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Mortgage crisis

Millions can't pay, risk losing their homes

By Jaimeson Champion

On July 24 the largest mortgage company in the U.S., Countrywide Financial Corp., reported that its second-quarter losses were much worse than expected and that problems in the subprime mortgage sector reported earlier were now spreading into the prime mortgage market.

Prime mortgages are those loans made to borrowers with solid credit histories. Delinquencies in this area are rising, indicating that the much-discussed problems in the subprime sector were just the first phase of a larger capitalist crisis.

Because of the size and breadth of its lending operations, Countrywide Financial is regarded by many economists and analysts as a bellwether of the U.S. housing market. The dismal report by the corporation sent all the major stock indexes into a tailspin, as jittery investors fueled large-scale sell-offs of stocks and bonds. The S&P 500, the Dow Jones Industrial and NASDAQ all experienced substantial drops that day.

The stock market is the most volatile it has been in years as investors attempt to decipher just how severe the mortgage crisis has become.

The view of the crisis put forth in the capitalist press has been that the problem of rising delinquencies and foreclosures would be confined to the subprime sector. Now it can be seen that this is not true.

For months, families with subprime mortgages have been feeling the acute pain of the mortgage crisis. These are people who had to pay more in interest to take out a mortgage because of their credit history. A disproportionate number are Black and Latin@, reflecting the depressed economic status of people of color in the U.S. They have already been forced into foreclosure and bankruptcy in droves, and at rates not seen since the Great Depression.

Only one week before Countrywide's gloomy report, in testimony given before Congress, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke had asserted that while the losses in the subprime sector were large and a detriment to U.S. economic growth, he believed they could be absorbed by the larger financial system by 2008, and that they would not spread into other classes of assets.

But the announcement by Countrywide Financial shows that the rash of delinquencies and subsequent foreclosures is spreading into the better-off sections of the working class and large segments of the middle class, the major holders of prime rate mortgage loans.

During the housing bubble of 2000-2006, those with good credit ratings were easily able to get prime rate mortgage loans. Prime rate mortgages have fixed rates of interest—usually 6 percent over 30 years. Subprime mortgages have low teaser rates for the first two years and then “explode” into double-digit inter-

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PHILIPPINES: Repressive law passes despite protest



PHOTO: PHILIPPINE FORUM

Filipinos in New York attack symbol of corrupt Macapagal-Arroyo regime.

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This week ...

SiCKO entertains, educates and mobilizes

By John Catalinotto

Filmmaker Michael Moore has grabbed hold of the nightmarish reality of the U.S. for-profit health care system and presents a powerful critique in what is his most effective documentary to date, "SiCKO."

Moore makes a direct attack on the U.S. health care industry, especially on insurance companies for denying payments, on private hospitals for denying care and on pharmaceuticals for pricing medicines beyond the reach of patients. He also effectively dissects the lying propaganda that these big capitalist sectors have been promoting for decades: their vicious attacks on government-funded and organized health care.

Moore shows, with gut-wrenching examples, how bad it can get even for the 250 million people here who actually have health insurance. He leaves the plight of the 44 million without health insurance to the viewer's imagination, while noting this additional vast problem. His examples are people anyone could identify with—working-class people of different ethnicities who through their bad luck got sick and through the health care system in the U.S. have either been impoverished, disabled or killed because insurance companies denied payment for needed care.

When you see doctors who review insurance testify that they are rewarded with bonuses for denying the claims, you know something is wrong with this system.

SiCKO contrasts the national health care systems—different versions of government single-payer plans—in Canada, Britain and France with the anarchic, completely profit-driven system in the United States. The U.S. system appears as not only inefficient and expensive but cruel, inhuman and somewhat absurd.

There is no question that Canada, Britain and France are also capitalist countries. The profit motive still drives industry, commerce and banking there. There are exploit-

ers and exploited, privileged and poor. But past struggles over health care—which Moore only hints at through an interview with former British Labor MP Tony Benn—have won concessions from the bosses that make life a lot better.

In these countries people still worry about their health, but they don't worry about being bankrupted paying for health care.

SiCKO also shows that the lies told about "socialized medicine" for decades by the American Medical Association, the private hospitals, the insurance companies and U.S. pro-capitalist propagandists are baseless.

Then Moore takes an important step further. He takes a look at the health care system in Cuba, that demonized country to the south where the revolutionary transformation begun in 1959 has been aimed at eliminating the profit motive. Here Moore's central figures are people who were heroes of 9/11—fire fighters and EMT personnel who were exposed to toxic chemicals while working amid the ruins of the World Trade Center.

Though these heroes have been honored in ceremonies, they haven't been able to get the health care they need in the United States—unless they could pay for it out of their pockets.

So Moore brings them to Cuba, where they are treated with respect, love and the best medical care available in any developing country in the world. The socialist reorganization of society has improved mortality rates for babies and elders alike there, despite the obstacle of a 40-year economic blockade by the imperialist colossus to the north.

Perhaps the most significant thing about SiCKO is that it has become a vehicle for struggle by focusing attention on an issue whose time has arrived. The Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC), which links the struggle against the war with that for social services, has been mass distributing an anti-war leaflet to SiCKO audiences.

The TONC leaflet has the headline: "Healthcare and the war are SiCKO" and points out how the war funding could easily pay for adequate health care in this country. It's been getting a great response at theaters, organizers report.

On the July 21 weekend, SiCKO opened in another 500 theaters in smaller cities, bringing the number to 1,200 in all. This means additional opportunities to hand out the TONC leaflet and mobilize against the war and for an improved health care system. (See troopsoutnow.org for the leaflet.)

Moore is off target only in how he treats the prisoners at the Guantánamo concentration camp, which he visits on the way to Havana. At Guantánamo he tries to contrast the Pentagon-supplied medical care to the prisoners—who are accused of causing the 9/11 disaster—with the lack of care for the 9/11 heroes. SiCKO's problem here is that the Guantánamo prisoners are also victims, in their case victims of U.S. physical and psychological torture. The U.S. has proven nothing against them, except perhaps that they believe in Islam.

The rest of SiCKO, however, is a rare and powerful progressive contribution to mass culture that competes successfully with U.S. corporate propaganda in its own arena. SiCKO illustrates the truth and entertains at the same time. □

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Healthcare & the WAR are SiCKO



DID YOU KNOW? (what is really sicko...)
One fourth of the Iraq war budget alone could fund health care for every uninsured person in this country.

- Think what the trillions of dollars wasted on war, occupation and destruction could do for the people:
- Provide free medicine for all of our seniors and chronically ill.
 - Change the dismal statistics of infant mortality in major cities like Detroit, Baltimore and Washington D.C. where the mortality rates for African American children rival the most impoverished countries.

- Stop the epidemic of hospital closings. In New York State 9 hospitals are closing their doors because of a \$1.5 billion deficit. Just 4 days of the war budget would cover the cost to keep these hospitals open.
- It could provide health care and treatment for the physical and psychological trauma that the survivors of Katrina and Rita are still suffering from.
- Make health care for low wage workers and immigrant families a priority so that the ever-growing pressure to cut health care for all workers will be reduced.

While the war is bleeding us at home it is miniscule in comparison to the bloodshed, misery and pain that is being inflicted on the Iraqi people. The Lancet medical journal documented that 655,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed during the war (Oct, 2006). The health of Iraqi people and the entire region has been destroyed. Solidarity demands that we act now to stop the war, end the occupation, and bring the troops home now!

STOP THE WAR NOW & FUND FULL HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Join the Campaign for Healthcare, Not Warfare. We will be converging in Washington D.C. on the week of Sept. 22nd-29th along with anti-war, community, union, immigrant rights and student activists to demand an end to the war and occupation. There will be a people's encampment with a massive march on Saturday, Sept. 29th. Health care workers, nurses, doctors, patients and patient advocates will set up a **HEALTH CARE, NOT WARFARE** tent and will march together to make our voices heard.

Issued by the Campaign for Healthcare, Not Warfare (a project of the Troops Out Now Coalition)
 For more info / to get involved / to sign a special appeal:
 www.TroopsOutNow.org • (212) 633-6646

44 million people have no health insurance!
 "Michael Moore's movie Sicko is a great step forward in pushing the issue of universal healthcare on to the national arena. It is a hard-hitting, uncompromising exposure of the corporate greed of the so-called "healthcare" industry that has caused so many people endless, unnecessary and cruel suffering. Sicko shows that healthcare should be a right and that it is possible for all if profit is taken out of the equation."

JOIN US.

Workers World Party (WWP) fights on all issues that face the working class and oppressed peoples—Black and white, Latin@, Asian, Arab and Native peoples, women and men, young and old, lesbian, gay, bi, straight, trans, disabled, working, unemployed and students.

If you would like to know more about WWP, or to join us in these struggles, contact the branch nearest you.

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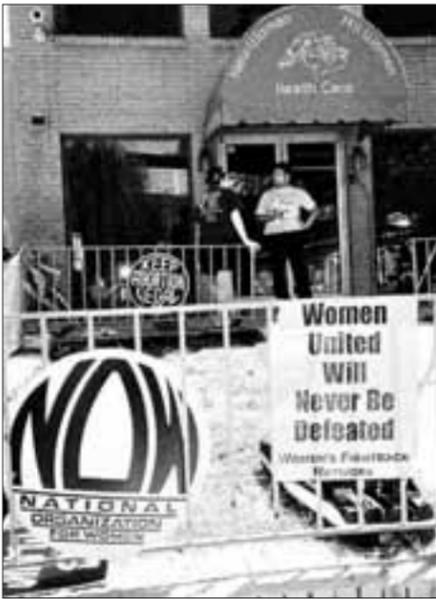
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By Minnie Bruce Pratt
Birmingham, Ala.

The local reproductive rights and justice community in Alabama declared victory on July 21 after a week of defending women's clinics against the onslaught of "Operation Save America" (OSA), a right-wing hate group.

Local organizers, with leadership from the Alabama National Organization for Women and staff assistance from National NOW and the Feminist Majority, mobilized Alabama Reproductive Freedom Summer from July 14 to 22 to withstand OSA. The week included clinic defense, rallies, an interfaith forum, community outreach and an abortion speak-out.

The speak-out on July 20 in an open area near the Five Points South fountain gathered over 60 participants. Some spoke about their own abortions, both legal and illegal. Some were obtained through the medical system by women who could scrape up the money; others involved alternative methods used by women who couldn't afford a doctor.

Many spoke passionately about their commitment to defend women's access to reproductive choice, including accurate sex education, safe and reliable birth control, comprehensive health care and support for child-rearing, as well as abortion.

Cheryl Sabel, Alabama NOW President, told of the doctor who counseled her when she was a pregnant middle-aged and divorced single mother. He performed the abortion and then urged her to speak out and stand up for abortion access for all women. She revealed that the doctor was David Gunn, who was fatally shot in the back by an anti-abortion protester in the parking lot of a Pensacola women's clinic in 1993.

The first of several abortion providers murdered by the ultra right wing, Gunn had dedicated his life to providing ob-gyn services to women from rural north Florida to central Alabama, including Birmingham. Reproductive rights activists campaigned after his death for Congress to pass the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, prohibiting physical force or intimidation from being used to prevent people from gaining access to a reproductive health facility.

Sabel stated that with Gunn's death she immediately began clinic defense at the Montgomery clinic where he had practiced, and had dedicated herself to the struggle for "each woman to decide for herself whether or when to bear a child."

