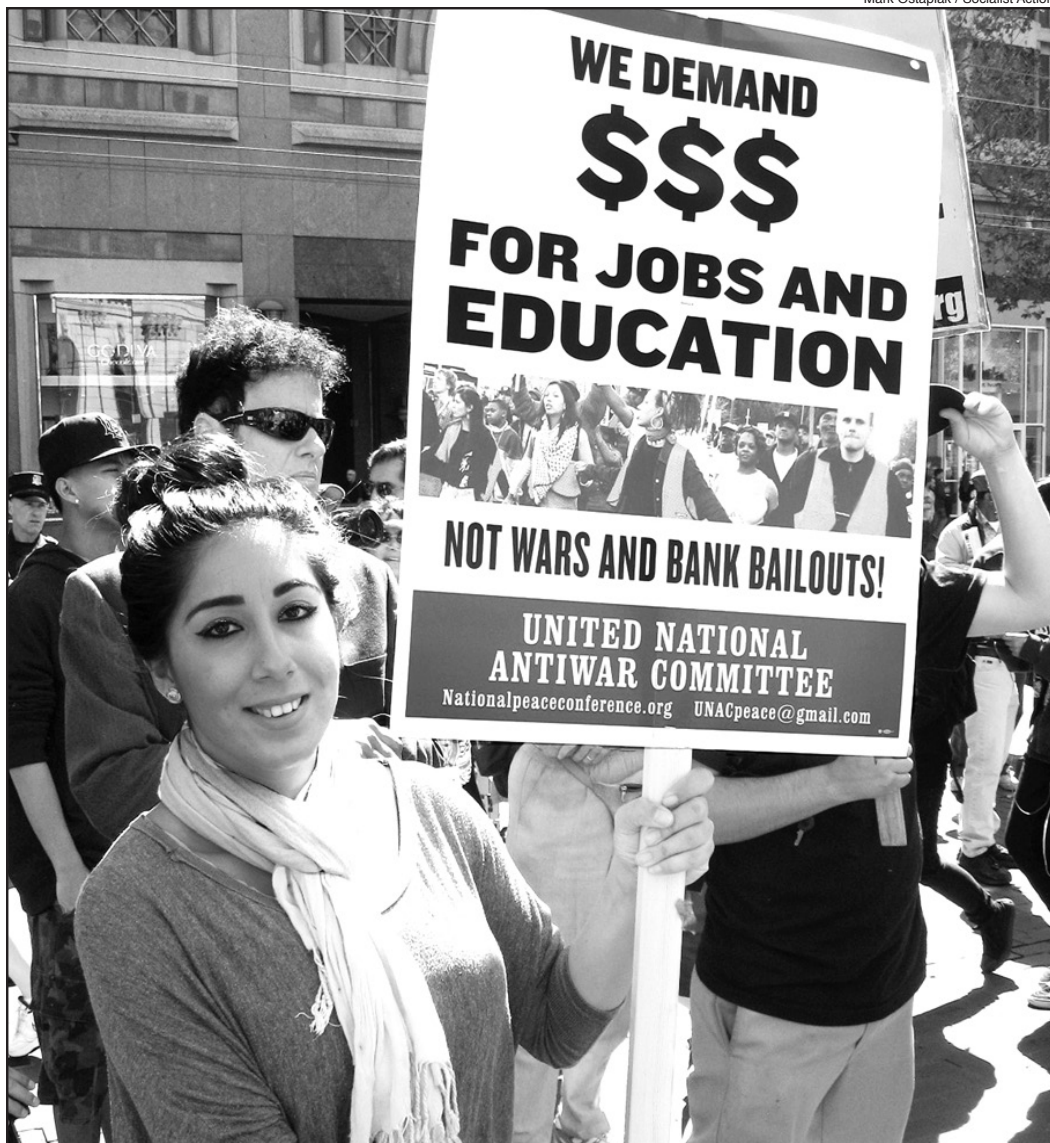


## Washington threatens new military strikes in Middle East

Mark Ostapiak / Socialist Action



By DANIEL XAVIER

As the presidential election rapidly approaches, it is predictably clear that the imperialist foreign policy agenda of the U.S. government will continue to advance unabated regardless of whether Barack Obama or Mitt Romney occupies the White House come January. Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize winner (!), has continued and expanded U.S. military aggression abroad by bombing or sending troops to Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Haiti, Uganda, Afghanistan, and Iraq—to name a few of his targets. Romney's campaign offers little alternative to the imperialist assaults carried out by the Democratic and Republican administrations for the last decade.

Following the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Benghazi that left an American ambassador dead, many are predicting another military action in Libya. The Obama administration continues to raise the specter of al-Qaeda to justify its warmongering policies abroad. According to the *Washington Post*, for several months the White House has met secretly to "examine the threat posed by

al-Qaeda's franchise in North Africa and consider for the first time whether to prepare for unilateral strikes." Use of drones may factor in prominently to any military intervention the United States makes in North Africa.

Obama, who massively expanded the drone program in Pakistan, defended the use of drone strikes in a January interview, stating that "drones have actually not caused a huge number of civilian casualties. For the most part they have been very precise." But a recent report, entitled "Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from U.S. Drone Practices in Pakistan," contradicts statements issued by government officials about the true effects of drone warfare. The report, which was a joint project of law professors at Stanford and New York University, describes how the government repeatedly under-reports civilian casualty rates by categorizing many victims as "combatants" and undermines efforts of other organizations to follow up on the site of drone strikes.

Obama's war policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan have failed to achieve success in po-

(continued on page 11)

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



By ADAM RITSCHER

With the U.S. presidential elections coming up again, a lot of workers and activists are eagerly discussing the campaigns, watching the debates, and even hitting the pavement to campaign for their candidates. We in Socialist Action commend people who take politics seriously and who are committed to fighting for what they believe in. However, we urge people to abstain from casting a ballot for the Democrats or Republicans, and to instead cast a protest vote for socialism.

Elections pose the question of which class shall rule. Should it be the class that has crashed the economy and stolen the jobs and homes of millions, or should it be the working class? That's why we're calling on people to **Vote Socialist**.

With both the Democrats and Republicans having been bought and paid for by Wall Street, we feel now more than ever it's crucial for working people to declare their political independence by voting socialist.

Contrary to what the defenders of the status quo say, we don't believe that casting a vote for a socialist candidate is a wasted vote. Change does not come through elections, but from social movements and mass action. But a protest vote for a socialist candi-

date can be used to send a message that you reject the misplaced priorities of our current political system and the political trap of lesser evilism!

We are calling for people to vote for whatever socialist candidate is on the ballot, or running as a write-in candidate, in their state. In particular, we endorse the following candidates for president:

- Peta Lindsay of the Party for Socialism and Liberation
- James Harris of the Socialist Workers Party
- Stephan Durham of the Freedom Socialist Party
- Stewart Alexander of the Socialist Party

While we have differences with each of these organizations on a number of political questions, we are giving them our critical support because we feel their campaigns represent a step towards working-class political independence. Campaigns such as these can serve as a placeholder for what our class ultimately needs—a mass labor party based on the unions.

Even more important than casting your ballot this fall, we urge you to get involved in your union, in the antiwar movement, in the women's movement, the immigrant rights movement—in the social movements that really can and will bring about the change we so desperately need! ■

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# Court denies re-hearing for Lynne Stewart

BY JEFF MACKLER

On Sept. 24, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit rejected Lynne Stewart's appeal for a re-hearing before the entire court. Her original conviction was upheld in 2009 by a three-judge panel of the Second Circuit. The court's opinion was not unexpected. This was the same court that earlier pressed Federal District Court John Koeltl to re-consider his original 28-month sentence and instead sentence Lynne to 10 years.

Disgracefully, Judge Koeltl explained the increased sentence by saying: "[C]omments by Stewart in 2006, including a statement in a television interview that she would do 'it' again and would not 'do anything differently' influenced [the] decision ... indicating the original sentence 'was not sufficient' to reflect the goals of sentencing guidelines."

Stewart, a leading civil rights attorney for 30 years, was convicted in 2005 on frame-up charges of conspiracy to aid and abet terrorism. Her crime? She issued a press release on behalf of her client, the "blind sheik" Omar Abdel Rachman, a leading Egyptian Islamic cleric who was also a victim of the U.S. "war on terror." Rachman was subjected to a government-instigated frame-up trial and convicted of conspiracy to destroy New York buildings. Typical of "conspiracy" convictions, no evidence of wrongdoing was presented at his trial other than the fact that he attended a meeting where some participants proposed the bombings that Rachman outright rejected.

A leading critic of the U.S.-backed Hosni Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt, he is currently serving a life sentence in Rochester, Minn. His case was the subject



of national attention a few months ago when Egypt's new president, Mohammad Morsi, embarrassed the Obama administration by demanding his release.

Lynne's attorneys explained on Sept. 24, "The clock now starts running on our Petition for Certiorari to the Supreme Court. We have 90 days to get it filed (with the possibility of a 30-day extension)."

Lynne's lengthy 2005 trial, which this writer attended for weeks on end, was replete with violations of basic democratic rights, all of which will be the basis of her upcoming appeal. The presiding judge allowed the introduction of massive "evidence of terrorist activities" without a single indication of Stewart's involvement. Indeed, much of this "evidence," in the form of press clippings, had been given to Lynne's defense

team by the government itself during the discovery process—again, and in all cases, without the slightest indication of Stewart's involvement.

When Lynne's attorney at that time, Michael Tigar, objected to the press clippings being introduced to the jury on the grounds that they were entirely hearsay, the judge agreed but nevertheless allowed them to be presented to indicate the mind of the defendant.

Lynne is incarcerated at FMC Carswell outside of Fort Worth, Texas. She has successfully recovered from a difficult surgery that was spitefully delayed by prison authorities. For 45 days Lynne was denied all visitors, mail and other basic prison "rights" on the trumped-up accusation that she violated prison rules in assisting a fellow prisoner to certify a legal document. Her spirits are high and she is now going through a backlog of some 100-plus letters from friends and supporters.

Write Lynne at: Lynne Stewart 53504-054, FMC Carswell, P.O. Box 27137, Ft. Worth, TX 76127. ■

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

## Reports from Antiwar Delegation to Pakistan

**Tuesday, Oct. 23, 7:30 p.m. Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Conn. Hear Joe Lombardo, UNAC; Judy Bello, Upstate Coalition to End Drones; Usman Khan, economist just returned from Pakistan. Room to be announced. Hosted by CCSU Youth for Socialist Action.**

**Monday, Oct. 29, 7 p.m. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Hear Joe Lombardo; Peter Lems, AFSC; others. Room to be announced. Sponsored by Philly Against War and Penn for Palestine.**

## 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 and mercenaries 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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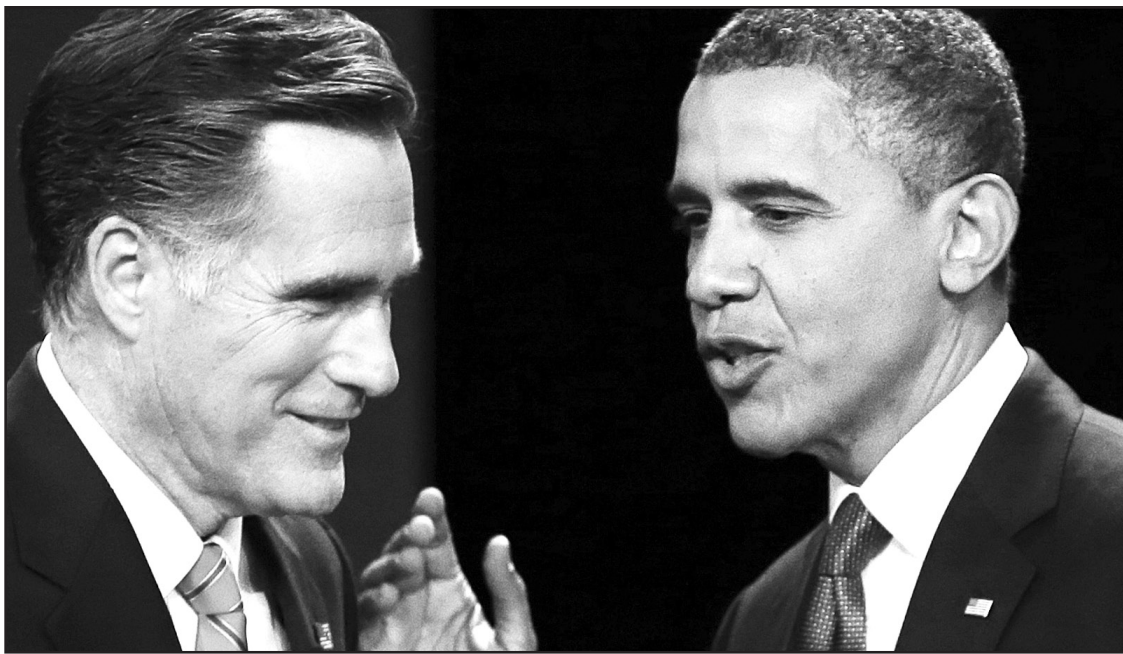
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# Presidential election: Where are the women?



