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As gov't cover-up deepens People of Gulf Coast demand answers

By LeiLani Dowell

Barbara Bush, accompanied by former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, visited hurricane relief centers in Houston on Sept. 5. When interviewed about the experience on American Public Media's "Marketplace" program, she offered callous statements about the misery the people there were undergoing.

She said, according to Editor & Publisher, "referring to the poor who had lost everything back home and evacuated, 'This is working very well for them. ... So many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this—this (she chuckles slightly) is working very well for them.'" (Editor & Publisher, Sept. 5)

The response from former First Lady Barbara Bush epitomizes the response of government officials across the board to the continuing crisis for the people of the delta region. Despite the evident desperation of the people of the Delta, the response to the disaster on the part of government officials continues to be sluggish and indifferent to the needs of the people.

One episode highlights this indifference. On Aug. 30, two Navy helicopter pilots assigned to deliver food and water to military installations along the Gulf Coast completed their mission, and then picked up a radio transmission from the Coast Guard asking for help with rescue efforts.

Unable to contact their superiors for permission, they headed over to the area. They picked up folks stranded on roofs and inside their houses, including two blind people who had been unable to climb to the roof of their house. Throughout that day they rescued 110 people.

Expecting a hero's welcome, the two pilots—Lt. David Shand and Lt. Matt Udkow—returned to base, where instead they received a reprimand for straying from their initial assignment. Udkow, who associates say was "especially vocal about voicing his disagreement to his superiors," was reassigned to supervise a kennel on base for pets of service members.

The New York Times of Sept. 7 says that "the episode illustrates how the rescue effort in the days immediately after Hurricane Katrina had to compete with the military's other, more mundane logistical needs."

Pentagon birds of prey descend

However, even with mounting national and international criticism, the government still deems it acceptable to write off the people of the Delta for

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Monday SEPT 12 National Day of Outrage

JUSTICE For the Victims of Katrina!

We must unite on September 12 to demand:

- * Immediate relief—food, medicine, water, clothing, and emergency shelter for the people of the region.
- * Extended unemployment benefits for all who have lost jobs, and a massive jobs and housing program for the near future.
- * Money for Hurricane Relief, Not War!
- * End the military occupation of New Orleans! People trying to feed their families are not looters!
- * An independent international investigation of the criminal negligence that caused this disaster.

Some of the cities where protests are already planned include: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Amherst, New Haven, Charleston SC, Jackson MS, Miami FL, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Boston, Detroit, Jersey City, Los Angeles, Houston, Raleigh, Washington DC, San Francisco, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Diego, Seattle, St. Louis, Kansas City, Memphis, Milwaukee, Atlanta, and hundreds of other cities and towns of all sizes, in every region of the country.

Initiating endorsers include the Million Worker March Movement; Troops Out Now Coalition; Saladin Muhammed, Black Workers For Justice; Harlem Tenants Council; Chris Silvera, Chair, Teamsters National Black Caucus; International Action Center; Cuba Solidarity New York; Rev. Lucius Walker, Pastors for Peace; Rev. Luis Barrios, Iglesia San Romero de Las Americas; and local leaders and activists from around the country.

Stop the execution of Francis Newton!
Let's have a moratorium on murdering Black people. Texas is set to execute the first black women in 150 years on Sept 14. This act would add racist insult to injury - don't even think about it!



New York ■ Los Angeles ■ Boston ■ Washington DC
Houston ■ Atlanta ■ San Francisco
and cities and towns across the country

It is a CRIME for the government:

- to allow people to suffer and die because of their race and class.
- to treat people like the enemy because they are black and poor.
- to spend \$200 billion on war while cutting budgets at home, resulting in more death and destruction.

**Rally at
Mon. Sept 12 5:00 pm
In front of the FEMA offices
at the
Federal Building
26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan**

Troops Out Now Coalition
www.TroopsOutNow.org 212-633-6646

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The other hurricane

Racism and poverty in the Delta

By Larry Hales

What is painfully obvious about Hurricane Katrina is not that the hurricane itself had any out-of-the-ordinary tendencies, but that regardless of the storm's category, the massive loss of life could have been averted.

Until it was far too late, the city, state and federal governments provided no means, didn't marshal the National Guard, didn't use the many boats and city buses—some now under water—to move people out of the city. No planes were used to fly people out of danger before Louis Armstrong Airport was closed down on Aug. 27, two days before the hurricane hit the city.

It is not that the hurricane did not consume many other parts of the Gulf Coast. Some towns in Mississippi are virtually gone. However, what happened in New Orleans uncovers the verity of life under capitalism: that regardless of the great wealth of U.S. society and the fact that workers and the poor create that wealth, most are left to fend for themselves in times of need and crisis.

Many articles have been written saying that the city could not withstand any storm above a category 3. Yet efforts to reestablish the coastal marsh were spurned and woefully underfunded by billions of dollars; only \$375 million of a needed \$14 billion came through. The weakened levees were not strengthened. Forty-four percent of the budget for the New Orleans Corps of Engineers was slashed and \$30 million was cut from flood control.

Coupled with the National Guard being depleted due to the war in Iraq, and members of the Army Corps of Engineers—needed to work on the levees—also being sent to Iraq, the real aims of the capitalist class and the Bush administration become startlingly clear. It is more important to them to shore up their occupation of Iraq, to steal the Iraqi people's oil reserves, than it is to protect the people of New Orleans and the delta from a storm that years earlier had been predicted would level this region.

Without transportation, people were forced to line up at the Superdome, where they were searched and told they would need their own food and water. Many thousands were turned away and sent to schools or back to their homes.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the anarchy of the capitalist system, especially during times of great crisis, and the racism and callousness of the Bush administration. No one will soon forget that Bush remained on vacation while the category 5 storm churned in the Gulf. Neither will it be forgotten how the victims of the storm were blamed by high-ranking officials like FEMA head Michael Brown.

Race and class underlying factors

The Gulf Coast is predominantly Black. Therefore, much of the area hit by the hurricane was predominantly Black, along with poor white. Mississippi's average per capita income, at \$24,650, is the lowest of any state. Louisiana is ranked number 42 with \$27,581 and Alabama number 40 with \$27,795, compared to \$32,937 nationally. All three states have poverty rates higher than the national average.

Racism is inherent under capitalism and the legacy of racism in New Orleans

has led to a predominantly Black city being ill prepared. Many of its residents are desperately poor; disproportionately jobless, underemployed and imprisoned; homeless and with a sub-par public education system. The jobs available are mainly low-paying, in the service industry.

Over 27 percent of the New Orleans population lives below the poverty line. Sixty-seven percent of the city is Black, and this population makes up the great majority of the poor—the ones left behind in every area of life. The homes that African Americans live in are mostly old or rundown tenements in the lower-lying areas of the city.

Another startling fact is that more than a third of the Black population lack automobiles. Both Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Mayor Ray Nagin decreed that those with the means to do so should evacuate the city before Katrina hit. Poor Black people did not have the means to leave on their own; they couldn't afford to own a car because of poverty or infirmity.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, Black people across the country have become incensed over the gross criminal negligence of all levels of government. The images of the poor, mostly Black, the elderly and children being ignored, dying slowly from hunger and dehydration, have been burned in people's minds. This may lead many to wonder or have doubts about the government's intent, but the statistics don't lie.

For decades, the local ruling class of New Orleans has re-segregated the city, destroying low-income housing to make way for expensive homes, townhouses and super retail stores in an area above sea-level.

The conspiracy is of the capitalists' making and is happening across the country. But in New Orleans it has been tragically revealed by Hurricane Katrina, for all the world to see. And with the destruction and the gruesome task of recovering thousands of dead bodies comes news that the unemployment rate for the hurricane-ravaged areas is to climb to 25 percent. Can the situation become devastatingly worse?

That is why the call to bring the troops home must be amplified—to stop the suffering and murder of the Iraqi people, to stop the loss of life of the many poor and oppressed sucked into the war machine by the poverty draft, and now so that the funds being consumed by the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can go instead to rebuilding the Gulf Coast and New Orleans.

The 25 percent unemployment rate does not have to be. It won't be if no expense is spared and the people of the Gulf Coast are allowed to rebuild on their own terms and in their own interests. □



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WW CALENDAR

DETROIT

Sat., Sept. 17

Hear a socialist analysis of the crisis in the South in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the flooding of New Orleans, and the criminal racist response of the U.S. government. Dinner at 5 p.m. \$5 donation/\$2 unemployed. At 5920 Second Ave. For info (313) 831-0750.

LOS ANGELES

Tue., Sept. 27

Film: "Poison DUST," a documentary on the U.S. use and the effects of depleted uranium in the Gulf War. Meet the director, Sue Harris. Sponsored by the International Action Center. 7 p.m. Ay 5274 W. Pico Blvd. #203. For info (323) 936-7266.

NEW YORK

Fri., Sept. 9

Workers World Party Meeting: Racism, Poverty & the Gulf Disaster, with Larry Holmes, a WWP leader and International Action Center co-director, and LeiLani Dowell, a leader of youth

group F.I.S.T. (Fight Imperialism/Stand Together). 7 pm. (Dinner at 6:30) At 55 W. 17 St., 5th Fl., Manhattan. For info (212) 627-2994.

Fri., Sept. 16

Workers World Party Meeting: Hurricane Disaster Eyewitness Accounts by Johnnie Stevens, People's Video Network videographer, and Teresa Gutierrez, coordinator of the Nov. 8 Town Hall Evening of Solidarity with Venezuela, who are on a fact-finding/solidarity mission for the Troops Out Now Coalition. 7 pm. (Dinner at 6:30) At 55 W. 17 St., 5th Fl., Manhattan. For info (212) 627-2994.

SAN DIEGO

Sun., Sept. 25

Film: "Poison DUST," a documentary on the U.S. use and the effects of depleted uranium in the Gulf War. Meet the director, Sue Harris. Sponsored by International Action Center. 2 p.m. At San Diego downtown Central Library, 820 East Street, 3rd Floor Auditorium. For info (619) 692-4422

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Who are the real looters?

By LeiLani Dowell

Many government officials and much of the corporate media have focused their discussion and coverage of Hurricane Katrina on the so-called “looting” of storm-ravaged cities.

On Aug. 31, two photos published on the Yahoo News website caught the attention of web bloggers. In both, people are wading through chest-deep waters with food in their hands. One caption describes the young Black man shown as “looting a grocery store,” while the other describes the two white people as “finding bread and soda from a local grocery store.”

While Yahoo News was quick to offer the disclaimer that the photos were taken by two different photographers, who wrote the captions, the effect remained the same—the criminalization of Black youth.

Racism has always been a tool of the capitalist ruling class, wielded to keep the working class divided and to justify war, occupation and poverty. Now the state is

using the racist view of Black people as “looters” to justify an outrageous lack of response on the part of the federal government to the needs of the most oppressed in the delta region—before and after the hurricane—as well as to force yet another occupation of troops onto a community of color.

The big-business government in Washington has looted the delta region for decades.

It looted public services for poor people while giving huge tax breaks for Big Oil operations in the region.

To pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it looted money from levee repair and other infrastructure upgrades that could have prevented much of today’s death and destruction.

And then it looted the people a third time by completely ignoring their cries for help after the storm hit, failing to provide for evacuation, food, housing or clothing for the survivors until four days later, when many had already died and a health emergency had been called.

The right to survive

It is criminal that the media would even suggest that people whose only way to get food, water and clothing is from locked stores are “looters.” The U.S. government, in fact, should have immediately announced that the people had the right to take whatever they needed from the stores to survive.

In trying not to sound too harsh on those left with no resources, the media sometimes tries to differentiate between “good” looters—the ones who are only taking food—and the “bad” ones—those who take other goods from stores. This happens to include clothing, on most accounts, which is badly needed by people who’ve been wading and swimming through filthy water for almost a week. But even if people take things other than food and clothing, is that the real crime here? Given the long history of economic repression in the area, a history dating back to slavery, they’re entitled to a lot more than that in reparations for generations of suffering.

Yet the capitalist politicians, with the media as their faithful allies, use tales of “looting” and “lawlessness” to blame the victims of this disaster for the failure of the government to carry out its mandated responsibility to help the people of the region. It is the same reasoning given by Michael Brown, the much-criticized director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who said that the death toll from the hurricane is “going to be attributable a lot to people who did not heed the advance warnings.”

This kind of blaming the victims is nothing new in the United States. After the terrible Johnstown, Pa., flood of 1889, a headline in the New York Herald blared “Drunken Hungarians, Dancing, Singing, Cursing and Fighting Amid the Ruins.” The Hungarians were the most recent immigrants of that time. After big storms in Galveston, Texas, in 1900 and a flooding of the Mississippi River in 1927 that inundated New Orleans, the scapegoats were Black people, many of whom were rounded up and transported to work camps. (“The Storm After the Storm,” New York Times, Sept. 1)

Today in New Orleans, police and military operations against looters have

replaced rescue efforts in some areas. The Associated Press reported on Sept. 1 that “the number of officers called off [in order to go after looters] amounts to virtually the entire police force in New Orleans.”

The AP article then describes city officials using equipment taken from an Office Depot and says that “during a state of emergency, authorities have broad powers to take private supplies and buildings for their use.”

Why isn’t this entitlement given to the people, especially when the government fails to respond to a crisis?

It was the Toronto Star of Canada—not a U.S. newspaper—that put the issue of “looters” into perspective. It reported on Sept. 3 about what had happened before the arrival of food and water from the federal government, four long days after the hurricane struck: “Thousands of refugees lined the street outside [the New Orleans] convention center yesterday, weak, begging for help and accusing their government of leaving them here to die. Instead of their federal government stepping in, they said, they had been saved by looters who smashed windows of abandoned stores and distributed food and water to those left with nothing.”

The imperialists realize that immense anger is brewing in the region. It is the same type of righteous anger, maybe even more intense, that led to uprisings like the 1965 Watts rebellion and the 1992 Rodney King-related rebellion in Los Angeles.

In those instances, the code words “looting” and “riot” were used to downplay and even ignore the justified rage in poverty-stricken Black communities occupied by brutal, racist cops. Then as now, the images of “looters” were overwhelmingly of Black youth. The National Guard is sent in with tanks and guns drawn, then and now, to protect private property over human lives, but also to ensure that self-organization of the masses does not occur.

Anger over the racist policies of U.S. imperialism is not contained to the delta region. Across the country and the world, it has only intensified with each news account of the devastation. It is coupled with anger about the continued U.S. occupation of Iraq, which was brewing long before Katrina struck. □



WW PHOTO: DEIRDRE GRISWOLD

New Yorkers demand justice, not repression

By Monica Moorehead
New York

Sept. 2—“Relief for hurricane victims, not war” and “Food and housing, NOT bullets, for New Orleans” were some of the slogans raised at an emergency demonstration here tonight. It was called on one day’s notice by the Troops Out Now Coalition in response to the catastrophic events in New Orleans and the delta region in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Anti-war and community activists, trade unionists and concerned people of all nationalities participated in the protest in front of the military recruitment center at Times Square during rush hour. The protest coincided with the arrival of thousands of National Guard troops in New Orleans, sent to restore “law and order” after days of death and suffering.

President George W. Bush arrived today in Biloxi, Miss., to pay a “visit” to some of the victims of the hurricane there. It was more than coincidence that as Bush was carrying out his photo-op, food supplies were finally being delivered to the thousands of victims who had been languishing outside the leaking Superdome in New Orleans, five days after the hurricane hit. People have been literally starving and going without water. Thousands are believed to have died, although the government is not giving out casualty figures.

Just as the troops arrived, mainly white and armed to the teeth with automatic rifles, Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco made this horrific statement to the press:

“I have one message for these hoodlums. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary.”

The “hoodlums” she was referring to are the thousands of hungry, homeless poor people, overwhelmingly Black, who were abandoned by government agencies on all levels before and after the devastation caused by the hurricane.

Speaker after speaker at Times Square characterized the inhumane treatment of the people left to die in New Orleans as “criminal,” “genocidal” and “racist.” Speakers also denounced the oil corporations and the super-rich as the real looters in society, not the most oppressed, who have been forced to liberate the necessities of life from locked-up stores in order to survive unimaginable conditions.

The rally charged that the hundreds of billions of dollars spent for war and occupation in Iraq should have been spent on strengthening the deteriorating infrastructure in urban areas like New Orleans, as well as for other human needs. Meanwhile, on a giant screen at the military recruiting center behind them, images were being flashed that glorified warfare and U.S. military strength.

A national day of solidarity with the hurricane victims has been called for Sept. 12. Initiating endorsers include the Million Worker March Movement; Troops Out Now Coalition; Harlem Tenants Council; Chris Silvera, president of the Teamsters National Black Caucus, and local leaders and activists from around the country. □

‘Money for hurricane victims, not war’

Outrage.

