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ANTI-DEATH PENALTY VICTORY

Kenneth Foster's life spared 2

Int'l tribunal on Katrina & Rita: We charge genocide

By Monica Moorehead
New Orleans

Aug. 29 marked the second anniversary of when Hurricane Katrina began its reign of devastation along the Gulf Coast, especially Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Before many Gulf Coast residents could recover from Katrina, Hurricane Rita quickly followed, deepening the mass destruction and the suffering.

Fast forward to Aug. 29, 2007—while George W. Bush and Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were in New Orleans taking their photo-ops, two significant events were taking place in other parts of this city. One was a march in the morning of about 1,000 people from the Industrial Canal—site of the broken levee in the lower 9th Ward—to Congo Square. The other was the opening session of the International Tribunal on Katrina and Rita, which was virtually boycotted by the national mainstream media.

The tribunal, initiated by the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), was supported by many national and international organizations, and was attended by hundreds of survivors of both hurricanes along with political and community activists from around the country and the world.

The main purpose of this people's tribunal was to expose to the world a multitude of crimes against humanity amounting to genocide carried out by the U.S. government on a local, statewide and federal level against the survivors, then and now. The tribunal ended on Sept. 2.

It has already been documented that it wasn't the rains and wind caused by Hurricane Katrina that destroyed 80 percent of New Orleans; it was the flooding from the broken levees, especially in the largely African-American and poor lower 9th Ward, that resulted in the highest numbers of deaths, unimaginable repression and massive forced displacement.

Two years later, while billions of dollars have rapidly been directed to restoring the economy of New Orleans—notably the industries related to tourism—the lower 9th Ward still resembles a weed-infested ghost town, as thousands of residents struggle to rebuild and to return home.

The goals of the tribunal were to fully expose the human rights abuses committed by the U.S. government and its agencies and operatives in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; to attain national and international recognition as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) for all the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; to attain comprehensive reparations for all Gulf Coast IDPs (including migrant workers and communities); to strengthen the Gulf Coast Reconstruction Movement and build a broad national and international movement in support of its aims and demands; and to hold the rogue U.S. government accountable for its human rights abuses and crimes against Gulf Coast IDPs.

On July 16, Bush, along with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, were sent letters by the tribunal's prosecu-

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Audience at Aug. 29 opening session of International Tribunal on Katrina and Rita. Wearing black cap is Million Worker March Movement leader Clarence Thomas.

WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD



Protests against death of trans immigrant

Los Angeles vigil on Aug. 27 brought together family of Victoria Arellano and groups that fight for immigrant rights, AIDS care, and trans, lesbian, gay and bisexual rights. Arellano, who died after reported medical neglect during two months of immigration detention, was supported by fellow prisoners who protested to demand she receive care. The sign reads, "Stop transgender discrimination." A vigil and protest were also held in Tucson, Ariz. See articles on page 5

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Historic victory

Kenneth Foster wins last minute clemency

By Gloria Rubac

Just six hours before his Aug. 20 execution was to take place, Texas death row activist Kenneth Foster Jr. won a major victory. Texas Gov. Rick Perry followed the recommendation of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and granted Foster clemency.

This happens so rarely in Texas that Foster's family and supporters were stunned when they received the news. Then smiles, tears of joy, cheers and shouts of victory filled the air—in Huntsville and around the world.

Family, friends and activists were gathering in Huntsville for the 6:00 p.m. execution and Foster's immediate family were finishing their last visit when, minutes after noon, Perry released his decision.

Foster's father, Kenneth Foster Sr., got to give his son the news. Then Tasha—Kenneth Foster's spouse—was allowed to give him a kiss through the wire mesh in the visiting area.

Foster was convicted under Texas' law of parties, which allows the death penalty to be given to accomplices in murder cases. He was sentenced to death in 1997.

But Foster was not an accomplice. Mauriceo Brown, a passenger in Foster's car, shot and killed Michael LaHood Jr. in 1996. Foster was more than 80 feet away at the time, in his car with the windows up and the radio blaring.

