



Labor turns up heat in grocery strike

Workers use militant tactics in fight to save healthcare

BULLETIN: As we go to press on Jan. 21, nearly one thousand grocery workers and their supporters protested outside the Vons/Safeway corporate headquarters in Arcadia, Calif. Twelve people were arrested for blocking the entrance, including: Rick Icaza, president of UFCW Local 770; John Grant, strike director for Local 770; and the secretary-treasurer of the California State Federation of Labor. Also arrested were John Parker and Preston Wood of the Community Action Project to Support Labor/ANSWER, Mike Schwartz of L.A. Strike Support Organization, and members of a Pasadena church.

By John Parker
Los Angeles

After 14 weeks of hardship and sacrifice, the current phase of the struggle of 70,000 grocery workers in Southern California has received a major boost.

The AFL-CIO announced on Jan. 16 that it was developing a national strategy for the strike and that more than 40 national labor unions had immediately responded to its initial call for fundraising by pledging more than \$600,000.

And the International Longshore and Warehouse Union announced at a Jan. 21 media conference that it plans to raise at least \$1 million to \$2 million for health benefits for the picketing grocery workers.

With many workers facing the threat of losing their homes and cars, these developments are right on time.

The strike and lockout involve a work force that is predominantly Black, Latina/o and Asian workers, with a high proportion of women. They are fighting for their healthcare benefits, pensions and decent wages against a two-tier hiring system. These workers see that the Greedy Three supermarket chains—Vons, Albertsons and Ralphs—continue to pay their CEOs and executives millions in salaries, bonuses and stock options, as well as health benefits that provide optimum care for them and their families.

The AFL-CIO intervention is a blow to the Greedy Three, whose main strategy is



WW PHOTO: JULIA LA RIVA

Still strong after 14 weeks.

to starve out the grocery workers and bring them to their knees. The AFL-CIO involvement may compel the supermarket chains to negotiate with the UFCW leaders in good faith. And the role of the national labor organization has the potential of being a challenge to the anti-worker Bush administration and to the new governor of California, who has begun imposing drastic cuts in healthcare on the poor-

est of the state, particularly children. The AFL-CIO recognizes that the crisis of healthcare is an issue that affects all its 15 million members.

Pressure from the rank and file of the union movement, along with the community, brought the AFL-CIO into the fray.

"To win this, we need an expansion nationwide," stated Rick Icaza, president

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E-mail: editor@workers.org
Web: www.workers.org
Vol. 46, No. 4 • Jan. 29, 2004
Closing date: Jan. 21, 2004

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Workers World-WW (ISSN-1070-4205) is published weekly except the first week of January by WW Publishers, 55 W. 17 St., N.Y., N.Y. 10011. Phone: (212) 627-2994. Subscriptions: One year: \$25; foreign and institutions: \$35. Letters to the editor may be condensed and edited. Articles can be freely reprinted, with credit to Workers World, 55 W. 17 St., New York, NY 10011. Back issues and individual articles are available on microfilm and/or photocopy from University Microfilms International, 300 Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. A searchable archive is available on the Web at www.workers.org.

Selected articles are available via e-mail subscription. Send an e-mail message to wwnews-on@wwpublish.com.

Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Workers World-WW, 55 W. 17 St., 5th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10011.

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After mayor bans ‘muster zone’

Diverse crowd supports struggle of day laborers

By Deirdre Griswold
Freehold Borough, N.J.

Drivers negotiating their way through the slush and snow on Main St. couldn’t believe their eyes. Their heads snapped as they passed the large crowd of huddled umbrellas near the sign proclaiming “Borough Hall, Freehold Municipal Building, Settled 1683.”

On a day “not fit for man nor beast,” nearly 200 people had gathered and marched to declare support for the rights of immigrant workers, specifically the day laborers whose right to meet each morning with contractors in a “muster zone” has been banned by Freehold Mayor Michael Wilson and the Town Council.

As a temporary measure, Rev. Andre McGuire of the Second Baptist Church, whose congregation is mostly African American, has come forward in solidarity with the Latino immigrant laborers and allowed them to gather at the church in the mornings in their quest for work.

What brought people out on Jan. 18, a day of unrelenting sleet and snow, was not just the official ordinance but also the campaign of slander, abuse and harassment against the workers, most of whom were born in sunny Mexico but have had to look for work in the U.S.

The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement 10 years ago has accelerated the destruction of small farms and businesses in Mexico, allowing U.S. capital and goods free access to the Mexican market. But it has provided no relief for workers, millions of whom must now emigrate to find employment.

The Committee of Workers for Progress and Social Wellbeing handed around a list of the day laborers’ demands: “The immediate annulling of the measures imposed by City Hall. The immediate end to harassment and intimidation against our community and our work center. The recognition of our contribution to the cultural, economic and social development and progress of Freehold. That we not be considered delinquents or terrorists. That our rights be respected like those of every inhabitant of Freehold and of the world.”

“Delinquents or terrorists.” What’s that about? It seems that, in addition to imposing fines and jail terms, the town authorities have threatened to turn over to the Department of Homeland Security the names of day laborers who defy their new rule. This super-department created by the Bush administration has taken over the Immigration and Naturalization Service, further criminalizing the treatment of immigrant workers.

Freehold is a town of 11,000, 28 percent of whom are Latinos, that is surrounded by upscale developments like Freehold Pointe, where new single-family homes start at \$600,000. Doing the landscaping and yard work plus a thousand other low-paying jobs in and around the town are the day laborers. The wealthy want an available pool of underpaid workers—but they also want them to be invisible and without a voice.

However, the workers are part of a new civil rights movement that will not shut up. It got media attention last Oct. 4 when national labor unions organized a cross-country caravan for immigrant rights that

ended up in a rally of 100,000 in Queens, N.Y., now the most multinational borough in New York City. The Freehold workers chose Jan. 18 for their rally to coincide with the Martin Luther King holiday, underscoring their connection to the civil rights movement.

With the help of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, they have also filed a class action suit demanding a reversal of the “muster zone” ban.

Also supporting the immigrant workers are Monmouth County Residents for Immigrant Rights, a group of Black, white and Latino residents that has passed out

thousands of informational flyers and that turned up in force at the rally. In addition, people drove through the sleet from nearby communities like Middletown and Toms River, and delegations came from the International Action Center in New York and the All Peoples Congress in Baltimore.

The solidarity shown this day in Freehold has put the authorities and their racist backers on notice that there are many people in the area who take seriously the old union slogan, “An injury to one is an injury to all.” This is an ongoing struggle and the day laborers say they will not stop until their rights as workers and as human beings are respected. □



WW PHOTO: DEIRDRE GRISWOLD

Solidarity shines in Freehold, N.J., Jan. 18.

Labor turns up heat in grocery strike

Continued from page 1

of Local 770 in Los Angeles.

Class struggle heating up

In spite of severe hardships put on UFCW grocery workers in southern California due to the refusal of Vons, Albertsons and Ralphs to negotiate in good faith, the UFCW local union members and their leaders remain even more determined and more willing to elevate the struggle against the big three grocery chains.

As a result, more militant actions—like civil disobedience, the expansion of pickets, and increased outreach to the community and rank and file—are being implemented.

For example, at a Vons supermarket in Garden Grove on Jan. 17, union officials were among 15 arrested for blocking the store entrance. Among those arrested were Greg Conger, president of Orange County’s UFCW Local 324; Art Pulaski, head of the State Labor Federation; and Mike Garcia, local president of the Service Employees International Union.

Local 770—the largest of the UFCW unions with over 20,000 members—resumed temporary pickets at Ralphs on Jan. 18. Picketers had been removed from Ralphs early in the strike, union officials said, to minimize hardship on consumers and focus more of the attack on the Safeway chain, which owns Vons. The Local 770 web site, in a brief report entitled “Back to Picketing at Ralphs for a

Day,” declared Jan. 18 “a success.”

A rally at the Vons corporate headquarters in Arcadia is planned for Jan. 21.

On Jan. 24 there will be services to mourn 10 grocery workers whose deaths were related to the strike. In some instances, stress was the cause, and in some exhaustion.

On Jan. 27, the UFCW is organizing a caravan to the home of Steven Burd, Safeway CEO and the engine behind the supermarkets’ strategy. Burd’s home will be surrounded with religious leaders and striking families who will bring their children and puppies.

Burd has proclaimed his commitment to the welfare of animals, so the union is demanding that he also recognize the impact on the children’s lives of his refusal to provide adequate healthcare to his employees.

One worker from Local 342, for example, fell asleep at the wheel and was killed while trying to supplement his income by driving a pizza truck at night after his picketing shift.

The grocery workers’ determination to keep on fighting is partly motivated by a desire to not let those who’ve fallen in battle die in vain.

Anger mounts, community-labor support grows

Local 770 successfully blocked a cynical attempt by the superstore Wal-Mart to sponsor this year’s annual Martin Luther King Day parade in Los Angeles. This

year’s parade was initially sponsored by Wal-Mart, a terrible insult to Dr. King’s legacy as well as the labor movement and the oppressed community.

After City Councilmember Martin Ludlow approached the labor community about this issue, Wal-Mart—a racist, anti-worker, anti-union corporation—was out and labor was in. The AFL-CIO became the official sponsor of this year’s parade.

This was a victory for the hundreds of thousands in the Black community in Los Angeles, who make up a high percentage of grocery workers.

The UFCW Local 770 website explains: “Dr. Martin Luther King died 36 years ago fighting for striking union members in Memphis. It is because of civil rights pioneers like Dr. King that we have the right to fight collectively for our healthcare, our pensions, our wages and our futures. Every single member is encouraged to participate in the annual Martin Luther King Day parade today in South Los Angeles.”

And the unity didn’t end with the parade. A local Black community organization had called for a solidarity picket at the Albertsons located at the beginning of the parade. Union officials decided to endorse and participate in the event. As a result, a loud and militant picket line blocked the entrance to the store.

All out for Jan. 31

The biggest example of this new strategy to cement further community and labor support is the building of a massive

march and rally on Jan. 31. Local 770 is devoting many of its resources and has gotten commitments from the Central Labor Council and State Labor Federation to make this a success.

In addition, a community and labor solidarity organization kicked off by groups that held food and toy drives for the striking and locked-out workers, including the Community Action Project to Support Labor initiated by ANSWER-Los Angeles, has unified and become the official representative of Local 770’s community outreach under the name CLASH—Community and Labor Acting to Save Healthcare.

This newly formed Local 770 group will concentrate all its efforts on building this march and rally. It is charged with activating community, labor and UFCW rank-and-file support for the rally and includes a full-time staffer from this group assisted by the local.

“We plan on getting as many posters up, leaflets out, petition signatures and phone calls made to every labor, student and community organization and their rank-and-file members as humanly possible,” said Page Getz, a member of the group who is concentrating on getting publicity out to some of the progressive radio stations.