'This clinic stays open'

OSA descended on the Planned Parenthood and New Woman All Women clinics on July 14. Some OSA members stated they would "not allow these places to remain standing" but would "turn them into rubble." Anti-abortion forces had placed city clinics under siege in 1988 and 1994 campaigns. In 1998 the New Woman facility was bombed by Eric Rudolph, who allegedly had ties to white supremacist, homophobic and anti-woman ultraright groups, including Operation Rescue—now renamed OSA.

Reproductive justice victory in Alabama

The bombing killed the clinic's security guard and seriously injured clinic nurse Emily Lyons, who has since had to undergo 22 operations to regain her health and mobility.

After the bombing, the clinic reopened within a week with a sign out front saying, "This clinic stays open." It has remained open since, including during the current OSA attacks. Emily Lyons still works at New Woman, as a registered nurse doing the state-required counseling of women seeking abortions there.

Spirit of resistance

The tenacious spirit of resistance shown by Lyons and Sabel was apparent as supporters defended the clinics during Reproductive Freedom Week, standing their ground all day, every day in the broiling July sun and through torrential thunderstorms. People came from Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee; from Albuquerque, Atlanta and Mexico City; from Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

In addition to NOW and Feminist Majority, organizations whose supporters were present during the week included the ACLU of Alabama; Georgians for Choice; Equality Alabama, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights group; Feminist Outlawz, an artist activist group that does clinic defense; GIRE (Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida/Information Group on Reproductive Choice); Medical Students for Choice; National Women's Fightback Network/International Action Center; Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; Socialist Workers Party and Workers World Party.

New Woman clinic owner Diane Derzis was clear on the need for struggle to keep women's access to a full range of reproductive care. She said to supporters, "It was you, not the police or the law, that kept the clinic open."

Many passersby offered support: office workers on lunch break; an African-American woman in her late teens walking to her high school equivalency class nearby; a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Alabama who hailed from Ivory Coast. Local workers in the Five Points area, many of them from the lesbian/gay/bi/trans community, were furious at the OSA invasion and eagerly took flyers. They also turned up the music at their restaurants to heavy metal and loud alternative rock to drown out the OSA preaching in the area.

During the week at least one-third of the defenders were young people, from their late teens to late twenties, and about one-third were male-identified.

The right-wing forces spewed non-stop hate, including anti-Islam, anti-LGBT, and anti-woman diatribes. Speakers also gender-baited abortion supporters, accusing them of not being "real" men or wom-



Right, Rev. Jack Zylman and Minnie Bruce Pratt on clinic defense. Below, Peggy Bridges and daughters Sarah Bridges and Colie Gilbert at abortion speak-out.

WW PHOTOS,
LEFT AND BELOW:
MINNIE BRUCE PRATT



en. Another tactic was the right-wing forces' claim that their hate campaign against reproductive choice was in the same tradition as the heroic Black civil rights struggle of the South.

The aim of the hatemongers was clear: not only to close the clinic, but to break down unity among oppressed peoples.

But reproductive justice advocates exposed their cynical ploy. The Rev. Jack Zylman of the Unitarian Universalist Church, a longtime civil rights activist, spoke of his conversations with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in which King made clear his belief that abortion was an acceptable choice for a woman. King had recounted that abortion referral to a reputable doctor was part of his pastoral counseling for a congregation member with a problem or troubled pregnancy.

Michelle Colon, MidSouth Regional Director for NOW and a woman of the African diaspora, said that the civil rights struggle was when "this battle began" and how the struggle for reproductive justice was its continuation. She exhorted supporters: "We must continue fighting for choice in the South. If we lose in the South, we lose everywhere. If they can't win here, they can't win anywhere."

High stakes unity

The stakes for unity have always been high in the South. The tactic of plantation slave owners and corporate steel mill owners of the past was to foment racism in white workers to prevent them from uniting with Black workers, and also to segregate jobs rigidly by sex and gender to keep women's wages low and men vulnerable to inhuman job demands.

In this context, the struggle for reproductive justice can look like a relatively isolated fight for "women's rights" against religious fanatics.

But the women who spoke out during Alabama Reproductive Freedom Summer made it clear that their need for reliable birth control, access to abortion, and affordable health care and day care were all part and parcel of their need to be able to support themselves and their families, financially and emotionally.

Two recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions can be linked to show the tightening grip of the capitalist state on women as workers and as women who bear and rear the children of the working class.

In April, for the first time since its original Roe v. Wade legalization of abortion, the court ruled against a specific abortion procedure, upholding by a 5-4 majority a 2003 federal ban on certain late-term abortions.

The OSA forces actually denounced this decision as "wicked" because the court did not completely outlaw abortion.

In May, the court ruled against Lilly Ledbetter, a worker at the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. in Gadsden, Ala. She had sued the company for wage discrimination on the basis of sex, using Title VII of the 1964

Civil Rights Act. The court's decision set virtually impossible time and procedure limits on workers' ability to file against discriminatory companies, ruling that pay inequity and discrimination against women workers and all workers of color is legal for employers under most circumstances

Women add strength to working-class struggles

Working women, documented and undocumented, are central to industrial development in the "new New South," particularly in Alabama as it experiences powerfully accelerated industrial growth and low unemployment rates. They contribute to the potential for increased strength in the working-class struggle.

The Alabama Development Office in 2006 was named the top state economic development agency in the U.S. for attracting new capital investment, with 568 companies locating there, adding almost 25,000 jobs and over \$3 billion in capital investment. (ado.state.al.us)

The state is home to three major automobile producers: Honda, Mercedes—which has doubled its plant size over the last 10 years—and Hyundai, with one plant of 400 robots that is one of most technologically advanced in the world. A second plant is in the works.

In the last two months National Steel Car of Canada announced it was locating a huge rail car factory in northern Alabama, while ThyssenKrupp of Germany decided to bring its new steel plant to the Mobile area, creating almost 30,000 direct and indirect jobs. (al.com)

The high stakes for unity within the working class, especially among women, are greater than ever.

And unity was demonstrated during the week of clinic defense, when a call came down to the clinic from undocumented Latina women workers being held in the Etowah County immigration detention center in Gadsden, Ala. Many had been transferred there from Georgia, where they had resisted their arrest with a 1,000-person hunger strike in March. (Huntsville Times)

The women had received virtually no gynecological care; one was bleeding extensively and in desperate need of assistance. Helen Rivas, a local Alabama immigrant rights organizer, and Olga Vives, NOW national vice president, left the clinic defense line to rush north to try to arrange medical care.

At the closing rally on July 21, Vives called on a breadth of struggle that unites care for poor women with universal health care for all, that combines an end to the war in Iraq with reallocation of funds to assist Katrina and Rita survivors. She said of all the struggles, "We will not go back. We will continue to be in the streets of the U.S., fighting until justice is ours." □

Auto workers to UAW:

Hold the line on jobs, wages and benefits!

By Martha Grevatt

Contract negotiations between Chrysler and the United Auto Workers started on July 20; three days later talks began with Ford and General Motors.

While opening the negotiations with the traditional handshake, the bosses have made it clear that they are looking at the bargaining table as if it were a butcher block. On their agenda is nothing less than a thoroughgoing restructuring of the auto industry, following the devastating pattern of steel.

News reports leading up to this point describe a multipronged attack targeting everything autoworkers have enjoyed for decades. The specifics have already been spelled out well in advance of the negotiations' official start. One day a newspaper will proclaim that the job bank—a program where laid-off workers receive 40 hours' pay while engaging in "nontraditional" work—is history. The next day the topic will be "health care in the crosshairs." Yet another will portray a two-tier wage structure as inevitable.

The rationale for the cutbacks, repeated over the past month on a daily basis, is the difference in hourly labor costs between the Big Three and the U.S. plants of their Japanese competitors. "U.S. automakers, UAW focus to be on cutting \$25 cost gap," read an Associated Press headline on June 13. One month later the purported gap has widened. "Chrysler ... says it pays nearly \$30 an hour more for labor than Japanese automakers do," stated the July 21 New York Times.

The supposed cost gap compares only U.S. labor costs. U.S. automakers indeed pay more for retiree health care than Toyota and Honda pay at their nonunion U.S. plants. Yet if the cost of health care is the problem, why are the Big Three cutting jobs and closing plants in Canada, where there is a national health program?

In 2003, the bosses' own figures pegged labor costs at \$52 an hour. Now costs are said to be \$70 to \$75 an hour. Where did the increase go? Autoworkers aren't seeing it in their paychecks—in fact, their cost-of-living allowance was cut for two consecutive quarters based on a supposed drop in the Consumer Price Index.

Inflation in the price of health benefits does not fully explain the alleged huge rise in labor costs.

The hourly dollar figures include health care for both active employees and retirees. Productivity has risen 50 percent in four years; cars that took 45 hours to build now take 30. There are fewer workers and they are working fewer hours. But health care costs are the same whether they work 40 hours per week, work lots of overtime, or are laid off. So, when they work fewer hours, the average hourly cost of health care is higher. Nevertheless, even trusting the companies' own figures, productivity has brought actual labor costs per vehicle down.

Yet, like a broken record, the automakers present the need for cuts as an incontrovertible fact.

The slanted news coverage, on a non-stop basis, fosters a feeling of resignation among the hundreds of thousands of UAW members whose futures hinge upon the outcome of these negotiations. At the same time, in a classic example of divide and conquer, the vast majority of unorganized workers are fed an image of overpaid and lazy UAW members.

Behind the propaganda and distorted figures is the built-in drive of capital, fueled by the expansion of private equity into the auto industry, to force down the price of labor power. While the Asian competitors may in fact have a cost advantage, that is not what is driving the restructuring. If the competition



from Asia could be eliminated, cutthroat competition between the Big Three would become exacerbated, and the bosses would still be telling the workers that pay and benefit cuts were necessary to remain "competitive."

In fact, when compensation is reduced for workers in the unionized sector, that exerts a downward pressure on the wages and benefits of workers in the unorganized sector. What would stop Toyota, Honda and Nissan from compelling their nonunion workforce to take a pay cut?

What the ruling class—not only in the U.S. but in Europe and Asia as well—has in mind is to complete the restructuring begun with the technological changes of the 1980s. They want to reduce the workforce to the absolute bare minimum number needed to maintain production. They want to eliminate work rules that protect jobs. Through automation technology they want to maximize exploitation.

When workers are torn away from the productive process and replaced by machinery, the process requires huge infusions of cash. That is the force behind the drive to reduce wages and at the same time sell off huge segments of the industry to vulture capitalists.

Hold the line!

On the first day of negotiations Chrysler CEO Tom LaSorda immediately proclaimed that "We can no longer afford to conduct business as usual." He reportedly aggressively told UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and Vice President General Holiefield that "We want a settlement." (New York Times, July 21)

Gettelfinger has delivered a mixed message. On the one hand he has made statements opposing drastic concessions. On the other hand, in settlements with auto parts makers Dana and Delphi, he has agreed to major cuts in wages and benefits as well as plant closings.

Whatever goes on behind closed doors, it is time for every concerned UAW member, every rank and file activist, every sincere steward and local official to make his or her voice heard.

We must say that enough is enough. We must say that we are fed up with givebacks to profit-hungry bosses who won't give an inch when it comes to their salaries and bonuses. We must say that we are willing to fight to hold the line on wages, pen-



UAW members work hard for their money.

sions, health care and our property right to our jobs. We must say that we refuse to be shark bait in the dangerous waters of private equity.

We can distribute educational leaflets. We can speak and pass resolutions at our union meetings. We can go to the company "Town Hall" meetings and challenge the bosses on their turf. We can sign petitions. We can follow the example of Soldiers of Solidarity and engage in "work to rule." We can find a hundred and one ways to challenge the line that concessions are unavoidable.