'What you all did mattered!'

After news of the decision, family and supporters gathered outside the governor's mansion in Austin for a rally and celebration.

Foster's attorney Keith Hampton, who had filed numerous appeals, thanked the grassroots movement that started in Austin and spread around the world for putting the necessary pressure on the board and the governor.

Hampton particularly thanked Foster's supporters from overseas. "If you're German, Australian, English, French or Italian, you had an impact that is larger than just Kenneth's case. Texans, particularly policymakers, generally don't care about what anybody outside of Texas thinks. I think this well-entrenched attitude has changed. I can personally tell you that decision makers were visibly shaken when I told them, 'Here are thousands of signatures from Germany'; when I casually mentioned, 'The Italians are lighting up the Coliseum'; when I pointed out the French deputy minister's letter alongside Desmond Tutu's and Jimmy Carter's; and when I hand-delivered beautifully handwritten letters from all over the UK. What you did mattered."

Bryan McCann, a leader of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty and a pen pal of Foster's, said: "This was a political victory. ... There is no understating the historical significance of what we won. ... While the death penalty is on the defensive across the nation, Texas continued to be the trend's exception. However, we made a dent in the Lone Star State's armor with the Kenneth Foster case."

McCann had visited Foster just a week before the scheduled execution.

The Save Kenneth Foster Campaign began last May after Foster received an execution date. Activists in Austin with the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, the Texas Moratorium Network and Students Against the Death Penalty joined with Foster's family and friends a little over an hour away in San Antonio to begin the fight.

Over the summer, there were meetings, rallies, marches, concerts, petition drives and forums. Foster's family and supporters did interview after interview. Slowly, the tide began to turn. Major newspapers around the state were editorializing to stop the execution. Texas legislators contacted the governor.

After the media began to examine Foster's case, even some death penalty supporters decided a person like Foster, who was merely in the car nearby, should not be executed.

Foster's case impacted people living all over the world, not just in Texas.

Perry's office had received correspondence from more than 11,000 people worldwide opposing Foster's execution, said Katherine Cesinger, a spokesperson for Perry, in an e-mail. The office received correspondence from only 11 people supporting his execution.

Claire Dube broke into tears when she heard the good news. She and Foster became close friends while attending John Marshall High School in San Antonio together and have known each other 15 years. Dube began writing Foster when she found out he was on death row and has been active in his defense work for several years.

"Wow, three days later, and I am still in shock and at a loss for words. I am exhilarated that Kenneth is alive! We won! We did it!" Dube told Workers World.

She added, "Everyone here and from around the world deserves a great big hug and a pat on the back for their efforts and part in saving his life. I am so thankful to everyone that came together and made the impossible possible here in Texas! There are no words that can express what I feel and how much my heart goes out to each and every activist. Kenneth means so much to his family, his friends and his supporters."

The day after the stay was issued, Foster's spouse, father and grandfather issued the following statement:

"We are ecstatic, overwhelmed and full of smiles! Finally the death row nightmare is over, no more seeing him from behind glass—soon we will be able to hug him. Nydesha [Foster's daughter] will be able to hug him. Without all the hard work from all of you—it would have not been possible. You guys worked around the clock, made the calls, wrote the letters, marched with us, signed petitions, helped us organize, contacted the media and made this cross bearable for us."

Foster has been moved from death row to a diagnostic unit for processing and will be assigned to another prison unit soon. Workers World newspaper will report on his new address as soon as it is known. Check www.freekeneth.com for updates. □



WW PHOTO: GLORIA RUBAC
"He encourages me," said 11-year-old Nydesha Foster in a radio interview. "That's what keeps me strong. ... I would probably not be able to do anything, because I'd be so sad and stressed out. ... And even though he is a father behind glass, he does a lot of stuff for me."

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Vol. 49, No. 35 • Sept. 13, 2007
Closing date: Sept. 5, 2007

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

A headline digest is available via e-mail subscription. Subscription information is at www.workers.org/email.php.

Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Workers World, 55 W. 17 St., 5th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10011.

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Coalition organizes to 'Restore Justice in Michigan'

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

"Restore Justice in Michigan" is the theme of a demonstration set for Sept. 10 in Detroit. Called by a coalition of civil rights and progressive legal organizations, it will express support for Judge Deborah Thomas, an African-American judge in Wayne County Circuit Court who is under unprecedented attack by Wayne County Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly, acting on behalf of the reactionary Michigan Supreme Court.

The attack began in 2004, when Judge Thomas challenged the lack of African-American representation on Wayne County juries. After a jury panel that appeared in front of her contained only one African American out of 30 individuals, she ordered an investigation. The results showed that African Americans made up only 27 percent of jury panels in Wayne County Circuit Court, while the county's population is 42 percent African-American. A further study by the National Center for State Courts found systematic exclusion of Blacks, including permanent removal from the eligible list of anyone who fails to return a jury questionnaire, a factor that tended to impact poor people most.

The vast majority of those tried in Wayne County Circuit Court are from Detroit, which has an 85 percent African-American population. Up until 10 years ago, Detroit had its own felony criminal court, the Detroit Records Court. Jury pools were based on panels selected from Detroit residents. As a result, Detroit was one of the few cities where African Americans facing felony charges had juries of their peers. However, in a racist maneuver the court was abolished by the Michigan state legislature and merged into Wayne County Circuit Court.

After Judge Thomas accepted a motion to challenge jury composition and ordered the studies noted above, Chief Judge Kelly ordered that Judge Thomas could no longer hear motions dealing with jury composition.

Recently Chief Judge Kelly ordered that Judge Thomas could no longer hear pre-trial motions. This is supposedly because Judge Thomas's docket is backed up. In fact, because prosecutors see her as being not totally pro-police and anti-defendant, they ask for jury trials in her cases and refuse bench trials. This slows down the processing of cases. Judge Thomas also faces judicial tenure commission sanctions before the all-white conservative commission, on charges that too many of her rul-

ings are anti-police and anti-prosecution.

In response to these attacks, the Coalition to Restore Justice in Michigan formed to defend her and fight the further erosion of justice in Michigan. The first meeting was called by Detroit City Councilmember Joanne Watson and attended by about 50 individuals representing organizations such as the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the National Political Congress of Black Woman, Women Empowered, National Action Network, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, National Lawyers Guild, Detroit Association of Black Organizations, Wayne County Criminal Defense Bar Association, Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI) and AFSCME Council 25. A demonstration at the Judicial Tenure Commission is planned for Sept. 10 at 11 a.m., followed by a hearing in the City Council chambers at noon.

The demonstration will also protest the total erosion of justice for poor and working people in Michigan. At the meeting people discussed how this attack is not limited to the criminal courts. They pointed out that the Michigan Supreme Court is dominated by members of the Federalist Society, an ultra-reactionary pro-business and pro-cop organization. As a result, the Michigan Supreme Court has become the most right-wing in the country.

Attorneys working in juvenile court noted how juvenile defenders from small firms with ties to the community have been eliminated. As a result, juvenile criminal defense is being contracted out to large silk-stocking firms, separate from the community and out of touch with the problems of the city's youth. Chief Judge Kelly is also privatizing the Friend of the Court division, eliminating union jobs as a result.

Civil justice is being systematically denied to poor and working people. Michigan Supreme Court decisions have made employment discrimination suits virtually impossible. Slip-and-fall cases, automobile negligence and suits for police chases have all been essentially eliminated or saddled with onerous conditions. The Supreme Court has enforced a one-year statute of limitation for disputes by parents of infants with automobile insurance companies; traditionally these cases were held in abeyance until the child reached adulthood to see what medical conditions had developed. Damage caps have limited the bringing of medical negligence cases and done away with products liability.