This emotion of speakers, participants and passersby rang out at Boston’s Park Street Station Sept. 3 in response to the catastrophic events in New Orleans and the Delta region in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC) of Boston called the emergency demonstration under the slogan “Money for the victims of the hurricane—not for war!”

The rally was endorsed by the Bolivarian Circle-Martin Luther King, Boston Committee for Peace & Human Rights, Chelsea Uniting Against the War, Coalition to Defend Reproductive Rights, Committee to Defend the Somerville 5, International Action Center, New England Human Rights Organization for Haiti, Stonewall Warriors and the Women’s Fightback Network. Union members from AFSCME, the Massachusetts Nurses Association, Service Employees, the Steelworkers and UNITE HERE also participated.



WW PHOTO: PETER COOK

Hundreds of passersby expressed sympathy with the action.

Another street rally in support of the hurricane victims is scheduled for Sept. 6 in the predominantly Black community of Roxbury. This action is also to raise awareness about Frances Newton, an African-American woman scheduled to be executed in Texas on Sept. 14 (www.freefrances.org).

—Bryan G. Pfeifer

The scandal of the levees

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

Louisiana authorities are saying that 10,000 people may have died in the state as the result of Hurricane Katrina.

Mounting evidence shows the human tragedy and devastation in New Orleans is a direct result of the U.S. war on Iraq.

The local Times Picayune newspaper warned in nine articles between 2004 and 2005 that millions of hurricane and flood-control dollars had been diverted to the war, saying of looming catastrophe, "It's a matter of when, not if."

President George W. Bush, faced with soaring war costs in Iraq in early 2004, recommended slashing the budget for engineering at Lake Pontchartrain by more than 80 percent. The breach in the New Orleans levees allowed water from Pontchartrain to flood the city.

In the last decade, the Corps of Engineers has worked to implement the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project (SELA), authorized by Congress in 1995.

But when Katrina hit, \$250 million worth of projects remained unfinished. One that a contractor was rushing was at the 17th Street Canal, the location of the main breach in the levees. (Editor and Publisher, Aug. 29)

Walter Maestri, emergency management chief for Jefferson Parish, said in 2004: "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay. Nobody locally is happy that the levees can't be finished, and we are doing everything we can to make the case that this is a security issue for us." (Times Picayune, June 8)

During a 2004 forecast exercise, federal, Louisiana and New Orleans officials saw a fictitious "Hurricane Pam" produce almost every tragedy now occurring.

But officials abandoned plans to prepare for the actual disaster because of budget cuts.

So those familiar with the situation looked on in disbelief when Bush said Sept. 2 on "Good Morning America": "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees."

Government agencies had been well aware of the potential for failure and the horrific human cost.

Racism and war on the poor

Brian Wolshon, an engineering professor at Louisiana State U. and consultant for evacuation planning, said at least 100,000 people in New Orleans were identified as "low-mobility"—elderly, infirm or impoverished and without cars. In disaster planning sessions "little attention" was given to what would happen to these people in the event of a hurricane or flood. When the question of their needs was raised, he said, "the response was often silence." (New York Times, Sept. 2)

People of color make up 70 percent of the New Orleans population—and 28 percent live below the poverty line. (Black Commentator) These were the people abandoned to death and devastation by authorities.

This racism and the criminal disregard of poor people recall the devastating flood of 1927, when levees broke up and down

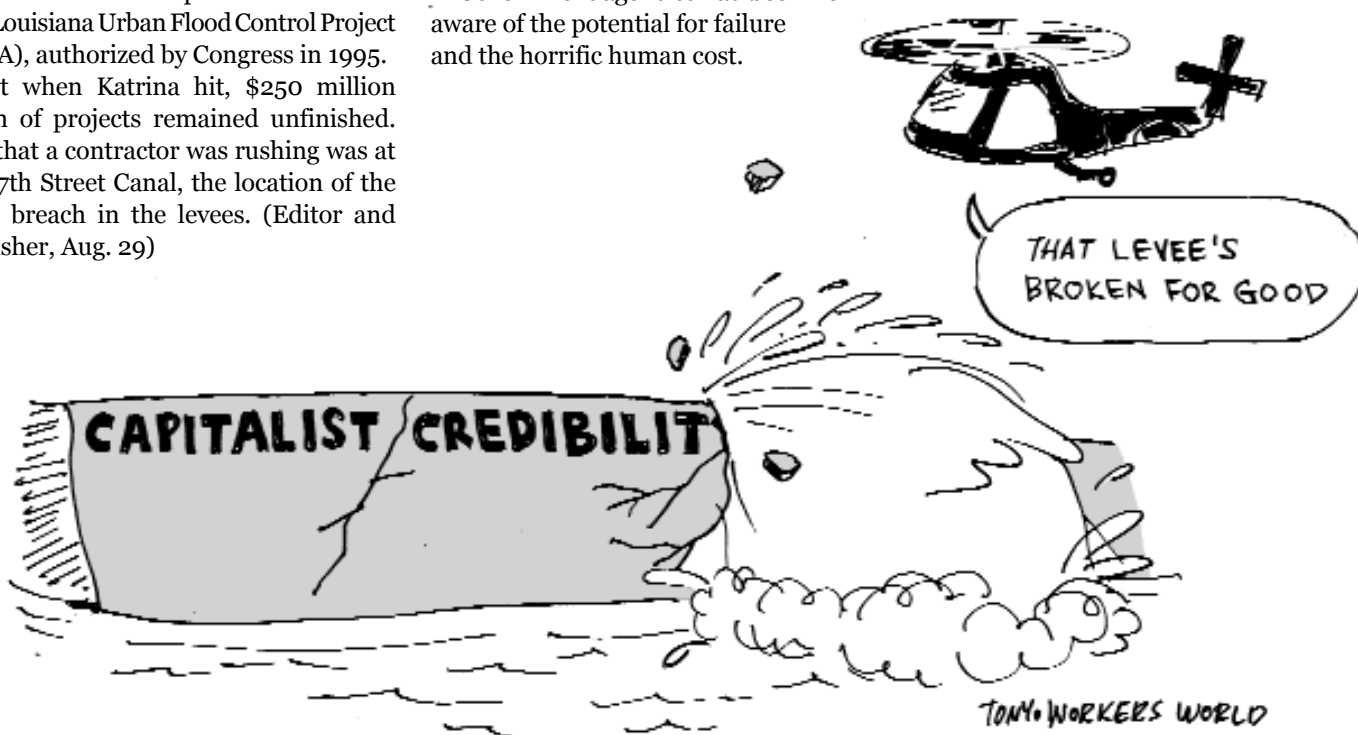
the Mississippi River after a spring of torrential rain. In the segregated South, Black people were "rescued"—and then confined in work camps, forced into work details to repair white owners' property. Some were shot for refusing to be re-enslaved. (Pete Daniel, "Deep 'N As It Come: The 1927 Mississippi River Flood")

As New Orleans was threatened, local, state and federal authorities agreed the Corps of Engineers should dynamite the levees below the city—where the population was mostly poor and rural. Though promised compensation, very few of the deliberately flooded-out people ever received a cent. (Judd Slivka, "Another Flood that Stunned America," U.S. News Online, Sept. 2)

London's Financial Times reported on this year's disaster with the headline: "Bush's Policies Have Crippled Disaster Response." But these policies, including war on Iraq, are a direct outgrowth of capitalist profit-seeking. Wetlands drained by land-developers and rendered useless as buffers against storm, the growth in global warming and the rise in sea level—all are spin-offs from unchecked, rapacious big business.

With planning and political will, the Gulf Coast lands could have been protected. Because of global warming, the Dutch—who are experts in preventing floods—have for some time been investing an additional \$10 billion to \$25 billion in "sea defense." They are upgrading all their "dikes, pumping stations and seawalls." (Christian Science Monitor, Sept. 4, 2001)

But the political will of both the Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. reinforces only a system of capitalist exploitation. A different answer can come from a rising storm against that system—one coming from the people who have lost the most and have the most to gain. □



Bush, Pat Robertson & 'Operation Blessing'

By Stephen Millies

George Bush can let Black people drown in New Orleans but he won't denounce Pat Robertson. He needs him too much.

In the wake of a storm of criticism for his handling of the hurricane and flood, Bush is more dependent on the millionaire televangelist than ever. Never has an event more exposed the utter contempt the capitalist government has for the lives of poor people in the United States.

When he's not attacking gay rights, Robertson is promoting terrorism. He recently called for assassinating Venezuela's elected president, Hugo Chávez, on his "700 Club" television show. However, this hasn't prevented the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) from urging people to give money to Robertson's Operation Blessing.

FEMA has actually put this outfit third on a list of places to receive donations to help Gulf Coast survivors. Will the homeless Black people of the Gulf see any of the money scooped up by Operation Blessing? Or will it be spent on defaming the popular leader of Venezuela's poor people, who has generously offered New Orleans \$120 million in aid?

Robertson may sound like a kook but he presides over a media empire with assets estimated at \$200 million. Supporters of Robertson's Christian Coalition do political dirty work for Bush.

The reason Pat Robertson is the wealthiest of all the hate preachers is because he comes straight from the ruling class. Robertson's father—Absalom Willis

Robertson—was a U.S. senator from Virginia for 20 years.

Pat Robertson's daddy was the junior partner of Sen. Harry Byrd Sr. in running a segregationist dictatorship that kept Virginia a low-wage paradise for Yankee bosses bringing their runaway plants from the North. In 1946 the Byrd machine considered drafting VEPCO utility workers into Virginia's National Guard because they were threatening to strike.

"Too much public education only gets working people riled and full of backsass," said Byrd.

Byrd's response when the Supreme

Court issued its Brown v. Board of Education ruling that school segregation was unconstitutional was to call for "massive resistance."

The Byrd machine shut down public schools rather than desegregate them. African-American children were barred from public schools in Prince Edwards County, Va., from 1959 to 1964.

The greatest crime of Byrd and Robertson occurred in 1951 in Martinsville, Va., when seven Black men—Francis Grayson, Frank Hairston, Jr., Howard Hairston, James Hairston, Joe Hampton, Booker Millner and John Taylor—were legally

lynched there on phony rape charges. The only evidence submitted was their own repudiated "confessions." So many had to be executed that they were sent to the electric chair in two shifts: four on Feb. 2 and three on Feb. 5.

The ruling class was taking revenge for its earlier failure to put the Scottsboro defendants—nine Black teenagers similarly railroaded—to death. A massive campaign led by the U.S. Communist Party in the 1930s saved their lives.

This is Pat Robertson's background and the sordid political base he can offer Bush. □

Help those abandoned by the gov't

Following are some of the many grassroots organizations providing assistance to the storm survivors:

HOUSTON

Send funds and goods—toiletries, soap, diapers, baby formula to: SHAPE Community Center, 3815 Live Oak, Houston, TX 77004. To offer housing in the Houston area, call (713) 521-0641.

LOUISIANA

Mail or ship non-perishable items to: Center for LIFE Outreach Center, 121 Saint Landry St., Lafayette, LA 70506, Att: Minister Pamela Robinson, (337) 504-5374.

Mohammad Mosque 65, 2600 Plank Rd., Baton Rouge, LA 70805, Att: Minister Andrew Muhammed, (225) 923-1400.

Lewis Temple CME Church, 272 Medgar Evers St., Grambling, LA 71245, Att: Rev. Dr. Ricky Helton, (318) 247-3793.

LOUISIANA

Camp Casey c/o Veterans for Peace is collecting funds, vehicles, Apple computer parts, digital cameras, baby products, more. Drop-off goods at: Pine View Middle School, 1115 West 28th Ave., Covington, LA 70434.

UPS or FedEx to: Veterans for Peace Chapter 116, c/o 645 Kimbro Dr., Baton Rouge, LA 70808. Contact: pjrate@sonic.net, (707) 536-3001.

MISSISSIPPI

Send donations to: The People's Hurricane Fund, Young People's Project, 440 N. Mills St., Su. 200, Jackson, MS 39202, or see www.qecr.org.

NEW YORK CITY

Bring funds and goods—towels, linens, diapers. Call first. Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, 388 Atlantic Ave., 4th flr, Brooklyn, NY, (718) 254-8800.

Northeast & Midwest Emergency Car Caravan to Louisiana & Mississippi

Provide vehicles, organize a drop-off point. Call John Waller at (718) 810-8426. Donate goods, email p4p@igc.org. Send funds for aid and caravan costs to: IFCO/Pastors for Peace, 402 W. 145th St., New York, NY 10031.

NATIONAL

The NAACP has set up a center in Biloxi, Miss. Donate online at www.naacp.org or call (866) 996-2227 or mail to NAACP Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund, 4805 Mount Hope Drive, Baltimore, MD 21215. Call NAACP state offices to donate clothing, linens, baby products.

BlackAmericaWeb.com Relief Fund, P.O. Box 803209, Dallas, TX 75240 or donate online at www.blackamericaweb.com/relief

National LGBT Youth and Family Groups has set up a fund for LGBT youth and families from the devastated areas. Donate at www.nyacyouth.org. □

It goes a lot deeper than FEMA

By Fred Goldstein

The big business media are howling for the head of Michael Brown, the hapless director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), for gross incompetence in his handling of the preparedness and rescue mission in the New Orleans disaster.

Brown should certainly be in jail for murderous and racist criminal neglect. But there are numerous others who belong there along with him, starting with President George W. Bush and his head of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff.

In this disaster, FEMA has shown utter negligence, in addition to disorganization, lack of communication, confusion and general all-around incompetence. But the stage was set for this long ago. On the scale of culprits, Brown, the inept fool in the spotlight, is way down on the list.

The political climate for the disaster can be laid at the foot of Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and all the others in the Bush administration who have championed the phony "war on terrorism." It is under this slogan that Bush had promoted the war in Afghanistan, the war and occupation in Iraq, the repressive, racist Patriot Act and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

'Homeland security' takes over

In March 2003, with great fanfare, the DHS was created and absorbed 22 federal agencies and 180,000 employees. Its budget started out around \$15 billion and has increased every year. It was \$30 billion in 2005. FEMA was one of the agencies taken over.

FEMA had been the only federal agency charged with the responsibility to try to prevent, plan for and reduce the effects of natural disasters. It was also charged with dealing with the aftermath of disasters, including providing damage insurance. It had a cabinet-level status.

As soon as it was put under the DHS, its

budget and its status were reduced. From then on, the so-called war on terrorism pushed everything aside and cut back on all constructive activities of the agencies that came under the DHS.

The Miami Herald of Sept. 3 wrote: "The Federal Emergency Management Agency, once a powerful independent agency focused solely on responding to earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters that occur on average about four times a month, was placed within the huge Department of Homeland Security after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Homeland Security sends \$1.1 billion each year to the states to combat terrorism, but \$180 million to help prepare for such disasters as Katrina. Much of the terrorism grant money is given under the conditions that specifically exclude spending it on items or personnel that would be used in responding to hazards other than terrorism."

This is a clear attempt to stop any attempt to use the money for natural disasters.

The Herald quoted George Haddow, former FEMA deputy chief of staff: "There are no emergency managers at any level in the Department of Homeland Security. It's all law enforcement."

Trina Sheet, executive director of the National Emergency Management Association, told the Herald: "Every state and community has warehouses of haz-mat [hazardous material] suits, personal protection equipment, bomb detectors, bomb diffusers, radiological detectors. ... But we've also got local officials where their emergency operations center is an office and a fax machine."

Michael Brown has been on television making a fool of himself. He told CNN's Paula Zahn on Thursday Sept. 1 that "the federal government did not know about the convention center people until today." That was several days after a world-wide audience of hundreds of millions had watched in horror as 15,000 African-American men, women and children desperate for food, water and transportation

were totally abandoned by the authorities.

He also told the CBS Early Show that he knew there were "pockets of people" who had not received the basics but that "we have the supplies."

Brown has been attacked for these stunning demonstrations of incompetence and ignorance—which also reveal the racism of the authorities. But the real power behind destroying FEMA's effectiveness in preparing for disasters is Chertoff.

Chertoff is behind Brown's incompetence

In July of 2005 Chertoff announced his long-awaited "review" of the DHS. After the review, his main move was to further demote and disempower FEMA. Shaun Waterman of the United Press International wrote about this reorganization on July 12:

"The change that drew most attention as the country braces itself for the annual hurricane season is that the department's Emergency Preparedness and Response is being dismantled." FEMA, the agency "that currently makes up the bulk of the directorate," was demoted and has "a director, rather than an undersecretary, reporting straight to Chertoff."

