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 interest rates.

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PHILIPPINES: Repressive law passes despite protest

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

PHILIPPINES:

Repressive law passes despite protest

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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. The 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 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.

The fact that the U.S. and Britain are also capitalist countries. The profit motive still drives profit-driven system in the United States. The U.S. system still. Moore’s central figures are people who were heroes of 9/11—firefighters 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 $100 trillion 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 distribut- ing 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 for 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—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 of U.S. physical and psychological torture. The U.S. has proven nothing against them, except perhaps that she believes 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.
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, while others would 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 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 a Black doctor whom she had approached in the back by an anti-abortion protester in the parking lot of a Pensacola women’s clinic in 1994.

The first of several abortion providers murdered by the ultra right wing, Gunn dedicated his life to providing reproductive health care. He remained open since, including during the current OSA attacks. Emily Lyons still works at New Woman, as a registered nurse doing the 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 the week. Gunn’s clinic, standing their ground all day, every day in the boiling 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 support was present during the week included the ACLU of Alabama; Georgians for Choice; Equality Alabama, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights group; Feminist Outlaw, an artist activist group that does clinic defense; GIRE (Grupo de Informacion en Reproduccion 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, it was the law, or the priest, 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 in the back to her high school equivalency class near by; 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 the reproductive freedom generation. Even one-third were male-identified.

The right-wing forces spewed non-stop hate, including anti-Islam, anti-LGBT, and anti-women’s rights. Speakers also gender-baited abortion supporters, accusing them of not being “real” men or women.

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 capitalista 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 origin in 1973, the Court decided legal abortion, the court ruled against a specific abortion procedure, upholding a by 5-4 majority a 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 the impossible treatment outcome—no 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.

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 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 had told him that abortion was an acceptable choice for a woman. King had reasserted that abortion referral to a reputa- able doctor was part of his pastoral counsel- ing 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 sup- porters: “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 planta- tion slave owners and corporate steel mill owners was to foment racism in white workers to prevent them from uniting with Black workers, and also to segre- gate “by color.” It was a way of keeping women’s wages low and men vulnerable to inhumane job demands.

In this struggle, the struggle for repro- ductive justice can be seen as a related isolated fight for “women’s rights” against religious fanatics.

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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 con- tribute to the potential for increased strength in the working-class struggle.

The Alabama Development Center in 2006 was named the top state economic development agency in the U.S. for attract- ing new capital investment, with 608 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 auto- mobile 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 techno- logically advanced in the world. A second plant is in the works.

In April, the U.S. Steel subsidiary National Steel Car of Canada announced it was locating a huge rail car factory in northern Alabama, 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 RVias, 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 workers for poor women with universal health care for all. That combination compared to the war in Iraq with reallocation of funds to assist Katrina and Rita survivors. She said of all the struggles, “We’re not going to 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 the unions reassert the traditional handshake, the bosses have made it clear that they are looking at the bargaining table as a duopoly block. On their agenda is nothing less than a thoroughly restructuring of the auto industry, following the devastating pattern of steel.

News reports leading up to this point describe a multipronged attack targeting everything auto workers 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—will be coming to an end. 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 cutsback, repeat-
ed over the past month on a daily basis, is the difference in hourly labor costs between Big Three and U.S. plants. This cost differential is due to the fact that the U.S. and Japanese automakers have invested heavily in the lucrative mortgage lender with investment banking operations. 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 pro-

claimed that “We are no longer a business as usual.” It reported aggres-
sively toughened up UAW President Ron Gettelfinger’s tough stance at the bargaining table.

Behind the propaganda and distort-
ed figures is the built-in drive of capi-
tal, 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 driv-
ing the restructuring. If the competition from Asia could be eliminated, cutthroat competition between the Big Three would become exacerbated and the house would still be telling the workers that pay and benefits 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 unorga-
nized sector. What would stop Toyota, Honda and Nissan from compelling their nonunion workforce to take a pay cut? What if 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 work-

force to the absolute bare minimum num-
ber needed to maintain production. They want to eliminate work rules that protect jobs. Through automation technology they want to maximize exploitation. Creditors and the 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.

**Mortgage crisis: Millions can’t pay, risk losing homes**

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est rates for the remaining 28 years of the mortgage.