At a recent meeting hosted by the

Committee for Corrections and Judicial Reform of MECAWI, Judge Thomas gave further insight into the erosion of constitutional rights in Michigan and in Wayne County Circuit Court particularly. Along with the lack of juries of one's peers, the constitutional right to habeas corpus—the doctrine under which defendants must be brought in front of a court to be charged within a short time after being detained—is being eroded.

Under the Michigan Constitution and state law, any judge can and must sign a writ of habeas corpus. However, Chief Judge Kelly has enacted a policy where only one judge per week signs habeas corpus writs. As a result, the rule whereby all defendants must be brought to arraignment within 72 hours of being jailed is being eliminated.

Judge Thomas noted that while formerly it was up to the criminal defendant or civil plaintiff to decide whether to waive their right to a jury trial, in Michigan the courts now allow the prosecution (and defendants in civil cases) to demand jury trials as well. That is what has led to the so-called backup in her court, where the prosecution always demands a jury trial rather than trying a case in front of a fair African-American woman judge who won't automatically side with the cops.

Judge Thomas criticized a rule that penalizes impoverished defendants by mandating that all trials must be held

within 91 days. Attorneys for the poor are forced to hold back spending on a case until it's going to trial due to scarce resources. As a result, they can't produce the needed evidence within the short time frame. Thomas noted that lawyers appointed to represent indigent defendants in Wayne County Circuit Court are among the lowest-paid in the country.

Judge Thomas also explained that in recent years a bill was passed excluding anyone who ever had a felony conviction from serving on a jury. This is yet another factor in diminishing African-American participation, since Blacks are disproportionately jailed in this racist society.

At the coalition organizing meeting, Jerry Goldberg, a local progressive attorney and activist with MECAWI, noted that almost 40 years ago it was mass demonstrations led by the Black Liberation Movement that first won the right to representative juries in the Detroit Records Court. When Judge George Crockett released members of the Republic of New Africa who were rounded up and held without charges after a shootout with police in the late 1960s, it was mass protest that defended Judge Crockett against a recall campaign, and with it the right to habeas corpus.

The Coalition to Restore Justice in Michigan has the potential to revive this kind of civil rights movement. For more information call 313-393-6005. □

DANFORR honored at Women's Equality Day event

By Workers World Detroit bureau

Detroit National Organization for Women held its annual commemoration of Women's Equality Day on Aug. 26 at an event on Detroit's waterfront, honoring four women as "Feminists of the Year." The awards were presented to the Hon. Alma Wheeler Smith, an African-American state representative; Polly Howe of the Michigan Pay Equity Network; women's rights activist Diane Russell of Macomb County NOW; and Kalimah Johnson, an African-American lesbian performance poet who devotes most of her creative efforts toward uplifting and empowering women who are survivors of rape, incest, domestic violence and discrimination. The program was chaired by Detroit NOW president Jacqueline Steingold.



Shalece Daniels at June 30, 2006 DANFORR action.
WWPHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

Special Recognition Awards were presented to Marisol Ybarra, NOW activist and former leader of Wayne State University's Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance and Students for Choice, and to the Detroit Action Network For Reproductive Rights.

Organizers Shalece Daniels and Kris Hamel accepted the award for "outstanding contributions to the feminist community" on behalf of DANFORR. Daniels told the audience, "We need to get more young women involved in the struggle to save and advance our rights. That's part of what we're all about." Hamel noted DANFORR's friendship and alliance with Detroit NOW and encouraged everyone to continue to work together for reproductive freedom and equal rights. □

Battle continues to rage

Same-sex marriage rights won for an instant in Iowa

By Caleb T. Maupin

The firmly established order represented by both the Republic and Democratic parties which says that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people should not enjoy the same rights as others, was cracked for a brief moment in Iowa on Sept. 29.

A judge in Polk County declared same-sex marriage legal, overruling the reactionary law which the state legislature had passed, euphemistically called "in defense of marriage."

As soon as the announcement was made, LGBT people began to pour into

the county to receive marriage licenses.

