. Our collapse in the presence of this great trickster, Barack Obama, could not have come at a worse time historically. Because just as we were collapsing politically,

doing nothing, saying nothing, neutralized, pacified, finance capital was collapsing here in this country and around the world.

What was the response from organized Black America to this collapse, what was the response from the most political block in the entire U.S.? There was very little, almost none. Because we were adulating Barack Obama as he rescued George Bush's bailout of the banks, and he wasn't even president yet.

We adulated him as he dedicated the entire American state to the task, to the mission, of saving the Wall Street casino. By March of this year, according to Bloomberg's financial services, the U.S. government under Barack Obama had committed \$12.8 trillion dollars—\$12.8 trillion dollars, to bailing out Wall Street. By July, that figure that figure had risen to \$23.7 trillion dollars. The entire gross domestic product of the U.S. in 2008 was only \$14.2 trillion. And here in July, months ago, the U.S. has already committed \$23.7 trillion to saving the banksters.

And, of course, they have saved Wall Street, they're awash in money while our joblessness continues to rise, and home foreclosures continue to rise. The casino is humming, but the rest of us look like the other part of Atlantic City. Y'all been there? Stone cold ghetto. Nothing moving, except the casino. That's the kind of country that Barack Obama has committed us to....

We have watched as the finance capitalist class has swallowed the American state whole. They own it lock, stock, and barrel and into the future. And we were collectively were paralyzed because a Black man was in the White House. We watched as a Black man signed the biggest war budget in the history of the human race.

The time for watching and the time for waiting is over. We are going to build a new movement from these small beginnings because there is no choice for us. The call [for the *Black is Back* rally and coalition] only came out seven weeks ago from the Uhuru movement. The same people who stood alone in standing up to candidate Barack Obama back in August of 2008 by simply posing the question, "What about the Black community, Obama?"

No one else posed that question, no one else had the guts or the insight or the manly and womanliness to pose that question. That question has led to our gathering here. That question has led to the beginnings of the building of a "Black is Back Coalition," for peace, social justice, and reparations. History is on our side. History is rushing down upon us. We're going to have to catch up with history, and I know we will because I know our people.

We have no choice but speak truth to power. It's that way. Because the alternative is political and even physical death. We will live because we will resist. Power to the people! ■

Mobilizations needed to free Mumia!

By CHRISTOPHER TOWNE

WASHINGTON—Mumia Abu-Jamal has spent 28 years on death row. His work as a reporter, known as the "voice of the voiceless," gave him a reputation with the Philadelphia police and resulted in his trial and imprisonment on frame-up charges of killing a cop.

Recently, the Supreme Court delayed ruling on an appeal seeking Mumia's execution, for the likely reason that it is waiting to rule on *Smith v. Spisak* first. While unanimity is often required from jurors for the death penalty, a "state's rights" ruling in *Smith v. Spisak* would let states determine their own requirements. This would make it possible for the state of Pennsylvania to put Mumia to death based on his 1982 trial.

Does a court exist to apply justice? The highest court of the land doesn't think so. In 1993 the Supreme Court allowed for the execution of an innocent man, Leonel Herrera. The chief justice stated that "actual innocence" could not be the deciding issue in an execution. The Court, in his words, exists to determine

constitutionality, "not to correct errors of fact."

The state, including the courts, is the product of class irreconcilability. The capitalist state intervenes in conflicts on behalf of the capitalist class—unless it is forced to make concessions to the working class or oppressed. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "power concedes nothing without demand." Faith in the courts is a pipe dream; a struggle is necessary for justice.

It was in this spirit that 150 activists braved rainy weather in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 12 to demonstrate for Mumia's release. We marched to the Justice Department, where, in a scene reminiscent of "Miracle on 34th Street," we delivered thousands of signatures from all over the world in support of Mumia.

A press conference preceded the march and brought together such figures as Marvin Cheatham, president of the Baltimore NAACP, and Laura Moye, head of the Amnesty International Death Penalty Project. Fignole Saint-Cyr came from Haiti, where he leads a lively campaign of people who add their voices to

the international movement to free Mumia!

The highlight of the press conference was undoubtedly the speech by 13-year-old Lejla Duka. Young Lejla is an unlikely candidate for a movement leader, except for the fact that her father and two uncles are victims of the "War on Terror" hysteria.