What if we could come together in an emergency conference, with autoworkers from all over the world, to develop a perspective for struggle? We would be organized so that, when the time comes, if need be we can call on our sisters and brothers to vote with one voice, with a resounding "no" to capitalist restructuring on the backs of workers.

We can draw inspiration from the UAW retirees, who have a rich history of struggle. As the GM-UAW negotiations began in Dearborn, Mich., three busloads of retirees from Flint arrived at 8:00 a.m. to picket and oppose concessions on pensions and retiree health care.

Martha Grevatt has been a Chrysler worker and UAW activist for 20 years.
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Mortgage crisis: Millions can't pay, risk losing homes

Continued from page 1

est rates for the remaining 28 years of the mortgage.

Prime rate mortgage holders don't have the exploding interest rates to contend with, but the continuing downward spiral in house values has clearly begun to affect their ability to pay their mortgages.

Many industrial workers were induced to refinance their mortgages during the housing bubble of 2000-2006, often by the lure of ready cash. For many workers with large medical, credit card and other bills, it seemed too good to pass up. Now, especially in the case of autoworkers, they are facing the double whammy of a rapidly deteriorating housing market coupled with forced cuts in wages and benefits.

It would be hard to overstate just how disastrous this spread of delinquencies and subsequent foreclosures can be for the lives of those sections of the working class, and segments of the middle class, who

thought they had secured their futures after years of labor.

Consumer spending accounts for nearly 70 percent of all economic activity in the U.S. today. Much of this spending has been stimulated by easy credit. What worker, or even student, hasn't been bombarded with offers of credit cards? The middle class and better-off sections of the working class are the primary source of this consumer spending. If these segments of the population were to be forced into foreclosure and bankruptcy in large numbers, the drop-off in consumer spending could snowball into a general economic catastrophe.

The mortgage crisis poses a dual threat. The immediate one, a major drop-off in consumer spending, is clearly growing. In addition, the crisis has imperiled Wall Street and the global system of finance capital, limiting its ability to stem the effects.

Major rating agencies like Moody's and Standard & Poor's are slowly being forced

to admit that they gave AAA ratings to what was essentially junk paper. A major revision in ratings for investments could provoke more large-scale sell-offs in the coming months and eliminate any chance of the kind of soft landing alluded to by Fed Chair Bernanke.

Wall street takes a big hit

Goldman Sachs, the premier Wall Street banker, has a close relationship with Countrywide. It has provided the mortgage lender with investment banking and many other financial services. One of its partners sits on the board of directors of Countrywide.

How deep its losses go remains to be seen.

Assessing Countrywide's second-quarter drop of 33 percent in revenues and 10 percent in shares, the Wall Street Journal of July 25 reported that CitiGroup, Bank of America and JP Morgan Chase have all

noted "deterioration in the credit quality of home equity loans."

This crisis is already spreading to pension and money market funds, which have invested heavily in the lucrative but risky real estate market, thus putting many workers' savings in danger from yet another direction.

And it has spread to the private equity corporations, which have been advancing the funds necessary to exploit the buyouts and mergers happening in the industrial sectors of the U.S. economy.

The Financial Times noted on July 25 that the \$20 billion financing for Cerberus' purchase of Chrysler has "hit trouble with banks deciding to postpone the sale of \$12 billion of debt attached to the car-making operations."

The housing bubble has burst. Now the house of cards created by the Wall Street robber barons in their mad rush for profits is also in danger of collapsing. □

Steam blast kills one, injures 30

'It's just the infrastructure,' says billionaire mayor

By Brenda Ryan
New York

When a large steam pipe exploded in crowded midtown Manhattan on July 18, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg told the press there was no reason to believe it was "anything other than a failure of our infrastructure."

A worker in a downtown office building was more exact. "It's not terrorism," she said. "It's Con Edison."

The power company has let its system of pipes and wires deteriorate and as a result the city has been hit with a string of disasters. The explosion occurred exactly one year after the city's last crisis—a 10-day power outage in the borough of Queens that left more than 174,000 people stranded in a sweltering heat wave. While people have been anticipating a similar electrical breakdown this summer, they were stunned by the volcanic-like eruption of the steam system.

The explosion tore a 35-foot crater in the middle of 41st Street and Lexington Avenue. A truck in the intersection was thrown into the air and then crashed into the hole.

The driver of the truck, a 23-year-old African-American man, was blasted with the 400-degree steam, suffering burns over 80 percent of his body. He remains hospitalized in critical condition.

A woman who had been close to the explosion had a heart attack and died. More than 30 other people were injured in a shower of flying rocks, mud and water.

The blast occurred one block from Grand Central Terminal, one of the main hubs of the city. The blocks surrounding the area were closed to traffic and business for several days. Con Ed has dubbed the blocked-off area the "frozen zone." Two Con Ed workers leaving the site two days after the explosion said it would be a long time before the pipe was fixed. "There are wires everywhere," one of them said.

By July 21, two blocks of Lexington remained closed. Filled with trucks and workers, several wearing white and gray protective suits, the street looked like a massive construction site. A day earlier a crew had removed the tow truck that had sunk into the crater.

Many businesses in the area have been shut down, losing tens of thousands of dollars. It's unclear if Con Ed will fully reimburse them. A spokesperson for the Public Service Commission told the New York Times that state regulations on reim-

bursments for electricity failures do not apply to the steam system.

While Con Edison is primarily known for selling gas and electricity to the people living in the five boroughs of New York, it also operates the largest steam system in the world. The system pumps steam through a 105-mile network of mains and service pipes buried under the streets. The steam, which travels about 75 miles per hour, is sold to more than 1,800 commercial and residential customers who use it for heating, hot water and air conditioning. Hospitals also use the steam to sterilize instruments. The system includes seven steam-generating plants and 3,000 steam "manholes."

Con Ed had repaired a leak at the site four months earlier. The power company said it did not know what caused the steam main to erupt but speculated that it was set off by cold water from an earlier rainstorm hitting the underground steam pipe. The 83-year-old pipe was installed in 1924. The New York Times reported that residents in the area had seen steam coming from the vicinity; one woman said it was so thick it was at times difficult to see.

Explosions and power outages

This was not the company's first steam pipe explosion. According to press reports, there have been more than a dozen such explosions in the city in the last 20 years.

In 1989 a similar eruption occurred outside an apartment building in the wealthy neighborhood of Gramercy Park. Three people were killed and dozens injured in that disaster. The Gramercy Park explosion also created a health hazard from the asbestos surrounding the steam pipe. Con Ed did not tell residents that the air was contaminated with asbestos until four days later, after tenants had tests conducted of the air. Con Edison later pled guilty to failing to report the contamination and in 1995 a federal judge ordered the company to pay a \$2 million fine and put it on probation for three years.

The current explosion also involved a pipe wrapped in asbestos. Bloomberg announced at a news conference the day after the explosion that the city's



Con Ed has filed a request for a rate increase that may add 17 percent to a typical utility bill.

Department of Environmental Protection had taken air samples throughout the city and, while none of them contained asbestos, some samples taken right at the site did. He advised people who had been covered with debris from the blast to bag their clothes and bring them to a Con Ed collection site.

Con Ed has had numerous other breakdowns in its system. There have been a series of power outages in the metropolitan area just in the past month. In 2004, a young woman was electrocuted and killed when she stepped on a metal plate in the East Village and last year a dog was electrocuted on a sidewalk in Brooklyn. Last year Con Ed reported that, in examining electrical equipment on city streets, it had discovered 1,214 stray voltage sites.

Yet as dangerous as these "hot spots" are, Con Ed came under fire earlier this year for jeopardizing public safety by hiring livery drivers, rather than trained utility workers, to sit in their cars and "guard" the hot spots until the company could make repairs.

The utility, which reported a gross profit of \$4.8 billion in 2006, has focused on raking in more money rather than preventing such disasters. In a recent filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the company reported that its steam operating revenues increased \$20 million in the first three months of the year compared to last

year, while its electric operating revenues were up \$10 million. Steam sales account for about 7 percent of its revenues.

It is also planning to hike its electricity prices. In May it filed a request with the New York State Public Service Commission for an electric rate increase of \$1.21 billion effective April 1, 2008. That translates into an 11.6 percent average increase in customers' bills. The company noted in a press release that a typical residential customer could get a 17 percent hike. The company requested additional increases of \$335 million, or 3.2 percent, in 2009 and \$390 million, or 3.7 percent, in 2010.

While the company is pushing people to pay more for power, it has shrugged off disasters as if they were unavoidable. But members of the New York State Legislature who looked into the Queens outage last summer pointed to the source of the problem as deregulation of the electrical power industry. The New York State Assembly Queens Power Outage Task Force issued a report in January saying that deregulation left profit-making utilities in charge of monitoring themselves.

"The utilities responsible for distribution of electricity through the grid were left to operate as a monopoly," the report stated. "Basic economics and experience tells us that monopolies operating free from stringent regulations are a recipe for disaster."

Members of the community have been fighting to make Con Ed accountable. The Western Queens Power for the People Campaign was started last year by people who live and work in the area to fight for justice and full compensation for the millions of dollars in damages and losses from the July 2006 Queens power outage.

Community efforts like this are needed all over New York City to confront Con Ed's greed and mismanagement. The real solution is for all services, including power, to be the property of the people rather than privately owned. □

Marchers keep pressure on Con Ed



PHOTO: WESTERN QUEENS POWER FOR THE PEOPLE CAMPAIGN

On the evening of July 17, people who live and work in Western Queens gathered for a rally and "flashlight march" through the streets of Sunnyside and Woodside to mark the first anniversary of last summer's 10-day-long Queens power outage. The event was organized by the Western Queens Power for the People Campaign.

Chanting "Con Ed, it's payback time!" and "Hey hey, ho ho, the Con Ed rate hike's got to go," some 100 marchers carrying flashlights sent a message to Con Ed management to accept fault for last year's outage and to pay

what it still owes to residents and small businesses who suffered losses.

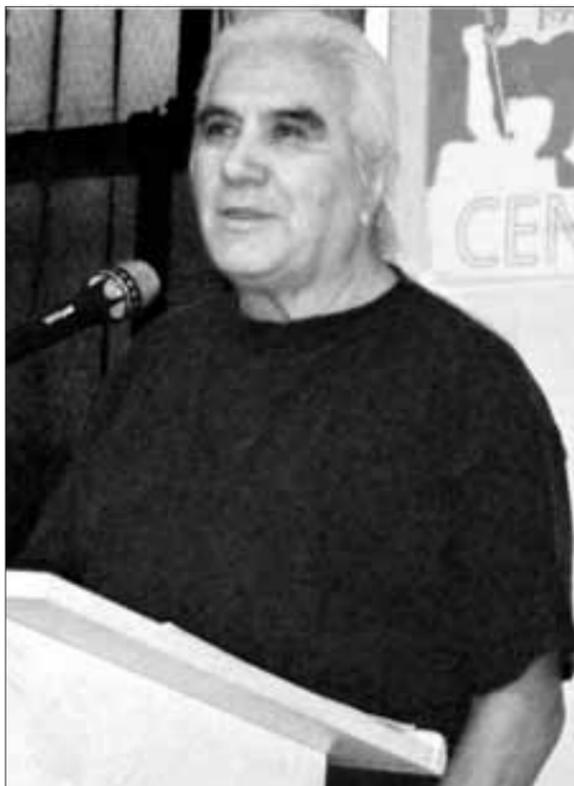
Protesters also said "No!" to the giant utility's request for a rate increase of 17 percent for residents and 10.7 percent for businesses. They were greeted by smiles, waves and applause from residents, workers and small shop owners along the route, which passed through working class, immigrant neighborhoods affected by the 2006 outage. For more information on this struggle, go to www.powerforthepeople.info.