Normally those licenses require a waiting period of three business days before the marriage can be performed. But Sean Fritz and Tim McQuillan, students at the University of Iowa, didn't wait. They found a loophole in which a couple can avoid the waiting period with permission from a judge.

District Judge Scott Rosenberg made it possible for the couple to become spouses

in the complete legal sense. When asked if he was making a political statement by signing for the speedy matrimony, Judge Rosenberg told the Des Moines Register: "I think had I not signed it, that would be a political statement. If I'm going to grant it for couples that are male and female, then why all the sudden should I change because a couple is the same sex?"

But the powers that be soon stepped in. After 21 licenses were signed, the ruling was put on hold; more couples were turned away.

Gregory Mathis and his partner didn't make it to Polk County quickly enough.

Mathis told the Cedar Rapid Gazette: "It's very disappointing, but I guess it's not new. In the 1970s I didn't get custody of my child because I'm gay. In the 1980s I was excommunicated from my church because I'm gay. I've had a lot of walls thrown up at me because I'm gay, this is just one more."

It is the movement in the streets that has won the LGBT progress that has been made, and it is in the streets that an end to state discrimination against same-sex couples will be won. □



www.workers.org/lavender-red/



WW PHOTO: SUE KELLY

Smithfield workers demand justice

By Sue Kelly

On Aug. 29, 150 workers at the Smithfield Foods pork processing plant in Tar Heel, N.C., and their family members traveled to Williamsburg, Va., to confront the stockholders of the corporation. The workers were joined by hundreds of supporters from New York, Virginia, Philadelphia, Richmond, Maryland, South Carolina and elsewhere, swelling the loud, passionate and diverse crowd to more than a thousand.

Almost everyone in the crowd wore a bright yellow "Justice/Justicia for Smithfield" shirt. Chants like "What's disgusting? Union busting!" and "What's outrageous? Sweatshop wages!" rang out along the march route.

The demonstration was the largest ever seen in Williamsburg, a tourist site built by the Rockefellers and often the site of international and national meetings of ruling class "dignitaries." This time it was the shareholders, the "owners" of Smithfield Foods—the large pork processing company that has been fighting the workers' right to form a union. The plant in Tar Heel is the world's largest hog processing plant, and the work there is difficult and dangerous.

Injuries have jumped 200 percent since 2003, due largely to speeded up lines and inadequate training. Poverty wages, brutal working conditions and crippling injuries are faced by the more than 5,000 workers at the Tar Heel plant, who are overwhelmingly African American and Latin@.

Cited by Human Rights Watch for violations of

international human rights standards, the company has tried to create an atmosphere of intimidation and violence for workers who want a union voice on the job. In a classic tactic of the ruling class everywhere, the company has attempted to suppress workers' efforts to fight back and organize by trying to foster racial tensions among the workers. Smithfield workers at the Tar Heel plant say no!

The rally and march began with an interdenominational faith service; First Baptist Church was packed. Afterwards, the group, stretching as far as the eye could see in any direction, marched to the site of the stockholders meeting. Although the local cops kept most of the demonstrators from getting near the meeting, a small contingent of workers, union and community leaders were allowed to speak to the shareholders inside the meeting. The contingent presented the stockholders with petitions signed by thousands of Tar Heel workers, representing a strong majority of the workers at the plant.

Press reports after the event said Smithfield bosses agreed to enter talks with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. The rally ended with workers making clear their commitment to see this struggle through—chants of "We will be back!" filled the air.

What can we do? Many store brands are actually made by Smithfield. Find out where the bacon you buy is made and if it's from Smithfield foods, ask your local store not to carry it. Visit the Justice for Smithfield Web site at www.smithfieldjustice.com or email smithfield@ufcw.org. □

UAW negotiations

Rank-and-file activists challenge 'prescription for disaster'

By Martha Grevatt
Cleveland

The union contracts between the United Auto Workers and Ford, General Motors and Chrysler will expire on Sept. 14. Negotiations continued through Labor Day weekend. The Aug. 31 Detroit News reported that the pace of negotiations is accelerating. As of this writing next to nothing has been conveyed from the national UAW leaders to the rank-and-file.