And, "in a move that is most likely to draw howls of protest from state and local emergency managers and FEMA's allies on Capitol Hill, the agency is being stripped of its preparedness functions." A former official explained, "Preparedness is what you do all year 'round to get ready for hurricane and fire seasons."

The policy of reducing natural disaster preparedness was reflected in the refusal of funds to complete a FEMA project specifically designed to prepare for a hurricane disaster in New Orleans.

FEMA had begun to carry out Project Pam. This project simulated a level 5 hurricane. Level 5 Hurricane Ivan just missed New Orleans last year. FEMA hired a private firm to do a \$250,000 study of the problems involved. But additional funds requested for a follow-up study on how to solve the problems were denied.

Brown, a former lawyer for the Arabian Horse Association, is a corrupt buffoon. He gave \$30 million in insurance to Miami-Dade residents who suffered some rain during a hurricane that hit 100 miles away, while he left residents from other areas, who actually suffered, without funds.

But the person in charge of the operation in New Orleans, with responsibility for starving New Orleans of preparatory funds, is Bush's man Chertoff. Brown is his flunky. In fact, the racist insensitivity of the Bush administration is illustrated by the fact that Chertoff did not even intervene in the crisis until Wednesday afternoon. This was two-and-a-half days after the people had been left on their own to suffer the ravages of the flood.

It was not until then that he appointed Brown to be in charge of the operation in the region. And it was not until then that he activated the National Response Plan to deal with the crisis. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, had already died, and tens of thousands were traumatized. Tens of thousands had still not been evacuated from the watery filth.

Even after Chertoff said the plan was implemented, the presence that the people felt was mostly that of armed troops. Food came slowly and evacuation even more slowly. It is still incomplete. People watched the evacuation of the private Tulane Hospital while 200 critical-care patients across the street in the largest public hospital for the poor, Charity Hospital, were without food, medicine, electricity or water. People were dying as reporters watched.

The Bush administration and its point man, Chertoff, have a reactionary, racist, anti-poor political and ideological position. This is what explains the willful lack of preparation for the disaster. It explains the deliberate delay in bringing even the most minimal aid to the people. And it explains the militaristic and police reaction to masses of people who have been subjected to a profoundly traumatic ordeal inflicted on them by criminal neglect and capitalist greed. □

As gov't cover-up deepens

People of Gulf Coast demand answers

Continued from page 1

being poor and overwhelmingly Black.

The Washington Post reports that 1 million people will be homeless for months as a result of Katrina. Clean-up efforts in the region are expected to take months as well. The draining of the water in New Orleans is expected to create another environmental disaster by killing everything in nearby waters, including in delicate wetlands and key maritime spawning grounds.

The Associated Press reports that evacuees are placing a strain on social programs in various states—programs that had already been stretched thin by budget cuts to feed the war budget.

Meanwhile, one of the few options being offered to Black youth at relief centers is the same that has been offered for decades in communities of color—that of joining the military.

An appeal sent via email from community organizers in the Houston Astrodome reads, "The National Guard [here] has engaged in ad hoc recruiting in recent days. [On] Sept. 7 the U.S. military is conducting a Job Fair in the Astrodome in a blatant effort to exploit the despair of masses of Americans evacuated from the Gulf Coast."

The other option offered regularly by the state—that of prison—continues in New Orleans. A photograph on the New York Times web site on Sept. 6 showed a line of overwhelmingly Black men at a "temporary prison ... set up at a Greyhound bus terminal in New Orleans."

No consideration has been made for the fact that many have been separated from their families and loved ones—in large part due to military evacuation plans. Stories in both the Los Angeles Times and the Detroit Free Press tell of infants and children being shipped to one part of the country while their parents were sent to another. A plan to move some evacuees from the Houston Astrodome onto cruise ships had to be postponed when many demanded to stay to continue looking for loved ones.

A mandatory evacuation has been ordered for New Orleans. Mayor Ray Nagin cites the environmental crisis that is abounding there, where any number of toxic chemicals from homes and factories have mixed with human waste.

"Mr. Nagin urged stragglers to leave immediately, saying he did not want possible explosions and disease to increase a death toll that Lt. David Benelli, president

of the Police Association of New Orleans, said could reach 2,000 to 20,000." (New York Times)

Along with this is talk of forcibly removing people from their homes, even of denying clean water to the people remaining.

However, what is not being discussed is the undoubtedly growing lack of faith in government officials who did little to nothing in the first place, not to mention soldiers with their guns trained on the people. It becomes completely understandable, with each new report of the government's preoccupation with protecting property and the wealthy, that some might want to take their chances rather than put themselves in such unsympathetic hands.

What is also strikingly absent from media accounts is any attempt on the part of government officials to connect with community leaders and grassroots organizations to get their input and participation in the process.

Many organizations and individuals have issued demands that are not being responded to by the government. One of those organizations is Community Labor United, a New Orleans coalition of labor

and community activists. It is calling for "the formation of the New Orleans People's Committee composed of hurricane survivors from each of the shelters, which will: demand to oversee FEMA, the Red Cross and other organizations collecting resources on behalf of the Black community of New Orleans; demand decision-making power in the long-term redevelopment of New Orleans; [and] issue a national call for volunteers to assist with housing, health care, education and legal matters for the duration of the displacement."

Saladin Muhammad of Black Workers for Justice says, "Some of us ... who participated in the recovery and reconstruction campaign following Hurricane Floyd know the importance of political forces linked to the African American liberation movement playing a major and leading role in organizing a people's response to catastrophes of this nature."

"The demand for self-determination as it applies to recovery and reconstruction is not only a demand for African Americans, it is also a working-class and gender demand, as self-determination aims to improve and change conditions for all who are impacted by national oppression." □

New Orleans community leader:

'THIS IS CRIMINAL'

Following are excerpts from an article being circulated on the Internet by Malik Rahim, a veteran of the Black Panther Party in New Orleans, an organizer of public housing tenants both there and in San Francisco, and a recent Green Party candidate for New Orleans City Council. He was a guest speaker at a 1998 Communist Manifesto conference in New York hosted by Workers World Party. Rahim lives in the Algiers neighborhood, the only part of New Orleans that is not flooded. What he describes is nothing less than deliberate genocide against Black and poor people.

Sept. 1—It's criminal. From what you're hearing, the people trapped in New Orleans are nothing but looters. We're told we should be more "neighborly." But nobody talked about being neighborly until after the people who could afford to leave, left.

If you ain't got no money in America, you're on your own. People were told to go to the Superdome, but they have no food, no water there. And before they could get in, people had to stand in line for 4-5 hours in the rain because everybody was being searched one by one at the entrance.

I can understand the chaos that happened after the tsunami, because they had no warning, but here there was plenty of warning. In the three days before the hurricane hit, we knew it was coming and everyone could have been evacuated.

We have Amtrak here that could have carried everybody out of town. There were enough school buses that could have evacuated 20,000 people easily, but they just let them be flooded. My son watched 40 buses go underwater—they just wouldn't move them, afraid they'd be stolen.

People who could afford to leave were so afraid someone would steal what they

own that they just let it all be flooded. They could have let a family without a vehicle borrow their extra car, but instead they left it behind to be destroyed.

There are gangs of white vigilantes near here riding around in pickup trucks, all of them armed, and any young Black they see who they figure doesn't belong in their community, they shoot him. I tell them, "Stop! You're going to start a riot."

When you see all the poor people with no place to go, feeling alone and helpless and angry, I say this is a consequence of HOPE VI [a federal grant program used to eliminate public housing—WW]. New Orleans took all the HUD money it could get to tear down public housing, and families and neighbors who'd relied on each other for generations were uprooted and torn apart.

Most of the people who are going through this now had already lost touch with the only community they'd ever known. Their community was torn down and they were scattered. They'd already lost their real homes, the only place where they knew everybody, and now the places they've been staying are destroyed.

But nobody cares. They're just lawless looters ... dangerous.

The hurricane hit at the end of the month, the time when poor people are most vulnerable. Food stamps don't buy enough but for about three weeks of the month, and by the end of the month everyone runs out. Now they have no way to get their food stamps or any money, so they just have to take what they can to survive.

Many people are getting sick and very weak. From the toxic water that people are walking through, little scratches and sores are turning into major wounds.

People whose homes and families were not destroyed went into the city right away with boats to bring the survivors out, but

law enforcement told them they weren't needed. They are willing and able to rescue thousands, but they're not allowed to.

Every day countless volunteers are trying to help, but they're turned back. Almost all the rescue that's been done has been done by volunteers anyway.

My son and his family—his wife and kids, ages 1, 5 and 8—were flooded out of their home when the levee broke. They had to swim out until they found an abandoned building with two rooms above water level.

There were 21 people in those two rooms for a day and a half. A guy in a boat who just said "I'm going to help regardless" rescued them and took them to Highway I-10 and dropped them there.

They sat on the freeway for about three hours, because someone said they'd be rescued and taken to the Superdome. Finally they just started walking, had to walk six and a half miles.

When they got to the Superdome, my son wasn't allowed in—I don't know why—so his wife and kids wouldn't go in. They kept walking, and they happened to run across a guy with a tow truck that they knew, and he gave them his own personal truck.

When they got here, they had no gas, so I had to punch a hole in my gas tank to give them some gas, and now I'm trapped. I'm getting around by bicycle.

People from Plaquemine Parish were rescued on a ferry and dropped off on a dock near here. All day they were sitting on the dock in the hot sun with no food, no water. Many were in a daze; they've lost everything.

They were all sitting there surrounded by armed guards. We asked the guards could we bring them water and food. My mother and all the other church ladies were cooking for them, and we have

plenty of good water.

But the guards said, "No. If you don't have enough water and food for everybody, you can't give anything." Finally the people were hauled off on school buses from other parishes.

You know Robert King Wilkerson (the only one of the Angola 3 political prisoners who's been released). He's been back in New Orleans working hard, organizing, helping people. Now nobody knows where he is. His house was destroyed. Knowing him, I think he's out trying to save lives, but I'm worried.

The people who could help are being shipped out. People who want to stay, who have the skills to save lives and rebuild are being forced to go to Houston.

It's not like New Orleans was caught off guard. This could have been prevented.

There's military right here in New Orleans, but for three days they weren't even mobilized. You'd think this was a Third World country.

I'm in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans, the only part that isn't flooded. The water is good. Our parks and schools could easily hold 40,000 people, and they're not using any of it.

This is criminal. These people are dying for no other reason than the lack of organization.

Everything is needed, but we're still too disorganized. I'm asking people to go ahead and gather donations and relief supplies but to hold on to them for a few days until we have a way to put them to good use.

I'm challenging my party, the Green Party, to come down here and help us just as soon as things are a little more organized. The Republicans and Democrats didn't do anything to prevent this or plan for it and don't seem to care if everyone dies. □

Time for a people's takeover

Oil companies are gouging America while the people in the Gulf Coast suffer. Should we pay more and more to line the pockets of these greedy monopolies, or should our money go to help rescue our sisters and brothers in the South?

Politicians, news commentators and the corporate elite tell us Katrina interrupted the supply of gasoline. They say that gives the oil monopolies some kind of license to almost double gasoline prices. They are making money hand over fist while the poor people of New Orleans are dying in the streets. It's time for some fundamental changes.

A couple months ago the Supreme Court ruled that a Connecticut town had the right to seize private property and hand it off to private developers if that promoted the "public good." Well, why can't the people take over the oil companies and turn them into non-profit public utilities for the "public good"?

Outlandish? Not really. The oil is a public property leased by the energy companies. The land and water that it sits under is mostly publicly owned.

The war in Iraq is not a war for oil—it is a war for oil profits. Converting these companies into non-profit public utilities means that our children and Iraqi chil-

dren can stop spilling their blood in this insane venture masterminded by Bush and his corporate friends.

If the people owned the oil industry, then we could set stable prices. We could compose responsible plans to restore the Gulf marshlands that can help protect cities like New Orleans from these terrible storms. We could press forward with less ecologically destructive sources of energy. And in times of crisis like this, we could devote our energy resources first to preserve and protect the lives of our people rather than to amass huge fortunes for a few billionaires.

—Chris Fry
Long Island, N.Y.

Gas gouging and body bags

Two million "refugees" and thousands dead from Katrina's wrath.

Washington spends hundreds of billions of dollars on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to benefit the same oil and gas companies and Wall Street

speculators that are now extorting working and poor people by jacking up gas and heating oil prices to the highest levels ever seen in this country.

The progressive government of Venezuela, because it has nationalized oil production, sells gasoline to its people at 12 cents a gallon. The U.S. government, on behalf of the "robber baron" oil and gas companies and Wall Street speculators, has twice tried to overthrow the elected Chavez government. Wanna guess why they want him out?

When people here are unable to heat their homes this winter, what will the U.S. government do? When working people can't afford to fill up their cars to get to work, what will it do? The government will protect the oil and gas companies and Wall Street speculators.

Should there be blame for the levee failures in New Orleans? Of course. Is it possible that the government was unaware that the levee system was designed for only a category-3 hurricane and that New Orleans was below sea level? Of course not.

But spending hundreds of billions of dollars on the military and the wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq for the benefit of the oil and gas companies

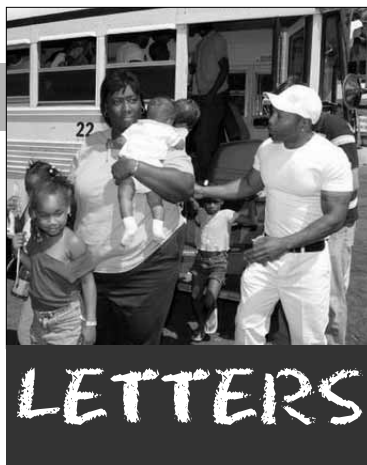
and Wall Street speculators while concurrently slashing funds to maintain the country's infrastructure is "a higher priority"! Cutting taxes on the wealthy while slashing funds for the city infrastructure became the "mantra" in Washington as high-priced corporate lobbyists paid off politicians for their votes.

Now the corporate bought-and-paid-for politicians and big-business media are screaming about looters. Not the real looters and price gougers of the board rooms of the oil and gas companies and Wall Street who are jacking up oil and gas prices, but poor people in the midst of this tragedy who are just trying to survive.

Possibly millions of working people and the poor have lost everything. Who will care for them once the TV crews leave? They will be simply abandoned to their fates. But will they "go quietly into the night"?

Anger was already building up as body bag after body bag returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. How high will that anger rise as 2 million refugees swamp the miserly "social net" while workers and poor all across the country are robbed at the pumps and as they heat their homes?

—Mike Gimbel
Executive Board member
Local 375, DC 37, AFSCME
New York





Saturday, Sept. 3

Hip-hop artist blasts gov't Military occupation, repression deepen in delta

By Larry Hales

Sept. 3—President Bush announced today that he plans to send an additional 7,000 combat troops and 10,000 more National Guard troops to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, bringing the Guard total to 40,000.

The city is looking more and more like occupied Haiti with the arrival today of hundreds more heavily armed troops, whose main role is to repress a thoroughly frustrated, angry Black population. Tens of thousands have been suffering from starvation along with a lack of water, housing, clothing, health care and other human needs so far denied by the government since the hurricane and subsequent flooding of New Orleans.

After the flood, tens of thousands were stranded for days at the Louisiana Superdome and the Convention Center, which became unfit for people to live in. The dome officials refused to turn on the air conditioning and toilets did not flush. Survivors were housed alongside dead bodies.

The major evacuations did not begin until late Thursday, Sept. 1. Food and water did not arrive in a major way until the next day. As of this morning, thousands were still stuck at the Convention Center, on an overpass near Interstate 10 and in their homes or on rooftops waiting to be rescued.

Poor people continue to die, as they've had to watch buses pass them by in unbearable heat and humidity. But for those with money, it was a different story.

"At one point Friday, the evacuation was interrupted briefly when school buses pulled up so some 700 guests and employees from the [Hyatt Regency] hotel could move to the head of the evacuation line—much to the amazement of those who had been crammed in the Superdome since last Sunday." (USA Today, Sept. 3) The tourists were clean, shaved, had recently eaten and were mostly white.

There are now more than 220,000

refugees from Louisiana in Texas alone, according to the New Orleans television station WWL-TV.

To date, at least 60 countries have offered aid to the hurricane victims. Cuban president Fidel Castro announced yesterday that 1,100 Cuban doctors were prepared to go to New Orleans and other parts of the delta to help with the overwhelming health needs. At this writing, the U.S. State Department has not given these doctors the green light to enter the country.

The U. S. government has also characterized the offer by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez to provide cheap fuel to the people of New Orleans, along with food and other necessities, as "counter-productive."

