

WORKERS WORLD

Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!



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\$1

In San Francisco, thousands say Put banks on trial!

By Bill Bowers
San Francisco

Thousands of demonstrators came out Jan. 20 to "Occupy Wall Street West" to mark the second anniversary of the Supreme Court Citizens United decision. This ruling called anonymous campaign contributions "free speech" and claimed corporations were "people," thus increasing the already overwhelming power of the rich over politicians.

In response, the Occupy movement around the country demonstrated at federal courthouses. Occupy San Francisco decided to target Wall Street West, the complex housing the local head offices of the major banks and financial institutions that rule the country. Demonstrators held a series of actions at different financial institutions, including a protest at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Siege of Wells Fargo, BofA

At least 250 people took the street as Occupy activists chained themselves to all four entrances of a large Wells Fargo bank branch. People chanted, "Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!" and — if you replace the X with "jobs," "schools," "health care," etc. — "We need X, make the banks pay!"

A group marched from Wells Fargo to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement office nearby. They denounced the Obama administration's deportation of immigrant workers and their families as well as Wells Fargo's investment in constructing private prisons and holding pens.

Meanwhile, another group put an office of Bank of America under siege, holding up a big banner and chanting, "Bank of America, bad for America!" Of course, the bank is based in the U.S., but it is undoubtedly bad for the entire hemisphere. Occupy activists also chained themselves to the doors.

The BofA deserved more than just a siege, so the 99% decided to hold a peoples' trial with the big bank facing charges. About 400 people witnessed as foreclosed homeowners detailed BofA's and Fannie Mae's manipulations and deceits when first offering and then foreclosing on mortgages. The main chant after each testimony was "Give the deed back!" which was repeated continually.

Bank of America and Wells Fargo have foreclosed on more people in San Francisco than any other mortgage-holders. The mostly African-American and Latino/a communities of Mission, Bayview and Excelsior have been hit especially hard.

At midday more than 1,000 people took to the streets and marched through the Financial District,

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LeiLani Dowell, Workers World Party. WW PHOTO: BRYAN G. PFEIFER



Gwen Ivey, Phila. Postal Workers Union. WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE



Occupy Wall Street West march in central San Francisco.

WW PHOTO: BILL BOWERS

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Donna Dewitt, president South Carolina AFL-CIO, speaking. WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

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Fighting censorship, repression

Internet strike stalls 'piracy' laws

By Greg Butterfield

A massive Internet strike closed down websites large and small on Jan. 18 in opposition to two bills in the U.S. Congress that would tighten corporate domination of the Web and increase censorship.

The bills, known by their acronyms SOPA and PIPA (the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect Intellectual Property Act), are backed by the money and influence of the massive U.S. corporate entertainment industry, including the Motion Picture Association of America and the Recording Industry Association of America.

Besides targeting individual Web users, the legislation is seen as taking aim at countries like China and Russia, which have resisted U.S. corporate domination of their domestic Internet services and copyright laws.

The bills seemed headed for easy passage in Congress. But the political climate is changing, and as word spread of the censorship bills, mass opposition mounted quickly.

The corporate-owned media focused attention on the shutdown of Wikipedia and half-hearted protests by tech-industry-dominated sites like Google and Amazon. But the strike's real strength came from the millions of Web users in the U.S. and around the world who participated by calling Congress and the White House, holding rallies and educational meetings, replacing their pages for the day with pro-strike information, or just staying off the Internet altogether.

On the micro-blogging platform Tumblr, to give just one example, some 650,000 users reportedly joined the strike, shutting down their personal blog pages for 24 hours. (Tumblr Staff blog, Jan. 20)

The show of Internet-user strength won a temporary victory: Congress declared an indefinite delay to voting on SOPA and PIPA.

But this struggle is only beginning.

The 1% demand Web domination

After years of piecemeal attacks on Internet users for so-called piracy — that is, the free sharing of culture and information — a major section of the U.S. and global ruling class seems intent on carrying out a full-court press to wrangle wholesale control of the Web for the profiteers in the name of "intellectual property rights."

The government/media propaganda message is that these laws are meant to protect artists' and inventors' rights. But the only ones they benefit are the 1% — huge transnational corporations that have stolen people's ideas and creations for decades in the name of megaprofits.

The corporations' message is sheer hypocrisy. Their entire capitalist system is built upon piracy, stolen labor and resources, and cultural appropriation.

As millions of websites were shut down in protest of SOPA and PIPA, the U.S. Supreme Court on Jan. 18 joined in the attack on free expression and culture and ruled 6-2 that works of writing, art and music long in the public domain could be re-copyrighted — that is, put

under the control of private companies and individuals. The case in question involved millions of works first published abroad from 1923 to 1989.

The public domain is not "a category of constitutional significance," the court majority ruled. (New York Times, Jan. 18) The decision opens the door to further re-privatization, a long sought-after goal of the corporate entertainment juggernaut.

FBI repression as ACTA looms

The mounting battle for Internet freedom must be seen in the context of the global uprising against capitalist austerity. From Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street, this upsurge of class struggle has used the Internet as a tool to mobilize millions into action against the wealthy and powerful.

While the current legislative battle is couched in the language of copyright law, the potential of SOPA and its ilk to be used to repress online political activity and speech is staggering.

On Jan. 19 — just a day after the massive Internet strike — the U.S. government retaliated and shut down the popular file-sharing site MegaUpload. The site's founder and several associates were arrested in New Zealand.

File-sharing sites are used not only to download movies and music — much of it in the public domain or with artists' approval — but also as an easy way to share political materials over the Web.

MegaUpload's homepage is now plastered with fascist FBI and Department of Justice logos. The FBI attack has had a chilling effect: FileSonic, a similar site, has shut down its file-sharing capabilities, and others are expected to follow suit.

The online protest group Anonymous in turn responded by hacking the homepages of the FBI, the DOJ and entertainment industry giants.

Waiting in the wings is ACTA — the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement — a secret international trade agreement backed by both the Bush and Obama administrations, and about to go before the European Parliament for approval.

Some details of the agreement have been leaked. If enacted, ACTA would force Internet service providers to closely monitor individuals' Internet use and report suspected "copyright infringement" to governments and copyright holders.

Under ACTA, people traveling across borders could be subject to having their laptops, phones, music players and other personal electronic devices searched for "pirated" content.

With these two provisions alone, the potential for political repression against anti-capitalists or anyone opposing injustice is enormous.

Online activists are now working to spread the word about ACTA and mount a new protest campaign prior to the European vote. □

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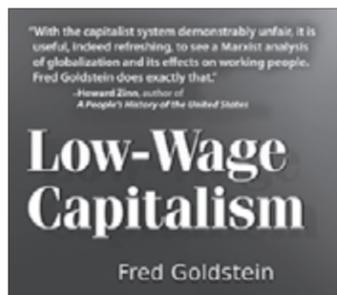
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Coalition sets demonstrations for Democratic National Convention

By Ben Carroll
Charlotte, N.C.

When the Democratic National Convention meets in Charlotte, N.C., in September, there will be thousands of people from across the country in the streets to raise demands for jobs and justice on the world stage.

That's what the Coalition to Protest at the DNC announced at its first press conference Jan. 19, held outside the Time Warner Cable Arena in Charlotte, where the convention will be held Sept. 3-6. More than three dozen labor, anti-war, civil rights, anti-foreclosure, immigrants rights, student and youth organizations, and many prominent activists from across North Carolina, the South and the U.S. have joined together to initiate this coalition.

They are united behind demands for "Good jobs for all! Economic justice now – make the banks and corporations pay for their crisis!" "Money for education,

health care, housing and all human needs, not for war and incarceration!" and "Justice for immigrants and all oppressed peoples! Stop the raids and deportations!"

At the press conference, held during the week commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., representatives from many organizations explained why they will be demonstrating.

"We're here to demand an end to the war on Black people, here and in Africa – from police brutality and mass incarceration, to AFRICOM [the United States Africa Command] and proxy wars across the African continent," said Efa Nwangaza, founder and director of the Malcolm X Center for Self-Determination.

Nwangaza continued, slamming the Democratic Party for their "silence on the depression-level, African-American unemployment," for taking no action to stop racist predatory lending and home foreclosures, and for the continued imprisonment of political prisoners.

Wall Street of the South

Coalition organizers call Charlotte "the Wall Street of the South." With the world headquarters of Bank of America and the eastern headquarters of Wells Fargo, it has the second largest concentration of finance capital in the U.S., behind New York City. Both banks are notorious for foreclosing homes, holding huge amounts of student loans, bankrolling the prison-industrial complex, and funding environmental destruction, among many other crimes against our communities.

North Carolina is also the least unionized state in the U.S., with a Jim Crow-era law still on the books that bans public workers from collectively bargaining. Virginia is the only other state with this ban. In both cases, Democrats enacted the bans and have done nothing about them since.

Donna Dewitt, president of the South Carolina AFL-CIO, raised that city workers in Charlotte have been fighting for years just to win the basic right of dues deduction.

Dewitt spoke about why workers should be mobilizing to protest at the DNC.

"Located in the Deep South of historical struggles for civil, worker, immigrant and human rights, North Carolina, like other Southern states, continues the competition to underbid other Southern states to attract corporations that locate to the South for lower wages and exploitation of workers. ... Elected officials of both major parties have followed the practices of the corporate world in their bid to protect the rich and deny the working families of our country."

Concluding the press conference, Ana Maria Reichenbach, with the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill chapter of Students for a Democratic Society, gave a spirited talk calling on young people to come to Charlotte this September. "Working-class youth of this country find our prospects of attending higher education diminished as tuition continues to rise. We're forced to go deeper into debt with student loans.

"Unemployment rates are soaring and those jobs available fail to provide us with living wages. ... We are rising up because we have the right to a dignified life and because we refuse to be a lost generation of jobless, uneducated people. We are rising up because this two-party system has failed to meet our needs."

Following the example of other cities that have hosted political conventions, Charlotte is preparing to pass restrictive new ordinances regulating demonstrations. They have denied every request by the Coalition to Protest at the DNC for permits to march, and have told organizers that the DNC has reserved every park in the city the weeks prior to, during and after the convention. Coalition organizers have vowed to fight the city for the right to protest during the DNC.

Organizations including Occupy movements across the country are already planning to mobilize to be in the streets of Charlotte during the DNC. For more information on the Coalition to Protest at the DNC and to find out how your organization can join, visit protestdnc.org. □

WWP leader denounces racist Tea Party

By Bryan G. Pfeifer
Milwaukee

LeiLani Dowell, Workers World Party leader and WW managing editor, visited Wisconsin Jan. 20-22 to participate in the ongoing people's uprising sparked by the state capitol occupation in February 2011 and Occupy Wall Street.