There is a high level of anxiety among workers in the plants, with all kinds of rumors floating and questions being asked. "Will we take a pay cut and how much? Will we lose '30 and out'—the right to retire with full benefits after 30 years regardless of age? Are we better off retiring under the current contract? Will the companies sell off the remaining parts divisions?"

UAW Vice President Cap Rapson said on Sept. 2, "I can tell you one thing, we are determined not to put any more costs on retirees for their health care." Speaking in Flint, Mich., Rapson couldn't easily peddle concessions to an audience that included the last surviving participants in the Great Sit-Down Strike of 70 years ago. They and all UAW retirees

are hoping Rapson's words are true, because Ford and GM retirees are—for the first time since health benefits were negotiated—paying close to \$800 out of pocket for health insurance.

The bigger question concerning health care is whether the UAW will agree to Big Three bosses' demands to establish a Voluntary Employee Benefit Association—VEBA. The companies want the UAW to assume complete responsibility, via the VEBA, for its members' health coverage in exchange for a one-time cash contribution. This would be a huge bonanza for the automakers, who are tens of billions of dollars in debt for employee and retiree health care costs.

The rank-and-file-based Soldiers of Solidarity explains in a leaflet:

"Vandalize Employee Benefits Again? VEBA is a plan for the company to walk away from retiree health care commitments, and shift all the risk to you. VEBA lets the companies off the hook, and puts the UAW in the divisive position of taking responsibility for and limiting benefits. VEBA permits the company to put in less than the real cost of health care. Increasing out-of-pocket expenses for retirees will make up the difference. However

Continued on page 10

ON THE PICKET LINE

By Sue Davis

Court order halts 'no-match'

After the AFL-CIO, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Immigration Law Center and three San Francisco labor groups sued the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Social Security Administration in federal court in San Francisco on Aug. 29, a judge issued a temporary restraining order Aug. 31 blocking the DHS's new so-called "no-match" rule from going into effect Sept. 14. It also stopped the SSA from sending notices informing 140,000 bosses of the rule.

The rule, which would affect approximately 8 million workers, requires bosses to give workers 90 days to fix problems when their Social Security numbers don't match the system's database. If the problem isn't resolved, bosses must fire workers or face criminal prosecution or fines of up to \$14,000 per worker.

The AFL-CIO suit read: "The new rule would place millions of U.S. citizens and non-citizens with work authorization at risk of losing their jobs because of discrepancies in the Social Security Administration tax database." A government study revealed there are 17.8 million errors in the SSA database—more than 70 percent affecting U.S.-born workers.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney was quoted in an Aug. 31 ACLU press release: "Employers have historically used SSA 'no-match' letters to fire workers when workers try to organize, when they report a wage claim or workplace hazard, or when they get injured. The new rule gives employers a stronger pretext for engaging in such unlawful conduct." Stay tuned.

Immigrants bolster union movement

Much of the growth in the union movement in the last decade is thanks to immigrant workers. The number of immigrant union members grew by 30 percent from 1996 to 2006, while the number of U.S.-born members decreased by 9 percent. (blog.aflcio.org, Aug. 30)

Based on analysis of census data, the Migration Information Source reported that immigrants made up 15 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2006 and 12.3 percent (1.9 million) of union members. That means nearly one in 10 immigrants was a union member in 2006. Percentages of immigrants have increased in all sectors of the economy since 2003. For instance, the percentage of immigrant workers in construction jumped from 21.5 to 26.9 percent in three years. (www.migrationinformation.com)

AFL-CIO for universal health care

The AFL-CIO kicked off its Labor Day celebration by announcing a new drive to bring about universal health coverage by the end of 2009. (Louisville Courier-Journal, Aug. 30) The announcement came the day after the Census Bureau announced the number of uninsured people had risen to 47 million—nearly a sixth of the population.

