

Momentum builds for May 19 protest against NATO / G8



Tony Savino / Socialist Action



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By CHRISTINE MARIE

On March 23-25, hundreds of antiwar and international solidarity activists, students, and Occupiers are coming together in Stamford, Conn., for the United National Antiwar Coalition conference. A major task of the UNAC conference will be to build national support for the May 19 protest against the NATO/G8 summit convening in Chicago. Leaders of every social struggle responding to the obscene war drive and military expenditures of the White House and its allies will be on hand to say "No!" to the wars of the 1% abroad and at home.

Today, the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and the continued drone attacks on Pakistan are generating new and militant resistance on the ground. Afghans have been mobilizing in large demonstrations, and officials in Pakistan have announced that they will not be deterred from finalizing an agreement for a Pakistan-Iranian gas pipeline by threats of U.S. sanctions. It is exactly the right political moment for the U.S. antiwar movement to renew itself and visibly demonstrate its support of the right of self-determination of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and, of course, Iran.

Yet, there has been a disturbing claim put forth by a number of leaders of the broad peace movement. They argue, often behind the scenes, that this year is not the time for antiwar demonstrations in the U.S. The assumption behind this whisper campaign is that protests against the imperial policies of the current White House will somehow lead to the election of a "greater evil"—i.e., the Republican candidate for president. The antiwar movement, they imply, should lay low until Barack Obama has been re-elected in November.

This perspective is not always laid out in a direct fashion. Sometimes those deeply invested in mounting an all-out campaign for the re-election of Obama argue that the issue of the wars has taken a back seat in the public mind to the fight for economic equality. Those who are against the U.S. wars abroad should not organize independent activities, these forces advise, but simply participate in community meetings and

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labor activities, and educate there about the way that the war budget leads to cuts for social services.

While no committed activist opposes taking the antiwar message to every single community and labor organization in the country, there is no reason to counterpose neighborhood outreach to mobilizing visibly in the streets at major gatherings of the war-makers. One effort should strengthen the other.

Protests at NATO/G8 Summit

In truth, the people suffering under U.S. occupation and military overseers the world over will be watch-

(Photos) Obama's policies have brought us more war and attacks on civil liberties. U.S. antiwar and social justice movements cannot afford to step aside during run-up to the presidential election.

ing the NATO/G8 summit, an event that will garner extraordinary global media coverage, to determine whether or not they have allies in the belly of the beast. Their calculations about the odds of beating back U.S. aggression if they dare risk mounting a resistance are based in part on their reading of U.S. politics. Antiwar activists have the most elementary obligation to show the world that the Occupiers and working people of the U.S. understand that the elementary obligations of the slogan "An Injury to One is An Injury to All" are international at their root.

An organizing pole that centers on opposition to U.S. wars can only strengthen the movement for economic justice. Without vital public antiwar organizations that are constantly educating and mobilizing, the fight for jobs and human needs will be more vulnerable to chauvinism and xenophobia, and, thus, infinitely weaker when confronting the bosses and the government. An organizing pole that consciously connects war abroad with the war at home does not have to be manifested in demonstrations the size and character of past U.S. peace movements to be central to U.S. politics and critical to the development of an effective working-class fightback today.

The notion that opposing U.S. intervention abroad should be subordinated to the U.S. election cycle is weak in its very foundation. There is no historical precedent that demonstrates that a Democratic administration will be less ruthless in the protection of U.S. corporate interests abroad than a Republican one. Quite the contrary!

Indeed, on Feb. 19, the U.S. marked the 70th anniversary of Franklin D. Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 9066, which initiated the internment of over 100,000 Japanese Americans in concentra-

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Chicago workers occupy factory, win temporary reprieve

By DAVID BERNT

Torrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO—Over three years after they inspired workers across the nation by successfully occupying the Republic Windows and Door factory, on Feb. 23 members of UE Local 1110 once again occupied their workplace, now run by Serious Energy. The occupation was in response to management's surprise announcement the same day that the factory would close immediately.

After 12 hours of occupation and an outpouring of support from the labor movement, Occupy Chicago, and other allies, Serious management caved in and agreed to keep the factory open for three months while the union seeks a buyer and investigates turning the plant into a workers' co-op.

Serious Energy took control of the plant after UE's successful plant occupation in December 2008. The factories' then owners, Republic, had shut down production and were preparing to send equipment to Iowa to start up a new non-union window and door factory. The UE occupation of Republic won widespread support and became a symbol of workers' anger toward the bosses as banks got billions in bailouts while workers saw their jobs disappear.

Republic's largest creditor, Bank of America, agreed to pay \$1.75 million in unpaid wages and severance to Republic's union workers after UE launched a campaign tying the bank bailouts to the plight of the Republic workers.

Serious Energy, a California-based company, later agreed to buy the Republic Windows factory to produce energy-saving windows. Vice President Joe Biden and a laundry list of politicians visited the plant. Biden cited the plant as an example of stimulus money helping the economy, creating "green" jobs. In the end, the stimulus money never materialized for Seri-



ous, and business never recovered. Only 75 of the over 200-member original workforce was ever recalled, and at the time of the announced closing only 38 workers remained employed at the plant.

Workers and UE reps were informed on the morning of Feb. 23 that the plant would close immediately. They were told by Serious management and their lawyers that the workers would receive severance in accordance with the WARN Act—two months' pay and benefits. This had been one of the major battles with Republic management, who refused to pay the workers their WARN Act severance. The WARN Act requires companies to give 60 days' notice of a plant shutdown, or pay workers the two months in wages and benefits.

UE local 110 President Armando Robles called a meeting of the plants' workers that afternoon. The workers decided they would not accept the closing of their plant, and occupied the factory. The workers demanded that Serious continue operations at the plant while searching for a buyer. Initially, management took a hard line, saying there was no way the factory could

Workers challenge management's lay-off notice on Feb. 23. (From left) Vicente Rangel, Armando Robles (UE Local 1110 president), and Leah Fried.

remain open. Police were called, and when they arrived they gave an order to the workers to vacate the plant within five minutes or be arrested. When the workers refused, the police backed off.

Supporters in the labor movement, Occupy Chicago, and other social justice movements mobilized to go to the factory on short notice. All the major local media outlets soon arrived as well. Police would not allow anyone to enter the plant, even to deliver food to the workers. After religious leaders intervened, the police again backed off, as supporters outside the factory chanted, "Let the workers eat!"

As the occupation continued through the evening, Serious management, seeing the determination of the workers, decided it did not want a major confrontation, and began negotiations. A little after 1 a.m., the workers agreed to an offer to keep the plant open for three months as the union and the company look for a buyer. Workers will be paid full wages and benefits during this time, even if Serious has no work for them. The union is also exploring options to turn the factory into a workers-owned co-op.

While the battle to save these workers' jobs is far from over, the Serious Energy workers proved once again that the only way anything can be won is through struggle. Twice these workers were told their jobs were lost and there was no hope, and twice the workers refused to let that happen. The workers' use of the old labor tactic of factory occupations, or sit-down strikes, is another example for other workers to draw on. As most unions accept more and more concessions, the Serious energy workers show that there is an alternative—fight back! ■

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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Modern day witch hunts sanctioned by law

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The rise of anti-Muslim legislation is a symptom of the attack on all our civil liberties. Measures that demonize Muslims at home are used to fuel U.S. wars in the Middle East.

By ANA NOLI

The indefinite detention provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) managed to avoid mass public outcry as most Americans diverted their attention to end-of-year festivities. On Dec. 31, President Obama made a name for himself as the president who codified into law measures that permit indefinite detention without due process and trial for U.S. citizens.

Much confusion has been garnered by the vagueness and ambiguity of the language of these provisions. But, Obama made one thing clear to soothe oppositional cries; he attached a signing statement to the bill assuring us all that indefinite detention would not apply to U.S. citizens—as long as he remains in office.

Many Democratic Party supporters refer to Obama's signing statement to exculpate the president and avoid real political analysis of the consequences of these provisions. A clarification of what's contained in the bill, as well as its historical context, is necessary to fully grasp the impending threat to basic civil rights.

The NDAA not only allocates \$662 billion to national security and the endless War on Terror, and ramps up economic sanctions against Iran, but contains two provisions that grant the president and U.S. military the power to detain anyone they deem a security threat indefinitely and without a trial.

Section 1021 of the NDAA allows the president to detain "covered persons" indefinitely "without trial until the end of the hostilities." The broad language of these provisions includes a description of "covered persons" as including anyone who "substantially supported" groups that the U.S. is in conflict with, "or associated forces ... against the United States or its coalition partners." These terms are so vague that the ACLU and other civil rights organizations agree they pose a threat to constitutional rights.

What's to prevent future administrations from freely utilizing these powers against those who oppose U.S. foreign policy, support the struggle of the Palestinian people, or simply disagree publicly with the government? Further complicating the debate, Section 1021, while excluding indefinite detention for American citizens, applies it widely to citizens detained abroad or undocumented workers living on U.S. soil.

But what augments confusion regarding the application of indefinite detention to American citizens is yet another confusing and ambiguous section of the law, Section 1022. U.S. citizens are excluded from the "requirement" of being detained but not from the possibility of indefinite detention! The language in these provisions is purposefully confusing in order to divide public opinion on the issue and prevent massive opposition to it.

However confusing the language may be to some, the indefinite detention provisions of the NDAA are real, and they fit neatly into the American history of attacking civil liberties at home while whipping up senti-

ment for war abroad. The Palmer Raids were designed to arrest and deport radicalizing immigrant workers and leftists, occurring in the context of World War I and the Red Scare. The internment of thousands of Japanese-American citizens in designated "War Relocation Camps," on the sole basis of their ethnic background, took place during World War II.

The McCarthy-era witch-hunts were designed to whip up anti-communist hysteria in preparation for the Cold War. COINTELPRO, an FBI counterintelligence program, was purportedly created in 1956 to fight communism in the context of the Cold War, but would reach into the Vietnam War era and be used not only against the Communist Party and Socialist Workers Party but also against many civil rights, antiwar, Black nationalist, and other individuals and groups associated with the left—including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, and Bunchy Carter, to name only a few. It is within this historical context that we have to view the current assault on civil liberties and the implications it carries.

The indefinite detention provisions of the NDAA are particularly frightening in light of recent Associated Press revelations of the NYPD's unlawful surveillance and data gathering of the Muslim community in collaboration with the CIA. Since 9/11, the Muslim community has bore the brunt of government attacks under the pretext of the "War on Terror." The government has wreaked havoc on entire communities through preemptive prosecution and contrived crimes by profiling Muslims as "predisposed to be terrorists" on the basis of their religious beliefs!

In what have become the "largest domestic intelligence agencies" in the country, the NYPD has infiltrated mosques, bookstores, cafes, and institutions frequented by Muslims without any evidence of wrongdoing.

AP reports sent a chill to civil rights supporters when they revealed the NYPD has been spying on Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) across the Northeast, including as far as Yale University in Connecticut, the University of Pennsylvania, and Rutgers University in New Jersey. Undercover agents reported on how often Muslim students prayed, monitored website activity, and even accompanied students on a white rafting trip, submitting names of students to reports compiled for Police Commissioner Kelly.