"We realize the occupation in Madison was a spark for Occupy Wall Street and many of the occupations that have happened, and we've been inspired by all of the struggles since then. It was great to meet some of the amazing activists, amazing women who are doing things, and other people in the communities who are really fighting back," Dowell told WW.

Dowell first participated in a women's meeting in Milwaukee's African-American community, meeting many women fighters. From there she met numerous activists and leaders engaged in many anti-capitalist, anti-racist forms of struggle. She also met leaders from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community.

On Jan. 21, Dowell was the featured speaker at a Milwaukee Workers World Party Forum, "Occupy For Socialist Revolution," at the Center Street Library, an African-American community institution. Later on, a robust discussion took place with the multinational crowd focusing on socialism and the need for oppressed people to have their self-determination respected by progressive and revolutionary movements. Many Workers World Party newspapers and literature were distributed and sold.

"The meeting was a great success. It is really exciting that socialism was raised in the title of the event and reflects that people are interested in socialism now in the United States, including in Wisconsin," said Dowell.

After the Jan. 21 meeting a delegation, including Dowell, went to Wauwatosa, just west of Milwaukee, to join a labor-community-student counterprotest of a Tea Party/Republican Party rally of a few thousand. The right-wing racist recruitment rally was in opposition to the Recall Walker movement in Wisconsin. This movement announced on Jan. 17 that it had gathered 1 million petition signatures to recall the union-busting Wisconsin governor.



At forum at Center Street Library Milwaukee; LeiLani Dowell, second from right.

WW PHOTO: BRYAN G. PFEIFER

After participating in the counterprotest, a member of the Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement and a member of Workers World Party waded into the crowd to the front of the stage and unfurled a banner that read: "Stop Racist Anti-Worker Assaults, Recall Walker/ Jobs Now, Make Banks Pay!" that completely disrupted the right-wing rally.

The progressive activists were surrounded by the racists, who tried to rip the banner and assault them, but the activists held their ground for a few moments longer before departing. They made the point that right-wing racists of any stripe will be directly confronted wherever they are. While on the sidewalk counterprotesting, Dowell and another sister of African-American descent resisted racist slurs by Tea Party-types.

Dowell and the rest of the delegation returned to Milwaukee to visit members of Occupy Milwaukee, Decolonize The Hood and Occupy Riverwest, among others.

"I'm so impressed by the people. There is a high interest in socialism, which is great, but also a real level of openness around struggle, raising issues such as self-determination, and particularly the women of color we met raising their issues. I'm really impressed by the dialogue that's going on in Wisconsin toward building real, true solidarity. We thank Wisconsin for the struggle. It's so important, and it really motivates all of us in New York, around the country and around the world," Dowell concluded.

Contact Milwaukee Workers World at milwaukee@workers.org.

One million say:

'Recall Gov. Scott Walker'



At Milwaukee Area Technical College Jan. 17

WW PHOTO: BRYAN G. PFEIFER

On Jan. 17, after 60 days of poor and working people working tirelessly throughout Wisconsin, it was announced that 1 million petition signatures had been gathered to recall the anti-union, anti-worker Gov. Scott Walker, a darling of

the Tea Party. This blow to the right-wing governor was celebrated in statewide rallies, with a thousand-strong celebration in Madison and a large rally at the Milwaukee Area Technical College (pictured.)

— Report & photo by Bryan G. Pfeifer

Transport union fights for fair contract

By G. Dunkel
New York City

Transport Workers Union Local 100 represents 34,000 bus and subway workers who move over 3 million New Yorkers every workday. As its contract expired on Jan. 15, the union held a rally that evening to both mark the Martin Luther King Jr. birthday anniversary and to press for a new contract.

According to TWU Local 100's Facebook page, there are only two wage proposals on the table. The one from the bosses, the Metropolitan Transit Authority, offers a five-year contract with 0-0-0-2-2 percent increases each year, that is, noth-

ing the first three years. The other is from the union for raises matching inflation.

The MTA is also pushing for major concessions from the workers: five unpaid vacation days; to have on staff bus drivers who work only part time; station cleaners working at two different pay rates, that is, two tiers; higher co-pays for the workers' health insurance; and changes to overtime rules that would cost workers \$8 million a year.

The MTA has taken the position that if TWU workers want a raise in wages, they have to pay for it by giving up other benefits. The union considers this totally unacceptable.

The MTA released its bargaining posi-

tion to the press before it gave it to the union bargaining team on Jan. 19. The union then suspended negotiations because the MTA's publicizing its position violated the procedures that both sides had set up previously.

State persecuted union

In 2005, TWU Local 100 challenged the anti-union Taylor Law, which outlaws strikes by public workers, by striking for 60 hours. The state government imposed draconian penalties on the union: the fines, prohibition of dues check-off and other penalties were so severe that the union had to sell its headquarters to pay them; the individual workers who struck

were fined two days' pay for each day they were out, plus the wages they lost because they didn't work.

The union president at the time went to jail. All the elected leadership of the local could have been imprisoned, although they weren't.

The International Labor Organization, a U.N. agency which seeks to protect human and labor rights, declared on Nov. 28, that the state of New York's treatment of TWU Local 100 was a violation of ILO Convention No. 87 on the "Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organize" and called on the state to rescind the penalties and make the union and its members whole. □

Pa. teachers strike for contract

By Joe Piette
Philadelphia

Teachers in Neshiminy, Pa., returned to their classrooms on Jan. 20, ending their strike, which had begun 11 days earlier. After almost four years of fruitless bargaining and working without any wage increases or a new contract since 2008, the 654 members of the Neshiminy Federation of Teachers had enough and began picketing.

The NFT has made six contract proposals to the Neshiminy School District on wages, health care contributions, and teachers' input on curriculum and class sizes in the 7,000-student district. Using union-busting tactics, the NSD has refused to bargain in good faith, even refusing significant givebacks from the teachers.

Ted Kirsch, president of the American Federation of Teachers, Pennsylvania, explained the union's position, "This board has refused to take 'yes' for an answer on financial concessions from teachers."

Instead of negotiating, management terminated health insurance for the strikers during the work stoppage. That cost teachers about \$450 for a single subscriber to about \$1,100 for family coverage.

In addition, School Board president



WWW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

Striking teachers returned to work. But they're still angry.

Ritchie Webb "suspended, subject to permanent termination," assistant basketball coaches Russell Selger and Bryan McGinty for refusing to cross picket lines. (Philadelphia Inquirer, Jan. 19)

According to 1992 Pennsylvania Act 88, students are required to have 180 days of instruction by June 15 of each year. By returning to work on Jan. 20, the NFT has an option to walk out again in the spring

if bargaining continues to be deadlocked.

The teachers returned to work angry because they're working without a contract. They seem determined to strike again if necessary. □

'No 50 percent wage cut'

Rally supports locked-out Caterpillar workers

By Martha Grevatt
London, Ontario, Canada

Four hundred and fifty members of Canadian Auto Workers Local 27 have been locked out by Caterpillar since Jan. 1. The lockout was the company's response when workers rejected demands for an immediate pay cut from \$35 to \$16.50 an hour, major cuts in benefits and the gutting of the pension plan.

Caterpillar, number 44 on the Fortune 500 list of the wealthiest corporations, made a record \$4 billion in profits last year and paid out a record \$70 million to their seven top executives.

The locked-out workers are fighting back and they are not alone. A Jan. 21 support rally called by the Ontario Labor Federation drew 15,000 from across the province and beyond. "If Caterpillar wants a fight," said OLF President Sid Ryan, "we're ready to go."

Workers from a broad cross section of public as well as private sector unions came out for the Caterpillar workers. Unions represented included the Steelworkers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Canadian Union of

Postal Workers, the Food and Commercial Workers, the Amalgamated Transit Union and the Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Ontario. Thousands of CAW members came from around the province, including 600 from Windsor.

The crowd cheered for the representative of Occupy London, which has been supporting the locked-out workers from day one. Local 27 President Tim Carrie thanked Occupy London for being on the picket lines, helping feed the picketers and setting up its tents outside the gates.

U.S. labor representatives included Roger Zaczek, president of United Electrical and Machine Workers Local 506. UE Local 506 represents workers at the Erie, Pa., locomotive plant of General Electric. Zaczek said GE tried to force concessions on the UE recently and he was in London to defend good jobs for all.

Caterpillar's anti-union history

From its opening in 1949 until 2005, the Ontario, Canada, plant was part of the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors. In 2005, GM sold the distressed division to hedge funds Greenbriar Equity and Berkshire Partners for \$200 million.

They renamed it Electro-Motive Diesel and in five years cut the workforce from 1,650 to 450. Then, Caterpillar's wholly-owned subsidiary, Progress Rail Services Corporation, bought EMD for \$800 million with the support of Canadian Conservative prime minister, Stephen Harper.

Caterpillar, the world's largest earthmoving equipment company, has a reputation for union busting. In the 1980s, the company began aggressively streamlining operations. By 1991, 30 percent of the workforce had been cut and only one-quarter of Caterpillar workers were still members of the United Auto Workers. That year, the company demanded concessions, including health benefit cuts and a two-tier pay scale. In November, the workers were walking picket lines.

The strike had widespread sympathy. Support rallies drew tens of thousands. The UAW-sponsored "Adopt-a-Striker" program raised \$1 million. Caterpillar workers in apartheid South Africa stopped work for an hour in solidarity.

The UAW abruptly halted the strike after the company threatened to hire permanent replacements. Citing that threat as "Caterpillar's trump card," the New York

Times proclaimed "management can bring even a union so mighty and rich as the United Automobile Workers to its knees."

Inside the plants, workers remained militant and defiant, sporting pro-union t-shirts, hats, buttons and armbands and chanting at work — for which discipline was frequently meted out. There were eight wildcat strikes in the next two and a half years. In-plant "work-to-rule" slowdown tactics were employed with some success, but the company was intransigent. By June of 1994, the strike was on again.

Production continued with salaried employees and scabs, and in December 1995, the UAW suspended the second Caterpillar strike. Workers rejected a new, concessionary agreement by 80 percent. Working without a contract, workers were frequently disciplined for minor offenses. In 1998 — after a six-and-a-half-year fight — workers at Caterpillar reluctantly accepted a six-year contract. It was the first UAW contract with a permanent two-tier pay scale.

Aware of Caterpillar's sordid history, workers at the Jan. 21 rally loudly chanted, "Not this time!" and they meant it. □

MICHIGAN

LGBTQ protesters: 'Gay families matter!'

By Martha Grevatt
Lansing, Mich.

In Michigan, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community is fed up. LGBTQ people are mad at right-wing legislators and the support they are getting from Gov. Rick Snyder.