Rapper West accuses Bush of racism

The Grammy-winning hip-hop artist Kanye West is being lambasted by the media in a way that many people of color understand. After performing for a Hurricane Relief concert aired on NBC and its affiliates last night, West refused to read the benign script prepared by corporate media writers. He instead told a national audience that "George Bush doesn't care about Black people. ... America is set up to help the poor, the Black people, the less well-off as slow as possible." West's statements were poignant and heart-felt. The anger and hurt of what has happened in the delta was clearly shown on his face.

Immediately, the network switched away from the African-American rapper to another performer, and apologized for the remarks. Not only did the network distance itself from West's statement, but his remarks were edited out of the West Coast showing of the relief concert.

This is to be expected from the corporate media. Their aim is to censor heroic statements like West's to try to divert people away from wanting to understand the truth of how this disaster could happen. But the images don't lie. Although the

business-controlled media have been trying to demonize victims of this administration's criminal negligence, calling them "looters" and "hoodlums," their poison is contradicted by the realities of what has happened, especially when someone like Kanye West speaks.

Hurricane a disaster waiting to happen

The negligence and callous disregard for human life can be seen in the events even before Hurricane Katrina hit, as well as since. One need only look at the statements and actions of government officials.

The most glaring is this: Hurricane Katrina was much weaker when it hit Florida, yet it killed 11 people there. By the time it approached the Gulf Coast, it had become a category 5 storm—the most destructive level. The Army Corps of Engineers and Louisiana State University created models of what would happen if a category 4 or 5 hurricane hit the area, and found that thousands would be killed; New Orleans would be virtually destroyed and flooded.

In an October 2001 Scientific American article, Mark Fischetti wrote: "A major hurricane could swamp New Orleans under 20 feet of water, killing thousands. Human activities along the Mississippi River have dramatically increased the risk, and now only massive re-engineering of southeastern Louisiana can save the city. ... New Orleans is a disaster waiting to happen."

The Bush administration's answer was to pull money away from efforts to strengthen the levees and reestablish the coastal marsh. Walter Maestri, emergency management chief for Jefferson Parish, La., admitted as much in June: "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay. Nobody locally is happy that the levees can't be finished, and we are doing everything we can to make the

case that this is a security issue for us." (Times-Picayune, June 8, 2004)

With all the predictions, with the hurricane at category 5 and lumbering toward the Gulf Coast, President Bush was on vacation in Crawford, Texas, where he had been for weeks. He was busy ignoring the vociferous calls from the Camp Caseys there and around the country to "Bring the troops home" from the other imperialist disaster in Iraq.

Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans ordered people to evacuate the city if they had the means, and so did Kathleen Blanco, Louisiana's governor. At least 20 percent of the people remained, however, with no means to escape. Over 27 percent of the people of New Orleans live below the poverty line. Thousands were initially turned away from the Superdome, and those who were let inside were told that they would need their own food and water because the Dome had none.

Kanye West's words illuminate the truth of what has happened in New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast. They shine more light on the nature of the Bush administration and this capitalist system.

The truth is that workers, especially the poor and people of color, are left to fend for themselves in great times of need—this is the true anarchy that capitalism creates. And when people begin to try to take the necessities of life, then, as West puts it, "They've given them permission to go down and shoot us."

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco proved West's point when she said, "These troops are battle-tested. They have M-16s and are locked and loaded. ... These troops know how to shoot and kill and I expect they will."

In a state where a "former" Klansman, David Duke, got a majority of the white vote when he ran for governor in 1992, the reports that armed white vigilantes have been roaming the streets, threatening the lives of Black people who may be liberating food, are very believable. □

Sunday, Sept. 4

Crisis continues More troops arrive, bringing coercion, not relief

By Deirdre Griswold

Sept. 4—As the world watches in horror, the life-and-death crisis continues to grow for thousands of distressed people, most of them African American, stranded in New Orleans. Enduring intense heat, they lack food, water and medical help and are surrounded by putrid water, garbage and corpses.

CNN reports today from Louisiana: "Time is running out for thousands of people awaiting rescue six days after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, rescuers say. Officials say they do not have the manpower, the resources or enough time to save everyone."

The report quotes a Coast Guard captain, Bruce Jones: "My guys are coming back and telling me, 'Sir, I went into a

house, and there are three elderly people in their beds, and they're gasping, and they're dying.' And we got calls today, 'We need you ... to go to a place in St. Bernard Parish. It's a hospice, ... and there are 10 dead and there are 10 dying.' But those people were probably alive yesterday or the day before."

The CNN report concludes: "For every person plucked from the flood, there are hundreds still waiting, rescuers say."

The authorities have released no figures on the death toll so far, but the Louisiana governor says it will be "in the thousands."

Meanwhile, stories keep coming out about how the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other local and federal authorities have been turning back skilled volunteers who want to help in this worst disaster ever suffered in U.S. history.

A Virginia newspaper writes: "Loudoun Sheriff's deputies and emergency personnel were on their way to hurricane-stricken Louisiana Thursday night but had to turn around when the federal government failed to come up with the required paperwork." (Loudon Times-Mirror, Sept. 2)

The Daily News of Jacksonville, N.C., wrote today: "[Sherri] Gabel, an emergency medical technician from Jacksonville, is one of thousands of trained health-care providers and emergency personnel who have flocked toward the ruined Gulf Coast in hopes of helping the thousands who have been stranded without food, water or medical care in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"But many are being turned away, said Gabel, a move she believes will cost more lives. In fact, she said the Federal Emer-

gency Management Agency [FEMA] tried to turn her away when she called them earlier this week. ...

"Gabel said she has watched authorities turn away both emergency workers and trucks loaded with supplies. ... 'Everyone saw this storm coming in,' she said. 'Everyone knew this storm was going to be a catastrophe. Here it is Friday and these people are crying and dying on the middle of the road because they don't have a single bottle of water. There's a lot of people not doing anything because they've been told not to.'"

Even people with the Red Cross are complaining that they cannot get into New Orleans. The organization's website says this on its FAQ page: "The state Homeland Security Department had requested—and



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continues to request—that the American Red Cross not come back into New Orleans following the hurricane. Our presence would keep people from evacuating and encourage others to come into the city.

“People are still trapped, starving and dying in New Orleans, but tragically, the Red Cross is not permitted to help them. Orders of Homeland Security.”

Venezuela's offer of help

Offers of help from other countries are also getting a polite “Thank you, we’ll see about it” from Washington, even as hundreds are still dying every day. Venezuela was the first country to offer help to the afflicted in the Gulf area, saying it could immediately send fuel and emergency workers.

CITGO, a company in the U.S. owned by the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, has a network of refineries and gas stations in the United States. One of these is based in Lake Charles, La., and was opened to give shelter and aid to some 2,000 residents of the area. But the U.S. government has not given the go-ahead for this to happen. Its attitude toward the ongoing revolution in Venezuela is completely hostile.

Now there is a new flood: criticism of the government authorities who allowed this unprecedented disaster to happen. In response, the Bush administration is seeking every possible way to deflect that criticism away from itself and its costly war in Iraq—which has drained money and resources from the budgets for flood control and disaster readiness—and turn it against the local authorities.

An internecine struggle has broken out over who will be in charge. Today’s Washington Post reports: “Behind the scenes, a power struggle emerged, as federal officials tried to wrest authority from Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco (D). Shortly before midnight Friday, the Bush administration sent her a proposed legal memorandum asking her to request a federal takeover of the evacuation of New Orleans, a source within the state’s emergency operations center said Saturday.

“The administration sought unified control over all local police and state National Guard units reporting to the governor. Louisiana officials rejected the request after talks throughout the night, concerned that such a move would be comparable to a federal declaration of martial law. Some officials in the state suspected a political motive behind the request. ‘Quite frankly, if they’d been able to pull off taking it away from the locals, they then could have blamed everything on the locals,’ said the source, who does not have the authority to speak publicly.”

The racist attitude of Washington and the Pentagon to the besieged people of New Orleans can be seen in this report from the newspaper Army Times of Sept. 2:

“Combat operations are underway on the streets ‘to take this city back’ in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“‘This place is going to look like Little Somalia,’ Brig. Gen. Gary Jones, commander of the Louisiana National Guard’s Joint Task Force told Army Times Friday as hundreds of armed troops under his charge prepared to launch a massive city-wide security mission from a staging area outside the Louisiana Superdome. ‘We’re going to go out and take this city back. This will be a combat operation to get this city under control.’

“Jones said the military first needs to establish security throughout the city.”

The reference to Somalia is a dead giveaway. Under the excuse of providing “humanitarian aid” during a food crisis, the U.S. military invaded the East African

country of Somalia in 1993 in an outright colonial operation. But an uprising of the people drove them out.

Instead of rescuing dying people, the military has gone to New Orleans to “establish security.” The people are seen as “the enemy,” “the bad guys,” those who have to be “taken out,” in military jargon.

The hideous, racist character of the state apparatus, especially in this area where 150 years ago Black people were sold in slave auctions to be worked to death on the plantations of the South’s ruling elite, is all too evident.

Why was there no preparation for this disaster, which had been predicted by all the experts? Why was there no emergency

mobilization until it was too late to save the people from the consequences of Hurricane Katrina?

Because the priority of this capitalist government, which has widened the gap between rich and poor in this country as never before, is first and foremost control, control and control over the working class, especially its most oppressed and potentially rebellious sections.

The Bush administration on Saturday met with representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Urban League and the NAACP. It wanted to “dispel any kind of notions that the administration did not care about African American people—or anyone else,” said one participant.

Monday, Sept. 5

Grassroots relief highlights gov't negligence

By John Catalinotto

Sept. 5—With a Labor Day visit to the devastated Gulf States region, President George W. Bush today tried to convey optimism and a sense of turning the corner as he defended his administration’s failure to rescue tens of thousands of poor, mostly Black, residents of New Orleans and other Louisiana and Mississippi areas.

Bush, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other officials toured the area. They had spent the first five days of the crisis doing next to nothing to help. Now they were posing for photo-ops to cover up their criminal inaction.

None was talking about the new threats of infectious diseases beginning to appear among the 1.5 million people who have left the destroyed area but are still not receiving adequate medical care.

Bush’s optimistic words clashed with the latest estimates of expected body counts from administration and local officials. New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, Homeland Security head Michael Chertoff and Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt estimated up to 10,000 bodies might be found in the wreckage. Hundreds more have died in and around Biloxi, Miss.

New Orleans’ breached levee at 17th Street was reported to be “almost repaired,” but officials were talking of needing nine months to make the city habitable.

Anticipating Bush’s visit, the editors of the Times-Picayune of New Orleans wrote an open letter attacking the federal agencies responsible for disaster relief:

“We’re angry, Mr. President, and we’ll be angry long after our beloved city and surrounding parishes have been pumped dry. Our people deserved rescuing. Many who could have been were not. That’s to the government’s shame.”

The large concentrations of people who had been in the Superdome and the Convention Center have finally been evacuated. The Bush administration, however, is concentrating the power of the state not on mobilizing emergency rescue and medical teams, doctors, nurses and nutrition-

ists to help people but on occupying New Orleans with some 40,000 police, National Guard and active-duty troops. It’s what his administration does worldwide.

The best news came from the actions of progressive and neighborhood organizations, mostly in the African-American communities, who were taking action to provide assistance where they saw the government’s actions inadequate at best, cruel and destructive at worst.

1.5 million displaced persons

Some 1.5 million people have left their homes on the Gulf Coast to relocate to 20 states, most of them going to other parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, and to Texas. Some of the biggest concentrations are in Baton Rouge, Louisiana’s capital, where at least 100,000 displaced people and rescue workers have gathered, and in Houston, the largest city in the region, where a reported 223,000 have been taken by bus.

The states involved have pledged to open local schools for the many displaced children, but local officials are already worrying about costs. Texas Gov. Rick Perry ordered emergency officials to airlift some of the people to other states willing to take them. And Baton Rouge Mayor-President Kip Holden has asked the U.S. Congress for financial help, saying the local government won’t be able to pay the higher bills.

A threat still exists that could have been handled with rapid medical care. “Officials at the Centers for Disease Control said some of the refugees have contracted a bacterial disease called vibrio vulnificus,” reported the Sept. 5 Los Angeles Times. “It may have been picked up by people with open wounds who were forced to wade through badly polluted waters for long periods of time.”

While vibrio vulnificus is supposed to be less dangerous than the bacterium that causes cholera, it can cause vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain among healthy people. It is generally not life-threatening and can be cured with antibiotics. For those who have other illnesses or weakened immune systems, however, it is very dangerous.

The additional crime here is that Washington has refused

to accept or even acknowledge the Cuban government’s offer Sept. 2 to supply 1,100 doctors. These physicians have experience working in difficult conditions similar to those along the devastated Gulf Coast—which few U.S. doctors have. They were ready to arrive on Saturday, President Fidel Castro said, each fully equipped with 53 pounds of medication for immediate use.

But after this monumental disaster, no amount of posturing and media manipulation can hide the ugly truth. After Bush’s much-publicized photo-op, where he played hero and hugged two young Black women in Louisiana, the German television station ZDF News reported that the president’s visit was a completely staged event. Their crew witnessed how the open-air food distribution point Bush visited in front of the cameras was torn down immediately after he and the herd of “news people” had left. Others that were allegedly being set up were abandoned at the same time.

The people in the area were once again left to fend for themselves, said ZDF. □



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Grassroots initiatives

The grassroots support has been quicker and often better organized than that of the Red Cross, not to speak of FEMA. Gloria Rubac of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty told Workers World that there has been an outpouring of support from the Houston population, especially from the Black community. “There is a real connection between Houston, especially the Frenchtown neighborhood, and southern Louisiana, for both Black and white people, through language and culture,” she said. “There are many volunteers, so many that the Red Cross has been turning them away.”

Rubac said that SHAPE, which stands for Self-Help for African People through Education and has been a center of political activity in the Black community since 1969, has been “a center of organization” in Houston. “Other groups bring in all sorts of aid to the SHAPE Community Center, where it is sorted for babies, adults, whatever. These are contributions from poor working class people in Houston contributing what they can. People with homes are taking families into their home.

“SHAPE has also been keeping track of who comes in from Louisiana and connecting people with others they know. The Red Cross wasn’t doing this until Sept. 5, so the community group did,” Rubac said.

“We heard that someone in New Orleans commandeered a bus and filled it with people trying to evacuate the city. It ran out of gas and got stuck. At the same



Camp Casey, Detroit

Continued to page 14

Wednesday, Sept. 7

On the road to New Orleans

The following is from cell phone reports to Workers World newspaper from Johnnie Stevens, an organizer for the Million Worker March, and Teresa Gutierrez, a Troops Out Now Coalition national organizer, from "Camp Casey New Orleans" in Covington, La.

9 a.m.: At 'Camp New Orleans'

Teresa Gutierrez: We're here, an hour outside of New Orleans, at the anti-war camp where activists have renamed their Camp Casey to honor the heroic people of this besieged city.

The progressive movement is going to have to work non-stop to make sure that what is really happening here comes out. This totally reminds me of the Trail of Tears and the relocation of Native American people.

You turn on the radio in Baton Rouge and you hear the white DJs talk about this tragedy and the need to pull together to help each other and love each other, and celebrating how New Orleans is "coming back," but then they're talking about the traffic conditions and weather.

The reality for the most oppressed is extreme horror, terror, displacement and relocation, and those who did not die will not have a chance to go back there unless there is a mass movement to demand it, to fight for it.

There's no government attempt to take a census. There's a woman we talked to who was evacuated to the Houston Astrodome. She has no idea where her family is. She has nothing left. She is so traumatized. She told us, "I'm just trying to keep my sanity."

Imagine losing everything and then having to live with 20,000 people in a dome, with all those contradictions, and

not know where your family is. When buses took people out of New Orleans, they dropped them off wherever the government wanted to. Even if the bus passed right here on a road where people had family that could take care of them, the government wouldn't let them get off the bus.

There's this human toll that they're trying to cover up. Everything is left to the collective good will of people, while the Red Cross and government do nothing. We talked to one of the Veterans for Peace people here whose sister, a nurse, volunteered to come down here to New Orleans, but the Red Cross said no, there were enough people here already.

People here on the ground know that there are not enough.

The movement has to demand to know why is the government turning away help, if not because they want more death and destruction. The government is calling for forced evacuation right now—people are opposed to that.

Johnny Stevens: Yesterday, we were in Baton Rouge interviewing people at a Muslim outreach center for relief in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

The people we talked to told us they like to be called evacuees—not refugees, because of how that word is negatively associated by the press.

We interviewed one guy who said there are meetings going on there about the neighborhood helping people—the Red Cross and FEMA weren't helping—they were.