—Mary Owen

Chilean fights deportation

Victor Toro fought the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. Now he is fighting deportation from the U.S. He explained to a Workers World forum in New York on July 19 that he intends to mount a struggle on behalf of all undocumented workers that also exposes the complicity of the U.S. government in setting up murderous regimes, like that in Chile, that force so many to seek asylum elsewhere.

—Report and photo by Deirdre Griswold



MILWAUKEE

Black community supports jailed alderman

By Bryan G. Pfeifer
Milwaukee

More than 100 supporters of Black city Alderman Michael McGee Jr. packed the Coffee Makes You Black coffee shop for a weekday morning news conference on July 17.

The event showed that many in the Black community see the targeting of McGee, who has been in jail since May 28, as payback for his steadfast support of economic and social justice for poor and working people, particularly with regard to Black youth, fighting police brutality and opposing gentrification.

McGee had also spoken out on national and international issues. He supports Mumia Abu-Jamal, demanding this political prisoner's freedom on his "Word Warriors" radio show on WNOV only days before his own May arrest. And, during his first term as alderman, McGee sent a letter to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez inquiring about heating oil assistance for poor people in Milwaukee.

"We are here to express our outrage for the unjust treatment he has received, the excessive and unreasonable bail on the local level and then a denial of bail on the federal level. This has convinced us that Michael McGee Jr. is a victim of character and political assassination," said Minister William Muhammad of the Nation of Islam Mosque No. 3 and the Millions More Movement.

Muhammad was joined by a wide range of Milwaukee's Black community to announce a new coalition of broad-based legal, religious and community organizations that will be engaging in McGee support actions throughout both the state and federal trials.

Alderman Michael McGee Jr.

PHOTO: WWW.CITY.MILWAUKEE.GOV



McGee denied release

On May 28 McGee Jr. was arrested and charged with various state offenses, including seven felony counts and five misdemeanors related to elections, bribery, conspiracy and contempt. His state bail on the day of arrest was \$250,000. But eventually, due to protests, it was dropped to \$50,000. As soon as McGee's \$50,000 bail was posted, however, he was immediately taken from the Milwaukee County jail into federal custody and moved to Dodge County, dozens of miles from Milwaukee.

At the time he was placed into federal custody McGee was charged with nine federal felony crimes including extortion, five bribery counts and one charge related to a financial transaction. McGee is charged with pressuring businesses in his district for money to get licenses OKed through the City Council.

Federal Magistrate Judge Patricia Gorence set bail for McGee at \$10,000 on the federal charges and issued a series of "orders" regarding his release on bail, including no direct contact with constituents and only a minimal amount of visitation with his family and attorneys. Under Gorence's orders, McGee would have been able to go to City Hall, but only for votes, and to attend medical appointments and

church services. But when federal prosecutors appealed, U.S. District Judge Rudolph Randa overturned Gorence's ruling allowing bail, sparking outrage in the Black community.

McGee has pleaded not guilty to all charges. A trial has been set for Oct. 1 on the federal charges. No date for a trial on the state charges has been set. McGee faces up to 30 years on the state charges and 115 years on the federal charges.

'We want to see him free'

Besides protesting the state and federal legal attacks on McGee, many at the press conference protested the media's racist treatment of McGee and the double standard applied to how he is treated compared with how other elected officials tried on various charges in recent history were treated.

Almost all other elected officials in Milwaukee and Wisconsin who have been charged and indicted in recent history were released on their own recognizance or a small signature bond. And, unlike serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, McGee has been denied the right to wear clothing of his choice to court. Instead, he's been brought to court chained and in jail clothes.

"Momentum is building. We call on all just people to step forward and deal with this situation," said press conference chair Brother Earl, standing before dozens of McGee supporters, many wearing "Free Michael McGee" buttons and "Free Ald McGee 4 Me" T-shirts in the African-diaspora themed coffee shop.

Pastor Mose Fuller of Saint Timothy Baptist Church said, "Not only Black people, every righteous person, every person

in this community, north side, south side, west side, east side, whatever side you live on, you should stand up and note the overt racism and injustice that has taken place against this alderman. ... I think the people should respond by any means necessary to get done what needs to be done in order to bring about justice."

McGee's colleague, Black city Alderman Ashanti Hamilton, also spoke up on his behalf, as did Milwaukee County Supervisor James White, who gave a historical overview of the attacks on Black self-determination and the prevalence of "white supremacy" and racial double standards in Milwaukee.

White closed by noting that having McGee in jail during the Frank Jude Jr. federal trial—which was taking place the week of the July 17 news conference—was more than an interesting coincidence. McGee helped lead protests against the treatment of Jude and in particular led a 4,000-strong protest march after three white cops were acquitted by an all-white jury in the Jude state trial in 2006.

Henry Hamilton III, a member of the legal redress committee for the local branch of the NAACP and a National Lawyers Guild member, and Joseph Battiste of the Rapid Response Team also spoke. Battiste called for an investigation of all local, state and federal agencies involved in arresting, charging, incarcerating and prosecuting McGee.

Wanda Montgomery, McGee's sister-in-law, spoke on behalf of the family.

"The first thing that happened was he was detained. The second thing that's happened he's been defamed. The third thing that they're trying to do is destroy him. ... We want to see due process. We want to see him free." □

Harlem fights to keep its identity

In Marcus Garvey Park, gentrifiers vs. drummers

By Agnes Johnson
Harlem, N.Y.

On Saturday, July 7, in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem, the community came from all over the New York boroughs to speak in one voice that the plotters of gentrification or recolonization would not subjugate the African identity.

White racism, which had dubbed Harlem a Black ghetto, has now sold Harlem to developers and the new residents have decided that the drums played in the park are "too loud." Marvin Gaye is probably rolling and screaming, "What's Goin' On?"

A week earlier, on June 30, two white police officers had come to the park drummers with complaints from residents of

a condo on Fifth Avenue, bordering the park. The drummers would not allow their African culture to be trumped by European displeasure. The drumming continued.

Then reinforcements of police came twice more to shut down the drums. But the Black community and drummers—about 80 people—said, in the words of Frederick Douglass, "We will not be that constant victim of U.S. cruelty and injustice." For decades, people had come together at that spot every Saturday from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. to play their instruments.

On this Saturday, the communal power of the drum circle would not submit. Men, women and children of all nations of the diaspora played, danced, laughed and listened to the rhythms of the Black World. The impact was felt by those who

remembered their history in a country where the African had been stripped of language, culture and human dignity. For this moment in time, all felt liberated and recaptured what had been embraced for over 25 years.

Many people filmed with cell phones and cameras as the drums played on, even louder. Across the street, four white residents watched from their balconies. Strangely, the police left. But the incident brought to the front the internal struggle the colonizers and colonized must face.

The NYPD action was not a surprise. Day after day, the community sees the role of control and containment they play. A legacy of 250 years of enslavement and age-old methods pushed forward.

A call then went out throughout the U.S. and responses came back from drum circles, performers and many who remembered this park's community. Everyone offered some kind of help or expressed outrage.

So on July 7 there was the response: "We are in our world. We have the right to assemble in our community. The drum has always been the soul and connecting point of the people." Present at the gathering were Loretta Abbott, an original member of the Alvin Ailey dance company, and members of the Harlem Arts Alliance.

The next week the administrators of the park came in with a deal to move the drummers to a "better place." The political apparatus knew they could not stop

the drum, so they offered all kinds of future annuities, such as a space of their own and a plaque where they previously played.

This new place in the park is a climb above the seating of the amphitheater, just below the bell tower. It turns out that the administrators must have forgotten that they also gave this spot to the Rasta community. Physically, the competition with the amplified stage sound is another wrench, but most tragic is to watch the elders, canes in hand, climb up the many steps to the space. Clearly they were out of breath when they reached the top.

One father, who brought two young children, summed it up with, "Where is humanity heading? This is about dignity and consideration of others. For many people who come [to the drum circle] this is their only mechanism. For many they don't have the luxury to go to the Islands or the Hamptons," referring to rich, elite beachside communities on Long Island.

The struggle will not end here by accommodating and integrating. The people of color understand very well what needs to be protected. If history is any indicator, the community will not go back in the box.

As Manala Manazine said when apartheid South Africa banned the singing of the anthem "NKosi Sikelel'I Africa" and musicians like Hugh Masakela and Miriam Makeba: "They banned virtually everything, but how do you stop people from singing?" □

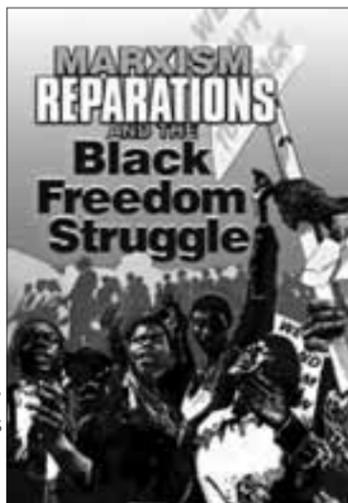
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Anti-war actions build toward Sept. 29 march

By John Catalinotto

President George W. Bush's refusal to retreat from Iraq has reawakened a broad grassroots opposition to the continued U.S. occupation of that country. Feeding this opposition is the growing awareness of the social costs of the war. Many anti-war activists expect the next moment of confrontation in Congress over the war to take place near the end of September.

Since media attention to the budget battle will also focus on the war, anti-war organizers have proposed actions in September and especially toward the end of that month to take advantage of this attention.

The Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC) has called since late April for an encampment in Washington starting Sept. 22 and lasting until Sept. 29, when there will be a march. TONC recently issued a statement calling for a "Unity Coalition" of all anti-war coalitions to share responsibility and a voice in that Sept. 29 mass action. (See troopsoutnow.org.)

'Momentum growing'

Sara Flounders, a TONC spokesperson, told Workers World that "the momentum for the Sept. 22-29 actions is growing. New endorsements are coming in from all over, including from the Green Party organizations and from the pro-impeachment group, 'After Downing Street.' We already have a list of hundreds of endorsers on the TONC website. By July 24 we should have a list of 30 organizing centers for transportation to Washington for the mass march Sept. 29."

Flounders said that the last week in September "is expected to be the time for a sharpening of arguments between the White House and Congress. We know that the Democratic Party, along with the ultrareactionary Bush White House, is

also a defender of U.S. imperialist interests, including the wish to seize Middle East oil. Only with the independent intervention of a mass anti-war struggle—as we propose for September—can we turn the rivalry between the two capitalist parties into a real political confrontation that can work toward ending the criminal U.S. occupation of Iraq."

By late September, the Pentagon is supposed to have reported on any "progress" following the U.S. escalation in troop deployments. And by Oct. 1, Congress is supposed to approve the budget for the next fiscal year, including the costs of the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, broad grassroots activity has met Bush's intransigence. The Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) finished a tour of 10 military bases in the eastern part of the country in early July. A group led by Cindy Sheehan that has traveled from Crawford, Texas, through Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., to Washington, will reach New York for a series of actions at the United Nations and in Central Park from July 26 to July 29.

Sheehan has said she will contest Rep. Nancy Pelosi's House seat in 2008 if Pelosi doesn't try to impeach Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney by midnight on July 23.