A new determination that can be felt and sensed, like a powerful second wind, is pushing forward the struggle to save healthcare and the union. The community support has risen in concert with the heroic sacrifices of the grocery workers. □

Stage set for bloody competition

Growing crisis underlies bank mega-merger

By Milt Neidenberg

“When the elephants dance, ants get crushed.” That old saying reverberates on Wall Street these days as J.P. Morgan Chase and the giant Chicago bank, Bank One, enter a mega-merger in which \$58 billion in stock is being exchanged. And it applies to other giant mergers in the banking industry, which have accelerated in the last few years. The crushed ants are the losing rivals and factions within the merger and in the struggle to be top player in the industry. Hundreds of billions of dollars are at stake in this power struggle, which will have major effects far beyond these empires.

The merged J.P. Morgan Chase is now in mortal combat with Citigroup, number one in the industry. In April 1998, at the height of the 1990s boom, a mega-merger of Travelers Insurance and Citicorp formed Citigroup, valued at \$72.6 billion. Citicorp is a huge retail banker that monopolizes the credit card industry; Travelers is a giant holding corporation that has absorbed other financial institutions.

Bank of America, which took over Fleet Boston Financial Corp. for \$43 billion in October 2003, is in third place. These three giants are the products of earlier mergers that rolled over many financial institutions, which now are either part of their empires or no longer exist.

Before the ink was dry on this latest merger contract, J.P. Morgan Chase and Bank One announced a wage freeze and a minimum of 10,000 layoffs. They have assured Wall Street investors that they will initiate \$2.2 billion in cost-cutting moves as soon as possible. They are ready to do battle with Citigroup. The turf will encompass the lucrative credit card industry and its tens of millions of consumers.

It will be a bloody scene. Huge numbers of credit card users have exhausted their savings, lost their jobs and overspent on their cards. The robber barons will fleece the consumer/borrowers, who

Anti-war longshore work stoppage scheduled

By Richard Becker

In a great boost to the March 20 anti-occupation mobilization, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, representing port workers in the San Francisco Bay area, voted at its Jan. 15 membership meeting to hold a Stop Work meeting on March 20—that is, to shut down San Francisco Bay ports to protest the war and occupation of Iraq.

Unique among U.S. unions, the Longshore and Warehouse Union has a long history of stopping work in support of progressive causes, ranging from the struggle against apartheid in South Africa to protests of U.S. wars in Vietnam and Central America to support for death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The Stop Work meeting will be held in solidarity with the actions planned in San Francisco and around the world. The local will be mobilizing for the San Francisco march and rally, and is calling on other locals on the West Coast to hold similar Stop Work meetings. □

will be further victimized by massive increases in interest rates and fees for services, from mortgage rates to auto loans to credit cards. They will also entice millions more to board the credit card train with an advertising blitz of monumental proportions.

The stage is set for an industry-wide banking struggle. Who wins and who loses will have a major impact on the stock market, investors and depositors. Due to the growing concentration of capital, many corporations that profess to be independent are actually meshed with banking trusts and combinations. Karl Marx explained the significance of the concentration and centralization of capital in his monumental work, “Capital.”

A trillion-dollar struggle

The New York Times of Jan. 18 describes the magnitude of this struggle: “With combined assets of \$1.1 trillion, the new banking giant runs a close second to Citigroup. Its market value, though, at a combined \$132 billion, would still be about half the size of Citigroup’s \$255 billion.” The article adds that the executives of J.P. Morgan have “much to accomplish before they can begin to challenge Citigroup’s title as the world’s largest financial institution.”

An analyst from Deutsche Bank told the Times that, although it was still early, the merger gives the new bank’s executives “the platform to eventually make another acquisition.”

The ruling class banking empires are now directly connected with the stock market and intimately bound up with credit institutions—the multitude of smaller banks, pension funds, insurance companies, mortgage institutions and credit unions. They reach into the Federal Reserve Bank, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other government regulatory agencies, and have political influence in the inner circles where government policies are made. Banking-industrial empires, they are the nerve center of capitalism.

Most important, through mega-mergers they have acquired huge funds, previously unmanageable, which become centralized and speculative. No large-scale speculation in stocks, bonds and commodities can take place without the banks. They supply the loans for speculation and risk and accept all kinds of stock, mortgages and other collateral. There is a risk that these loans may become non-performing—that is, unpayable. Argentina went into a tailspin after it defaulted on its loans. Recently, the International Monetary Fund issued a report saying that U.S. deficits could wreak havoc on the world economy.

The Financial Times of Jan. 16, in an article headed, “Banks Warn on Emerging Markets,” quoted William Rhodes, senior vice-chairperson of Citigroup and first vice-chairperson of the Institute of International Finance, which represents more than 300 of the world’s banks and finance houses: “There is now a risk that markets may again be moving ahead of fundamentals, as was the case in 1997 before the Asian crisis.”

With short-term interest rates at 1 percent, U.S. investors and bankers have enlarged their appetites for risk and speculation. The devaluation of the dollar—the world’s reserve currency—has accel-

erated this trend and destabilized global trade. It is a disaster in the making, which will lead to defaults and bankruptcies.

In another Jan. 16 article, the Financial Times warned of these probabilities: “The question is not if the next crisis will occur, but when.”

Are the battles looming ahead a rerun of the power struggles that broke out more than half a century ago within the ruling factions of U.S. finance capital? The principal contenders in that mammoth conflict were the Rockefellers, the richest family in the world with global holdings in oil; the Morgan empire, whose interlocking power over U.S. industry dominated corporate America; and the Du Pont dynasty, whose profits from two world wars made them a close second to Rockefeller.

The glittering prize was the domination of banking, the most lucrative section of the capitalist system. A virtual civil war continued through decades of booms and busts, wars and periods of peaceful coexistence among them. War has now broken out again.

Today, the old patterns of domination don’t fit with the new technology. Old alliances among ruling factions based on old relationships of forces are breaking apart. Are the present-day captains of banking and industry different from the former dynasties that controlled so much of the wealth here and abroad? Are there new constellations of ruling-class factions that are beginning to show signs of coming apart?

In his remarkable work, “America’s Sixty Families,” Ferdinand Lundberg in 1937 described the relationships that existed among the U.S. ruling class families. His research needs to be updated.

As these divisions grow in proportion to the vastness of their holdings, ownership is sure to become the bone of contention among them. Will holding a strategic amount of stocks assure these tycoons that their huge aggregations of property will remain in their hands? No. In a crisis, it is likely that the capitalist state will intervene to establish order and keep the system afloat.

State capitalist intervention is no answer for the workers, however. The working class, which creates all value with its labor power, has intervened on its own behalf in the past—including in the U.S. in the crisis of the 1930s, when workers seized factories in the great sit-down strikes.

The overall reality is that the capitalist system is moving toward another major crisis. In a period of decline, the ruling class depends on imperialist wars, parasitic military production, and the deepening exploitation of the working class and oppressed. The so-called war on terrorism that has outraged the people of the world, speculation, the huge debts, a falling dollar and overproduction that gluts world markets also threaten to destabilize global class relationships.

The most effective answer to this crisis lies in a general, independent counter-offensive by the multinational working class and oppressed peoples, along with the rising immigrant struggle, against the bankers and industrialists, who are weakened by mounting factional struggles but backed up by a capitalist government that is prepared to bail them out. The counter-offensive must be a nationwide class mobilization. □

ON THE PICKET

Immigrant coal miners locked out in Utah

More than 70 coal miners in Huntington, Utah, have been on strike against the Co-Op Mine for almost four months. Most are Mexican immigrants who went on strike to protest flagrant safety violations and harsh disciplinary measures imposed when they tried to organize into the United Mine Workers union. The company retaliated by locking the strikers out.

Company owners, the Kingston family, reportedly make profits of up to \$1 million a month by paying the workers \$5.25 to \$7 an hour. Standard union wages range between \$15 and \$20 an hour.

Working conditions at the Co-Op Mine are dangerous. Miners, who complain of being inadequately trained, are forced to work under unsafe conditions that violate Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations. For instance, they have to use defective and unsafe machinery. When they become injured, they do not have access to workers’ compensation or decent medical insurance. There are no retirement benefits. Racist abuse and mistreatment by the bosses are routine.

The Co-Op miners have the full support of the Mine Workers and the labor movement in Utah, as well as students, religious groups and supporters of immigrant rights. But they need support from around the country to win the strike, their jobs back and union recognition. Supporters can spread the word about their strike and organizing drive. Send a message of solidarity from your union, community group, student organization or church by writing to the United Mine Workers of America District 22, 525 E. 100 South, Price, Utah 84501. Make checks out to “Co-Op Miners Relief Fund.” For more information, visit www.umwa.org/coop/coop.shtml.

Strike brings Tyson to the table

For the first time since the 470 meat packers of Food and Commercial Workers Local 538 in Jefferson, Wis., went on strike against Tyson Foods last Feb. 28, the company agreed to bargain, as of Dec. 18-19. Negotiations are continuing.

The workers have refused to accept Tyson’s demands for a four-year wage freeze for current workers and a cut of \$2 an hour for all new employees. Along with cutting sick leave and vacation time and eliminating profit sharing, Tyson also wanted to freeze pension benefits for current workers and eliminate pensions for all new employees. The company intended to shift health-care costs to employees, making coverage unaffordable for many families of current employees and unaffordable for almost all families of new employees.

Union officials attribute the company’s resumption of negotiations to national publicity, pressure from members of Congress and Wisconsin activists, and continuing loss of profits. (Labor Union News, Jan. 2004)

Tyson executives asked to resume negotiations the day after strikers, University of Wisconsin students and local labor supporters picketed the home of the head of Tyson’s board of directors. The day before, the U.W. Board of Regents had announced it would divest more than \$200,000 invested in Tyson Foods. The move, which supported a campus boycott of Tyson products, was the first time the Regents had withdrawn investments since they divested from companies doing business with

LINE

SUE DAVIS

apartheid South Africa in the 1980s.

“About the same time the Bill Moyers show featuring the strike aired nationwide, the company’s quarterly earnings statement came out showing that they lost about \$36 million in the prepared food division,” said union representative Dick Knapp. “The company attributes a lot of that loss to the strike, and it must have had a lot to do with their change of attitude.”

Borders workers ratify first contract

The 60 workers at the flagship Borders Bookstore in Ann Arbor, Mich., represented by Food and Commercial Workers Local 876, ratified their first two-year contract on Jan. 8. They will receive an annual increase of 3 percent, or the Borders national rate, whichever is higher.

Some other hard-fought gains include an increase in starting salaries from \$6.50/\$7 an hour to \$6.75/\$7.25. Wage caps at the top end of the pay scale were removed, and a merchandise credit was translated into wages. A grievance procedure was created, and a union-management committee was created to discuss non-grievance issues. Breaks have been lengthened from 10 to 15 minutes. Outsourcing of maintenance jobs was also stopped.

The workers’ strike weapon wins again!