We talked to a 3-year-old child who said, "I want my father!" We talked to a mother who told us she lost two of her kids. Another woman was saying, like a lot of these people are saying, they don't know where

anybody's at. She asked, "How's someone gonna know where I'm at; that I'm safe?"

We interviewed a white couple who was forced out of their home. The police came and told them they had to leave. They were telling us that hundreds of people were being dropped off on the bridge in the hot sun. There was no food, no water, but a whole lot of helicopters—five or six—always in the air, all day long, and they wasn't helping.

We talked to at least eight white people who said that the real aim now was to bring the rich people in and this was the opportunity. It's what everybody was saying. And everybody is very angry. The most glaring anger is that they won't allow people to come in to help when the city is underwater and over a million people need help.

And they're very young: 18 to 30-something, 40-something. And very angry. They said how come Bush had an aircraft carrier right there on the port but didn't bring it in to rescue them? They saying \$10 billion in so-called aid isn't equal to the amount of people that was in need. They were clear that it was racism, that FEMA and the Red Cross wasn't bringing any help in to them.



Buses removing people from New Orleans.

We're here at Covington where the Veterans for Peace set up Camp Casey and Cindy Sheehan gave them a bus to set it up. They're going out to all the different parishes and dropping food off daily. Another group here from Tennessee is doing the same thing. So far the Army is letting them in, but today is supposed to be the end of that.

Right now, we're on our way to New Orleans.

Noon: On a back road to Algiers

Johnnie Stevens: We are trying to get off the highway into Algiers, a parish of New Orleans, but the road is blocked everywhere by soldiers. Teresa says it looks like Colombia.

They got us off the highway. They waved us away onto a highway ramp and sent us down to a back road, but that was blocked by soldiers, too.

We're riding a back road now. You can see the destruction of slums; a lot of the trees cut down by the storm. There's dead animals all over the place.

The whole time we've been on the road—from Baton Rouge, Lafayette, St. Charles parish—we haven't heard no Cajun music, no blues and no jazz on the radio stations. This whole thing seems like ethnic cleansing.

The traffic last night was so incredible. They're not accepting credit cards at hotels, gas stations. We picked up two white youth, on their way to the hospital to visit their parents whose prior medical conditions were agitated by all the stress, and we stopped to get gas. We met a woman there who couldn't get no gas 'cause that's all she got was a credit card.

Algiers is right over the bridge. Our aim is to make it into Algiers. □

Even before the dying is over

The corporate vultures move in

By Milt Neidenberg

Emperor George has no clothes. Hurricane Katrina has exposed his administration and its ruthless indifference to the needs of a population exploited by class, race and poverty.

The government has lost its credibility because of the too-little, too-late response to the colossal catastrophe in New Orleans and the Gulf states. The hurricane has brought home death and destruction, hunger and disease such as wars of imperialist conquest have brought to the world's peoples—Iraq and Afghanistan, foremost.

Statistics have now taken on a human face. The contrast—stark and indisputable—is between a government indistinguishable from the empire of high finance and a Black community dispossessed and poor, now more than ever homeless and jobless. The tragic events in the Gulf states are a brutal reflection of a racist and class virus, institutionalized and national.

On July 24, the opening day of the AFL-CIO convention, a group of Black trade unionists had presented this critical issue to the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition. A statement was distributed by co-leaders of the Million Worker March Movement (MWMM), Clarence Thomas and Saladin Muhammad. Entitled "Racism and sexism: Major pillars of the crisis in U.S. trade union movement," it said that the most immediate problem for the labor movement, if it is to survive and

grow, is confronting "institutionalized racism and gender discrimination."

"The failure to organize the South," it went on, "a low-wage region which has been used historically by the corporations to force billions in concessions from organized workers and tax abatements from cities and states throughout the country by their threats of plant closings and runaway shops to the South, stands out as a major indictment of labor's failure to struggle against racism.

"Organizing labor in the South, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, meant taking on the struggle against legal segregation and white supremacy. It meant aligning with the Black civil rights movement and broadening the character of labor organizing and representation from being a narrow economic movement to a movement for social and economic justice."

The article concluded: "Prejudice means profits for the boss. For the worker—Black and white—it means lower living standards, humiliation, violence, often death." How prophetic!

Halliburton already at the trough

Cost estimates for restoring the Gulf Coast infrastructure have already reached \$200 billion—more than enough to attract the biggest corporate vultures.

"A Halliburton Co. subsidiary that has come under fire for its reconstruction work in Iraq has begun tapping a \$500-million Navy contract to do emergency

repairs at Gulf Coast naval and Marine facilities that were battered by Hurricane Katrina." (AP, Sept. 4)

Vice-President Dick Cheney headed Halliburton from 1995 to 2000. The government is locked into fulfilling the needs of the military-industrial complex.

Halliburton/KBR is a notoriously anti-union corporation. There are 22 "right to work" states and Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama are among them. They also have some of the highest poverty levels in the country. And now, estimates are that at least 1 million jobs have been wiped out.

Halliburton, bank lenders, contractors and subcontractors are licking their chops over the billions that will be pouring in from government and humanitarian aid. The oil barons are reaping huge profits as they hold the public hostage by monopoly pricing of energy products. Jacked-up prices at the gas pumps and for home heating oil ensure them more "windfall" profits.

Meanwhile, the cleanup, recovery and repair work in the stricken areas is too little, too late for hundreds of thousands. And this after a five-year downward cycle in income and benefits over the whole country.

New census data show that 800,000 additional workers found themselves without health insurance in 2004, bringing the total of uninsured to 45.8 million. Some 1.1 million more people fell into poverty in 2004, bringing the ranks of the poor to 37 million. Only the top 5 percent

of households experienced real income gains in 2004.

Yet the minimum wage has remained at \$5.15 for the last eight years. Congress recently rejected any increase.

It's time for a fightback.

History as a guide to action

Back in 1932, just one year after the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, an army of poor and unemployed was formed to meet the challenges of a national emergency. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was initiated by a presidential executive order on April 5, 1933. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was also established by executive order in 1935.

Both were created to sidetrack a potential revolutionary development that was rapidly spreading. The government was responding to the continuous demonstrations of the unemployed, rebellions and general strikes—the hallmark of Roosevelt's first term.

Communists, socialists and other progressives organized unions in the WPA and other projects. Labor battalions of the unemployed were formed nationally in the CCC. However, these labor camps were highly regimented under a military code of behavior.

Both organizations built highways, bridges, public buildings and recreation facilities. New roads were built, telephone lines strung up, federal parks created and

Continued on page 11

'Drowning New Orleans'

The putrid waters of capitalist politics

By Fred Goldstein

President George W. Bush, flanked by his cabinet, deflected media questions about the slowness of the federal government's response to the hurricane disaster by declaring that he did not want to "play the blame game." This is akin to a bank robber caught in the act pleading that "Now is not the time to make accusations."

Of course, the Bush-Rove strategy is precisely to play the "blame game." The White House is trying to direct attention to the failures of state and local authorities. Michael Chertoff, head of Homeland Security, has begun talking about the "breakdown of state and local authorities."

Rep. Tom DeLay, the Republican House majority leader, has canceled House hearings on the Katrina response by declaring it is a local and state problem. "It's the local officials trying to handle the problem. When they can't handle the problem, they go to the state, and the state does what they can do, and if they need assistance from FEMA and the federal government they ask for it and it's delivered." (CNN, Sept. 7)

Of course, the Bush administration is the primary culprit in this disaster. It appointed Bush's national campaign manager, Joe Allbaugh, as director of FEMA for the first two years of the administration. Allbaugh knew nothing about disaster management. He resigned and appointed Michael Brown, another Bush crony, to be the new director. Brown also knew nothing about disaster management.

Allbaugh went on to become a lobbyist for Halliburton subsidiary KBR. Vice President Dick Cheney was the CEO of Halliburton, a giant oil services corporation, before he came to the Bush administration. These two directors, operating under Chertoff, choked off funds for New Orleans hurricane preparations.

Bush created the Department of Homeland Security in March 2003. The DHS absorbed 22 agencies, including FEMA.

DHS diminished the progressive functions of these agencies, such as funding public health and preparing for natural disasters. It spent billions on giving out contracts to corporations for such things as "bioterrorism"—part of the campaign to sustain a permanent national frenzy over terrorism. The aim was to justify spending hundreds of billions of dollars on "staying the course" in the quagmire of the Iraq occupation.

Trying to get off the hook

Scientific American magazine, in its October 2001 piece entitled "Drowning New Orleans" by Mark Fischetti, revealed how the New Orleans authorities were preparing for a major hurricane.

With all the issues on the table--gas prices, the war, the oil industry's role in the floods and the corruption of Halliburton--the Democrats could have a political field day and make gains among the people. But their orientation is to be the loyal imperialist opposition--with the emphasis on obsequious loyalty.

"The boxes are stacked eight-feet high and line the walls of the large, windowless room. Inside them are new body bags, 10,000 in all. If a big, slow-moving hurricane crossed the Gulf of Mexico on the right track, it would drive a sea surge that would drown New Orleans under 20 feet of water. 'As the water recedes,' says Walter Maestri, a local emergency management director, 'we expect to find a lot of dead bodies.'"

The Scientific American article revealed in detail both a computer model of the expected hurricane and a concrete program of prevention—including sea gates that would stop Gulf storm surges from reaching Lake Pontchartrain and measures to rebuild the city's natural defenses against storms.

But instead of preparing to prevent the disaster, New Orleans disaster emergency authorities were preparing for 10,000 deaths.

It is doubtful that they informed the largely African American population of New Orleans about the 10,000 body bags. They didn't call for mass demonstrations to demand funding. Neither did the governor, the mayor, the congressional representatives or the senators. They all played by the rules of capitalism.

Hurricane after hurricane threatened New Orleans. Preparations moved at a snail's pace. Staring disaster in the face—disaster for the people, that is—these capitalist politicians, mostly from the Democratic Party, confined their efforts to lobbying and horse trading in Baton Rouge and Washington. They settled for piecemeal handouts that did not come close to getting the job done.

Everyone is now trying to get off the hook.

Big business wants answers

But the Wall Street Journal, the voice of big business, is not waiting for Congress or the president to investigate. Their system has been shaken and they are conducting their own detailed investigation. The ruling class wants to know what really happened. They want to know right away and without the distortions and cover-ups expected from their own politicians.

As part of its investigation, to which it has assigned no less than 21 reporters, a WSJ article on Sept. 7 describes in chilling detail what Walter Maestri was preparing for in 2001. The newspaper precisely pinpointed the areas of flooding and how they developed by interviewing 90 eyewitnesses.

"Trapped between three cascades of water were the neighborhoods of the Lower Ninth Ward, where nearly 14,000 African Americans lived, a third of whom owned no vehicle and a third of whom had physical disabilities, according to U.S. Census Data ...

"To the north, water poured through Black and Vietnamese neighborhoods closer to Lake Pontchartrain, where another 96,000 people lived ... large numbers of those people had not evacuated."

The Lower Ninth Ward is located next to an industrial canal. "As the hurricane rolled into New Orleans, scores of boats broke free or sank. In the Industrial Canal, the gush of water broke a barge from its moorings. It isn't known whose barge it was. The huge steel hull became a waterborne missile. It hurtled into the canal's eastern wall just north of the major street passing through the Lower Ninth Ward," creating a 500-foot breach.

In less than five minutes the water was 7 to 10 feet deep.

Bush and the Congress rushed back to Washington overnight when Terri Schiavo, who was brain dead, was going to have a life-support tube removed. But the potential emergency affecting the lives of well over 1 million people never got their attention. They were too busy making deals and planning how to enhance their careers.

The canal is operated "mostly by the federal government," according to the Journal. It is a crucial waterway "for vessels carrying petroleum products, industrial chemicals and oil-field pipes because it connects the river to the Gulf. ...

"Barges and ships were routinely delayed because of growing traffic levels and the lock was 'literally falling apart at the hinges' in 1998, according to a U.S. Army Corp of Engineers report." It was never replaced.

As for the slanderous reports about people refusing to obey the mandatory evacuation, Stanley P. Stewart, a 49-year-old mechanic from the Lower Ninth Ward, told the Journal: "Where was I to go? I'd like to ask the mayor how you take 14 people with no finances and book them in a hotel. It's not that we didn't leave. It's that we couldn't."

Guilty at all levels

What the Journal may not reveal is what Scientific American showed about how the oil and gas industry has built pipelines and channels through the marshlands over the years. It is estimated that these projects are responsible for a third of the erosion of the natural protection of the marshlands. Land developers also have played a destructive role.

What emerges clearly from the preliminary investigation is that, while Bush is to blame in the short run, all the capitalist authorities are to blame. They have no concern for the masses. They let the oil industry and shipping industry have their way year after year. The capitalist government is primarily organized to support the profit-making enterprises of the corporations and for purposes of repression.

Helping the workers and the oppressed people who suffer under this system of exploitation is the last thing on their list of priorities. But now that this disaster has happened, they will all blame each other and vie to show that they want to help the people.

Bush and the Congress rushed back to Washington overnight when Terri Schiavo, who was brain dead, was going to have a life-support tube removed. But the potential emergency affecting the lives of well over 1 million people never got their attention. They were too busy making deals and planning how to enhance their careers.

Suddenly they found \$10.1 billion and are promising up to \$50 billion more. Any significant portion of that money, appropriated at the proper time and used in a genuinely constructive way, could have saved thousands of lives and hundreds of thousands of homes and jobs.

The political managers of the system realize that there is a deep crisis—a crisis of confidence in the system among the people. They are rushing belatedly to repair the image of the system while try-

ing to balance "responsibility" with political ambition.

Only the Congressional Black Caucus, among all government bodies, has unequivocally denounced Bush. Former President Bill Clinton, on the other hand, is trying to shield Bush. He has said that we all have to pull together. He has teamed up with George Bush senior to show "bipartisan" class unity between the two capitalist parties in the crisis.

Senators Susan Collins, Republican from Maine, and Joseph Lieberman, Democrat from Connecticut, have called for a Katrina commission to investigate. But they should be investigating themselves. They are on the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. Hurricane preparedness definitely falls under the definition of governmental affairs.

Where were they? The New Orleans situation was known nationally as a disaster waiting to happen. There were debates and discussions in the open and behind the scenes in Congress over appropriations to deal with the situation.

Congress is all talk

As far as the people are concerned, Congress is just all talk, with capitalist politicians drawing high salaries and holding fancy titles—like chairperson of the Governmental Affairs Committee or of the environmental and coastal subcommittee, etc., ad nauseam. But their real job is to grease the wheels of the capitalist machine of exploitation.

Right now, the Navy has asked Halliburton to fix its installations damaged in New Orleans. Halliburton is a firm that services the giant oil monopolies, including Chevron, ExxonMobile, Conoco, Phillips, and others. Halliburton is a corrupt war contractor in Iraq serving the oil industry there, among other things.

The oil companies pump hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil every day out of the Gulf. They refine hundreds of thousands of barrels in the Mississippi Delta region. They are gouging the public at the gas pumps. They have contributed mightily to the deterioration of the New Orleans environment. And their interest is primary in the Iraq war—which is being fought mostly for oil and fabulous profits.

With all the issues on the table—gas prices, the war, the oil industry's role in the floods and the corruption of Halliburton—the Democrats could have a political field day and make gains among the people. But their orientation is to be the loyal imperialist opposition—with the emphasis on obsequious loyalty.

In addition, they have to be careful not to dig too deep or they will uncover the dereliction of the Clinton administration—before Bush—and the Democratic-controlled Congress. They too allowed the oil companies and the industry to have a free hand at eroding the ecology of the region and failed to fund and carry out responsible disaster management planning that all the experts said for years was necessary.

The lesson for the workers and the oppressed is that leaving their fate to the capitalist authorities is a prescription for disaster. The only way out is to organize independently and establish popular authority through organizations outside the framework of the capitalist political parties and governmental apparatus.

Community organizations, unions and all other organizations of the people must have supervisory authority and responsibility in matters of public safety. That means pushing aside the capitalist profit system. It must be done. □

On the Picket Line

by Sue Davis

Boeing machinists strike

About 18,500 machinists at Boeing, a major U.S. producer of airplanes, set up picket lines on Sept. 2 in Seattle, Wichita, Kan., and Gresham, Ore. The major issues: wages, health care and pension benefits.

During three months of negotiations leading up to the strike, the best Boeing offered was a 5.5 percent wage increase—which would be significantly reduced by a hike in health care costs—and pension payments of \$66 a month for every year of a retired employee's service. Wichita employees received a separate offer.

Members of the Machinists and Aerospace Workers want all workers to get the same package, with \$80 in pension payments and no increase in health-care costs.