The movement to impeach Bush and Cheney has also developed momentum. Polls by the American Research Group made public July 5 show that 45 percent favor impeaching Bush and 54 percent Cheney. The World Can't Wait, along with Democratic Party and Green Party organizations, have joined to promote this effort. Anti-militarist Ramsey Clark has been promoting this impeachment effort since the early days of the war.

Flounders mentioned that TONC was protesting July 23 at Rep. Jerry Nadler's office in Manhattan as part of the national

effort to demand that impeachment proceedings be started against Cheney and Bush.

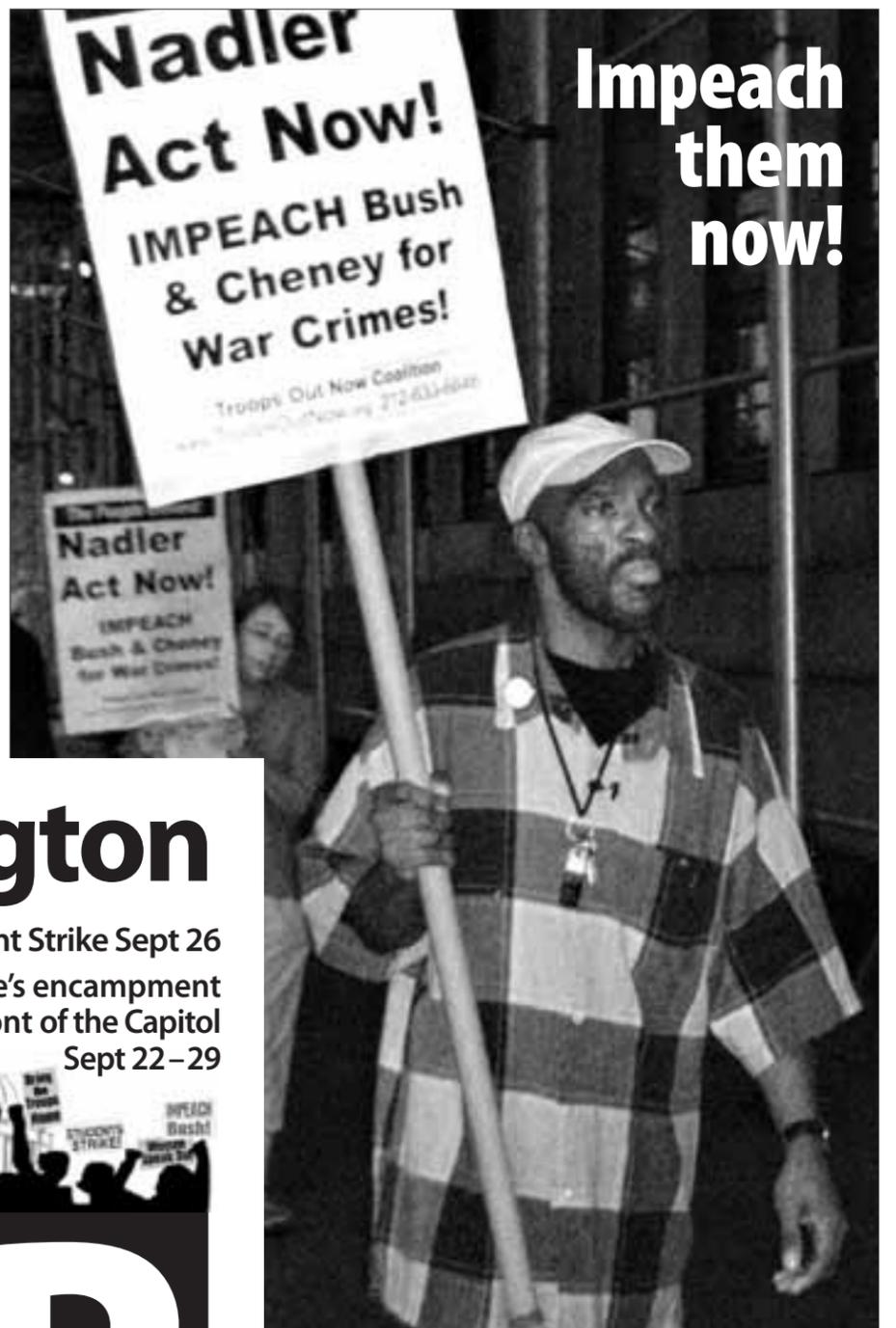
Encampment in Los Angeles

TONC in Los Angeles—which includes Bayan USA and Latinos Against the War—held a news conference on July 16 to promote the September actions. Those present included Yael Korin of the Campaign to End Israeli Apartheid; Peter Thottam of the Center for the Impeachment of Bush; Don White of CISPES-LA; Arab-American activist Mazen al-Moukdad, a member of Al-Awda and TONC-LA; Javier Rodríguez of the March 25th Coalition and TONC-LA; long-time peace activist Jerry Rubin; International Action Center and TONC-LA members Maggie Vascassenno and John Parker; Rudy Pisani, Vets for Peace; and

Ron Kovic, a Vietnam vet and author of "Born on the Fourth of July."

TONC-LA is calling for an encampment in that area, too, on Sept. 22-28, with a mass march on Sept. 29. Media coverage of the news conference included extensive interviews on KPFFK, a Pacifica radio station, Telemundo and Channel 9/KCAL.

That same day, TONC in New York held a protest in Times Square protesting Bush's hard-line reaction to the "interim report" from Iraq. Following the protest, 30 people returned to Solidarity Hall to discuss Michael Moore's film "Sicko" and the use of TONC's leaflet at theaters showing it. The leaflet combines an appeal to end the occupation of Iraq with a demand for universal health care and has been enormously popular with audiences at the film. □



WW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN

As part of a national day of action, the Troops Out Now Coalition on July 21 picketed the office of Rep. Jerry Nadler in New York, calling for the impeachment of President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney for crimes against peace and humanity and war crimes. Nadler is chair of the congressional committee that has jurisdiction over impeachment. The group After Downing Street initiated the national day of action. □

Truer today than ever

"Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries. ... Imperialism is capitalism in that stage of development in which the domination of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the partition of all the territories of the globe among the great capitalist powers has been completed. ... Moreover, imperialism is an immense accumulation of money capital in a few countries...."

—V.I. Lenin's "Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism," written in 1916.

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EL SALVADOR

Struggle over water brings gov't repression

By Heather Cottin

José Ever Fuentes is a leader of campesinos from Oratorio de la Concepción, a peasant community near Suchitoto, El Salvador. When, early in July, local organizers in Suchitoto called for a march against the privatization of water in the region, Fuentes joined hundreds of campesinos and workers from the area in the protest.

Fuentes is a long-time member of the Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), now a legal party in El Salvador, which has resisted U.S.-sponsored dictators and imperialism since leading a war of liberation in the 1980s.

Workers World interviewed his son, René Valentino, at an FMLN-NY activity on Long Island. Valentino said the marchers faced the combined forces of the army and police, equipped with artillery, machine guns and helicopters, as well as units of the anti-riot squad. El Salvador's ARENA government attacked the peaceful demonstration, wounding over 100 people. Dozens were hospitalized. Under a new "anti-terrorism" law, 14 protesters were arrested, including his father.

Many of the arrested were women. They are being denied water and medical assistance, according to the Committee of Families for Freedom of Political Prisoners in El Salvador.

Valentino noted that the government announced its National Policy of Water Decentralization on July 2, exactly one year after the torture and murder of the parents of Monjarás Manzanares, known as "Mariposa," who was from Suchitoto. "Mariposa" had been the voice of the FMLN's Radio Venceremos during the war.

The region around Suchitoto is an FMLN stronghold. Thousands were killed there by the army during the war, Valentino said. After the arrests and the attack on the



Protest in San Salvador after arrests in Suchitoto.

PHOTO: FMLN

Suchitoto protesters, FMLN organizations across the country demanded the release of the prisoners and 20,000 people marched in San Salvador on July 7.

Water, profits and repression

Some 90 percent of El Salvador's natural water is contaminated. In 1999, the country had the second-highest level of infant mortality in Central America due to intestinal infections and diarrhea.

A government service, ANDA, provides water to 172 municipalities out of the 262 existing in the country, but cannot do so on a regular basis. ANDA reported that in 2002 less than 53.3 percent of the population had access to piped water.

In January 2000, the state water company tripled the price of water for those who used the least, penalizing individual customers while offering a rebate for businesses. Millions of El Salvadorans have to choose between drinking water and their children's education. Education is privatized, too.

Those who can afford \$15 to \$20 a month to buy drinking water from private companies pay about six times the monthly ANDA bill. The ARENA government exploits ANDA's water delivery problems as a pretext to justify the entry

of private companies and has slashed its budget by 37 percent since 2005. (La Prensa Gráfica, Dec. 27)

Representatives of SETA, the water workers' union, say privatization would mean the "extinction" of their union and limit Salvadorans' access to clean water. But Salvadoran President Antonio Saca is pushing a privatization proposal, demanded under the "free trade" CAFTA agreement, to comply with the requirements of a 1998 loan from the Inter-American Development Bank. (Paul Pollack, ww4report.com, March 1, 2006)

This is known as "structural adjustment."

Who must bear the weight of these adjustments? It is on the backs of poor women. Women work overtime to buy water from tanker trucks. They stand in line for hours at public standpipes. Women walk miles to collect water from streams and ponds, carrying the burden on their heads.

El Salvador's levels of income inequality rank among the highest in the world, according to the United Nations Human Development Report on El Salvador for 2003. In the 10 years before the report was issued, the wealthiest 20 percent of families "had increased their share of

national income to 58.3 percent," and the neediest 20 percent "had their share cut to 2.4 percent."

Resisting privatization and repression

Since the Peace Accords brought a truce in 1992, the FMLN has been organizing opposition to poverty, repression and privatization throughout the country.

In 1998, the government privatized ANTEL, the state-owned telephone company, which led to the layoff of 5,000 workers, the loss of seniority, salary cuts and the dissolution of ASTEL, the workers' union. Phone rates soared, but ASTEL reorganized with FMLN support three years later.

In 2002, the nurses and doctors of the Salvadoran Social Security Hospital System, FMLN supporters, went on strike, successfully preventing the privatization of health care.

El Salvadorans have a history of struggle. The overwhelming opposition to the arrests and repression in Suchitoto prompted Saca's Cabinet of Public Security to present the Legislative Assembly with a list of reforms of the Penal Code designed to increase the penalties against what they called "public disorder." The same day, July 23, the FMLN immediately declared that the ARENA government was trying to create a legal mechanism to strengthen repression.

Blanca Flor Bonilla, an FMLN leader in Nicaragua, denounced the government measures: "The people are awakening. We are sure that we will beat this." She was referring to the masses taking to the streets and to anticipated FMLN victories in municipal, legislative and presidential elections coming up in 2009. (Prensa Latina)

"These protests will free our political prisoners. ... Suchitoto shows that the next victory for the people of Latin America will be in El Salvador," René Valentino said. □

History has absolved Cuba

By Caleb T. Maupin

"What heart is not set aflame by the promise of freedom?" Fidel Castro asked a kangaroo court of the U.S.-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista so many years ago in 1953. He was being charged with the crime of attempting to overthrow the Batista dictatorship and the corrupt, decadent, colonized and impoverished order in Cuba along with it.

Fidel Castro and 160 others had led an attack against the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The attack failed. Some of the young revolutionaries were killed outright or tortured to death; Castro and others were apprehended. The speech Castro gave in his defense was soon widely circulated under the title "History Will Absolve Me." It became a recruiting tool for the building of a guerrilla army that eventually toppled the regime in 1959.