More than 150 people rallied outside the State House in Lansing on Jan. 19 to deliver a message: "Gay Families Matter." The protest was organized by a coalition of LGBTQ community centers around the state, after Snyder signed a bill making it illegal for any public employer to provide domestic partner benefits.

Zachary Bauer, executive director of the Kalamazoo, Mich., Gay and Lesbian Resource Center, explained that 60 percent of the voters of Kalamazoo voted to give domestic partner benefits to city workers. The bill overturns this progressive vote. "They took away your voice," said Bauer.

"Anytime that someone works to deny the rights of a group — rights that they enjoy — they are a moral hypocrite," said David Garcia, executive director of the Detroit-area community center, Affirmations. "I am a gay father. My son lives with me. I am a Mexican-American. My son is being raised by many aunts, uncles and cousins. Rick Snyder is a moral hypocrite."

"We're residents of the state of Michigan. We deserve the same rights as heterosexual families," added Curtis Lipscomb, executive director of KICK, a Detroit organization for LGBTQ African Americans.

Also represented at the rally were LGBTQ centers from the Michigan cities of Benton Harbor, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor and Saginaw; the Ruth Ellis Center for LGBTQ youth in Detroit; and the statewide civil rights group, Equality Michigan.

When Snyder exited the building, he waved but maintained his distance from the rally. He was loudly booed, and so was the bill's sponsor, Republican State Rep. Dave Agema. Protesters followed Agema down the street, chanting "Gay families matter!" Agema complained on Facebook of being "swarmed with gay men screaming hate at me."

Right wing targets LGBTQ community

Last year, the right wing failed to strip state employees of domestic partner benefits. An anti-same sex marriage bill passed by Michigan voters was used to try to take away these negotiated health care benefits. The right wing said granting equal benefits treats same-sex relationships as the equivalent of heterosexual marriage and is therefore illegal.

The Civil Service Commission then ruled that a state employee could choose an individual living with them — a partner, family member or housemate — to put on their insurance plan. A majority of the state legislature voted against the Civil Service ruling but lacked the supermajority needed to overturn it.

The latest bill is a mean-spirited attack on LGBTQ municipal and county workers after the right wing could not take benefits away at the state level.

The same state legislature refused to pass an anti-bullying bill to protect schoolchildren from abuse based on categories including race, religion, sex and sexual orientation. In other states, where policies "enumerated" specific types of discrimination, student complaints decreased.

Michigan was one of five states that had no anti-bullying statute until a weakened law passed last year without enumeration. The bill removed previous language that actually contained an exception for bullying driven by religious conviction.

The LGBTQ movement in Michigan will try to stop the state legislature from passing House Bill 5039, which would overturn local civil rights ordinances that prohibit anti-LGBTQ discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled a similar bill in

Colorado unconstitutional.

There are at least three other bigoted bills that may be voted on this year in Michigan. Senate Bill 518 forces state universities to allow students in psychology and counseling programs to refuse to counsel LGBTQ students. House Bill 4089 blocks gender reassignment surgery in prisons and other state institutions. Agema has introduced a new bill that eliminates the Healthy Michigan Fund Initiative for HIV prevention and care, making Michigan also ineligible for federal funds for these programs.

The right-wing attacks on the LGBTQ community are anti-union and anti-democratic. It is now illegal for public unions to negotiate equal benefits. The right of a local community to ban discrimination is threatened.

Meanwhile, Michigan Public Act Four allows Snyder to appoint an "emergency manager" to take over a city, county or school board, stripping power from elected governments. The EM can break union contracts, privatize schools and sell public assets, but must fulfill debt obligations. So far, most cities under receivership are majority African-American.

Activists at the demonstration on Jan. 19 eagerly signed the petitions to repeal Public Act 4. □

Challenges, opportunities for pro-choice movement

Defending legal abortion on 39th anniversary

By Sue Davis

The pro-choice movement is marching for reproductive justice on the 39th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. But not only in the streets.

More than 50 national groups supporting women's health and rights have coalesced behind a "Trust Women Week National Online March," scheduled to run from Jan. 20 through Jan. 27. Supporters are signing an online petition posted by MoveOn to send a strong message to members of Congress and state governors and legislators that they are demanding reproductive health, rights and justice. (moveon.org)

This national tactic was adopted to counter the unprecedented attacks in 2011 on legal, safe, accessible abortion at all levels of government. In a political climate where each Republican presidential candidate is trying to show he's more anti-abortion than the next guy, pro-choice supporters anticipate that 2012 will see many more attacks.

So they're kicking off this year with a united pro-choice message. Petition signers can choose various slogans to express their politics. Among them are "I trust women and I vote," "Reproductive rights are human rights" and "We are the 99%. Fix the economy, and stop the attacks on women's health."

On Jan. 22-23, pro-choice activists took to real streets to express these sentiments and others. Demonstrations were held in New York; San Francisco; Los Angeles; Little Rock, Ark.; and Washington, D.C. and thousands of supporters attended activities in cities across the country.

Legal restrictions mount amid violence, harassment

The Guttmacher Institute tallied 92 state laws that limited access to abor-



WWW PHOTO: JOHN CATALINOTTO

Washington, D.C., 2004. Thousands of young women march to defend right to abortion.

tion in 2011. Currently 19 states mandate preoperative counseling that includes false information about the health consequences of abortions; 25 have 24-hour preoperative waiting periods; and 33 states offer no Medicaid coverage for poor women, who are disproportionately women of color, young and live in rural communities.

Violence continues. On New Year's Day, a firebomb damaged a clinic in Pensacola, Fla. Clinic providers, staff and patients — regardless of what kind of reproductive health care they are seeking — are subject to daily harassment.

For example, after Todd Stave, who owns Germantown Reproductive Health Services in Maryland, hired Dr. LeRoy Carhart, a longtime abortion provider in Nebraska, to do first- and second-trimester abortions last spring, the clinic was subjected to a week-long protest by Operation Rescue in August. The condo association from which the clinic has rented space for 19 years was deluged with demands to cancel the lease. But the low-

est blow was when the anti-choice forces picketed the opening day of school that Stave's 11-year-old daughter attends and were there again on Open School Night.

Fightback launched to stop attacks

To counter these attacks, pro-choice legal organizations like the Center for Reproductive Rights turned back anti-choice laws in several states. A broad coalition, headed by Mississippians for Healthy Families, stopped passage of a "personhood" amendment in that state. If passed, it would have given all the rights of a living person to a fertilized egg — restricting all abortions, outlawing many types of birth control and possibly criminalizing some complications from pregnancy.

After intense pro-choice actions, both online and in the streets, three bills passed by the House of Representatives — one mandating that a hospital could let a woman die rather than perform an abortion, another for a federal ban on insurance coverage for abortions, and another ending federal Medicaid payments to

Planned Parenthood — were not passed by the Senate.

On Jan. 20, the Obama administration announced that the vast majority of health insurance plans must provide contraceptives for women free of charge. It also rejected a broad exemption, lobbied for by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which would have denied family-planning coverage to all employees (regardless of their religious affiliation) at Catholic hospitals, colleges and charities.

The National Network of Abortion Funds, with more than 100 local affiliates which help fund poor women's access to abortion, is building a coalition to expand its fight to overturn the Hyde Amendment. That ended federal Medicaid coverage for poor women seeking abortions in 1976. NNAF also runs the George Tiller Memorial Abortion Fund, set up on May 31, 2009, the day the heroic abortion provider was gunned down in his Wichita, Kan., church.

After Tiller was murdered, his clinic was closed. But recently Julie Burkhart — inspired by Dr. Tiller, whose motto was "Trust Women" — set up the Trust Women PAC. Through it Burkhart is raising \$500,000 to open The Family Health Service Center: A Trust Women Facility in Wichita in Dr. Tiller's memory.

In addition to Trust Women Week, the pro-choice movement needs to join with others fighting for rights for the 99% in 2012. As longtime reproductive rights journalist and activist Eleanor J. Bader concludes in her article in the Winter 2012 issue of On The Issues Magazine, "The only solution is radical, bold action — sit-ins, civil disobedience and mass demonstrations — in defense of liberty, justice and gender equality."

Statistics are from Bader's article, "Anti-Abortion Harassment and Violence Still Stifle Access," www.ontheissuesmagazine.com.

DETROIT MLK DAY

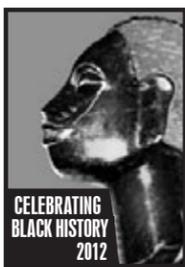
Women, Civil Rights and the struggle ahead

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Detroit

For the ninth consecutive year, the Detroit Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Rally and March was held at the Central United Methodist Church. This historic church, where Dr. King often spoke, remains a supporter of contemporary social justice and peace activities through its leader, the Rev. Ed Rowe.

Since 2004, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI) has set out to reclaim the genuine legacy of this civil rights leader, assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. What is deliberately overlooked every MLK Day holiday is the principled stand Dr. King took during 1967-68 against the United States war in Vietnam and the necessity he saw in linking the fight to end racism and war with the need to eliminate poverty.

This year's focus was on the role of women in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Four women, all contributors and co-editors of "Hands on the Freedom Plow," a first-person account on the role of women within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), were



the featured speakers. SNCC was considered the most militant organization of the period that grew out of the Southern struggle to end legalized segregation and disenfranchisement.

The panel included Prof. Gloria House, who worked in Lowndes County, Ala., in 1965-66 as the Black Power movement emerged; Dr. Gwen Patton, who participated in the Montgomery, Ala., civil rights struggles; Marilyn Lowen, who worked in Mississippi with local communities fighting racism and disempowerment; and Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, who participated in various organizing efforts in Mississippi.

In addition to the women from SNCC, Arlene Holt Baker, the highest ranking woman within the U.S. labor movement as executive vice-president of the AFL-CIO, addressed the crowd. Other rally speakers included Aurora Harris, a community activist, poet and board member of Broadside Press, and John Hardy, a former Freedom Rider and activist with SNCC during 1960-63.

Under the theme, "The Struggle Escalates for Jobs, Peace & Justice," a march through downtown Detroit enjoyed significant participation from labor, includ-

ing delegates to the national AFL-CIO annual MLK weekend conference in Detroit, who joined in as an act of solidarity and unity. The march also had the support of area students and a socialist contingent of youth chanting anti-capitalist slogans.

Each year, the planning committee presents an "MLK Spirit of Detroit" award to deserving activists and individuals. This year, the award went to the organizers and participants of Occupy Detroit.

Voting rights under attack

The rally and demonstration also challenged the threat of emergency state management over Detroit and other majority African-American cities in Michigan. A statement from the MLK Committee entitled, "Hard Fought Right to Vote Under Attack," raised that "almost 47 years after the passage of the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965, voting rights are again under attack by racist political forces in the U.S."