Noting that Boeing profits have tripled in the last three years, Mark Blondin, president of IAMAW's District 751, said the Boeing offer represented "a corporate strategy to break the workers who have built this company." (Sept. 3, New York Times)



PHOTO: UAW

Jaunice Conyers, a mechanic who has worked for Boeing for 10 years, said, "We make them a lot of money. They can give a lot of money to the CEOs and they can retire for the rest of their lives. But they don't want to give the small people anything besides just a paycheck."

A regulatory filing made by Boeing on Sept. 2 confirmed Conyers' statement: Boeing gave two top interim executives \$2 million in stock awards for their work this year.

The strike is expected to cost Boeing about \$70 million a day. A 10-week strike in 1995 "depressed Boeing's earnings as the company delivered fewer planes." (New York Times, Sept. 2) The workers are in a strong position because the company's worldwide orders have begun to pick up recently. Go, Boeing mechanics!

Boycott Gallo Sonoma!

The United Farm Workers initiated a second boycott of Gallo wine on June 14. The UFW called the boycott because Gallo pays its Sonoma County vineyard workers, many of whom are immigrants, poverty wages and denies them benefits, job projections and humane living conditions.

In recent weeks silent vigils and prayer services were held in California, including a "No Gallo!" march in San Francisco by 1,500 farm workers and supporters.

New talks between UFW and Gallo of Sonoma are scheduled for Sept. 14. Supporters can put pressure on Gallo by sending the company an e-mail asking them to bargain fairly with the UFW and expressing support for the boycott. To sign, visit www.gallounfair.com.

Immigrant workers at risk

Immigrant workers, especially Latinos, are dying on the job at a far greater rate than other workers, documents a new AFL-CIO report, "Immigrant Workers at Risk: The Urgent Need for Improved Workplace Safety and Health Policies and Programs."

The study shows that between 1996 and 2000 foreign-born workers increased by 22 percent, but their share of fatal occupational injuries nearly doubled, to 43 percent. Between 1992 and 2002 (the latest figures available), workplace fatalities among all foreign-born workers increased by 46 percent. But Latino workers died in even higher numbers: there was a shocking 58 percent jump in on-the-job deaths for Latino workers during the same period.

The report noted that many immigrant workers "toil in high-risk occupations, work in the unregulated 'informal' economy and often fear reporting workplace injuries. Many are not aware of their legal rights to safety and health on the job and to workers' compensation if they are injured." To counter that, the report profiled several successful outreach projects by unions and community groups to educate immigrant workers on worksite hazards and their legal rights on the job.

The report detailed 13 recommendations to improve safety and health protections for immigrant workers. Some of these include requiring all employers to provide safety and health training in a language understood by workers and strengthening whistle-blower and anti-retaliation provisions for all workers, regardless of their immigration status, who exercise job safety rights and raise job safety concerns. □

76 arrested in solidarity action

Militant sit-down supports NYU workers

By Shelley Ettinger
New York

Well over 1,000 people massed on the south border of Washington Square Park here Aug. 31 to demand full union rights for New York University graduate employees. Members of many New York unions joined workers and students who came from up and down the East Coast to protest NYU's union busting.

The demonstration was big, loud and angry. It culminated in a sit-down blocking the entrance to Bobst Library, which houses NYU's administrative offices.

Police arrested 76 people, including AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, UAW Vice President Elizabeth Bunn and scores of NYU workers.

NYU President John Sexton had announced earlier in the summer that, as of the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year and the expiration of Local 2110's first contract, he would withdraw recognition of the graduate employee union. He now refuses to negotiate with Local 2110 for a new contract.

Sexton moved to bust the union after the National Labor Relations Board ruled that graduate employees are not workers and not entitled to collective bargaining rights. This reversed an earlier ruling.

The original Labor Board ruling had paved the way for legal recognition of Local 2110, also known as the Graduate Student Organizing Committee—and for the first union contract for graduate employees at a private university in the United States.



Graduate employees say they are not going back, regardless of the latest ruling. They are discussing various tactics to force the bosses to back off their effort to bust GSOC.

With the new school year about to start, one of the most popular chants at the rally was, "No contract, no grades."

The president and two executive committee members from Teachers Local 3882, which represents NYU clerical employees, were taken away in handcuffs alongside graduate employees. Local 3882's contract is about to expire. Activists expect a difficult fight to hold onto hard-won benefits.

One of the biggest contingents Aug. 31 was from UNITE HERE, mostly Yale University workers. UNITE HERE General President Bruce Raynor was among those arrested.

This public show of unity was significant, since UNITE HERE boycotted the national AFL-CIO convention in July and is closely aligned with the Service Employees and Teamsters unions, which split from the federation. However, other than individual members who showed up on their own, those unions had no visible presence.

The writer is a member of Teachers Local 3882, the NYU clerical workers' union.

Detroit Labor Day

March supports Northwest strikers



Solidarity with striking Northwest Airlines mechanics and cleaners came through at this year's Labor Day parade.

Northwest on Aug. 20 forced 4,400 members of the Airline Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) out on strike when the company demanded a 75 percent reduction in jobs from the levels four years ago, plus extreme wage, benefit and work rule concessions that would essentially disband the union.

As they marched to the theme: "Protect Pensions,

Health Care and Social Security," many workers dropped money in collection cans, resulting in a generous contribution to the strike fund. Often, parents handed their children cash to place in the buckets. The AMFA is fighting for the future jobs and benefits of today's young people.

A Labor Day appeal called on the Metro AFL-CIO to convene an emergency meeting of all labor to get behind the Northwest strikers.

—Story and photo by Cheryl LaBash

The corporate cultures move in

Continued from page 9

millions of trees planted. The WPA performed theater and created new art forms that reflected the struggles, the sacrifices, and the bonding of Black and white in a people's movement.

In 1937, the Ohio River flooded surrounding areas. It was the CCC that saved lives and homes. They were indispensable in fighting a Labor Day hurricane in the Florida Keys in 1935, when winds of 150 to 200 miles per hour knocked out bridges and rail lines; Vermont and New York floods in 1937; and a New England hurricane in 1938.

Emperor George and the government have no inten-

tion of organizing and subsidizing the laboring masses in order to rebuild New Orleans and the cities bordering the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Oil production facilities and the corporations that use the ports will get their first attention, along with the casinos and hotels that bring in the tourists.

Organized protests are spreading rapidly. The people must be allowed to assemble independently of the government and work out a program to resist these shameful policies. The \$10.5 billion emergency relief must be directed to the people's needs, but it is only a drop in the bucket. The fallout from Katrina will be felt for years. □

'STOP SEPT. 14 EXECUTION!'

Supporters of Frances Newton work nonstop

By Gloria Rubac
Houston

Civil rights activist Dick Gregory and the president of the American Bar Association have joined the growing list of supporters of Frances Newton who are demanding that the state of Texas halt the scheduled Sept. 14 execution of this African American woman.

With a week remaining before the scheduled execution, the Committee to Free Frances Newton is working nonstop.

There will be a teach-in, a hip-hop rally, a demonstration in front of the district attorney's office, an Amnesty International vigil, a meeting at the University of Texas in Austin and a demonstration in front of the home of Newton's court-appointed attorney.

The committee is also endorsing the Sept. 12 Emergency Day of Outrage called by the Troops Out Now Coalition and will be protesting outside the Astrodome housing New Orleans evacuees.

Twenty-five thousand postcards have been printed to send to Texas Gov. Rick Perry. The committee itself has mailed in over 5,000. A campaign by the committee



and the International Action Center has generated tens of thousands of e-mails.

After suffering the racist indignities and terror unleashed by the government in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Black community is rising above the Bush-made disaster to stop this execution.

A recent arrival in Houston from New Orleans named Corey, who experienced six days of waiting to leave his home town, said about Frances Newton, "This country wants us to be Americans, but I am not an American. My people were stolen from our home, brought here and enslaved. They want to execute that girl? That's

because this government treats us all like n——. They don't care about our lives. They shouldn't execute anyone. They've already got too many problems with us right now!"

Corey is living in temporary housing in downtown Houston at the Convention Center.

Deloyd Parker, executive director of the SHAPE community center here, said about Newton, "Even amid the crisis, we must not stop fighting to stop Frances' execution. Our people are under attack and

this execution cannot be allowed to happen." The community center is providing clothes and housing for flood survivors from Louisiana. It was born out of the 1960 civil rights and Black liberation struggles. SHAPE Center now has people

coming to it who had been referred by the Red Cross.

"The Red Cross and FEMA are multi-million-dollar organizations and they're making referrals to us?" Parker exclaimed. "If this government can create a crisis because of a natural disaster, should we trust them to do the right thing in the criminal justice system? Absolutely not! Frances Newton must NOT be executed and must be given a fair day in court!"

Activist Njeri Shakur concluded, "The ruling elite of Texas, who have announced they have no more room for people from New Orleans, have the life of Frances Newton in their hands. The evidence shows she is innocent. They must stop this execution now! We will not allow another attack on our people." □

NEW YORK CITY

Rich-poor gap wider than ever

By LeiLani Dowell
New York

The increasing gap between the rich and the poor in this city was highlighted in a Sept. 4 article in the Metro section of the New York Times entitled, "In Manhattan, Poor Make 2¢ for Each Dollar to the Rich."

According to recent data, New York, the center of U.S. finance capital, now has the widest income gap in the country: the top fifth of wage-earners make 52 times the amount that the bottom fifth make. New York University economist Edward Wolff is quoted as attributing the disparity to an increase in Wall Street incomes coupled with a decrease in wages for low-income workers.

Not surprisingly, the article tells that compared with the poorest in Manhattan, the top fifth of wage earners are disproportionately white and male. The author describes the lowest-income tract in Manhattan, a public housing project called the Wagner Houses in East Harlem: "The median household income there is \$9,320, most of the residents are black or Hispanic and do not have high school degrees, 56 percent live below the poverty level and about one in 10 are foreign-born."

The highest-income tract is a mere 60 blocks away, where, the article says "none

of the residents identified themselves as black."

The article also reports that the Bronx, which is both a borough of New York City and a county, is now the poorest urban county in the United States. These numbers are striking for the area, especially considering that the Bronx includes the Riverdale area, an enclave of multi-million-dollar houses overlooking the Hudson River. Yet even with this averaged in, the poverty rate in the Bronx is at 30.6 percent, making it fourth in the country on the list of high-poverty areas.

A Census Bureau report a week earlier said that across the country incomes have stagnated and poverty rates risen, "even as the economy grew."

The only thing missing from these reports in the corporate media is Karl Marx's analysis of how capitalism works. He proved conclusively that, without militant struggle by the working class, the tendency of capitalism is to drive down workers' wages and other compensation even as the rich get richer.

This ruthless downward pressure from the bosses does not spring from the personal greed of individuals but from the capitalist system itself, and will only end when capitalism has been replaced by social ownership of the vast productive wealth now in the hands of billionaires. □

Reproductive rights under attack

Director quits FDA in protest

By Sue Davis

Susan F. Wood, director for the past five years of the Office of Women's Health at the Food and Drug Administration, resigned on Aug. 31 in protest over the FDA's recent failure to authorize over-the-counter distribution of the so-called "morning after pill."

"I have spent the last 15 years working to ensure that science informs good health policy decision," Wood wrote in her resignation. "I can no longer serve as staff when scientific and clinical evidence, fully evaluated and recommended for approval by the professional staff here, has been overruled."

Wood was responding to an announcement on Aug. 26 by FDA Commissioner Lester M. Crawford that the agency would indefinitely delay deciding whether to allow over-the-counter sales of the emergency contraception, known officially as Plan B, because it didn't know how to limit sales to women 17 and older.

Pro-choice advocates have since pointed out that states currently curtail sales of liquor and cigarettes to minors. Eight states already allow non-prescription sales of the pill without restrictions. Republican governors of Massachusetts and New York recently vetoed bills allowing access in their states, in lock-step with the Bush anti-reproductive rights agenda.

Although an independent advisory committee, the FDA's regulatory staff and the head of the agency's drug center all recommended that Plan B be approved, Crawford took it upon himself to overrule them. A number of women's groups, including the Black Women's Health Imperative, Our Bodies, Ourselves Book Collective, the National Organization for Women and the National Women's Health Network, charged Crawford with

advancing the Bush anti-choice agenda.

In fact, Crawford's unilateral action has been hailed by anti-abortion groups, which say, unscientifically and misleadingly, that the pill causes abortions. What these groups don't say is that they also oppose contraception and promote only religious-based, abstinence-only sex education for teens.

"I feel very strongly that this shouldn't be about abortion politics," Wood told the Sept. 1 New York Times. "This is a way to prevent unwanted pregnancy and thereby prevent abortion. This should be something that we should all agree on."

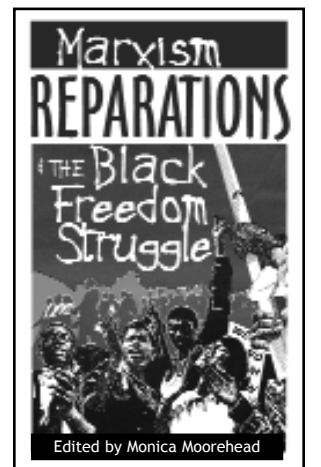
Ellen Catalinotto, a certified nurse midwife of more than 20 years who specializes in teen pregnancies, believes that the pill should not be restricted to older teens. "The 'morning after pill' is very appropriate for teens having unexpected and unprotected sex because they often can't admit being sexually active and they lack access to health insurance and other methods of contraception," she said.

Noting that the teen pregnancy rate has fallen in recent years, Catalinotto added, "This pill will only help it drop more." Statistics compiled by the Alan Guttmacher Institute show that emergency contraception was responsible for a 43 percent decline in abortion between 1994 and 2000. For other such statistics and a description of how the pill works, go to www.guttmacher.org.

Note: The National Network of Abortion Funds has set up an emergency fund to help women in the Gulf region affected by the hurricane. In a statement announcing the fund, it stated that "women who currently need abortions may very likely have to seek second-trimester abortions and will need increased funding necessary for later procedures." To find out more about the fund and to donate, go to www.nnaf.org.

Marxism, Reparations & the Black Freedom Struggle

- ◆ Racism, national oppression & the right to self-determination *Larry Holmes*
- ◆ Black labor from chattel slavery to wage slavery *Sam Marcy*
- ◆ Reparations & Black Liberation *Monica Moorehead*
- ◆ Harriet Tubman: woman warrior *Mumia Abu-Jamal* (Guest Commentary)
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- ◆ Causes of turmoil in Jamaica PART I PART II PART III *Pat Chin*
- ◆ The driving force behind the land seizures *Monica Moorehead*



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Under pressure from labor

Puerto Rico suspends mass layoffs

By Tom Soto
San Juan, Puerto Rico

In September 2004, Moody's Investor Services and Standard & Poor's—two Wall Street credit rating houses—quietly announced they were downgrading the credit worthiness of Puerto Rico's government bonds.

Moody's cited a government debt of \$39.4 billion—up almost \$8 billion over the last 2-1/2 years—that makes Puerto Rico's per capita debt higher than crisis-racked Argentina's. Moody's also pointed to the government's \$1.5-billion deficit in the fiscal year 2005 budget, which began in July.

In February 2005, Gov. Anibal Acevedo Vilá appointed William Lockwood Benet, "an expert in innovation of economic policy with experience in privatization transactions and bond issues," to preside over Puerto Rico's Development Bank and to lead the efforts "to reestablish Puerto Rico's credit worthiness." Lockwood's "professional experience" included former positions at Banco Popular of Puerto Rico, Citibank Global Finance, Merrill Lynch and Conservation Trust.

Offensive against workers and poor

In July, Governor Acevedo declared that, due to Puerto Rico's debt and budget crisis, his administration had made the "painful and historic decision" to lay off 40,000 public employees out of a total of 312,000.

In addition, the government announced that water usage rates would increase by 128 percent, bus fares by 50 percent and highway tolls by 43 percent. In the last three years the price of electricity has risen 60 percent, while gasoline prices, even before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, were at the all-time high of \$3 to \$3.20 per gallon. The government has also announced it will increase yearly car registration fees by 100 percent.

In April, the University of Puerto Rico, which includes 11 campuses serving

70,000 working class students, introduced a 40 percent increase in tuition fees. A month-long student strike failed to revoke the increase, but students are continuing their struggle.

With many union contracts coming up for renegotiation, the governor has ruled out wage increases and has declared he will not sign any bills that require increased spending. Several labor laws are pending before the Legislature.

The first immediate victims of the announced cutbacks in social services were 600 children from the poorest communities whose government-supported daycare centers were closed.