Prime rate mortgage holders don’t have the exploring interest rates to contend with, but the continuing downward spiral in home equity prices has clearly begun to affect their ability to pay their mortgages.

Many industrial workers were induced to take out subprime mortgages on the housing bubble of 2000-2006, often by the lure of ready cash. For many workers with large medical, credit card and other bills, these subprime mortgages were a relative blessing and many elsewhere, especially in the case of auto workers, they are facing the double whammy of a rapid-

ly rising rate of repossession hearings 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 the credit market bubble that populated the popula-
tion 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. A major revision in ratings for investments could provide 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 lender, has declared the relationship with Countrywide. It has provided the mortgage lender with investment banking and many other financial services. In fact, some of its partners sit on the board of directors of Countrywide.

How deep its losses go remains to be seen. Assuming Countrywide’s second-quad-
ter 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 mortgage market funds, which have invested heavily in the lucrative but risky real estate market, thus putting many retiree 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 $2 billion of debt attached to the car-making operations.”

The housing bubble has burst. Now the houses of cards created by the Wall Street robber barons in their mad rush for profits are also in danger of collapsing.
Steam blast kills one, injures 30

By Brenda Ryan
New York

When a large steam pipe exploded in crowded midtown Manhattan on July 18, billions of dollars worth of property damage and 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 43rd Street and Lexington Avenue. A truck in the intersection was thrown into the air and then crashed into the hole.

The driver of the track, a 23-year-old African-American man, was blasted with a 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 businesses 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, the area was covered with debris from the blast. A shower of flying rocks, mud and water.

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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 conditions for Black and working people, particularly with regard to Black youth, fighting police brutality and exposing 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 Lebanese President Hafez al-Assad 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 McGee is $50,000 bail was posted, however, he was immediately taken from the Milwaukee County jail into federal custody and moved to Dodge County, dozen miles from Milwaukee.

At the time he was placed into federal custody McGee was charged with nine fed- eral 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 constitu- ents and only a minimal amount of visita- tion 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 several 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 state charges and 155 years on the federal charges.

“We want to see him free!”

Besides protesting the state and fed- eral 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 com- pared 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 his right to wear clothing of his choice to court. Instead, he’s been brought to court chained and in jail clothes.

Almost at the same time, McGee called for an investigation of all local, state and federal agencies involved in arresting, charging, incarcerating and prosecuting McGee.

“We want to see him free”


**Harlem fights to keep its identity**

In Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem's drummers

By Bryan G. Pfeifer

Milwaukee

On Saturday, July 7, in Marcus Garvey Park, the Harlem Arts Alliance and the Million Man March brought together Black community leaders, activists and drummers with complaints from residents of a condo on Fifth Avenue, bordering the park. The drummers could not allow the 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—more than 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 have come together at that spot every Saturday from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. to play their instruments.

On this Saturday, the communal pow- er 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 celebrated 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 apartheid methods persists. A call then went out throughout the U.S. and responses came back from drum circles, performers and many who remem- bered this park’s commitment to the future, all offered some kind of help or expressed outrage.

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 our people. The event at Marcus Garvey Park—organ- izing were Loretta Abbott, an original mem- ber of the Harlem Arts Alliance, 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 amenities, such as a space of their own and a plaque where they previously played.

If a drum in 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 have forgotten that they also gave this spot to the Rasta community. Physically, the competition with the amplified stage sound is another issue, 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, “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 beachside communities on Long Island, the Hamptons, to refer, rich, elite beachside communities on Long Island.

The struggle will not end here by accom- modating and integrating. The people of color understand very well what needs to be protected. The struggle will not end here by accommodating and integrating. The people of color understand very well what needs to be protected. The struggle will not end here by accommodating and integrating. The people of color understand very well what needs to be protected. The struggle will not end here by accommodating and integrating. The people of color understand very well what needs to be protected.
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 calling for a “Unity Coalition” of all 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 calling for a “Unity Coalition” of all anti-war organizers and from the pro-impeachment movement. The group After Downing Street initiated the national day of action.

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 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 completed ... Moreover, imperialism is an immense accumulation of money capital in a few countries...."
**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 Farabundo 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 1980-92.