Her relatives make up three of the "Fort Dix Five," whose convictions rest on taped conversations in which the men used the word "jihad," on their purchase of weapons, and on the testimony of paid FBI informants. According to the government, this translated into a "plot" to attack Fort Dix.

Lejla's presence at the Mumia rally showed real solidarity; defense campaigns are greatly strengthened when victims of the system are united, and can see the connections between their struggles. Her speech earned her a long and heartfelt standing ovation.

Pam Africa of MOVE and the International Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal was the last to speak. MOVE has been committed to freeing Mumia since the very beginning. This is fitting, considering that Mumia's reporting on the police attacks on MOVE (including

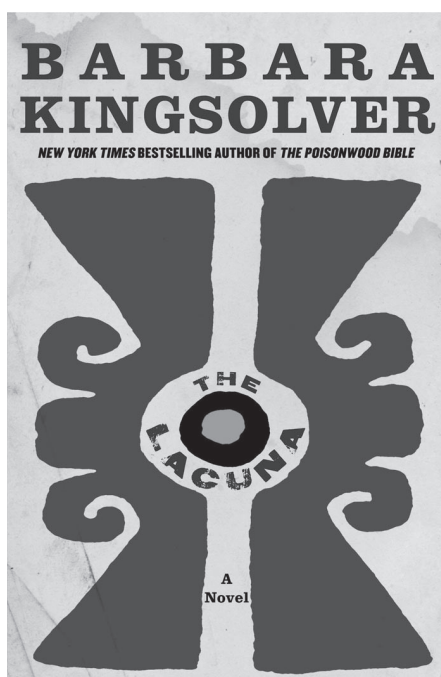
the 1978 police beatings in which the three-week-old Life Africa was stomped to death) earned him the ire of the Philly police, and was no doubt a factor in deciding to frame him for murder.

Pam's speech included criticism of Seth Williams, elected last month as the first Black district attorney of Philadelphia. Williams, a Democrat, campaigned on a promise to get Mumia executed. While organizing against Williams, Pam received phone calls from liberals telling her to "lay off this guy, we could have our first Black DA."

Recently, numbers at protest rallies have shrunk, due in part to the illusions that many activists have had in Obama and the Democratic Party. This rally was important. We don't start at the finish line; small rallies help consolidate our forces, and our most dedicated fighters, to prepare for the inevitable upsurges that result from continued injustices under capitalism.

Those who would ask the movement in Mumia's defense to consider him a sacrificial lamb, an issue to "forget" so that we can get some watered-down reforms from the Democrats, are badly mistaken. The execution of Mumia would be a defeat for all of us. Free Mumia! ■

'The Lacuna' — novel gives vivid view of Trotsky in exile



By CARL SACK

Barbara Kingsolver's books and essays hold a seminal place in the lexicon of contemporary American literature. Her widely read non-fiction writings, including her most recent, "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle," are rich with commentary on workers' struggles, our relationship to nature, and the search for a better world. But while her essays are valuable, her novels are gems, portraying working-class characters, places, and historical events in as vivid and entralling a style as those of any author alive today. Now Kingsolver has turned her pen to a new subject: Leon Trotsky.

"The Lacuna" (HarperCollins, 2009) is not a study of Trotsky per se. Written like a journal, the story follows a protagonist, Harrison Shepherd, who grows up with his mother in Mexico after she leaves his American father. The mother is shown as a debauched opportunist chasing after powerful oil men and diplomats, allowing herself to be used as a mistress, to her ultimate ironic detriment and tragedy. Harrison himself becomes disillusioned early, as the family is first trapped on an island at the estate of a wealthy tycoon, then later moved to a tiny flat in Mexico City.

Through Harrison's accounts, we witness a number of important historical events that you won't find in the average U.S. high school history textbook. The first of these occurs while he and his mother are living on Isla Pixol: the end of the three-year-long Cristero War. This was a rebellion initiated by the Catholic Church against secular reforms enacted by the revolutionary 1917 Con-

stitution, which seized extensive church landholdings and placed restrictions on education and clerical activities of the Church. On June 21, 1929, "the church bells rang all day ... calling back the priests with their gold rings, landholdings, and sovereignty intact."