A developing atmosphere of struggle

The announced layoffs, the reduction of social services, and increased prices for basic food stuffs and other commodities have generated shock, uncertainty and worry among workers and their families.

The most vocal opposition to the layoffs and cutbacks has come from the island's organized labor movement, which is calling for a fightback campaign.

Unions representing the public employees as well as other sectors of the economy have denounced the layoffs and cutbacks as "unjust" and have demanded that the government tax the banks and the rich instead. They include the Federation of Puerto Rican Workers (Federación Puertorriqueña de Trabajadores), the Union of Puerto Rican Workers (Sindicato Puertorriqueño de Trabajadores), the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores), the Federation of Teachers (Federación de Maestros), the Electrical Industry Workers Union (Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Eléctrica), the Teamsters (Unión de Tronquistas), and others.

The labor movement has warned the government that going ahead with its plans for mass layoffs and cutbacks could provoke a general strike like the one that occurred in 1998, when the unions paralyzed the country to protest the privatiza-

tion and sale of the Puerto Rican Telephone Co.

Forced reduction of working hours

Though the opposition movement is only beginning, it has been so quick, sharp and vocal that the government has attempted to dress up its austerity plan by "asking civic-minded public employees to voluntarily work four days instead of five."

All the unions have rejected this so-called voluntary reduction of working hours, but the governor has insisted that if public employees don't participate voluntarily by Sept. 1, the reduced work schedule will be mandatory.

José González, a maintenance employee who has worked for 17 years at La Fortaleza (the governor's mansion in old San Juan), told the newspaper *El Nuevo Día*: "A reduction of 20 percent in my salary would be a serious blow to my family. ... I earn \$449 bi-weekly. Can you imagine removing 20 percent of my salary, with all the loans and bills to pay?"

In Puerto Rico, on average, 50 percent of a worker's salary is committed to the payment of personal debt.

Unions begin to organize fightback

In August, organized labor began pulling out its members for noon-hour "warm-up demonstrations" in front of government buildings. On Friday, Aug. 12, 5,000 public employees and their supporters gathered at the Capitol Building demanding the intervention of the Legislature to avert the crisis. They later marched to La Fortaleza under the slogan: "Tax the rich."

Some unions have mobilized delegations to lobby the members of the Legislature, pressuring them to approve a tax on bank, corporate and Big Oil profits, which are at record levels but declared "untouchable" under the current capitalist model of this colonial economy. But as occurs in other capitalist countries, the governor blames the Legislature for not

approving his budget, and the Legislature blames the governor for the current \$1.5-billion deficit—all of which is calculated to mask the real problem and deceive the workers.

Two tendencies in labor movement

The organized labor movement in Puerto Rico is divided into two wings. Most public employees directly affected by the layoffs are represented by unions whose orientation is class-collaborationist, favoring a non-struggle approach in the current crisis. Some of these unions are tied to the AFL-CIO in the United States.

The left wing of the labor movement is led by the Electrical Industry Workers Union, the Federation of Teachers (the largest union in P.R.), the Puerto Rican Workers Council, the Teamsters and the Brotherhood of Exempt and Non-Educational Employees, among others.

These unions are more class-conscious and struggle-oriented and are attempting to forge a fightback alliance within the labor movement. They openly criticize corruption within the government as well as union bureaucracy. They emphasize greater worker participation and often form community-labor coalitions to fight for working class political and economic objectives.

What lies behind the debt crisis?

Puerto Rico has been economically transformed since the Spanish-American War in 1898, when it was invaded by the United States and taken over as a U.S. colony. Having developed a considerable economic infrastructure, Puerto Rico has become highly lucrative for foreign investors.

A recent advertisement for the Offshore Corporation explains: "Puerto Rico provides unparalleled value that no other location can match. It is a United States community with a foreign tax structure.

Continued on page 15

Eyewitness Philippines

U.S. military actions broaden crisis

By Sharon Eolis
Manila, Philippines

An International Solidarity Mission came here Aug. 8-13 to defend a people under siege from the regime of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her government's imperialist backers in Washington.

The week of activities was initiated by the International League of People's Struggles-Philippines chapter, Krapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights), Promotion of Church People's Response, Bayan (New Patriotic Alliance), International Association of People's Lawyers and Bayan Muna Partylist. Of roughly 90 delegates from 19 countries, about 30 came from the U.S.

This event took place as U.S. troops in collusion with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) began a new round of war maneuvers against the armed revolutionary movement in Sulu Province in Southern Mindanao. The Arroyo government has directed and supported military attacks and massacres in communities of Moro people there.

The fighting in Sulu began in February,

when the AFP and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) had an encounter. The AFP has accused the MNLF of coordinating with the Abu Sayyaf—an Islamic group that has been the primary pretext for U.S. military intervention in the Philippines.

Broader crisis

Oil prices are going through the roof, food prices rising and real wages decreasing. On the political front there is mass pressure to oust Arroyo. Congress is debating whether to set up the procedure for Arroyo's impeachment.

It is helpful to look at the effects of globalization, government spending, the foreign debt and unemployment to get an understanding of the broader crisis.

Some 86 million people live in the 7,000 islands that make up the Philippines. While Tagalog, English, Cebuano and Ilocano are prominent, more than 80 other languages and dialects are spoken. Indigenous people make up 12 percent of the population.

Eight million Filipinos work overseas, 70 percent of them women. Most work in

Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. A large number of Filipino nurses work in the U.S.

According to President Arroyo, these overseas workers sent \$8 billion home to the Philippines in 2001.

Debt servicing was 55 percent of the national budget in 2000, military spending was 9.2 percent, and only 2 percent was spent on health care.

The minimum wage is \$5.45 per day in Manila and much lower in the provinces. The cost of living per month for a family of six is \$340. Nurses make \$180 per month and doctors \$288. This is partly why health care workers go abroad.

The income of the bottom half of the population dropped 3 percent between 1988 and 2000 while the income of the top fifth increased by 4 percent.

Between 1989 and 2000, after the Philippines joined the World Trade Organization, imports of rice increased by 540 percent and poultry increased 580 percent. The Philippines is now the world's sixth-biggest importer of rice. The growth of agribusiness, with absentee landlords, has left thousands of farmers landless and

homeless. Electricity has been privatized.

About 89 percent of the people work part-time, are self-employed or are unpaid family workers, as can be seen in the villages especially.

Eolis was a U.S. delegate in the International Solidarity Mission. Next: Talking to Moro refugees.

New IAC book—Guide to resistance



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Requiem for a reactionary

It is a requirement of capitalist custom in the U.S. that when a Supreme Court justice dies, it is necessary for the entire establishment to genuflect, praise and admire them. It does not matter if he was a racist, misogynous reactionary, like William Rehnquist, or a liberal. Democrats and Republicans alike must fall in line. It is part of the ritual of engendering awe and veneration for the authority of the court.

In the case of Rehnquist, it is a stretch for liberals and moderates. Democrats must summon all the hypocrisy they are capable of for the occasion. After all, it was Rehnquist who stopped the vote recount in 2000 and basically appointed George W. Bush president.

Rehnquist began his career as a Republican operative in Arizona on the team of extreme right-wing militarist Barry Goldwater. He was a thug for the Goldwater machine, participating in Operation Eagle Eye at polling stations during the early 1960s. The goal was to intimidate and block African American and Latin@ voters.

He later became a clerk for Justice Robert Jackson, a Roosevelt appointee. At the time of the ground-breaking legal challenge to segregation, *Brown v. the Board of Education*, Rehnquist counseled Jackson to oppose *Brown* and uphold *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which enshrined the racist doctrine of "separate but equal." He denounced his colleague's "pathological" search for discrimination.

Rehnquist was such a low-life liar that later on he tried to blame it on Jackson, even though Jackson had ignored his advice and voted for *Brown*. As a champion of the Confederate "states' rights" ideology, he opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He was against affirmative action at the University of Michigan.

Rehnquist twice voted against *Roe v. Wade*, dissenting in the original decision and again in 1992 in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, a 5-to-4 decision to uphold *Roe*. He also voted with the majority to overturn the Violence Against Women Act in 2000. He voted with the police in many crucial cases.

Rehnquist's role was to overturn the legal gains achieved by the civil rights movement and the Black liberation struggle after World War II. These gains were codified by the court of Chief Justice Earl Warren. Warren became the target of racists and reactionaries for years. Rehnquist came to the court as

those struggles were receding. He began a 33-year campaign to overturn those gains as well as *Roe v. Wade* and other post-Warren accomplishments of the movement.

Bush announced that he intends to appoint Rehnquist's clerk and political protégé, John Roberts, to take over as Chief Justice. Roberts' record is as clear as a bell. He is a right-winger all the way. He advised the Reagan administration to restrict the Voting Rights Act and has generally been dismissive of civil rights. He has opposed *Roe v. Wade* and referred to the "so-called right to privacy" upon which it is legally based. He has opposed family planning. He is opposed to the Endangered Species Act. He opposed protection of the environment against corporate degradation. He denied the right of workers to get disability for carpal tunnel syndrome. He upheld the Bush administration's right to conduct torture at Guantanamo. And Roberts wants to open the door wide to allow religious teachings in schools and government institutions. And—he was a lawyer for Bush in 2000. At that moment mentor and protégé, Rehnquist and Roberts, worked in harmony to hand Bush a presidency that he had lost.

Nevertheless, the Democrats are going through the motions of treating this enemy of the people with the dignity and respect required by the ruling class.

This level of opportunism of the Democratic Party is reminiscent of when Bill Clinton destroyed welfare, torpedoed the health care system, signed the Effective Death Penalty Act and implemented "Don't ask, don't tell" against gays in the military.

Looking back, it is no surprise that the leading Democrats are praising racist, anti-woman, reactionary Rehnquist in his coffin and letting it be known that his right-wing protégé is going to get a pass to the Supreme Court. But then, what can you expect from a capitalist party that has passed the Patriot Act, called for more troops to Iraq and declared its opponents "un-American." That's capitalist politics. Business as usual.

But just as in the days of the Warren court, the coming mass upsurge—which is bound to arise out of hatred for the Iraq war, the exposure of the bankruptcy of the regime during Katrina and the economic devastation eating away at the workers and the oppressed—will send all these reactionaries running for cover. □

PARIS FIRES

African community demands safer homes

By John Catalinotto

Thousands of Parisians demonstrated on Aug. 28 to protest the deaths of 17 African immigrants, 14 of them children, in a fire that gutted their decrepit apartment house on Aug. 25 in the southern part of the city. Another 23 people were injured.

"Housing for all," the demonstrators shouted, and "A roof, that's the law" and "Government—murderer." Various housing organizations called the action in front of the building, which was blackened and cracked by the blaze.

The protesters' rage was fueled by the memory that in April another fire in a similar building holding poor African immigrants killed 24 people. Then, on Aug. 29, another worn-out building in Paris housing Africans burned, killing two more people.

The victims this time were immigrants from Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Gambia. These countries are former colonies of France that still are tied economically to French imperialism, reinforced by language. Just as many people from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean are forced to migrate to the United States to find work, so do many Africans go to France.

According to a law passed in 1945, the government is required to replace defunct apartments in Paris with adequate housing affordable by the poor and people living in precarious situations. Trade unions and housing associations continue to demand that this law be applied, but the city has lagged in replacing housing over the last decade.

In addition, African immigrants face the rightist government's indifference to the poor as well as the racism of more reactionary elements, in and outside official circles.

The people in the buildings that burned, as well as many others, have been placed in dangerous run-down hotels, similar to welfare housing in U.S. cities where such housing exists. Some homeless in Paris have been waiting for relocation since 1991.

One tenant said that in some apartments 12 people lived in three rooms. Children often roamed the halls. Overall, 130 people, including 30 adults and 100 children, had been staying in the seven-story building near Place d'Italie.

Now they are lodged in a gymnasium nearby. They said they prefer to stay together and organize rather than leave the gymnasium individually. They will wait for adequate housing instead, spokespersons said. □

Monday, Sept. 5

Grassroots relief & gov't negligence

Continued from page 8

time, the New Black Panther Party of Houston took three buses intending to pick people up from New Orleans. They wound up rescuing those from the bus that was stuck and taking them to Bossier City, La., near Shreveport."

In another development, the anti-war movement is helping survivors of Hurricane Katrina. A delegation from Camp Casey in Crawford, Texas—named after a GI killed in Iraq—set up camp in Covington, La., across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans, to help the people forced to flee the Gulf Coast. The "White Rose" bus of the Veterans for Peace, Chapter 116, set up Camp Casey Covington, which is now providing food and medical support at the Covington Pine View Middle School on 28th Street.

The Camp Casey group has already made deliveries of water to the Red Cross and has been providing communications via its satellite connection. An e-mail from Dennis Kyne says they set up a distribution line that delivered tons of food and supplies in the first two days. Other Veterans for Peace groups are sending truckloads of goods into the area. The only way to reach Camp Casey Covington right now is through Gordon Soderberg at his e-mail address: gordonsoderberg@mac.com.

Expanding the struggle

Along with bringing direct relief, progressive organizations have expanded the struggle to demand more aid from the government. A Camp Casey in downtown Detroit gave the microphone to someone who had just come from New Orleans to stay with family members. When the group then joined the Labor Day parade,

the hurricane survivor carried a sign calling for the Cuban doctors to be allowed to help the displaced Gulf Coast population, reports Cheryl LaBash. "We hung a banner between streetlight poles that said, 'Bush Lies—New Orleans Dies—Money for Our Cities, Not for War.'"

A number of organizations have called for coordinated national demonstrations on Sept. 12, preferably at federal buildings, to demand:

- Immediate relief—food, medicine, water, clothing and emergency shelter for the people of the region.
- Extended unemployment benefits for all who have lost jobs, and a massive jobs and housing program for the near future.
- Money for hurricane relief, not war!
- End the military occupation of New Orleans! People trying to feed their families are not looters!
- An independent international investigation of the criminal negligence that caused this disaster.

Initiating endorsers include the Million Worker March Movement; Troops Out Now Coalition; Saladin Muhammad, Black Workers For Justice; Harlem Tenants Council; Chris Silvera, Chair, Teamsters National Black Caucus; Malik Rahim, Greencross, New Orleans; International Action Center; Cuba Solidarity New York; Rev. Lucius Walker, Pastors for Peace; Rev. Luis Barrios, Iglesia San Romero de Las Américas; and local leaders and activists from around the country. Protests are already planned in all the large cities and in over 100 areas of the U.S. □

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Puerto Rico layoffs blocked

Continued from page 13

Here you can enjoy the benefits and protections of operating within a U.S. jurisdiction with the added tax benefits of operating under a Controlled Foreign Corporation (CFC) structure. Profits from sales to the U.S. mainland are free from U.S. taxation, and goods enter the U.S. market duty-free. In addition, Puerto Rico offers a highly attractive incentives package that includes 100 percent exemption from multiple taxes; special treatment for pioneer industries and much more.

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Who pays for all the unparalleled "benefits and incentive packages" for foreign corporations alluded to in this advertisement? The working people of Puerto Rico do. According to the Development Bank of Puerto Rico, in the fiscal year 2004 the island's Gross Domestic Product was \$78.8 billion; of that, \$30 billion went straight into the pockets of U.S. investors. In that same year, per-capita income was reported at \$12,947.

If one looks at the corresponding profits taken out of Puerto Rico over the previous 107 years of U.S. colonial capitalist domination, and add that to the debt service to the banks, which is now at \$1 billion each year, you begin to understand what is really behind the so-called debt crisis.

The current struggle being generated by the so-called debt and fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico is a reflection of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism: that while the working class collectively produces all the wealth of society, this wealth is appropriated by a handful of private corporations and banks.

Due to the enormous pressure exerted by the labor movement, the government of Puerto Rico thus far has not gone ahead with its announced plans of mass layoffs.

In late August, Benet, the "expert" president of Puerto Rico's Development Bank, suddenly resigned for "personal reasons." Two weeks later the government "found monies it had not included in its original calculations," and now claims the deficit is down to \$300 million.

We will see what the Puerto Rican government decides to do, but in the meantime organized labor has begun to lay the groundwork for any future struggle that may be necessary. □

Italian hunger strikers demand: 'Let Iraqis speak at anti-war conference'

By John Catalinotto

Supporters of the Free Iraq Committee in Italy began their sixth day of a hunger strike on Sept. 5 in front of the Foreign Ministry building in Rome. The hunger strikers are demanding that Italy's Foreign Ministry grant visas to Iraqis invited to speak at the international conference, "Leave Iraq in Peace—Support the Legitimate Resistance of the Iraqi People," scheduled for Oct. 1-2. So far, the government has refused to do so.