Fighting layoffs at Harvard

Harvard University workers are bracing for a wave of layoffs at the university’s library system this January despite Harvard’s record endowment of \$19.3 billion. Library administrators claim the cuts are necessary because of “budget shortfalls,” though no middle-management cuts have been proposed. Many layoffs occurred in 2003.

The layoffs have triggered campus protests, spearheaded by the No-Layoffs Campaign at Harvard, a group of union workers, students and alumni. In a recent letter to Harvard faculty, the NLCH contrasted the layoffs with the record endowment; the university’s vast program of expansion, building and renovation; and salaries of \$40 million to two Harvard money managers—enough to pay the salaries of 900 clerical workers at \$30,000 a year. The letter predicted more deterioration of already-failing library services if the cuts go through. NLCH vowed to continue its protests in a Jan. 9 news release.

Connecticut janitors ratify contract

The 2,000 Connecticut janitors represented by Service Employees Local 32BJ overwhelmingly ratified a new one-year contract. Hourly pay for full-time workers will go to \$10 an hour on Dec. 31, 2004, up from \$9 under the previous contract, which expired on Dec. 31, 2003. Employers also agreed to increase health coverage contributions for each employee by \$40 a month.

To increase its negotiating leverage, the union asked for a one-year contract that will expire on the same date as the union’s other agreements with commercial buildings in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. □

Michael Jackson in the lion’s den

By Leslie Feinberg

“Not guilty.” Those two words received short shrift in the massive media storm surrounding Michael Jackson’s Jan. 16 arraignment in Santa Maria, Calif., on child molestation charges.

The word “circus,” however, took center stage in media coverage. And in virtually all the accounts, it was Jackson—facing charges that could lock him in a jail cell for more than two decades—who was accused of creating that atmosphere.

Christopher Darden, who was a prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson criminal trial that ended in acquittal by the jury, told reporters, “The circus has begun, and he [Jackson] is the ring master.” Darden told the syndicated TV show Entertainment Tonight, “It’s a circus from minute one, and it’s going to be a circus up until sentencing happens, or”—Darden had gotten ahead of himself—“up until we get a verdict in this case.”

The mass demonstration of public support for Jackson outside the courthouse was also billed as a “circus.” Thousands came from Los Angeles and Fresno, Calif., Las Vegas, Phoenix and Philadelphia, and from South Carolina and other parts of the United States. People also traveled from Brazil, England, Japan, France, Spain, Holland, Germany and Australia to stand up for Jackson.

Police estimates of the crowd outside the courthouse seemed low—1,500 to 2,000—based on the aerial views visible on electronic coverage. But the day after the arraignment, virtually all the print media reported “hundreds.”

Assume for a moment that the widespread use of the word circus is not being used to dehumanize Jackson by associating him with the most immediate images of circuses: clowns, “freak shows” and performing animals. Perhaps the media are merely trying to convey the mood of spectacle?

If that is true, might not the following have been offered as the generator of spectacle at Jackson’s court appearance?

More than 2,500 police were standing six rows deep around a court complex now guarded 24 hours a day. Cops used attack dogs for “crowd control.” Extra court officers were shipped in from nearby Santa Barbara.

Half a dozen police and media helicopters circled and hovered in the air above the court complex.

More than 600 journalists, producers and television crew members jostled each other and everyone else. Some 100 television stations from around the globe sent personnel. Forty TV satellite trucks were parked outside.

Vendors hawked T-shirts and fast food. If Jackson’s court appearance was a circus, it was reminiscent of the brutal ancient circuses organized by the emperors of the Roman Empire as part of the political tactic of public diversion. Those who found themselves in the center ring of the Circus Maximus had to fight—often to the death—for their freedom.

In the lion’s den

Inside the courtroom, Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville castigated Jackson for being 10 minutes late.

Attorney Mark Geragos tried to explain that unprecedented traffic and crowds had

delayed their arrival.

But the judge interrupted: “There are no ifs, no excuses. I will not have it.”

Under pressure from the prosecution, Melville imposed a gag order to keep any parties from speaking to reporters.

The judge ruled that Jackson’s lawyers can see copies of search warrants and affidavits, and transcripts of tape recordings on which the prosecution is basing its case. Prosecutors had fought to keep a seal on the records. Melville denied a motion by media outlets—including The Associated Press—demanding the material be released into the public record.

The judge also barred cameras, including television, from the court—a ruling that enraged the networks.

Geragos asked the judge to recognize Jackson’s new co-counsel, Benjamin Brafman, a New York attorney who is not a member of the California bar. “Such requests are routinely granted,” the Jan. 17 New York Times reported, “but Judge Melville refused to allow Mr. Brafman to speak. Later, the judge relented and gave Mr. Brafman courtroom privileges.”

Jackson’s role in the proceedings only took five minutes. Two hours later, when his lawyer asked if Jackson could leave the courtroom, “as a personal courtesy,” the judge told the court, “I assume Mr. Jackson has to go to the bathroom.”

Melville then warned Mr. Geragos to instruct Michael Jackson to restrict his “liquid intake” before court.

Support for Jackson is becoming an objective factor that the judge and prosecutor have to take account of now. Jackson’s entire family was with him during his court appearance. The Nation of Islam is providing security for him. The Rev. Jesse Jackson admonished the prosecutor and media for the way they have treated Michael Jackson. Civil-rights activist Dick Gregory is waging a 40-day hunger strike to support Jackson. And many other African American political and cultural leaders have publicly stood up for Jackson.

The day of the arraignment, simultaneous demonstrations of support for Jackson took place in Mexico, Ireland, Hungary, Russia, England, the Netherlands, Sweden and other countries.

Jermaine Jackson said that his brother Michael and their entire family “are overwhelmed at the outpouring of support from the fans. It is a testament, a true testament to Michael’s messages of love and inclusion, that so many people of diverse backgrounds are traveling around the globe to support him.”

Jackson appeared not to leave the courtroom intimidated. He climbed up on top of his vehicle and sang to the crowd. The throng of supporters pushed past police and surrounded Jackson, chanting slogans and singing lyrics from one track of his 1995 album “HIStory” that indicts the Santa Barbara District Attorney Tom “Mad Dog” Sneddon for what is widely perceived as his vendetta against Jackson.

‘Mad Dog’ Sneddon

Jackson is accused of sexual misconduct with a 12-year-old boy with cancer who had asked to meet the singer. The alleged acts for which Jackson was being arraigned were supposed to have taken place between Feb. 7 and March 10, 2003.

That timing is very odd.

According to the charges, Jackson would have begun molesting the boy amid

the furious scrutiny and criticism he faced after having appeared with the 12-year-old in a television documentary, aired last Feb. 6, in which they were shown holding hands and saying that they had slept in the same room but not in the same bed.

Reportedly based on a complaint to a county hot line from an enraged school administrator who saw the documentary, Los Angeles County child welfare officers began investigating Jackson’s relationship with the boy.

The investigation, which ended Feb. 27, concluded that the allegations of molestation were groundless. The boy, his mother and his siblings all denied that any improprieties had taken place.

Further adding to questions of credibility in this case is the fact that the boy’s family has a history of litigation involving hundreds of thousands of dollars in compensation claims.

Sneddon, who unsuccessfully brought charges of child molestation against Jackson a decade ago, said he did not think the Los Angeles County findings were relevant to his case.

Sneddon’s widely publicized appeal in November 2003 for anyone, anywhere, who had any evidence of misconduct by Michael Jackson to contact his office is a prosecutorial version of “reality television”: Who wants to be a millionaire?

Attorney Mickey Sherman told the CBS News Early Show: “I think everyone expected there would be more victims coming out of the woodwork and that hasn’t happened. I think that’s rather significant.”

The stench of racism

“Wacko Jacko,” “bizarre,” “freak”—Jackson is publicly dehumanized by media pundits for his perceived sexuality, gender expression and sex ambiguity. But this inhuman tabloid-journalism scarcely masks the deep racism involved in this case.

Googling the words “Jackson” and “race card” lifts the rock.

In actuality, the “racist card” has already stacked the deck. Just two examples, painful to repeat in print, offer greater understanding about the intensity of racism involved in the demonization of Michael Jackson.

One newspaper article refers to the compact-disk players that some Jackson supporters played outside the courthouse as “ghetto blasters.” (The Australian, Jan. 16)

And Orville Schell, dean of the graduate journalism school at the University of California at Berkeley, dredged up a vicious Jim Crow metaphor familiar to white supremacists when he said of Jackson, “He is a tar baby of monumental proportions, into which all too many reputable news outlets are being stuck.” (St. Petersburg Times, Jan. 11)

Jackson faces an amorphous charge of molestation, defined in California as lewd and lascivious. According to Michael Hestrin, a Riverside County, Calif., deputy district attorney, “There’s no requirement that Michael Jackson touched the child underneath the clothing, it could be on the shoulder, it could be anywhere on the body.” (mtv.com, Jan. 16)

Hestrin added, “The prospective jurors in this case are going to be largely affluent, largely white.” There is no legal requirement to include any number of Black, Latino, Native or Asian people as jurors.

Michael Jackson, in the center ring of the Circus Maximus, is fighting for his life. □



ATLANTA

Activists confront Bush

By Dianne Mathiowetz
Atlanta

More than 1,000 protesters defied police attempts to move them into a distant “free speech” area and noisily denounced the anti-people, war-mongering policies of President George W. Bush as he arrived at the gravesite of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for a wreath-laying ceremony on Jan. 15.

Many in the crowd were incensed that Bush would exploit the legacy of Dr. King and his contributions to the struggle for justice, peace and equality for a campaign photo opportunity.

When the very diverse demonstrators refused to leave the sidewalk directly across from King’s crypt, the police brought in city buses to block people’s view and access to the brief ceremony.

Riot-gear police stood atop the buses. Sharpshooters were positioned on the roofs of nearby buildings. A phalanx of heavily armed police lined the street.

Nevertheless, the crowd spilled onto higher ground and climbed onto fences and walls, and people raised their signs over the buses. With drums, chants and boos, Bush’s exercise in political opportunism was disrupted.

The presidential entourage then sped down historic Auburn Avenue—where still more protesters, unable to get to the King gravesite, were at different corners.

Bush spent only a few minutes “honoring” King. He then spent hours at a campaign fundraising dinner at the World Congress Center that netted him at least \$1.2 million for his 2004 election campaign. In his speech to the well-heeled crowd, he made no mention of Dr. King.



Bush takes advantage of Martin Luther King birthday for a 'photo-opportunity.' But 1,000 protestors give the Commander in Chief of the racist war against Iraq the kind of 'welcome' he so richly deserves. The King placard reads, "No War on Iraq!"



The cost of Bush’s trip to Atlanta, estimated at over \$300,000, will be born by taxpayers because of his “presidential” ceremony at the gravesite.

The White House staff had called the King Center just days before to announce the presidential visit. Longstanding plans for an all-day program on human rights with participation from a broad range of activists and leaders, including Maria Elena Durazo of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, were put in jeopardy.

