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Anti-racist protests confront Tea Party

By LeiLani Dowell

A visit of the "Tea Party Express" to cities in the Midwest — a region of the country that has been most devastated by the economic crisis of capitalism — did not go unchallenged. Rather, activists and community members confronted them at several stops to denounce the right-wing attempt to divide working and oppressed people and to show that the racist, sexist, anti-lesbian-gay-bi-trans, anti-immigrant, corporate-funded Tea Party does not speak for working people.

The Tea Party is attempting to appeal to the popular discontent in the face of the economic crisis and attacks on working people in the form of budget cuts and layoffs. However, they want to fuel that discontent into a reactionary program that scapegoats immigrants, targets people of color and lesbian, gay, bi and trans people, and stands against women's rights.

The group presents itself as a grassroots organization, but in actuality it's funded by corporate, ultra-right organizations such as FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity. These bigots have been heavily assisted by the corporate media in relaying their message to the public.

However, activists across the country are beginning to organize to confront the Tea Party and send a real message of unity and working-class solidarity.

Some 50 counter-protesters staged a demonstration at an April 11 Tea Party Express rally in **Clinton Township, Mich.**, a suburban area north of Detroit. Local progressives and anti-racists joined activists called out by the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice; the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shutoffs; and Workers World Party.

"Racist, sexist, anti-gay, Tea Party bigots go away!" and "Health care is a right — fight, fight, fight!" were among the chants greeting those going to the neo-fascist rally. The chant "Against 'big government'? Abolish the Pentagon!" highlighted the hypocrisy of the racists.

The anti-Tea Party demonstration was covered by local media, which interviewed and videoed many of the participants. At a closing rally Chloe Secor, a Clinton Township high school student, denounced the racism and hate embodied by the Tea Party movement, saying it was not the legacy she wanted for her hometown.

That same day, a contingent rallied against the Tea Party Express stop in **Berea, Ohio**, near the **Cleveland** airport. Protesters carried placards stating "Free enterprise killed 29 miners," "Health care is a right" and "Workers of the world, united for health care and jobs for all." The demonstration received countless honks of solidarity and the support of passersby, *Continued on page 4*

STRIKING PHILLY NURSES BATTLE UNION-BUSTING



PHOTO: KELLY VALDEZ

Struggle inside Philly City Council chambers. See page 5.

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Anti-Tea-Party protesters gather in Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo; placard from Boston protest.

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Community anger grows over Imam's assassination

WORKERS WORLD
this week...

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire
Detroit



Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah

A community meeting was held March 27 to announce the launching of an independent investigation into the assassination of Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah. The event was held at the Historic New Bethel Baptist Church on Detroit's West Side, just several blocks east of the location of the Masjid al-Haqq mosque, where Abdullah served as leader for more than two decades.

Abdullah was shot 20 times by FBI agents on Oct. 28, during a series of raids carried out by a multijurisdictional task force that included Dearborn, Mich., and Detroit police. The Masjid al-Haqq mosque had been infiltrated by the FBI for more than two years, during which time informants sought unsuccessfully to encourage illegal activities among the members.

Abdullah and several of his members were eventually lured to a warehouse in neighboring Dearborn to assist with the unloading of merchandise. The FBI then sent in a dog that attacked the imam, who was later killed in a hail of bullets.

The March 27 rally was attended by several hundred local activists and religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities. The event was co-sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations of Michigan and the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality, with endorsements from the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice and the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shutoffs.

DCAPB spokesperson Ron Scott chaired the meeting, and presentations were made by the Nation of Islam, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, CAIR, Congressperson John Conyers and MECAWI. Appeals were made for donations for the legal defense fund for 10 other Masjid al-Haqq members, the Detroit 10, who face felony charges stemming from the raids.

Imam Dawud Walid, Michigan CAIR's executive director, described the delayed release of evidence. At the request of Dearborn Police Chief Ronald Haddad, the Wayne County Medical Examiner's report was not issued until Feb. 1. The release of 75 autopsy photographs was also held up by the Dearborn police.

A number of local and national organizations have demanded a Justice Department review of the FBI actions, including the use of informants in religious organizations. Detroit Congressperson John Conyers, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, wrote a letter in February to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder requesting such an investigation. The requests have gone unanswered.

Corporate media slander as photographs released

The much anticipated release of the autopsy and crime scene photographs took place on April 8. Five photos, made public by CAIR, illustrated the brutal nature of the assassination.

However, one day prior to the release, the Detroit News

published a front-page story that attempted to undermine the growing community support for Abdullah's family and the Masjid al-Haqq members. The article claimed that in 1980, a 22-year-old Abdullah attempted to grab the revolver of a Livonia, Mich., police officer during a routine traffic stop. (April 7)

This article asserts: "Livonia police reports detail the incident that led to Abdullah's 1981 conviction for felonious assault on a police officer, for which he served 26 days in jail. They provide another view of the man some supporters have described as a peaceful observer of Islam but a criminal complaint describes as a radical separatist intent on killing police officers."

It is unlikely that an African-American youth accused and convicted of felonious assault against a suburban Detroit police officer in 1980 would have served only 26 days in jail. Attorney Nabih Ayad, a Canton Township, Mich., lawyer representing the Abdullah family, told the Detroit News that raising the incident, which is three decades old, was "extremely far-fetched and without any credibility" in relation to Abdullah's death.

Mujahid Carswell, Abdullah's son and a well-known Hip-Hop artist who is also a Detroit 10 defendant, told this writer that the claims made against his father in regard to the purported Livonia incident were highly unlikely. Carswell, who is known in the recording world as "Mu," said that the authorities are attempting to take attention away from the gross injustice done to his father, his family and his followers.

One of the photographs shows the imam handcuffed, lying facedown and riddled with bullets. This photograph was published by the local newspapers; however, more graphic pictures were not shown in the corporate press.

At an April 11 community meeting held by DCAPB at the downtown St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Walid presented two other photographs that show deep lacerations to Abdullah's face, apparently from dog bites.

The Detroit Free Press stated in an April 8 editorial: "Efforts to manage community sentiments by withholding information always fail — and often backfire. With many lingering questions about how Abdullah died, Abdullah has become a national and even international figure — and, in some circles, a martyr. Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies have lost credibility with many of the Muslim-American groups they are trying to build relationships with in the post-9/11 era."

Numerous organizations have issued letters and passed resolutions decrying the assassination and demanding justice, including the NAACP, the Democratic Party 14th District Caucus, MECAWI, the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners, the Congress of Arab-American Organizations and the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights.

Both Carswell and Abdullah's other son, Omar Regan, have expressed their appreciation for the work of MECAWI in organizing three demonstrations in response to the assassination, the appearance of Attorney General Holder in Detroit last November and the delayed release of the autopsy report on Feb. 1. □

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Mumia Abu-Jamal: At the Crossroads

By Dolores Cox
New York

April 3 was “Call to Action Day” at Columbia University — a day to inform, mobilize and organize to save the life of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The theme was “Live from Death Row: Mumia at the Crossroads in the Age of Obama.” It was organized by Educators for Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Co-sponsors were the Columbia groups Lucha, the Black Students Organization, the Muslim Students Association and the Intercultural House at Columbia, the Arab Student Association at SIPA, Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine, the African Diaspora Literary Society and the Black and Latino Student Caucus at the School of Public Health.

EMAJ’s founder Mark Taylor, who is also a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, thanked Columbia students for holding this event. For 15 years, the group has educated and organized for justice for Mumia. They are coordinating the national campaign for a civil rights investigation into his case by the U.S. Justice Department.

EMAJ says that the same judicial violations and racism surrounding Mumia’s case account for the disproportionate incarceration of other Black people and the increasing illegal detentions of Arabs and Muslims.

More than 500 students, teachers and activists, including members of the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC), the Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the International Action Center, attended. The six workshops — on campus organizing, media building and legal struggles — and the evening plenary were open to the public.

Johanna Fernandez, a Baruch College professor and an EMAJ coordinator, moderated the evening panel on “Live from Death Row.”

Each speaker described Mumia as a true revolutionary, who speaks for the oppressed and whom the government seeks to silence because he speaks the truth about capitalism and repression.

Pam Africa of MOVE and the Philadelphia Free Mumia Coalition emphasized that now, more than ever, Mumia’s life is endangered, as all legal avenues have been exhausted. She emphasized the power of the people to effect change and said that it was mass action that rescued Mumia from his scheduled execution in August 1995.

Now activists must, Africa stressed, become fully engaged in the campaign to demand a full and complete investigation by the U.S. Justice Department of the racist, illegal prosecutorial actions by the Philadelphia district attorney’s office, the police department, the courts and city officials.

Jamal Joseph, a Columbia professor, former Black Panther and founder of IMPACT Repertory Theatre for youth, told of the federal government’s Cointelpro campaign, which destroyed the Black Panther Party when party members spoke about the need for unity of all peoples. “We need a movement to release Mumia,” he said and quoted Frederick Douglass, who said, “Agitate, agitate, agitate!”

Vijay Prashad, Trinity College historian

and author, talked about the attacks on the workers and said that what is needed is a commitment, a movement and a struggle. In comparing U.S. state oppression here and abroad, he asserted, “Mumia is Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Guantánamo.”

Cornel West, noted African-American scholar and Princeton University professor, urged everyone to act to support Mumia and to oppose the mass incarceration of and police brutality against Blacks and Latinos/as.

West said that, in the age of Obama, there’s no concern for the plight of everyday people under corporate power, and that the poor and working class in the U.S. and globally are suffering unnecessarily. Today, as in Reagan’s age, greed has run amok. Despite massive poverty, the people are declared “too little to rescue, the banks too big to fail.”

The evening’s highlight was Mumia’s phone call, live from death row. The audience gave him a loud standing ovation. Mumia opened with, “Power to the people!” He thanked everyone for being there and all of his supporters.

Mumia reviewed his life as a Black Panther and the good works the young Panthers performed without the advantage of speaking to Martin Luther King or Malcolm X, who were already murdered. They built their organization because they felt oppression in their bones, and they



Two days after Mumia’s 56th birthday, join us to demand that the U.S. Department of Justice launch a CIVIL RIGHTS INVESTIGATION of Mumia’s case.

Following a PRESS CONFERENCE, we’ll march to the DoJ for a RALLY. A MEETING is also scheduled with the DOJ. With the over 20,000 members of the CIVIL RIGHTS CAMPAIGN DEMAND justice for Mumia—his life is in greater danger now than ever.