Who can deny that Castro was correct? In terms of medical care, education, literacy and employment, Cuba stands far ahead of any other nation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some are skeptical of such claims, but they need look no further than the CIA's own World Fact Book.

While the CIA has done its best to drown the Cuban Revolution in blood with terrorist attacks, bombings and assassinations, it is nevertheless forced to concede the facts about Cuba in its own publication.

The fact book shows that a child born in Cuba has a better chance of surviving than one born in the United States, despite the



fact that the U.S. contains the most wealth of any country in the world.

It shows that Cuba's life expectancy is far ahead of every other Latin American nation, and is just slightly lower than that of the U.S.

These figures show that Cuba has a government devoted to the welfare of the people. It has built countless hospitals, clinics and medical research facilities since the revolution. Cuba has a medical college where people from all over the world are trained to be doctors in their home countries. It exports more medical aid than any nation on earth. It even offered medical aid to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina—an offer that Washington spurned.

Unlike the government in Washington, the Cuban government has devoted itself fully to the fight against AIDS. As a result, the rate of infection with HIV-AIDS in



On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro and 160 others attacked the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Photo on left shows Castro being arrested after the attack.

Cuba is only a sixth of what it is in the U.S.

The fact book shows that Cuba now has a 99 percent literacy rate—again, far above all the capitalist nations of Latin America.

Even while Cuba was fighting off the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, its literacy campaigns did not stop. Cuba now has free, high-quality schools and all children are guaranteed an education through secondary school. All education, including the university level, is free to Cubans.

How is it that a small island in the Caribbean has been able to accomplish so much?

What is it that Cuba has that the rest of Latin America and most of the developing world do not have?

It has socialism. Cuban society is not based on greed and profits. The Cuban Revolution, which started out as a struggle against a bloody dictatorship, went on to

free the land from the control of agribusiness, much of it in the hands of U.S. corporations. In the words of Che Guevara, it was "an agrarian reform that grew over into a socialist revolution" as the revolutionaries, in order to keep their promises to the people of a better life, began to liberate the offices and factories as well.

The means of production—the factories, the big farms and banks—are now in the hands of the Cuban people, who are using them to build a better future for themselves and their children.

"What heart is not set aflame by the promise of freedom?" Castro said so many years ago, and when the people of the world look upon Cuba their hearts are set aflame. They see the lie in the claim that capitalism is the best we can do and that humans are naturally greedy.

History has absolved Fidel Castro, as it will absolve all who fight for socialism, not just in Cuba but all over the world. □

Where it says 'counter-terrorism,' read 'oil'

U.S. expands military command in Africa

By Phebe Eckfeldt

The Pentagon is expanding its military operations in Africa. It says its aim is to insure "peace and security" and "promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy and economic growth in Africa."

After the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, who can believe them?

On Feb. 6 Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced that the Bush administration was in the process of creating a Unified Combatant Command for Africa, to be known as AFRICOM. In July President George W. Bush nominated Gen. William E. Ward to be its commander.

AFRICOM is slated to encompass the entire continent of Africa, except for Egypt, which is under the U.S. Central Command.

It was former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who drew up the initial plan for AFRICOM and presented it to Bush.

The Defense Department divides its worldwide military operations into regional commands. Currently, the U.S. Central Command comprises the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and Central Asia. The U.S. European Command coordinates much of sub-Saharan Africa as well as Europe. The U.S. Northern Command coordinates North America. The U.S. Southern Command coordinates South America, Central America and the Caribbean, while the U.S. Pacific Command is made up of East Asia and South Asia, including the Indian Ocean islands off the coast of southeast Africa.

Bush's goal is to have AFRICOM functional by Sept. 30, 2008. The plan includes establishing U.S. military bases in many more African nations with an AFRICOM headquarters in an as yet undecided location in Africa.

After 9/11 the Pentagon had set up the Pan-Sahel Initiative. It now operates the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism

Initiative, which enables U.S. military personnel to roam freely around many of the oil-rich African nations under the guise of "fighting terrorism."

Oceans of oil

What's the real motivation for this sudden focus on Africa? Like a rapacious, bloodthirsty hunter, U.S. imperialism is salivating with desire over what it sees there: oceans of oil, as well as abundant other natural resources. But to secure the operations of U.S. corporations in extracting billions of dollars worth of oil as smoothly as possible and establishing control over more markets, the Pentagon, oil executives and Bush have come up with AFRICOM.

In 2002 the African Oil Political Initiative Group, a lobbying group made up of members of the oil industry and the government, presented a white paper to Bush and Congress urging greater extraction of oil from Africa, stating that the Gulf of Guinea is "an area of vital interest to the U.S." (Christian Science Monitor, May 23, 2002)

In 2004 a former member of Bill Clinton's National Security Council, Richard Wilcox, motivated the establishment of an African command in an op-ed piece: "The Navy has conducted major exercises off West Africa, an area that, according to a recent study by the National Intelligence Council, may surpass the Persian Gulf as a source of oil for the U.S. in a decade." (New York Times, Oct. 14, 2004)

By 2006 the Pentagon announced it would expand its Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, where 1,500 U.S. troops are stationed in Djibouti at Camp Lemonier, from 88 acres to 600 acres. This region is a gateway to the oil-rich Middle East, where the U.S. is conducting a colonial occupation of Iraq and where the Palestinian people continue to resist against Israel.

The military, like the Bush administra-

tion, makes it sound as though ordinary U.S. citizens need this oil, and that without the Pentagon's presence other countries, like China, will get it: "The Center for Contemporary Conflict of the United States Navy states that U.S. policy towards Africa is largely defined by international terrorism, the increasing importance of African oil to American energy needs, and the dramatic expansion and improvement of Sino-African relations since the turn of the century." (Strategic Insights, January 2007)

However, while all countries need and buy oil today, only a few send their troops to control the sources. The difference is that these imperialist countries—especially the U.S., Britain and France—are dominated by huge corporations that make fabulous profits off of oil, from the exploration and drilling to the refining and marketing. When they send in the troops, the billionaires get even richer while the taxpayers get stuck with the military bills. And our gas prices keep going up.

No stability for African workers

The Pentagon has been trying to sell AFRICOM to skeptical African leaders as a way to fight terrorism and create "stability on the continent." Stability for whom? The African people? Those who work in the oil fields?

Wilcox wrote his piece after a two-day walkout of oil workers in Nigeria that was followed by a four-day general strike by the Nigerian Labour Congress. The workers were protesting massive poverty in this oil-rich country and an extreme rise in domestic fuel prices.

Labor resistance, combined with that of groups like the Niger Delta People's Voluntary Force and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, resulted in the loss of millions of barrels of crude oil during the months of October and November 2004. ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and Shell have invested

billions of dollars in the Gulf of Guinea area and expect to reap even more in profits.

Nigeria is among the top five suppliers of oil to the U.S. Algeria, Angola and Gabon are among the top 15. Crude oil production in sub-Saharan Africa surpassed 4 million barrels a day in 2000—more than Iran, Venezuela or Mexico. (Christian Science Monitor, May 23, 2002)

The National Intelligence Council says oil exports from the Gulf of Guinea will reach 25 percent of total U.S. imports by 2015. Congress has budgeted \$500 million over six years to the European Command, which oversees this area.

While the U.S. expresses concern that China is attempting to gain control over Africa's natural resources, the recent economic agreements China has made with African states are very welcome there. An article in the February 2007 edition of National Geographic says that "China's oil purchases come with a commitment to finance large infrastructure programs," such as building railroad lines and roads.

By contrast, instead of building up Nigeria, U.S. oil companies have devastated it both economically and environmentally. The oil industry does not create jobs for local people, and pollution has ruined their subsistence farming and fishing. This country of 130 million people was once self-sufficient in food but now imports most of it. While the oil companies reap billions from what they take from under the feet of the people, Nigeria is forced to import the bulk of its fuel.

Per capita income in Nigeria is \$1,400. In the oil capital of Port Harcourt, there is no publicly supplied electricity, clean water, schools or medicine. Oil spills, acid rain, the disappearance of thousands of acres of mangrove forests and wetlands are what U.S. imperialism and the oil companies leave behind.

AFRICOM will pave the way for more such destruction. □

Washington's war spreads to Pakistan

By Deirdre Griswold

Pressures from the Bush administration on the regime of Gen. Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan are pushing that country into an acute social crisis.

Frustrated in their efforts to conquer Iraq or even poverty-stricken Afghanistan, yet reluctant to deploy their own frazzled troops in even more combat zones, the U.S. imperialist leaders have been leaning heavily on Musharraf to attack Afghan insurgents and any Pakistanis in the border region who might be sympathetic to them.

A Reuters story filed from Miranshah, Pakistan, on July 25 reported that "Several thousand villagers fled a Pakistani tribal region on Wednesday, where an army offensive was expected any day following pressure on Pakistan from the United States to act against al Qaeda cells."

With antiwar sentiment in the U.S. shaking up the political scene and George W. Bush's popularity still in the cellar, the U.S. president is desperately playing the Qaeda card in all his public pronouncements, using the "fear factor" generated by 9/11 to justify his continued colonial

occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

It remains a fact, however, that the aggressive thrust of the U.S. military into this oil- and gas-rich area of the world has outraged the peoples who live there and is what has inspired many to fight against the foreign invaders. Those fitting this description are not al Qaeda but the U.S. and its partner Britain, the former colonial master in much of the Middle East and South Asia.

In Pakistan, the opposition to Musharraf comes not only from militant Islamic groups—like the Lal Masjid mosque in Islamabad that was brutally attacked by the Pakistan Army on July 10 on orders from Washington, causing hundreds of casualties—but from secular, democratic forces and also from the Marxist left, which in the past was often the main target of government oppression.

Musharraf came to power in 1999 through a military coup but then managed to get himself named president. This year, according to Pakistan's constitution, he must be reelected or stand down. He precipitated a constitutional crisis when, in March, he dismissed Chief Justice Muhammad Chaudhry. Huge demonstra-



WWW PHOTO: DEIRDRE GRISWOLD

Pakistan-USA Freedom Forum meeting in Brooklyn, N.Y., calls for end to Musharraf dictatorship.

tions supporting Chaudhry erupted all over the country.

On July 20 the Pakistan Supreme Court reinstated the chief justice, ruling that Musharraf's dismissal of Chaudhry had been illegal. Pakistanis at home and in the diaspora joyfully celebrated this rebuke to the regime.

However, Musharraf has the army and the backing of Washington. He has 80,000 troops in the northwest areas of Pakistan, where opposition to his rule has been most militant. And, should he falter in carrying out Washington's wishes,

the U.S. has already threatened to bomb Pakistan "back to the Stone Age," according to Musharraf himself in an interview with "60 Minutes" last Sept. 24.

One way or the other, the war for empire begun in Iraq is surely coming to Pakistan. This rapidly deteriorating situation is just another reason why all who struggle for peace and justice should be preparing now to make the Sept. 22-29 anti-war actions in Washington a powerful effort to pull back the imperialists as they throw more troops and money into a war for global domination that even Bush admits is "endless." □



Bush justifies torture

The U.S. government once pretended that it treated prisoners humanely, while its enemies were unspeakably cruel. Of course this was just propaganda. Whenever U.S. interrogators felt it was required, they would use whatever means was at hand to get information. If necessary, the CIA or the Pentagon would train puppet troops to use cattle prods, electric shock and other forms of torture. The School of the Americas trained generations of Latin American military in these techniques.

Still, even having to pretend humanity is a restraint. It means the torture has to be done secretly or farmed out. It means those who torture illegally have to be careful they don't get caught.