The invited Iraqis represent diverse civilian organizations that operate legally in Iraq. They all also politically support the Iraqi resistance to the U.S.-led occupation of their country.

The Italian Foreign Ministry office in Baghdad had at first said it would grant the visas. Only after 44 rightist members of the U.S. Congress wrote a letter

demanding that the Italian government bar the conference did the ministry reject the visa applications.

Most Italians, as distinct from the rightist government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, were against the U.S. attack on Iraq. Most support a democratic discussion of the Iraq occupation. In addition, growing resentment over U.S. longtime manipulation of Italy's political life has led to more active support for the Oct. 1-2 conference.

The Iraqis who accepted invitations to the conference include Sheikh Jawad al-Khalesi, leader of the Iraqi National Foundation Congress; Ayatollah Sheikh Ahmed al-Baghdadi; Salah al-Mukhtar, former Iraqi ambassador to India and Vietnam; Sheikh Hassan al-Zangani, international spokesperson of the movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr and former editor of the paper Hawza, closed by the

occupation authorities; Mohammad Faris, Iraqi Patriotic Communist Party; and Ibrahim al-Kubaysi, brother of the kidnapped secretary of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance.

On Sept. 2 the Free Iraq Committee requested a visa for Haj Ali to speak at the conference. Haj Ali is the man tortured by U.S. personnel in Abu Ghraib prison who appeared in photos wearing a hood and attached to electrodes. The committee is challenging the government, seeing if it dares reject his visa on the basis of "national security," which is the excuse given for the other refusals.

The number of hunger strikers had grown to seven by the fourth day. They include veterans of the anti-imperialist movement and youth active against the occupation of Iraq. The last report from the committee states that the "comrades are doing well." □

Haitian militants reject U.S.-orchestrated elections

By G. Dunkel

In Haiti, which has been under the iron fist of UN/U.S. occupation for a year and a half, the imperialist-supported regime is trying to pull off national and local elections this fall to ease the political crisis there. This maneuver has led to a split in Fanmi Lavalas.

Fanmi Lavalas is the party of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the popular president who was forced out of his country on Feb. 29, 2004, by armed U.S. officials. Thousands of its militants have either been imprisoned or murdered since then by the coup regime.

Early in August, Rudy Hériveaux, Yvon Feuillé and Louis Gérald Gilles, three high-ranking leaders of Lavalas, officially registered the party for the upcoming elections.

Their right to take such action was challenged by other leaders closer to the base of Fanmi Lavalas, particularly in the militant and impoverished communities of Belair and Cité Soleil, the source of numerous demonstrations supporting the return of Aristide as the rightful president. The Haitian National Police broke up most of these demonstrations by firing on and sometimes killing protesters.

The importance of Cité Soleil is well understood by the imperialists. In an arti-

cle that itself tried to give credibility to elections held under military occupation, the Aug. 29 New York Times observed that "bringing some semblance of order to Cite Soleil and giving its residents a chance to vote in the elections are seen as important steps in establishing a new, credible government in Haiti."

Cité Soleil a bastion of resistance

Cité Soleil is part of Port-au-Prince, but with 500,000 or so people living there, it is more than just a neighborhood. It is a bastion of Aristide support. Many people in this politically aware, extremely poor community say that without ending the occupation, restoring justice and the constitution, the people of Haiti have no chance of resolving the social and economic crisis afflicting their country.

On July 6, 1,400 UN soldiers with helicopter support entered Cité Soleil and assassinated Dread Wilme, a leader of the Lavalas Movement there, after a 12-hour gun battle. Yet the UN still doesn't control Cité Soleil. UN forces conduct no regular patrols, have no checkpoints and operate only in armored personnel carriers.

"Political leaders in Cité Soleil are deeply skeptical of elections," the same New York Times article admits, "having watched as Mr. Aristide, who twice took office in elections, was twice removed..." But if Cité Soleil does not take part in them, the elections will not be regarded as fair and the current de facto government will not gain the political legitimacy it is seeking.

Since the February 2004 coup, the National Popular Party (PPN) has been working in a coalition with the popular organizations of the Fanmi Lavalas base, helping to organize demonstrations demanding the return of Aristide. In a statement released on Aug. 30, the PPN said that "to participate in these phony elections will give legitimacy to the Feb. 29 coup d'état. This gesture will likewise say we accept the occupation of our country and the neo-liberal plan the IMF imposed."

One of the first actions of the current Haitian regime was to open Haiti's internal markets to competition from U.S. agribusiness, which can produce rice, one of Haiti's staple foods, far cheaper than

Haitian farmers can. Faced with losing their livelihood, even Haitian peasant organizations that once opposed Aristide are now against the current government.

On Aug. 31, President Aristide issued a statement from exile in Pretoria, South Africa. "In Haiti, in order to have elections and not a 'selection,'" it said, "the following steps must be taken: 1) The thousands of Lavalas who are in jail and in exile must be free to return home. 2) The repression that has already killed over 10,000 people must end immediately. 3) Then, there must be national dialog."

A wave of renewed violence against Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic has been accompanied by mass deportations. Since many Haitians working there send a portion of their meager wages home to support their families, this is deepening the economic crisis inside Haiti.

A coalition of Haiti support groups in the United States has called for the first session of an International Tribunal on Haiti to take place on Sept. 23 at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., the evening before a national march against the war in Iraq that is expected to draw thousands of protesters.

Prosecutors will present a detailed description of what preceded the coup and preliminary indictments covering the period when the National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute, two quasi-governmental U.S. agencies, were training successors to the Tonton Macoutes and other notorious paramilitary groups. The tribunal plans to present the details on actions taken by the governments of the United States, France and Canada to destabilize the Aristide government.

Most importantly, the International Tribunal on Haiti will introduce eyewitness and expert testimony on the daily slaughter being carried out by masked police with the criminal complicity, and increasing participation, of the UN occupation forces.

A blue-ribbon Commission of Inquiry, led by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, will be announced at the Sept. 23 session of the tribunal. □

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UN troops shot to death Sonia Romelus, 22, and her sons Nelson, 1, and Stanley, 4, in their home on July 6 in Cité Soleil. Now the killers will be judged.



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Huracán Katrina: Gobierno de EEUU culpable de negligencia criminal

EDITORIAL

Casi todas las muertes, las heridas, los daños y la destrucción resultado del huracán Katrina son el producto de los crímenes de la administración de Bush.

El Presidente Bush fue criminalmente negligente al desviar hacia la guerra genocida en Irak, los fondos pedidos para proteger al pueblo de Nueva Orleans. La administración de Bush lo hizo con pleno conocimiento del peligro inminente. La principal agencia gubernamental a cargo de los desastres, la Agencia Federal para el Manejo de Emergencias (FEMA por las siglas en inglés) ya había advertido del potencial para un desastre en 2001.

Con la evacuación completa de Nueva Orleans, decenas de miles de personas atrapadas sin alimentos, agua potable, o luz, con miles de hogares destruidos y la tasa de mortandad subiendo cada hora, este es un desastre de proporciones sin precedente. Afecta profundamente a la gente negra, que representa la mayor parte de la población de Luisiana, Alabama, y Mississippi, y está sufriendo desproporcionadamente porque está sometida a la discriminación racista, lo que la deja en condiciones de pobreza y más vulnerabilidad ante tales desastres. Un 70% de l@s residentes de Nuevo Orleans son afroamerican@s y viven en condiciones parecidas a las de apartheid.

Algunos políticos lo están denominando como “nuestro tsunami”. El tsunami del diciembre pasado también cobró un saldo excesivo de muertos por culpa de una negligencia criminal. Pero los tsunamis ocurren raramente. Los huracanes en cambio, ocurren en la región del delta casi todos los años. Este desastre no sólo era predecible, sino pronosticado. La que parece una tragedia inevitable causada por la naturaleza, fue anunciada hace mucho por científicos, ingenieros, agencias gubernamentales, ambientalistas y expertos en el manejo de desastres.

El escritor sobre asuntos científicos del periódico Houston Chronicle escribió el 1 de diciembre de 2001:

“Nueva Orleans se está hundiendo.

“Y su protección mayor ante un huracán, el protector delta del Río Mississippi, se está erosionando rápidamente, dejando a la ciudad histórica peligrosamente cerca de un desastre. ...

“Tan vulnerable, en verdad, que a principios de este año, FEMA clasificó los daños potenciales a Nueva Orleans como entre los tres desastres probables más catastróficos que (podría) enfrentar este país”. Los otros dos eran un terremoto en San Francisco y un “ataque terrorista contra la Ciudad de Nueva York”.

Los gobiernos federales, estatales y locales conocían el peligro. Sabían lo que causaba el peligro y cómo bregar con ello. Pero poco o nada hicieron. Dejaron a la población de la región del delta sin advertencias e indefensa para hacer frente al inevitable desastre.

¿Por qué no hicieron nada? Un reporte en la revista ‘Editor and Publisher’ del 30

de agosto reveló que “\$250 millones en proyectos cruciales” planeados por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros del Ejército (CIE) en el delta para reforzar los diques y construir estaciones de bombeo no podían ser llevados a cabo. El CIE jamás intentó ocultar el hecho de que las presiones de los gastos para la guerra en Irak, así como la “seguridad de la patria”, ocurriendo a la misma vez que los recortes en los impuestos federales, fueran la razón de las dificultades.

“La época de huracanes en el 2004 fue la peor en décadas. A pesar de ello, el gobierno federal vino esta primavera con la reducción más severa en la historia de Nueva Orleans, de los fondos para huracanes y control de inundaciones”.

El reporte del periódico Houston Chronicle de 2001 citó un estudio de un consorcio de agencias gubernamentales hecho hace varios años. Este consorcio recomendó que entre \$2 y \$3 mil millones eran precisos para proyectos capaces de rectificar el problema. ¡Esto es menos que los gastos de un mes para la ocupación militar de Irak, que cuesta \$4 mil millones mensualmente, por lo menos! Por supuesto, parte de los más de \$300 mil millones gastados en la guerra pudieron haberse utilizado para tomar medidas preventivas.

Claro que aunque Bush es el culpable inmediato, no debemos olvidar que el Partido Demócrata votó a favor de la guerra y por cada centavo gastado allá. Entonces, los Demócratas también son criminalmente responsables por la devastación en Nueva Orleans al igual que por la guerra ilegal y la ocupación militar.

Ya que las autoridades capitalistas han dejado ocurrir este desastre, Bush está tomando una postura como si todo estuviera normal en relación al desastre. Al igual que después del Tsunami, pasaron días para que él interrumpiera sus vacaciones y saliera fuera de su hacienda en Crawford.

El gobierno federal es la única autoridad capaz de movilizar los recursos necesarios para la misión de rescate y reconstrucción. Se dice que un millón de personas fueron evacuadas de Nueva Orleans y los condados circundantes antes del huracán. En realidad, el gobierno no desalojó a nadie. Las autoridades simplemente declararon un desalojo obligatorio y entonces dejaron que la gente se fuera por sí sola. Ahora dicen que “por lo menos cien mil personas” quedaron dentro de la ciudad.

La gente no tiene dónde hospedarse. Mucha gente no tiene comida. Sus efectos personales se han perdido. No hay cuidado médico disponible. Las escuelas no están accesibles. Incontables personas están sin techo. La crisis inmediata requiere una movilización nacional de personal médico, asistentes sociales, expertos en rescate, ingenieros hidráulicos.

Comida, agua y suministros médicos

deben ser provistos con urgencia por los monopolios agrícolas, cadenas de supermercados, empresas farmacéuticas. Wal-Mart y otros gigantes de ventas al detalle deben ser obligados a enviar gratuitamente ropa y otras necesidades básicas. Productos agrícolas almacenados a través del Medio Oeste del país y otras regiones deben hacerse disponibles.

Toda forma de transporte—aviones, autobuses, ambulancias, helicópteros, barcos pequeños—deben ser movilizados a la región. Estas y otras medidas deben ser implementadas de inmediato por el gobierno federal basado en sus responsabilidades y en sus poderes de operaciones en emergencia.

En otras palabras, todos los recursos humanos y materiales de esta sociedad deben estar disponibles a las víctimas de esta crisis. Las corporaciones tienen control de estos recursos, pero los trabajadores que los crearon tienen todo el derecho a utilizarlos.

Dejen que el gobierno y los empresarios paguen. Poner a la gente—la gente sufriendo del delta—antes que las ganancias debe ser la orden del día. Las restricciones de la propiedad capitalista deben ser anuladas para el bienestar de las masas.

En particular, las empresas petroleras deben ser forzadas a otorgar miles de millones de dólares para la reconstrucción, de las súper ganancias que sacan de la región del delta a diario.

Exxon-Mobil refina 493.000 barriles diarios en Baton Rouge; Chevron, 325.000 barriles diarios en Pascagoula, Mississippi; Conoco Phillips, 247.000 barriles diarios, nombrando sólo a unos pocos. Todas estas riquezas han sido sacadas de la región, sin mencionar todo el tesoro gastado en el intento de conquistar a Irak y su petróleo. Y no sólo deben devolver las ganancias que sacaron del pueblo al subir los precios de la gasolina a más de \$3 el galón, deben ser forzados a bajar los precios drásticamente.

En general, las compañías gigantes multinacionales deben ser obligadas a pagar reparaciones a causa de toda la riqueza y trabajo que han sacado de Nueva Orleans—por donde pasa tanta riqueza de este país—mientras que la mayoría de la gente se queda con apenas lo suficiente para sobrevivir.

En cuanto al esfuerzo de reconstrucción, las autoridades están tomando medidas limitadas. Están hablando de que va a tomar meses o años para que la ciudad se alivie del desastre. La gente que tiene seguro de inundación puede hacer cola cuando llegue a sus barrios. La gente pobre que no tiene seguro de inundación tendrá que arreglarse por su cuenta. Tal vez FEMA les dé una limosna para ayudarles por un tiempito. Toda la histeria racista que está siendo fomentada sobre los “saqueadores” es una pantalla para ocultar el hecho de que el gobierno no ha previsto nada para alimentar a la gente, y

que tanta gente afroamericana vive en condiciones realmente precarias.

Pero la verdad es que hay una solución mucho más rápida y completa para cambiar la situación en la misma cara del gobierno. Hay millones de trabajador@s que pueden ser movilizado@s para ir y ayudar en la región.

Ahora mismo hay una explosión en la construcción de viviendas en la que cientos de miles de albañiles y otr@s trabajador@s de la construcción están trabajando asiduamente mientras que los urbanizadores de bienes raíces compiten entre sí para ganar súper-ganancias en la especulación en el mercado de viviendas.

Lo que se necesita es una movilización total de l@s trabajador@s de la construcción, albañiles, ingenier@s hidráulicos, personal médico, trabajador@s de servicios sociales y trabajador@s de todas partes del país para detener el trabajo usual capitalista y movilizarse para ayudar a la gente de Nueva Orleans, Biloxi y la región del delta—financiad@s totalmente por el gobierno.

Millones de trabajador@s desemplead@s podrían ser contratad@s a sueldos negociados por los sindicatos para ayudar. El movimiento sindicalizado podría estar en la vanguardia del esfuerzo de reconstrucción.

Con toda su tecnología, los patrones están preocupados con cómo poder recuperar sus pérdidas de la industria de seguros, con cómo poder hacer funcionar sus refinerías lucrativas, y con cómo poder volver a obtener las ganancias en la zona lo más pronto posible. La clase trabajadora, al contrario, se preocupa por el futuro de la gente, especialmente l@s afroamerican@s, latin@s, blanc@s pobres y l@s explotad@s que sufren más y recibirán la menor ayuda.

Una vez comience el esfuerzo de reconstrucción y sea posible comunicarse con la región, los sindicatos, organizaciones comunitarias, y los grupos del movimiento deben establecer medidas independientes por las cuáles puedan dar auxilio y ayuda a la gente de esa zona afligida.

Movilizando a las masas, poniendo a la gente antes que a la propiedad es cómo se hacen los proyectos de reconstrucción en Cuba, bajo la organización socialista de la sociedad. Debe hacerse la demanda de que el gobierno trate este desastre como una emergencia y una crisis nacional de la mayor magnitud. Hay que tomar medidas proporcionales al grado de la crisis, medidas como por ejemplo, dar seguro de desempleo extendido a tod@s en la región. Las pérdidas de propiedad personal deben ser completamente restauradas. Y el gobierno debe subordinar todos sus esfuerzos para dar auxilio efectivo a corto y largo plazo a las víctimas. Pero a la misma vez la clase trabajadora en este país debería encontrar una manera para ir más allá de la autoridad capitalista y traer cualquier forma de auxilio y ayuda que pueda a la gente del delta. □