The statement noted, "The intent of the Voting Rights Act was to enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which were passed after the Civil War and guaranteed the right to vote for African Americans and other minorities. In 1964, the 24th Amendment was passed, which prohibited the use of the poll tax, that is, a tax that must be

paid in order to vote.

"The main task of the 'emergency manager' is to make sure that the banks and bondholders get paid, period. The EM has no accountability to the citizens of the city it manages, and citizens have no voice in the decisions made by the EM."

Following the march, a community dinner, prepared by the Wobbly Kitchen, Food Not Bombs, the Avalon Bakery and Occupy Detroit, was served to hundreds of people at the Central Church. After dinner, Writer L. Bush, a local poet and Occupy Detroit activist, presented a cultural program that included Sista Otis, Jessica Care Moore, The DDJ Trio, Markita Moore and Tracey Morris. During the earlier rally and march, the Mosaic Youth Choir, the Deep River Choir and the Matrix Theater made important cultural contributions.

In addition to the Detroit MLK Committee, event co-sponsors and endorsers included Veterans for Peace, Chapter 74; Swords Into Plowshares; the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shut-offs; Advocates for Informed Nonviolent Social Change; the Detroit Green Party; the Jamaica Project; Broadside Press; the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization; the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights; and other local organizations. □

Rally honors MLK's labor legacy in Philadelphia



WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

By **Joe Piette**
Philadelphia

Occupy Philly activists, union officials and workers organized a successful march and rally on Martin Luther King Day, Jan. 16, in Philadelphia. The activities emphasized King's involvement in the fight for "economic justice and dignity for all" and honored his legacy of support for the working class.

John Johnson Jr., president of Transport Workers Union Local 234, spoke at the 30th Street train station where the rush-hour march began. He talked about the millions of jobs that could be created by repairing the nation's infrastructure.

Occupy Philly distributed a chant list to march participants, which featured this quote by King on the back: "Some-

thing is wrong with capitalism as it now stands in the United States. We are not interested in being integrated into this value structure. A radical redistribution of power must take place."

Gwen Ivey, Philadelphia Area Local President of the American Postal Workers Union, criticized a 2006 congressional act for causing the huge deficits in post office budgets and threatening hundreds of thousands of jobs. Outside the 30th Street post office, Ivey linked postal workers fighting this crisis to all those who are confronting a "system that puts profit before people."

Hundreds of participants then filled the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 33 hall. The diverse, standing-room-only crowd heard D.C. 33 President Pete Mat-

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People's Assembly continues Dr. King's dream

By **Gerry Scoppettuolo**
Providence, R.I.

Strong and urgent voices of protest and plans for future organizing highlighted the Rhode Island People's Assembly Annual Martin Luther King Conference Jan. 21 in Providence.

Workers World Party First Secretary Larry Holmes, delivered the keynote address. He quoted one of Dr. King's last public statements: "What good are civil rights without economic rights?" Holmes urged the assembly to understand the class-struggle dimensions of the current period.

"We must look past whatever shortcomings we feel about the Occupy Wall Street movement and understand that what is happening now is part of the worldwide collapse of capitalism as more sectors of the previously privileged working class are now experiencing what it's like to have no future," stated Holmes.

In his last days before he was assassinated, Dr. King's Poor Peoples Campaign



Providence, R.I.

WW PHOTO

was planning to organize what came to be known as Resurrection City in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1968. This forerunner of today's Occupy movement was in response to devastating Black unemployment that had not been relieved by the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in law, which legally desegregated public places, especially in the Jim Crow South.

Mary Kay Harris, lead organizer for Direct Action for Rights and Equality and a longtime Providence activist, co-chaired the conference.

During the assembly floor discussion, John Prince of Providence condemned the prison-industrial complex: "It is disturbing that people who are recently released from prison are denied jobs be-

cause of their record. The women's prison here is overcrowded. We are forced into a future of jails, institution or death!"

Another participant, just released from an 18-year incarceration, urged the assembly to remember the contributions of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party, declaring that "imprisoned youth have the most revolutionary potential. We must learn from what [BPP chair] Huey Newton said: that vanguard leadership must take its cue from the people."

Martha Yager, from the American Friends Service Committee, told of the brave actions of women from Occupy Providence who were currently occupying the House of Compassion, a residential program for women living with HIV in Cumberland, R.I., that's slated for devastating cutbacks. (<http://houseofcompassionri.org/>)

The RIPA is currently organizing its annual MLK Unity Day April 4 at Providence City Hall. For more information, contact liberation401@cox.net. □

Newark community group protests 205 days and counting

By Dolores Cox
Newark, N.J.

The People's Organization for Progress in Newark, N.J., launched its Daily People's Protest Campaign for Jobs, Peace, Equality and Justice on June 27. As of Jan. 17, the organization's demonstrations had taken place for 205 consecutive days.

POP intends to continue demonstrating through July 15, at which time they will have protested for a total of 381 days. Their protests are modeled after the number of days the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott lasted, launched by Rosa Parks in December 1955.

More than 150 organizations have endorsed POP's campaign.

POP activists have endured extreme weather conditions throughout the summer and winter seasons. They carry signs reading "Stop Foreclosures," "Stop Job Cuts," "Workers Need Higher Wages," "Bail Out the People" and "We Demand Jobs for a Living Wage."

With their megaphone, these activists strongly demand union representation, a public works program and an end to student loan debt. They also denounce charter schools. POP calls for an end to the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq occupa-

tion. They say "no" to war on Iran. Their signs, which read "Toot Your Horn for Jobs," draw steady streams of supportive horn honking by motorists, including bus drivers.

Larry Hamm, New Jersey state chairperson of POP, cites a U.S. Department of Labor report issued in December, revealing that the overall national unemployment rate for African Americans rose from 15.5 percent to 15.8 percent and from 39.6 percent to 42.1 percent among Black youth.

In New Jersey, one in every six Black men was unemployed compared to one in 13 white men. "Trickle-down" economics is not working, Hamm points out. He says that the wealth is not trickling down; it's trickling up.

On Jan. 17, New York activists representing the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC), the International Action Center, the Take Back WBAI Coalition, the Lynne Stewart campaign and CPRMetro.org joined POP members at their protest.



People's Organization for Progress is aiming for 381 straight days of action in Newark, N.J.

WW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN

The protest schedule is from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Monday through Friday and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Springfield Avenue and West Market Street intersection. That's in front of Old City Hall and the Lincoln Monument. On Saturdays, the group demonstrates from

noon to 2 p.m. at the corner of Broad and Market streets. POP's meetings take place every Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, 224 West Kinney St. in Newark.

See the website at www.njpop.org. Call 973-801-0001 for daily updates. □

Put the banks on trial!

Continued from page 1

which is in central San Francisco on the edge of the Asian community. The main chants included, "We are the people, no one is illegal/¡Todos somos humanos!" and "¡La Migra, la policia, la misma porqueria!" (La Migra, the police, the same filth!) Among the marchers were about 200 from Occupy Oakland, which brought its sound bus, a transformed Alameda County Transit bus.

Citibank and Bechtel headquarters were also targeted throughout the day.

Marchers joined the UNITE HERE picket at the Hyatt Regency, where workers have been fighting for a fair contract, swelling the ranks of the picketers.

After the workday ended, the crowd grew even larger. Despite a heavy rainstorm, this was the largest Occupy action of the new year. More than 100 Occupiers gained entrance to the Cathedral Hill Hotel at 1001 Van Ness Ave., taking over the hotel for hours. A site of labor disputes, the hotel sits vacant while 10,000 homeless people are living on the streets of San Francisco.



San Francisco workers put Wells Fargo bank under siege.

WW PHOTO: BILL BOWERS

Movement still strong

This action at Wall Street West shows that the Occupy movement is still going strong, despite the centralized decision of the capitalist state to use force to drive activists out of the parks and squares they were using as organizing centers. More than that, the movement is still directing its fire against the most powerful capital-

ist institutions: the banks and the politicians who bail them out.

The Occupy movement's activity in solidarity with immigrant workers is growing, as is its direct actions to stop foreclosures on peoples' homes, popular churches and movement offices by the hated mortgage companies and its solidarity with organized labor. □

Workers, supporters 'occupy' NYC cafe



Organizers and workers connected with the Laundry Workers Center held their first action of what they call a "Workers Led Workplace Justice Campaign" on Jan. 21 on the East Side of Manhattan. Dozens of people from the workplace, Occupy Wall Street and other pro-worker forces gathered first at a concrete park at Third Avenue and 64th Street for a short rally where the workers' grievances were explained. The group then held a short march to 1201 Second Ave., the site of a Hot & Crusty cafe, and marched in for a guerrilla occupation, showing the bosses that the underpaid and abused immigrant work staff had many friends.

— Report & photo by John Catalinotto

phia

thews and Father Isaac Miller, retired rector of the historic Episcopal Church of the Advocate, lead off the program.

Co-chairs were Jim Moran, founder of Philadelphia Area Project for Occupational Safety and Health, and Kamillah Fairchild, representing the Occupy Philly Labor Working Group.

The evening's highlight was the electrifying speech given by Anthony Monteiro, Temple University professor and community activist. He argued that if the Reconstruction period had not been sabotaged by Northern industrialists and Southern plantation owners, "There would have been no need for Martin Luther King to be in Memphis in 1968, where he was assassinated, because the South would not have been the preserve of the union-busters and the cold-blooded white supremacists."

To enthusiastic applause, Monteiro stressed, "Both sides in this presidential farce are going to talk about how they are going to create jobs. They're not going to create jobs. The system we live under is unsustainable." His talk ended with a call to support political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The meeting was a show of unity of some of the most active members in the Philadelphia labor movement. Speakers included Ron Blount, president of the United Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania; Colin Flory, Service Employees health care organizer; and Cory Ballard and Valerie Owes, UNITE HERE organizers.

Also addressing the group were Audra Traynham, Media Mobilizing Project and SEIU Local 32BJ; Henry Nicholas, president of National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, AFSCME; Eileen Duffy, school nurse, organizer of the 440 Campaign against layoffs and member of Philadelphia Federation of Teachers; and Mike Davis, Communication Workers Local 13000, Eastern Region Vice President.

Euware X. Osayande ended the evening with a poem from his book, "Whose America?" His call to fight against racism and all forms of bigotry ended with the poem's stirring words: "Watch us make it free." □

ARIZONA

Anti-Mexican Studies bigots now banning books

By Teresa Gutiérrez

Another racist message from Arizona's ruling class has been sent to oppressed people and especially Latinos/as of Mexican descent. That message is: Get back, get down, your lives are worth nothing to this system.

On Jan. 10, the Tucson Unified School District voted to suspend its Mexican-American Studies Program after an administrative law judge ruled that it violated a new state law and could lose millions of dollars in annual aid for a particular school district.