The Secret Service said that Bush’s security required that the entire area around the crypt be sealed off for four hours before his arrival and that Auburn Avenue be cleared of cars. No one would be able to visit the gravesite on what would have been Dr. King’s 75th birthday for most of the day. Participants in the human rights conference would be barred from

entering or leaving historic Ebenezer Baptist Church from noon on.

The MLK March Committee, which has annually organized the public events honoring and continuing the message of Dr. King, refused these conditions.

In news conferences, the civil-rights leaders recalled that on King’s birthday in 2003, Bush announced his opposition to affirmative action and was actively pushing for war against Iraq.

This year, Bush waited until Jan. 16 to announce his recess appointment of Charles Pickering to the 5th Circuit federal appeals court in New Orleans. Pickering’s nomination has been vigorously opposed by civil-rights, labor and women’s organizations.

There was worldwide news coverage of the Atlanta protest. Headlines in major newspapers blared that Bush had been booed at King’s gravesite.

Organizers of the protest, including the Rev. Timothy McDonald of Concerned Black Clergy and the various member organizations of the Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition, noted that people had broken the zone of insulation from protest and dissent that has become a defining trademark of the Bush presidency.

Articles in the Atlanta newspapers before Bush’s visit had detailed the Secret Service’s elaborate efforts to deny any effective protest against him. In city after city, the rights of free speech and assembly are routinely denied so that Bush rarely is personally confronted by opposition to his policies.

For many in Thursday’s demonstration, the outrage they felt at Bush’s hypocritical use of Dr. King’s message of universal justice and peace overcame any police intimidation. □

BUFFALO, N.Y.

Battle against racist police brutality

By Matthew L. Schwartz
Buffalo, N.Y.

It was the biggest protest so far in the fight against police abuse and racist profiling in Buffalo, N.Y.

On Jan. 17, over 100 protesters rallied at noon in front of a central city transit station. Then, in a determined show of solidarity, they marched two miles across town in 20-degree weather. The march was followed by a 20-car caravan.

The rally was held at the location where, in October, three white Niagara Frontier Transit Authority cops beat a young African American student for not showing her transit pass, and then beat the African American woman bus driver who came to the teenager’s defense. Protesters have been demanding that the bus driver be reinstated to her job and all charges against her be dropped.

The Coalition Against Police Abuse sponsored the rally and march, which was led by a banner reading, “In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stop racism, stop police brutality!”

The crowd reflected the diversity and unity of this coalition of individuals and organizations from the African American community and the anti-war movement.

At the very front of the march, one of the coalition’s African American organizers carried a placard reading, “Money for city services and schools, not war.” Over and over, the marchers tied the NFTA cops’ racism to city cutbacks under the rule of the banks’ financial control board, and to the price of the “endless war.”



WW PHOTOS: MATTHEW L. SCHWARTZ

Speakers and placards made it clear that the group was targeting all police repression and violence, and attacks on civil liberties, in all communities. One of several similar placards signed by the coalition read, “Stop Racist Profiling—Free Our Yemeni Neighbors!” That was targeting the “Homeland Security” siege and arrests of Arab and Yemeni community members and leaders here.

Protesters chanted, “An injury to one is an injury to all,” some shouting on megaphones: “Speak out now! You could be next!”

After the march, the protesters moved

inside to a public hearing and speak-out where many angrily described the racist abuse and profiling they and their families have suffered. Over and over again, their stories ended with a call to “fight back!”

As a significant contribution to the fight against police brutality, other community leaders have planned a one-day total boycott of the Buffalo transit system on Jan. 21. This event has sparked interest from the media, and excitement among those hearing about it, and is intended as a powerful statement to demand respect and dignity. □



Protests

By Monica Moorehead

Activists inside the United States and internationally paid tribute to the struggle-oriented legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King with marches, civil disobedience, rallies and much more. A majority of these actions took place on Jan. 19, the U.S. federal holiday recognizing his birthday.

In a number of demonstrations, local ANSWER—Act Now to Stop War & End Racism—coalitions linked the occupation of Iraq to the struggle for social justice at home. The following round-up is just a microcosm of what took place all over the globe:

In Los Angeles, over 100,000 people attended a parade on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Sponsored by the AFL-CIO, the parade was led by a delegation of striking

NEW YORK CITY RALLY:

'No Republican convention here!'

By Monica Moorehead
New York

"Send Bush to Mars! Bring the troops home!"

This was a popular chant among the hundreds of multinational activists who heroically rallied and marched in New York's brutal sub-zero temperatures on Jan. 15, the 75th anniversary of the birth of civil-rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They were there to protest President George W. Bush's racist, colonial war and occupation of Iraq as well as other important foreign and domestic policies.

The demonstration began with a rally in front of Madison Square Garden. The arena is the designated site of the Republican National Convention scheduled for late August 2004, when Bush is expected to be reselected as the party's presidential nominee.

A significant coalition, made up mostly of people of color, labor, community and anti-war forces, has been formed to protest against the convention being held in New York City. After the outdoor speak-out, protesters marched to the Community Church for an inside rally. Along the march route, a great majority of passersby expressed their solidarity with the chants and slogans by clapping, raising their fists or giving the thumbs up. Some spontaneously joined the march.

The stage banner inside the church read: "The Convention Is Cancelled Until All Troops Are Home and New Yorkers Have: Jobs with decent wages, housing-affordable-no rent hikes, healthcare, education-no tuition hikes, immigrant rights, civil rights and liberties."

Larry Holmes, a leader of the ANSWER coalition, proclaimed King's birthday as a "day of struggle against war, racism, colonialism and for liberation." He also called for a U.S. war crimes tribunal against the Bush administration and denounced Bush's visit to King's gravesite in Atlanta, which invoked protest there. He spoke of the importance of reaching out to the people of Brooklyn, the Bronx, Harlem and other oppressed sectors that have been traditionally excluded from the anti-war movement.

Speakers at the rallies included City Councilperson Charles Barron; Nellie Bailey, Harlem Tenants Council; Randa Jamal, Al-Awda-Right to Return Coalition; Walid Bader, Arab Muslim American Federation; union leader Brenda Stokeley

of New York City Labor Against the War; Cleo Silvers, 1199ers for Peace and Justice; the Rev. Herbert Daughtry, House of the Lord Church; Charlotte Kates, New Jersey Solidarity-Activists for the Liberation of Palestine; Sara Flounders, International Action Center; Gloria Pacis, mother of imprisoned GI resister Stephen Funk; Dustin Langley, Support Network for An Armed Forces Union organizer; Brian Becker, ANSWER steering committee member; Teresa Gutierrez, Stop the U.S. War in Colombia Committee; Amanda Vender, Network in Solidarity with the People of the Philippines; Wolsan Liem, Nodutdol for Korean Community Development; Brian Barraza, CASA Mexico and Mexican Workers Center; Louis Jones, N.Y. Aids Housing Network; Jennifer Wager, Pastors for Peace; and others.

One of the highlights of the indoor rally was the appearance of a delegation of Mexicano immigrant workers from Freehold, N.J., who are mounting a struggle for civil rights and against racism. □



Protesters rally in front of Madison Square Garden.

WW PHOTO: DEIRDRE GRISWOLD

Former Black Panther announces bid for mayor

By Monica Moorehead
New York

Flanked by hundreds of enthusiastic Brooklyn supporters and representatives from the New York Black political movement, City Councilperson Charles Barron officially announced his mayoral candidacy on the steps of City Hall on Jan. 19. The election takes place in November 2005.

Barron announced his candidacy on the official holiday honoring the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Barron spoke about his candidacy to the cheering crowd by saying: "We launched this movement in the name of Dr. King. We are calling for a racially balanced, gender balanced ... structure in New York City. ... We are developing a people's platform that we are going to take across this city."

This platform includes free tuition for all City University of New York students, freedom for all political prisoners, economic development and job creation to battle poverty, real affordable housing, reparations, quality health care, a cleaner



Mayoral candidate Charles Barron, with raised fist.

PEOPLES VIDEO NETWORK: JOHNNIE STEVENS

environment and much more.

Barron told his supporters that while his opponents may have millions of dollars at their disposal, he has a movement behind him, especially Black people.

Barron is a longtime political activist and a former member of the Black Panther Party. He is currently helping to lead a

campaign to keep the 2004 Republican National Convention out of New York City, in protest of the Bush administration's racist occupation of Iraq at the expense of mass unemployment and cuts in social programs at home.

For more information on the Barron campaign, call (718) 303-9590. □

honor Dr. King at home and abroad

grocery workers who are fighting for health care. Other multinational labor contingents along with the ANSWER coalition participated in the parade.

In Detroit, protesters marched to an indoor rally at the Central Methodist Church where a tape of Dr. King making his famous April 4, 1967, speech against the Vietnam War was played. The stage banner read, "Michigan Says No to War." The Detroit rally, along with a march in nearby Ann Arbor, denounced a reactionary petition put forth by right-wingers to end affirmative action in Michigan.

In Seattle, some 10,000 people marched and rallied under the theme "March in MLK's Footsteps—Justice Begins at Home." Those who participated came from the Black, Latino, Asian communities as well as the unions and anti-

war organizations.

In Boston, demonstrators rallied in front of the Massachusetts Statehouse to protest Gov. Mitt Romney's attacks on poor and working people and President George W. Bush's war on Iraq. The demonstrators then marched to the Tremont Street Military Recruiting Center to demand: "Bring the troops home! End the occupation from Iraq to Palestine."

In the San Diego parade, the ANSWER coalition adorned a truck with a banner highlighting the Dr. King quote, "The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government." Another banner included a portrait of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal with the slogan: "Stop Police Brutality! Jail Killer Cops!"

In Washington, D.C., despite physical intimidation by security personnel and

police, a solidarity action with the striking Sterling Laundry workers prevailed. Prominent Black activists Mahdi Bray, a leader of the Muslim American Society, the Rev. Graylan Hagler, Latina members of the UNITE union, and representatives of the Baltimore All-Peoples Congress were present, and repelled these physical attacks by goons.

In San Francisco, over 5,000 people gathered at the train station to greet the "freedom" train that arrived from San Jose, Calif. ANSWER organizers passed out fliers about the March 20 demonstration. Contingents included anti-death-penalty advocates trying to stop the execution of Kevin Cooper, supporters of the striking grocery workers in Southern California and striking Latino mine workers from Utah.

On Jan. 15, Dr. King's birthday, the Anti-War Joint Action Committee ended a two-day sit-in in Tokyo, Japan, at the Defense Agency, in which they had protested the Koizumi government's plans to send Japanese advance troops to Iraq.

TransAfrica forum sent a delegation to Caracas, Venezuela, to commemorate Dr. King's birthday. Minister of Education Aristobulo Isturiz took the delegation to the opening of one of the 3,000 Bolivarian schools, named in honor of Dr. King. Under the Hugo Chavez administration, education of the poor is being given top priority.

Contributors to this article include Abayomi Azikiwe, John Beacham, Sharon Black, Peter Cook, Jane Cutter, Bill Hackwell, Cheryl La Bash, Bob McCubbin, Matthew L. Schwartz, and Kikuchi Takao.