The Bush administration prefers to declare that it tortures legally. The Bush gang says it has the right to waterboard, starve, humiliate, sleep-deprive, isolate, terrify and otherwise make life miserable for its prisoners. Then they will not only reveal secrets but will confess to anything the interrogators want them to. It has declared that its prisoners held at Guantánamo are outside U.S. and international law and have no right to be protected by the Geneva Conventions, those international agreements that regulate the treatment of prisoners of war.

Thus the Bush administration sorely resented the Supreme Court ruling in June last year on Hamdan v. Rumsfeld. That ruling stated that all prisoners held in U.S. custody—no matter what nationality they were, no matter which country they were held in—were protected at least minimally by the Geneva Conventions. Then last fall Congress passed the Military Commissions Act of 2006, which

instructed the Bush gang to issue an executive order stating that any further interrogations would comply with U.S. and international law.

On July 20, Bush issued his order. But instead of heeding Congress's intent to curb some of the more blatant torture techniques, he kept the order as vague as possible. No more defacing the Koran at Guantánamo, it said, but waterboarding—nearly drowning the prisoner repeatedly—would not be ruled out. No more sexual humiliation, but vagueness on sleep deprivation.

Even Human Rights Watch, which more often than not serves as a U.S. foreign policy tool, took Bush to task on the July 20 pronouncement. The HRW said Bush's order tries to approve an explicitly illegal operation the CIA has been carrying out: the detention and interrogation program, which has "disappeared" suspected U.S. enemies or held them for years in secret prisons.

Just as with Vice President Dick Cheney's secret meetings with oil executives, the pardon of "Scooter" Libby, Paul Wolfowitz's maneuvers at the World Bank, Donald Rumsfeld's administration of Abu Ghraib, and now Bush's insistence on his right to torture prisoners, the administration has been marked by an attitude that it can do whatever it likes, no matter what the law is, no matter what the opposition says in Congress.

It should be no surprise, then, that there is such a groundswell in the country asking that Cheney and Bush be impeached. People are beginning to see that only a direct confrontation with the criminals in the White House can stop the crimes. Every word out of Bush's mouth makes that confrontation more and more necessary. □

Cuba's CENESEX led the way on sexual rights

By Leslie Feinberg

Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) carries out its important collective labor—including combating what remains of pre-revolutionary prejudice against same-sex love—in what was once a privately owned Havana mansion.

Mariela Castro Espín, director of CENESEX, stressed that sexologists have a "scientific, social and political responsibility" to help raise understanding and consciousness in the whole population. (havanajournal.com, April 1, 2003)

CENESEX's goal, Castro Espín explained, is to contribute to "the development of a culture of sexuality that is full, pleasurable and responsible, as well as to promote the full exercise of sexual rights." (MEDICC Review, Vol. VIII, No. 1, March-April 2006)

Since she and CENESEX are part of the revolution, they don't have to do this work alone.

"Historically speaking," Castro Espín stated, "changing mentality is one of the most difficult things to do, one of the slowest processes in society. Even though we've made substantial political and legislative strides, we're still bound by aspects of roles defined long ago.

This subjectivity begins early, in the way children are raised, in how they're taught to play.

"We have to learn to recognize which elements of the traditional masculinity or femininity are actually doing us damage. What parts of the picture actually take away from our freedom, fulfillment and dignity. We have to take a hard look at these things, or else we'll keep passing them down from generation to generation." (MEDICC Review)

She offered a concrete example about AIDS safer-sex education. "We have to include a gender perspective—promotion of new constructs of masculinity and femininity—and not just take an epidemiological approach."

She said an epidemiological approach to prevent AIDS transmission might simply suggest, "Use a condom."

But the system of male chauvinism imposed on Cuba for centuries created a mindset in which some males feel that condoms may be a sensation barrier to full sexual enjoyment, to which they are entitled. Castro Espín emphasized, "So for him to use a condom, he has to

begin to construct and define his masculinity in a different way, that doesn't put a premium only on his own pleasure. In the end, this stereotype is very dangerous to his own health as well as his partner's—and this can be true for homosexual as well as heterosexual couples, whenever a relationship defines that one partner has hegemony over the other.

"So you need to combine both an epidemiological and a gender approach to these very intimate issues. This is why, for example, our posters and other materials emphasize that protection of your partner against HIV and STDs in general is a sign of caring, and that means it's a responsibility of both partners in a relationship."

Castro Espín told MEDICC Review interviewer Gail A. Reed regarding CENESEX: "We work with groups who promote safe sex among their peers: men who have sex with men [MSM], transvestites and transsexuals, adolescents and young people in general and then more broadly with medical students. In each medical school, there's a department of Sexology and Education for Sexuality."

All education in Cuba, it bears repeating—including medical school—is free.

Castro Espín observed in 2006: "Regarding attitudes towards MSM and bisexuals as well, there have been positive changes—I say empirically, since we are still studying this.

But at our conferences and workshops that we hold with people from the whole country, it's clear that participants are more able now than 10 years ago to understand and respect another sexual orientation. I think the work that's been done over the decade in health and by the Cuban Women's Federation has helped to bring about that change, and we've done it reaching out to people's sensitivity as human beings.

"In essence, our view is that any kind of prejudice or discrimination is damaging to health."

'Modifying the social imagination'

As a revolutionary worker, Mariela Castro Espín demonstrates in every interview that she has already rolled up her sleeves to do the next job that needs to be done.

She talked about the revolutionary labor that is still required to make progress in overcoming old prejudices about same-sex love. "First," she told MEDICC Review in 2006, "I think we have to work more and better in the schools. We've worked with the Ministry of Education, but I'm still not satisfied we've made enough progress, and so we need to deepen understanding among teachers and other school staff; we need to carry more on educational TV and so on.

"And this also has to do with a gender focus, of course. In the 70s and 80s, we found a lot of fear and resistance to a national program for sex education with such a gender focus. The program was finally accepted in 1996, and now it's taught throughout the country; since then it has reduced school dropouts from early marriages and childbirth by one half."

Castro Espín elaborated: "The country now has policies that legitimize sexual orientations and also has brought laws in line with a gender perspective. But on the legislative front, there is still a lot to be done."

She has proposed that when the Cuban Constitution of the Republic is next revised, the category of "sexual orientation" be added. Castro Espín said homosexual Cubans are protected, but "when something like that is made explicit, it is official recognition that there is a need to avoid any type of discrimination, like racism or sexism."

Such a legal measure, she pressed, would make this protection even more evident. And, she added, it's important to protect against discrimination, not just in public institutions "but also in the space of the family, because it

Continued on the next page

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&
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Rainbow Solidarity In Defense of CUBA

This soon-to-be published work, a compilation of 25 articles from the Lavender & Red series in Workers World newspaper, shows the tremendous progress the Cuban Revolution has made in uprooting colonial and imperialist-era anti-gay prejudice.

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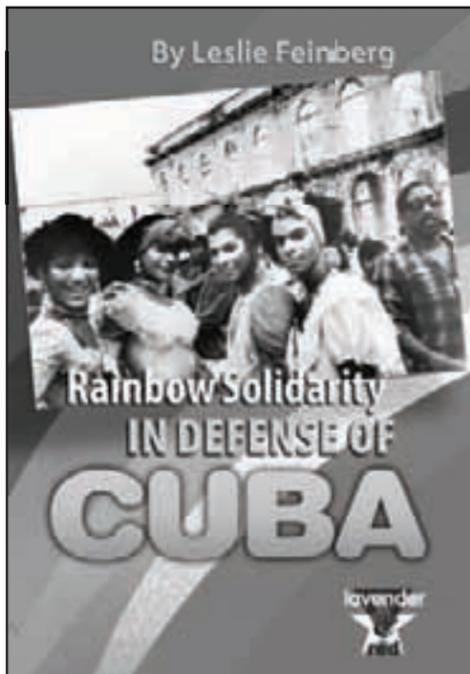
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is often there that a homosexual is first insulted or rejected.”

No Cuban of any sex has to marry in order to have economic support, a job, a home, health care or other rights that are guaranteed to every person. Castro Espín pointed out, though, that although homosexuals live within the law in consensual relationships: “gay marriage is not recognized, so you have many issues such as inheritance that aren’t fully resolved. We need changes in the family code itself related to these and other questions, including domestic violence. CENESEX has now presented two bills in Parliament before the education and children’s commissions that have to do with gender,” she noted in 2006, “and these have been well received.”

Unofficial same-sex marriages have taken place on the island. For example, four local young males ranging in ages from 17 to 22 held a double same-sex ceremony outdoors, in front of loved ones and neighbors, in the working-class suburb of San Miguel del Padrón, southeast of Havana, in 2001. (workingforchange.com, July 13, 2001, based on a report from the French Press Agency)

Castro Espín summed up, “By the 1970s, reforms to the penal code excluded the classification of homosexuals as criminals [because of their sexual orientation]; any word that discriminated against homosexuals was modified.

“However,” she stressed, “that is not enough because I think our laws should better reflect the respect that homosexuals deserve. Greater and more professional work is needed at the micro-social level, because what this is about is trying to change perceptions, modifying the social imagination.” (Alma Mater, journal of the University of Havana, CENESEX website: www.cenesex.sld.cu)

Next: CENESEX proposes groundbreaking transsexual rights.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-106 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

E-mail: lfeinberg@workers.org



PHILIPPINES

Labor leader released but harsh law passes

By Dianne Mathiowetz

Joyful celebrations were held in the Philippines and around the world on news of the release of Crispin Beltran, a legendary labor leader and member of the Philippines Parliament who had been charged on Feb. 25, 2006, with “rebellion” against the government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Known as Ka Bel to millions of Filipino workers and peasants, Beltran has a history of standing up for the rights and welfare of the poorest sectors of the population going back more than 50 years. He was imprisoned and tortured during the brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, headed the militant workers’ organization known as KMU (May 1st Movement), and in 2001 was elected to the Philippines Parliament.

As a representative of the Anakpawis (Toiling Masses) partylist, Ka Bel spoke

out forcefully against the fraudulent election of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, championed the rights of migrant workers forced to leave the Philippines by the extreme poverty epidemic throughout the country, and argued passionately for an increase in the minimum wage.

In 2006, Arroyo’s government was in severe crisis with increasing popular unrest over her policies of subservience to multinational corporate interests and U.S. military plans. Continuous charges of corruption, graft and electoral fraud made banner headlines in newspapers across the country. In addition, the level of police and paramilitary violence and repression against all forms of dissent during her term of office had reached unprecedented numbers, with hundreds of activists killed, “disappeared” or imprisoned.

The gigantic gap between rich and poor is evident to the eye as soaring luxurious hotels and condominiums tower over shantytowns made of cardboard boxes and scraps of metal. Row after row of cash crops such as pineapple line the rural roads while agricultural workers have little to eat. From the ranks of the Catholic Church to students to the urban poor, there has been great discontent with the Arroyo government.

In February 2006, as rumors spread of a coming military coup, she declared a “state of emergency” and ordered the arrest of Crispin Beltran and five other elected parliamentarians, plus other leaders of civil society, on the bogus charge of “rebellion” for organizing opposition to the state’s repressive policies.

After 16 months of legal motions and demonstrations, international petition drives, rallies and other types of support for Beltran and the others, the Philippines Supreme Court this July 10 rejected the government’s case and ordered Ka Bel’s release, declaring him and his compatriots innocent of the charges.

Despite international condemnation of the Arroyo government’s human rights record, on July 11 the U.S. Congress appropriated \$30 million for military aid to the Philippines for fighting “terrorism.” This is almost three times what the Bush administration had requested.