According to various news sources, 60 percent of the 53,000 students in that school district are Latino/a. Arizona is also ground zero for vile anti-immigrant legislation.

Reminiscent of book burnings under Nazi Germany, immediately after the ruling, school officials began to gather up any books that dealt with Chicano or Mexican-American history. Sometimes those books were gathered up right in front of the students who had come to class to study their history.

"Chicano" is the term that many Mexicans born in the United States or whose families have lived here for generations use to identify themselves. It is synonymous with pride in one's history and a symbol of resistance against racism and occupation.

As Tucson journalist Roberto Cintli Rodríguez wrote, "First, the Tucson school district came for the Mexican-American studies program. Now it's come for its books." (<http://drcintli.blogspot.com>)

One of those racists behind this latest attack is Arizona State Superintendent John Huppenthal. On Jan. 6, Huppenthal threatened that about 10 percent of the district's state funding, about \$15 million over the course of a year, would be withheld if it did not dismantle its Mexican-American studies courses.

According to CNN, that came after a December administrative law ruling stating that "the program was teaching 'in a biased, political and emotionally charged manner,'



and upheld a state finding that it violated a 2010 law that bans ethnic studies classes which 'promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, promote resentment toward a race or class of people, are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group or advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.' In Tucson, only Mexican-American studies classes were affected." (Jan. 22)

The books in question include "500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures," edited by Elizabeth Martinez; "Message to AZTLAN," by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales; "Occupied America: A History of Chicanos," by Rodolfo Acuña; "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," by Paulo Freire; and "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years," edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, as well as a reading by Shakespeare.

This racist attack on people's history had an immediate impressive response from individuals and organizations. One of those organizations was a group that has been organizing against this assault for a long time.

UNIDOS (United) heroically took over a school board meeting in April 2011 and chained themselves to board members' chairs.

In their statement, in part, on the

recent ruling, Alonso Palomino says: "While the institution continues to fail us, the community continues to rise. Ethnic Studies is abolished inside the gates of our schools but not in the streets of our community. UNIDOS presents: School of Ethnic Studies, the first steps to reclaiming our education."

This response was one of many heroic acts of resistance. Students walked out of school for a day, and a major event is planned for Jan. 24.

James E. Garcia of Phoenix is a university lecturer and playwright. He writes, "A relatively small contingent of powerful, bigoted public officials have worked relentlessly to make it happen. Why did it happen? It happened because the state's Latino population has nearly doubled in the past 20 years and the right wing is angry and afraid that it is helpless to stop it. In one generation, Latinos will be 50 percent of the state's population and, short of declaring martial law and deporting everyone with brown skin, there's nothing anyone can do to prevent that." (The Arizona Republic, Jan. 15)

The dismantling of progressive ideas in education is but one of many attacks sweeping the country. Demonizing people's history takes place amidst the depor-

tations of over 1 million workers.

All of this is in the context of the push by the capitalist ruling class to drive down the standard of living of all workers in this country. Education for our youth, just like a job for all, is not only not a priority, it is not even on the to-do list.

In this election year, it becomes ever clearer that only the struggle, only the fightback in the streets, in Washington, at our workplaces, everywhere is the solution to a lack of education, housing and so on.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano movement fought like hell for the right to study our history. It is not a right we will let go of. This writer was politically shaped by the writings of one of the authors who are now banned in Arizona, Rodolfo Acuña. He is a hero of the Chicano people. His words quoted here are a clarion call to struggle, a call we should all rise to.

Acuña eloquently writes: "From the top on down, Arizona officials know that their actions is causing many Latinos to be stigmatized. They know that they are contributing to their dropping out of school and they don't care. ...

"My mother would say about the gaggle in Tucson, no tienen madre. They are disrespectful; they don't care about the law, or how many people are hurt by their actions.

"I am not as nice as my mother was. I feel much like the people in the Boyle Heights area when the Night Stalker ... was terrorizing Los Angeles. They put out signs daring him to come East of the River, and then took care of him when he did. Hopefully the Tea Party will come to L.A." (AztlanReads.com, Jan. 16)

From the Southwest and beyond, the message to Huppenthal and all the racist reactionary capitalists must be: 500 years of Chicano history will never be swept away with the stroke of a pen.

The writer of this article was heavily involved in the Chicano movement in Texas, including membership in MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization), Raza Unida Party and CASA-HGT.

Historic strike halts Panama Canal expansion

By Olmedo Beluche

Olmedo Beluche is a sociologist, professor at the University of Panama, and veteran political activist in the Unity in the Comprehensive People's Struggle organization (ULIP).

Some 5,000 workers who are building two new locks for post-panamax ships in the expansion of the Panama Canal went on strike Jan. 16. The stoppage has been total, both in the Pacific and Atlantic areas, and joined by all categories of workers, from assistants to low-level supervisors.

[Post-panamax ships are larger than the maximum-size ships that currently move through existing locks — WW]

A list of demands shows that a series of abuses committed by the United for the Canal Group consortium provoked the strike. The consortium is headed by the Spanish transnational Sacyr and the main Panamanian construction company, the CUSA Group. The family of the current administrator of the Panama Canal, German Zubieta, owns CUSA.

The strike has lasted for a week and is hitting a key sector of the economy. It is so

strong that the Ministry of Labor — which has been so pro-business and anti-worker in other conflicts — has been cautious in its statements and has avoided repressing the workers.

The strikers have denounced all kinds of abuses: from unjustified firings to discriminatory lower wages for Panamanian workers compared to those paid to Spanish and Italian employees. This is reminiscent of the dual salary scale based on ethnic origin imposed by U.S. imperialism in the Canal Zone, a truly racist apartheid that existed during the U.S.'s colonial presence [beginning in 1903] until 1977.

The workers' demands centered on an obsolete pay scale enacted by the Panamanian government for canal workers, known as Decree No. 3 of March 4, 1980. This scale has lagged behind the galloping inflation in recent years, the salary adjustments made in the minimum Wage Acts of 2009 and 2011, and the collective agreement of the Sole Union of Construction (SUNTRACS) with the employers (CAPAC).

Decree No. 3 fixes a maximum of \$2.90 an hour for the lower category, while

striking workers and the leaders of SUNTRACS demand a minimum of \$6 an hour. The Minister of Labor has proposed an increase not exceeding 5 percent of the basic wage of this decree.

The problem has become complex because not only is Decree 3 obsolete, but it expresses the segregationist criterion with which the bourgeoisie and the Panamanian governments have wanted to handle matters regarding the Panama Canal since it reverted to national sovereignty in 2000.

Since the early 1990s, shortly after the U.S. invasion of 1989, Yankee imperialism demanded from the Panamanian bourgeoisie that in order to transfer the canal, as established by the 1977 treaties, a legal special status should be established, segregated from the jurisdiction of the rest of the republic.

Many have criticized this status. It is as if the Canal Zone continues to exist, only this time administered by "Panamanians," since the board of directors of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) is composed of senior business people from the banking and construction sectors who

have Washington's endorsement.

It is under those circumstances that in 1994, the Panamanian capitalist ruling class and its political parties, with U.S. endorsement, imposed Title XIV of the Constitution. This fails to give the Panama Canal an autonomous regime, but instead imposes a real segregation from the rest of the nation.

Creates a state within a state

Among other things, Article 320 of the Panamanian Constitution established that the ACP budget "is not part of the General State Budget." It is as if another state had been created within the Panamanian state, the same as the previous Canal Zone, with the only difference that now it is administered by "Panamanians."

Following that segregationist logic, Article 322 of the Constitution established a "special" labor system for workers in the Panama Canal, a system outside the national laws and the Labor Code. Among other things, this article prohibits strikes in the canal, which constitutes a violation of the Constitution itself, international

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Casualties rise as U.S.-backed armies try to subdue Somalia

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

During mid-January, the number of deaths and injuries in Somalia escalated as foreign military forces accelerated their campaign to destroy the al-Shabab Islamic resistance movement and subdue areas of the country under its control.

The invading troops come from Ethiopia, Kenya and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). They are financed and backed by the U.S., Israel and other imperialist states, which seek to prop up the pro-Western Somalia Transitional Federal Government. These forces on the ground are complemented by European Union naval vessels that are cruising in the Gulf of Aden, ostensibly to fight "piracy."

Kenyan troops first entered southern Somalia in October in an operation called "Linda Nchi." The Kenyan government said it was responding to incursions by al-Shabab into its territory. However, the military invasion had been planned with Washington for nearly two years.

In an effort to justify their latest intervention in Somalia, the White House and State Department have claimed repeatedly that al-Shabab is linked with al-Qaida. U.S. drones have killed hundreds of Somalis over the last several months.

On Jan. 21, a British citizen of Leba-

nese descent was killed by a U.S. drone in Elasha Biyaha, located outside the capital of Mogadishu. The AMISOM forces had launched an offensive in the capital and its environs aimed at driving al-Shabab supporters out of Mogadishu.

As early as Jan. 20, civilians living in the capital reported serious clashes between TFG troops, reinforced by AMISOM, and al-Shabab fighters in the Karan and Heliwa districts. Afgoye, a town that is the current residence of many people internally displaced by the war, was bombed as well in an air strike of unknown origin.

Hundreds of residents of the northern sections of the capital fled after they awoke that same morning to sounds of mortar fire. The AMISOM forces, composed of 10,000 troops from Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti, states all closely allied with the U.S., are making a major effort to expand their operations outside Mogadishu.

AMISOM troops have been restricted to small areas of the capital due to the fierce resistance of al-Shabab and to their unpopularity among the Somali masses. The al-Shabab fighters are carrying out a formidable resistance to the Western-backed military units. People residing in the capital reported that al-Shabab ambushed AMISOM and TFG troops in Daynile, Heliwa, Dharkenley and Yaqshid

last straw — that the Panamanian state, either through the general budget or the ACP, has to cover wage increases from its funds to guarantee the profits of national and foreign entrepreneurs benefitting from the canal's expansion.

When the debate on the expansion of the Panama Canal through a new set of locks for post-panamax ships began in 2006, those of us who were opposed argued two things, now shown to be accurate. First, the work is not urgent to world trade because the canal is far from its maximum capacity, which implies indebteding the country for the benefit of international shipping companies. Second, spending at least \$5.2 billion on this work means transferring income from the canal to benefit banks and builders — income that should serve to solve the Panamanian people's social problems.

The struggle over generations for sovereignty was so that the Panamanian people should live better, not to benefit a small national and foreign business elite. That is what is happening; the wealthy from the United for the Canal Group are taking for them and the overseas elite the profits from the canal expansion, while paying crumbs to the Panamanian workers. That is why this strike has been legitimate and historic and has the support of all trade union and popular organizations in Panama.