In Newark, N.J., NYPD's unlawful activities included building databases on the local Muslim population, photographing places of worship, and indicating the ethnic background of individuals involved. NYPD's surveillance occurred even without the mayor of Newark having been told, causing some reporters to justly question whether the NYPD feels empowered to act as a "national police force."

Even before these revelations, the NYPD had a record of profiling entire communities, especially the Black community, through stop-and-frisk policies. The AP reports add to the list of grievances against the NYPD,

(Left) Following the lead of the U.S. gov't in fomenting anti-Islamic hysteria, New York cops spied on Muslims in a number of cities.

including against their use of an anti-Muslim film, "The Third Jihad," in training police officers.

The widespread attacks on the Muslim community have triggered resounding public opposition throughout the country. In New York City, Muslim leaders from the Arab American Association of NYC and the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) have requested the resignation of Police Commissioner Kelly. The Association of Muslim American Lawyers, with the support of over 40 Muslim and non-Muslim organizations, issued a statement requesting the investigation of the NY Police Department by the Attorney General. Muslim Student Associations issued public statements opposing NYPD's spying on their organizations and requesting apologies. Local CAIR chapters in collaboration with peace and justice activists organized press conferences denouncing the NYPD's illegal activity.

Even the Yale University president publicly condemned the NYPD surveillance, and the Rutgers University AAUP-AFT not only demanded that surveillance of their campus cease but also an investigation of the NYPD's demographics unit.

However, despite efforts by Muslim organizations and their allies to call for investigations of unconstitutional New York police activities, Mayor Bloomberg continues to defend the department's intelligence gathering activities. Under the pretext of securing the nation and protecting New Yorkers, Bloomberg legitimizes racial, ethnic, and religious profiling of entire communities.

The rise of anti-Muslim legislation is a symptom of the attack on all of our civil liberties. Unlawful surveillance, entrapping, and preemptive prosecution of the Muslim community have reinforced stereotypical and false notions of Muslim people as a "threat" to the U.S. Such measures that isolate and demonize the Muslim community at home are used to fuel U.S. wars in the Middle East. By creating an image of Muslims as a "potential terrorist" threat, the U.S. government gathers support for its War on Terror at home and abroad.

We are facing a huge battle to restore our civil liberties on many fronts, from police brutality on communities of color and Occupiers to fights over the right to protest. Therefore, we must respond to the attacks on the Muslim American community as if it were a direct attack on each one of us. Indeed, if this surveillance goes unchallenged, we all become more vulnerable to new encroachments on our political and civil freedoms.

Recent efforts by national civil rights organizations such as the ACLU and CAIR in asking for investigations and accountability of the NYPD are important steps

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International activists to address UNAC conference

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Heading the list of international presenters at the March 23-25 Stamford, Conn., conference of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) is Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, wife of the former president of Honduras, José Manuel Zelaya, who was sent into exile by a U.S. backed military coup.

On Feb. 11-12, the founding conference of the Liberation and Re-foundation Party (Libre), a new political party established by the National Front for Popular Resistance of Honduras, chose Castro as its presidential candidate. She speaks at a moment when the U.S. is proposing to double military aid to the current Honduran regime, a regime that they hope will continue to cooperate in the use of this Central American nation as an important U.S. basing and military command center that is deemed important to the facilitation of trade with the Far East.

Castro is one of many international activists who are gathering at the UNAC conference to build solidarity in the fight against U.S. and NATO aggression. Others include Kazem Azin of Solidarity Iran; Manijeh Nasrabadi of the Raha Iranian Feminist Collective; Adaner Usmani of the Labor Party of Pakistan; Sergio Fernández, a member of Mesa Amplia Nacional Estudiantil (MANE) and the recent national student strike in Colombia; Gamelyn Oduardo, who helped to organize a 10-month Puerto Rico student strike; and Andrew Murray, a British Trades Union Congress leader of the massive Nov. 30 UK public-sector general strike.

Murray will be sharing a panel with Mike Fuqua, a member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union Local 21, who with the help of



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the West Coast Occupy movement wrested a contract from the union-busting grain shipper EGT at the port of Longview, Wash. Because the U.S. government planned to use the Coast Guard to militarily ensure the safe docking of a scab ship in the port of Longview, the Action Program that will be the subject of deliberation at the conference calls for the condemnation of the use of

the U.S. military at home against unionists.

The new militarization of law enforcement in the U.S., and the

specific use of related tactics, weapons, and strategies, is another thread that is spurring the participation of a number of other recent victims of repression. Veteran and Oakland occupier Scott Olsen will join leaders of the fight against NYPD wartime spying and harassment of the Muslim American community, such as Imam Talib Abdurrashid of the Islamic Leadership Council of Metropolitan New York, Cyrus McGoldrick of the New York City Council on American Islamic Relations, and Monami Maulik of Desis Rising Up and Moving.

All of these international and domestic leaders are coming together to share analysis and solidarity with U.S.-based activists determined to teach the connections between the U.S./NATO war drives, the attacks on civil liberties, and the 1%'s austerity drives. Even more importantly, they are gathering under the umbrella of the United National Antiwar Coalition, a formation that remains committed to mass movement building, to mounting visible opposition in the streets to U.S. imperialism, and retains confidence that this can and will be done in Chicago and beyond.

The draft Action Program submitted by UNAC's National Coordinating Committee is open to full discussion, debate, amendment, and vote at the March 23-25 conference. This is an open, democratic, one-person-one-vote assembly of the broad antiwar and social justice movements. See unacpeace.org to read the draft Action Program and how to submit amendments, alternate plans, and resolutions for consideration by the conference. ■

For more information on the March 23-25 UNAC conference, and to register, go to unacpeace.org.

... Antiwar

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tion camps. FDR, considered by many of those bound by the framework of lesser-evil politics as the most saintly Democrat of all time, presided over one of the most brutal eras of U.S. conquest in the modern era.

The backdrop for internment—part of the U.S. war for economic dominance over the Japanese Far East colonies during World War II—is once again in the news. President Obama's strategic and military "return to Asia" demonstrates that in times of economic crisis, imperialist powers will leave no stone unturned in efforts to maintain a competitive edge. Indeed, the U.S. ships belligerently patrolling the Persian Gulf and the scab-herding Coast Guard vessels called into service offshore from Longview, Wash., are part of a many-pronged effort by U.S. elites to maintain their economic hegemony through a combination of driving down costs and using the threat of military force to shape trading patterns and capital flows worldwide.

The war by embargo on Iran's oil sales, the threats to sanction Pakistan for a gas pipeline involving Iran, the growing military presence in Central and South America are all related to the efforts of U.S. elites to compete successfully with weaker but still threatening capitalist powers such as China, Brazil, and India.

As Vijay Prashad explained recently in the *Asia Times*, "Iran" has become a code word for the efforts of the U.S. to demand the acquiescence of India and China to their own economic subordination. And the deeper the global economic crisis faced by the corporate and financial world, the more desperate will be the use of military adventure as a tool of economic dominance.

It is difficult to believe that working people and students in the U.S. will be able to stand up to the bosses' drive against their standard of living, and to forge the political tools for a victory on this front, without coming to grips with the deeply intertwined efforts of the U.S. government to drive down their competitors abroad. Therefore, those who seek to build a movement for economic equality must also use obvious opportunities to strengthen visible opposition to the wars abroad and in the process contribute to the overall understanding of the working people about the nature of the opposition to their demands.



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

The NATO/G8 summit to be held in Chicago in May is the most important date on the calendar for these kinds of actions. By its very nature, this meeting, which brings together the military and financial arms of the global 1% to discuss Afghanistan, Pakistan, the so-called War on Terror in Africa, and approaches to making working people pay for their economic crisis worldwide, must be at the top of the antiwar agenda.

The seven-month campaign to make the right to protest war and austerity in Chicago a national and international issue has been quite successful. Permits have been granted, and the momentum is growing to win more victories against Chicago's Rahm Emmanuel administration and the Dept. of Homeland Security.

The fight for civil liberties

These endeavors are a critical component of assembling the forces to roll back the current attacks on civil liberties—a new COINTELPRO and the codification of indefinite detention without due process or court trial—emanating from the Obama White House. Unfortunately, in the midst of these efforts, new voices are coming forward to confuse the issues.

The most destructive has been that of columnist Chris Hedges. In a Feb. 6 article, Hedges, with extremely broad strokes, equated the "Black Bloc" to a deadly cancer out to destroy the social justice movement. His promotion of a tiny group to the stature of a deadly danger to peace activists was an unnecessary political gift to government and police spokespeople who have mounted

(Above) Occupy Chicago is one of numerous organizations that have endorsed the May 19 mass protest against the NATO / G8 summit.

an aggressive campaign to paint those who protest war and austerity as violent threats to the social order.

In order to defeat the government's attempts to use the NATO/G8 summit as the launch pad for an even more Orwellian security state, we must take the opposite approach. We must turn the tables on the city of Chicago and Homeland Security, explaining that the protests that are being organized for Chicago are around the issues of the 99% and must be not be suppressed. These demonstrations include one developed by the California Nurses Association/National Nurses United to demand a tax on Wall Street, as well as the May 19 permitted march initiated by the United National Antiwar Coalition and being organized by the Coalition Against the NATO/G8 Wars and Poverty Agenda.

Several other important political figures have misrepresented by omission the range of protests currently planned for Chicago in May. Tom Hayden, whose Feb. 15 column "Occupy Chicago? 1968 Again?" usefully urges the involvement of the AFL-CIO and the Sierra Club, unfortunately suggests that without them and their messaging, the "Chicago spectacle is likely to be one of street battles, tear gas, police brutality, and mass arrests."

Similarly, Staughton Lynd on Feb. 28 wrote an "Open Letter to Other Occu-

piers," in which he noted concerns "about the impending confrontation in Chicago in May between the forces of Occupy and those of capitalist globalization."

Hayden's and Lynd's missives both seemed to be predicated on a call by *Adbusters* for Occupiers to come to Chicago in May. And inexplicably, since the original call by *Adbusters* for the Occupation of Wall Street resulted in a historic, peaceful, and inspiring mobilization of youth willing to endure all kinds of hardship to non-violently represent the simple aspirations of the 99% for equality, they focus on presuppositions that the Chicago protests will be inchoate, without leadership, and immature. Instead of focusing his fire on the powers that be, Hayden warns that protest in Chicago might lead to "political platforms imposing law and order," just as Chicago 1968 allegedly led to Republican conservatives winning elections and to J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO program to spy on political activists. This turns both history and current reality on their heads.

Obama has already re-launched an even more virulent form of COINTELPRO. Targeted executive assassination of U.S. citizens is already occurring. The indefinite detention without trial of U.S. citizens has been recently codified. The only possible response to these sweeping attacks is building mass movements in the streets. The fight to build such a movement cannot be on hold until after the election.

Those strategic debates, networking, and coalition building are underway internationally, nationally, and in Chicago. This work will deepen at the United National Antiwar Coalition conference in Stamford at the end of March. In the run-up to Chicago, all the forces of the peace, justice, and civil liberties communities must be united in one effort to place the blame for violence where it belongs—on the city of Chicago, the White House, and Homeland Security.