At Monterrey summit

Rising struggles frustrate U.S. plans for FTAA

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

Amid protests restricted by the government and a heavy police presence, the Americas Summit was held on Jan. 12-13 in Monterrey, Mexico. Many protesting groups had signed a statement declaring U.S. President George W. Bush “persona non grata.”

In the U.S., with rare exceptions, it was called the Americas Summit. But outside the U.S., particularly in Latin America, it was called the “Extraordinary” Americas Summit, meaning unusual, unscheduled. It was a meeting imposed by the U.S.

The U.S. had requested this summit through the Organization of American States to “discuss common economic, social and political themes among all the heads of governments of the region.” All, that is, except Cuba, which since the 1960s has been barred from the OAS by U.S. veto.

In 1994, when the Americas Summit first met in Miami, the result was the so-called “Washington Consensus.” At the time, the governments south of the Rio Grande were pro-U.S. and pro-market economy, headed by right-wingers like Sánchez de Lozada of Bolivia, Fujimori of Peru, Menem of Argentina and Samper of Colombia. That summit announced the Free Trade Area of the Americas—the FTAA, or ALCA in Spanish.

The FTAA begins officially in 2005, but the “neoliberal” process has already begun to be imposed on the region. In order to get loans from the international banks controlled by imperialism, these countries must open their markets to U.S. finance capital and privatize their most profitable national enterprises. They have to open their borders and remove duties on U.S. goods. At the same time they must lower or completely eliminate any subsidies to their own manufacturing and agricultural industries. They also must lower or eliminate their budgets for social programs, health care, housing, education and so on.

Poverty in region doubles

It is not surprising, then, that this policy has resulted in a terrible devastation of the region and the intensification of poverty. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez at the summit referred to the FTAA as a model for inequality, not for integration, that has doubled the number of poor from 110 million to 227 million.

This acute erosion of the basic standard of living, of the people's ability to feed and house their families and have access to education and health care, has caused an increase of political consciousness. The masses identify their misery with neoliberalism, the FTAA and capitalism. The upsurge of resistance to capitalism, even if not expressed as such, is evident in their slogans and actions.

Mobilizations against neoliberalism and its visible symbol, the FTAA, have been organized in almost every country of the region. This goes along with a very appropriate anti-U.S. sentiment.

This is very different from 1994. The mobilization of the masses has changed the balance of forces to the detriment of those who automatically supported every U.S. move, including keeping the U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico, against the people's wishes. The actions of the people have resulted in the election of heads of

government who are paying more attention to the needs of the masses than to the wishes of the U.S. These new heads of government, with some exceptions, are very aware that the people could oust them if they passively accept U.S. demands. A prime example of this was the ousting of the pro-U.S. Bolivian president, Sánchez de Lozada, last October by huge militant protests and strikes by the Indigenous masses and others.

In Ecuador a year ago, Lucio Gutiérrez was elected by popular vote on a very progressive political platform. Now he has aligned with the U.S. against the masses. The people are now trying to oust him, too, and several actions are organized for the coming weeks.

Popular governments have been elected in Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala and Paraguay, and the forces of the Bolivarian Revolution keep growing stronger in Venezuela. In Uruguay, the Broad Front—Frente Amplio—is likely to win the October 2004 general elections. Even in Colombia, where the right-wing government aligned with the U.S. abets assassinations of union leaders and progressives, the masses defeated a devastating referendum pushed by President Alvaro Uribe. The following day, a left-wing candidate was elected mayor of Bogotá, the second most important government post in the country.

Also, there has been tremendous opposition in Latin America to the U.S. war against Iraq. The growing recognition that the real terrorism comes from the U.S. is accompanied by an increase in acceptance, friendship and cooperation with Cuba.

This change of the political spectrum has correctly made the Bush administration think that the goal of achieving the FTAA by the year 2005 is at risk. They were hoping that the talks towards that goal would be wrapped up this year. That is why this “extraordinary” summit took place.

Chávez: 'FTAA is a cadaver'

Bush and the U.S. ruling class didn't get what they wanted. The final statement vaguely mentioned continuing discussions in the spirit of the Miami 2003 ministerial meeting, where the U.S. insistence on continuing agricultural subsidies almost stopped the FTAA negotiations in their tracks. As Chávez said, "The FTAA is a cadaver."

The other main issue pushed by Washington was the exclusion of “corrupt governments” from the negotiations. The opposition to this was equally strong, since the U.S. gave no definition of what it meant by “corruption.” It was perceived as a plot to exclude any government that the U.S. deemed problematic.

The most significant outcome of the summit was the emergence of two poles: on one hand, the U.S., Canada and Mexico with a few others; on the other, for the first time in history, a bloc of countries opposed to the neoliberal policy of the U.S. in the region. Cuba, which has resisted imperialism for 45 years, is of course part of this bloc, even though it is not part of the OAS. The bloc also includes Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and the majority of the CARICOM countries of the Caribbean.

In desperation to dismiss the growing

stature and respect for Cuba and Venezuela in the region because of their stand for dignity and sovereignty, the U.S. mounted an attack on both countries before and during the summit. U.S. Undersecretary of State for Hemispheric Affairs Roger Noriega, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush all generated a verbal blitzkrieg against both countries, accusing them of being undemocratic and destabilizing the region. Bush also accused President Nestor Kirchner of Argentina of being a friend of Fidel Castro, to which Kirchner responded that Argentina is a sovereign country and not the USA's backyard.

Similar arrogance was displayed against Brazil. But the fiercest attack was against Chávez, whose audio was even cut off during his speech to the summit. Chávez was the head of state most opposed to the FTAA and the summit in general. After Bush spoke criticizing Cuba, Chávez spoke on behalf of that island. He mentioned the Robinson Mission, in which 100,000 Cuban teachers have brought literacy to 1 million Venezuelans, and the Barrio Adentro (inside the neighborhood) Mission, in which 10,000 Cuban healthcare providers have helped the poorest of the poor in Venezuela's most desperate neighborhoods.

With the deliberate aim of dividing to rule, Bush held a press conference before the summit with Mexican President Vicente Fox, announcing, among other things, that Mexico was going to be involved in Venezuela's referendum to recall President Chávez. Mexico will give \$10,000 to an OAS organization to be an observer during the referendum. But

there may not even be a recall referendum, since Venezuela's constitution states that one can be held only if there are a required number of valid signatures—something the National Election Council must decide.

What makes the U.S. rulers so desperate? Their dreams of hegemony in the hemisphere are vanishing along with control over the resources. South America is a very wealthy region with precious metals, fertile lands, oil, gas and great biodiversity. The Amazon, straddling Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, is often referred to as the world's lungs. The Guaraní underground water reservoir covers an area larger than Spain, France and Portugal put together and is part of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The market of Southern Cone countries, Mercosur, which encompasses Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, is planning to include Venezuela, which is in the north. The Latin American and Caribbean countries are forming economic associations to challenge the U.S., dealing a major blow to Wall Street's plans for the region.

To secure its domination of the region, the U.S. is fast militarizing the hemisphere. But a popular slogan now is: "Beware, imperialists, Bolívar's sword is moving throughout Latin America."

Millions of Latin Americans have also been forced to emigrate to the U.S. to find jobs, in spite of the tremendous wealth of the region. These children of Bolívar work in the restaurants of New York, the valleys of California, the mushroom farms of Pennsylvania. They carry the struggling spirit and consciousness of belonging to the working class, without any illusions about the “American dream.” □

March 20, 2004

GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. BOMBING AND INVASION OF IRAQ



**BRING THE TROOPS
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**END COLONIAL OCCUPATION
FROM IRAQ TO PALESTINE
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MONEY FOR JOBS, HEALTH CARE
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12 noon	12 noon	11 a.m.	Assemble	12 noon
Times Sq.	White House	Dolores Park	Hollywood	Bandstand at
March to U.N.	202.544.3389	(18th St. & Dolores St.)	and Vine.	Boston Common
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		415.821.6545		

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Mass protest, armed attacks send clear message:

U.S. OUT OF IRAQ!

By John Catalinotto

Massive demonstrations, armed actions against U.S. and other troops, and a direct assault on U.S. headquarters in Baghdad have shown once again that the Iraqi resistance to foreign occupation remains a painful obstacle to Washington’s expansionist plans.

A reported 100,000 members of the Shiite community demonstrated in Baghdad Jan. 19, marching three miles to the University of al-Mustansariyah. A similar demonstration of 30,000 had taken place Jan. 15 in Basra in the south of the country. The protesters’ main demand was direct elections of an Iraqi government to replace the Coalition Authority.

Shiite religious leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, speaking for the Shiite community, has rejected the present U.S. plan to impose a provisional legislature selected by 18 regional caucuses. Al-Sistani wants national elections where Iraqis can elect their leaders directly, something Washington wants to postpone until at least 2005.

When a spokesperson for Al-Sistani raised these demands in Baghdad, the crowd responded by chanting: “Yes, yes to elections. No, no to occupation.”

This hostile reaction to U.S. authority is among the Shiite community, which U.S. analysts always claim is the sector of Iraqi Arabs most favorable to the U.S. intervention.

Resistance continues

The Iraqi resistance has continued to carry out armed attacks on the 130,000 U.S. troops and their 40,000 or so allied forces throughout Iraq. On Jan. 17, a bomb that exploded under a Bradley Fighting Vehicle killed three U.S. troops and three Iraqi “Civil Defense Forces.”

The three U.S. dead raised the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq since the March 20, 2003, invasion to 500. This is more than the number of U.S. troops killed in the first four years of U.S. intervention in Vietnam, between 1961 to 1965.

Other reports noted that 14 U.S. helicopters have already been shot down and that Iraqi fighters are getting more skilled in using the rocket launchers that can bring them down.

In addition to those killed, there have been 3,000 U.S. troops wounded badly enough to be evacuated. Thousands more have been sent away for treatment of illnesses. Perhaps an even more significant number is the 21 suicides among U.S. troops.

A 1,000-pound car bomb detonated Jan. 18 near the gate to the U.S. headquarters in Baghdad, killing more than 30 people, some of them reportedly Iraqis wanting to work with the occupation. Two U.S. contract employees may have been killed in the blast.

This guerrilla attack demonstrated the complete lack of security for anyone who cooperates with the U.S. occupiers.

Changing tactics

To try to recover the initiative, the U.S. command has carried out more severely repressive and murderous actions against the Iraqis, especially within the so-called Sunni triangle to the north and west of Baghdad. This has led to more Iraqi civilians being arrested, beaten and murdered by the nervous U.S. troops, who see the entire population as their enemy.

The Pentagon has also begun to carry

out the greatest and most rapid replacement of troops since World War II. This movement will repatriate the 130,000 troops, most of whom have been in the field for a year and are anxious to get home. Some 105,000 new troops are supposed to replace them over the four months until May 2004.