Buses will be leaving from New York and Philadelphia. Cars and vans will come from other cities. For info in NY call: 212-330-8029 www.FreeMumia.com

were motivated by love for the people, said Mumia, referring to Che’s statement that true revolutionaries are guided by great feelings of love.

The machinery of oppression continues today, explained Mumia, referring to the “new Jim Crow” justice system. He encouraged young people to use their energy and abilities to organize and said that they don’t need to wait and ask for permission to do so.

Suzanne Ross of the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC) stated that “Mu-

mia’s death is not acceptable,” and she called on everyone to go to Washington, D.C., on April 26 to demand a federal civil rights investigation of Mumia’s case.

The evening closed with loud chants of “Free, free, free Mumia and all political prisoners!”

For transportation and logistical information, see www.freemumia.com/april26.html. Every Thursday call the Justice Department hotline: 202-353-1555, or switchboard: 202-514-2000, to demand a civil rights investigation.

Clothing workers fight to save their jobs

By Martha Grevatt
Cleveland

On April 7 hundreds of Cleveland union members rallied to support 300 workers fighting to keep the Hugo Boss men’s suit factory open.

The German clothing manufacturer has operated the plant since 1995 when it bought it from Joseph and Feiss, which had been making suits in the Cleveland area since the 1800s. Many of the workers have worked in the factory for decades, yet their top pay is only \$12.80 an hour. In October the members of Workers United voted down a pay reduction to \$8.30 an hour. In the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day the company announced it would close the Brooklyn, Ohio, plant and move work to Turkey and possibly Bulgaria or Romania.

The rally for the workers, one of many



since the December announcement, drew representatives of at least two dozen public and private sector unions. The Hugo Boss workers, who are mostly immigrants and workers of color, came out in full force. Rep. Dennis Kucinich and Ohio Governor Ted Strickland were among elected officials who addressed the workers.

The real keynote speaker, however, was actor Danny Glover. Since learning of the rotten deal Hugo Boss workers were getting, Glover publicly sided with the union. The renowned actor successfully

convinced Academy Awards attendees not to wear Boss suits to the ceremonies.

Workers and their supporters were buoyant over the announcement that the National Labor Relations Board had upheld a complaint of unfair labor practices filed by Workers United. The NLRB ordered

Boss back to the bargaining table; talks on the pay cut and plant closing resumed the day after the rally. This victory came about because of the determination of the workers and their supporters.

After the rally, members of the Cleveland chapter of Bail Out the People Movement confronted the politicians. They should do more than just speak at rallies, BOPM members argued. They should take stronger action against companies like Boss by freezing their assets and/or seizing their plants through eminent domain. □

‘Richie’ Richardson — an editor & anti-war hero

F.O. Richardson, who everyone called “Richie,” was still in his teens when he jumped into France on the night of June 5, 1944, the eve of the allied landing at Normandy. He survived, luckier than the many young men whose parachutes and bodies were shredded by German machine-gun fire.

Jump ahead 21 years. He was in many ways the ideal keynote speaker at a mass rally in Union Square in February 1965 organized by Youth Against War and Fascism to protest President Lyndon Johnson’s sending of combat troops to Vietnam.

In those days groups like the John Birch Society — the spiritual ancestors of today’s Tea Party organizers — would hold counter-demonstrations. They liked to call anti-war forces “cowards.” Richie

was right in their face, which got them even madder. They attacked the demonstration but found to their surprise that the protesters held the line.

Richie was a Workers World Party member through the 1960s and the early 1970s. In January 1968 he took on an assignment that became a vital contribution to the class and anti-imperialist struggle. He assumed responsibility for editing *The Bond*, which over the next few years became the best-read newspaper of protest for the rapidly growing resistance movement of soldiers, sailors, marines, air troops and GIs of all types during the Vietnam War.

The Bond became the monthly newspaper of the American Servicemen’s Union. Under Richardson’s editorship, tens of thousands of copies each month were

passed hand-to-hand by GIs all over the world, bringing an anti-war and anti-racist message and mobilizing them against the dictatorial chain of command.

The Vietnamese finally liberated the south of their country in 1975. With his editorial and artistic skills, Richie had made a concrete contribution any working-class activist could be proud of. He was one of those many heroes who helped defeat U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia.

Richie died this March. There will be a gathering in his honor on April 17 at 2 p.m. at the Ethical Culture Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., at Prospect Park West between 4th and 5th Streets. Surviving family members and friends will pay their respects to this class fighter.

— John Catalinotto

Mumia Abu-Jamal’s book, **‘Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners defending prisoners v. the U.S.A.’** is available at Leftbooks.com.



Anti-union Massey mine explosion kills 29

By Bryan G. Pfeifer

A week after killing 29 miners, Massey Energy Company officials are still walking free and uncharged for any crime while grieving loved ones of the dead miners and their communities continue to suffer.

Due to the insatiable greed of Massey Energy, the coal miners at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia died April 5 in an explosion at a mine cited repeatedly for improperly venting methane gas, among hundreds of other safety violations. Massey subsidiary Performance Coal owns Upper Big Branch.

Initially 25 miners were known to be dead. Four more missing coal miners were found dead later. There are still high concentrations of methane in and around the mine where the original explosion took place. This entirely preventable mine disaster is the worst in the U.S. in 40 years.

"Statistics prove that it's much more likely to be safe and alive in a union mine than a nonunion one," Phil Smith, United Mine Workers media spokesperson, told Workers World.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, since 1989 seven of the eight largest explosions have occurred at nonunion mines.

"As I said previously, at times like these we are all brothers and sisters in the coalfields. We suffer and grieve along with the families. And as we do, we cannot ignore the very troubling realities of what happened in that mine in the days and weeks leading up to the disaster. Nor can we ignore the grim statistics that are associated with Massey and the mines under its control," said Cecil Roberts, UMWA president in a statement released on April 8 (umwa.org).

Roberts said that a UMWA Health and Safety Department review of fatalities at coal mines since 2000 showed that prior to the Upper Big Branch disaster 20 people had died at mines operated by Massey, its subsidiaries or subcontractors.

According to Associated Press reports, federal inspectors cited the Upper Big Branch mine almost 500 times in 2009 for safety violations, including those related to methane gas. The inspectors proposed nearly \$1 million in fines. Massey paid only \$168,393 in penalties.

In the last month alone, Massey was cited 57 times, including 60 orders issued to close down part or all of the mine. Despite this, and although three workers died at the Upper Big Branch mine in the past 12 years and scores of workers were hurt and working under unsafe conditions, the mine was allowed to continue operating. Massey tripled its production at Upper Big Branch in 2009. (wvgazette.com)

Massey, which is nonunion and anti-union, has one of the worst safety records in the mining industry. According to union leaders, Massey and other mining corporations,

particularly nonunion ones, have an institutional policy to ignore, corrupt and fight in every way possible the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the regulatory agency for the mining industry.

"This incident [at Upper Big Branch] isn't just a matter of happenstance, but rather the inevitable result of a profit-driven system and reckless corporate conduct. Many mining companies have given too little attention to safety over the years and too much to the bottom line," said Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO and former president of the UMWA, in a statement released on April 6.

The UMWA and other poor and working people's organizations are assisting the families of the killed miners. Certainly no amount of monetary compensation can replace the loss of the miners. Still, it will take a struggle to ensure that Massey officials — well-known for their contempt of workers — are held responsible for killing the miners, a responsibility which includes compensation and other support to the families.

Massey: Enemy of workers and poor

Massey Energy is the largest coal producer in Central Appalachia, with underground mines, surface mines, and processing and shipping centers in West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee. Massey is also engaged in joint operations with the Essar Group in India. Workers at Massey extract, process and transport primarily low-sulfur bituminous coal used for power generation, metallurgical coke production and industrial boilers.

Coal still generates more than 50 percent of U.S. electricity needs. More than a billion tons of coal are burned in this country annually. There are still an estimated 275 billion tons buried deep underground.

Massey has a decades-long, ruthless approach to workers, the environment and safety regulations. The company pays virtually no taxes. A Virginia People's Assembly march in January targeted Massey headquarters in Richmond, Va., for the corporation's atrocious record, which includes union-busting, mountain-top strip mining and flouting safety regulations. (vapeoplesassembly.org)

Massey is perhaps most well-known for its virulently anti-union ideology and activities. Presently the corporation is vigorously opposing the Employee Free Choice Act. CEO Don Blakenship is well known for his anti-UMWA attitude and oppositional activities against unions and other organizations representing poor and working people.

According to Massey's 2009 annual report, only 1.8 percent of the 5,800 workers at Massey are members of a union such as the UMWA.

There is no word yet from the UMWA or from Trumka of any plans for protests at Massey headquarters in Richmond, Va., or other Massey corporate locations. □

On the Picket Line

By Sue Davis

NYC building workers set to strike

More than 30,000 doorpeople, janitors, porters, handypeople and superintendents who keep thousands of New York City's elite residential buildings humming are set to strike at 12:01 a.m. on April 21 if the Realty Advisory Board doesn't stop demanding what Service Employees Local 32BJ called "unfair and unacceptable cuts to health care, overtime and sick days" in a March 17 statement. When negotiations stalled in early April, Local 32BJ members voted unanimously to strike. The union has scheduled a rally for April 13 to tell New York's \$584 billion real-estate industry, which has been flush with cash during this recession, that they will not bow down to unreasonable demands to further line the already-stuffed pockets of greedy landlords.

Hotel workers' actions across U.S.

The 850 workers at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square hotel walked out April 7-10 as part of UNITE HERE Local 2's ongoing struggle for a decent contract. The billion-dollar hotel industry wants the workers to pay more for health care, but the low-paid workers say they can't afford what the bosses propose. The union has held rolling strikes since the contract expired in August 2009. With negotiations stalled since December and none scheduled, Local 2 plans other strikes targeting the top 60 high-priced hotels. In the meantime it's called a boycott of six hotels: the Hilton Union Square and Hilton Fisherman's Wharf, Westin St. Francis, W Hotel, Grand Hyatt and Le Meridien Hotel.