With or without the Sierra Club, responsible and serious forces are organizing the political discussions, the civil liberties campaigns, the local and national activist community to deal with every challenge thrown at them by the Emmanuel administration in Chicago and the Secret Service. The path toward the new social justice movement about to be fully born must go through the struggle for the right to protest without serious repression in Chicago. That fight is not over. It has just begun. ■

By LISA LUINENBURG

On Dec. 12, John Morton, the director of Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE), which operates under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security, announced that the long-controversial 287(g) program is ending.

The designation 287(g) refers to a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act that authorizes ICE to enter into agreements with local law enforcement agencies (called a Memorandum of Agreement, or MOA) to deputize local police officers to act as immigration agents in their daily work. For example, operating under a 287(g) agreement, a county police officer could question and detain a person based on their immigration status.

In many places, this program has led to increases in racial profiling, as local police officers increasingly stop anyone who looks or speaks like an "immigrant" for arbitrary reasons. In particular, Maricopa County, Ariz., under the jurisdiction of the notorious Sheriff Joe Arpaio, has been well documented for serious allegations of abuse under the 287(g) program.

John Morton announced that in the new 2012 budget for the Department of Homeland Security, the DHS will not sign any new 287(g) agreements and will terminate the least productive of its agreements, saving an estimated \$17 million. While Morton's statement may seem like a victory for immigrants and immigrant-rights activists, the reality is that ICE will now put its energy into expanding the highly controversial Secure Communities program. The DHS stated in its budget request that "the Secure Communities screening process is more consistent, efficient and cost-effective in identifying and removing criminal and other priority aliens."

Secure Communities (also known as S-Comm) is a national biometric fingerprint database that is used to check the immigration status of anyone who is booked into jail. Anyone who is suspected of being an undocumented immigrant has a detainer (or ICE hold) placed on their case. ICE interviews the detainee either in jail or after they are released. If ICE deems it necessary, they are then taken into custody, and deportation proceedings are initiated.

When it was initially introduced in 2008 under the Bush administration, S-Comm was piloted in 14 jurisdictions nationwide. As of May 2011, the program had expanded to include over 1210 jurisdictions under the auspices of the Obama administration. The DHS has vowed to implement the program nationwide by 2013. S-Comm is only the latest step in the Obama administration's new and supposedly "softer" immigration enforcement strategy, which so far has resulted in record highs of 392,000 deportations in 2010 and 396,000 deportations in 2011.

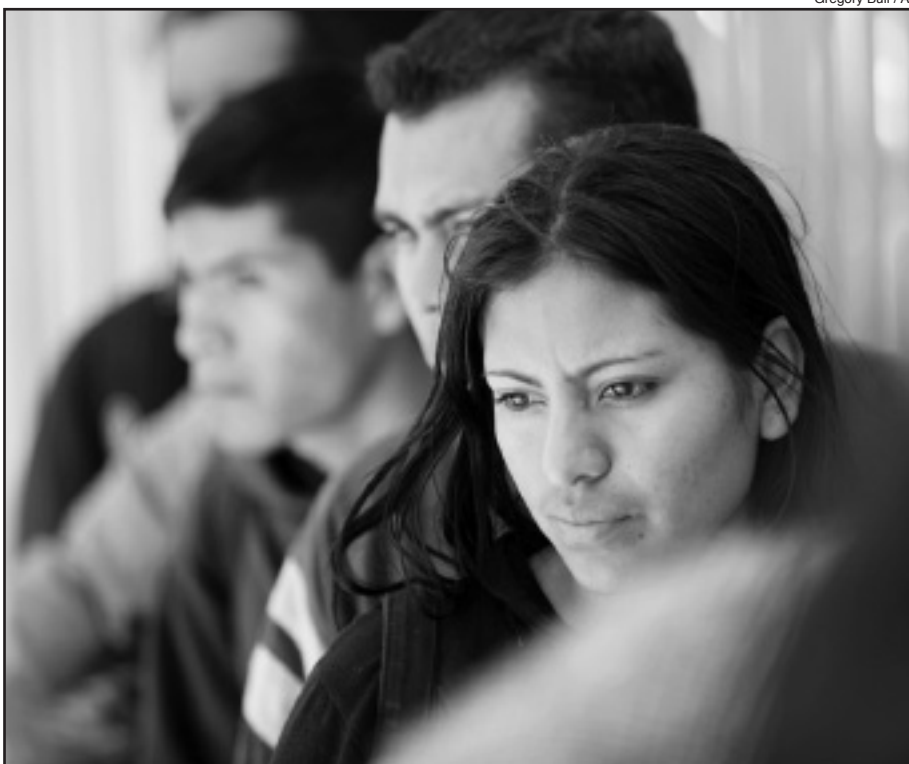
However, the implementation and expansion of Secure Communities has become increasingly controversial and divisive. When S-Comm was originally introduced, its stated goals (taken from a 2009 report to Congress) included the major goal of deporting dangerous criminals. Nevertheless, ICE's own statistics show that the vast majority of immigrants deported under this program have committed either no crime at all, or have only a low-level offense (such as a misdemeanor) on their record. For example, between 2009 and the first five months of 2011 between 83%-85% of ICE detainees apprehended through S-Comm had lower-level (or no) offenses; in the first five months of 2011, 32% of those arrested were non-criminal.

The fact that these statistics are so high points to an even greater increase in racial profiling in jurisdictions where S-Comm is put in practice. Every day, police officers in communities across the country are pulling immigrants over for arbitrary reasons like having a broken taillight, or a rosary hanging from their rearview mirror. There have even been reports of people accused of a false crime and later released who have been deported under the Secure Communities program.

Police officers know that any immigrants they book in the jail will have their fingerprints run through the Secure Communities database, and they will be handed over to ICE. Essentially, then, there is no longer a reason to deputize local police officers to act as immigration agents under the 287(g) program. S-Comm does all the work for them.

During the initial phase of expansion under the Obama administration, participation in Secure Communities was seemingly offered to counties on an optional basis. However, because of the failure of the program to meet ICE's own stated goals of deporting "dangerous criminals," and reports of dwindling trust of police officers in immigrant communities where S-Comm was being implemented, more and more coun-

ICE expands immigrant deportation program despite growing outcry



Gregory Bull / AP

(Left) Immigrants wait to be processed in Nogales, Mexico, after being deported by U.S. authorities.

As the Secure Communities program has quickly expanded to new areas, without any kind of public notification or debate, so has resistance. The Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee (MIRAc), along with a coalition of local labor, religious, and community organizations, has been fighting for over a year to keep S-Comm out of the state. However, despite the prior existence of separation ordinances in St. Paul and Minneapolis (the two largest cities in Minnesota), ICE implemented the Secure Communities program statewide on Feb. 7, 2012.

MIRAc and the No More Deportations campaign immediately called for a public protest at the government plaza in downtown Minneapolis, which is located right across

from the Hennepin County jail. "This news is horrifying," said Isaac Martín of the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee. "This program would compromise community safety and separate families here in Minnesota. We call on county and local officials to refuse to honor ICE detainer requests, and we call on President Obama to end the horribly misnamed 'Secure Communities.' This program just doesn't make any communities more secure, and in fact it makes immigrant and Latino communities much more insecure by separating hundreds of thousands of parents from their children."

In Connecticut, an immigration law clinic at Yale has filed a federal class-action lawsuit to challenge the use of detainers by ICE, and immigrant advocates have delivered a petition urging state officials to delay implementation of Secure Communities in their state. As the FBI and ICE continue to work together to expand the web of Secure Communities and other biometric data-sharing programs across the United States, it is clear that we all must begin to resist, or face the increasingly frightening consequences. ■

ties began to attempt to opt out of participating in Secure Communities. First came Arlington, Va., then three counties in California—Santa Clara, San Mateo, and San Francisco. After seeing this first wave of resistance, ICE backtracked and said that counties could no longer opt out of the program. Following this announcement, states began to withdraw from participation. In 2011, the states of Illinois, New York, and Massachusetts, along with Washington, D.C., and the municipalities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Boston all attempted to withdraw from the program, without success.

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn even wrote a public letter defending his state's withdrawal from S-Comm, in which it was stated: "Governor Quinn remains deeply troubled that Secure Communities has the opposite effect of its stated purpose. Rather than making our communities safer, the program's flawed implementation divides communities and families ... a program that was supposed to be targeted toward individuals convicted of serious crimes ... instead, frequently targets individuals who have been convicted of no crimes at all—the mother on her way to work; the father dropping off his kids at school."

After resistance to participation in Secure Communities continued to grow, ICE changed its stance once again, stating in August of 2011 that it was voiding all of its MOAs with local jurisdictions. In practice, ICE could now implement the program wherever and whenever it chose, despite growing resistance from police, local and state governments, and community activists. And it began to do just that.

In response to all of this controversy and lack of clarity, the National Day Laborer's Organizing Network (NDLON), the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), and the Immigration Justice Clinic of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law joined forces to file a massive request under the Freedom of Information Act to release federal documents surrounding the highly secretive Secure Communities program. As a result of this request, over 15,000 documents relating to S-Comm were released to the public in February 2011. One of the most shocking discoveries revealed by these documents was that S-Comm is only the first step in the development and implementation of a national biometric database that will be launched by the FBI, called Next Generation Identification (NGI). In a report released on the internet, these non-profit organizations stated: "Documents disclosed as a result of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) litigation ... reveal that Secure Communities goes far beyond immigration enforcement. The program is part of a larger secretive information-collection project that profoundly undermines democracy and liberty. ... The newly disclosed documents expose the FBI's goal to accumulate a biometric database ... extending to the collection and retention of iris scans and digital photographs to support automated facial recognition scans in real time."

Essentially, then, Secure Communities is the testing ground for government programs that will soon be used to collect information on all people living within the United States, regardless of citizenship status. More information regarding the Secure Communities FOIA documents can be found at: www.uncovertheruth.org.

... Witch hunts

(continued from page 3)

in the struggle to garner opposition to government attacks on civil liberties. However, these legal means are no substitute for the power of mass united movements in reversing McCarthy era tactics and defending civil liberties.

In Connecticut, efforts to build a mass movement have already ensued. On Feb. 18, in Berlin, a coalition representing over 30 organizations met to initiate a campaign to stop indefinite detention. The meeting was sponsored by peace and justice organizations, civil rights groups, antiwar groups, and local Occupiers. Speakers included Steve Downs from Project SALAM, Cyrus McGoldrick from CAIR-NY, and Farzana Rahman from the Muslim Peace Coalition, to name a few. Over 100 people attended the meeting, representing the antiwar movement, occupy, interfaith groups and local Muslim organizations.

Efforts seeking to form links between the antiwar movement and the Muslim community have also been fostered by the Muslim Peace Coalition in New York City, organizing rallies and protests in collaboration with the antiwar movement, Occupy, and the main NYC Arab, Muslim, and South Asian community groups—including DRUM, NLG-Muslim Defense Committee, and CAIR.

Only by building a mass movement that transcends religious, ethnic, and racial confines to defend the Muslim community will we stop the attack on all of our civil liberties! Socialist Action stands in solidarity with the Muslim community in their fight for civil rights! An injury to one is an injury to all! Civil liberties for all! ■

U.S./NATO hands off Syria!



(Left) Mourners in Idlib, Syria, carry body of rebel killed in fighting with government troops, Feb. 12.