It is a clear indication that both big business parties in the U.S. share a common view on the strategic importance of a compliant political proxy in the Pacific. Declaring the Philippines the “second front on the war on terrorism,” the



PHOTO: WWW.ARKIBONGBAYAN.ORG
Crispin Beltran, known to the people as ‘Ka Bel.’

Pentagon already has brought thousands of U.S. troops to the Philippines to train Filipino soldiers.

U.S. forces have taken part in military operations against armed resistance movements on various islands of the Philippines, including Mindanao, where indigenous peoples and Moslem communities have remained unconquered since the early 1900s, when the U.S. first gained control of the country.

The millions appropriated by Congress will be used to bolster the firepower of the Filipino military and police, both of which have been accused of being involved in more than 860 extrajudicial killings of activists from every sector of Philippine society, from priests and archbishops to peasant and labor leaders. In addition, some 200 members of various opposition groups have been “disappeared” and another 200 imprisoned during the six and a half years of the Arroyo presidency.

Just days after having \$30 million more to spend on counterinsurgency weapons and training, the Philippines Parliament passed the Human Security Act, a measure similar to the USA Patriot Act, which expands the government’s ability to curtail dissent in the name of fighting “terrorism.”

The HSA defines “terrorism” in such broad language that almost any protest or campaign that “alarms” the population against a policy advocated by the government could be subject to the law’s jurisdiction.

Among its many dangerous and abusive provisions is one that allows anyone to be arrested and held for three days without being charged. Still another section provides for “extraordinary rendition,” the notorious policy of sending a prisoner to another country—particularly one that uses torture—to be interrogated.

Ka Bel, immediately upon his release from detention, appeared on the floor of the Parliament to denounce the Human Security Act. Refusing to be intimidated, the various movements in the Philippines have conducted protests and demonstrations in many cities and towns, demanding its repeal.

Mathiowetz was part of an International Action Center delegation that visited Crispin Beltran for several hours in December 2006 at a Manila hospital, where he received medical treatment while under police guard.



LGBTQ support for Palestine

“End the Siege of Gaza” was the theme of an evening rush-hour demonstration at a major intersection in San Francisco on July 20, organized by Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism (QUIT!). Holding signs and banners, the two dozen LGBT activists protested the inhumane embargo of Gaza in Palestine by the United States, European Union and Israel.

Because Israeli troops are preventing people and goods from crossing the borders of this densely populated strip of desert, Palestinians in Gaza have been denied the most basic necessities of life, like food and medical care. Going into its sixth week, the sealed border has trapped thousands trying to carry on daily life. As a measure of the chaos this has caused, the siege is already responsible for the deaths of at least 28 peo-

ple who had to wait hours to cross the border, unprotected in the hot sun.

Israel, which receives U.S. aid of \$14 million per day, is openly punishing the Palestinians for having elected a government led by the Islamic party Hamas.

Kate Raphael explained why LGBTQ people are standing against the U.S.-backed Israeli occupation of Palestine and siege of Gaza: “We’re here because we’re outraged at the human rights and humanitarian crisis the siege of Gaza has caused, which the media and U.S. government have ignored. As queer people, we know what it’s like to be ignored or misrepresented.”

Chaya G. added: “There are queer people in Palestine, Iraq and everywhere else, too. That’s why we’re here.”

—Report and photo by Joan Marquardt

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COLOMBIA

Uribe en atolladero por escándalo de la parapolítica

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

El presidente de Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez se encuentra en un atolladero por el escándalo de la parapolítica. Como Merlín, el mago en la corte real del Rey Arturo, él está intentando encontrar un sortilegio que pueda cambiar el espectáculo de esa cruel realidad. Su delirio está compartido por el Presidente de los EEUU George W. Bush, quien junto a sus socios cercanos, consistentemente defiende a Uribe.

Pero la realidad sigue arrastrando a Uribe más hacia el horrible atolladero producto de las estrechas relaciones de sus socios políticos más cercanos con los criminales paramilitares que han infligido tanto sufrimiento en el pueblo colombiano. Hasta ahora, más de una docena de políticos, incluso senadores y otros oficiales del gobierno, todos pertenecientes a partidos o grupos aliados a Uribe, están presos como resultado de estas conexiones. Y eso no es todo.

Según no solamente defensor@s de los derechos humanos sino también de los demás paramilitares, las investigaciones y las detenciones subsecuentes están aumentando y acercándose mucho al mismo Uribe. Y los testimonios de paramilitares “reinsertados” o “desmovilizados” sólo han comenzado a revelar la enmarañada red de crímenes, asesinatos y gran corrupción que involucra a las FFAA, la policía, oficiales gubernamentales de Colombia, al presidente y a varias corporaciones de los EEUU.

Un video revelador

Dan Kovalik, un abogado del sindicato Trabajadores Unidos de la Industria del Acero de los EEUU, (United Steel Workers), representa a los familiares de

tres empleados asesinados de Drummond, empresa minera estadounidense. Esta corporación actualmente está en medio de un proceso legal en la corte federal en Alabama por haber utilizado paramilitares en contra de sus empleados en Colombia. Durante sus esfuerzos investigativos para la demanda del USW contra Drummond, Kovalik encontró un video grabado el 31 de octubre de 2001, en Antioquia, departamento norteño de Colombia. En el video se ve a Uribe, entonces candidato a la presidencia, estrechando la mano de un jefe paramilitar muy conocido de esa zona, Frenio Sánchez Carreño, también conocido como Comandante Esteban. El vocero de Uribe negó una relación entre ellos diciendo que Uribe “no estaba consciente de que la persona era paramilitar o tenía conexiones con ellos”.

Kovalik respondió en un artículo publicado en el número del 15 de junio del periódico Nuevo Herald, basado en Miami, que “Es razonable suponer que Uribe debe haber sabido que se reunía con miembros de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC—paramilitares—incluso el Comandante Esteban, dada su alta notoriedad”.

Un artículo publicado en Semana.com de Colombia da credibilidad a la aseveración de Kovalik en el artículo en el Nuevo Herald, diciendo, “El periódico también afirma que durante ese período, el nombre del Comandante Esteban era muy conocido entre los sindicalistas de Barrancabermeja. Doce días antes de la reunión, Esteban firmó un mensaje de las AUC, denunciando a los sindicalistas de la región, algo que provocó una huelga de 24 horas por los trabajadores de ECOPETROL. Esta noticia tuvo repercusiones a nivel nacional”.

Socios de Uribe bajo investigación

Aunque Uribe niega la asociación con los paramilitares, hay un reporte del Departamento Secreto vinculando al actual Comandante General del Ejército Mario Montoya con los paramilitares de Medellín. En julio, la Corte Suprema de Justicia inició una investigación de tres congresistas más por la misma razón. Entre ellos estaba el primo hermano de Uribe, el Senador Mario Uribe. El vicepresidente de Uribe, Francisco Santos,

también está bajo sospecha por asociación con paramilitares, particularmente con Carlos Castaño.

Jorge Noguera, el ex director del Departamento de Seguridad (DAS) fue arrestado de nuevo el 6 de julio. Noguera, quien fuera nombrado a su puesto por Uribe, estuvo encarcelado en febrero pasado y acusado de haber permitido la infiltración de paramilitares en el DAS. También fue acusado de haber otorgado a los paramilitares una lista con nombres de sindicalistas, muchos de los cuales fueron asesinados subsecuentemente.

Noguera había estado en la cárcel por un mes cuando una juez decidió en marzo que su detención era ilegal debido a la falta técnica de que el fiscal en su caso era solo un “diputado” en vez de ser el fiscal general. Después de esta ridícula decisión, el fiscal emitió un nuevo mandato en el que decía que había evidencia que conectaba a Noguera con los paramilitares.

Estos “parapolíticos” como les llaman en Colombia, están ahora en el sistema de justicia. Sus testimonios podrían ofrecer más información sobre las alianzas paramilitares de otros, incluyendo a Uribe. Por esa razón, y para “proteger” a sus amigos parapolíticos, Uribe tendrá que ingeniarse alguna manera para ayudarlos a salir de ese atolladero.

A finales de mayo Uribe propuso una ley que ayudaría a los políticos que son socios de los “paras” pero que no hayan cometido ningún crimen “atroz” y confiesen la “verdad”. Ni sus adversarios ni los parapolíticos, quienes se opusieron a la parte de la propuesta que les impediría ocupar un puesto público, aceptaron esta propuesta de ley.

Las exoneraciones unilaterales de Uribe: ¿montaje, encubrimiento, o ambos?

A finales de mayo Uribe unilateralmente liberó a más de 100 presos que él identificó como miembros de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), el mayor enemigo de Uribe con quien él se ha negado a negociar. Las FARC niegan que todos fueran miembros activos de su organización.

Uribe también liberó a Rodrigo Granda, miembro de las FARC responsable de relaciones internacionales, para actuar como “negociador de paz”. Granda dijo que él toma órdenes sólo del secretariado de las FARC. Para que las negociaciones sobre el intercambio de prisioneros tengan éxito, los dos lados tienen que sentarse a plnearlas. Pero Uribe lo que estuvo haciendo fue un gesto teatral y en realidad no estuvo abierto al discurso. Granda eventualmente se fue a Cuba, nación que le había ofrecido asilo.

Algunos días más tarde, el 18 de junio, el gobierno colombiano emprendió una operación militar para rescatar a políticos que las FARC habían retenido. Once diputados de Cali murieron en el fuego cruzado. Uribe acusó a las FARC de matarlos.

Cambio humanitario

Con aprobación de los Estados Unidos, Uribe había llamado consistentemente a un rescate militar de los rehenes. Esta actitud ignora completamente la demanda de la mayoría del pueblo colombiano, incluyendo la mayoría de los parientes de los rehenes, quienes quieren ver un cambio humanitario negociado. Interpretando completamente mal la situación, Uribe llamó a manifestaciones el 5 de julio para “condenar el terrorismo”, que para él quiere decir condenar las FARC. Pero miles de personas salieron con consignas de “intercambio humanitario ahora”, y much@s culpularon al gobierno por las muertes de los once diputados, declarando como irresponsable a la administración de Uribe.

En una muestra descarada de crueldad para los parientes de las víctimas, oficiales del gobierno local en Cali criticaron a Carolina Charry, hija de una de las víctimas, cuando ella agradeció a los presentes en la manifestación, por su solidaridad y “por movilizarse para rechazar las políticas de gobierno que están manchadas con la sangre de mi amado padre. . . un presidente indolente se negó a escuchar cuando en todos los tonos le suplicaron declarar a Pradera y Florida Zona de Encuentro para el Acuerdo Humanitario”.

El verdadero terrorista

Los terroristas verdaderos, conocidos por millones de colombian@s, son los criminales paramilitares que están aliados con las fuerzas del gobierno y el imperialismo estadounidense. A través del Plan Colombia, las corporaciones estadounidenses con ayuda del Pentágono, conspiran para robar la riqueza y los recursos naturales del pueblo colombiano.

No nos olvidemos de las víctimas de los crímenes de los paramilitares: cerca de 5.000 miembr@s de la Unión Patriótica asesinad@s; 4 millones de gente desplazada; cientos de asesinatos ya confesados por sólo uno de los paramilitares; cientos de cuerpos siendo desenterrados de fosas comunes; más de 3.000 personas secuestradas; los 10.000 cuerpos que se espera sean encontrados en varias fosas comunes según el fiscal general.

“Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres” expone el carácter de Uribe. La estrecha compañía de los paramilitares criminales ha sido su gran problema. □

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