By ALICE RICHARD

On Oct. 3, President Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney squared off in the first presidential debate, in which independent parties were prohibited from participating. The debate was focused on domestic policy, and the candidates primarily sparred on taxes, Social Security, and the federal deficit. Despite the White House's assurances that they are on the women's side of the War on Women, Obama's only mention of women was an anecdote about his grandmother. Nobody mentioned that October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Many have blamed moderator Jim Lehrer for not asking any questions on women's issues, but Lehrer does not write the questions. In fact, a private nonprofit corporation named the Commission on Presidential Debates crafts the event. The CPD claims to be non-partisan; however, its co-chairs are Frank Fahrenkopf Jr., chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1983-1989, and Mike McCurry, press secretary of the Clinton administration. The rest of the board reads as a who's who of Democratic and Republican party stalwarts, and wealthy philanthropists. No other parties are represented. The content and style of the debates is primarily decided by the campaigns themselves. The Commission brings the production to fruition and makes sure that the moderators are to the candidates' liking.

The CPD has had the same Executive Director since its inception, Janet H. Brown. In 1988 Brown held a press conference about the League of Women Voters (LWV) announcement that they will no longer host presidential debates. In response to a question asking whether the next debate would happen, Brown said, "We will wait to see what is the consensus of the two campaigns."

While Brown's statements dodged the issue of accountability to the American people, the LWV's state-

ment from October 1988 was quite clear: "The League of Women Voters is withdrawing sponsorship of the presidential debates ... because the demands of the two campaign organizations would perpetrate a fraud on the American voter. It has become clear to us that the candidates' organizations aim to add debates to their list of campaign-trail charades devoid of substance, spontaneity and answers to tough questions. The League has no intention of becoming an accessory to the hoodwinking of the American public."

The independent media show "Democracy Now!" sponsored a debate that allowed Green Party candidate Jill Stein and Justice Party candidate Rocky Anderson to respond to the same questions asked of Obama and Romney. Neither candidate brought up women's issues, such as contraception or equal wages. As for health care, candidate Anderson said that he supported a "single-payer Medicare-for-all system," and candidate Stein said that she supported Medicare for all.

A closer look at both the Green and Justice Parties' platforms on women reveal a disconcerting lack of information. Rocky Anderson wrote that he supports abstinence for teens; the statement appeared in an article about parental notification, under a section entitled Family Planning, which is the party's one and only allusion to women's issues. The Green Party does have a section on Women's Rights, which has two points: supporting UN protocol to prevent human trafficking, and a call for the U.S. to ratify the UN Women's Bill of Rights. This bill was signed by the U.S. in 1980, and calls for the signatory parties "to adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women" [Article 2(b)]. The Green Party does not propose any actions that would enact this Bill of Rights.

For two years, the media has been covering the War



(Above) Slutwalks, in 2011, focused on issue of rape and marked a new wave of mass protests for women's rights.

on Women. This war, waged against contraception, abortion, and employment rights, has been framed as being perpetrated primarily by Republicans and other right-wing groups such as the Tea Party. The Democrats have managed to escape blame for allowing anti-women laws to be passed, emphasizing their support for such legislation as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and the Affordable Care Act (popularly known as "Obamacare").

However, these legislative initiatives do very little to protect the rights of women in practice. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act provides women with more time to file a complaint of pay discrimination based on gender, but doesn't make any provisions for fair pay. Biden's VAWA is up for reauthorization this year, but the Democrats have not fought to maintain it, and as we go to press it has not been reauthorized.

Finally, Obamacare, which mandates that all Americans purchase private health insurance, has many loopholes that allow employers to decline giving women coverage for contraception and birth control. It must also be remembered that the anti-women Stupak Amendment to the health-care bill, which de-funded insurance coverage for abortions, was proposed by a Democrat.

While paying occasional lip service to women in order to garner votes, the Democrats do not stand for women's rights in practice. Casting a ballot for Obama in November will do nothing to ensure that women's rights won't continue to be rolled back at an alarming rate. Ultimately, in order to win equality, women must break politically with both capitalist parties, Democrats and Republicans, and build a mass movement in the streets. ■

By DANIEL ADAM

## Obama demands detention without trial

Four years ago, Barack Obama ran for president on the promise of closing the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, within one year of taking office. Today, the prison remains open—the pledge all but forgotten. Instead of dismantling Guantanamo and with it the government's power to detain without a trial, Obama wants to expand this power and apply it to U.S. citizens and non-citizens alike. He is attempting to legalize through courts and legislation what Bush merely asserted through executive opinion.

On Dec. 31, 2011, the president signed into law the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act, with a key provision that allows the U.S. government to imprison any person without trial or charges who is deemed a member of, or having "substantially supported" the Taliban, al-Qaeda, or "associated forces." In January, Chris Hedges filed a lawsuit against the law and was joined by several other activists and journalists (including Daniel Elsberg and Noam Chomsky).

In court hearings the Obama administration refused to define terms such as "associated forces" and "substantially support" or say whether or not the plain-

tiffs could be imprisoned without trial for the journalistic and political activity they already practice. The government has refused to say whether people are already detained under this law, and has claimed that it would have the right to do so under previous laws anyhow.

In May, federal Judge Katherine Forrest issued an order temporarily blocking the government from using this provision. On Sept. 12 she ruled the indefinite detention provision unconstitutional, with an order to permanently bar its use. Forrest found that terms like "associated forces" and "substantial support" are so vague as to make it possible to detain people for the most basic exercise of free speech and political activity.

The Obama administration responded without delay, filing in rapid succession an appeal to overturn Forrest's ruling and an emergency stay (to keep her ruling from going into effect during the appeals process). The stay was granted, and the appeal will go to the Second Circuit Court. If Forrest's ruling is upheld there, the case will have nowhere left to go but the Supreme Court.

The determination with which Obama has defended this law now makes it clear that he favored it all along. The grand legislative good cop/bad cop routine has been exposed in court by a few activists.

Of course, turning back the 800-year-old right to a trial is only one part of Obama's drive to strengthen the state's repressive powers. Obama has claimed—and exercised—the right to assassinate U.S. citizens at will. He has gone to great lengths to defend torturers and war criminals, even leading an unprecedented campaign against those who expose these crimes. He has indicted six government whistle-blowers under the 1917 Espionage Act—twice the number indicted under all previous administrations combined. His administration has continued the policy of pre-emptive prosecution (a combination of frame-ups and criminalization of thought) and has overseen FBI raids and subpoenas of 23 labor, antiwar, and international solidarity activists.

Yet this wave of repression is by no means invincible. A national defense campaign prevented Chicano and antiwar activist Carlos Montes from serving a

lengthy sentence on trumped up charges. Twenty-two other activists targeted with FBI intimidation have refused to testify at grand juries after two years of subpoenas, and have yet to be charged with contempt. The movement against the NDAA has won enough traction to win a rare (though fleeting) court victory and expose the real objectives of the Obama administration.

In the face of this offensive in general and in each particular case, we have a choice. We can remain silent, and embolden the reaction. Or we can use each instance of repression to educate, find allies, and inspire thousands and millions with confidence and determination through independent mass action in defense of our basic rights.

Capitalists may break their own laws when expedient, but their rule depends upon a widespread belief in their system's morality and a fear of their power. When masses of working and oppressed people lose both of these through education, experience, and struggle, the continued existence of capitalism is put into question. ■

# \$243,000 in attorney fees levied against SA National Secretary Jeff Mackler

By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS

In late July 2012 San Francisco Superior Court Judge Curtis E.A. Karnow imposed \$243,279.50 in punitive attorney fees against Socialist Action National Secretary Jeff Mackler and five other plaintiffs, who, two years earlier, had filed a law suit against the state of California challenging important provisions of Proposition 14, the new and infamous "Top Two" election law.

Top Two, the product of a bipartisan vote in the California State Legislature, was in significant part aimed at banning minority parties and candidates from fully participating in the electoral process. The law bans write-in campaigns outright and forces candidates who are not "ballot qualified" and who run in a now mandated "open primary" to identify themselves as "no party preference" despite the fact that they are members of political parties.

Mackler, who ran an effective 2006 Socialist Action write-in campaign for the U.S. Senate, joined the lawsuit to defend these elementary democratic rights and to avert the forced designation of "no party preference" in anticipated future electoral efforts when he is well known as a national leader of Socialist Action. The five other plaintiffs in the suit were similarly members of a number of political parties that ran candidates in California.

Other opponents of Top Two, like the ballot-certified Peace and Freedom Party, have challenged the initiative on the grounds that its passage all but eliminates the right to run in general elections, as Peace and Freedom has done since the 1960s. Since only the top two candidates in the mandated primary election can run in the general election, even if the top two are members of the same party, as is today the case in some eight California election districts, minor parties are for all practical purposes banned.

Proposition 14/Top Two was backed by multimillionaire "liberal" Republican Charles Munger Jr., whose interest in the initiative, according to *Ballot Access News* editor Richard Winger, is to eliminate fringe or ultra-conservative parties or candidates from the ballot who might siphon off votes from "mainstream" California Republicans like former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Munger, who is also chair of the San-



(Left) Jeff Mackler speaks at San Francisco antiwar demonstration in March 2009.

assistance of a friendly judge, one might presume.

Some two years of litigation followed, during which time California courts rejected the challenge filed by the six plaintiffs. The matter was dropped, but not until Judge Karnow, breaking with all legal precedents, awarded Nielsen Merksamer's well-heeled clients \$243,279.50 in attorney fees against Mackler and the other plaintiffs.

California law bans such awards unless a lawsuit has harmed the "public interest." Similarly, federal law, which in this case trumps state law, prohibits the awarding of attorney fees unless a lawsuit is "frivolous." But neither Nielsen Merksamer nor Judge Karnow alleged that the original lawsuit filed by the plaintiffs met either of these criteria.

Several observers saw Karnow's decision as closer to a political act of Republican Party patronage than one in accord with an established principle—encouraging citizens to use the courts to redress legitimate grievances, in this instance the fundamental democratic right to participate in the electoral process.

The six plaintiffs immediately challenged the imposition of the punitive attorney fee award by filing a Motion for

Reconsideration, in which they are asking the very court that rendered the decision to change its mind. Within a matter of weeks, a broad range of civil and democratic rights organizations filed amicus (friend of the court) briefs, which showed that the legal fees imposed on Mackler and the other five plaintiffs violated state and federal law in a number of ways. A total of five amicus briefs were submitted to the court on the plaintiffs' behalf—an unprecedented number for any state trial court proceeding.