After moving to Mexico City, Harrison sees a servant girl carrying a bird cage on her back, accompanying a diminutive but fiery woman: "when she turned, her skirts and silver earrings whirled and her face was very startling, an Azteca queen with ferocious black eyes." This is none other than Frida Kahlo, artist and wife of "the much-discussed painter" and communist Diego Rivera. After seeing Rivera's in-progress murals in the National Palace, Harrison resolves to work for him.

There is an interlude in which Harrison is sent to boarding school in Washington, D.C. Aside from picking up some of the gringo culture he has missed out on, he witnesses the bloody massacre of World War I veterans by infantry and tanks under General MacArthur in 1932. In one journal entry, we are treated to a description of the shooting and saber-slicing of unemployed patriots in view of thousands of civil servants.

Following this episode, one of Harrison's journals is missing—ostensibly burned, we are led to believe, because it contained the details of a sexual affair with a fellow male student. Thus, the next scenes return us to Mexico when Harrison is 19 and once again working full-time for Rivera and Kahlo.

It is here that we meet Lev Davidovich (Leon Trotsky) along with his wife Natalia, personal assistant Van (Jean Van Heijenoort), and several U.S. Trotskyists. From Harrison's vantage point as a cook for the Riveras, we are given a window into the daily life of the Trotskyes: their grief as their children and friends are murdered one by one by agents of Stalin, news of the Moscow show trials, the ravenous propaganda of the bourgeois press about "the villain in our midst." Several journal entries are dedicated to the Commission of Inquiry into the charges against Trotsky organized by the U.S. Socialist Workers Party and chaired by John Dewey. There is even treatment of the surrealist art movement. This is all in the historical record, but written as richly poetic memoir.

Eventually, Harrison's penchant for record-keeping is discovered by Lev, and he is promoted to the position of the Commissar's personal secretary. But the pressures of life with the Riveras pile up, first in the form of an affair between



(Above) Trotsky, in Mexico, reads U.S. socialist paper, *The Militant*.

Frida and Lev, and eventually resulting in a split between Lev and Diego that prompts the former to move six blocks away, to the final Casa Trotsky. Harrison moves too, continuing to afford us an exciting window into historical characters and events, culminating in the first nearly-successful attempt on Trotsky's life by Stalinist agents including Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros. Finally, there is the vivid and tragic scene in which Ramon Mercador, under the alias Jacson Mornard and unsuspected of ill will by the house residents, buries an ice ax in Trotsky's skull.

After Trotsky, the setting transitions abruptly to Asheville, North Carolina, in the author's own neck of the woods. The link is a shipment of Frida's paintings that Harrison is sent to steward to New York, along with a lengthy interjection by the "archivist" Violet Brown, ostensibly the postmortem editor of Harrison's journals, explaining how he came to reinvent his life in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The book becomes a bit more tedious here, largely composed of letters and both historical and fictional news articles, woven together to advance the story through evolving U.S. political culture of the 1940s. The plot largely hinges around the racist propaganda and rumor-mongering of the press, a theme being that they hold much responsibility for approving the civil rights violations that start with Japanese internment and are to culminate in the 1950s Red scare of McCarthyism. One can draw parallels to current bourgeois news media.

Unfortunately, Kingsolver's political misunderstandings show through in a confused treatment of the Trotskyist

position on World War II. SWP-led anti-war demonstrations are mentioned, but Harrison ponders of Lev, "he would abhor Roosevelt's friendly partnership with Marshal Stalin. ... But wouldn't he agree with the president, that sacrifice must be made toward the ideal?"

The Fourth International, the worldwide socialist federation that was Trotsky's lasting legacy, never gave support to the imperialist powers of the U.S. or Britain in World War II despite their alliance with the USSR, but rather maintained its position for the overthrow of those powers by the working class.

Harrison himself manages to stay out of the war (unfit to serve due to "sexual deviance"), and after a stint in civilian service, begins his career as a popular fiction writer. But even through good fortune we see the inevitable coming, as the noose of post-war anticommunism draws tighter around him, eventually costing him nearly everything.