Some 39,000 of the new fresh troops will be reservists, wrenched out of their jobs and from their families and plunged into a nightmare none had ever imagined

when they joined up.

The officers have ordered 25,000 Marines to the “triangle” to replace the 101st Airborne troops. There they are supposed to carry out tactics similar to those used in Vietnam to win the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqis.

In Vietnam this was done by trying to discover who the local political leadership was and then murdering them. The Vietnamese won despite this slaughter.

With the change in troops will come a

change in equipment: more lighter, faster vehicles, more Humvees, fewer tanks and Bradley Armored Vehicles.

A Knight-Ridder reporter wrote in a feature story that all Iraqis, from college students to cab drivers, are using the archaic word “Ulooj” to refer to U.S. troops. The ancient term from Arabic literature can be translated as pigs of the desert, foreign infidels, little donkeys, medieval crusaders, bloodsuckers and horned creatures. □

Open letter from the Arab-American & Muslim community to U.S. anti-war movement

Dear peace and justice organizations and activists,

On March 20, 2004, the world will mobilize against war and colonial occupations. The significance of this historic day is evident to all and requires no further elaboration. The political clarity and character of this mobilization in the U.S., however, remains illusive.

This is where our community stands:

In confronting war, the people of Palestine and Iraq have paid dearly. They stand against the imperial project shoulder to shoulder with communities of color and the working class in the United States, along with a great many subjugated peoples around the globe—from Afghanistan to Colombia, and from the Philippines to Vieques, and on. Without a doubt, the Palestinian and Iraqi people are both welded together in an inextricable unity at the forefront of the global anti-war movement, transforming themselves as a whole as its embodiment and paying in its defense with the dearest of all—their very existence. Yet, despite every home destroyed, child murdered, acre confiscated and tree uprooted, town colonized and ethnically cleansed, wall built, refugee remaining nation-less, and incremental robbery of their self-determination, they remain the very antithetical formulation of empire and with a vision of justice for all.

In the United States, we, Arab-Americans and Muslims, have been maliciously targeted, stripped of our rights, and positioned outside the constitutional framework of this country. A new COINTELPRO has been unleashed against our homes and living rooms, as our fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters are plucked away and thrown into unknown prison cells. Thus, in a continuum of history, we stand with African Americans, Japanese Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and all others in the painful struggle for justice. From them all, we take our cue, for they are our predecessors and our partners in this long march.

Accordingly, we the undersigned hereby declare that:

1. We do not accept de-linking the struggle of the Palestinian people from the anti-war movement, and regard the struggle in Palestine, as it is viewed worldwide, to be central to any peace and justice mobilization.

2. We insist that the Palestinian right to return and to self-determination are the key anchors of the Palestinian struggle, and that organizations that attempt to diminish, sidetrack, or abro-

gate these rights, regardless of any other position they may take on Palestine, are acting contrary to the will and aspiration of the Palestinian people.

3. We view all attempts to relegate our collective presence to the margin and to tokenize our participation in the movement to be racist in character. In its attempt to silence the Arab and Muslim voices for decades, particularly that of the Palestinian people, the movement in the U.S. has stood alone in the global movement for justice. We see ourselves as full partners in leading the movement as signified in the heavy price we continue to pay along the way, and reject any attempt to objectify our presence.

4. We regard the positions that the “colonial occupation of Iraq must be internationalized,” or that ending the occupation must be conducted over a period of time until the “Iraqis are able to secure their democracy,” as implicitly colonial and racist. These are positions that are rooted in the construct of “manifest destiny” and the “white man’s burden” to “civilize.”

5. We call on our people everywhere to hold all organizations accountable to the positions they take, especially those that depict racist attitudes towards us, implicitly or otherwise, particularly those that tokenize and objectify our struggle. Any organization or movement that finds it acceptable to minimize or disregard for political expediency the struggle of any people should not be allowed to function within the global justice movement. Justice is neither selective, nor partial or conditional.

We are firm on these principles for the March 20th mobilization and beyond as we call on all communities and organizations to mobilize and stand in force under the following unifying five slogans:

1. End all colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere!
2. Bring the troops home NOW!
3. No to internationalizing colonial occupations!
4. Stop the attacks on civil liberties!
5. Money for jobs, education, and health care, not for war!

As we salute and stand empowered with sectors of the movement that have taken a principled stand on justice, we seek to participate in the empowerment of all as we call for a genuine global united front against war.

All out on March 20, 2004!

Listed in alphabetical order. To join as an organizational signatory or to be listed in solidarity, please write to: rashmawi@sbcglobal.net

- Signers
- Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition
- Al-Bireh Palestine Society, Calif. Chapter
- Al-Qalam Institute
- American Muslims for Jerusalem (AMJ)
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Greater Sacramento Area Chapter
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, N.J. Chapter
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Seattle Chapter
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Los Angeles/Orange County Chapter
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
- Arab Center of Washington-Seattle
- Arab Muslim American Federation
- Arab-American Community Center, Chicago
- Arab-American Forum, N.H.
- Arab-American Press Guild
- San Francisco Bay Area Palestine Coalition
- Canada-Palestine Association
- Canada-Palestine Friendship Society
- Canadian Arab Federation
- Committee for Democratic Palestine-Canada
- Committee for Justice-USA
- Deir Yassin Society of N. Y.
- Free Palestine Alliance-USA (FPA)
- Friends of Ghassan Kanafani, Toronto Chapter
- Kana’an Review
- Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation (MAS Freedom Foundation)
- Muslim Students Association of the U.S. and Canada (MSA-National)
- Muslim Students Association, Calif. State University, Sacramento
- Muslim Students Association, University of Calif., Davis
- National Council of Arab Americans (NCAA)
- Palestine Children’s Welfare Fund
- Palestine House Educational & Cultural Center, Canada
- Palestine Right of Return Congress-USA
- Palestine Solidarity Committee-Los Angeles
- Palestine Solidarity Committee-Seattle
- Palestine Solidarity Group-Chicago
- Palestinian American Women’s Association (PAWA)
- Sacred Roots
- Students for Justice in Palestine, Calif. State University, Sacramento
- Students for Justice in Palestine, University of Calif., Davis
- The Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP)
- The United Muslim Association of High Schools Club



It's not just Iowa

Every time election season begins with the Iowa caucuses, we have to point out that Iowa is not typical of the United States. Before too many conclusions are drawn about the political climate in this country today, let's look at the facts about this Midwest state.

First, its population comes to about 1 percent of the countrywide total. Of its 2.86 million people, 91 percent are white, compared with 69 percent in the United States as a whole. (Most Native people were forced out of Iowa or killed in the 1800s.) Some 12 percent of children in Iowa live below the poverty level, while the figure for the whole U.S. is 21 percent. While nationally 81 percent of the people live in metropolitan areas, in Iowa only 46 percent do.

It's just a fact that if the first primaries or caucuses were held in New York or California or Ohio, the outcome would be different.

By following a schedule that puts Iowa and New Hampshire—which is actually 95 percent white—first, the capitalist political establishment is already skewing the race for the nomination in a conservative direction.

This is typical ruling class politics. Industrialization and the gobbling up of farmland by agribusiness have driven most of the population of the U.S. into the areas around the big cities, yet the political institutions—especially, of course, the U.S. Senate—are weighted to discount the views of these large, multinational working class concentrations.

Thus it is not surprising that in Iowa John Kerry, who artfully came across as the anti-war, pro-war candidate, helping to confuse the voters with peace demagoguery wrapped in flag waving, came out ahead. Having the Kennedy machine behind him and a personal fortune didn't hurt, of course.

Capitalist politics boils down to the fine art of ignoring and marginalizing the most exploited and oppressed—thus discouraging them from participating—while finding, or manufacturing, divisive issues that will arouse bigoted passions and energize those on the right.

Bush did that in his State of the Union address when he called for a "marriage amendment" that simultaneously denies same-sex couples civil unions while promoting the idea that people are poor because they're not married—and not because decent-paying jobs are as scarce as hen's teeth these days.

At the same time, of course, Bush had to say something about jobs, since his corporate cronies are laughing all the way to the same banks that are foreclosing on jobless workers.

But neither Democrats nor Republicans have any program to deal with the looming capitalist economic crisis that has made a mockery of the term "recovery." All around the world, the political climate is shifting to the left as this bankrupt system drives millions into poverty while creating a new class of billionaires. The U.S. elections don't provide even a pale reflection of this gathering storm. □

Bush's election speech

In the three years since the Bush administration took office, it has pillaged the working class to pour hundreds of billions of dollars yearly into the coffers of the very rich. It has used the Pentagon's war machine to smash the governments of two almost defenseless nations in Asia. And it has abused the fears arising from 9/11/2001 to justify the detention of thousands of mostly Arab and South Asian people behind bars without legal proceedings.

For his State of the Union 2004, Bush offered more of the same. As it is an election year, he flavored the speech with patriotic triumphalism and threw in Medicare drug coverage for seniors—and drug payoffs for the pharmaceutical monopolies.

He lied a lot. He presented the tax cuts as putting money in the pockets of ordinary families, when far more is taken out from cuts in social programs. In truth, half the households in the U.S. earn less than what Bush's cabinet members will average in savings from his tax cuts this year. He even defended the lie about "weapons of mass destruction" used to justify the attack on Iraq, by claiming that Saddam Hussein had "plans." This justified the sacrifices made by U.S. youths, he said. He of course omitted entirely the sacrifices imposed on the Iraqi people, or the obvious massive resistance to the ongoing U.S. occupation and seizure of Iraqi resources.

The Democratic Party responded immediately by again proving it would never challenge fundamental imperialist policies. It promised to steal a little less from the workers, to give away a little less to the rich and to gather more allies behind the Pentagon when it wages wars of conquest.

The only effective response to Bush's barrage of lies is coming from those who are choosing to fight back, from Iraq to Palestine to anti-globalists who met in India during the World Social Forum, showing that billions around the world are in solidarity with this resistance to U.S. imperialist rule.

And here at home working people have the same choice: to passively allow young people to be turned into cannon fodder for conquest, to accept the degradation of living standards, or to join in the resistance. This can be to support striking workers, to rally behind immigrants demanding their rights, to defend those seized by the overgrown state power, and to fight against the continued occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and whatever other targets the Bush administration chooses.

On March 20, thousands will heed the call by the ANSWER Coalition to march in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities in the U.S. and around the world and give that message. It will be the best response to Bush's State of the Union. □



ITALY

Wave of transport strikes

Low pay along with threatened layoffs and privatization have provoked a series of strikes and protests across Italy.

Unions at Alitalia, the state-owned airline, have taken the lead in the protests. The Italian government cleared the way for privatizing the airline in 2003, and management announced plans to lay off 2,700 workers. That announcement spurred a Jan. 19 one-day strike by airline workers. The walkout forced Alitalia to cancel 364 flights. BBC News reported that the check-in desks at Rome's Fiumicino airport were deserted.

Striking workers rallied at the Finance Ministry in Rome. "We want the [layoff] plan withdrawn and discussions to start again from scratch," union leader Stefano Pietrini said.