A joint brief was submitted by the National Lawyers Guild and the Center for Constitutional Rights by a top Los Angeles law firm (Hadsell & Stormer). The internationally prominent law firm of Orrick, Herrington and Sutcliffe submitted a brief from FairVote, a national voter rights advocacy group. The law firm of Jina

(continued on page 5)

## Hands off Iran! Dismantle all nuclear weapons, starting with those of the U.S. and Israel!

The following statement was issued on Sept. 15 by Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste (Canadian state).

Ottawa's decision to cut diplomatic ties with Iran is a desperate political move to try to sustain a reactionary and unpopular policy. Nothing to do with any Iranian threat to global peace and security, it is designed to counter the nearly total isolation of Israel and U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Clearly, Iran has the right to defend itself by any means necessary from the imperial predator states, especially the USA, which engineered the overthrow of the democratically elected government in Iran in 1953, fueled the cruel Reza Shah Pahlavi dictatorship for decades, and sponsored a devastating war against Iran (1980-1988).

The lack of evidence that Iran is nuclear-weapons capable does not deter Washington and Tel Aviv from making accusations and threats, just as George W. Bush did in 2003 to rationalize his invasion of Iraq, resulting in the death or displacement of millions of Iraqis. Self-defense is for victims, not victimizers.

Whether Iran has "the bomb" or not, the major threat of nuclear annihilation stems from the USA and its attack dog in the Middle East, the apartheid Zionist

state. Washington has by far the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, and it is the only state to use the barbaric weapon (twice against Japan in 1945).

American presidents have repeatedly threatened to deploy "the bomb," chiefly in pursuit of their corporate interests in the Middle East and Asia, but as seen in the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, not exclusively so. Israel's nuclear arsenal is the only one in the vast Arab region, signalling the ultimate price the Zionist establishment puts on terminating its illegal occupation of Palestine.

What is so galling for the White House and the Pentagon is the public relations coup Tehran scored by hosting the conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, in late August, attended by representatives of 120 countries (two-thirds of the United Nations Assembly). Could Washington and Tel Aviv attract that kind of solidarity without coercion?

Stephen Harper's hard-boiled Minister of External Affairs John Baird cites the repressive character of the Ahmadinejad regime. He accuses it of using diplomatic personnel to promote its interests and to intimidate Iranians living in Canada. To be sure, the Islamic Republic is deeply undemocratic and repressive. So is the Saudi regime, which extended its repressive force into Bahrain to quell an



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Arab Spring uprising. Recall also that the Harper Conservatives intervened in the 2006 election in Venezuela by funnelling money to the right-wing opposition.

Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste condemns all forms of oppression and exploitation. At the same time, we defend the right of oppressed nations to national self-determination. We believe it is the task of the workers and farmers of Iran to settle accounts with their ruling class, to replace the tyranny with a vibrant, pluralist, socialist democracy.

Canada's rulers could not be less interested in facilitating grassroots democracy in Iran. Their interventions in Afghanistan and Haiti attest to that.

NATO bombing of Libya, in which Canadian Forces played a despicable leading role, resulted in U.S.-engineered regime change. But it did not prevent the murder of the U.S. ambassador in Benghazi on Sept. 11. Should Washington and Ottawa now break relations with the government they helped to install in Libya? Do they have a similar political "make-over" in mind for Syria? Protests this week across the Muslim world show what is in store for the Western powers if they continue to bomb, invade and occupy foreign lands.

Socialist revolution from within, not imperialist intervention, is the road to genuine democracy and social justice. NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair is wrong to pause, wrong to invite Harper to further explain his reactionary diplomatic move. International working-class solidarity starts with opposition to the schemes of our own ruling class and their state, and by clearly opposing the war drive of the Western powers. A crucial task in this regard is to strengthen the broad, united front, action-oriented antiwar movement, and to appeal to the Iranian community to be a prominent part of it.

Demonstrate the opposition of immigrants, workers, youths, women, seniors, NDPers, and the entire labour movement to the impending blood bath.

Hands Off Iran! Restore diplomatic relations now! Canada Out of NATO! NATO out of Afghanistan! Disarm the war makers, starting at home! Money for public health, education, housing and good jobs, not for war! Workers to power, from Iran to Egypt, and beyond! ■

# European workers mobilize against austerity

Angel Navarrete / Bloomberg

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Last month saw huge street mobilizations in several European countries in which the working class has been besieged by austerity demands by their governments and the European Union. Demonstrations and general strikes took place in Portugal, Spain, and Greece.

On Sept. 26, over 100,000 people marched in Athens as workplaces closed down in a 24-hour general strike across the country. The airport closed for several hours, and shops, museums, transportation, and shipping stayed shut for the day.

While political activity was relatively subdued following the national elections last June, anger has burst forward once again as the government proposes a new round of cuts in order to secure aid from the EU and the International Monetary Fund.

This will mean more attempts to slash wages and jobs. Already, the official unemployment rate is about 24 percent, and 55 percent among young people. The government also wants to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67, to reduce social benefits, cut spending on education and health care, and to close or privatize public facilities.

The strike and main rally was called by the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), the union of civil servants (ADEDY)—the two largest union federations. PAME, a union attached to the Communist Party (KKE), held a separate rally.

ANTARSYA, the coalition of revolutionary organizations that the Fourth International-affiliated group, OKDE-Spartacos, participates in, fully supported the Sept. 26 strike. A day earlier, the Central Coordinating Committee of ANTARSYA issued a statement that said in part: "We need to take the streets again. To continue where we left it at, with strikes and demonstrations, occupations and mobilization in central squares. To organize resistance and solidarity. Through class reconstruction of the labor movement, with movements operating as safety nets, with popular assemblies everywhere. With an anti-capitalist program that opens a different path in the face of destruction. ...

"We live at a critical time when the crisis deepens and the explosive contradictions of the Eurozone are made bare, when political crisis becomes more acute, and when the limits and insufficiency of the left "Europeanism" and "governmentalism" are obvious. New great possibilities are emerging for a left anticapitalist intervention and the rallying of the forces around a nec-



essary anti-capitalist program. ...

"ANTARSYA addresses a combatant call for common head on action to every activist, every collective, every force etc that is oriented towards a politics of rupture and subversion. Now, more than ever before, it is the time for all forces that move in an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-EU direction to join forces. ANTARSYA seeks to open the discussion for left politics today and the necessary revolutionary strategy for the period we live in."

Eleven days earlier, on Sept. 15, Portugal was shaken by a giant outpouring of workers into the streets. One million people demonstrated (a tenth of the country's population), including 500,000 in Lisbon, against the calls for increased austerity.

This was the largest demonstration since the downfall of the Salazar regime in 1974. However, Rui Pereira Viana, an activist in the Committee for the Cancellation of the Portuguese Debt, pointed out in the Fourth International journal *International Viewpoint* that "there is a significant difference between the two dates. On May 1, 1974, when a million people invaded the streets of Lisbon, what was striking was the way people laughed and hugged each other, after the fall of the Salazar dictatorship, which had taken place on 25 April with the Carnation Revolution. On September 15, 2012, it was this joy that was missing in the streets of Lisbon and Porto."

Pereira Viana stated that the official slogans for the demonstration made the reasons for the revolt quite clear: "Out with the Troika!" "We want our lives!" "We have to do something extraordinary!"

"Everything is implied in these three sentences," he wrote: "The urgency of bringing down the government, putting an end to the policy of austerity, reconnecting with the social functions of the state, suspending the payment of the illegitimate debt that benefits capital and dispossesses workers."

Pereira Viana noted that "with an obvious lack of a sense of timing, two days after the calling of the demonstration, the Prime Minister announced the most offensive measures that workers could remember: an increase of 7 per cent in the social contributions paid by workers accompanied by a cut of 5.75 per cent in employers' contributions and additional cuts in the social functions of the state. This measure comes on top of the previous austerity measures and involves a new wage reduction of at least 8.5 per cent." After the marches had taken place, however, the government felt compelled to announce that it was withdrawing the most recent tax measures (though new measures might be imposed later).

In the Spanish state, on Sept. 25, tens of thousands attempted to "encircle" the seat of parliament in Madrid. Jan Malewski wrote in *International Viewpoint* that "amid cries of 'Democracy

(Above) Police attack protesters near parliament in Madrid, Sept. 25.

kidnapped!' and 'Government resign!' the demonstrators first organized massive popular assemblies, before heading for Neptune square, facing Parliament. ... More than 1300 special anti-riot police officers were mobilized. They charged, firing rubber bullets, leading to confrontations that continued through the night, leaving more than 60 wounded with at least 35 arrests.

"However, the next day on Sept. 26, thousands again gathered before the Parliament. And the government, conscious of its growing social discredit, began to see that neither its campaign nor the police deployment had succeeded in intimidating the tens of thousands of people who denounced the sequestration of the presumed 'seat of popular sovereignty' by the 'dictatorship of the markets.'"

Malewski noted that in both Portugal and Spain (unlike in Greece), "these great popular mobilizations have been initiated by new social movements and not by the big trade unions or political parties of the traditional left." This, he said, "amounts to a new stage of the rupture with the historic organizations of the workers' movement, locked into conservatism and increasingly clear in their heated defense of the status quo, and thus, in the eyes of a growing mass of those in revolt, useless if not hostile organizations." ■

## ... Attorney fees

(continued from page 4)

Nam & Associates submitted a joint brief by Ralph Nader and the Center for Competitive Democracy and another by author, political reformer, and rank choice voting advocate Steven Hill. Finally, the law firm of Walter Riley, a prominent Oakland civil rights attorney, submitted a brief on behalf of the Alexander Meiklejohn Institute.

In a stunningly arrogant manner, Nielsen Merksamer demanded what amounted to an illegal "emergency" (ex parte) hearing before Judge Karnow—essentially insisting that he dismiss the plaintiff's Motion for Reconsideration outright. Gautam Dutta, the plaintiff's attorney, appeared the very next day before a packed courtroom of 50-plus plaintiff supporters and demanded that Judge Karnow recuse himself from the proceeding and that the court reject the Nielsen "emergency" demand to dismiss.

Karnow, who had the option to challenge the demand

that he recuse himself, declined to do so. Nielsen's motion to dismiss was rejected and a new court date of Oct. 22, instead of Oct. 3, was set to hear the plaintiff's Motion to Reconsider. Such a motion is rarely granted in California courts. In this case, however, the action imposing the draconian and unprecedented attorney fee stands in such blatant violation of state and federal law that the punitive "SLAPP suit" might well be dismissed and the matter ended on Oct. 22.

Karnow's decision to recuse himself could be an indication that he has no further interest in pursuing this matter in what began as a David and Goliath battle between the huge and moneyed Nielsen law firm and a single attorney representing six dedicated plaintiffs seeking justice.

With the unprecedented amicus briefs filed by other major law firms on behalf of nationally recognized civil and democratic organizations, the plaintiffs are justified in expecting a victory on Oct. 22. But in these troubled times when basic democratic rights and civil liberties, including the right to participate in the electoral process, are under attack across the country, nothing can be taken for granted.

Should this repressive and illegal fine be affirmed, the plaintiffs will have no alternative but to appeal to the California courts and then, if necessary, to the U.S. Supreme Court—a sobering prospect. Equally worrisome, the financial clock is ticking and the original punishing imposition of \$243,279.50 can only be expected to mount with each appeal.

Needless to say, the chilling effect of this case could be considerable. Legally, the result not only undermines public policy but violates outright the protections afforded to public-interest plaintiffs under both federal and state law. Unless it is reversed, this unprecedented, unjust ruling could have sweeping consequences over a far broader range of issues and litigants than the underlying dispute (which addresses the merits of the Top Two Primary's enabling legislation).