A major importance of Kingsolver's new work is that it will expose millions of mainstream readers to a view of history with which few are familiar. "The Lacuna," though a fictional story, succeeds in correcting the dogma equating communism with Stalinism. Rescuing Lev Davidovich from anonymity seems to almost happen accidentally, a part of a larger drama that is life and art.

"The Lacuna" deserves prominent consideration in the resurgent discussion around Trotsky's life and work currently taking place. It also deserves reading simply as a beautiful and intimate adventure story. ■

Socialist Action candidate gets positive response in Minneapolis

By BRENT PERRY

MINNEAPOLIS—On Nov. 3, voters in this city, for the first time, used ranked-choice voting to elect local officials. Ranked-choice voting, also known as instant run-off voting, allowed voters to rank up to three candidates for each office.

This wasn't the only thing new on the Minneapolis ballot, however; Socialist Action fielded its first candidate for Minneapolis City Council. I proudly ran as Socialist Action's candidate in Ward 12.

The campaign's primary demands were: Stop Foreclosures, End Police Brutality, Expand Public Transportation, and Create Green Jobs by moving to 100% Renewable Energy.

Like the rest of the country, Minneapolis is continuing to suffer from the foreclosure crisis. The incumbent Democratic Party council member for Ward 12 even voted against a resolution calling for a voluntary suspension of foreclosures. The incumbent council member also voted for reappointment of Police Chief Tim Dolan. This was after Dolan had awarded

the Medal of Valor to a cop for killing a young, unarmed Hmong man, Fong Lee, while he was running away from police.

The environment is also an important issue to people in Minneapolis, where a significant portion of electricity is produced by a garbage burner. The burner takes in garbage that could be composted or recycled while putting out emissions that create health hazards, in addition to greenhouse gases.

Members of Socialist Action and campaign supporters received a lot of positive responses while door knocking to spread the message about the candidacy. I was also invited to participate in a candidate forum sponsored by a neighborhood association. The major newspapers ignored the entire election for the most part, but our campaign was highlighted in an article by the *Minnesota Independent*.

Unfortunately, ranked-choice voting doesn't seem to have had much impact in this election. Every incumbent who ran for reelection won, and every candidate with Democratic Party endorsement won. Voter turnout was only 20%, and

the mayor was reelected with fewer votes than any Minneapolis mayor since 1910.

While reforms like instant run-off voting and proportional representation may create an opening for socialists and other left candidates to intervene in elections, Socialist Action has argued that democracy within capitalism remains extremely limited. The ruling class simply would never allow its own elections to be used to end its rule.

I ended up with 130 first-choice votes (2.76%), 269 2nd-choice votes (10.70%), and 356 3rd-choice votes (25.67%). A total of 755 people, or 16% of the people who voted, ranked me somewhere in their three choices.

This is an indication that many are open to the idea of socialism, and it demonstrates how socialists can effectively use elections as a platform to expose the failures of capitalism. ■

Popular Pamphlets from Socialist Action Books

- Stop the Occupation of Iraq: A Socialist Perspective \$3
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- The Struggle Against Fascism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. \$2
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Order from Socialist Action Books, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Please add \$1 per pamphlet for shipping.

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

THE BAD NEWS BEARERS

"The Messenger" shows scenes to moviegoers that the U.S. government would rather we not see—like flag-draped coffins—scenes that are enacted throughout the country, in tree-shaded suburbs with American flags hung from porch railings and fences, yellow ribbons tied around trees. Two soldiers in full dress and snappy berets approach a home, knock on the front door, and when it opens deliver heartbreaking news to the designated next-of-kin: "The Secretary of Defense wishes to inform you ..." The rest of the sentence is drowned out by cries of disbelief and rage, which devolve into anguished sobs.

Ben Foster plays Will Montgomery, a recovered, wounded soldier with only a few months left of his third deployment to Iraq. He's been assigned to partner with veteran messenger Tony Stone (Woody Harrelson), who was in Desert Storm, to bring bad news to good people.