Mundo Obrero translated this article, which is slightly shortened here.

districts, resulting in the death of a TFG military official.

In a video recently released by al-Shabab, an alleged spy for the Central Intelligence Agency, Ahmad Ali Hussein, confessed to being recruited by the U.S. covert action organization. Hussein was reportedly executed by his captors in late January or early February of 2011.

On Jan. 21, several armed militants reportedly took a U.S. citizen into custody in Galkayo, located in the breakaway Puntland region of the country. Somali police officer Abdi Hassan Nur said that the gunmen had surrounded the man's vehicle, forced him to exit and enter another car.

During the recent fighting in Mogadishu, Keysaney Hospital in northern Mogadishu was struck by two mortar shells on Jan. 22. Reports indicate there were no injuries or deaths from the attack.

Keysaney is one of two International Committee of the Red Cross surgical referral hospitals in the capital. It is managed by the Somalia Red Crescent Society and treated 2,000 patients with war-related injuries in 2011.

Kenya pays heavy price for intervention

Despite claims that the Kenyan military is already halfway through its operations to subdue al-Shabab in Somalia, the invasion has had a serious negative impact on the East African state. A report issued by the Nairobi-based Inter-Regional Information Network of the United Nations says, "Security, service delivery and economic activity in northeastern Kenya have deteriorated considerably since October 2011, when the country's military forces deployed in neighboring Somalia in an effort to eradicate the al-Shabab militia, which has vowed to avenge the incursion." (IRIN, Jan. 13)

The same article points out that in Kenya, "In December alone, at least 15 inci-

dents involving grenades or improvised explosive devices (IEDs) occurred in the regions of Garissa, Wajir, Mandera and Dadaab, where some 463,000 people, mostly Somalis, are housed in the world's largest refugee complex. Food prices had also increased with local traders no longer able to import goods from Somalia."

A former senior research analyst at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London wrote, "Military intervention in Somalia, whether unilateral, multilateral or under the auspices of some supranational body, has never achieved its aims nor led to long-term peace, let alone political and social harmony. Current operations conducted by the African Union, Kenya and Ethiopia are the latest in a line of foreign military actions in Somalia." (African Arguments, Jan. 17)

Oil drilling begins

In the breakaway region of Puntland, whose leaders sought international recognition independent of Mogadishu, a Canadian oil and gas exploration firm has begun drilling at two wells in the Dharoor plains, known as Shabeel-1 and Shabeel North-1. Calling itself Africa Oil, the Canadian firm is working in partnership with two Australian counterparts, Red Emperor and Range Resources, hoping to find an estimated 300 million barrels of recoverable oil.

According to Reuters Press Agency, "Africa Oil said last year it planned to drill up to eight wells in blocks it holds interests in across East Africa, including the two in Puntland." (Jan. 17)

The initiation of such economic activity lends credence to the notion that the current military interventions in Somalia are not because of al-Qaida. The U.S. and other imperialist countries are exporting more oil than ever from the African continent, with plans to expand well into the first half of the 21st century. □

law and the principles of the International Labor Organization. ...

We say that this strike has historical significance because it has hit the segregationist scheme that the Panamanian bourgeoisie and Yankee imperialism have wanted to establish for the Panama Canal, and it has exposed the constitutional and legal contradictions covered under the ACP scheme.

The contradictions expressed in Decree 3 are even more absurd and ridiculous because the "United for the Canal Group" workers are not employees of the ACP, but of a private consortium which should be governed by the Labor Code and Panamanian labor laws, such as the minimum wage.

It is a double abuse at the outset to claim that these workers were governed by Decree 3 of March 4, 1980. Therefore, these workers have acted correctly by striking to demand their salary adjustment, both under the SUNTRACS-CAPAC collective bargaining agreement and under the law governing the minimum wage in Panama.

The worst of all the abuses and pay-backs — and the one that has frozen the negotiations aimed at resolving the strike — is that today it was learned [La Prensa, Jan. 21] that there is a secret clause between the United for the Canal Group and the ACP (contract clause 3.7) that obligates the Panamanian state to pay 100 percent of any wage adjustment that goes beyond Decree 3 of 1980. This is the



GAZA: Symbol of Resistance

A book of articles from WW, edited by Joyce Chediak. The compelling story of how Gazans withstood blockade and bombardment only to stand tall, refusing to give up the right to determine their own lives and to choose their own government; how Gaza's courage inspired a worldwide solidarity movement determined to break the blockade and deliver aid; exposes the forces behind the punishment of Gaza, and how a growing people's media is breaking the mainstream media's information blockade on this event.

Available at Amazon and bookstores around the country
<http://gazaresistancebook.com/>

HAITI

Prison guard trial ends in surprise conviction

By G. Dunkel

On Jan. 19, 2010, prison guards in Les Cayes, a town on the southern coast of Haiti near the country's most western point, carried out a massacre of over 20 prisoners. Though the government charged 13 guards with murder, attempted murder and other crimes, few expected justice to be done at the trial.

After the judge, Ézékiel Vaval, went to New York at the end of testimony, most Haitians thought the fix was in. The threats against the judge and the prosecutors had apparently worked, people thought: the guards would walk.

The guards were so confident that they even threatened a New York Times reporter covering the trial.

The list of historic massacres carried out against the workers and peasants of Haiti is long. For example, the big landlords that massacred hundreds of poor peasants protesting in Jean-Rabel in 1988 weren't even identified, much less sanctioned. The authorities didn't even count the corpses.

But when Judge Vaval returned to Les

Cayes and issued his verdict on Jan. 19, the second anniversary of the massacre, he found seven of the 13 guards guilty and sentenced them from two to seven years in prison. What was even more surprising was that the verdict was primarily based on the testimony of prisoners who survived.

Hundreds of members of the community packed into the theater in downtown Les Cayes, where the trial was held. These people erupted into cheers over the verdict and jeers at those convicted. The 21 guards and cops who escaped before the trial started were convicted in absentia.

The defense lawyers announced that they intend to appeal.

The result of the trial in Les Cayes shows that the thirst for justice among the Haitian people has not been quenched. But with a half a million families still living in ripped tents and squalid shacks because their homes were destroyed in the earthquake two years ago, with no public sanitation system in all of Haiti and with just a small percentage of Haitians having access to clean water, after billions of dollars were raised for Haiti, much, much more remains to be achieved. □

Elections? Stay in the streets

As our front-page story on Occupy Wall Street West shows, the Occupy movement has made it very clear that hundreds of thousands of people across the United States, from big cities on both coasts to smaller ones in the midlands and hundreds of towns and rural areas in between, are distressed and angry enough at the present situation to march in the rain and snow, occupy banks, sleep on the ground, attend countless meetings, defy hordes of cops before getting arrested, and above all make their voices heard.

More and more, they are reaching out to the unions and the communities, both to give support and to get support when the state clamps down and tries to bust them up.

This is how genuine movements coming from the grass-roots are born and grow. They are demanding change and are directing their demands at the 1% — the very, very rich who in the sixties and seventies were called the Establishment and who Marxists know as the ruling class.

This movement gets some attention from the corporate media now and then — but nothing like the day-in, day-out barrage of manufactured news, commentary and opinion about the election process that is portrayed as the most important thing happening in the country.

We hear again and again about the Tea Party “movement” — a bunch of reactionaries and racists who heeded the call of the super-rich Koch brothers to get right-wing Republicans elected in the 2010 congressional elections. Now they are getting much attention again, having put some muscle into the Gingrich campaign in South Carolina. He was speaking to wealthy whites in South

Carolina when he attacked Obama as the “food-stamp president.” It was really a racist attack on poor people that shows who the Tea Party types really are.

But what has the electioneering season got to do with the problems facing so many tens of millions of workers and oppressed communities in this country? Will anyone in either the Republican or the Democratic party, from Obama, Romney and Gingrich on down to those running for lower offices, put forward a program to do what the people want?

Poll after poll shows a rising tide of anger at the very, very rich and the financial institutions that serve them. People want jobs or an income to live on if they can't get work. They want the rich to pay a lot more taxes so that social services aren't cut while more workers are laid off. They want their money spent on the environment and schools and hospitals and housing, not bailouts to the banks and endless wars.

Obama's State of the Union address, his opening shot in the campaign, tried to tap into this anger when he said he was for an economy where “everyone does their fair share and everyone plays by the same set of rules.” This is open to many interpretations. By the same set of rules, does he mean an economy where someone with \$1 billion and someone with \$10 both have the right to start a bank? One where a rich person and a poor person will both be punished equally for stealing a loaf of bread?

Capitalist politics is aimed at obscuring the class differences that lead to poverty, on the one hand, and obscene wealth, on the other. In this season of open reaction versus liberal demagoguery, it is what the movement does in the streets that will count and lay the basis for real change. □

Occupy Atlanta takes on the banks — and wins!

By Dianne Mathiowetz
Atlanta

Higher Ground Empowerment Center is a 108-year-old church located in the Vine City neighborhood of Atlanta, one of the most neglected areas of the city. It has long been a community resource, offering vital assistance, including a food pantry, youth summer camps and Saturday tutorial programs to the Black residents, many of them poor, who live in this struggling community.

Located just blocks from the Georgia Dome, home to the Atlanta Falcons, the area has drawn the attention of speculators and developers looking for cheap land and big future profits. Vacant lots and boarded-up houses can be found along its narrow streets.

In 2008, a massive tornado swept through this area and continued through downtown Atlanta. National news showed pictures of skyscraper hotels and business towers with hundreds of shattered windows. Yet, there was next to no coverage of the devastated neighborhood of Vine City. Falling trees crushed many

of the small wooden-frame houses in the neighborhood.

Ferocious winds had toppled the steeple off the church sanctuary and severely damaged the building. For weeks after the storm, Higher Ground provided temporary shelter in other church buildings for many people who had lost everything in the tornado.

When the church's insurance was insufficient to make all the needed repairs, it took out a \$1.1 million loan from BB&T bank. However, the church was unable to keep up the loan payments, as it was impacted by the economy's downturn, the loss of congregants during the 18-month reconstruction and the bank's onerous interest rate.

Despite the pastor's multiple attempts to modify the loan, in December 2009, BB&T took possession of the church and the surrounding properties. The bank tore down the rental buildings and small stores that had supplemented the church's income and leased the sanctuary back to them in an amount still too high.

Facing imminent eviction on Jan. 13, church leaders contacted Joe Beasley,

Feb. 4 anti-war actions Called to stop imperialist threats to Iran

By John Catalinotto

A broad spectrum of U.S.-based anti-imperialist and anti-war organizations agreed on a Jan. 17 conference call to hold coordinated protests across the country on Saturday, Feb. 4. The demands will be: “No war, no sanctions, no intervention, no assassinations against Iran.”