Supporters of Jeff Mackler and the other plaintiffs plan to attend the San Francisco Superior Court hearing at 9:30 a.m. on Oct. 22 at 400 McAllister Street at Polk. Please come 30 minutes early, as you have to clear security. All supporters of democratic rights are urged to join them. ■



## Video flap distracts from Arab revolution

By ANDREW POLLACK

On Sept. 11, demonstrations broke out in several predominantly Muslim countries as news spread of a viciously anti-Islamic video produced in the United States. Crowds gathered in front of U.S. embassies and consulates, in some cases storming them. In Benghazi, Libya, a U.S. diplomatic building was attacked and four U.S. officials, including the ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, were killed.

The Obama administration later tried to portray that incident as a long-planned “al-Qaeda” attack using the video controversy as cover. It’s too early to tell who was really behind the attack, but what matters far more is how the media has used this whole episode to further inflame anti-Islamic sentiment, while it continues to ignore the real, and far more massive, protests throughout the Arab world for social justice, independence, and democracy.

Soon after the Benghazi attack, numerous Muslim groups in various countries held protests and issued statements lamenting the deaths of Stevens and his colleagues. This reflected in part ongoing discomfort among progressive activists in the region with attempts by fundamentalist elements to portray themselves as the leaders of the uprising of the last two years. But these apologetic protests also represented confusion or even outright misrepresentation concerning the role of Stevens and his colleagues.

A *New York Times* article titled “Deadly Attack in Libya Was Major Blow to C.I.A. Efforts” reported, “The attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans has dealt the Central Intelligence Agency a major setback in its intelligence-gathering efforts at a time of increasing instability in the North African nation. Among the more than two dozen American personnel evacuated from the city after the assault on the American mission and a nearby annex were about a dozen C.I.A. operatives and contractors, who played a crucial role in conducting surveillance and collecting information on an array of armed militant groups in and around the city.”

“It’s a catastrophic intelligence loss,” said one American official ... “We got our eyes poked out.” CIA personnel carried out their secret missions, said the paper, in the very building where Stevens was killed.

Stevens himself, while lionized as a “friend of Arabs,” a gentle, humor-loving diplomat, was in fact part and parcel of the imperialist intelligence-gathering operation. Typical of some of the frequently Orientalist tributes to him was that “he understood the Arabs.”

But he was not just a wine-sipping, reception-holding diplomat. Stevens has been the main political point person for the U.S. in its military intervention in Libya. Before that, he had served in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel and, said *The New York Times*, “in State Depart-

ment offices overseeing policy in the region. He served as the deputy chief of mission in the [Libyan] capital, Tripoli, from 2007 to 2009 during the relatively brief easing of tensions with Colonel Qaddafi’s government.” His postings in the other countries named (including Egypt under Mubarak) meant he was a key political operative in Washington’s political interaction with those dictatorial regimes.

He was, in sum, a fixer, an operative gathering information and engaging in talks with the rulers of those countries on behalf of U.S. imperialism. In that respect, he was more like Graham Greene’s “Quiet American”—a meddler on behalf of empire—than the diplomatic figurehead portrayed in encomiums delivered after his death.

### “Why don’t they thank us?”

U.S. government officials and the media used these events as proof of the “ingratitude” of countries that Washington had supposedly helped free from dictatorship—ignoring the fact that the U.S. had backed Mubarak et al. right up until the moment of their departure, had long dealt with Gadhafi before falling out with him and bombarding Libya with planes and missiles, and continues to support the most pro-imperialist, anti-democratic forces in the region. For the masses in these countries, in contrast, the video was symbolic of the humiliating scorn, slander, and lies heaped upon them by Western powers for centuries.

Vijay Prashad, in his article “Libyan Humiliation a Driving Force for Anti-Americanism” (*Alakhbar English*, Sept. 12, 2012), noted that this is not the first such protest in Benghazi, and he listed rallies, building invasions, and bomb incidents in January, April, May, and August of this year against Libyan government, UN, and Western diplomatic targets. “Frustration with the West is commonplace amongst sections of society who are not Gaddafi loyalists, but on the contrary fought valiantly in the 2011 civil war against Gaddafi. The NATO intervention did not mollify a much more fundamental grievance they have against the US-UK, namely the sense of humiliation of the Arab world against the arrogance of Western domination in cultural and political terms.”

“An earlier incident helps to highlight this point. In late 2005, protests across the world took place in reaction to a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, publishing cartoons that demeaned the Prophet Mohammad. This upsurge came to eastern Libya in early 2006 when an Italian minister, Roberto Calderoli, wore a t-shirt that bore that offensive cartoon. A demonstration of more than 1,000 people, mainly political Islamists and pious Muslims, gathered in front of the Italian consulate in Benghazi. ... The Gaddafi regime sent in its armed police, who opened fire, killing 11. After the police firing, a section of the middle class that was not sympathetic to the Islamists turned against the Gaddafi regime, and demanded justice not

only around the 2006 incident but also for families of those members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and others massacred in Abu Salim prison in 1996.”

It was a February 2011 protest in Benghazi commemorating the 2006 incident that kicked off the anti-Gadhafi rebellion.

Prashad describes outrage at Gadhafi’s collaboration with imperialism in repressing demonstrations against European slanders of Islam, as well as his help in aiding Western powers via detention and torture. The CIA had in fact been welcomed to Libya by Gadhafi in 2004. British intelligence agents were similarly welcomed, and collaboration in matters of detention and torture begun.

Another source of discontent in the country is the rigged elections this July, which, said Prashad, “were celebrated in the West, since it seemed that unlike Tunisia and Egypt, the Islamists had not garnered the fruits of the revolts. The neo-liberal sections, led by Mahmoud Jibril’s National Forces Alliance won a majority. ... His victory in the polls vindicated NATO, which now felt that it had its man in charge—open to sweetheart deals for Western oil companies and eager to push further the neo-liberal agenda that was constrained five years ago.”

The rules for the July elections favored Jibril’s Alliance and were skewed against Islamist candidates. “The results of the July elections, therefore, are not representative of the social character of the country, where political Islam plays an important role. Talk of the ‘defeat’ of the Islamists in the ballot box further inflames a section that believes that it remains integral to the future of Libya.”

The humiliation cited by Prashad was reinforced by government and media commentary in imperialist countries on the protests, which ranged from outrage at the “ingratitude” of the Arab masses for non-existent aid in freeing themselves from

dictators, to reinforcement of anti-Islamic stereotypes, such as the cover of *Newsweek* featuring a photo of bearded, angry Muslim men with the headline “Muslim Rage.”

Meanwhile, throughout the days surrounding these events, the quieter, more bureaucratic official policy of Islamophobia continued apace as Obama’s drones continued to rain down death, with a formal declaration that any adult male could be considered a legitimate target without any evidence. And the focus on the video protests served Washington as a useful distraction from the ongoing regional revolt. Arab revolutionaries noted the discrepancy in size between the anti-video protests and the far larger rallies in recent years against local dictators and Western intervention.

In fact, at the very same time that the video protests were occurring, significant developments in the anti-dictator, anti-imperialist revolt in the region were taking place. Protests broke out in the West Bank against Palestinian Authority-imposed price increases. Those protests, mobilizing thousands, also explicitly denounced the PA’s broader neoliberal economic policies, as well as the Paris Protocols, the economic component of the Oslo Accords, in which the PLO leadership formally agreed to its subservient status vis-à-vis Israel.

In Egypt, on Sept. 16 and 17, a new wave of strikes broke out among school staff and students, transport workers, and others. Protests were also held against IMF attempts to impose new debt on the country.

### Anti-Islam, anti-Palestinian ads in N.Y.

Later in September, U.S.-based Islamophobe and Arab-hater Pamela Geller sparked off a parallel controversy as she brought to New York’s transit system racist ads that she had earlier paid to display in San Francisco. The ads declared, “In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad.” Local activists mobilized quickly to denounce the ads via social media, pickets, and “correcting” the ads by putting antiracist, pro-Palestine stickers on top of them.

Geller is part of a multi-national anti-Muslim, anti-Arab network of bigots, a network whose leading lights have been cited in the scribbles of such mass murderers as Norwegian right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik. Her stunt comes after a months-long wave of anti-Islamic violence (see article in our last issue) in the U.S. involving murder, beatings, and mosque desecration.

Geller’s opponents noted that the alleged “civilized/savage” dichotomy is an exact replica of the ideological justification for wars of genocide against Africans and African-Americans, Native Americans and Latin@s, Palestinians, and other nationalities whose land various imperialist overlords wanted to seize.

Columbia Professor Hamid Dabashi, writing in *Al Jazeera English*, also noted a parallel in Mitt Romney’s

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## ... Anti-Muslim video

(continued from page 6)

description of 47% of Americans as “freeloaders.” Of course, Obama holds the same disdain for working people as Romney, but carries it out in practice without the inflammatory rhetoric.

Dabashi himself noted, “The thick vulgarity of the [Geller] ad turns it into a caricature, safely distances it from Harvard political scientists theorizing ‘the clash of civilisation,’ as it distances it from the very core of American imperialism, so that once this minor disorder is thus identified and acknowledged as ‘a trivial and disgraceful pustule,’ the real problem—namely the fact that the entire American foreign policy, its demonization of Muslims in the courses it teaches in its military academies, its flushing the Quran down the toilet by way of torturing Muslim ‘savages,’ by drone attacks on innocent people in Pakistan or Afghanistan, and by its unconditional support for Israel repeatedly articulated by President Obama—are all evaded, never even named, and thereby exorcised.

“The ad is not an exception that proves a rule, but an exception that camouflages the rule.”

While many mainstream pundits complain about the “lack of respect for freedom of speech” that the protests against the video and Geller’s ad supposedly reveal, these same pundits have ignored the growing efforts of Zionists in the U.S. to ban anti-Zionist speakers and shut down events critical of Zionism, claiming they are supposedly “anti-Semitic.”



(Above) Cyrus McGoldrick, advocacy director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, takes a photo of Pam Geller’s anti-Muslim, pro-Zionist ad in New York’s Times Square subway station, Sept. 24.

By ANDREW POLLACK

## Mass anti-militia protests in Libya

In the article above, we note the varied motives of those Arab and Muslim forces protesting the assault on the U.S. diplomatic/spy compounds in Benghazi. Nowhere was the reaction more dramatic than in Libya itself, where many of those who had welcomed Gadhafi’s fall from power have been growing increasingly tired of the behavior of sectarian militias who participated in the uprising, some of whom the new imperialist-backed government has relied on to keep it in power and to police the country.

Andrea Khalil and Malak Bouod, in their article at *jadaliyya.com*, “Libyan Eastern Tribal Chiefs, Population, and Government,” described a meeting organized by tribal chiefs in the country’s eastern region (where Benghazi sits) after the assault on the U.S. sites. The chiefs invited government officials, but made it clear that the latter were there to listen, not decide.

The central demand of the meeting was that the militias give up their weapons and

dissolve, and that the government take responsibility for all military and policing functions. Many of those at the meeting condemned recent attacks on Sufi shrines and other criminal acts of the militias, condemnations which have been widespread among Libyans and Libyan expats in social media in recent weeks.

The meeting condemned the attack on the U.S. site, as well as “kidnappings and ‘disappearances’ committed by armed brigades operating outside the control of the military and police.” But they also warned against the act being used “as a pretext for foreign military intervention in Libya.”

The declarations of the chiefs match growing dissatisfaction with the continued chaos in the country since Gadhafi’s fall. Khalil and Bouod cite opinion polls in which 70% of those surveyed ranked “fighting crime and disorder” as their first, second, or third priority, with 51% saying it was their first priority.

The authors admitted that the tribal chiefs who ran the meeting are neither elected nor representative of any grassroots organizations, but say that the space they’ve opened in defiance of the government could be filled by youth and other “civil society groups.” There is evidence both for and against this thesis.