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 unionized bus drivers who added to the attack. The Salvadoran government’s ARENA government attacked the peaceful demonstration, woundering 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 tortured by local water service, 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 massacre 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 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 33.9 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 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 by 58.3 percent, and the neediest 20 percent “had their share cut to 2.4 percent.

**Resisting privatization and repression**

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

In 1999, the government nationalized ANTEL, the state-owned telephone company, which led to the layoff of 5,000 workers. They were victimized by the mass arrests and the dissolution of ANTEL, the workers’ union. Phone rates soared, but ASTEL, which had joined 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 call for the Legalisation of the FMLN and a list of reforms of the Penal Code designed to increase the penalties against what they called “public disorder.”

The same day, July 2, 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 be 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.

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**History has absolved Cuba**

By Caleb T. Maupin

“What heart is not set aflame by the promise of freedom?” Fidel Castro asked a kargaroo court of the U.S.-hacked 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 correspond- dent, 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, litera-
y and employment, Cuba stands far ahead of any nation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some are skeptical of such claims, but they 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 terror- ist invasion attempts 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 govern ment 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 coun tries. 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 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 agribusi ness, much of it in the hands of U.S. cor porations. In the words of Che Guevara, it was an anti-imperialist revolution that grew into a socialist revolution” as the revolu tionaries, in order to keep their promises to the people of a better life, began to lib erate the offices and factories as well.

The means of production—the facto ries, 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 on fire, as if 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.
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 its efforts to conquer Iraq or even poverty-stricken Afghanistan, yet reluctant to deploy its own frustrated 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 Minahash, Pakistan, on July 25 reported that "Several thousand villagers fled a Pakistani tribal region on Wednesday, where an army offensive against Taliban insurgents gathering pressure on Pakistan from the United States to act against al Qaeda cells."

With American pressure, the U.S. military and the U.S.-shaking 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 appearances, 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 Pakistani Army on July 10 on orders from Washington, causing hundreds of casualties—but also 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 demonstrations 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 onto the "terrorist list." The United States is "very concerned," according to White House press secretary Tony Snow, about Musharraf's "attitude towards the Taliban and al Qaeda terrorist groups in the northwest of Pakistan."

Pakistan is among the top suppliers of oil to the U.S. Algeria, Angola and Gabon are the three largest, with Nigeria being the fourth. The U.S. companies operate in sub-Saharan Africa surpassed 4 million barrels a day in 2000—more than Iran, Venezuela or Mexico. (Christian Science Monitor, May 25, 2004)

The National Intelligence Council says oil exports from the Gulf of Guinea will reach 19 percent of total U.S. imports by 2015. Congress has budgeted $500 million over six years to the European Command, which will handle 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 150 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.

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 economic growth in Africa."

Many of the U.S. Earl Rumsfeld who drew up the initial plan for AFRICOM were protesting massive poverty in Pakistan, the opposition to Musharraf presented a white paper to Bush urging greater extraction of oil and money into a war for global dominance. The National Intelligence Council says that even Bush admits is "endless."

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 oil, from the oil industry does not create jobs for local people, and pollution has ruined their subsistence farming and fishing. This country of 150 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.

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AFRICOM will pave the way for more such destruction.
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 torture prisoners. It’s done that way on sexual rights

Cuba’s CENESEX led
the way on sexual rights

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—that 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. It can cause damage for those who have sex with men as well as heterosexual couples, whenever a relationship defines that one partner has hegemonic rights over the other.”

“So you need to combine both an epidemiological and a gender approach to these two intimate issues. This is why, for example, our posters have a message on male circumcision. 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—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 aware now than 10 years ago to understand and respect another sexual orientation. I think the work that’s been done over the decade in the homophile field in Cuba’s National Center for Sex Education has helped to bring about that change, and we’ve done it reaching out to people’s sensitivity as human beings.