By SOCIALIST ACTION (U.S.)
POLITICAL COMMITTEE

For revolutionaries in the United States, there is no question that our primary responsibility in regard to solidarity with the workers and peasants of Syria is the need to organize against U.S. intervention. No other task is so crucial to ensure self-determination so that Syrians can win their battle for democracy, social justice, and genuine independence. It is only within that context that revolutionaries can take the next step and present to radicalizing workers in this country an analysis of the roots and prospects of the Syrian uprising.

The Marxist method is predicated on what Marx liked to call the “all-sidedness” of phenomena, the way in which all factors bearing on a situation need to be taken into account, both in and of themselves and in their interaction with each other. Nowhere is this method more needed than in the current case of Syria. Even after clearing away the lies of regime supporters and of the imperialists, the complex class structure of the country, the maneuvers of the regime at home and abroad, the diverse array of political forces on both sides of the dispute (as well as straddling the fence) makes facile sloganeering even more useless than normally.

We start from three basic premises in relation to the uprising:

1) The economic exploitation of Syria’s workers and peasants by its ruling class, a class subservient to global capital, and the horrific oppression and murderous policies of the Syrian regime to enforce that exploitation, mean that we stand with the Syrian masses in their uprising against the regime. We take note of their heroic steadfastness, repeatedly mobilizing tens, often hundreds of thousands, despite the sure knowledge that dozens will be shot dead each time they rally.

2) Syria today is ruled by a heinous dictatorship. The defense of the Syrian people against that dictatorship must begin with supporting their right to self-determination. This means that we oppose any and all imperialist threats of intervention, blockades, embargoes, and sanctions, not to mention the imposition of “no fly zones” or “humanitarian corridors.” The U.S. has no interest in the rights of the Syrian people, and the results of any intervention can be foretold by looking at the horrific misery now seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Haiti, and other countries where “humanitarian” interventions have occurred. Our support for self-determination gives us the standing to damn the Syrian dictatorship while pointing to the only forces that can truly free Syria—the Syrian masses themselves—forces organized independently of imperialism and its native supporters inside Syria.

3) We support the self-organization of the Syrian masses and encourage the revolutionary elements of the mass movement to build and strengthen organs of mass mobilization and decision-making. We encourage the formation of a revolutionary party to provide leadership and develop a program that can reflect the wishes and needs of the masses, a program that channels their potential to lead a successful revolution, and opposes both outside

Victory to the working people of Syria!

intervention and the derailing or betrayal of the revolution by homegrown bourgeois forces.

Revolutionary socialists support the right of the masses and revolutionary groups to mobilize, and indeed, to arm themselves against every dictatorship and especially against the well-armed Bashar al-Assad regime of torture, detention, and murder. We encourage the mass organizations to turn individual or small group defection into a consciously organized splitting of the army, with radicalizing rank-and-file soldiers and lower-rank officers joining neighborhood and workplace-based committees to form self-defense squads for the revolution. These squads would unite not only to oppose the regime but also to prevent the consolidation of the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) as a tool of imperialism, a goal being earnestly pursued by traitorous high-ranking officers in cahoots with the U.S. government.

We also note that a central motivation of Washington’s desire to manage Assad’s ouster either by diplomacy or by arms is to prevent the anti-Zionist policy that would surely result from regime change resulting from a popular uprising. For all of its rhetoric denouncing Assad’s supposed anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism, and complaints about his links to Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, Washington knows that he (and his father) could be trusted not to mount a serious challenge to the key U.S. ally in the region, Israel. The Syrian regime even refused to try to reclaim the Golan Heights, which Israel occupied in 1967.

Revolutionary socialists also stand for the right of self-determination for Syria’s Kurds, as we do in every country where this oppressed nation is denied its rights. Our support for the right of self-determination means that we leave it to the Kurdish nation to decide whether they wish to remain within the state of Syria (and Turkey, Iraq, Iran), or to set up a separate state.

In Syria, the Assad regime has repressed the Kurds and engaged in ethnic cleansing in Kurdish areas. Tiny concessions by the regime in the area of citizenship rights have not stopped Kurds from taking part in the mass demonstrations.

And as in other countries with Kurdish minorities, we note the danger of imperialist manipulation of their justifiable hatred of the regime that oppresses them, and note that this is an opportunity for the opposition to win the Kurds over politically by supporting the right of the Kurds to self-determination—up to and including separation. In that sense, the situation in Syria bears some

resemblance to that of the Spanish Civil War when the Republic had an opportunity—one unfortunately neglected, given its bourgeois leadership—to paralyze the fascist forces by granting Moroccans the right to self-determination.

Foreign intervention

The Syrian uprising originated in the same interaction of resentment at economic suffering, and at tyranny imposed brutally to prevent revolt against such exploitation and inequity, that has been seen throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Anyone with the slightest familiarity with the economic policies of the U.S. and European ruling classes, and their enforcement of IMF-dictated poverty and austerity programs around the world, would realize that Assad’s neoliberal economic policies are perfectly fine with the West—as is the dictatorship used to enforce it. Yet Washington and its allies obviously consider that there would be advantages in putting an end to the Assad regime. As in Libya, what the imperialists desire is not jobs or justice for the masses but an opportunity to get more “boots on the ground” in a region rife with revolution

since the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt broke out. In this they are wholeheartedly supported by their favorite client regimes in the Gulf Cooperation Council—i.e., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, etc.

Imperialism also gains some advantage by the fall of a regime in Syria, which, like other right-wing populist regimes in the region, has specialized in anti-imperialist and Zionist rhetoric, and even occasionally provided material support to carefully selected resistance groups. Such aid has been given with strings attached, of course, to ensure that resistance groups limit themselves to isolated attacks divorced from the kind of mass mobilization that would not only threaten imperialist and Zionist interests but those of the Syrian and similar regimes as well. Such “resistance” credentials, which have fooled all too many middle-class and Stalinist observers from afar, are but a cruelly duplicitous vestige of mass upheavals from the 1950s and 1960s, upheavals prevented from reaching consummation in full-blown revolutions by the seizure of power of such tyrants as Assad’s father.

Nor do Russia and China, which fund and supply Assad and are providing his main diplomatic cover, have any more interest in the rights and needs of the Syrian masses than Washington and its allies. They too are simply maneuvering for power, influence, and resources.

The danger of open, full-scale military intervention, as manifested in threats from Washington and its allies and puppets, has grown sharply in recent weeks, so much so that most observers expected the result of the Feb. 24 conference of “Friends of Syria” to be a bloodthirsty threat of armed force against the regime. These “Friends” include all the major imperialist powers, one of whom, France, has been pushing for weeks for the creation of “humanitarian corridors,” i.e., areas of Syria to be conquered by troops from imperialist countries and/or from client regimes in the Gulf, ostensibly to allow free passage of food and medicine, but obviously designed to allow an imperialist army with a thin cover of “Free Syria Army” officership to roll into Damascus.

The traitorous heads of the Syrian National Council and the FSA went to Tunis to try to convince U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her ilk to invade and to recognize them as the “legitimate” leaders of the country. In these maneuvers, the “Friends” and their quisling allies have been greatly aided on the diplomatic front by the Arab League, the council for region regime heads.

But in the event, Washington was resigned to a final declaration from Tunis simply repeating its demand that Assad stop firing on his citizens and allow aid and medical relief into the country. In both an editorial and a news article the day after the conference, *The New York Times* claimed that both Washington and its allies “have ruled out military intervention.”

A post-conference analysis by Egyptian Nasserist politician Abdelhalim Qandil claimed that the U.S. “may even prefer the situation as it is: the Arab Syrian army worn out in a bloody war against the people. And the Syrian regime challenged and undermined, but not over-

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thrown, because the West does not know exactly where Syria would be going after Bashar.” Qandil noted correctly that “the first to benefit from the demand for a foreign intervention is Bashar’s regime itself. An intervention harms the cause of the revolution and stains the reputation of its supporters.”

It’s not yet clear whether Washington’s relative rhetorical restraint in Tunis was simply cover for an inevitable military assault, or instead a genuine reflection of the strategic difficulties it faces given Russian and Chinese opposition and its own difficulties in ongoing wars elsewhere, current or pending. Naturally, opponents of war against Syria cannot afford to count on the latter.

Certainly, the U.S. government would love to have its hands free for an armed intervention—especially as the uprising is beginning to secure a permanent presence in the city’s major cities. The weekend before the Tunis conference, hundreds of thousands mobilized in Damascus for the funeral of a man killed by the regime. It is just this type of mobilization, which if prolonged will mean the certain death of the regime at the hands of the masses, that Washington hopes to forestall in favor of a “controlled” change of regime that securely places its puppets in power.

The need for intervention in Washington’s eyes is heightened by the fragmented and undependable state of the FSA. Rather than a coherent, disciplined fighting force, *The Wall Street Journal* noted, “Syria’s armed rebels appear to have only nominal unity under the umbrella of the so-called Free Syrian Army. Last year in Libya, by contrast, rebel fighters appeared to answer more directly to that country’s National Transitional Council.

“Though the FSA says it represents a mushrooming group of defected soldiers, opposition activists concede that several armed fighters—including local militias—are aligning with the dissident army by name only.” An SNC spokesperson admitted to *The Journal* that it needed help “to focus on reining in armed factions under the umbrella of the FSA. The responsibility of the SNC is to ensure that the groups on the ground are connected with each other and come under an integrated command.”

In a similar vein, on the eve of the Tunis conference, *The New York Times* ended an article on divisions in the opposition by noting that “exiled Syrian Army officers who formed the Free Syrian Army, based in Turkey, have stayed aloof from the council, and even they do not really control the many local militias that adopt the army’s name alone.”

And in *Al Jazeera*, Nir Rosen, who has interviewed armed anti-Assad forces, noted in mid-February that there is “no central or unified leadership for the armed revolution.” The FSA, he claims, is a name endorsed by “diverse armed opposition actors throughout the country, who each operate in a similar manner and towards a similar goal, but each with local leadership. Local armed groups have only limited communication with those in neighboring towns or provinces—and, moreover, they were operating long before the summer” when the mainstream media began to claim that the FSA was becoming a significant force and that defections from Assad’s army were swelling.

Rosen claims that the armed fighters are not Salafis or members of the Muslim Brotherhood or al-Qaeda. They are devout, he says, but are fighting to defend their friends, their neighborhoods, villages or province. “Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood ideologies are not important in Syria and do not play a significant role in the revolution,” he claims.

Conflicting reports about the respective armed strengths and presence on the ground of the military forces of the regime, the opposition, and of external powers can be seen in a Feb. 9 report by Voice of Russia radio exam-

Supporting Syria’s right of self-determination means opposing all imperialist threats of intervention.

ining claims by the Israel-based Debka Report. Debka had claimed that Qatari and British special forces were already aiding Syrian rebels. The VR account detailed claims, counterclaims, rebuttals and denials by all parties to the conflict about the presence of such forces, and noted the possibility that the claims were misinformation spread by the regime to excuse its poor military performance, or alternatively, were perhaps spread by the imperialist powers to justify more massive intervention.

Debka had even upped the ante by claiming that the presence of foreign special forces in Syria—and not just from Qatar and the UK, but from Israel, the U.S., and France as well—is an “open secret” and that they’ve been there since August of last year.