The strike comes less than three weeks after a Jan. 8 strike by air traffic controllers shut down flights across the country. Air traffic controllers have been without a union contract for two years. They are demanding raises to keep up with inflation.

Air transport workers are not the only Italian workers on the picket lines. Bus, subway and train workers in Milan launched wildcat strikes Jan. 12, picking up a campaign they began before the hol-

idays. Those strikes challenged the \$103-a-month raise that more moderate unions settled for earlier. By Jan. 14, the Milan city government capitulated, agreeing to higher raises for the city transit workers.

But labor unrest is far from over. Alitalia workers have planned another strike for Feb. 9. Air traffic controllers have called for more job actions on Feb. 20. Italy's labor union confederations have also been considering a nationwide general strike if the national government proceeds with plans to cut back pension benefits.

CHAD

Telecom workers walk off the job

Telecommunication workers in the central African country of Chad walked off the job Jan. 16 in an unlimited strike aimed at ousting the general manager of the publicly owned Sotel-Chad. The strike followed management's announcement that it would cut back employee benefits.

A public resolution by the workers' union Synatel demanded "the unconditional departure of the general manager, the nomination of future leaders in line with the law, and the immediate lifting of antisocial measures," the French News Agency reported.

By Jan. 19, the strikers declared victory. A presidential decree released Sotel CEO Myaro Berangoto from duty.



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NIGERIA

Protests against fuel tax grow

Thousands of Nigerian workers and their supporters took to the streets of the capital city of Lagos Jan. 15 to protest a government tax hike on fuel. The protest was part of a broader campaign by the Nigerian Labor Congress to force President Olusegun Obasanjo to repeal the tax.

“There is a need for Nigerians to let our rulers know that tax is hurting most of us, especially the masses,” NLC leader Johnson Fati told the French News Agency.

Nigeria is a major world oil producer, and one of Africa’s most developed countries. But most of the oil industry is heavily dependent on U.S. and European giants like Chevron and Shell.

The Nigerian union federation is mobilizing its members for a general strike to begin Jan. 21. On Jan. 19, the German Press Agency quoted NLC President Adams Oshiomhole saying, “All Nigerians should use the intervening period of Monday and Tuesday to undertake large-scale shopping and withdraw as much money from their bank accounts as possible, as every sector of the economy will be shut until the government returns to the path of sanity.”

In June 2003, police killed 12 Nigerian workers during an eight-day general strike against fuel price hikes. In those strikes, oil workers did not shut down production. But this time, the country’s two main oil workers’ unions have threatened to join the strike and shut down oil exports, according to AFX News.



Coal miners win better pay, benefits

Over 100 coal miners spent more than three days underground in mid-January when they took over mines near Zenica, northwest of Sarajevo, to win better pay and working conditions. Thirty-five miners stayed in the mines after their shifts ended on Jan. 13. Seventy more joined them the next day.

Miners’ union leader Mujo Prasko told the Associated Press Jan. 15 that the workers were demanding salaries of \$320 a month, better benefits including paid meals, and the resignations of the Mine Union Board.

By Jan. 17, after spending 82 hours more than 1,000 feet below the surface, the miners declared victory. Ahmed Hadzipasic, prime minister of the Muslim-Croat half of Bosnia-Herzegovina, announced on Jan. 16 that all the miners’ demands would be met.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the former autonomous regions of Yugoslavia that was granted independence in 1994 after purging the Serbian population. The nationalist government is now protected by over 10,000 NATO troops. □

U.S. pushes for ‘regime change’ in Haiti

By G. Dunkel

The opposition to Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide may have failed in its violent attempt to prevent the celebration on Jan. 1 of Haiti’s bicentennial of its victory over slavery and colonial rule, but it is continuing its campaign to drive him from power.

Aristide was elected president for a second time in 2000 with 92 percent of the vote and has vowed to complete his mandated term. He has the overwhelming support of the poor in a country that has the lowest standard of living in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, he is calling for “national unity and reconciliation.”

The character of the opposition was revealed in a lynching carried live on Haitian National Television on Jan. 7. Opposition demonstrators could be seen savagely beating a government supporter with fists, rocks, steel bars and broken bottles, then throwing him 15 feet down into a ravine. He reportedly died. (Haïti-Progress, Jan. 14-20)

While this beating was not mentioned in the U.S. and European press, the death of an anti-government protester, the attempt of her funeral cortege to storm the Presidential Palace, Haiti’s White House, and attacks on an anti-government protest on Jan. 18 are all well reported.

Other news is also distorted. The “Group of 184,” headed by U.S.-born sweatshop magnate Andy Apaid, called for a “general strike” on Jan. 7 and 8. As in past “general strikes,” the gasoline stations, stores and businesses controlled by the Haitian bourgeoisie closed, while the rest of the country went about its business

as usual. The “general strike” made the North American press but the response to it didn’t.

“It’s not really a strike,” said Ben Dupuy on TNH, “It’s more like a lockout.” Dupuy is secretary general of the National Popular Party, a major party on the left in Haiti.

Social tension in Haiti is growing so high that many Haitians say that if Haiti still had an army, there would have been at least one coup by now. Aristide dissolved the army in 1995, just before his first term ended.

U.S. support for the opposition is growing so open that even the Associated Press admitted on Jan. 15 that the International Republican Institute, an affiliate of the Republican Party that gets funding from official government sources, is giving money to the organization headed by Apaid, as well as to other Aristide opponents. The European Union, which is also playing an imperialist role in Haitian politics, appears to be backing the “Civil Society” opposition group.

The situation among opposition groups is very fluid, with shifts and maneuvers breaking out as the political winds move this way and that, depending on what the State Department or the EU says. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell met Aristide during the Monterrey summit of the Organization of American States in early January and urged him to set up a government of “national reconciliation,” a plan that Haiti’s Catholic bishops are pushing. (State Department Press Briefing, Jan. 14)

An EU statement issued Jan. 15 concentrated on attacks on “peaceful” protesters and the fact that the term for Haiti’s par-

liament has expired. Under Haitian law, the opposition would have had to join the councils setting up the elections. But they boycotted them as part of their campaign against Aristide. Now they can claim he is ruling “undemocratically” without a legislature.

France, Haiti’s former colonial ruler, is leading the EU efforts there. It is concerned with maintaining its two present Caribbean colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe and perhaps extending its influence while the U.S. is preoccupied in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Washington has been determined to put Haiti under its complete control, get rid of President Aristide and install someone who will fully represent U.S. corporate interests. It has pursued this course ever since Aristide first won a smashing victory over the pro-U.S. candidate, Marc Bazin, in 1990. That was much more than a electoral victory—it was a mass movement that put into office someone the Haitian people wanted. U.S. policy since then has been set on reversing this defeat for U.S.-managed “democracy” in Latin America.

Even though Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, economic pressure from the EU and the U.S.—shutting off promised aid, forbidding the Development Bank from distributing loans—hasn’t been enough to dislodge Aristide. He still has a tremendous base of support among the poorest people.

Progressives in the United States and other developed countries who want to support Haiti must realize that the media are waging a massive campaign of disinformation against the Haitian people and their government. □

Hawaii: The struggle continues

By Dustin Langley
New York

The People’s Video Network hosted a Jan. 17 showing of “Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation,” at the International Action Center here in New York. A lively discussion about today’s ongoing struggles for liberation followed.

The film describes Hawaii before the arrival of colonialists in 1778 as a very advanced civilization, with developed agricultural and fishing techniques. Because the land and resources were held in common, the people enjoyed great abundance, having to work only four hours a day to meet their needs. This left time to create great works of art and to explore the seas as far as 2,000 miles from home.

All this changed with the arrival of Captain Cook and the European settlers who followed. Tuberculosis and other diseases wiped out much of the island’s population. Missionaries and other settlers pressured the Hawaiian people into accepting private ownership of land. Within decades, title to thousands of acres had fallen into the hands of non-Hawaiians who built massive sugar plantations.

By the mid-1800s the U.S. government saw Hawaii as key to control the Pacific. During the reign of Queen Liliuokalani and her brother, King Kalakau, a group of planters and business owners seeking to control the kingdom politically and economically formed an organization called the Committee of Safety. In 1893, with the

help of U.S. Marines, they engineered a coup.

On July 4, 1894, Sanford Dole, whose family held vast pineapple and sugar plantations, announced the inauguration of the Republic of Hawaii and declared himself president. On Aug. 12, 1898, the Republic of Hawaii became the Hawaiian Territory, with Republic President Sanford Dole appointed as the first territorial governor.

The struggle continues

More than a hundred years later, the struggle for sovereignty continues. Jesse Heiwa, a member of the Hawaii Solidarity Committee and one of the organizers of the Jan. 17 showing, said: “The struggle for Hawaiian sovereignty continues and it is one that socialists everywhere should support. Those interested can get updates by sending an email to:

HawaiiSolidarityCommittee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.”

Other information on the struggle for self-determination in Hawaii can be found at www.hawaii-nation.org.

In discussion after the film showing, viewers noted the similarities between the takeover of Hawaii and imperialist conquests of other countries, including Iraq. There too, the people’s rights and wellbeing are subordinated to the drive for control of natural resources and markets.

The discussion ended on a forward-looking note. One viewer said, “If the people of Hawaii were able to enjoy such abundance that they only had to work four hours a day, just think how much we could do and how rich our lives would be, with all the advances in technology, if we had an economy that was also based on common ownership of the land and means of production.” □

Propuesta migratoria de Bush es una trampa

Continúa de página 12

miento laboral, de los inmigrantes y de los progresistas en los Estados Unidos conduzcan las luchas de clase profundas que produjeron las gloriosas celebraciones del Primero de Mayo y del Día Internacional de la Mujer.

Hay tremendos ejemplos de lucha en este país que podemos mirar para inspirarnos.

Las latinas y los latinos en California que recientemente dirigieron un gran paro para protestar la revocación de los derechos de manejar así como la lucha de trabajadores en la industria de supermercados luchando por el acceso al cuidado de la salud en Los Angeles son dos buenos ejemplos. Sus victorias serán una victoria para todos los trabajadores. □



Propuesta migratoria de Bush es una trampa

Por Teresa Gutiérrez

Una piñata vacía. Un gran regalo a los patrones. El nuevo programa de braceros. Una gran cantidad de trabajadores temporales. Esclavitud.

Estas son algunas de las respuestas al anuncio del Presidente George W. Bush de la nueva política sobre inmigración.

El 7 de enero, Bush propuso lo que la prensa capitalista ha descrito como “un cambio total en las leyes de inmigración del país.” Bush dijo en parte, “Hoy le pido al Congreso que se una a mi para la aprobación de nuevas leyes migratorias que reflejan [cuatro] principios que cumplen con las necesidades económicas de América y representan nuestros más altos ideales.”