The ad-hoc group that took part in the call decided that although there are only two weeks to organize, it will invite anti-war forces around the world to join in, if possible, so that this emergency action could develop into a global day of action.

All agreed on the need to stop U.S. imperialism and/or Israel from launching a military attack on Iran. There was also a consensus that the new sanctions President Barack Obama signed into law on Dec. 31 — with the goal of breaking the Iranian central bank — were themselves an act of war aimed at the Iranian people. The political activists on the call raised the danger of a wider war should fighting break out in or around Iran.

While the organizations involved had varied assessments of the Iranian government, they all saw any intervention from U.S. imperialism in the Southwest Asian country as a threat to the entire region and to peace. Some of the people on the call who are originally from Iran and who were in touch with family and friends there conveyed the Iranian people's anger at the recent assassination of a young scientist.

There was agreement to make “no assassinations” one of the demands to show solidarity with the Iranian population as well as to condemn the U.S. and its allies for criminal activities against Iran and its people.

As of Jan. 19, the organizations that called the actions or endorsed later included the United National Antiwar Coalition, the International Action Center, SI! Solidarity with Iran, Refugee Apostolic Catholic

Church, Workers World Party, World Can't Wait, American Iranian Friendship Committee, Answer Coalition, Antiwar.com, Peace of the Action, ComeHomeAmerica.us, St. Pete for Peace, Women Against Military Madness, Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality-Virginia, WESPAC Foundation, Peace Action Maine, Occupy Myrtle Beach, Minnesota Peace Action Coalition, Twin Cities Peace Campaign and Bail Out the People Movement.

Individual endorsers include authors David Swanson, “When the World Outlawed War,” and Phil Wilayto, “In Defense of Iran: Notes from a U.S. Peace Delegation's Journey through the Islamic Republic”; and U.N. Human Rights Award winner Ramsey Clark, a former U.S. attorney general.

The list is expected to grow steadily as word spreads. Right now people can follow developments on the Facebook link: No War On Iran: National Day of Action Feb 4, www.facebook.com/events/214341975322807/.

There will also be updates, giving times and places of demonstrations, at the International Action Center website: www.iacenter.org and www.stopwaroniran.org.

Catalinotto represented Workers World Party on the Jan. 17 conference call.

NO WAR ON IRAN

★ SANCTIONS ★

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FEB 4, 2012

<http://www.facebook.com/events/214341975322807/>

Join us Sat. Feb 4
 NYC 1 pm - 47 St. & 7 Ave
 Rally then a March to
 Israeli Mission & US Mission to UN
 demanding
NO WAR ON IRAN!

Southeast regional director of the Rainbow/Push Coalition and active participant in Occupy Atlanta. Within hours, activists pitched tents on HGEC's grounds. Before a well-attended press conference on Jan. 12, it was declared “Occupied.”

On Jan. 17, following a 3-hour contentious negotiating meeting with BB&T management arranged by Beasley, HGEC Senior Pastor Dexter L. Johnson, members of the church, Occupy Atlanta, the National Action Network and others left the bank building with the deeds to all the church properties back in hand. BB&T had agreed to resell the church and surrounding land for \$175,000 at 1 percent interest on a 25-year mortgage.

This is the second victory that Occupy Atlanta has won in recent months.

On Dec. 6, the organization came to the assistance of injured Iraq War veteran, Brigitte Walker. Her home in Riverdale, Ga., a southern suburb of Atlanta, was scheduled to be auctioned off on Jan. 3. Following well-publicized press conferences, a neighborhood cleanup and

a community organizing meeting with other distressed homeowners, within 2 weeks, JPMorgan Chase modified her mortgage to an affordable amount.

Occupy Atlanta is in another struggle with Chase Bank over the foreclosure of the Pittman's home in Atlanta. The house is in the Old Fourth Ward, the area of the city where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birth home is located, and has been in the family since 1953.

Chase foreclosed on the house and moved to evict the Pittmans as Dr. Eloise Pittman, the head of the family, died of cancer. Activists with Occupy Atlanta have been camped out in tents in the front yard since Dec. 6. The bank has started and stopped negotiations several times.

Occupy Atlanta is urging supporters to call James “Jamie” Dimon, the chairperson and chief CEO of JPMorgan Chase, and demand a satisfactory conclusion to this blatant example of predatory lending. Call 212-270-1111 or fax 212-270-1121. More information is available at www.occupyatlantia.org □

As Afghan soldiers rebel

U.S.-led 'coalition' shows cracks

By Deirdre Griswold

It was more than 10 years ago — Oct. 7, 2001, to be precise — that the Bush administration first sent troops to Afghanistan, in what it called Operation Enduring Freedom. The name was cooked up by whoever in the Pentagon comes up with such euphemisms. The only thing that has endured is war, brutal and destructive.

In fact, by June 2010 the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan had become the longest war in U.S. history.

And unless the Obama administration abandons the ambitions of the U.S. ruling class to subdue the Afghan people and turn their country into a strategic stepping stone to exploit Central and South-west Asia, the war will go on indefinitely.

But perhaps not with what the U.S. government calls its “coalition partners” — other imperialist countries in NATO that agreed to send forces to bolster the U.S. troops there.

Every war waged by imperialist “allies” involves secret promises to share the spoils of war once they have won. But when victory is called into question, these alliances become shaky.

Right now, it is France that may be contemplating leaving the “coalition” and withdrawing its troops. There is an immediate reason: the killing of four French soldiers and the wounding of 15 others on

Jan. 20 by just one soldier of the Afghan armed forces, supposed allies of the imperialists.

Just weeks earlier, two members of the French Foreign Legion had been killed, also by an Afghan soldier.

After the latest attack, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that France was suspending its military mission in Afghanistan, which has been training Afghan soldiers. France has almost 4,000 troops there; they were due to stay until the end of 2013. The vast majority of the people in France oppose their country's role in the war, according to polls, and want the troops brought home now. The economic crisis in Europe undoubtedly has made the people even more war-weary.

Some 90,000 of the 130,000 foreign troops now stationed in Afghanistan come from the United States. Nearly 10,000 come from Britain, which first attempted to shoot its way into Afghanistan in the middle of the 19th century, but finally gave up after fierce resistance by the Afghan people.

The original reason given by Washington for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan was the presumed role of Al-Qaida in the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon. Last May, U.S. Special Forces killed the leader of Al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden, as U.S. military and political leaders watched on satellite

television. Bin Laden was living in Pakistan, not Afghanistan, when he was killed.

So what's the excuse now for the U.S. to stay in Afghanistan?

Afghan soldiers take aim at 'allies'

A report based on a secret military study conducted by the “coalition” admitted there was enormous hostility in the Afghan army to the occupying troops. “Lethal altercations are clearly not rare or isolated; they reflect a rapidly growing systemic homicide threat (a magnitude of which may be unprecedented between ‘allies’ in modern military history),” notes the report. (New York Times, Jan. 20)

The study found that between May 2007 and May 2011, at least 58 Western troops were killed in 26 separate attacks by Afghan soldiers and police. Most of the attacks had occurred after October 2009. By the end of 2011, the number was even higher.

It's bound to increase as reports grow of U.S. soldiers desecrating the bodies of Afghans they have killed, while insulting their religion and culture.

This “coalition” report is critical of the Pentagon's public relations department, which has tried to belittle the problem. But the report evades the real cause of the Afghan people's animosity toward the West — putting it down to “cultural incompatibility.”

This attitude toward Afghanistan perpetuates the insults added to the injuries done to this country by Western imperialism. Afghanistan, a land at the heart of the historic Silk Road linking the Middle East and Europe to China, was from its earliest days a place where many cultures came into constant contact. “It was not only in terms of trade, money and luxury goods that the Silk Road had an overwhelming effect. It was also vitally important in the transport of ideas,” writes Bijan Omrani on the website of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan are no less tolerant than any others toward outside cultures. What they cannot and will not accept, however, are the atrocities and vicious indignities that are inevitable when outside powers attempt to impose their will through military might.

The virtual rebellion by members of the Afghan army and police against the occupying forces merely reflects the intense hatred for these oppressors by the Afghan people as a whole.

According to costofwar.com, the war in Afghanistan has cost the U.S. almost \$500 billion. The destruction done to Afghanistan and its people is incalculable. But it will take a very big struggle by the anti-war movement in the U.S. to force the capitalist government to admit its defeat and get out. □

Demonstrations, strikes mark anniversary of Tunisian uprising

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Long-time Tunisian ruler President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled his country on Jan 14, 2011 for the monarchy of Saudi Arabia, where he has been granted political refuge. The uprising that began in Tunisia 14 months ago was the first in a series of events that have reshaped the debate and struggle in much of Africa and the Middle East.

Although the forced resignation of Ben Ali was a major victory for the masses, it did not resolve the growing deprivation of the workers and youth. Nor did the uprising resolve the inherently exploitative relationship between Tunisia and the imperialist states, which still dictate the terms of its foreign policy toward the West.

Yet the Tunisian people have not given up on the total transformation of their country. In recent weeks a new round of strikes and mass demonstrations has erupted in various regions of the country, including the capital of Tunis.

On Jan. 17, a strike in the northern farming town of Siliana shut down schools and several roads. The people in Siliana were protesting against high unemployment and poor living conditions.

Demonstrations in the northwestern city of Jendouba halted traffic on a major thoroughfare. Protesters said the government had completely ignored the social and political concerns of working people.

Also in the north, university students in the city of Manouba are on a hunger strike, angry over the banning of women students who choose to wear the niqab, a full-face veil. The students demand that the ban be immediately lifted, but university officials have so far refused to back down.

In the central region mountain town of Maktar, a general strike erupted on Jan. 13 over the lack of progress since the oust-

er of the former president last year. Locals in the area chopped down trees and used them as a barricade to prevent traffic from flowing through the town.

One local vendor, Mounir Louhichi, said: “We're dying here, there is nothing. We're worn out by the cold and unemployment. No running water, no city gas despite being near the pipeline running from Algeria to Italy.” (AFP, Jan. 20)

A young English teacher, Ouided Slama, explained: “We are rebelling because it is, quite simply, intolerable.” Residents feel that the new government has totally ignored their plight.

“There is no one,” noted a young man who drew a large question mark on the door of the local branch of the dominant Islamic Ennahda party, which won 40 percent of the vote in recently held elections. Ennahda and a bloc of left-leaning parties control the new parliament. Mounia Laroussi, a school teacher, added, “What we want is for the authorities to come see us.”

Bank workers demand bosses resign

In Tunis, a struggle has been unfolding at the Central Bank, where employees have been protesting their working conditions. Demonstrators have demanded the resignation of the bank's president and vice president.