“In essence, there’s no use 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 to legitimize same-sex relations 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 has also criticized Cuba’s education system for failing to protect, but “when something like that is made explicit, it’s 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

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Continued on the next page
is often there that a homosexual is first involved 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 communal relationships: “gay marriage is not recog-
nized, so you have many issues such as inheritance that aren’t fully resolved. We need changes in the family code itself relat-
ted to these and other questions, including domestic violence. CENEXE has now pre-

tented 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 marriage has tak-

en 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 neigh-


bors, in the working-class suburb of San Miguel del Padréon, southeast of Havana, in 2001. (workingforchange.com, July 13, 2001, based on a report from the French


Press Agency)

Casta Espín assumed up. “By the 1970s, reforms to the penal code excluded the clas-

cification of homosexuals as criminals [because of their sexual orientation]; any word that discriminated against homo-


sexuals 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. CENEXE website: www.cenexes.xld.eu)

Next: CENEXE proposes ground-


breaking transsexual raids.

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


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. 23, 2006, with “rebel-


lic” against the government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Known as Ka Bel to millions of Filipino workers and peasants, Beltran has a histo-


ry 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 bru-


tal 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 elec-


tion of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, champi-


oned 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 corrupt, 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 homes 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 lit-

tle to eat. From the ranks of the Catholic Church to students to the urban poor, there was 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 lead-


ers of civil society, on the bogus charge of “rebelleny” 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 com-


mon view on the strategic importance of a compliant political proxy in the Pacific. Declaring the Philippines the “sec-


ond front on the war on terrorism,” the

Pentagon already has brought thousands of U.S. troops to the Philippines to train Filipino soldiers. U.S. forces have taken part in mili-


tary operations against armed resistance movements on various islands of the Philippines, including Mindanao, where indigenous peoples and Moslem commu-


nities have remained unconquered since the early 1900s, when the U.S. first gained control of the country.

The Philippines, portrayed 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 opposi-


tion 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 mea-


sure 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 popula-


tion 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 pro-


vides 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 demonstra-


tions in many cities and towns, demand-


ing its repeal.

Mathiowetz was part of an Inter-


national 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.
El presidente de Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez se encuentra en un atolladero por el escándalo de la parapolítica. Como Merkel, 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. Eso no es todo.

Según no solamente defensor@s de los derechos humanos sino también de los demás paramilitares, las investigaciones y las detenciones subsiguientes están aumentando y acercándose mucho al mismo Uribe, y los testimonios de paramilitares “reinsertados” o “desmovilizados” sólo han comenzado a revelar la enredad real de crímenes, esquemas 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 es 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 2005, 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, de Colombia da credibilidad a la aseveración de Kovalik en el artículo en el periódico Nuevo Herald, diciendo: “El periódico también afirma que durante ese periodo, el nombre del Comandante Esteban era muy conocido entre los sindicalistas de Barranquilla. Veinticuatro 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 a los paramilitares de Medellín. En julio, la Corte Suprema de Justicia inició una investigación sobre tres congresistas más por la misma razón. Entre ellos estaba el primer hermano de Uribe, el abogado 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 jueza 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 llamaban 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 confesado “verdad”. Ni sus adversarios ni los paramilitares, quienes se opusieron a la parte de la propuesta que les impedía ocupar un puesto público, aceptaron esta propuesta de ley.

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

A finales de mayo Uribe unilateralmente liberó a más de los 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 negaron 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 aceptó las armas sólo del secretariado de las FARC. Para que las negociaciones sobre el intercambio de prisioneros tengan éxito, los dos lados tienen que sentarse a pliendarlas. Pero Uribe lo que estuvo haciendo fue un gesto teatral y en realidad no estuvo abierto al diálogo. 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.

Change 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 un mega “acuerdo de paz” el 5 de julio para “condenar el terrorismo”, que para él quiere decir condenar a las FARC. Pero miles de personas salieron con consignas de “intercambio humanitario ahora”, y muchos culparon al gobierno por las muertes de los once diputados, declarando como irresponsable a la administración de Uribe.

En una muestra descarada de crudicia para los parientes de las víctimas, oficial 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 presidencial indidente se negó a escuchar cuando en todos los tonos le suplicaron a declarar a Pradera y Florida Zona de Encuentro para el Acuerdo Humanitario”.

El verdadero terrorista

Los terroristas verdaderos, conocidos por millones de colombianos/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, consiguen 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 miembros/s de la Unión Patriótica asesinados, 4 millones de gente desplazada; cientos de asesinatos ya confesados por solo 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.