On the one hand, on Friday, Sept. 21, over 30,000 Libyans stormed some militia bases, forcing them to dissolve and leave their weapons behind. The demonstration, said Khalil and Bouod, “was organized by a leaderless group of thirty to forty activists, with no dominant political affiliations or ties to NGOs. It was a well-organized, carefully thought-out demonstration that sought to draw the biggest and most peaceful crowds possible.”

If the tens of thousands involved can become organized by neighborhood, by workplace, by campus or profession, this would over time, and with proper leader-

ship, give the masses the sense that they, and not the government or sectarian militias, can be the sole power in the country.

But for now the apparent leaders of the anti-militia movement seek instead to reinforce the authority of the new bourgeois government—an authority that the timid and insecure government prefers to share with the sectarian militias.

As *Al-Jazeera* reported, “Since the killing of Stevens, the Libyan government has taken a two-track approach—shutting down Islamist militias like Ansar al-Sharia that operated without official government permission, but also offering public backing to many of the most powerful armed groups, which have official licenses to operate.”

Thus, when the masses showed eagerness to go again into the streets the following Friday to deal with the remaining militias, both government officials and religious leaders begged them to stay home.

## Pakistan factory fires claim lives of 300 workers

By USMAN KHAN YUSUFZAI

On the evening of Sept. 11, a massive fire engulfed the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Karachi, killing at least 258 workers in the worst industrial accident in Pakistan’s history. All but one exit to the factory and all the windows were locked, trapping many workers inside. Several hours earlier, in Lahore, a shoe factory burned down, killing 25 workers.

Preliminary reports indicate that both the fires may have been caused by faulty electrical wiring; in the case of the Karachi fire, sparks from wiring may have caused a boiler to explode, igniting the blaze, although investigation results are largely inconclusive. The factory owners, Abdul Aziz Bhaila and his son Arshad Bhaila, were arrested in Larkana and charged with murder. The Sindh High Court granted them interim bail until Oct. 6.

Ali Enterprises produces garments, especially jeans and hosiery, for export to Europe and the United States. According to Pakistan’s National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), most of the workers at the factory were not registered for any of the government’s social insurance programs, which provide pensions, income support, and representation in labor disputes.

The factory was not registered with the Labour Department, which would typically provide for regular safety inspections. Industrial labor in Pakistan is governed by the Factory Act of 1934, passed under the British colonial government before the partition of India.

The fires highlight the appalling conditions faced



(Left) Relatives mourn workers killed in Karachi garment factory fire on Sept. 11.

countries, where workers can be paid far less and without labor protections that get in the way of the extraction of surplus and the pursuit of profit.

The result is a race to the bottom, in which smaller capitalists in the developing world compete with each other to provide export goods at the lowest possible cost, resulting in the extensive use of child labor, unpaid overtime, industrial accidents, and the ruined lives of countless millions of workers. The Pakistani garment industry is notorious for the use of child labor and the locking of workers in factories during the working day.

Several weeks earlier, the factory was given an SA8000 certification by Social Accountability International (SAI), indicating that it had “met international standards in nine areas, including health and safety, child labor, and minimum wage.” SAI provides monitoring services for labor conditions at low-cost suppliers in the developing world; it is primarily funded by corporate backers, which is a clear indicator that the organization is merely an arm of the capitalist class, rather than one that fights for workers’ protection.

In response to the fires, the Labour Party of Pakistan and the NTUF called for a general strike on Sept. 15. They were joined by several groups associated with Sindh nationalist parties who were already planning actions in response to a local government ordinance, leading to violent clashes with the police in Hyderabad and Thar. In addition, the National Students Federation organized an occupation of Baldia Town, the district in which the factory was located, which began on Sept. 29.

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## Auto Workers pact with Big 3 deals major setback to labour

By BRUCE ALLEN

Vice president of CAW Local 199, and V.P. Niagara Regional Labour Council (writing in a personal capacity)

Three years ago, General Motors and Chrysler workers made massive contract concessions. In fact, GM workers experienced two rounds of concessions bargaining in less than a year, the Harper government enforcing even

greater rollbacks than GM said it needed. Following that enormous historic defeat, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) leadership loudly but unconvincingly assured their members that we would fight again another day.

Three years later, “another day” has come and gone, without a fight and with more concessions at GM, Ford, and Chrysler. The latest concessions are unprecedented, particularly with respect to new hires.

The CAW long denounced the two-tier wage agree-

ments accepted by the UAW in the U.S. Now the CAW has all but completely acquiesced to that type of arrangement. New hires will be paid approximately \$14 per hour less than regular workers. It will take them 10 years to attain the full rate, which will remain virtually unchanged for many years to come—plus it will take a full six years just to reach 70 per cent of the full rate.

Worse, new hires will see deductions from their wages go towards the cost of their pensions, which will be seriously inferior to those available to current employees, while current employees experience no wage deductions that go towards their pensions. In effect, the CAW has accepted a blatant system of two-tier pensions. New hires will also get much less vacation time.

All of this will result in a windfall of additional profits for the Detroit Three auto corporations’ Canadian operations, and it will accelerate the general decline of living standards for industrial workers in Canada. The time when autoworkers led the way in raising the living standards for industrial workers in Canada are long gone. Now they are leading the way downwards. And the CAW is functioning like a conduit for capital’s onslaught against labour.

Current active employees at the Detroit Three in Canada will share in the pain of these long-term collective agreements—in force until 2016. There are no wage increases at all. There will be only one cost of living increase—in the last quarter. Built-in COLA is replaced by lump-sum payments, cynically timed to be paid just before Christmas, when autoworkers used to get a seasonal bonus.

Simply stated, this means autoworkers will experience a steady decline in real income over the next four years. So will retired autoworkers. They have already been stripped of COLA on their pensions and they suffer a very inferior two-tier benefit package, which is steadily eroding.

None of this has been justified by declarations that new product investment has been acquired. There are no new products to be built in Canadian auto plants. Now the sorry, but all too familiar refrain is that we are living in tough times, faced with policies from hostile governments, including a high dollar. These excuses simply signal that there is no reason to expect anything but more of the same, even with the approaching CAW-CEP merger, and with very serious consequences for labour as a whole, particularly in terms of living standards. No one is now proclaiming we will “fight again another day.”

A very bleak future lies ahead, unless we see the emergence of a rank and file-based opposition to the current leadership—a class-conscious movement that recognizes that calling a halt to the ongoing retreat is imperative to keep us from going from very bad to even worse. ■

(Left) The Oct. 6 antiwar march in Toronto was one of many worldwide events marking the 11th anniversary of the war in Afghanistan.

Photo: Walid Sabihuddin



## Queer rights set bar higher — even in baseball

By JOHN WILSON

The recent furor over Blue Jays baseball player Yunel Escobar’s anti-gay slur has subsided, but it demonstrates a number of things.

(Escobar played through a game with the words “Tu Ere [sic] Maricón” [“you’re a faggot”] outlined in his under-eye shadowing. This was caught on camera by a fan and went viral.)

Blue Jays honchos responded with a three-day suspension and an obviously insincere apology by Escobar. The fact that a penalty was imposed at all tends to show that there is increased sensitivity even in the corporate media to homophobia. There were fewer than the expected phony excuses offered for Escobar’s conduct, and plenty of outrage at the slap-on-the-wrist penalty. His financial penalty was less than \$100,000 out of a multi-million-dollar salary!

The increased awareness of homophobia in Ontario has several sources. At its heart is the determined struggle by queer rights activists and their allies that resulted recently in victory on two major issues:

The passage of “Toby’s Law” mandates inclusion in the Ontario Human Rights Act of gender identity and gender expression. The Accepting Schools Act addresses the issue of anti-gay bullying, specifying that students in Catholic schools have the right to form Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and to name them whatever they wish (see *Socialist Action*, August 2011).

Both these victories, and the more recent one of Quebec students on the tuition hikes issue, show that when you fight uncompromisingly for what you want, you can win. That’s not guaranteed, of course. What is guaranteed is that if you don’t fight, you lose.

Another victory is that Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) marched in the 2012 Toronto Pride pa-

rade with a sizeable contingent. But the fight for free speech at Pride will continue. Pro-Zionists at City Hall recently pushed through a motion via the (mayor’s) executive committee instructing city staff to amend the city’s anti-discrimination policy to prohibit the phrase “Israeli apartheid,” ignoring advice that such a manoeuvre would not survive a legal challenge.

On the gay marriage front, the latest figures from Statistics Canada show the number of same-sex marriages rose 181% between 2006 and 2011, although overall not a large number. Of course, these numbers are voluntarily provided, and many folks do not trust any government agency to maintain their privacy, so the data should be taken with a large grain of salt.

Commentators from the queer community made the point that large numbers of long-term couples have not gone the marriage route. Nonetheless, it does demonstrate that there’s a demand. This is somewhat ironic, considering that the institution of marriage is declining rapidly in most imperialist countries. ■

## Public workers show solidarity in action

By JULIUS ASCOTT

Vice president, OPSEU Local 532.

TORONTO—Anticipating the harsh wage restraint bill soon to be presented to the Ontario legislature, public-service workers put solidarity on display at a large, lunch-time rally on Sept. 12 outside the Ministry of Environment building. Nearly 170 workers rallied to save public services and jobs. Passing motorists honked their horns in support of the union flag-waving crowd. The employer could not fail to notice.

The event was co-sponsored by locals

of the bargaining units in that Ministry—the Ontario Public Service Employees Unions (OPSEU), The Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario (AMAP-CEO), and the Professional Engineers of the Government of Ontario (PEGO).

The event, the first of its kind in this round of bargaining, sets an example for workers across the province. Many yearn to see a mass rally fill Queen’s Park against the big business “austerity” agenda, and in defense of collective bargaining rights, much like the teachers’ unions demonstrated on Aug. 28 in front of the Ontario legislature.

OPSEU Local 532 took the initiative to organize the solidarity event. The aim was to cut across the rivalries that sometimes plague the labour movement. It was a good opportunity to show the em-

ployer that members of the Ontario public service, and working people in general, will not take lightly cuts to public services and attacks on the labour rights with which we won a decent standard of living—now threatened by the present crisis.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, in his spring budget, demanded major concessions to balance the books at the expense of public services. He has threatened to privatize ServiceOntario. Now he is promoting the so-called Protecting Public Services bill. It would allow the government not just to freeze the wages it pays to 500,000 unionized employees—including nurses, home-care workers and hydro linemen—but roll them back. It would give Cabinet the power to remove or modify salary grids—as was done to the province’s teachers.

The government could also unilaterally change or eliminate any non-wage benefits unionized public sector workers now receive.

And the bill would bar unions from either striking or appealing such decisions to the courts. Authoritarian powers like those could last until 2018—when the government expects the budget to balance.

Challenging such laws in court, as the education workers’ unions are doing, is grossly inadequate. Needed is a campaign to educate everyone—through action.

The time has come for an unlimited general strike. Let’s massively occupy the front lawn at the legislature. We should enlist the support of all working people and the entire public, because everyone stands to lose by the attacks on rights and services now underway. ■



# Montreal march: A celebration that demands more!

By BARRY WEISLEDER

About 2000 people braved persistent rainfall and cool temperatures on Sept. 22 to celebrate the recent partial victory of the Quebec students' movement. They rallied at Parc Lafontaine and marched through the streets of downtown Montreal, flanked by riot police armed with shields, truncheons, and rifles. The cops arrested two people for "launching projectiles," and used pepper spray on some demonstrators.

Speakers at the opening rally, organized by the largest students' federation, CLASSE, emphasized that the struggle for free post-secondary education continues. This was in the wake of the Parti Quebecois minority government decision to annul the five-year 75 per cent fee hike imposed by the Jean Charest Liberal Party regime defeated in the Sept. 4 provincial election. Premier-elect Pauline Marois said her government would substitute inflation-indexed fee increases—counter to the demand to eliminate fees.