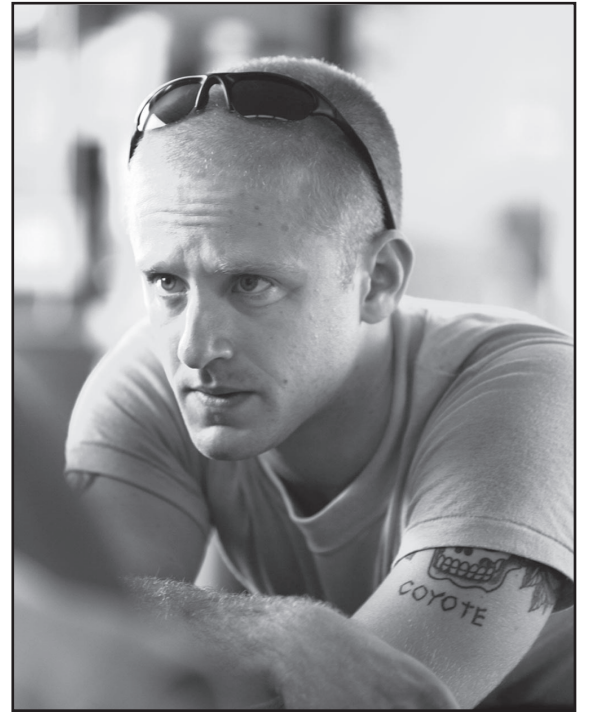
The next-of-kin already suffer, losing their loved ones to Iraq and Afghanistan and worrying constantly about their well being. Israeli army veteran Oren Moverman directs his film with such skill that the viewer feels he or she is right behind the men on the doorstep, accompanying them into their hallways or front rooms. We witness their agony and heartbreak, and suffer with them. It feels voyeuristic.

Harrelson's character lives up to his name—Stone; he's been at this too long. He runs down a list of "don'ts" right off the bat for Montgomery: Don't touch the person, no hugs, no hand-holding, no pat on the shoulder; stick to the script. No "Good morning or afternoon," he says, "There's nothing good about it."

Moverman, together with co-writer Alessandro Camon, an Italian, create a balance in the film by getting into the messengers' lives when they're off duty. Montgomery is sensitive, we see it in his eyes and demeanor, yet he harbors rage. He loses control in private—plays loud music, shouts, and punches walls. Stone is a flat-out womanizer, such as he can't remember names and doesn't want to. He's allegedly on the wagon, but after one rough reaction to their message, drinks with Will at a bar. Thankfully, no big deal is made of this. He just does what his does.

"The Messenger" takes no political stance, but presents an honest portrayal of one more reason to end all wars. ■

(Right) Ben Foster plays a U.S. soldier, wounded in Iraq, who now must carry bad news to other soldiers' families in "The Messenger."



Honduran congress rejects Zelaya return; Election boycott appears widespread

By CLAY WADENA

In Honduras the Nov. 29 election is finished, as is the Dec. 2 congressional vote to decide whether or not to restore the ousted, democratically-elected President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya.

In the election, Porfirio Lobo of the conservative National Party (one of the two traditionally dominant parties of Honduras) won the most votes by all counts. However, controversy has emerged regarding the percentage of voters that abstained from voting.

Figures from the coup-installed regime and correspondingly friendly press put the figure at 30-40%. But the National Resistance Front (the primary coordinating body of demonstrations and strikes against the coup, which had led the call for a boycott) and more liberal press have put the abstention figure at 60-70%. At that rate, abstentionism in this election would eclipse all past elections held since the democratic transition in the early 1980s and signal a victory for those that called for an electoral boycott.

The day after the election the National Resistance Front organized an automobile caravan through the capital of Tegucigalpa to celebrate the victory of the electoral boycott. Meanwhile, the de facto government, president-elect Lobo, and the U.S. government all claimed the election was a success.

The present course of the Honduran ruling elite and the U.S. government had become clear following the signing of the Oct. 30 "Tegucigalpa-San Jose Agree-



(Above) Police officer takes aim at pro-democracy forces during the first days of the coup.

ment." In that accord—signed by both ousted President Zelaya and de facto government President Micheletti—both sides had agreed to abide by a decision of the Honduran congress on the matter of Zelaya's reinstatement. While it was not written in the agreement explicitly, Zelaya was led to believe that the vote would be taken very soon thereafter and that he would be reinstated. In return for this, the deal seemed to be, Zelaya would support the electoral process of Nov. 29 (in which neither he nor Micheletti were eligible to run).