Employees of Columbia Sussex Corp., the fourth-biggest hotel owner in the U.S. with 67 hotels, called a boycott of seven hotels the week of March 22. Members of UNITE HERE say the layoffs, pay freezes, benefit reductions and health-care cuts have got to stop. The company is trying to bleed the workers as it scrambles to pay off more than \$1 billion it borrowed to buy 14 hotels in 2005. The union calls for a boycott of seven hotels, three unionized and four unorganized, to support a union organizing drive. The union hotels are the Baltimore Sheraton City Center, Hilton Crystal City outside D.C. and the Anchorage Hilton. The non-union hotels are the Westin Washington, D.C., City Center, Westin Emerald Plaza San Diego, Wyndham Chicago and Westin Chicago Northwest.

DOL workers 'ready to march'

During a March 31 union town hall meeting, workers at the Department of Labor, represented by Government Employees Local 12, accused Labor Secretary Hilda Solis of acting like her Bush predecessor. Contract negotiations, including such issues as paid family leave, flexible work schedules, teleworking and ending management nepotism, have dragged on for more than a year. Workers intend to picket the DOL with an inflatable rat. (Union City!, online newsletter of Metro Washington Council AFL-CIO, April 1)

S.F. Labor demands jobs for all

As part of a four-year review by the United Nations Human Rights Council designed to ensure that the U.S. complies with a number of U.N. treaties mandating full employment, the right to a job and union rights, the San Francisco Labor Council passed a resolution March 15 requesting that it collaborate with other labor organizations in writing a report to be delivered to the UNHRC. Among other provisions the report will call on the U.S. to enforce the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978, "remove all obstacles to organizing workers and encourage Congress to pass the Employee Free Choice Act," and post all U.N. treaties that mandate workers' rights in every workplace in the U.S. □

Anti-racist protests confront Tea Party

Continued from page 1

including several young people who said they knew the Tea Party movement was corporately funded.

Most of those participating in the Tea Party Express looked to be high-income employees, driving Hummers and pricy sport utility vehicles. One Tea Party participant screamed an anti-gay slur at the protesters, making clear the group's homophobic sentiments.

On April 12 the Tea Party Express was confronted in **Buffalo, N.Y.** The Buffalo International Action Center, part of the Bail Out the People Movement, held a loud, visible, persistent and militant counter-demonstration. As they stood at the entrance to the rightwing extremists' rally at Buffalo's downtown harbor, the IAC and friends were an unmovable opposition, insistently chanting the whole time.

Activists in **Boston** are planning to challenge the Tea Party when it arrives there on April 14. A statement promoting the protest reads: "Sarah Palin and the so-called 'Tea Party Express' have announced that they will hold a rally at the Boston Common Bandstand starting at 10:00 am. This is the same group of

ultra-rightwing, neo-fascist racists that have tried to exploit the current economic crisis by using the vilest racist tactics to attack Obama, unions, immigration, health care and the environment.

"While the demagogues, including Fox News and many others, that are in control of this group may try and hide behind populist slogans, it should be clear to all that their true goal is to further the political and economic program of Wall Street, big oil, the wealthy and the corporations, and they will stop at nothing in order to do so. ...

"We cannot stand by and allow Sarah Palin and the Tea Party to gather and try to use racism to divide us without a response. History has shown that only through organizing and mobilizing a strong, anti-racist, pro-working-class counterattack against both the economic crisis and racist division will we be able to successfully defeat these rightwing, neo-fascist organizations and their supporters once and for all.

Ellie Dorritie, Kris Hamel and Caleb Maupin contributed to this report.

WW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH



Striking nurses battle Temple Hospital's union busting

By **Betsey Piette**
Philadelphia

The strike at Temple University Hospital in north Philadelphia that began March 31 is heading into its third week. Hospital administrators are demonstrating their lack of concern over patient safety and are ready to spend whatever it takes to break the union representing more than 1,500 nurses and professional/technical staff.

This key strike's outcome will impact on all workers in the Philadelphia area. And solidarity now from other workers and unions will affect the nurses' chance for victory.

TUH management tells workers they should accept a contract fraught with concessions and givebacks because of the economic downturn. Meanwhile, in just the first week of the strike, management has spent \$4.7 million to hire 850 strikebreakers. Scabs' salaries average \$5,500 but can be as high as \$10,000 per week. Bonuses estimated to cost around \$100,000 will go to any scab staying past week one.

Regular weekly payroll costs for TUH's 1,500 employees would have been only \$2.6 million. The entire four-year contract proposed by the nurses and allied professionals would have cost the hospital \$9 million.

While squandering money to pay scabs more than union workers earn, management is also spending around \$1.7 million for the scabs' meals and transportation, including airfare and luxury hotel accommodations and extra security for people willing to cross the picket line.

The profit going to California based HealthSource Global Staffing, a company that specializes in providing temporary nursing staff to break strikes across the country, is \$1.1 million a week. Contrast that dazzling amount with the cost to continue a longstanding tuition benefit for nurses' dependents that TUH eliminated last year: only \$1.1 million per year.

The Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals represents striking TUH nurses. PASNAP is calling on the hospital to document the credentials of the temporary staff. PASNAP Executive President Patricia Eakin told Workers World, "Sixty-five percent of Temple's admissions come through their emergency room, yet word has gone out that the hospital is diverting ambulances to other hospitals because of inadequate staffing."

PASNAP took 400 striking hospital workers and supporters to the Philadelphia City Council on April 8 to get city representatives to pass a resolution of concern over the potential jeopardy to public health from the undertrained scab workforce. The resolution noted that when the busiest emergency room serving some of north Philadelphia's poorest communities cannot open its doors, it's a public health crisis.

The striking nurses took over most of the seats in the chamber and upstairs galleries during the council's biweekly meeting. Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez, the first Latina elected official in Philadelphia, introduced the resolution supporting the nurses' strike. But Councilman Darrell Clarke, who represents the district where TUH is located, then blocked this resolution from reaching the floor for a vote.

A key contract issue involves the nurses' concern over patient care. TUH management wants workers to accept a gag clause that would prohibit them from saying anything negative about the hospital or voicing concern over patient care in any public forum. Management's lead negotiator, Robert Birnbrauer, told the union bargaining committee: "You want your constitutional rights. Go somewhere else!"

To expose management's intention to silence staff, National Nurses United, with which PASNAP affiliates, took out a



Temple students show solidarity with nurses.

WWW PHOTO: BERTA JOUBERT-CECI

full page ad in the Philadelphia City Paper prominently displaying Birnbrauer's words.

Growing community support

On April 9 community organizations, including the Philadelphia Student Union, the Media Mobilizing Project and the Unified Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania, brought their members out to join striking nurses on the picket line.

Mariah Porter with the Philadelphia Student Union told Workers World: "It's wrong for them not to get a contract and for the nurses to not get paid. They need a contract to feed their families."

PSU member Justin Carter described his organization's efforts to get students more of a voice in the school system. He connected the hospital's gag order against nurses to the school district's denial of students' right to speak about conditions in their schools. Carter told the striking nurses, "As long as you are able to stand up, we'll stand up with you."

The students initiated a chant that was popular with everyone on the picket line: "What's disgusting? Union Busting!"

Desi Burnette, with the Media Mobilizing Project, reminded people how PASNAP worked with the community in March 2009 to try to keep open Northeastern Hospital when Temple University decided to close the facility, which had been providing care to the surrounding community for 100 years.

Ronald Blount, president of the 1,200 member Unified Taxi Workers Alliance, joined the nurses' picket line. Blount was clear that if Temple succeeded in breaking a union like PASNAP, which represents some of the higher paid unionized workers in the city, every sector of the work force will lose.

Support from rank-and-file workers for the striking nurses has been evident all along, from flashed victory signs to the loud honks from passing cars, ambulances, buses, trucks and taxis every time the nurses hold a rally. But for PASNAP to defeat management's union busting campaign, leaders of other unions have to call on their membership to come out in organized mass public demonstrations of support, with the clear understanding that an injury to one is an injury to all. □

Students, cafeteria workers join to fight Sodexo

By **Roger Sikes**
Atlanta

Across the U.S., in at least 10 states, food service workers employed by the giant multinational corporation Sodexo are actively fighting to win union rights and recognition. In the metropolitan Atlanta area, students at five campuses — including Emory University, Georgia Tech and Morehouse College — have joined together to combat attempts by company management and university officials to threaten and intimidate the workers.

For example, on Feb. 17 the bosses brought two union-busting lawyers onto the Emory campus to give anti-union Powerpoint presentations to all food service workers, who were required to attend. This kind of mandatory meeting is a common tactic practiced by union-busting corporations. A typical slide was headed "Top 10 Reasons Why You Might Not Want to Join A Union."

But things didn't go as the union busters planned.

At noon, a student action in an Emory dining hall erupted to protest the Powerpoint presentations, effectively halting them after they'd been shown to only half of the 220 workers employed by Sodexo.

Similarly, when on March 8 the same two lawyers arrived on Tulane University's campus to give an identical anti-union presentation to the Sodexo food service workers there, students camped out in front of the meeting room to distribute fact sheets that countered the lies and myths regarding unions. Workers were seen reading the pro-union pamphlets throughout the Powerpoint presentations.

The student supporters at Emory are challenging the university administration's supposed "neutrality." They point out that by sub-contracting various areas of work like cafeteria services to private entities that pay low wages and offer no benefits, universities trim their costs while boosting the subcontractor's profits.

Emory claims that Sodexo food service workers are not part of the university community although they have some of the most contact with students. Also, the official response to reports of harassment, discrimination and any other unfair labor practice is that these matters are not the university's responsibility but an issue between the workers and Sodexo management. (tinyurl.com/y7nq6d3)

Students at Emory aren't buying that argument.

On April 9, a demonstration was held



April 9 protest aims to pressure Emory's administration to implement labor code.

PHOTO: SOPHIA TEONA

on Emory's campus to pressure the administration into implementing a Labor Code of Conduct to enforce the rights of subcontracted workers to organize if they so choose. E-mail blasts and phone calls are being sent continuously to the university president, provost and head of campus life demanding that they implement the code.

Over 60 students, workers and community members entered the administration building to demand that the code be implemented. They filled the hallway outside the president's office. Students later marched through the university cafeteria to show support for the workers.

The workers, mostly Black women,

smiled broadly, waved and clapped as the students with their pro-worker, pro-union signs weaved their way through the food line.

As a result of this action, a meeting with the university president has been set to discuss the issue.

Campuses will be escalating campaigns leading up to the end of the school year. The week of April 12 will be a nationally coordinated week of action including anything from leafleting to sit-ins and barricades.