The national labor organization outlined several essential features of a national health-care system: It should control "rising and irrational" health care costs, provide comprehensive high-quality care for all and preserve the right to choose your own doctor. Last week the American Medical Association, the largest organization of physicians, also launched a campaign to cover the uninsured.

UTLA endorses anti-war action

The Board of Directors of United Teachers Los Angeles passed a resolution Aug. 23 renewing its call for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and endorsing all fall anti-war activities, including the Sept. 22-29 tent cities at Los Angeles' downtown Federal Building and the Sept. 29 marches in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. The resolution noted that the billions of dollars spent on the war would be better spent on meeting pressing human needs at home, especially disaster recovery for Katrina survivors.

In Memoriam: Bill Sorro

Labor and community activist and one of the most revered members of San Francisco's Filipino community, Bill Sorro, died Aug. 27. Sorro was a founding member of the I-Hotel Tenants Union, which fought for years against evictions of mostly senior Filipino and Chinese tenants who finally lost their homes in 1977. Since then, a successful struggle was waged to save the historic Manilatown community and to secure the former hotel site for low-income housing.

An ironworker, Sorro was an active trade unionist and communist. His decades of tireless service as a tenant and community advocate were recognized in 2005 when he received a Local Hero Award from public television station KQED. A gallery exhibition, "A Serving of Love: The Passion of Bill Sorro," is on display in the rebuilt International Hotel Manilatown Center through Oct. 6. □

Death of trans immigrant in detention forges united protests

By Leslie Feinberg

Olga Arellano spoke at a rally at the Federal Building in downtown Los Angeles on Aug. 27 about how her 23-year-old daughter, Victoria, died July 20 at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) federal detention facility in South Los Angeles.

"I can only find the strength to talk about this because I want people to know what is going on inside that place," Olga Arellano stated. "I don't want another family to have to live through this nightmare." (Daily Journal, Aug. 9)

Authorities reportedly refused to give Victoria Arellano—an undocumented Mexican transwoman with AIDS—urgently needed medical attention and her critically necessary prescribed antibiotic, despite mass protests on her behalf by other immigrant detainees. Authorities had imprisoned her since May in a men's mass detention cell.

Outrage over Victoria Arellano's death is forging a coalition of organizations that fight for immigrant rights, AIDS care, and trans, lesbian, gay and bisexual rights. The bilingual Los Angeles vigil and media conference was called by Arellano's family and Bienestar—a Latin@ community service and advocacy organization working to meet the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Aug. 26 call for the vigil was signed by Grupo de Apoyo HIVIDA in Ciudad Juárez, México, and the following California-based groups: Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California; API Equality; Garment Workers Center; Homies Unidos; Coalition of Humane Immigration Rights of Los Angeles; Club Napa Gay; QTeam; Gay and Straight Alliance Network; Inlakech; SELA HIV Prevention Program; Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center; Transgender Law Center; The Wall Las Memorias Project; and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

National organizations included the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF); National Immigrant Solidarity Network; Project Islamic HOPE; Lambda Legal; and the Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Coalición de Derechos Humanos—Arizona; Immigration Equality—N.Y.; and Esperanza Peace and Justice Center of Texas endorsed.

The immigrant rights March 25 Coalition and the Troops Out Now Coalition supported and publicized the vigil.

Bienestar communications manager, Coral Lopez, said: "This case exemplifies what we've been saying for all these years—immigration is in fact an LGBT issue. Victoria's unfortunate death demonstrates why we need to be working in coalition on these issues."

A solidarity vigil for Victoria Arellano was also held Aug. 28 at the Federal Building in Tucson, Ariz. Sponsoring groups included Derechos Humanos, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, May 1st Coalition, Borderland Theater, Fundación México, Tucson Samaritans, Salt of the Earth Labor College, Humane Borders and Wingspan—Southern Arizona's LGBT community center.

That vigil called for socially just legislation, an end to deaths at the border, an end to raids, a moratorium on immigration detentions and deportations, restoration and expansion of the due process rights of all immigrants and protection and expansion

of the labor, human and civil rights of all immigrants and refugees.