But very soon after the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Agreement had been signed, a representative of the Obama administration

stated that the U.S. government would recognize the victor of the elections whether or not Zelaya were restored. This immediately destroyed any chance that the Honduran congress would act quickly on the matter, despite repeated demands from Zelaya and many Latin American governments that the vote on Zelaya's restoration be held.

The Obama administration and the coup government went to great lengths to portray the elections as legitimate, essentially instructing other countries that they had no real choice in the matter. *The New York Times* reported on one exchange at a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS), which was very telling: The Paraguayan ambassador to the OAS said, "Paraguay is not only not going to accept the outcome of the elections, it will not even accept that the elections are held. These elections for us simply will not exist." The Brazilian ambassador to the OAS remarked that the situation was like a "badly written soap opera, with sinister characters played by the de facto regime, which history will judge."

But the American ambassador struck a much different note. "I've heard many in this room say that they will not recognize the elections in Honduras," he said to the group. "I'm not trying to be a wiseguy, but what does that mean? What does that mean in the real world, not in the world of magical realism?" The American ambassador went on to note that they would eventually have to accept the elections as legitimate. ■

As it stands now the countries that had said they would not recognize the victor have stood by their word, including Latin American "powerhouses" Brazil and Argentina. Meanwhile, a small handful of conservative regimes (Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, and Panama) have recognized the elections along with the U.S.

Amidst the electoral dispute, the Honduran congress convened on Dec. 2 and voted 111-14 not to reinstate Zelaya. Yet Zelaya had already stated he would not accept reinstatement only to serve out a little more than a month left of his term (something he felt would only legitimize the coup).

The resistance in Honduras now faces one of its most difficult tests yet. The U.S. government will be leaning hard on countries around the world to recognize the new government, portraying it as the only path forward out of this crisis. Meanwhile, the right wing in Honduras will be consolidating the gains they have made since the coup.

The resistance includes a chunk of Zelaya's Liberal Party (which essentially split over support for the coup), union organizations, campesino organizations, leftists, and popular forces that were inspired to political action for the first time by the coup. The way forward will depend greatly on the strength and vision of the resistance.

It was the resistance that truly forced the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Agreement, as hollow as it was, by creating a political climate in which the United States had to at least pretend to be anti-coup. The resistance, through its many demonstrations and strikes, made it impossible for regional leaders and mainstream press to gloss over the coup—despite claims by the Honduran Supreme Court, Honduran Congress, and Honduran military that the coup was a perfectly legal event.

The resistance is still organized, and it can still count on support from huge sectors of the oppressed in Honduran society (the second poorest country in Central America). One of its most prominent demands has been the call for a Constituent Assembly, a body that could rewrite the Honduran constitution and hopefully break the right-wing stranglehold on Honduran society. That demand still holds popular support, but it is quite certain that the Honduran oligarchy will do everything they can to stop such an assembly from being held.

The forces aligned against the Honduran people are very powerful, but the masses have shown a higher level of political consciousness and activism than many thought possible in a country where the left has historically been severely repressed. Although it will not be easy, with a high level of organization and an unswerving will to fight, the masses can still achieve victory against the Honduran oligarchy and its allies. ■

Canada unemployment still on the rise

With joblessness, unemployment insurance applications, bankruptcies and food bank usage still on the rise, claims of an economic rebound simply mock the victims of the capitalist economic crisis. Canada's 55 billionaires, and their government in Ottawa, seem not to be much concerned; their focus is on reigning-in public spending and reducing the debt at the expense of working people.

Unemployment in Canada is 8.6 per cent, officially, though it is higher in Ontario, and actually double that rate if discouraged workers and the involuntarily part-time and under-employed are taken into account. Economists at Export Development Canada, and at the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, stress how "feeble" the 'recovery' is, and predict growing joblessness throughout 2010 across the world's most developed economies. Of course, even prior to the crash in 2008, rates in the less developed countries were already catastrophic.