The PQ voted in Cabinet to rescind Law 12, with its heavy fines for demonstrations without police permission, for picketing near colleges and universities, and its threats to decertify students' unions that fail to comply.

Sadly, two student federations did not endorse the Sept. 22 demonstration. Union banners were scarce too. But Professors Against the Hikes, along with several civil rights, feminist, environmentalist and political organizations, were highly visible. They were joined by a troupe of drummers, who enlivened the somewhat soggy procession.

Seven members of Toronto Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste travelled to Montreal to participate in the action. They distributed hundreds of leaflets in French urging a continuation of the campaign for free education. Socialists also demand that charges be dropped against the over 3000 people arrested in the spring and summer student protests.

The LAS stresses the need to mobilize against the bosses' agenda at all levels. This was clearly expressed on its bright yellow banner bearing the slogan, "A bas



Ryan Remiorz / The Canadian Press / AP

l'austerité capitaliste. Pouvoir aux travailleurs / travailleuses!"

The LAS held a public forum, conducted mostly in French, on the Saturday evening. A number of Quebecois activists attended and signed up to learn more about the Pan-Canadian revolutionary organization.

The PQ moved quickly in its first days in office to announce the closure of Quebec's only nuclear power facility, to end shale gas development, to cancel a loan to reopen the province's last asbestos mine, and

(Above) May 15 student protest at Lionel Grouix College in Ste. Therese, Quebec.

to remove a health-care premium. But the PQ budget, expected in early 2013, will show how the bourgeois nationalist government actually chooses to relate to the interests of students and workers. Pundits predict major cuts to social expenditures and more subsidies to business. Thus, the struggle for a just, equal, democratic, and sovereign Quebec continues. ■

## Liberals defeated; PQ untrustworthy Step up struggles against austerity!

By ROBBIE MAHOOD

MONTREAL—Coming on the heels of the mass mobilisations of Quebec's "printemps érable" (Maple Spring), the Sept. 4 vote result is disappointing. The election of a minority Parti Quebecois (PQ) government brings to an end a nine-year Liberal Party (PLQ) reign. Liberal leader Jean Charest went down to personal defeat in his Sherbrooke riding. Beyond that, there was little solace for partisans of working-class politics. The federalist bourgeoisie expressed relief that the outcome was a lot less unfavourable to their interests than they feared.

The PQ could muster only 32% of the vote and 54 seats, against 31% of the vote and 50 seats for the Liberals. Pauline Marois, Quebec's first woman premier, will lead a minority government hostage to the right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ), which captured 27% of the vote, but only 19 seats owing to the undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system. In a large number of ridings, the PQ won because the vote was divided by its Liberal and CAQ opponents. Conversely, in perhaps a dozen seats, the PQ lost by a margin equal to the combined totals of its two smaller rivals, Quebec Solidaire (QS) and Option Nationale (a pro-independence split-off from the PQ).

The PQ's anemic victory can only deepen the crisis of this bourgeois nationalist party, which has tried in vain to convince some section of the Quebec capitalist class to support independence, the dream of that bourgeois patriot, Jacques Parizeau, or even the much diluted "sovereignty association" proposed by the Reverend Rene Levesque.

Under Marois, the PQ has distanced itself ever further from any concrete perspective for sovereignty, while affirming its fealty to the neo-liberal consensus. But this has not diminished the hostility or outright demonization of the party in the corporate media in Quebec, and es-



Rogério Barbosa / AFP / Getty Images

pecially in English-speaking Canada. The assassination attempt on Marois on election night appears to be the work of a deranged individual. But it cannot be fully divorced from the atmosphere of fear and hatred that has been cultivated for years towards the national aspirations of the Quebecois, especially the goal of independence.

Jean Charest tried to parlay a backlash against the striking students into a victory at the polls, following the example of Charles DeGaulle after the May 1968 uprising in France. But the student struggle was relegated to the background, studiously avoided during the election campaign by the other parties, including even the leftist QS.

The politics of the street and the ballot box were never so far apart—almost like parallel universes. The mainstream parties and media sought to shut down the mass struggle and divert it into the electoral arena. The Liberals portrayed any challenge to government outside of elections every four or five years as illegitimate, backing up this narrow vision with the iron fist of Loi 12. For the PQ, elections always take precedence over

mobilisation in the streets. Pauline Marois removed her red square when the election writ was issued and called for a moratorium on strikes and demonstrations.

Unfortunately, QS acquiesced to this parliamentary fetishism, failing to follow through on its support for the students by making it a key campaign issue.

In the end, the Liberals retained their firm hold on anglophone and allophone voters, as well as on francophone federalists. Hostility to the striking students was no doubt a factor in buttressing the Liberal vote. But in the end the national question proved once again to be the most important line of demarcation in Quebec politics.

Renegade pequiste Francois Legault and his CAQ failed to dislodge either of the two major parties. The CAQ is an amalgam of disparate forces. Like its predecessor, the Action Democratique du Quebec (ADQ) (whose remnants it absorbed) its staying power cannot be guaranteed. But its relative success confirms the base for right-wing populist anti-working-class politics.

On the left, QS doubled its vote to 6% and elected a second member to the National Assembly—a modest advance, but less than expected and limited principally to Montreal. Undoubtedly, QS support was diminished by the pressure for a tactical PQ vote to defeat the Liberals. It is difficult to challenge this lesser-evil logic from a strictly electoralist standpoint. Needed is a patient explanation of the pro-capitalist nature of the PQ and the way it blocks the national and social aspirations of the vast majority in Quebec society.

To be sure, the PQ still retains something of a social democratic halo. However, this image is increasingly tarnished, particularly when struggles break out and the PQ's true class loyalty is revealed.

Unfortunately, QS leaders Amir Kadir and Francoise David muddied the waters

towards the end of the campaign by offering to support a PQ minority government to, in their words "pull the PQ to the centre left." In the end, the vote for the Liberals and the CAQ was too strong, and for the left too weak to give this scheme any legs. What it reveals is the short-sighted electoralism and political confusion of the QS leaders. Most importantly, such proposals nourish false hopes in the PQ and in the dubious proposition that a centre-left option is available in the crisis-wracked capitalist system.

Neither the Liberals nor the CAQ have any such illusion. They are aggressive partisans of the employers' agenda: decisively weakening the power of the unions, selling off or dismantling the public assets dating from Quebec's "Quiet Revolution," following the lead of Ottawa in fiscal and foreign policy, and staying within the Canadian federation. They are committed to accelerating the pace of neoliberal "reforms."

Together these two right-wing parties received almost 60% of the vote. Ottawa and the anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie can take some comfort in the strong showing of the Liberals, the PQ's relative weakness, and the emergence of the CAQ as a kind of back-up plan to ensure Quebec's compliance with neo-liberal austerity. The PQ's pledge to rescind Law 12 and roll back the Charest college fee increases goes against this agenda. The demand for free education does even more so. This is the moment to escalate the pressure on the PQ, and to advance a radical new agenda.

Quebecois workers need a party that undertakes the vigorous defense of their class interests by fighting for independence and socialism. Quebec Solidaire is not yet that party, but it is an expression of an emerging class differentiation that has been lacking historically in Quebec politics. The way forward for QS lies in a break with parliamentary manoeuvring, advancing a coherent anti-neoliberal programme, and acting as a consistent champion of popular struggles such as the mass movement of students and their allies this spring and summer that succeeded in bringing down a hated neo-liberal regime. ■

.By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

*"Detropia," a documentary film, written and directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady.*

"Detropia," created by noted documentarians ("Jesus Camp") Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, is a powerful film about the demise of Detroit, one of America's largest cities, home of Motown and General Motors, whose economy had been based on the automotive industry. You can't help but think about it for a long time afterwards. It's depressing to realize that the same situation is slowly happening to other large American cities. Many in California alone have declared bankruptcy, or are on the verge of declaring it.

Detroit—with its abandoned buildings, weed-grown lots, and streets devoid of people and traffic—reminded me of Pripyat, in the Ukraine, the closest town to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

In the 1930s, according to "Detropia," Detroit was the fastest growing city in the country; but by 2010, it was the fastest "shrinking" city. With a population of almost 2 million in 1950, it is now down by half. Ewing and Grady included TV ads from that era, in which fashion models swan around shiny "dream cars" in chandeliered showrooms.

An archival propaganda clip depicts an unreal, thriving Detroit illustrating "The American Dream," where Dad pulls up in his GM car, blond, tousled-haired kids skip home from school, and Mom in her apron waits at the front door. Huge Cadillacs sail along wide, tree-lined boulevards, past thriving shops and car-dealerships, at a time when a large part of the population was Black and Hispanic.



## Abandoned Detroit

Compared to what the city is like today, it's hard to imagine how such a sickening, rapid ruin of a major American city could happen. Unfortunately, the film fails to explain it.

Research shows, however, that elements that triggered Detroit's decline included the fact that Japan manufactured smaller, precision-made, fuel-efficient automobiles available to U.S. consumers for thousands of dollars less than American cars. In order to keep up with foreign competition and boost their profits, Detroit manufacturers scrambled to further automate the assembly lines, costing thousands of jobs. And finally, the automakers laid off thousands more and shifted production to low-wage countries like Mexico and China.

In his Cadillac, a local official of the decimated United Auto Workers drives

the filmmakers to the former site of the Cadillac plant, which once spanned miles. As the camera pans over weed-choked lots and abandoned buildings, he speaks of the impact its closure had on employees and their families who'd worked for GM for decades.

The owner of the Raven Lounge let his employees go due to lost revenue, but he won't close. He invites Ewing and Grady inside and we see his club now as a meeting place for regulars to commiserate as they eat, drink, and listen to live music. He feels that the economy is coming back but adds that the government won't tell people that the country is in the same place it was during the 1930s Great Depression because "they'll get scared."

Attending a new car show featuring electric and solar-powered cars, the lounge owner notes that American-

made cars cost a few thousand dollars more than those made in China. "How can they do that? People will buy these cheaper cars." But no one tells him that Chinese autoworkers earn only a few dollars a day and suffer terrible working conditions (hopefully, that might change, as noted in the recent strikes and protests at China's FoxConn, makers of tech giant Apple products).

Ewing and Grady filmed a night scene of enterprising men ripping apart an abandoned building for salvage, which will end up in China.

When the film was made two years ago, Detroit suffered, it is said, 40,000 square miles of vacant land—almost a third of the city. At a city council meeting with government urban planners it was suggested that the vacant land become farms. Though some scoffed, many residents did start vegetable gardens.

Driving the filmmakers along the Detroit River, the UAW official explains how the people's spirit will save their city. It is quiet without traffic; you hear birds singing, leaves rustling in the trees. There are shots of derelict, weed-grown buildings that exude a certain dignity standing in the middle of empty lots.

The film doesn't posit any solutions, yet spirits remain high, as illustrated by the Detroit Opera's staging of a hilarious, updated version of "The Mikado," rewritten to reflect the hardships wreaked on the city's people by government, financial institutions, and bureaucracy.

"The middle class serves as a buffer between the rich and poor," the Raven Lounge owner philosophizes. "Once the middle class is gone? What's left? Revolution!" ■

## S. African miners resist repression

By DANIEL XAVIER

Miners at South Africa's Anglo American Platinum (Amplats), who are on strike for higher wages, have vowed to resist new measures to repress their struggle. In early October, two leaders of their branch of the National Union of Mineworkers were killed. One of them was shot when police attacked an Oct. 4 miners' demonstration. The following day, Amplats fired the 12,000 miners on strike at its facilities. "This is the beginning of the war," strike leader Gadhafi Mododa told Agence France-Presse (Oct. 6).

In August, all eyes turned to South Africa when the government brutally massacred dozens of striking workers at the nearby Lonmin platinum mine in the Marikana region. The miners were on strike for better wages and working conditions and were rallying near the mine to gain support for their demands. The African National Congress (ANC), which has been in control of the South African government since the fall of apartheid in 1994, intervened in the dispute on the side of the employer, deploying police against the workers, who were corralled into a barbed-wire enclosure and gunned down mercilessly by the cops.