The political constellation of the opposition

The diversity of the FSA is a reflection of an even more diverse array of forces in the opposition, both internal and in exile. While the mainstream media’s claims that the internal opposition is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood seem unfounded (especially as it has had little organizational presence inside the country since the 1982 Massacre in Hama), the Brotherhood does seem to be the largest force in the mostly-expatriate Syrian National Council.

But it must also be kept in mind that just as claims of “Islamist” domination of Egypt’s revolution were designed to oppose its progress, in Syria such claims (including allegations that al-Qaeda has a presence) are used to justify outside intervention. What’s more, such claims parrot those of Assad, who has stepped up the policies initiated by his father of divide and conquer, pitting all the country’s sects and religions against each other—policies which led the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) from the start to stress their nonsectarian character. Of course, the longer the conflict drags on, the greater the danger of real sectarian divisions appearing (which, as in Iraq, would suit Washington just fine).

Inside Syria the repeated mobilizations, and material, medical, and self-defense support for them, are still in the hands of the LCCs, which, while they are in informal contact with each other, have yet to produce a national structure, much less speak with one political voice.

In a Nov. 2 statement the LCCs stated their opposition to outside intervention, a policy that apparently has not been dropped. (In contrast, at a talk on Feb. 22 at Columbia University, a representative of the Network of Arab-American Professionals claimed—in language eerily reminiscent of the rhetoric before the invasion of Libya—that grassroots forces inside Syria were clamoring for the SNC to secure imperialist intervention. The NAAP rep further justified such calls by denouncing the alleged presence of Russian and Iranian forces in Syria and their material aid to the regime and its military.)

There is also some presence of the revolutionary left inside the country, including Trotskyists as well as ex-Maoists, but it is unclear how big or influential such revolutionary forces are. One group from this milieu, the Syrian Revolutionary Left Tendency, whose declared purpose is to unite such forces, issued a statement in December 2011 hailing the call for a general strike. The Tendency called for the strike to be the occasion for unifying all opposition forces in action committees and

(Left) Gov’t soldiers secure area near Damascus for visit of Arab League observers, Jan. 26.

(Right) Free Syrian Army member, Feb. 18.

noted: “The future of our people and of its country can only be decided on by the masses of our country. The mass general strike will lead there.”

The Tendency also counterposed such unified organizing to outside intervention, ending its appeal with the slogan, “Long live the Arab permanent popular revolutions!”—the very thing that Washington and its allies and clients fear most.

Against intervention and for the uprising

Repeating their stance vis-à-vis Iran, Iraq and Libya, some on the left in the U.S. have claimed that opposition to Washington’s war drive against Syria requires silence about, or even denial of, the crimes of Assad. This stance has been eloquently refuted by progressive Arab authors and activists and by the Arab masses themselves in pro-uprising rallies throughout the region.

Bassam Haddad, in his *jadaliyya.com* column, “An Idiot’s Guide to Fighting Dictatorship in Syria while Opposing Military Intervention,” wrote that claims that opposition to the regime reflects “outside interests” are “empty and an insult to our intelligence.” He noted that calls for intervention came mostly from outside forces such as the SNC, not those inside Syria. Haddad recounted the presence of Syrian flags in Egypt’s Tahrir Square during the one-year anniversary rallies on Jan. 25—flown to indicate support for the uprising.

In an interview with *International Viewpoint*, radical economist and activist Adam Hanieh stated that “in the case of Syria, it is clear that the Western states, Israel, and the Gulf countries want to see a more pliant regime, and this is partially motivated by a desire to undermine Iran’s regional influence (connected of course to Hizbullah in Lebanon).”

But he added, “The overall anti-imperialist sentiment remains strong among the Syrian population and the attempts by parts of the Left to smear the entire uprising as a stand-in for imperialism belies a Manichean worldview that badly misunderstands the country’s history. I don’t see any contradiction in opposing intervention and simultaneously being against the Assad regime—which, we need to remember, has embraced neoliberalism and consistently used a rhetoric of ‘anti-imperialism’ to obfuscate a practice of accommodation with both the US and Israel.”

Another eloquent voice against such Manichean (or what we today call “campist”) worldviews is Columbia University Professor Joseph Massad, who in his *Al Jazeera* column, “Imperialism, despotism, and democracy in Syria,” wrote: “Like Saddam, the Assad dynastic regime has been an ally of the Saudi theocracy and its junior Gulf partners, and an agent of U.S. imperialism in the region, especially in its major intervention in Lebanon in 1976 at the invitation of the Christian fascist forces who called the Syrians in to help them crush the leftist revolutionary movement in the country, including the PLO. ... Moreover, the Assad regime again proved most helpful to its U.S. and Saudi sponsors when it joined the imperial coalition to invade the Gulf in 1990-91 under the U.S. flag. On the Zionist front, the Syrian regime proved as pliant as the Jordanian one, ensuring the security of Israel’s “borders,” which Israel conquered and established inside Syria’s and Jordan’s own territories.

Socialist Action could not agree more with those who, while mobilizing in broad united coalitions against imperialist intervention, look eagerly toward a revolution by Syria’s workers, peasants, students, and women. Without a revolution that puts political and economic power firmly within the hands of Syria’s working people, building a genuinely anti-imperialist, pro-social justice society is impossible. ■

BOOKS: *How the 1% screw the rest of us*

By JOHN ORRETT
and BARRY WEISLEDER

The appearance of “The Trouble With Billionaires” could not have been more timely. Published in Canada by Penguin Books (Toronto, soft cover edition in 2011, 272 pages), the book is to be released in the USA under the title “Billionaires’ Ball: Gluttony and Hubris in an Age of Epic Inequality” on March 27 by Beacon Press.

It’s as though co-authors Linda McQuaig, a Toronto Star political columnist who has written eight books, and Neil Brooks, professor of tax law at Osgoode Hall Law School, had anticipated the Occupy movement and its odious target—the incredible inequality of wealth and income that is a burgeoning North American scandal.

The authors provide numerous shocking descriptions of the vastness of the wealth concentrated in so few hands. Here’s one example: if Bill Gates started counting his money at the rate of one dollar every second, every hour of every day, he would have to count for 1680 years to complete the task.

One chapter challenges the notion that immense wealth acquisition is the reward for the sheer brilliance and unique efforts of a precious few remarkable individuals. It draws on the works of famous liberals and conservatives like Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Hobbes to demolish the “great man” theory of history. They argue that the greatest innovations and discoveries, by the likes of Isaac Newton and Joseph Marie Jacquard (inventor of the loom), were built on a pyramid of accumulated human knowledge and that this knowledge is really the inheritance of us all.

The book looks at the adverse affects of gross inequality on human health, social relationships, and democracy. It cites studies that show that a healthier, more politically inclusive society results from a more equal distribution of income and wealth.

The authors compare the era of the Roaring Twenties,



Matt Rourke / AP

leading up to the great stock market crash of 1929, with the years prior to the economic crisis of 2008. The deregulation of banks and provision of huge tax breaks for corporations and the super rich preceded both global crises.

In 1911, U.S. President Howard Taft deregulated the banks in America, allowing them to become involved in the selling of stocks and bonds. Then in the 1920s, An-

drew Mellon, serving as Treasury secretary under three presidents, was able to reduce corporate and personal income taxes massively in favour of the rich and powerful. A speculative frenzy hit the stock market, with paper values rocketing far above their real worth. This resulted in the market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Under the New Deal, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s programme to save capitalism—greater regulation, higher marginal tax rates, and government spending—started to pull the U.S. economy out of depression, although World War II played a more decisive role. In 1938 Roosevelt signed the Fair Labour Standards Act. It established a national minimum wage. Workers’ pay rose and union membership grew from 12 percent to 35 percent in 10 years. The Glass Steagall Act of 1933 prohibited a bank holding company from owning other financial companies. (It was repealed in 1999 by the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act.)

The state interventionism of the Second World War was followed by an era of unprecedented growth in capitalist economies, as well as a much greater sharing of wealth production (to divert workers from the path of revolt). But as the authors point out, “The wealthy interests had never given up resisting the New Deal.” President Ronald Reagan’s crushing of the air traffic controllers’ strike in 1980 signalled a return to blatantly one-sided laws in the interests of the rich and powerful. Through the regimes of Reagan, the Bushes, and Bill Clinton, progressive taxation was rolled back. Washington deregulated businesses and banks.

In Canada a similar trend was afoot. In 1987 Michael Wilson, the finance minister in the Conservative Government of Brian Mulroney, began a major overhaul of the federal tax system to reduce the burden on the country’s richest families. Rules on Family Trusts, set up essentially to avoid taxes, saved Canada’s richest families \$7.9 billion between 2000 and 2010. A report from the Senate

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A tale of courage and determination set during the Black holocaust

By BARRY WEISLEDER

For Black History Month, or at any time, here is a book worth reading. “The Book of Negroes,” a novel by Lawrence Hill (published by Harper Collins, 2007, Toronto, 680 pages), won the 2008 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize and was CBC Radio’s “Canada Reads” 2009 top choice.

Hill’s protagonist is a holocaust survivor. Aminata Diallo, an 11-year-old girl, is stolen from her village in West Africa and forced to walk for months to the sea in a “coffle”—a long chain of yoked and shackled slaves. The “toubabu,” European slavers, jam Aminata and hundreds of her African “homelanders” into a filthy, stinking, tomb-like vessel for a hellish voyage that many did not survive. History records that the infamous “Middle Passage” extinguished the lives of millions of the over 115 million Africans who were killed or enslaved in the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Eventually, she arrives in South Carolina, where her life as a slave begins. Due to her mother’s training and her own bright mind, Aminata develops certain advantages other slaves do not: she possesses the skills of a midwife, speaks several languages, and learns how to read and write.

These abilities save Aminata’s life, but do not shield her from horrific physical cruelties (including branding with a hot iron, beatings, rape), plus the seizure of one of her two children, and a very lengthy separation from the other.

In the 1770s, seeking freedom, she serves the British in the American Revolutionary War and inscribes her name, and many others, in the historic “Book of Negroes.” This book, an actual historical document, is an archive of freed Loyalist slaves who requested permission to leave the United States in order to resettle in Nova Scotia, only to discover that this new place was also oppressive and unyielding.

Aminata eventually returns to Sierra Leone, passing ships carrying thousands of slaves bound for America. The colony at



Freetown is under-resourced, stagnant, and totally dependent on its British sponsors. Moreover, it is surrounded by slave trade operators. Aminata has a close brush with death when she hires slavers who promise to take her to her ancestral village of Bayo, deep in the interior.

Later she finds herself crossing the ocean once more, to England, to present the account of her life to a British parliamentary committee, hoping it may lead to abolition of slavery, or at least end the trade in humans, which is all the liberals and progressive religious leaders thought could be attained at first. The trade was outlawed in 1807, and slavery itself abolished in the British Empire in 1833.

It took a civil war in America to legally ban slavery in 1865 (by adoption of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution). But as documented in “Slavery By Another Name” (Douglas A. Blackmon, Doubleday, 2008), peonage, the chain gang, sharecropping, and other nefarious devices kept the

super-exploitation of Blacks rampant right through the 1950s in the USA.