Roger Sikes, a graduate student in Public Health at Emory, is a leading member of the effort to support the Sodexo workers' union drive.

Remember Earth Day

Gas explosion deepens opposition to hydraulic fracturing

By **Betsey Piette**
Philadelphia

Faced with organized public opposition from Ohio to Pennsylvania, companies that profit from the expansion of natural gas wells using hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus Shale region are engaged in a campaign to sell the idea that the practice is entirely safe, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Fracturing involves the pumping of millions of gallons of water containing sand and chemicals deep into underground fissures to release natural gas.

In a commentary entitled “Shale Concerns Overblown,” Lou D’Amico, president of the Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas Association, stated that hydraulic fracturing “has not impacted local wells” and “is not a threat to water supplies.” (Philadelphia Inquirer, April 9)

Nothing could be further from the truth. The 2005 energy bill, which was pushed through Congress by then-Vice President Dick Cheney, exempted the oil and natural gas industries from the Safe Drinking Water Act, the main federal law that ensures drinking water quality.

D’Amico also conveniently ignored an explosion that occurred in a gas well in western Pennsylvania’s Washington County on March 31 at a drilling site

operated by Atlas Energy, Inc. It caused flames to shoot 100 feet into the air, visible for more than seven miles.

Janice Crompton reported that “Property owners living near the site of a gas well ... said they had been trying for days to reach state officials about noxious odors at the site.” George Zimmerman, who filed a lawsuit against Atlas Energy last year, alleged that the company “ruined his land with toxic chemicals” such as arsenic and benzene, used in hydraulic gas well fracturing. (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 1)

The same day, Kathie O. Warco wrote in the Washington Co. Observer-Reporter that “This is not the first problem. During a three-day period in early December, a discharge went into a pond feeding a stream.”

This January, Pennsylvania environmental officials fined Atlas Resources \$85,000 after a series of violations at 13 wells, including spill of fracturing fluids and other contaminants onto ground around the sites. This action by the state’s Department of Environmental Protection followed reports of other incidents, including a fish kill in one of the state’s recreational lakes and the release of toxic chemicals into the environment. The web-based news service propublica.org provides more details on these incidents.

D’Amico might be forgiven for not keeping up with small-town media, but the incidents of exploding wells and even houses, wastewater leaks, fish kills and other environmental concerns stemming from hydraulic fracturing have been so numerous that in March the Philadelphia City Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a moratorium on shale-gas development on privately owned land in the eastern part of the state.

Vital drinking water could be affected

In February state regulators opened a public comment period on a proposal for drilling permits in the Delaware River watershed, which provides drinking water to 15.6 million people.

Like corporations everywhere that voice concern over the cost of government intervention when it comes to monitoring the harm their operations cause, the natural gas industry, through mouthpieces like D’Amico, preaches “states’ rights” to block federal oversight.

The natural gas drillers know they can count on politicians like Gov. Ed Rendell and Pennsylvania state legislators to be more lenient, as they look to this rapidly expanding industry as a cash cow to offset budget deficits. In January the state accepted \$128.5 million in bids from natural gas drillers to develop 32,000 acres of

Pennsylvania state forests, increasing the amount of state land open for drilling to 692,000 acres — one third of the publicly owned land.

Previously, revenue from the lease of state land would go to land conservation efforts. However, Rendell changed existing state laws to divert the income from these leases to general operating revenue.

After abandoning a similar proposal in 2009, Rendell is again suggesting a tax on drillers, but environmentalists want moratoriums on the practice until environmental impact studies can be done.

Under growing pressure from environmental groups and a concerned public, the federal Environmental Protection Agency is set to begin a study of hydraulic fracturing this spring. It would be the most expansive look yet at how the natural gas drilling process can affect drinking water supplies.

The findings could affect whether Congress decides to repeal the exemption that shields fracturing fluids from federal regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce has also launched an investigation into whether hydraulic fracturing is contaminating water supplies and posing other dangers to the environment and public health. The oil and gas industry strongly opposes this new approach. □

Diverse communities unite to protest Westboro Ba

By **Jeremy Radabaugh**
Charleston, W.Va.

From April 8 to 11 the bigoted Westboro Baptist Church — infamous for promoting hate speech and fascist propaganda against lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer communities — orchestrated a hate tour in Charleston, W.Va., but were met with strong opposition.

Initially WBC bigots intended on attacking the LGBTQ, Jewish and Catholic communities by picketing synagogues, Catholic institutions and the LGBTQ-friendly district of Charleston, referred to as the East End. But after the coldblooded slaughter of 29 miners at the hands of the Massey Energy bosses, the WBC bigots, in an open display of their fascist, anti-worker orientation, decided to scapegoat

the deceased miners.

The WBC immediately posted on their Web site that they were also going to picket the miners’ funerals in Raleigh County with signs that read, “Thank God for Dead Miners.” The last time the WBC bigots picketed in West Virginia was at the funeral of the dozen Sago miners killed during a different mine disaster in another part of the state in January 2006.

On April 8, six WBC members held their first so-called “picket” in the East End and were confronted by a multigenerational and multinational crowd of over 300 counterdemonstrators. The crowd had a strong labor presence, including rank-and-file members and representatives of the state AFL-CIO, the West Virginia Public Workers Union UE Local 170, the Teamsters, the West Virginia

Students protest repression at Berkeley campus

By **Judy Greenspan**
Berkeley, Calif.

University of California-Berkeley students, faculty members and community supporters turned out April 5 in the pouring rain on Sproul Plaza, the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement in 1964, to support nearly 100 students facing suspension for their participation in student protests last fall. They held a spirited rally despite the poor weather.

“When they threaten us with suspension, they threaten our right to protest on this campus,” stated Marika Iyer, one of the Wheeler 33, students who were arrested after taking over Wheeler Hall Nov. 20, to protest dramatic tuition hikes and campus worker layoffs and furloughs. According to Iyer, the protest was a direct response to plans to privatize the university. Iyer called for the “reinstatement of the public on our campus.”

Many more students were arrested throughout the fall for other protests. According to Amanda Armstrong, a graduate student and member of the Wheeler 33, some students were arrested for “posting literature on walls and windows near the Free Speech Movement Café.” Armstrong

pointed out the latest fee hikes and wage cuts amount to a direct assault on working people. “And that is why we refuse to suspend our protest.”

Also at the rally were university clerical and maintenance workers who have been hard hit by the furloughs and layoffs. Several professors and lecturers also addressed the demonstrators. Professor Joi Barrios (shown here speaking), a lecturer in Filipino studies, compared the “courage and tenacity” of students in the Philippines with the protestors at UCB.

The UCB Office of Student Conduct is recommending seven-month suspensions for the student protestors. A growing coalition of organizations is demanding that all charges be dropped and that the “student code” be suspended — not the students. □

WWW PHOTO: JUDY GREENSPAN



MARXISM, REPARATIONS & the Black Freedom Struggle

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NYC UNION SQUARE

Activists gear up for united mass outreach on May Day

By Brenda Ryan
New York

A standing-room-only crowd of activists gathered April 7 to continue building for the May Day rally at New York's Union Square.

The joint meeting of the May 1 Coalition for Worker and Immigrant Rights and the Bail Out the People Movement drew more than 90 people. They included members of immigrant communities and unions, and also representatives from the March 4 student actions for education. In a spirited discussion, they reported on the widespread organizing efforts under way for the May 1 action.

The meeting was one of several being held around the city as May Day rapidly approaches. Another one was recently hosted in Washington Heights by the Movement for Independence, Unity and Change, a coalition of Dominican forces.

Teresa Gutierrez, a co-coordinator of the May 1 Coalition, and Larry Holmes of BOPM co-chaired the meeting. Gutierrez spoke about how May Day 2010 is building on the historic march of 250,000 for immigrant rights in Washington on March 21. While the organizers of that march failed to demand legalization for all, this is a central demand of May Day.

Holmes said the demonstration at Union Square represents a struggle against raids and deportations as well as a demonstration for all those who want jobs, who are concerned about education, who are fighting racist brutality, gentrification and homelessness. He also described it as a demonstration against the "Tea Party" movement.

"The Tea Party's program is division," Holmes said. "It says 'let's not go after the banks. Let's go after immigrants, let's go after Black people.' May Day is a gigantic answer from progressive people."

The theme of May Day is unity. Those at the meeting showed how organizing has spread throughout many of the city's communities. BAYAN USA Chairperson Berna Ellorin noted that BAYAN, the Day Laborers United of Woodside, the Philippine Forum and many other Queens groups are organizing a march for immigrant rights in Woodside and Jackson

Heights on April 18, to build up for May 1.

Students from the City University of New York who organized the March 4 action reported they are mobilizing students for May Day. "Your fight is our fight," one declared.

A member of the Trail of Dreams connected May Day to the battle of immigrant youths. Trail of Dreams is a group of undocumented youths who began a march from Florida in January and expect to arrive in Washington, D.C., on May 1. These undocumented students are openly and heroically declaring their immigration status to continue their five-year-long struggle to demand passage of the Dream Act, which would grant residency for six years to students 16 or younger.

Participants in the Trail of Dreams from New York came to the May 1 meeting to announce plans for an April 10 rally and take-off from Washington Heights to D.C.

High school students also spoke about their organizing efforts. A student from Build On, a youth group that does local community service and builds schools in other countries, said her organization is doing outreach to bring thousands of students to the May 1 rally. Dalia Griñan, a ninth grader and co-organizer of the May 29 post-Katrina/Rita Awareness Walk, linked May Day to the struggle for justice for survivors of the hurricanes.

Members of the May 1 Coalition as well as BOPM are also intensifying their efforts to get the word about May Day into every community of the city. Dozens of people have put up posters in every borough and passed out leaflets on the streets and at various events. The reception has been overwhelmingly positive. Storekeepers are eager to have leaflets posted in their windows and many people ask for additional leaflets to get out in their neighborhoods. □

ptist bigots

Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers-WV.

There were also activists from LGBTQ, pro-choice and environmental groups. The crowd chanted, "Bigots Out of Charleston, We Demand Rights as One!" "Queer, Straight, Black and White, Same Struggle, Same Fight!" and "Pro-Life, That's a Lie, You Exploit When Miners Die!" The bigots did not stay as long as they had planned. They were surrounded and silenced by a united crowd of working and oppressed people.