But this tragic massacre only served to embolden the workers, who were outraged that the government would so flagrantly betray their interests to support private capitalists. Workers and community members organized meetings all throughout the country in the wake of the government violence. The platinum miners did not back down on their demands, but continued to fight for a better livelihood.

Their efforts managed to secure a 22 percent wage increase when Lonmin finally agreed to settle with the striking workers in September. The workers rejected a lesser contract offer earlier in the month and continued to put pressure on the company until management finally caved. Their victory shows what gains can be made from unified action and sustained strike activity.

The grievances of the platinum workers are reflective of the hardships of the South African population at large. The *Huffington Post* reported 30 million South Africans, nearly 63 percent of the population, live on less than 10 rand (\$1.25) per day. The Marikana miners' victory has pointed the way forward for other South African workers, who have begun to follow their example. Despite the continuing repression, strikes have spread to a number of other mines, including workers mining platinum, gold, iron, and chrome.

According to *Reuters*, 75,000 workers, or 15 percent

of the South African mining industry, are out on strike. In early October, the strikes spread to Kumba Iron Ore, another unit of the giant Anglo American corporation. Meanwhile, 20,000 truckers stopped work in the Johannesburg area, demanding higher wages.

Workers at Gold Fields' KDC West mine have occupied

an outcrop of rock near their workplace (much like the Lonmin platinum miners did), vowing not to leave until their demands were met. The company responded to the workers' demands by evicting them from company-sponsored hostel housing, but the miners have continued to fight for better wages and working conditions.

Socialist Action stands in solidarity with the workers of South Africa. The miners' resilience and capacity for action in the face of repression from government officials and bosses alike has been truly inspiring. ■

## Will winds from Chicago be felt in Philly?

By ANTHONY ROSSINI

PHILADELPHIA—Parents, teachers, and students in this city are being bombarded with a bipartisan corporate message. We need to "grow-up," we are told. They say we need to face the fact that there is a "real crisis" of no money for public education. Our role is to help the unelected rulers of education here, the School Reform Commission (SRC), in doing the "hard work" of deciding which schools must close. They would have us collaborate in turning over public education to corporate interests.

The 1% "job creators," unwilling to pay taxes, are willing to spend their millions on the deconstruction of public education and the elimination of public sector unions and jobs. With funding from corporate sponsored NGOs, the SRC hired consultants from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to devise an administrative plan for Philadelphia schools. As typical in poor communities across the country, the BCG plan would abrogate contracts, turn "failing" schools over to charters, and divide the system up to be administered by private interests.

Fortunately, parents, teachers, and students are awakening to what is happening. Working people are in the process of making their own plans. They have had a quarter century of tossing children off a sinking ship and calling it reform. PCAPS, the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools, has been formed by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the AFT, Action United (a community group), parents, and students. PCAPS has the potential to do the real "hard work" of building a social movement to fight for equitable fully funded public schools that would provide students, parents, and teachers with support needed to fight expanding poverty and imprisonment.

Over 300 people attended the first PCAPS confer-

ence on Sept. 22. Panelists emphasized two points that resonated among conferees throughout the day: One was that, given that we are up against forces that command hundreds of millions of public-relations dollars, our strength lies in asserting our own program. We cannot overcome the assault on public schools by endlessly reacting to the austerity and privatization agenda.

Secondly, our countervailing powers lie in the potential of organizing our vast numbers into a social movement. We cannot accept the "there is no money" scenario because taxes on the rich are the lowest in many decades; there is always money for expanding prisons; and trillions are being spent on imperialist wars, drones, and corporate welfare.

The winds from Chicago could be felt by all at the conference, but this was true especially among the union teachers present. Apathy, alleged by some to exist in the ranks of the Philadelphia teachers, was nowhere to be seen. Teachers spoke up in the workshops. They are ready to work with the community and signed up to work with PCAPS.

The emerging spirit of teachers eager to work with community forces was also witnessed the following Monday evening when a community church meeting of about 700 was held at the Enon Baptist Church. Though the message from the pulpit leaned in the direction of the SRC's "hard choices" mantra, the discussion among teachers, who came out in notable numbers, showed anger at the SRC plan and evident willingness to join with community in a fight back.

The sense this reporter got from teachers at both meetings is that they are angry. They want to have a discussion within their union and are willing to work to save their union and renew public education. There is a real need to hear more from Chicago teachers about how they did it. ■

# ... Chi. teachers

(continued from page 12)

to hire more support staff if funds become available.

Some of this new language will be hard to enforce, since it is dependent on new gambling money from a bill that has not been passed yet. CPS already routinely violates the classroom size language. However, preserving and winning contract language will put the union in a better position to continue the fight for well-funded schools.

In an agreement made prior to contract negotiations, CPS agreed to hire 600 laid-off teachers in music, arts, and world language subjects in order to lengthen the school day, as Emanuel had unilaterally imposed for this school year, without substantially lengthening the teachers' workday. Emanuel had wanted to lengthen teachers' workdays without a raise in salary.

- The contract won enhanced language on grievance definitions and arbitration for discipline cases. Improved short-term disability and maternity benefits. Doubled annual supply fund per teacher to \$250.

- New language on recall rights: Teachers whose schools close will be able to follow their students to the schools they are transferred to if positions are available. Laid-off teachers will also be placed on a recall list. New teaching positions will have to be filled 50% from the recall list, a compromise since the union wanted 100% filled by laid-off teachers. Another weakness of the recall language is that teachers who are rated as "unsatisfactory" by a new evaluation system will not be eligible for the recall list. Despite these weaknesses, the recall language is a major gain; previously, Chicago teachers had no district-wide seniority, only seniority within their school.

Among the major concessions was a new teacher evaluation system, in which lower scoring teachers would lose seniority protection for layoffs. The evaluation system was mandated by SB 7, and the union did negotiate to limit the use of standardized tests in scoring to 30%, the minimum allowable by law. There will also be an appeal process for teachers scoring in the lowest category.

The evaluation system will not subject tenured teachers to layoffs in the contract's first year. Nonetheless, many teachers could face layoff based on subjective evaluations that do not take into consideration the conditions their students face outside the classroom and the lack of resources inside it. Severance pay for laid-off teachers will also be reduced to six months down from 12 months.

Despite not winning all of their demands and agreeing to some concessions, the overall contract has more wins than losses. CTU faced many obstacles, including a hostile collective bargaining environment, as unions everywhere have given historic concessions, including teacher unions in large urban school districts, where locals, often with the encouragement from the national leadership of the AFT, have agreed to pay cuts, merit pay, and given up seniority entirely.

The union also faced a mayor who was emboldened by aggressive support from the ruling class and the White House to bust the CTU as an example to all teacher unions that the even the militant CTU could not defeat the attempt to destroy public education. SB 7, quite intentionally, reduced CTU's ability to bargain, making all issues except for wages and benefits permissible topics of bargaining instead of mandatory, meaning CPS was not required to bargain class sizes, working conditions, seniority, and other working conditions.

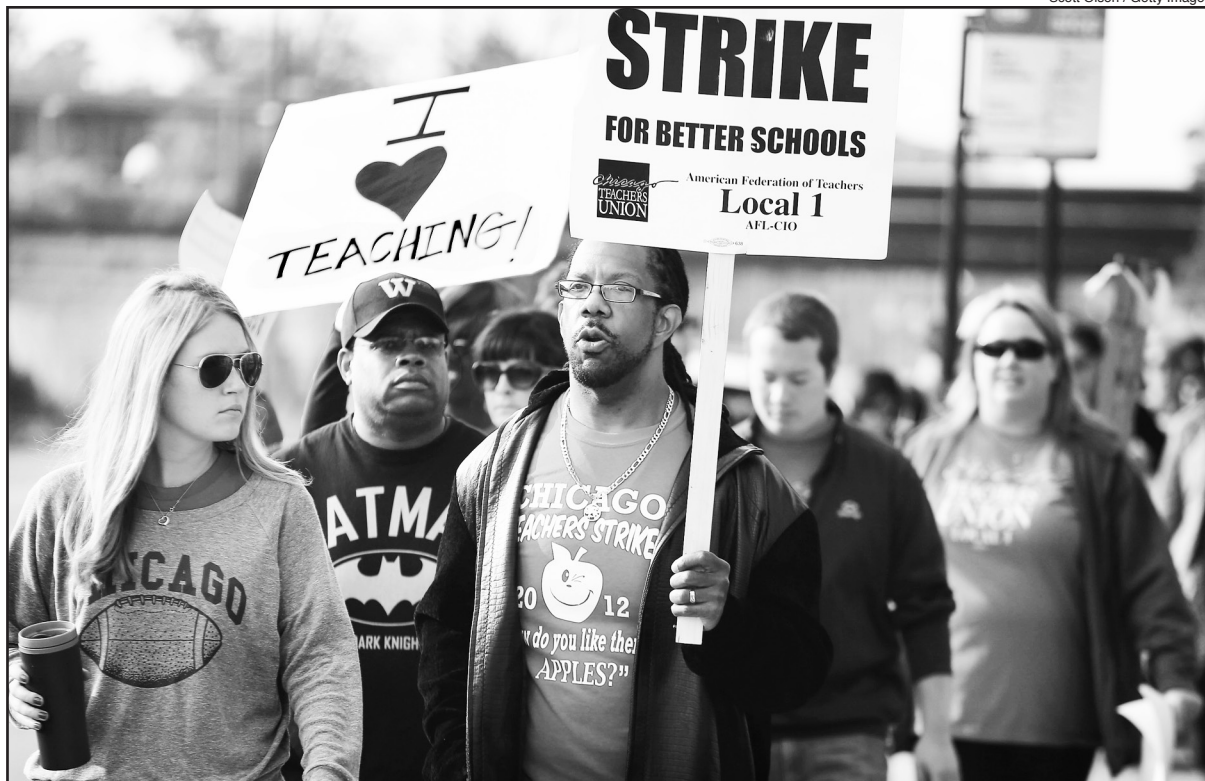
The threat of injunction hung in the air, as CPS may well have convinced a judge that the CTU strike was illegal since the outstanding issues in bargaining were non-economic. All along, CTU rejected the limitations on bargaining, continuously proposing non-economic issues such as class size and air-conditioning.

In the face of this, CTU decided to fight back, and they fought hard. By striking and unleashing their social power to push back against an unabashed attempt at union busting in an era where so many unions have simply laid down in the face of pressure, the Chicago teachers have provided a shining example to all workers of how to win and to defend past gains.

## A blueprint for union struggle

The strike laid out the initial outlines of a blueprint for every union on how to fight back. CTU proved that when unions battle they win the sympathy of other working people, union and non-union, who know from their own experiences that the bosses and politicians are seeking to cut wages and public services. CTU rejected the all-too-common practice of secret negotiations and publicized what was being discussed with their membership and the public.

The union reaped the benefits of longstanding ties with neighborhood and parent organizations. The solidarity from community groups during the strike was no fly-by-night alliance. CTU leaders have been working for years with groups across the city against



school closures and other issues, building mutual trust between the union and community and parent organizations.

The internal organization of the rank and file was critical. The ranks were constantly mobilized both before and especially during the strike to provide visibility to the struggle and provide a sympathetic image of dedicated teachers fighting City Hall. The strike authorization vote alone put to bed the myth that teacher unions don't represent rank-and-file teachers. Even more critically, the unions' democratic functioning made possible an engaged membership, who felt genuinely that this fight was theirs to win.

The officers kept nothing from the ranks, explaining each step of the way their strategy and goals and seeking membership approval and input throughout. This was most exemplified in the House of Delegates vote to suspend the strike. The officers did not try to sugar coat the deal and muscle through a yes vote, as is standard in most unions. When the House of Delegates wanted more time to examine the tentative agreement, the officers deferred, and encouraged a democratic discussion among the ranks.