The original “Book of Negroes” is about 18 inches by 18 inches, with just over 150 pages. The remarkable hand-written ledger is a historical treasure. Detailing names, ages, backgrounds, and often degrading physical descriptions (“stout wench”), it’s the first public documentation of Black people in North America—specifically, the 3000 freedom-seekers who left New York for Nova Scotia and other British colonies near the end of the American Revolutionary War. In exchange for their service to the empire, Black Loyalists were promised liberty and land. What they received was little better than the circumstances they left behind—poverty, hunger, disease and servitude.

Pretty well known is the underground railroad in Canada; less so is the country’s own history of slavery and its dubious distinction as the site of North America’s first race riot. In 1784, gangs of unemployed white men

attacked the Black settlement of Birchtown, Nova Scotia, destroying 20 homes. Angry at their betrayal by the British, 1000 Black Loyalists sailed for Sierra Leone just 10 years after arriving in Canada, embarking on the world’s first return-to-Africa journey.

Lawrence Hill’s work is a brilliant, easy to read, compelling story of personal triumph over impossible circumstances. Populated by endearing, appalling, inspiring, sympathetic and maddening characters, vividly drawn, the story exposes the system that ushered modern capitalism into the world, “with blood dripping from its every pore” (Karl Marx, “Capital,” Vol. 1).

The author, a light-complexioned African-Canadian male who resides in Hamilton, Ontario, transported himself into the skin and mind of an indomitable, sensuous, dark daughter of West Africa from three centuries ago—no mean feat. His narrative of the times, and of the complexity of the mercantile relations that ensnared perpetrators and collaborators of slavery alike, enables the reader to see that we are dealing with a profit system that cultivates evil.

Hill describes a revolt on the ship that carried Aminata to America. But it is a lonely example in a book suffused with submission. In truth, there were constant revolts against slavery—in Africa, on the ships, and in the New World.

These revolts initially involved Blacks and poor whites. In the British West Indies between 1638 and 1837 there were 75 major slave rebellions, 22 of which involved thousands of slaves. In Jamaica, the Maroons made war on the English in the 1700s and won territorial autonomy. It was the great revolution in Saint Domingue (today’s Haiti) in 1794, led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, that rang the death knell for slavery. Half a million Black inhabitants repeatedly fought off the combined armies of Europe. The slaves’ cry of self-emancipation was the real motor for abolition.

The British supported abolition because they wanted to weaken the French Empire, which was based on the wealth of Saint Domingue. But the masses stormed onto the stage of history, not as helpless victims, but as shapers of their own future. While such analysis is not found in “The Book of Negroes,” its moving depiction of a remarkable woman in horrendous times arises like a humanist anthem. ■



By TONY MONTEIRO

Following is a section of the speech given by Tony Monteiro at a celebration of Martin Luther King Day on Jan. 16 in Philadelphia. Over 200 people attended the program in the union hall of AFSCME District Council 33, which organizes Philadelphia sanitation workers and other municipal workers.

Political activist Dr. Tony Monteiro is a Distinguished Lecturer in African-American Studies at Temple University. His writings will include two forthcoming books—one on analytical Marxism, and another on W.E.B. DuBois's contributions toward a philosophy of human science.

If we want to know who Martin Luther King really was, [we must consider] the speech that sums up his life, and is therefore his legacy to us and our children and grandchildren, great grandchildren and generations to come. It is the speech he delivered a year before he was assassinated, in New York: "Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam," subtitled, "A Time to Break Silence," where he says to his critics: I will not allow you to butcher my conscience. How can I be for non-violence here in America and not be for non-violence in Vietnam or anywhere else where imperialism is waging wars against peoples of color?

The second thing that he said in that speech is that he did not come to that pulpit in Riverside Church to speak to or criticize North Vietnam or the Vietcong. He wanted to speak to, as he put it, "my own government—the major purveyor of violence in the world."

And then he went on to ask the question that still resonates, and that we *must* ask—as difficult it might be in 2012 to all sides running for president of the United States. The question of Martin Luther King: Who made America the policeman of the whole world? Your hands are dripping with the blood of Africans! Rape? *You* invented rape as an instrument of war and terror against the captured Africans. Democracy? As Frederick Douglass said: "What to the slave is your Fourth of July? You hypocrites!"

So King put his moral case before the world. The world heard King, [but] America looked at King with skepticism: You've gone too far—Negro, boy, "nigger." You've gone too far! Who are you to criticize this president who has done more for African Americans since any president since Lincoln?

Now, we can get into a whole lot of discussions about this! Lincoln? The Emancipation Proclamation [was] signed as a part of a war policy because white working-class Irish, German, and English no longer wanted to fight, as they said, "a rich man's war" to "free niggers." And hence, if the North won the war, it was not because of Lincoln but [because of the actions of] 200,000 Africans—men and women. Lincoln did not free the slaves; the slaves freed themselves.

And [Lyndon B.] Johnson was not the author of civil rights. The text of the civil rights legislation was written in the streets of Montgomery, Ala., the bus boycott, the children's marches in Birmingham. That's the text of the civil rights legislation! It is in the lives of African Americans! But they asked Martin Luther King: How dare you criticize this president?

But what were the civil rights "leaders" and *The New York Times* editorial page saying? The white "liberals," that is? They were saying that political *expediency*—the "lesser of two evils," "we've got to re-elect this man"—means *more* than moral consistency.

Let's be real. When King attacked the war in Vietnam, he didn't just attack that policy. Remember, he talked about a *movement* beyond civil rights that would attack war, racism, and economic exploitation. For him it was both a moral crusade and a movement to save the country—and ultimately to save the world from American imperialism. We cannot underestimate this.

King would go on to write a book, "Where Do We Go from Here: 'Chaos or Community?'" ... America, he said, had become consumed in consumerism, individualism, and rank materialism. Has anything changed? It's just gotten worse—a culture that prioritized and put a premium upon things, and not human beings. And so, the "beloved community" would be a moral reconfiguration

The real Martin Luther King

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



(Above) N.Y. Occupy for Jobs rally on King's birthday. Protest signs are inside a Bank of America branch.

(Left) Dr. Tony Monteiro.

In his Riverside Church address, King wanted to speak to, as he put it, "my own government—the major purveyor of violence in the world."

of human society and human relationships. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere! There is a fierce urgency of "now we must act!"

These are the foundations of King's liberation theology. King was a Christian—a philosopher and a theologian. Somebody asked about systematic theology; that's what he did his PhD. dissertation on, focusing upon the German theologian Paul Tillich. But he was also deeply influenced by a man of his own father's generation—Howard Thurman. When King goes to Boston University [where he earned his doctorate], Howard Thurman is the dean of the chapel.

Howard Thurman was raised by a grandmother who, as a teenager, lived under slavery. The end of slavery came when she was well into her teen years. He was raised in Florida; he would go on to become a theologian, and I want to emphasize this, a mystical Christian—which is to say, he sought not only to understand the relationship of man to man, but man to nature and man to the cosmos. *Holistic* understanding. We can see King working that out in the practical and day-to-day life of the civil rights movement

The last thing I want to discuss is King's intellectual life at Crozer [Theological Seminary]. We do not know enough about that. I just want to make clear that the background of what he was studying at Crozer was World War II, Hitler, and the most devastating two wars in human history. And if the logics of World Wars I and II were to continue, humanity would ultimately destroy itself. But World Wars I and II were the wars that Europeans fought over who would dominate the resources of Africa and Asia—white men fighting one another over the colonial world, especially Africa, that they had divided among themselves in 1884. So they went into a situational suicidal set of wars over who would dominate the very people and lands that they had enslaved and colonized. You talk about irony, ambiguity, and contradiction—this is what was going on.

But then there was India, and there was Mahatma Gandhi, and there was the independence movement. Gandhi says, how do we free India, but *also* how do we save humanity from European values? Should we adopt their methods and their values to free ourselves? And of course, he said non-violence and direct action. Through Howard Thurman, King learns of the Gandhian philosophy of social action and social change.

But then there is something else that I don't think King could get from Howard Thurman. ... King graduates from Morehouse [College] when he is 19 years old. So he is a kid, but he is also a prodigy, intellectually a prodigy. ... He looked at the German Church. Hitler rises; the Church is quiet. Only a very few churchmen and women stood up to oppose Hitler. One of them was a guy by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer had been in Harlem, at Abyssinian [Baptist Church], deeply influenced by Black spiritual life. He

goes back; he does not accept the Church's acquiescence to Hitler. Ultimately, he and a group of colleagues decide that they must act against Hitler, and hatch a plan to assassinate him. They fail; they were not trained assassins. Bonhoeffer is arrested, and 45 days before Hitler and the Nazis surrender, he is executed.

King and [others] have to take this into account and ask the question, how could Christians—under the notion that we do no harm to anyone, that we are pacifists—how could the Christian Church acquiesce to Hitler? This is where King gets the notion of the fierce urgency of *now*. Christians are not what Christians say they are; Christians are what they *do*. Christianity is a King is not the religion of pious and self-important individuals who dress up and go to church; but a Christian is one who acts against injustice.

And so, I want to end on this: the *real* Martin Luther King ... by any measure, was a revolutionary. There is no question about it. And that's why I [am emphasizing] the last speech, the speech that he gives a year to the day before he was assassinated—he gives the speech on April 4, 1967; he is assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tenn., leading a march of Black sanitation workers.

Let me step back, though. Now I have to go to W.E.B. DuBois, "Black Reconstruction in America," his most important work, but one of his least read works. The first chapter [is] entitled, "The Black Worker." What King called the "enslaved Africans" was a *Black proletariat*. That word might not sit well with everybody, but I'm telling you what he called them. That's what King was leading: they were not just sanitation workers—they were a part of this mass of Black workers.

Out of that struggle in Memphis comes the modern version of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. You see people walking around [in this hall] from DC 33? That goes back to Memphis! Out of that comes the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and probably the most powerful Black labor leader in the country today, William Lucy—directly from Memphis. King was leading this movement of the Black working class. Seventy-five to 80 percent of whom, right now as we speak, live in or near poverty. Some of our working-class communities not far from here: Go to Strawberry Mansion [a Philadelphia neighborhood]—100 percent unemployed! This is what he was leading.

What are the solutions to this massive, horrific, historically constituted [situation]—rooted in a slavery that has never died? We are still living it. White America is living it. And I can tell you, if we are honest, there are many Black people who are thinking and living like we lived under slavery. And it's not our fault.

To resolve this problem, we have to transcend the methods and ideology of the fight for civil rights. We are now at the level of struggle for human rights and reparations. And the question for us, and we have to ask it even if we will never see it fulfilled: Can human rights for Black people and reparations for Africans at home and abroad be achieved under the system—let's call it what it is, *capitalism*, and racism—that was built upon the free labor and super-exploitation of Africans all over the world. I think Martin Luther King answered it—no! When he talked about the "beloved community?" No! In his last speeches: Could America and the economic system of American be sustained? No!

The question is: Will we have the courage to do what is necessary, and to begin to organize for a future that we might not live to see? ■

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Red Tails," directed by Anthony Hemingway. Adapted from the book by John B. Holway.

Unfortunately for the film-going public, most critics gave "Red Tails" short shrift, but I thought it deserved better. "Red Tails" is to be looked at as neither a war film nor an antiwar film, but as a film about racial prejudice and segregation of Blacks in the military during World War II. It focuses on the Tuskegee airmen of the Army Air Corps, and thankfully contains less pro-American jingoism than most movies about World War II.