The next day, WBC bigots picketed a Catholic high school and a funeral for some of the miners in Raleigh County, an hour south of Charleston. This time they had more police protection and counter-protesters could not get as close to them as they had before, but the stronger police presence did not stop the energy and militancy of the counterprotesters.

On April 10, the WBC spewed anti-Semitic hate outside of two synagogues, holding signs saying "Jews Killed Jesus" as well as "God Hates West Virginia." The bigots were challenged by a sizeable number of LGBTQ youth and students, and members of the synagogues. Finally, on April 11, the WBC bigots picketed a Catholic church and were confronted by both silent and vocal protesters. While the church leadership encouraged people to hold a silent vigil, many people were too enraged to be silent.

The WBC bigots were confronted everywhere they went. Working and oppressed people of different national and religious backgrounds united around a common, material cause and let the fascists know they were not welcome in their town!

Jeremy Radabaugh is a labor activist in West Virginia.



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Workers, communities devastated as Auto plants closed, sold off and destroyed

By Martha Grevatt

Few autoworkers have heard of Maynards, yet the company that brags of being “one of the pre-eminent liquidation, auction and appraisal companies in North America” is playing a major role in the current phase of capitalist restructuring — in this case “destructuring.” (maynards.com)

Liquidators such as Maynards typically buy on the cheap a plant that is closing and sell off the contents to any number of capitalist scavengers looking for a deal on this or that piece of equipment. Whatever remains gets sold as scrap or left to rust. Not only are the plant workers out of a job, but the potential for the plant to reopen under new ownership, re-employ laid off workers and restore lost tax revenue to the plant community is destroyed.

Maynards’ catalog includes dozens of closed and soon-to-be-closed plants in the U.S., Canada and Europe. The company is proud of its record — since 1989 Maynards has bought and auctioned off over 40 General Motors plants. More recently its client base expanded to include Ford, Chrysler and NUMMI, the GM-Toyota jointly operated plant in California.

On March 10 Maynards bought Chrysler’s stamping plant in Twinsburg, Ohio, where this writer has worked for over 22 years. Workers have known since May 1, 2009, of Chrysler’s intent to close the plant this year.

A number of auto parts manufacturers

surveyed the facilities, fueling speculation on a potential new owner. The sale, approved the next day by a New York bankruptcy judge, crushed all hopes the remaining 400 workers in the plant had of finding work with a new employer. Chrysler has informed the union, UAW Local 122, that the plant will permanently close on or around July 30.

Despite the hurt felt by hundreds still working in the plant, Maynards has been inside the plant with potential buyers for the huge stamping presses. One new press typically costs around \$40 million to buy and install. Maynards, which paid \$45.5 million for the entire facility, hopes to pocket at least \$50 million from the auction.

Up until the day of the sale, workers had been led to believe that the “New Chrysler” that emerged from bankruptcy would buy our plant back from “Old Chrysler,” the debtor-in-possession of eight plants and three parts warehouses slated for closing. These facilities were set aside as collateral to secure the \$2 billion promised to lenders in the government-brokered plan to wipe out Chrysler’s \$6.9 billion in debt. This was the balance owed on a \$10 billion loan to the former owner, Cerberus, which borrowed the money to fund a restructuring plan that has eliminated tens of thousands of UAW jobs through technology and the moving of work to low-wage countries. Workers’ plants were then sacrificed to protect the investment of JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley and a

group of hedge funds.

New Chrysler — now known as Chrysler Group LLC and headed by Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne — would bid no higher than \$40 million. After that cutoff amount the Chrysler board apparently determined it would be cheaper to buy only the presses it could use. The other player was Ray Park, a vulture capitalist who typically buys up “distressed” companies and then exits when they become profitable. Park was involved in the initial spinoff by GM of American Axle and left a few years later, a half-billion dollars richer. As the initial “stalking horse” bidder he was compensated \$600,000 for losing the bid.

Workers’ labor created the wealth

The local union had gone to great lengths to make a business case to Chrysler management for keeping the plant open. The argument was that with only two stamping plants remaining, the company would not have enough press capacity to stamp out all of the body parts needed by the assembly plants. The strategy backfired. Chrysler simply realized it could purchase some of the presses from the Twinsburg plant and move them to other locations.

The city of Twinsburg will soon feel a huge financial pinch, with the loss of both property tax and employee income tax revenues. Firefighters, teachers, sanitation workers and others will likely be laid off. Dozens of municipalities in Northeast Ohio, where Chrysler workers reside, will

lose even more tax revenue as well.

The assumption is that nothing can be done, as the sale is perfectly legal. But is it? A contract between the UAW and Chrysler, which workers modified under great duress, included huge concessions but retained a moratorium on plant closings. No exception was made for Twinsburg. In fact, specific new language called on the union and company to study ways to keep our plant “viable.” Isn’t the plant’s sale and its imminent destruction a contract violation? Shouldn’t the UAW have challenged the court ruling approving the sale?

Given the far-reaching impact on the local community, shouldn’t the mayor of Twinsburg, the Summit County commissioners and the governor of Ohio be pursuing a seizure of the plant on behalf of the workers and community through eminent domain? This is perfectly legal under Ohio law.

Every autoworker facing a plant closing needs to be asking these questions. Dozens of highly productive plants, acres and acres of floor space, billions in high-tech robots and machinery and endless miles of conveyor lines — all financed by the sale of vehicles we workers produced — are being sold off piecemeal or scrapped. It was our labor power alone that produced the capitalists’ wealth. The wanton destruction of the value we created must be fought. The plants belong to us, and we should fight for them.

E-mail: mgrevatt@workers.org

Lesbian’s fight for HS prom rights opens national struggle

By Kris Hamel

Constance McMillen, an 18-year-old senior at Itawamba Agricultural High School in the small town of Fulton, Miss., just wanted to do what millions of high school students around the country look forward to every spring: get dressed up, go to prom and have a great time. But McMillen is a lesbian. She wanted to take her girlfriend to the prom. She wanted to wear a tuxedo.

When her plans became known to school officials and they said, “No,” the American Civil Liberties Union and Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition stepped in on McMillen’s behalf and demanded the school rescind its policy banning same-sex prom dates and allowing only male students to wear tuxedos. The Itawamba County School District responded by canceling the April 2 prom altogether.

But McMillen didn’t give up. She went public with her resolve to attend the prom and be herself. The ACLU of Mississippi filed a lawsuit on her behalf and on March 23 the federal court in Aberdeen, Miss., ruled that the Itawamba school district had violated McMillen’s constitutional rights when it deprived her of going to the prom.

In its 12-page decision, the court wrote: “The record shows Constance has been openly gay since eighth grade and she intended to communicate a message by wearing a tuxedo and to express her identity through attending prom with a same-



Constance McMillen

sex date. The Court finds this expression and communication of her viewpoint is the type of speech that falls squarely within the purview of the First Amendment.”

McMillen was happy about this victory. She stated, “It feels really good that the court realized that the school was violating my rights and discriminating against me by canceling the prom. All I ever wanted was for my school to treat me and my girlfriend like any other couple that wants to go to prom.” (aclu.org, March 23)

But the court didn’t order the school to put the prom back on the calendar. It seemed to take as good coin the school district’s assurances that an “alternative” and “private” prom being planned by parents would be open to all students. That April 5 event turned out to be a separate and totally unequal prom that was anything but nondiscriminatory.

Only seven students attended, including McMillen, who accompanied another female student but not her girlfriend, who was facing a lot of harassment. The “real” prom was taking place at a private country club. McMillen was not invited.

“It was not the prom I imagined,” said McMillen. “It really hurts my feelings. These are still people who I’ve gone through school with, even teachers who loved me before this all started. I’ve never

been a bad student and I don’t feel like I deserve to be put through this.” (Associated Press, April 7)

McMillen’s story has attracted national attention and dozens of offers from around the country to host or help fund an alternative independent prom. She plans to attend a soiree in San Francisco on May 1 hosted by the National Center for Lesbian Rights, which is paying her travel expenses. While appearing on the Ellen DeGeneres Show on March 19, the talk show host and lesbian entertainer presented McMillen with a \$30,000 scholarship check from Tonic, a digital media company.

The Facebook site, “Let Constance Take Her Girlfriend to Prom!” has more than 428,000 fans as of April 12. Supporters of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights are encouraged to send a message of outrage to the Itawamba school board and demand equal treatment of LGBT students. Go to www.hrcactioncenter.org.

The Human Rights Campaign also has a petition campaign underway for passage of a federal Student Non-Discrimination Act. Every year, and not just at prom time, untold numbers of LGBT students face unequal, discriminatory, harassing and bullying treatment from both peers and school administrators. □

GREECE, FRANCE Workers

By G. Dunkel

The French economy is the second largest in Europe, after Germany’s, and Greece’s economy has been on the verge of default for some months. Capitalists in both France and Greece are trying to solve their economic problems by laying off workers, cutting their salaries and retirement benefits, raising taxes and slashing social services.

The bosses in France have taken a piecemeal approach — for example, projecting over 7,600 layoffs in the national railroad system in the next two years and trying to outsource some auto parts plants to India or Brazil.

The financial crisis has severely impacted Greece’s tourism and shipping, two main sectors of its economy. The Greek government had also bet big on cheap, easy credit to stimulate its economy.

When credit became scarce, the economy went into a tailspin and the government could just barely borrow enough to cover the debts that were coming due. The European Central Bank and the German and French governments have told the Greek government to raise funds by imposing austerity on the workers.

But workers in both countries have opened a counteroffensive, in Greece holding four one-day general strikes since February and planning to expand those actions.

The first Greek general strike in February demanded that the rich pay for the crisis since they were the ones who really benefited from the government spending. There were three general strikes in March, as the government attempted to squeeze the workers harder.

The austerity measures are harsh, cutting public service workers’ salaries by

Continued on the next page

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Leaked Pentagon video reveals occupation's brutality in Iraq

By Gene Clancy

It is an absolutely chilling demonstration of coldblooded murder. A U.S. Apache gunship circles a Baghdad neighborhood looking for "targets" — people to kill. A military video shows the intended targets through superimposed crosshairs: a group of men dressed in civilian clothes, no masks, two men who might be carrying rifles — common enough at that time in Baghdad — but all casually sauntering along a street and into a small square.

The film is eerily silent except for staccato radio messages between the helicopter, command headquarters and nearby troops on the ground.