Los principios que él dice mantener en alto fueron: “ 1)América debe controlar sus fronteras; 2) la nueva leyes migratorias deben servir a las necesidades económicas de nuestro país; 3) no deberíamos dar injustas recompensas a los inmigrantes ilegales en el proceso de ciudadanía o causar desventaja a aquellos que llegaron o esperan llegar legalmente; 4) las nuevas leyes deben proveer incentivos para que los trabajadores extranjeros temporales regresen permanentemente a sus países de origen después de que el período permitido para trabajar en los Estados Unidos haya expirado.”

El anuncio de Bush fue denunciado poco después. Activistas laborales, inmigrantes y sus representantes condenaron inmediatamente la política como una anti inmigrante y pro patrón.

Durante semanas los representantes de los inmigrantes, varias organizaciones latinas y algunos miembros del Congreso habían estado esperando ansiosamente por conocer la posición de Bush sobre inmigración.

El anuncio de Bush era importante para una reunión que tendría lugar esta semana en México con el Presidente mexicano, Vicente Fox. Como otros presidentes mexicanos previos, Fox revisa intensamente la política de inmigración. Más de la mitad de los 8 a 12 millones de trabajadores indocumentados en este país son de México.

El plan de Bush desafía descaradamente el sentimiento de los inmigrantes quienes en los últimos años se han levantado heroicamente contra décadas de explotación diciendo: “Basta ya”. Como nunca antes, desde California a Illinois y Nueva York, los inmigrantes están cambiando el rostro del movimiento laboral organizándose para defender sus intereses.

El anuncio de Bush es especialmente una bofetada a la histórica manifestación del 4 de octubre de Libertad para los Obreros Inmigrantes en Queens, N.Y.

Más de 100.000 inmigrantes participaron ese día—arriesgando deportación y pérdida de salarios y empleos—para exigir derechos y dignidad.

El lema principal del 4 de octubre fue la amnistía. En su plan de inmigración, Bush enfáticamente se pronunció contra esta demanda.

Bush dijo, “Yo me opongo a la amnistía, que pone a los trabajadores indocumentados en un camino automático hacia la ciudadanía.”

Un obrero mexicano en la ciudad de Nueva York dijo después del anuncio de Bush: “Yo he sufrido muchos años de

abuso. Mi padre murió en México el año pasado y yo no pude ir al funeral. Estoy separado de mi esposa y de mis hijos. Yo gano menos que la mayoría de los otros trabajadores.”

“Yo me he ganado mi ciudadanía”.

Bracero versus amnistía

Una de las partes más importantes de la propuesta de Bush es un programa de trabajadores temporales. Mientras que la prensa ya ha sembrado la confusión diciendo que esto “efectivamente llega a ser un programa de amnistía”. (New York Times, Enero 7), eso está muy lejos de ser verdad.

La provisión de trabajador temporal de la nueva política de Bush es como un nuevo programa de braceros.

“Bracero” se refiere a una política puesta en práctica durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial hasta la década de los 60. El programa permitía a trabajadores mexicanos venir a los Estados Unidos legalmente por un tiempo determinado y para una industria específica.

El programa de braceros de la década de los 40 trajo mano de obra barata para trabajar, a merced de los patrones, en los campos de Texas y otros estados. Estuvo lleno de abusos. Los trabajadores reportaban condiciones horribles, y muy a menudo no recibían pago—y luego de servir su período casi como esclavo, se les expulsaba de los Estados Unidos.

Este tipo de abusos continúa hoy. Un representante de los inmigrantes dijo el 8 de enero que los obreros de la agricultura en los Estados Unidos a menudo reportan que los patrones solo les pagan por medio día aún cuando hayan trabajado el día completo. También se les dice que deben “donar” una semana de pago para poder regresar el próximo verano.

La nueva política de la Casa Blanca solo agravará la situación.

Bush dijo el 7 de enero, “Yo propongo un nuevo programa de obreros temporales que combine a los trabajadores extranjeros que quieran trabajar, con empresarios que los necesiten cuando no se puedan encontrar americanos que llenen el puesto”.

La Casa Blanca dijo que los inmigrantes podrán obtener estatus legal por tres años y volver a solicitar una vez. Deben pagar una tarifa para registrarse en el programa y sus nombres serán puestos en un banco de datos nacional.

“Este programa espera que los obreros regresen permanentemente a sus países después que su período de trabajo en los Estados Unidos haya expirado,” dijo Bush.

Según reportó el diario The New York Times, “Un trabajador indocumentado y el patrón tendrán que solicitar el permiso conjuntamente, con el patrón sirviendo como garante del nuevo trabajador”.

Janice Fine, investigadora del Instituto de Política Económica, escribió en el diario Boston Globe el 11 de enero que una de las razones por la cual el plan de Bush es extremadamente errado es que los patrones logran mucho poder.

Fine reportó en un estudio nacional que ella condujo y que documenta los mismos abusos que “depresivamente” suceden una y otra vez en todo el país: “Salarios no pagados, tiempo extra forzado, altas tasas de accidentes de trabajo, discriminación, hostigamiento sexual y despidos injustos. Los trabajadores que se quejan son despedidos y puestos en listas. Los empresarios ignoran rutinariamente las regulaciones del gobierno, y el sistema de observación

del gobierno en la mayoría de estas industrias es terriblemente inadecuado”.

La investigadora continuó diciendo que un gran número de inmigrantes ni siquiera podrá adherirse al programa porque trabajan principalmente en el sector informal de la economía. Los patrones de jardineros, jornaleros, domésticos, lavadores de plato y otros más no se verán inclinados a participar.

¿Y porqué deben hacerlo cuando las ganancias son tan grandes y la fuente del trabajo es tan vulnerable?

Fine también destacó que existe poco incentivo para que los trabajadores participen, dado que no hay ninguna garantía de ciudadanía.

El programa resultaría en trabajadores que se auto identifican, con la posibilidad, en cambio, que sean deportados al terminar el programa de trabajadores invitados.

Política de inmigración para la clase capitalista

El anuncio de Bush resultó en un torbellino de versiones periodísticas que se referían a la política migratoria como una “política rota”.

Pero la política está lejos de ser rota. Es posible que carezca de suficientes fondos y personal, según las opiniones de varias personas..Y puede que esté ridícula e infrahumanamente burocratizada.

De acuerdo a un ex abogado del Servicio de Inmigración y Naturalización, por ejemplo, desde el año 2001 Bush ha prometido reducir los retrasos en el procesamiento de las aplicaciones de inmigración. Pero ha ocurrido todo lo contrario. El retraso ha crecido de 3,9 millones de casos hasta unos 6,2 millones durante los últimos dos años. (Washington Post del 11 de enero, 2004)

Y en un desarrollo peligroso, el nuevo Departamento de Seguridad de la Patria heredó las responsabilidades del Servicio de Inmigración y Naturalización. Esto asegura que la inmigración se torne en una cuestión sumamente política asociada directamente con la llamada guerra contra el terrorismo.

Pero ya sea que el sistema sea eficiente o no, la política de inmigración funciona precisamente como debe—orque representa un gobierno capitalista que a su vez representa la clase dominante. Es esta clase la que últimamente establece la política sobre la inmigración, la guerra contra Irak, y todas las demás cuestiones.

Esta es la clase que no respeta ninguna frontera nacional. Es libre de andar por todo el planeta creando las clases de condiciones económicas y sociales que fuerzan a los trabajadores a venir aquí.

Bush declaró que es incorrecto que “los empresarios utilicen el mercado ilegal de trabajo”. Pero no es el “mercado de trabajo” que es ilegal.

La verdad es que los miles de empresarios y las corporaciones multinacionales impunes que emplean trabajadores ilegales jamás van a cerrar los talleres súper explotadores o comenzar voluntariamente a pagar un salario más alto. Esta es la base fundamental del sistema de ganancias.

El sistema capitalista—al que sólo le interesan la guerra imperialista y las ganancias—tiene que tener a su disposición la posibilidad de súper explotar a los inmigrantes. Hay muchas ganancias por extraer de su fuerza de trabajo.

Es por esto que la política sobre la inmigración de Bush es un regalo para los

patrones. Va a sacar a los trabajadores indocumentados de la sombra con la promesa de un estatus legal temporero, pero dejándolos en la voluntad de los patrones.

La economía de los Estados Unidos no aguantaría una sola hora sin el trabajo de los inmigrantes. ¿Quién llevaría las comidas, cortaría la grama, construiría las oficinas, pintaría las uñas, picaría la lechuga, empacaría la carne, o cuidaría a los niños?

En el 2001, el Centro Hispano Pew estimó que “la fuerza laboral no autorizada” alcanzó una suma de aproximadamente 5,3 millones de trabajadores. Esta incluyó 700.000 trabajadores de restaurantes, 250.000 empleados domésticos, y 620.000 trabajadores de la construcción.

Claramente, el sistema capitalista depende del trabajo de los inmigrantes. Depende de una política migratoria que crea una cantidad disponible de mano de obra barata que pueda ser manipulada fácilmente, pagada lo menos posible, y donde los trabajadores pueden ser importados o deportados como requiere la economía y a la voluntad de los patrones.

Solución a la política de Bush: Solidaridad

Detrás de la política migratoria de Bush está el intento de dividir a los trabajadores. Inevitablemente esto va a resultar en un incremento del racismo, chauvinismo y la reacción contra los inmigrantes.

Sin duda se va a alentar un clima de temor entre los trabajadores nacidos en los Estados Unidos. Se va a forzar a los trabajadores a competir entre si por empleos en un momento cuando la tasa de desempleo está alta y la de subempleo es aún más alta.

Este clima va a favorecer a los patrones que contarán con este miedo para forzar la disminución de salarios. Si Bush y los patrones prevalecen los estándares de vida van a caer más para los trabajadores en este país y en el resto del mundo.

Un inmigrante contó a un periodista que él estaba indocumentado y tuvo un trabajo en construcción que pagaba \$10 por hora pero lo perdió porque un inmigrante recién llegado aceptó trabajar por \$8..Este inmigrante expresó ira hacia los inmigrantes recién llegados, según el artículo.

Esto es nada más un solo ejemplo que ilustra que la única solución a la política de los EE.UU. frente a la inmigración es la de organizar. La solución es librar una campaña independiente de solidaridad entre todos los trabajadores.

En vez de que los trabajadores estén confrontándose uno contra el otro—por nacionalidad, por país de origen, por su orientación sexual, etc.—la solución es la de organizar un movimiento multinacional para demandar un fin a la explotación una vez por todas, un movimiento que declare que no hay fronteras en la lucha obrera.

Ahora el movimiento trabajador y progresista en los Estados Unidos debe salir a las calles en cifras récord y demandar una amnistía para todos los inmigrantes. Debe demandar un incremento del salario mínimo así como empleos para todos. Protegiendo los derechos soberanos de las naciones de Latinoamérica, África, Asia y del Caribe debe ser la base para que las naciones oprimidas estén libres de la intervención imperialista y del Fondo Monetario Internacional.

Ha llegado la hora para que el movimiento
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