An indication of increasing desperation is the growth of dependence on food banks, and the inability of the latter to cope with the demand. HungerCount's annual report shows that of the 800,000 people who visited a food bank in March 2009, 72,000 were there for the first time; close to 300,000 of the users were children. The increased demand on food banks is due not only to the 'recession', but to the disappearance of well-paid jobs in the manufacturing and forestry industries, to be replaced by low-paying positions. — BARRY WEISLEDER

U.S. occupation of Iraq has achieved chaos and ruin

By GERRY FOLEY

As the U.S. administration debates escalating its war in Afghanistan, more and more shocking stories are coming out about the extent of the ruin the U.S.-led war has created in Iraq. And they also give an indication of why it is so difficult for the U.S. government to get out of what is clearly becoming a deepening abyss in Afghanistan. Moreover, and what is worse from the standpoint of ruling rich, it is one from which U.S. capitalism as a whole can extract little profit, since Afghanistan has no oil.

The most privatized war since the Spanish American war has spawned a welter of parasitic big businesses, including Murder Incorporated-type mercenary forces, that do profit enormously from such operations, operations that bring only ruin to the peoples who are their victims and waste the national wealth of the United States and the lives of many of its young adults.

An article in the Nov. 20 *New York Times* revealed that the more than \$53 billion that the U.S. has spent supposedly on “reconstruction” in Iraq (the largest amount of “aid” since the Marshall Plan) has been wasted. The article’s headline put the blame on the Iraqi government, which was allegedly failing to support the projects built by U.S. money, but reading further on shows that in reality projects were not planned so much to benefit the Iraqis as to fatten U.S. big corporations.

The article acknowledged: “While Iraq has often been guilty of poor management, American authorities have repeatedly failed to ask Iraqis what sort of projects they needed and have not followed up with adequate training. And whether or not the American-built health centers and power plants are ever used as intended, the American companies that won the lion’s share of rebuilding contracts from federal government have been paid.”

The article repeatedly stated that the Iraqis lacked the personnel to properly use these facilities, but the writer did note: “Exacerbating the problem, Iraqi and American officials say that hundreds of thousands of Iraq’s professional class have fled or been killed during the war, leaving behind a population with too few doctors, nurses, engineers, scientists and others.”

And whose fault is that? This is a discreet reference to the carnage wreaked by the U.S.-led war and occupation, which has far exceeded the crimes committed by the bloody Saddam Hussein regime, supposedly the target of the U.S. attacks. The Iraqi people have seen primarily the destruction wrought by the United States, not any benefits from its “reconstruction.”

According to *The Times* article, “Ali Ghalib Baban, Iraq’s minister of planning, said that U.S. expenditures had had no discernable impact. ‘Maybe they spent it,’ he said, but Iraq doesn’t feel it.’ ...

“Where is the reconstruction?” asked Sahar Kadhum, a resident of Kut, about 100 miles southeast of Baghdad. “The city is sleeping on hills of garbage.” *The Times* article pointed out that 40 percent of Iraqis still lack access to clean drinking water and 90 percent of hospitals still lack the basic medical equipment. It also noted that according to one aid organization, “Iraqis also have disproportionately high rates of infant mortality, cerebral palsy and cancer.”

The rate of cancer and birth defects is particularly high in the city of Falluja, where the U.S. launched a massive military operation in reprisal for the popular lynching of four members of the hated mercenary force, Blackwater. The British *Guardian* reported Nov. 13: “Doctors in Iraq’s war-ravaged enclave of Falluja are dealing with up to 15 times as many chronic deformities in infants and a spike in early life cancers that may [sic] be linked to toxic materials left over from the fighting.

The *Guardian* article, moreover, pointed out: “Abnormal clusters of infant tumours have also been repeatedly cited in Basra and Najaf—areas that have in the past also been intense battle zones where modern munitions have been heavily used.”

The real object of the U.S. assault is now generally recognized as oil. Even some U.S. officials admit, as Jackson Williams pointed out in the Nov. 15 *Huffington Post*: “Alan Greenspan noted in his 2007 memoir *The Age of Turbulence*, ‘I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.’”

Some American oil companies have reaped a bo-

(Photo) Nov. 19 protest by Shiites in Najaf demands Iraqi government release political detainees, most of whom are supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr.



Given the degradation inflicted upon the Iraqi people, how could a government set up under the aegis of the U.S. have any authority?

nanza, most notably in the Kurdish area, where the resentment of the U.S. is less. (Saddam Hussein undertook a genocidal campaign against the Kurds.) But in Iraq as a whole, the hatred created by the destruction, repression, and abuse inflicted under the aegis of the U.S. will undoubtedly seethe for generations and eventually wipe out any oil concessions U.S. companies have gained. In the long run, Kurdistan may not be an exception, since the U.S. rulers have been and remain opposed to the national aspirations of the Kurdish people.