The gunship crew believe they have spotted a weapon being carried by one of the men and ask for clearance to "engage." Given the go-ahead by their base commander, the gun crew in the helicopter unleash a hail of machine-gun and rocket fire, mowing down over a dozen human beings. The helicopter continues to circle, its sights homed in on a wounded man trying to crawl to safety, as the crew wonder aloud whether to kill him or not.

A short time later a civilian van appears on the ground. The gunship excitedly reports that the van is picking up bodies and survivors and asks for clearance to engage. The van is hit with a barrage of machine-gun fire and a missile. More people lie dead around the van.

The helicopter advises the ground troops to "look for a pile of dead bodies." One of the troops on the ground exclaims, "Hey! I think I just ran over a body," and chuckles. However, as they search the destroyed van, the soldiers find, not gun-toting insurgents, but two dead Reuters journalists and two badly wounded children. "Well, they shouldn't bring their children to the battle," remarks someone in the gunship. The soldier on the ground agrees.

The video, which was classified, was surreptitiously leaked to and decoded by a Web site known as WikiLeaks and released on April 5. This means that someone connected to the Pentagon — perhaps a soldier fed up with the U.S. role in Iraq — has put human interests ahead of so-called loyalty to the empire.

The most immediate reaction to the release was hostility from sources as varied as Fox News, the New York Times and the

New York Daily News. CBS News ran a shortened version of the 17-minute film on WikiLeaks, leaving out some of the most egregious comments by the soldiers.

When the Department of Defense investigated the incident, which occurred in 2007, it found "no violations of the rules of engagement." According to the BBC, the Pentagon is trying to retrieve the original tapes of the film from the crew who were involved.

Most of the recent debate over the release of the video has centered on whether or not the U.S. military was justified in firing at the people on the ground. Apologists for the military claim to see men carrying weapons in the video. Others claim that what is seen is a tripod for a large camera.

Remarkably, none of the critics of the video finds anything unusual or threatening about men walking, not running,

and then gathering in a small group in the middle of a street with a military helicopter hovering overhead. One also might wonder what danger is posed by a civilian van trying to pick up dead and wounded people.

But debate over the details misses the main point.

Of course, the behavior and attitudes of the U.S. troops were inexcusable. Many might claim they were "just doing their job." Their "job," however, was the completely unjustified occupation of a country and the slaughter of people who never attacked or threatened them in any way. That is the real cause of this atrocity.

Josh Stieber is a GI who was attached to the ground troops shown in the video at the time, but was not on patrol because he was applying to be a conscientious objector. He's now an activist in Iraq Veterans

Against the War. Stieber told the audience of Democracy Now! on April 12 that the troops, including the helicopter crew, were following the orders and the training that they had received from the Army. His point was that this was no rogue operation, and that the fault lay in the system.

The U.S. government and ruling class know very well that a war of occupation inevitably leads to brutalization of the young men and women who are placed in that situation. Ultimately, every man, woman and child in the occupied country becomes an "enemy."

Progressive people around the world must demand that all U.S. occupations cease and the perpetrators of this and all other U.S. war crimes — not just the individual soldiers but their commanders — be brought to justice before the people of the world. □

Osprey crashes

The high cost of high-tech war

By Sean Schafroth

In southeastern Afghanistan on April 8, a United States Air Force V-22 Osprey went down, killing three Air Force service members and a civilian contractor. This was the first time the multimission, tilt-rotor aircraft has crashed in military operations since being introduced in June 2007.

The program to develop the Osprey cost \$40 billion. Each aircraft costs \$70-75 million, making this an expensive loss to the military. Ospreys have a rotor that can be moved to either lift the aircraft up or propel it forward. However, if the rotor fails, the Osprey simply falls from the sky, which is why the machine has been controversial since its development began in the 1980s.

Since 2005, reportedly 11 Ospreys have been manufactured each year. Plans exist to increase production to at least 24 and possibly 48 per year beginning in 2012, that is, from \$1.8 to \$3.6 billion in one year alone. (Congressional Research Reports, 12-2009)

While jobs are becoming scarcer daily, as public education and infrastructure



The expensive Osprey.

crumble and thousands needlessly die each year due to inadequate medical care, billions of dollars are being thrown at the military-industrial-financial complex to continue imperialist plunder overseas.

Politicians cry about the huge expense of health care for poor people here. Meanwhile, they eagerly approve pouring taxpayer dollars into building newer and more efficient technology to kill innocents and topple governments. Financial corporations exert enormous influence over Congress and the White House, as there

is a virtual revolving door between Pentagon positions and corporate boards.

The authorities manipulate youth here into becoming their murderous agents, who are sent overseas to kill and occupy countries. Many end up with their lives shattered — if they survive. All of this is happening to increase corporate control worldwide. Lives by the millions and dollars by the trillions are simply part of the cost in the view of the capitalist establishment, a horrendous but inevitable fact of life under the capitalist system. □

resist Eurobosses' attacks

nearly 15 percent and raising workers' retirement age by two years.

When the Greek government passed additional cuts on April 9, the main trade union confederations called separate demonstrations opposing the legislation. The unions are discussing whether to call a two-day general strike April 21 and 22, or just go out for one day. (AFP, April 9). They are also considering possible actions in May.

When European Union Economic and Monetary Commissioner Olli Rehn announced a 45-billion-euro package of loan guarantees for Greece April 11, he hailed the government for implementing "a very bold and ambitious program." (Bloomberg News, April 11) Rehn's praise was an acknowledgement of the strength of the Greek workers' resistance. If Rehn didn't ask for tougher measures, it might be because he knew the Greek government would fail to impose them.

France and its unions

France's national railroad system (SNCF), which is responsible for long-distance and short-haul passenger and freight service throughout the country, has laid off 20,000 workers since 2002 and cut way back on investing in and maintaining its system. Even its world-renowned high-speed trains called the TGV have become less reliable.

Its freight service does the work of 300,000 trucks on French roads, but the SNCF management, with the full backing of France's right-wing government, wants to shut down freight because it is not clearly profitable. Most SNCF layoffs have been from freight service.

The April 6-8 strike there was the third that some of the trade unions representing SNCF workers have called this year. The unions intend to push their demands until they get serious bargaining and concessions.

Sodimatex at Crépy-en-Valois is a small

Communist Party of Greece blames the super-rich for the economic crisis in February protest.

PHOTO: KKE



auto parts factory in a rust belt northeast of Paris, where management announced a closing on April 10. The workers wanted a severance bonus of 21,000 euros, while management was offering 3,200. When the 92 affected workers, who were unhappy with management's offer, held an April 1 demonstration, cops fired tear gas to disperse them.

Workers then seized the plant, wired a gas tank so they could blow the plant up and started burning six-foot-high piles of pallets and tires with gas canisters at night so the cops would know they were serious. (Le Monde, April 4.) This spectacle of workers inside a plant protecting

themselves with a burning barricade was all over French television.

After the right-wing mayor of Crépy-en-Valois, with tears in his eyes, begged management to stop dillydallying and bargain, management increased its offer to 13,000 euros. Negotiations should resume April 12.

One worker pointed out that the company has spent in each month since April 2009 the total of what the workers are demanding, "They would rather lose money than give us some." Another worker added that they are obviously planning on closing more plants and don't want to set a precedent. (L'Humanité, April 9) □

Earth Day, nukes, and dirty wars

The U.S. presides over the Nuclear Security Summit held April 12-13 in Washington. U.S. spokespeople keep repeating that its purpose is to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists. But U.S. imperialism is the one that has wielded its nuclear arsenal as a terror threat, both against the Soviet Union in the days it existed and against all sorts of states that had no nuclear weapons. U.S. imperialism is the only power to actually use nuclear weapons — against the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in the last days of World War II. And the Pentagon is still “improving” its nuclear weapons.

Then the U.S. invited Israel to this summit. Israel possesses nuclear weapons yet refuses to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Washington excludes Iran, which has no nuclear weapons and has signed the treaty. Besides trying to get sanctions against Iran, Washington is using the summit to attack the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. As the country under unrelenting attack from the Pentagon for the past 60 years, the DPRK has the strongest right to arm itself with whatever weapons it can.

April 22 is Earth Day. Following the disgraceful, imperialist-led negotiations in Copenhagen last December, it is a breath of fresh air — in all senses of that term — that President Evo Morales of Bolivia has called together another kind of summit for April 20-22 in Cochabamba. Even its name is inspiring: The Global Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. An April 11 release says President Morales will call for forming a multilateral Organization of Original Nations and Workers.

There is much to say about protecting the environment from profit-driven industries and climate change. We’ll report on the results of this conference in Bolivia, which will surely raise the questions in a more effective manner than

the world’s exploiters did in Denmark.

Meanwhile, those who want to stop terror, especially the most destructive terror — state terror — and those who want to stop the most drastic assault on the environment can turn their attention to stopping two dirty wars of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is hard to imagine anything more wasteful and destructive of the environment than high-tech Pentagon wars against masses of people, nor anything so destructive of peace and human rights.

Recent media exposures have shown once again the disgusting criminal acts that occur when an oppressor state wages an unjust war of occupation against what were once sovereign countries.

In Iraq a video leaked by some courageous soldier or Defense Department worker has shown what day-to-day murder was like in Baghdad in 2007. To the troops in the helicopter, any Iraqi was an enemy, any cylinder was a weapon, and slaughter was not only justified — it was orders. In a complete misunderstanding of history, the helicopter soldier on the radio referred to his unit as “Crazy Horse.” The original Crazy Horse was a leader of the resistance, who fought against the U.S. military. Look it up.

In Afghanistan the U.S. troops near Kandahar, where they are supposedly preparing a major offensive to win “hearts and minds,” recently strafed an ordinary bus with machine gun fire. At least five people were killed and 18 wounded. In the following days thousands of Afghans poured into the streets to protest the U.S. occupation.

Those protesting Afghans had the right idea. They should be joined by millions in the United States who also pour into the streets and take the first step to save the environment and stop terror as they demand that all U.S. military forces — official and mercenary — get out of Iraq and Afghanistan. □

Oil profits, security impact U.S.-Nigerian relations

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
 Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Acting Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan met with President Barack Obama on April 11 at the White House as a prelude to the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington, D.C.

The newly appointed head of state’s visit comes amid a pivotal point in the country’s history and in its relations with the United States. Nigeria still claims to be the leading exporter of crude oil to the U.S. from the African continent, although reports last year indicated that Angola had surpassed Nigeria in total barrels traded.