Black musician Terence Blanchard, who wrote the soundtrack, said on an NPR talk show that George Lucas, who produced the film, had been trying to make "Red Tails" for 23 years. No studio wanted to back it. Lucas then put up \$50 million of his own money.

Once it was in the can, so to speak, he couldn't find a distributor. No one was interested in taking on a film about Black World War II fighter pilots. So Lucas ante-upped another \$50 million to get it on screens; propitiously, it was released during Black History Month. It was in theaters during the NAACP awards show on TV, at which surviving Tuskegee airmen in the audience received special recognition, and George Lucas, a commendation for his efforts.

"Red Tails" opens with a quote from a 1925 Army War College study, which concluded that Blacks were unsuitable to serve in the military due to their lack of intelligence, ambition, and courage. Yet due to pressure from civil rights groups, Congress, and the Black press, a Black squadron was formed. The unit, backed by an entire service arm, consisted of officers and over 400 enlisted men. By mid-1942, over six times that many were stationed there, but only two squadrons were in training. After basic training, it moved to the nearby Tuskegee Army Air Field, in Alabama.

Racism in the Air War



(Above) David Oyelowo as Tuskegee fighter pilot Lt. Joe "Lightning" Little.

Consequently, Tuskegee became the only Army installation performing all phases of in-depth pilot training at a single location.

The film takes place in Italy during 1944, where the pilots—depicted in the movie by mostly unknown actors who made up a composite of the airmen—flew bomber escort missions in old P-40s held together by the likes of chicken wire and chewing gum. The dialogue is clunky in some scenes. In fact, one of the surviving airmen, Lt. Col. Jefferson, who had seen the film, stated in an interview that the pilot banter was strictly make-believe Hollywood stuff. "If that kind of conversation would have gone on, Colonel Davis [A. J. Bullard, played by Terence Howard in the film] would have court-martialed us."

The dialogue between the pilots during the combat scenes seems "forced and out of place," he said, "and most characters were two-dimensional." Still that shouldn't take away from the historic significance of WWII Black fighter pilots proving to their white cohorts and officials in the Pentagon that they were suited to the task.

In an early suspenseful scene, hot-dog pilot, "Lightning" Joe Little (David Oyelowo), disobeys orders and shoots up and destroys a German ordinance

supply train. Soon, Bullard travels to the Pentagon to demand that the Army leaders allow the Black squadron a combat opportunity, and give them newer planes. Major Emmanuel Stance, played by Cuba Gooding Junior, was the commanding officer of the squadron; he basically stood around clenching a pipe between his teeth, *a la* MacArthur.

The film's strength is the very realistic action scenes, in which the airmen display their skills and aggressiveness in the dogfights between planes while escorting four-engine prop-driven bombers piloted by whites against the stereotyped German pilots. The airmen nicknamed the German leader "Pretty Boy" (Lars van Riesen), whose face bears an ear-to-chin scar. Reporting on his intercom, he expresses his astonishment, "The enemy pilots are all Africans!"

On their first mission into Europe—Berlin, to be exact—the airmen, in new Mustang P-51 propeller fighter planes with their distinguishing, freshly painted red tails, were successful in distracting and shooting down German jet planes so that white American cohorts could accomplish their goal. Not shown, however, is the damage on the ground

caused by their bombs. Berlin was devastated by U.S. and British air attacks, with a third of its housing wiped out during the war and with an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 dead civilians.

The race issue comes up in a scene in a village. Lightning enters an officers' club frequented by white pilots and is told, "This is an officers' club, get out of here, nigger!" Lightning's reaction lands him in the brig, where Bullard dresses him down, and then ends up telling him that he is the best pilot they've got. Jarringly anachronistic is a scene of the men in a "football huddle" pep talk and another when someone advised a buddy to "man up."

According to Jefferson's interview, the Black pilots were eventually transferred to a Michigan airbase for a combat readiness assignment, where they had fewer privileges than the German POWs who also were there; he felt that there should have been a scene showing the German POWs enjoying more freedom because "white people, even our enemies, had more rights."

Military desegregation began July 26, 1948, when President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which states, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." The order was not fully implemented until October 1953.

In 2007, President G. W. Bush honored Tuskegee Airmen with the Congressional Medal of Honor—six decades late. Now, there needs to be a film about something equally, if not more, egregious: Japanese men, U. S. citizens, who enlisted to fight for a country that rounded them up, forced them off their lands and farms, and incarcerated them and their families in U.S. internment camps. George Lucas? Anybody? ■

Tragic Ontario accident exposes migrant workers' plight

By RIC EKAPUK

TORONTO—In early February a horrific accident shocked Ontario. A flat-bed truck struck a passenger van at a rural intersection near Stratford, two hours west of Toronto, killing 11 people. Of the deceased, only one was a Canadian citizen; the others were agricultural migrant workers from Peru who were being transferred from one job to the next in the passenger van.

It is sadly indicative that one of Ontario's worst traffic accidents in history should involve migrant workers,

since the latter already experience some of the worst working and living conditions in the province. They usually work long hours for low pay, on dangerous and very physically demanding jobs that few Canadians would consider doing. They live separated from their families for long stretches of time, in isolation from the wider community, and sometimes in cramped, substandard living quarters.

Little is done to challenge or change these conditions because migrant workers are often afraid to speak out. "They're more vulnerable. They

don't have access to the same kinds of services as permanent migrants they have a fear of loss of employment, which means they're less likely to report unsafe working conditions," according to a Laurier University researcher on migrant workers, Jenna Henneby, quoted in the *Globe and Mail*.

What was Ottawa's response? Expand the migrant worker program. In 2007, there were over 300,000 foreign temporary workers in Canada, according to Laurier's International Migration Research Centre, up from 80,000

a decade earlier. Under Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the growth in migrant workers has outstripped that of immigrants—a clear sign of his government's priorities.

At least part of this growth can be attributed to a new migrant worker program introduced by the federal government in 2002, the "Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Training." Unlike previous agriculture and temporary workers' programs, employers hiring under this "pilot project" can bring workers from any country and only need to show that Canadians have not responded to job ads. With easier access to foreign temporary workers comes less scrutiny of the conditions they face once here. According to the *Globe*, "even the most fervent boosters of the migrant-work programs say this set-up [the pilot project] is perhaps more lax than it should be."

In a country built by immigrants, it should not be acceptable that some who continue that work today be denied proper working conditions and the benefit of making a home here. Obstacles in the path of unionization of agricultural workers must be removed.

Socialists also demand that migrant worker programs be quickly phased out of existence, and that all migrant workers who have lived and worked for the required period of time in Canada be offered citizenship. Because, as we know, "an injury to one is an injury to all," this issue should be a priority for unions and the labour-based New Democratic Party. ■

Duluth Occupiers reach out to foreclosed homeowners

By ADAM RITSCHER

DULUTH, Minn.—The scourge of home foreclosures is sweeping the nation. Despite that fact that the Democrats and Republicans dumped hundreds of billions of public money into the vaults of the big banks, working class-homeowners are seeing no relief. And it's no different in Duluth.

This winter, a group of activists from the local Occupy movement got together and decided to try and do something about it. Calling themselves Project Save Our Homes, they reached out to a local homeowner, Ann Lockwood, who was facing foreclosure.

Ann's story is tragic, but at the same time similar to that of millions of other working-class homeowners, who more often than not are in foreclosure due to a medical catastrophe or losing their job. Ann was a health-care worker who, a couple of years back, suffered a minor, on the job, injury. What should have been a routine surgery ended up causing an infection. Two-dozen surgeries and a million dollars in medical bills later, Ann lost her leg, and her job. Yet despite this tragedy, the bank that held her mort-

gage, refused to work with her and acknowledge her new difficulties.

Ann was just weeks away from a sheriff's sale when she was contacted by Project Save Our Homes. She readily accepted our offer to help, and we sprung into action. Thousands of signatures were collected in a petition to her bank demanding that they do the right thing. Protests were held, the media was contacted, and a powerful upsurge of community support embraced Ann's cause.

This sudden, and unexpected deluge of publicity shamed State Farm Bank into canceling the foreclosure and offering her a new agreement that will keep Ann in her home.

It was a victory that brought tears to many of our eyes, but it has since triggered a deluge of pleas for help from other area homeowners. Since Ann's victory, Project Save Our Homes has gone on to organize community forums on the issue of home foreclosures, secure the endorsement of dozens of unions and community and activist groups, and is already working on its next campaign—to save the Dunbar family in the neighboring city of Superior from foreclosure. ■

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which were gained through over a century of struggle.

The resistance of Feb. 12

On Sunday, Feb. 2, the day of voting and the sell-off, hundreds of thousands—the estimates vary between 500,000 and one million—gathered in downtown Athens to protest against their degradation, and the destruction of their life perspectives and of the most minimal requirements of a public welfare-oriented society.

The police, as usual, brutally attacked the demonstrators, shooting chemical projectiles at the demonstrators at Syntagma Square. They tried to clear the square before most of the demonstrators arrived at the center. But the heroism of the demonstrators holding out in front of Parliament prevented this intention, and the rage of a considerable part of the Athenian people expressed itself for hours.

As usual, groups of black-clad and masked protesters fought skirmishes with the police, with Molotov cocktails, etc., at various points in the city center. When most of the demonstrators were pushed back by police, creating “empty zones,” groups of masked men suddenly appeared and set some, partly historical, buildings on fire. It remains unclear whether this occurred due to actions of police troublemakers or authentically autonomous groups.

Two PAME contingents, under KKE leadership, as always strictly separated from the other demonstrators, positioned themselves at a safe distance from the focal points in front of the parliament, continuing their tradition to never clash with the police. This is PAME’s usual ceremony, but it still amazes everybody with its legalism and its consistent rejection of any common action.

It is not easy to answer the question of how the resistance might continue to try to reach its goals. The call for an indefinite general strike might be necessary, but at this stage it might not ensure unified action. It is clear, however, that the economic, political, and social

... Greek workers resist austerity



Milos Bicanski / Getty Images

(Above) Greeks camped out in front of Parliament building in June 2011.

crisis is moving toward the boiling point, and that a solution does not lie within the framework of the capitalist exploitation system or the rules of the totally discredited parliamentary democracy and their governments. The solution can only be found through the self-organization of working people at their workplaces and in the neighborhoods, and ultimately through the creation of a different type of democracy at the national level, according to the principles of workers’ councils.

The Greek and international mass media did everything possible to hush up the massiveness of the demonstration in downtown Athens. Instead, they focused as much as possible on reports about the fires and devastation. They systematically obscured, in particular, the fact that the policy leading to the first Memorandum (May 5, 2010) and the second Memorandum is equivalent to a coup, which simply annuls the previously known form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

The memoranda policies of the Pa-

pandreou and now the Papadimos governments lack any democratic legitimacy. Their main support is that of the police club, their only “argument” the threat of national bankruptcy—which is the reality anyway and whose size and hopelessness are increasing more and more by the continuation of the dominant policies. The objective of remaining in the euro zone has also lost all meaning as it focuses solely on the security of bank profits, whereas the impoverishment of the population is rapidly proceeding.