The Deputy Secretary General of the Tunisian Bank Federation, Moaman al-Gharbi, said the union supported the Central Bank workers but did not have the authority to endorse their call for the resignation of the executives. Al-Gharbi said the demonstrations are based on years of frustration. (Tunisia-Live.net, Jan. 20)

The workers are also concerned about the overall role of the Central Bank in the national development of the country. Al-Gharbi noted, “Financial institutions are the backbone of the economy.”

The union leader added that the banks' role “in sustainable development — especially in the interior regions of the country — needs to be specified and emphasized. The workers of the Central Bank do not wish to harm the country's economy in any way, and will thus not hinder the operation of their institution.”

As the Tunisian working class escalated its struggles, the General Labor Union (UGTT) announced a comprehensive strike set for Jan. 25. However, this call was later rescinded until further notice.

Mongi Abdel-Rahim, spokesperson for the UGTT, said the general strike was suspended because of talks between the Min-

ister of Social Affairs and representatives of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali. Abdel-Rahim said that if, after March 30, the unions are not satisfied with the outcome, “We will resume the general strike.” (Tunisia-Live.net, Jan. 21)

At the 22nd Congress of the UGTT, held in December 2011, more left-leaning leaders were elected to official positions.

These recent developments show there is still a strong need for a broad-based alliance of progressive forces to ensure that the popular aims of the 2010-2011 uprising are not lost, but are upheld as an inspiration for deeper levels of struggle against neocolonialism and imperialism. □



A rally made up mostly of people of Egyptian ancestry gathered in Times Square at midday on Jan. 21 to join in a Global Day of Action supporting the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the Egyptian revolution that removed former President Hosni Mubarak from office.

Similar rallies and marches took place in dozens of cities around the world, including Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston and Washington, D.C., in the U.S.; Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver

in Canada; Melbourne and Sydney in Australia; and Paris and Rome in Europe.

U.S.-based groups extending solidarity included the International Action Center, represented in the photo by co-director Sara Flounders, speaking. Just behind her is Joyce Chediak, who delivered a solidarity message from Workers World Party to the Egyptian people present.

— Report & photo by John Catalinotto

Resistamos las amenazas imperialistas de EE.UU. contra Irán

Por Sara Flounders

Crece el temor de que por un error de cálculo, una provocación deliberada o una operación de bandera falsa [Nota de la traducción: en jerga militar es cuando se ataca utilizando una bandera ajena para implicar al país adversario], se desate una guerra de Estados Unidos con Irán.

La peligrosa combinación de amenazas públicas por altos funcionarios estadounidenses, el masivo despliegue militar del Pentágono, los vuelos continuos de aviones no tripulados y el sabotaje industrial contra Irán, proporcionan una ominosa advertencia. Los medios de comunicación corporativos han estado más que dispuestos a vitorear sabotajes industriales, virus informáticos y asesinatos selectivos. Las maniobras de guerra con Israel, previstas para el 15 de enero de repente se pospusieron para mayo o más tarde.

El Congreso de Estados Unidos votó abrumadoramente para incluir disposiciones vinculantes en el Acta de Autorización para la Defensa Nacional y el presidente Obama firmó la legislación el 31 de diciembre ordenando el estrangulamiento económico de Irán. Estas disposiciones del AADN exigen que cualquier otro país del mundo se una a este bloqueo económico de Estados Unidos contra Irán o se verán sancionados por Estados Unidos. Esto en sí es un acto de guerra.

Irán ha acusado directamente a la CIA del asesinato el 11 de enero del físico Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, el cual ha indignado a los/as iraníes. Roshan es el último de cuatro científicos asesinados selectivamente en dos años.

Estalle o no una guerra, es esencial echar un vistazo a las poderosas fuerzas que sientan las bases para esa conflagración.

Una guerra de EE.UU. podría matar a cientos de miles de iraníes y desestabilizar toda la región. Provocaría un alza descontrolada en los precios del petróleo y del gas, devastando las frágiles economías de los países más pobres y desestabilizando la zona europea que se encuentra cada vez más inestable.

Marxistas revolucionarios como Fidel Castro, líderes políticos de China y Rusia, y hasta un curtido general israelí se han unido a muchos comentaristas políticos para advertir que un ataque por Estados Unidos o un ataque coordinado con Israel contra Irán podrían convertirse rápidamente en una guerra mucho más amplia.

Mientras defiende su derecho soberano a desarrollar la autosuficiencia energética, Teherán ha hecho todo lo posible por desviar las acusaciones y amenazas de EE.UU. Irán se ha sometido a años de intrusas inspecciones de sus instalaciones de investigación e industria para confirmar su cumplimiento con el Tratado de No Proliferación Nuclear.

Pero Washington insiste en detener el desarrollo de Irán — y no sólo su desarrollo de energía nuclear, para asegurarse de que su futuro como productora



de petróleo se debilite. Durante décadas, Irán se vio obligado a importar petróleo refinado. Washington ha intentado impedir que Irán importe repuestos para construir refinerías de petróleo, al igual que ha intentado detener todo el desarrollo de Irán desde la revolución de 1979.

El mito de que la guerra estimula

David Broder, corresponsal político del Washington Post durante 40 años y experto de los noticieros, describió en un artículo del 31 de octubre de 2010, cómo Obama podría abordar su debilitada situación cuando los republicanos barrieron con el Congreso. Argumentó que para arreglar la economía y recuperar su popularidad, la solución era obvia e inevitable: "Guerra con Irán".

Broder ha tenido más de 400 apariciones en el programa de comentarios políticos "Meet the Press". Ganó incluso un Premio Pulitzer. Se podía contar con Broder para que reflejara el pensamiento y los planes políticos de Washington. Sólo la máquina de guerra puede sacar a Estados Unidos del estancamiento económico, argumentaba Broder.

"Recordemos a FDR y la gran depresión", escribió Broder. ¿"Qué es lo que finalmente resolvió esa crisis económica? La Segunda Guerra Mundial. [Un enfrentamiento con los mulás] ayudará políticamente [a Obama] porque el partido de la oposición le estará instándolo

a hacer. Y mientras aumentan las tensiones y aceleramos los preparativos para la guerra, la economía mejorará".

Tras la muerte de Broder en marzo, Obama le llamó "el más incisivo y respetado comentarista político de su generación". (New York Times, 9 de marzo)

La declaración de Broder muestra una mentalidad absolutamente criminal. También muestra una ilusión peligrosa. Broder propuso tranquilamente el asesinato de decenas de miles de personas, la devastación de ciudades enteras, la destrucción de toda una cultura como una solución económica temporera para ganar una elección en Estados Unidos.

Otros comentaristas, igualmente argumentando fríamente con Broder decían que una guerra con Irán no sería lo suficiente porque todas las armas necesarias ya existen y están desplegadas. Por lo tanto, no resultaría en un aumento de pedidos militares. ¡Una guerra más grande sería necesaria para dar un empujón lo suficientemente grande!

En 1939, la revitalización de plantas cerradas en EE.UU. de acero, caucho y textiles por los pedidos del Gobierno para fabricar tanques, buques, jeeps, cascos, uniformes y chalecos de vida para vender en Europa, fue un gran estímulo. La entrada de los Estados Unidos en la Segunda Guerra Mundial en 1941 proporcionó un enorme aumento en la capacidad productiva que sacó a la economía de Estados Unidos de una depresión económica de 10 años. Lo que funcionó como estímulo económico hace 70 años, antes de la existencia del gigantesco complejo militar-industrial de alta tecnología, ya pasó a la historia.

Hoy, Estados Unidos tiene una máquina militar y un presupuesto militar más grande que el del resto del mundo combinado, superior a 1 billón de dólares al año en gastos declarados y ocultos, incluso sin otra guerra. Está garantizado crecer a un ritmo del 5 al 10 por ciento al año. Esto está incorporado en las proyecciones del presupuesto del Pentágono incluso sin los excedentes de presupuestos.

El mundo no cederá a los mandatos de EE.UU.

Los planes de Washington de conquistar fácilmente Afganistán e Irak y establ-

ecer regímenes títeres estables quedaron frustrados. El plan estadounidense para una guerra económica en Irán también ha revelado las debilidades de EE.UU.

El secretario del tesoro Timothy Geithner inició una gira de naciones del Asia sudoriental a principios de enero para convencer a Corea del sur, China, India y Japón a que cortaran sus importaciones masivas de petróleo iraní y acataran las sanciones.

China y la India — ambas grandes economías — se negaron directamente. China compra un tercio de las exportaciones de petróleo de Irán.

La administración Obama dijo que Estados Unidos ofrecería a los países que soliciten una exención temporal, que continúen las compras de petróleo de Irán mientras estén haciendo otros arreglos. Un ministro de la India dijo que su país seguirá haciendo negocios con Irán. Corea del sur dijo que solicitaría una exención estadounidense porque planeaba aumentar las compras de petróleo de Irán.

Los oficiales japoneses, al reunirse con Geithner parecieron estar de acuerdo. Pero después de su partida, el ministro de relaciones exteriores Koichiro Gamba se retractó diciendo: "A Estados Unidos le gustaría imponer sanciones. Creemos que es necesario ser extremadamente cautelosos sobre este asunto". (AFP, 13 de enero)

Rusia anunció que rechazará cumplir con las sanciones. También lo hizo el miembro de la OTAN, Turquía. La Unión Europea insistió en que se aplase por seis meses, debido al temor por las consecuencias económicas para los endeudados países de Italia, España y Grecia. El gobierno griego dijo que necesita al menos un año.

El petróleo crudo de Arabia Saudita requiere sustancialmente mayores costos de refinación al contener más azufre que el petróleo iraní el cual es más liviano. En un momento de recesión capitalista global, este costo añadido no es fácil de vender.

Hasta los leales colaboradores de EE.UU. están rechazando las exigencias de Washington. Pakistán, por ejemplo, se negó a abandonar un gasoducto para transportar gas natural iraní hacia Pakistán y en el futuro incluso hasta la India.

Todo esto serían buenas noticias. Pero el peligro es que el poder corporativo estadounidense viendo por todos lados su decreciente capacidad de imponer sus dictados, está cada vez más propenso a imponer soluciones militares.

Esta situación está agravada por los reveses de EE.UU. en Irak y Afganistán que han debilitado la dominación del sudoeste de Asia por la superpotencia estadounidense respecto a Irán. Cuanto más EE.UU. pierde su control sobre la región, más desesperado se puede poner el imperialismo y arriesgarlo todo en una loca aventura para recuperar su posición anterior.

Cada voz se debe levantarse en esta hora urgente contra las sanciones y la guerra. □

NO

**a la Guerra contra Irán
a las sanciones,
a la intervención
a los asesinatos**

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