“The U.S. is Nigeria’s biggest customer in the international crude oil market and much of its energy security is directly affected by militant activities in the Niger Delta,” according to the April 12 ThisDay newspaper published in Nigeria.

The article noted that discussions between Jonathan and Obama centered around efforts to stabilize the political situation in the oil-producing region of the Niger Delta and the legislative plans under way to restructure the oil industry inside the country through the Petroleum Industry Bill.

The debate surrounding the bill has described it as the most extensive overhaul of the petroleum sector since national independence from Britain in 1960. Nigeria’s oil industry has been dominated since 1956 by British, U.S. and European firms that contributed virtually nothing to the country’s development.

An April 7 Financial Times article states that in this debate over the future of oil in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous state, the character of relations with the U.S. will be determined: “At stake are tens of billions of dollars of potential investments, and reforms that could breathe new life into an industry that provides 80 percent of the government’s income and one in eight barrels of crude that the U.S. imports.”

Osten Olorunsola, Shell’s regional vice-president for gas, says, “The PIB is definitely unlikely to pass [through the national assembly] in its current form before the elections (2011). Not passing anything would magnify the overall level of uncertainty.” (Financial Times, April 7)

Oil minister Diezani Allison-Madueke is a former employee of Royal Dutch Shell where she spent 14 years and rose to become its director of external relations.

The Financial Times says, “Some industry groups are said to have lobbied for her appointment, reasoning that her background would make her sympathetic to oil companies’ claims that the bill’s tougher terms would jeopardize \$50 billion of planned investment.”

Prior to Jonathan’s U.S. visit, the two countries signed a bi-national commission agreement, the first of its kind with Africa under the Obama administration.

An April 5 French Press Agency article reports, “The State Department said bilateral US-Nigerian trade was valued at more than \$42 billion in 2008. Nigeria is the United States’ largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa, thanks in large part to its petroleum industry. Nigerian oil comprises 8 percent of U.S. imports, while about half of the oil produced in Nigeria goes to the United States. The United States also is the largest foreign investor in Nigeria, including in the offshore oil and gas industries by Exxon-Mobil and Chevron.”

Nigeria, U.S. ‘security’ and the nuclear summit

Another major item on the agenda during the meeting between Obama and Jonathan was the question of the so-called U.S. war on terrorism. Nigeria has been targeted recently because of an incident involving a 23-year-old passenger aboard an airline flight traveling from Amsterdam to Detroit on Dec. 25.

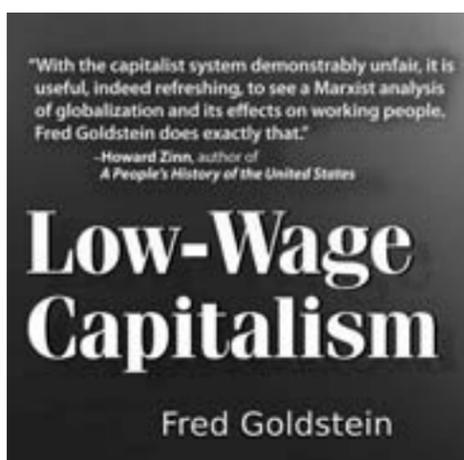
In response to the Dec. 25 incident, Nigeria and numerous other states around the world were targeted by the U.S. for special scrutiny at airports inside the country and flights bound for it. Nigerians have objected strongly to their country’s listing as a possible security threat to the U.S.

The Nuclear Security Summit meeting held by the Obama administration and representatives of 47 nations is taking place in the aftermath of the signing of a new agreement with Russia. During the signing, Obama made special mention of both Iran and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, threatening both countries by calling them states posing possible threats to international security resulting from their nuclear programs.

Iran has maintained that its nuclear programs are strictly for civilian purposes. The DPRK, which has been living under U.S. threats ever since the U.S. war devastated the country from 1950 to 1953, is reported to have developed a limited nuclear weapons capability, and has also tested missiles that have drawn protest from the United States and the United Nations Security Council.

The state of Israel, however, which has been reported to possess nuclear weapons capability, has not been questioned or pressured by the U.S. and other imperialist states about its military intentions. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he would not attend the Nuclear Security Summit due to the intentions of Egypt and Turkey to question the Zionist state over its reported possession of a nuclear arsenal.

The summit represents another effort on the part of the United States to dictate the terms of nuclear weapons capability. Those states that are allied with the U.S., such as Pakistan and India, are allowed to possess nuclear weapons, whereas nations that take a political line independent of imperialism are threatened with sanctions and military actions for even developing nuclear power. □



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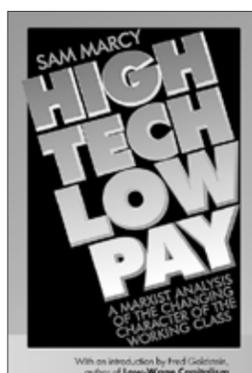
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Popular rebellion in Kyrgyzstan shakes up Pentagon

By Deirdre Griswold

For eight and a half years, the U.S. military has been at war in Afghanistan — the longest war in U.S. history, against one of the poorest countries in the world. The Pentagon has sent a growing force there — the number of troops tripled after the Democratic Party won the presidency — and built up bases in the region in order to keep the flow of warm bodies and materiel moving from the U.S. to Afghanistan.

The largest transit base in recent years has been in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, a Central Asian nation of 5 million people that was formerly the Soviet Republic of Kyrgyzia. Last month alone, nearly 50,000 U.S. military personnel transited through the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan going to and returning from Afghanistan.

Regardless of who was in the White House, who headed the State Department or the Department of Defense, or what U.S. polls showed about the attitude of the people here toward the war, the plans made at the Pentagon for moving troops and supplies to Afghanistan continued on schedule.

Until April 7. Then near-panic reigned in Washington — enough for the Pentagon to announce it was stopping flights into and out of Manas for 12 hours. They were resumed, but on April 9 Major John Redfield, a spokesperson for U.S. Central Command, announced that the U.S. military in Kyrgyzstan had decided “to temporarily divert military passenger transport flights” away from the Manas base. (Reuters, April 10)

This development has exposed the vulnerability of U.S. imperialism and its war

plans at a time when mass struggles are raging in several countries against the dire impact of the global capitalist economic crisis.

What happened in Kyrgyzstan to shake up the Pentagon? Tens of thousands of people risked their lives in a militant, popular uprising. They brought down a corrupt government that had enjoyed a cozy relationship with the U.S. military, while cutting its people’s standard of living to starvation level.

Here are some of the facts that have come to light:

- Now-deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who got into office through a Western-engineered “Tulip Revolution” in 2005, had early in his term threatened to terminate the base’s contract. But the U.S. agreed to raise the rental price from \$20 million to \$60 million. And, in a side agreement not made public until now, it worked out a deal whereby the president’s brother sold jet fuel to the U.S. occupiers at a profit of \$10 million a month — which works out to twice the money paid to the government of Kyrgyzstan. A former U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, Chuck Squires, was hired to handle the contract. (New York Times, April 12)
- While feathering his own family’s nest, Bakiyev raised the price of state-supplied heat, electricity and hot water this January from 170 percent to 400 percent. In a country where close to half the people live below the poverty line and winter temperatures drop to below zero Fahrenheit, this was like a death sentence for many, who had to choose between food and heat. The



huge increase left some people having to spend 80 percent of their income on heat and light.

When Kyrgyzia was part of the Soviet Union, it received fuel oil and other essentials at a subsidized price from the central government. In effect, it and other southern republics benefited from an affirmative action program meant to bring up their economic development closer to the national level.

Once the USSR was broken up into small competing countries and capitalism was restored, the standard of living for the working people in these areas plummeted. The privileged, however, were now free to become “entrepreneurs,” which usually meant attaching themselves in some way to the rapacious interests of imperialist corporations, which bribed officials to open their doors to the unbridled exploitation of an area rich in natural resources. This is the main source of the corruption now endemic in the governments of these small countries.

The people of Kyrgyzstan could take

it no longer. On April 7 they surrounded government buildings in the capital, Bishkek, and refused to disperse. On the orders of President Bakiyev, troops fired into the crowds, killing at least 75 people and wounding hundreds more. However, the people did not retreat and ended up taking over the government buildings as the army and police broke ranks.

The uprising spread throughout most of the country, overthrowing officials of the old regime.

An interim government has been formed headed by Roza Otunbayeva, a former foreign minister. Bakiyev has fled to southern Kyrgyzstan and refuses to step down.

The new government sent a delegation to Moscow seeking economic assistance from Russia. It says that its first priority is dealing with the economic hardships the people face and that it has no immediate plans to cancel the contract that leases Manas Air Base to the Pentagon.

But the people’s mandate is very clear — and Washington is very worried. □



Larry Hales addresses mass rally in Dhaka March 31.

PHOTOS: SST-BANGLADESH

Students celebrate worldwide struggle

By Larry Hales
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST), along with the All India Democratic Students Organization and All Nepal National Independent Students Union (Revolutionary), was invited to attend the end of the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Socialist Students Front of Bangladesh.

The Socialist Students Front, the youth and student organization of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh, was founded in 1984. That was thirteen years after Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan through armed struggle, in response to the Pakistani government’s repression and its neglect following a devastating cyclone.

The SSF has tens of thousands of activists around the country. This was evident in the many thousands who attended the rally and march in the Bangladesh capital

of Dhaka on March 31.

The rally was held at the University of Dhaka and the march proceeded from there through the city. The thousands of students, many carrying red flags, wound through the streets, blocking traffic and inspiring many onlookers with militant chants for socialism and against U.S. imperialism.

The international participants engaged with student activists from throughout the country, from Dhaka to Syhlet and Chittagong. The theme for the new era of activism, ushered in after the end of the 25th year celebration is “A New Era of Student Movement,” whose goal is to win education as a right for all.

Panels were set up so the guests could engage with Bengali students. The focus was the struggle for education in Bangladesh and across the world, even in the imperialist nations. Many of the students prepared questions for the international activists. These ranged from wanting to

know about the various struggles in India for education and against Indian expansionism to the struggle in Nepal for socialism, to the success of the March 4 Day of Action to Defend Education in the U.S. and the left movement in the U.S. The Socialist Students Front had sent a solidarity letter to the activists in the U.S. organizing for March 4.