This fightback by teachers resulted in an important advance for working people. The collective strength and determination of the Chicago teachers dented, at least for the moment, the 1%'s onslaught on the public services that serve the 99% and the workers who provide them. Chicago teachers returned to work in high spirits knowing they had done so.

Almost all teachers wore red on the first day of school as a sign of solidarity and strength. Chicago teachers know they have won a battle, but the war continues. CPS is planning to close over 100 schools in the next few years and plan to continue opening new non-union charter schools. Massive budget cuts are on the horizon, and the Chicago teachers' pension is also in crisis after a decade of CPS's failing to make pension contributions. Successfully beating back Rahm Emanuel's attempt to bust their union has put CTU in a strong position to continue the battle to defend their union and public education.

Union militants and class-struggle fighters took note of the fact that CTU President Karen Lewis became somewhat of an overnight national figure because she led a major challenge to a Chicago Democratic Party administration intent on breaking the third largest teachers' union in the country. The often-repeated call for Lewis to run for mayor echoed an important sentiment for working people to run their own candidates for public office, as opposed to the present subordination of the union bureaucracy to the anti-worker Democratic Party.

As is often the case when working people engage in serious strike battles, the question is posed as to what weapons they have available in the political arena. The need for a labor party based on reinvigorated, democratic unions in alliance with the oppressed has never been more striking.

The CTU strike also showed the critical need for labor solidarity. While the CTU example brought some picket-line support to the teachers, the reality of the labor leadership default was glaring in Chicago when virtually every public employee union signed individual and major concessionary contracts, leaving Chicago teachers to go it alone. Labor's classical solidarity slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all," was honored in the breach.

If there ever was a time to call for a Chicago Congress of Labor—not to mention a national labor congress—to meet the concerted ruling-class offensive against all workers, this was it. Had the major public employee unions, as well as broader union forces, convened such a congress and considered a proposal

for a united solidarity pact against future cutbacks and erosion of hard-fought workers' gains, the defeatist notion that working people have no alternative but to accept devastating blows could be blown asunder.

Despite receiving merely lackluster support from the labor movement, Chicago teachers and their parent and community allies persevered and significantly set back the major efforts of the ruling parties to impose a stinging defeat. It is only a matter of time until the example of the CTU becomes the norm, and no union will be compelled to take on the bosses and their kept media and courts alone. "Solidarity Forever," the music and fighting spirit that brought the organized labor movement into being, will once again be shouted out strong and clear by workers everywhere. ■

# ... U.S. war threats

(continued from page 1)

litical terms and have only wrought more devastation in the region.

A delegation of U.S. antiwar activists, organized by Code Pink and including leading members of the United National Antiwar Coalition, is on an investigative and solidarity tour of regions of Pakistan that have been hit by U.S. drones. The delegation's march to the Federal Administrative Tribal Areas—where they have hoped to hold a rally against drones—has been big news in Pakistan and worldwide. The delegation members intend to interview families of drone victims, and will report their findings to meetings planned for a number of U.S. cities upon their return.

Meanwhile, Israel and the United States continue to saber-rattle and make war threats against Iran. At a recent meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made headlines with his stage-prop display of a cartoonish bomb diagram, apparently depicting that Iran was nearing the final stage of acquiring a nuclear weapon and could have enriched enough uranium to create a bomb as early as summer 2013.

While his speech was the butt of many jokes in the media, such as on Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*, the implications of Israel's policy objectives are not so funny. Netanyahu stressed that sanctions and diplomacy were doomed to failure, implying that military action may be necessary to stop Iran. He stated: "Iran uses diplomatic negotiations as a means to buy time to advance its nuclear program." While it is still unclear whether the U.S. or Israel are ready take military action in the Persian Gulf, activists must be on guard to oppose these ongoing attempts to demonize Iran in order to justify a new war.

The United National Antiwar Coalition is at the forefront of the struggle against war and political repression. UNAC co-sponsored a series of actions around the country, set for the anniversary of the war in Afghanistan on Oct. 7, to demonstrate against imperialist wars abroad and to defend civil liberties at home. UNAC and their allies in New York City, including Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), the Islamic Leadership Council of NY, the Muslim Peace Coalition, and Black is Back, held a rally outside the state building in Harlem. Actions also took place in Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities. ■

# Chicago teachers defeat plan to gut union, schools

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—After a nine-day strike that electrified this city and won broad support from working people, the 26,000 members of the Chicago Teachers Union returned, heads held high, to the classroom Sept. 19 after successfully pushing back against an all-out attack against their union. The teachers' strike ended the day before by a vote of the union's House of Delegates after a democratic discussion of a tentative agreement reached with the Chicago School Board. The contract was approved on Oct. 2 by a 79.1% vote of the union membership.

In the face of an attempt to completely bust their union, the CTU was forced to strike, as the school board refused to back down from its demands for massive concessions. The union was well prepared for the strike, having mobilized the rank and file for a multitude of actions over the past two years and having built ties with neighborhood and parent organizations.

The union maintained picket lines outside of all 615 Chicago public schools and CPS headquarters. Neighborhoods were dotted with groups of teachers wearing red CTU shirts and holding signs at major intersections and expressway overpasses. Parents, students, and community members joined the picket lines, knowing that the teachers were fighting for better schools.

Morning picket lines in the neighborhoods were followed by afternoon mass rallies downtown, where on three consecutive days more than 10,000 teachers flooded the streets. Picket lines were greeted with a constant chorus of honks in support of their strike. Honks came often from CTA bus drivers, fire engines, squad cars, and other city vehicles whose unions have also been in the sights of the union busters in City Hall and whose rank and file clearly saw the teachers' fight as an extension of their own struggles.

Other unions in the city showed support. Teamsters Local 705 provided their union hall for CTU strike headquarters. Officers and members of the Firefighters Union, SEIU, AFSCME, ATU, and other public-sector unions joined teacher picket lines. Teachers unions across the country showed support, including UTLA of Los Angeles, which donated \$10,000 to the union's strike fund. SEIU Local 1, which represents maintenance and cleaning workers in CPS, honored picket lines. UPS drivers also honored the picket lines, refusing to deliver to CPS.

Working people in this city stood with the teachers despite an avalanche of anti-union editorials and news reports from the corporate media. Although the strike caused major inconveniences for working-class parents, over 50% of city residents, and an astounding 66% of parents of CPS students, supported the teachers in the strike.

The union won popular support by emphasizing that they were fighting for better schools. The union demands for smaller class sizes, more social workers, more libraries, and other resources to help students resonated with Chicago's working class, who have experienced eroded public services across the board at the same time City Hall hands out hundreds of millions each year to corporations and politically connected developers. A popular sign at teachers' picket lines and rallies read, "my working conditions are your child's learning conditions."

The attack on public education in this city escalated when Rahm Emanuel, the former chief of staff for President Obama, took office in 2011. Emanuel has made breaking public-sector unions, especially the teachers union, the cornerstone of his mayoralty. Emanuel packed the Chicago School Board with billionaires—including Penny Pritzker, an heiress of the Hyatt Hotel Chain and Obama fundraiser—who have advocated breaking unions in order to replace public schools with privately run charter schools in Chicago and across the country.

The board cancelled a previously negotiated 4% raise for 2011. Emanuel, with the support of other Democrats in the Illinois legislature, pushed a new state law that required school districts to develop teacher evaluations that are highly dependent on unreliable standardized tests and undermined teacher seniority, and limited the Chicago Teachers Union's bargaining rights, among other anti-union provisions. The law had several new regulations aimed specifically at the Chicago Teachers Union, including a requirement that 75% of the membership, not just those who



***The contract approved by the teachers blunted the worst of the school board proposals, made some gains, but included painful takeaways.***

vote, authorize a strike. One of the bill's proponents, Jonah Edelman, head of the anti-union Stand for Children, declared that the new law would make a Chicago teacher strike impossible.

#### **Union offered vision of how to fix the schools**

The Chicago Teachers Union, led by a reform leadership elected in 2010, decided from the beginning that Rahm Emmanuel and his billionaire friends' "reform" agenda was an outright attack on their union and public education generally. Unlike in other big city school systems, where teachers unions have not put up a fight and even become willing collaborators in the undermining of public education, the CTU refused to be "partners" with the union busters. Instead, they offered a competing vision of how to fix public schools and prepared the rank and file to fight for it. CTU denounced the "blame the teacher" reform proposals, calling instead for more resources for neighborhood schools.

As bargaining stalled, the teachers union mobilized members in a contract campaign. The teachers and allied parent and neighborhood organizations distributed leaflets in Chicago's neighborhoods explaining what the struggle was about and how the union was fighting for better schools. The union held a mass indoor rally followed by a march of 5000 teachers through downtown Chicago near the end of last school year.

The union then held a strike-authorization vote. An astounding 92% of the bargaining unit voted to authorize the strike. Not a single one of the 615 CPS Schools voted against the authorization. Two weeks before the strike, a rally of over 10,000 teachers and their supporters flooded downtown Chicago on Labor Day.

In addition to the public contract campaign, the union also organized itself internally. Each school assigned a picket captain to organize logistics. The union also had a strike headquarters, where teachers and supporters could pick up and distribute leaflets, picket signs, and other strike materials. A daily strike bulletin was published to update members on negotiations and daily strike activities.

As the strike entered its fifth day, the unions' negotiating team and the CPS board came close to a tentative agreement. CPS quickly leaked to the media that a deal had been agreed upon and the strike would soon be over. CTU responded that although a deal was close it had not been agreed upon, and in any case the strike could not be suspended until a vote of the union's House of Delegates.

That Saturday a mass solidarity rally in Union Park of over 10,000 workers, many from unions from around the Midwest, again took over parts of Chicago. The following day, CTU officers presented the tentative agreement to the House of Delegates. In a move that shocked the corporate media and political class, the House of Delegates voted to continue the strike, not on a basis of rejecting the agreement outright, but so delegates could review the agreement and get input from their members. This exemplary display of union democracy was met by denunciations from the media and politicians, most of all Rahm Emanuel, who filed, unsuccessfully, for an emergency injunction to force teachers back to work.

That Monday teachers headed back to the picket lines in the morning and in the afternoon each school met in locations across the city to democratically discuss the pros and cons of the deal and whether their delegate should vote to suspend the strike. The following day, the House of Delegates, after an intense and heated discussion of the tentative agreement voted to suspend the strike.

#### **Significant gains; painful concessions**

The contract negotiated by the union blunted the worst of the proposals made by the school board, made gains in other areas, and also included some painful concessions.

Among the provisions defended and gained are:

- The contract preserves step-and-lane increases, in which teachers are paid more based on seniority and educational level, and it beat back the boards' proposal for merit pay, where teachers would receive salary increases based on their students' performance on standardized tests. Merit pay is the signature issue of groups like Stand for Children and other anti-union education "reform" outfits who assumed the new anti-union law would force CTU to accept it. They seek to erode teacher seniority and increase even further the use of standardized tests.

- Teachers gained salary increases of 3%, 2%, and 2%, and an optional 4th year at 3%. The contract is for three years, with the union having an option to void the 4th year, at which time the end of the contract would coincide with the mayoral election.

- Maintained current health-care benefit levels: The board proposed a 40% increase in employee contributions. This was a major victory, as almost all collective bargaining contracts, both public and private sector, contain health-care concessions these days. However, the union agreed to participate in an intrusive "wellness program" aimed at reducing health care costs.

- Many improvements in work-rule language, including an anti-harassment article to protect teachers from bullying principals: The contract preserved classroom size language that the board wanted eliminated. Teachers are guaranteed textbooks for their students starting on the first day of school. There was also improved language for clinicians, paraprofessionals, nurses, and social workers, and the board agreed

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