At least one American official is set to garner a huge windfall, but not for service to an American oil company. *The New York Times* reported on Nov. 12, “we learn that Peter Galbraith, former ambassador, foreign policy expert to Joe Biden and John Kerry, and son of the famed economist John Kenneth Galbraith, is in line to reap \$100 million dollars—maybe more—from contracts between a Norwegian oil company and the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq. As an advisor to DNO, Galbraith and a partner received a 10% stake in a large Kurdish oil field back in 2004.” A hundred million dollars (or more!) is quite a perk for a diplomatic assignment.

It is not only ruin and robbery that the Iraqis can remember the occupation forces for. It is also the abuse, in particular the humiliation of detainees. The story of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military at Abu Ghraib prison has become a legend, throughout the entire Muslim world in particular. And recently there have been parallel revelations about outrages by the junior partner of the United States in the Brotherhood of Torturers, Great Britain. But in Britain, at least, the victims of torture and humiliation at the hands of British military personnel have found legal advocates.

The Nov. 14 British *Guardian* reported: “The Ministry of Defence has confirmed it is investigating 33 cases of alleged abuse, including rape and torture, of Iraqi civilians by British soldiers. The lawyer representing the alleged victims, Phil Shiner, said there could be hundreds of uninvestigated claims of abuse.

“One claimant alleges that soldiers based the abuse they allegedly subjected him to on photographs of the abuse at the notorious US detention centre at Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib prison, the *Independent* reported. In one case, British soldiers are accused of piling up Iraqi prisoners on top of one another before subjecting them to electric shocks.”

Shiner said: “Given the history of the UK’s involvement in the development of these techniques alongside the US, it is deeply concerning that there appears to be strong similarities between instances of the use of sexual humiliation.”

Some American officials, including the lavishly rewarded ex-ambassador Galbraith and the current vice president, Joe Biden, favor the partition of Iraq into three mini-states, which they claim would be more stable than the ethnically and religiously divided present country. They probably think that smaller entities would be more easily dominated. But the likelihood is that they would have even less legitimacy than Iraq in its present form.

That is, of course, except for an independent Kurdistan, which is what the overwhelming majority of the Kurdish people want. But U.S. imperialism’s major ally in the region, Turkey, is violently opposed to the independence of any part of Kurdistan. And a small Shiite majority entity in the south would almost certainly become a satellite of Iran. That is an inevitable geopolitical reality. A “Shii-istan” in the south of Iraq would confirm that the major gainer from the U.S. assault on Iraq would end up being Iran.

Moreover, given the ruin and degradation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the U.S.-led wars and occupation, how could any government established under the aegis of the United States have any authority? In fact, the continuation of guerrilla attacks—although the most active guerrilla organization, al-Qaida in Mesopotamia, has become discredited by its ruthlessness and sectarianism—has revealed that the Iraqi army and police are far from faithful to their government.

In the case of a recent major bombing in central Baghdad near important government buildings, the Iraqi government arrested 61 military officers and men for negligence or collusion with the bombers (*Washington Post*, Nov. 30).

After almost a decade of involvement in Iraq, it is evident that the U.S. has achieved nothing but create a massive festering sore. But out of the chaos and ruin U.S. big businesses and corrupt officials have reaped huge profits. So, they want to extend operations to Afghanistan and Pakistan and beyond.

U.S. imperialism has reached a morbid state that mirrors the decadence of the crumbling capitalist system as a whole, and actually is coming more and more into conflict with the interests of preserving the system overall.

The U.S. capitalist class now apparently recognizes that the Iraq adventure was a fiasco. That is probably one of the reasons that decisive sections of it backed Obama in order to try to give U.S. policy a new look. But all the corruption they fostered is like a tar baby in which they find themselves stuck. Only mass mobilizations in the U.S. and elsewhere for immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and an ending of the covert intervention in Pakistan can end the descent into ruin—not only in the countries that are victims of U.S. military intervention, but in the United States itself. ■