The role of Germany

Any reporting about Greece is incomplete if it does not include the role of Germany. The German politicians and ministers of the federal government play a nefarious role in the looting and destruction of Greek society. The politicians not only refuse to recognize the war reparations and debt

payments, which at a formal level would amount to some hundred billion euro, thus displaying a shameful historical ignorance and arrogance; they also dictate the rules of dismantling Greece in an intolerable way. These include, for instance, German or EU-related control of the accounts on which Greece will have to pay. The German minister of finance, Mr. Schäuble, wants also to prescribe when and under what circumstances the Greek population should or should not vote.

Another indication of how mad the prevailing policy actually is—which could lead all Europe into the catastrophe—is showed in a press release by the German *Spiegel-Online*, Feb. 15, about the assets of the Germans: “8.5 trillion euros [in German possession] could pay off debts in the euro zone. While governments scrape together every penny in the crisis, the Germans have amassed a huge fortune. Less of their own debt, they have about 8.5 trillion euro. That is enough money to completely pay off the debt of all euro countries. Tangible assets such as cars, furniture, jewelry and art collections are not included.”

How long will it still be possible to lead entire nations of Europe into bankruptcy, while there is enough social wealth to enable all people to live without unemployment, poverty, and agonizing struggle for survival, even on a world scale?

The solidarity of the people in Germany, and particularly of those who are still able to use their brains despite the massive and deliberate fraud, the evil propaganda of the mass media, is one of the most important keys to reversing the hopeless situation that Greece and almost the entire European periphery are facing, which is also threatening the European center in the clearly foreseeable future. ■

... Inside the 1%

(continued from page 8)

Banking Committee, chaired by Leo Kolber, lawyer and former CEO of the multi-billionaire Bronfman family’s holding company, persuaded the Liberal Jean Chretien government to reduce the capital gains tax in Canada. This caused a huge loss of federal revenue. Where did it go? We know that 50 percent of capital gains go the richest 1 per cent of the population. During the last two decades, corporate taxes have also been significantly reduced and replaced with higher consumer taxes.

North American tax regimes continued to change so that corporations and wealthy individuals benefited from lower corporate, income, capital gains, and inheritance taxes. The discrepancies of income and wealth even surpassed those of the 1920s. Since industrial profit rates were at an all-time low, surplus wealth was devoted to wild speculation in Mortgage Derivatives and Credit Default Swaps. Speculation facilitated by the deregulation of financial industries hit a wall with the collapse of these Ponzi schemes. The banking crisis of 2008 and the ensuing deep recession continue to this day.

McQuaig and Brooks present a series of reforms to force billionaires to pay more. Higher tax revenues and increased government spending on social programs could reduce the wage and wealth gap that presently bedevils society.

They propose two new tax rates—60% on income over \$500,000 and 70% on income over \$5 million. Tax loopholes that benefit the rich, like Capital Gains exemptions and business “entertainment” expenses, would be eliminated. A Financial Transaction Tax, also known as the Tobin Tax, should be imposed on all financial transactions. Cooperative and enforceable international measures for a clampdown on tax evasion can be devised. Every time a payment or disbursement is made to an individual or corporation from an off-shore banking haven, a copy of the transaction would be sent to the national jurisdiction of the corporation or individual involved.

Inheritance taxes could be a major source of expenditures to meet human needs. Taxing all inheritances over \$1.5 million on a steeply progressive scale up to 70% on



Mario Tama / Getty Images

inheritances of \$50 million dollars, would be a step forward. The authors propose putting this money into an education trust fund to make college and university accessible to all. Finally, governments should strive to change social attitudes towards taxes. The role of taxation in achieving a fair, democratic, and equitable society should be promoted, say the authors.

McQuaig and Brooks have written a very readable and informative book—a valuable resource for critics of the tax system. The progressive tax measures they propose are among the measures that the NDP in Canada, and a future labour party in the U.S., should fight to achieve.

Sadly, the authors suggest that capitalism can be transformed from within by enacting such reforms. This is wrong on many levels. Even the most radical tax reform will not end the alienation of labour, nor break the political power of the super-rich—both of which are rooted in the capitalist mode of production. Keynesian measures and progressive taxes cannot stop the ups and downs of the business cycle, much less permanently entrench social justice.

The authors themselves show how the capitalist class resists taxation, how it uses all the power at its disposal, including control of political parties and the media, to sabotage any move towards social equality. If these measures

fail they have other means at their disposal—exorbitant interest rates, wage suppression, and using high levels of government debt, coupled with budgetary deficits, to justify “austerity” policies designed to further rob the working class. And that is to say nothing of resorting to state violence to quell protest!

In terms of Canadian fiscal deficits, the combined federal and provincial shortfalls are about \$65 billion annually. Keep in mind that since 1980 the top 1 per cent has increased its share of national income in Canada from 8.1% to 13.3%. That’s a shift of \$67 billion. If taxes had stayed at the 1980 level, there would be no deficit nationally.

“The Trouble with Billionaires” explodes many myths. It demolishes the claim that there is a “free market,” the claim that without huge salaries the rich would exert little or no effort (we should be so lucky!), and the contention that there is meaningful democracy under capitalist rule today. The authors deserve credit for that. Nonetheless, a radical critique of capitalism, and of the capitalist state, is needed.

First of all, capitalism is a global system. Its crises are triggered by overproduction (of useless things) and the decline in the average rate of profit (due to the system’s growing reliance on machines, rather than exploitable labour). Under capitalism the ruling powers spend billions to send armed forces around the world to impose regimes amenable to the extraction of natural resources for their home industries at the lowest possible price.

Capitalism despoils the environment and puts the existence of humankind in peril. While workers should fight for a more progressive tax system, taxation alone cannot achieve a just society. Socialists fight for progressive reforms, but aim for the abolition of taxation and the abolition of the class system through collective ownership. The solution for growing inequality and oppression is a planned economy run on the basis of human need, controlled by democratic workers’ governments, and globally coordinated. In a word, socialism. ■

U.S., Israel hurl war threats against Iran

Mojtaba Heidari / Mehr News Agency / AP



(Left) Iranians, chanting, "Death to Israel and America," carry coffin of Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a uranium-enrichment facility director. Iranian officials blame U.S. and Israel for bomb that killed him.

By DANIEL XAVIER

The drums of war in Washington are beating yet again. U.S. government officials, along with corporate media pundits, are calling for military action against Iran. Using similar logic that was used to justify the invasion of Iraq (that Saddam Hussein had "weapons of mass destruction," which turned out to be a lie), the United States and Israel continue to assert that Iran is using its nuclear energy program to build a bomb.

President Obama, in his recent State of the Union address, stated: "Let there be no doubt. America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal." Far-right-wing media pundit Tucker Carlson, in an interview on Fox News, took the rhetoric even further, saying: "Iran deserves to be annihilated" and that the United States has the moral authority to carry out a preemptive attack against Iran.

While there are certain similarities between the threats made against Iraq and the current calls to war against Iran, there are some marked differences as well. The media hype and public statements against Iran have not yet reached the fever pitch that we witnessed in the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

We must stand firm in demanding no war and no sanctions against Iran, and be prepared to come out into the streets to protest an attack.

The U.S. ruling class is somewhat divided on their approach to Iran and is hesitant to throw all their weight behind an invasion at this point, given the volatility of the global political situation at the moment.

With 76 million people, Iran is well over twice as populous as Iraq and more advanced economically. An invasion of Iran would be a massive undertaking for the U.S. and Israel and would stretch their military resources to the limit.

The mainstream media have painted Israel as the wild card in this situation, claiming they might attack Iran even if the United States has no desire to intervene militarily in the region. Israel relies on billions of

dollars in U.S. aid annually to pay for its own armaments and military operations. To go to war with Iran, Israel would need at least tacit approval and support from the United States.

Moreover, Israel's leaders are also divided on the idea of carrying out a preemptive strike against Iran. While Prime Minister Netanyahu has criticized the sanctions, saying they have not done enough to halt nuclear development in Iran, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has insisted that Iran has not crossed the "point of no return" in developing a nuclear weapon.

Even U.S. intelligence reports contradict the accusations by politicians and media pundits that Iran is building a nuclear weapon. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on Feb. 23 that "U.S. intelligence agencies don't believe Iran is actively trying to build an atomic bomb." Nonetheless, prominent figures, including presidential candidates from both the Democratic and Republican parties, continue to make threats against Iran.

In any case, many point out that the U.S. and Israel have already been carrying out a low-intensity war against Iran for years, via

sanctions, strategic bombings of nuclear facilities, and targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. Press TV reported that CIA and Mossad (Israel's spy agency) agents were involved in aiding the assassination of Iranian scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, who was killed in a car bombing on Jan. 11 near a college in Tehran. This case is only one of many that have come to light over the past year, though little attention is given to it in the mainstream corporate media.

While it is still unclear whether an armed attack on Iran is on the horizon, we in the antiwar movement should not dismiss statements by the U.S. and Israel threatening military action. We must stand firm in demanding no military intervention or sanctions against Iran, and be ready to protest in the streets if an attack takes place.

From March 23-25, in Stamford, Conn., antiwar activists from all around the country will be gathering at the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) conference to say no to U.S. military intervention abroad. We encourage all who can attend this timely national antiwar conference to register on-line at unacpeace.org, or e-mail unacpeace@gmail.com for more information. ■

Greek workers resist economic free fall

By ANDREAS KLOKE

ATHENS—The Memorandum No. 2 became reality by a vote in the Greek Parliament on Feb. 12. One hundred ninety-nine MPs, mainly of the ruling parties, PASOK and "New Democracy" (ND), decided to completely sell out the interests of the Greek population, working people and young people, and especially of future generations, to the dictatorship of the Troika—i.e., the international banks and finance capital.

The Greek ruling class and their stooges in government and Parliament hope in this way to assert their role as junior partners in the EU and the euro-zone and to make their position permanent and secure through the subjugation and impoverishment of the proletariat and the current so-called middle classes. Their policies are based on the fact that social resistance and the workers' movement has not yet been able to broaden and to centralize significantly their actions directed against government, capital, and Troika. This is despite the series of general strikes and mobilizations of the past



Thanassis Stavrakis / AP

two years, with the highlights being the occupation of Syntagma Square in front of the Parliament in June and the two-day strike on Oct. 19-20, 2011—with some 500,000 demonstrators in Athens alone.

Among the main factors that have

made possible the disaster of the Memorandum policies of the past two years are the bureaucratization of the unions under PASOK direction, which has prevailed for decades; the division of the movement through the profoundly reformist Communist Party (KKE), which

constantly acts in an extremely sectarian manner; the ongoing parliamentary fixation of KKE and the other reformist Left Alliance, SYRIZA; and the continued fragmentation of the anti-capitalist and revolutionary forces, despite some efforts of their most important alliance (ANTARSYA)—as well as an often helpless, violent activism on the streets.

The Memorandum No. 2 will bring an unprecedented slump in the general living conditions and the de facto dissolution of Greek society, as it has evolved in recent decades. The unemployment rate is already above 20%, and in absolute numbers over one million.

The Troika sweeps off the table any perspective of temporarily weakening the systematic impoverishment, or any tiny hope of economic recovery. The country is being sacrificed to the alleged stability of the euro and the sacrosanct banking profits. The fate of human beings does not matter any longer in today's EU and euro zone; Mammon reigns unchecked and goes literally over corpses.

What is being imposed on Greece is the beginning of the general attack of big business on living conditions and workers' rights in all EU countries,

(continued on page 11)