The international activists were able to visit many universities while in Bangladesh: the University of Dhaka, which has a rich cultural history and is one of the oldest and largest universities in the country; Jahangirnagar University, which is the only school where all the students reside on campus; and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

The guests visited many other places as well, including a monument to the many who were killed in the national liberation struggle against Pakistan and in the language movement that started after Pakistan declared Urdu as the only official

national language. This drew the ire of the Bengali people who were a nationally oppressed group with its own culture, traditions and language. Students from the University of Dhaka organized protests, even though the government had outlawed assemblies, meetings and protests to counter mass sentiment.

The activists also visited a tea field where they were able to talk to some of the workers. They are trying to organize those who toil under oppressive conditions, working up to 12 hours a day, stooped over and forced to pick tea leaves rapidly in the blinding hot sun.

The international participants agreed to deepen their relationships as part of the international struggle to demand and win education as a right for all.

Representing Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) at the SSF events, Hales played a leading role in mobilizing students and youth for the March 4 education protests across the U.S.

Filtración de vídeo del Pentágono revela brutalidad de la ocupación en Irak

Por Gene Clancy

Es una demostración absolutamente escalofriante de asesinato a sangre fría. Un helicóptero de combate Apache estadounidense sobrevuela un barrio de Bagdad en busca de “objetivos” — gente para matar. Un video de las fuerzas armadas muestra los objetivos intencionados en el punto de mira de los lentes de la cámara: un grupo de hombres vestidos de civil, sin máscaras, dos hombres que podrían portar un rifle — algo común en ese tiempo en Bagdad — pero todos caminando tranquilamente por una calle dirigiéndose a una pequeña plaza.

La película es inquietantemente silenciosa, salvo por mensajes radiales interrumpidos entre el helicóptero, los mandos militares y las tropas desplegadas en las inmediaciones.

La tripulación del helicóptero de combate cree que ha visto un arma llevada por uno de los hombres y pide permiso para atacar. Dado el visto bueno por su comandante en la base, el equipo de tiro en el helicóptero desata una lluvia de balas y cohetes, sobre más de una docena de seres humanos. El helicóptero sigue circulando, enfocando su mira en un hombre herido que se arrastra buscando refugio,

mientras la tripulación del helicóptero se pregunta en voz alta si lo matan o no.

Poco tiempo después aparece una camioneta civil. La tripulación del helicóptero informa con excitación que la camioneta está recogiendo a los cadáveres y sobrevivientes y pide permiso para atacar de nuevo. La camioneta es atacada con otra lluvia de balas y de misiles. Más personas quedan muertas rodeando la camioneta.

El helicóptero aconseja a las tropas en tierra a que “busquen un montón de cadáveres”. Uno de los soldados en el terreno, exclama: “¡Hey! Creo que pasé por encima de un cuerpo” y se ríe. Sin embargo, al revisar la camioneta destruida, los soldados no encuentran insurgentes armados, sino a dos periodistas de Reuters muertos y a dos niños malheridos. “Bueno, no debían traer a sus niños al campo de batalla”, comenta alguien en el helicóptero. El soldado en tierra concuerda.

El vídeo, que se clasificó como documento secreto, se filtró subrepticamente y fue descifrado por un sitio web conocido como Wikileaks y publicado el 5 de abril. Esto significa que alguien conectado con el Pentágono — tal vez un soldado harto del papel de EEUU en Irak — ha puesto los intereses humanos por encima de la llamada ‘lealtad al imperio’.

La reacción más inmediata a la publicación del vídeo fue la hostilidad de fuentes tan variadas como Fox News, el New York Times y el New York Daily News. CBS News difundió una versión abreviada de la película de 17 minutos de Wikileaks, omitiendo algunos de los comentarios más atroces de los soldados.

Cuando el Departamento de Defensa investigó el incidente, que ocurrió en 2007, no encontró “ninguna violación de las reglas de combate”. Según la BBC, el Pentágono está tratando de recuperar las cintas originales de la película de la tripulación que estuvo involucrada.

La mayor parte del reciente debate sobre el lanzamiento del vídeo se ha centrado en si las fuerzas armadas estadounidenses estaban justificadas al disparar contra la gente en tierra. Los apologistas del ejército afirman ver a hombres que portaban armas en el vídeo. Otros afirman que lo que se ve es un trípode para una cámara grande.

Sorprendentemente, ninguno de los críticos del video encuentra nada inusual o amenazante acerca de hombres caminando y no corriendo, y luego reuniéndose en un pequeño grupo en medio de una calle con un helicóptero militar sobrevolando el área. Uno también podría

preguntarse qué peligro representa una camioneta civil tratando de recoger a los muertos y heridos.

Pero el debate sobre los detalles omite el punto principal.

Por supuesto, el comportamiento y las actitudes de las tropas estadounidenses son inexcusables. Muchos podrían reclamar que estaban “simplemente haciendo su trabajo”. Su “trabajo”, sin embargo, era la ocupación totalmente injustificada de un país y la masacre de personas que nunca les atacaron o amenazaron de ninguna manera. Esa es la verdadera causa de esta atrocidad.

El gobierno de EEUU y la clase dominante sabe muy bien que una guerra de ocupación inevitablemente lleva al embrutecimiento de los hombres y mujeres jóvenes que colocan en esa situación. En última instancia, cada hombre, mujer y niño en el país ocupado se convierte en un “enemigo”.

La gente progresista alrededor del mundo debe exigir que cesen todas las ocupaciones por los EEUU y los autores de este y todos los demás crímenes de guerra estadounidenses — no sólo los soldados individuales, sino también sus comandantes — sean llevados ante la justicia ante los pueblos del mundo. □

Berkeley, California

Llamado a amnistía incondicional para los que se resisten al servicio militar

Por Dee Knight

En la primera acción de este tipo durante las actuales guerras de EEUU en Irak, Afganistán y Pakistán, el Concejo Municipal de Berkeley, California, aprobó el 9 de marzo una resolución titulada “Amnistía incondicional y universal para los/as que se resisten a la guerra militar y para los/as veteranos/as que han actuado en oposición a la guerra por cuestiones de conciencia en Irak, Afganistán y Pakistán”, según un informe del grupo ‘Courage to Resist’.

“Amnistía” significa que todas las acusaciones y demás castigos quedan oficialmente “olvidados”. “Incondicional” significa que no hay condiciones. “Universal” significa que se aplicaría a todas las condenas o cargos pendientes relacionados con la resistencia o la negativa a prestar servicio en las actuales guerras de los EEUU, así como ausentarse sin permiso.

Esta amnistía incluiría a todos los veteranos con licencia por conducta sin honores por tal resistencia. El llamado añade que los veteranos deben tener su licencia elevada automáticamente a la categoría de honrosa, y que deberían tener derecho a todos los beneficios.

Bob Meola, el comisionado de paz y justicia de Berkeley que escribió el proyecto original de la resolución declaró: “Espero que esta resolución sirva como modelo e inspire a las ciudades y pueblos en los Estados Unidos a aprobar resoluciones similares y estimule un movimiento que resulte en la amnistía universal e incondi-

cional para los veteranos y resistentes a las guerras en Irak, Afganistán, y Pakistán.

“Las tropas que han tenido el valor de resistir ya han sido traumatizadas suficientemente. Han obedecido a sus conciencias y merecen la sanación y el apoyo y el aprecio de la gente en todas partes. El movimiento de resistencia de los soldados está creciendo. Sus miembros/as son héroes y heroínas y deberán ser tratados/as como tales cuando se les da la bienvenida a la sociedad civil”.

La nueva resolución profundiza el compromiso de la ciudad de estar contra la guerra, lo cual hizo de Berkeley en 2007 una “ciudad santuario” para quienes se resistían al servicio militar y al reclutamiento militar obligatorio.

Exigida por primera vez durante la guerra de Vietnam

Para terminar con los castigos a los estadounidenses que se resistían a la guerra de Vietnam, el periódico de resistentes estadounidenses que estaban en Canadá en ese tiempo, AMEX/Canadá, fue el primero que en 1973 formuló la demanda por la amnistía incondicional y universal. La demanda se convirtió en el centro de una amplia campaña basada en una alianza de resistentes exiliados, veteranos contra la guerra y soldados en servicio activo, con el apoyo firme de grupos pacifistas, religiosos y por los derechos civiles.

La campaña estuvo caracterizada por el desafío abierto en contra de los

esfuerzos del gobierno de castigar a los resistentes quienes “aparecían” en conferencias contra la guerra, convenciones políticas y audiencias congresionales — casi siempre sin aviso — demostrando el amplio apoyo a la resistencia y a la amnistía.

Esta campaña condujo al Presidente Jimmy Carter a otorgar la amnistía incondicional a los resistentes después de la guerra estadounidense en Vietnam en enero de 1977. Carter sintió la presión después de que un resistente exiliado, Fritz Efav, se apareció en la Convención Nacional Demócrata de 1976 como parte de la delegación “Demócratas en el Exterior”, y fue nominado para vice presidente por la Madre ‘Gold Star’ Louise Ransom (cuyo hijo murió en combate en Vietnam). El veterano discapacitado de la guerra en Vietnam Ron Kovic, quien escribió ‘Nacido en el cuatro de julio’ [Born on the Fourth of July], apoyó la nominación dejando atónitos y en silencio a los

delegados quienes luego le ovacionaron.

¡Amnistía para todos/as!

Después de la gran manifestación en Washington, DC el mes pasado donde miles de inmigrantes y sus simpatizantes exigían legalización plena para toda la gente sin documentación oficial en este país, el nuevo llamado a una amnistía para quienes se resisten a la guerra debía ser extendido para incluir a ambos grupos.

Igual sucede con el santuario — un tipo de solidaridad que se ha extendido por décadas a los dos grupos por iglesias, sindicatos, ciudades e individuos. De hecho, el concepto de santuario emergió durante la Edad Media cuando las iglesias frecuentemente ejercían un poder paralelo al de las autoridades civiles. Una persona o un grupo podía pedir protección en la iglesia para defenderse de las autoridades opresivas y así evitar la captura y el castigo.

Hoy como en el pasado, la lucha por la amnistía y el santuario es una lucha por el derecho a oponer resistencia frente al poder gubernamental injusto. Y es una manera en que la gente progresista puede ejercer su propio poder y forzar el fin del militarismo y el racismo.

Para ponerse al día sobre la resistencia al servicio militar, vea www.CourageToResist.org

Dee Knight era un redactor de AMEX/Canadá de 1968 a 1974, y sirvió como coordinador del Consejo Nacional para la Amnistía Incondicional y Universal de 1974 a 1975. □