Prisoners protested for Victoria

Victoria Arellano, whose birth name was Victor, came to the U.S. as a child. As a young adult, she worked at a supermarket in West Hollywood while volunteering at a drug and alcohol treatment facility.

Three years before her detention, she was medically described as "asymptomatic." She was prescribed a dose of antibiotics—first bactrim and later dapasone—designed to stave off pulmonary infections that could lead to pneumonia.

Arellano was swept up by ICE agents in May and denied medication while in detention facing deportation.

"The consequences of taking someone off that medication," observed Homayoon Khanlou, chief of medicine for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, "is that within a few weeks a patient may unfortunately develop pneumonia and then not respond to treatment." (Daily Journal, Aug. 9)

She was held in a mass cell designed to bunk 50 men, but in which some 80 prisoners were crammed.

If the tenderness of the solidarity that the immigrant men showed to Arellano could have saved her life, she would still be alive.

The respect for her as a trans prisoner can be heard in the quotes by the men jailed with her, who described in an Aug. 9 Daily Journal report how Arellano lay in a bunk bed suffering from excruciating headaches, stomach cramps and back pain.

Prisoner Oscar Santander recalled, "We all asked the guards for help, to take Victoria to the infirmary, but no one did anything."

In the last two weeks of her life, prisoner Walter Ayala said, "She was so sick that if you tried to move her she would scream."

He stressed, "We made requests to the infirmary asking for help because she was so sick. She wasn't eating, she had constant diarrhea, and she was vomiting blood. The nurse who responded was totally inhumane. She said, 'Oh, is that the same person you complained to us about before? The doctor hasn't approved any medication. Just give her Tylenol and water, and it'll go away.' This happened each time we made a request for six days."

The men described how they used their bath towels soaked in cold water to try to bring down her fever and brought cardboard boxes for her to throw up into. The immigrant detainees cleaned up the blood and vomit.

Under pressure from those imprisoned with Arellano, on July 13 the detention center infirmary gave her a prescription for amoxicillin, which is not an antibiotic used to treat AIDS-related infections, medical experts noted.

Less than a day later she was back in the cell. Arellano couldn't stomach the drugs and threw up blood, Santander said.

"The last week was the worst," he stressed. "She couldn't stand so we took turns taking her to the bathroom."

Prisoner Abel Gutierrez said, "She was so sick and they wouldn't do anything." Gutierrez described how that night, 80 of her fellow prisoners defied the order to line up for evening head count, and staged a protest on Arellano's behalf.

Gutierrez said the detainees chanted one word loudly in unison, over and over: "Hospital!"

More than 70 of the prisoners signed a

petition demanding immediate medical care for Arellano.

The mass demonstration by prisoners forced officials to call an ambulance. Arellano was taken to the intensive care unit of Little Company of Mary Hospital.

There, although she was too weak to stand and on a respirator, Arellano's mother found her daughter chained to a hospital bed, while two immigration agents stood at the door.

Olga Arellano said, "At times, my Victoria wanted to reposition her body, but she couldn't because she was shackled." Guards refused the mother's request to unchain her daughter, who died two days later.

Medical neglect is lynching

After Arellano's death, her fellow prisoners collected \$245 from what little money they had and sent it to the Arellano family. (Daily Journal)

Arellano family attorney Roman Silberfeld stressed the solidarity shown by the more than 70 detainees who petitioned authorities for immediate care for a fellow prisoner. "These are people who are on the verge of being deported and have their cases pending and yet they stand up to the government that could kick them out and say, 'This is wrong.'" (Los Angeles Times, Aug. 11)

More than 20 of the men who contacted outside help on Arellano's behalf or witnessed her mistreatment were reportedly transferred out of the Los Angeles area, which disrupted their legal consultations and family visits. (hrw.org)

Bardis Vakili, of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, added that some of the detainees who were transferred were not allowed to bring



Victoria Arellano

their legal papers, although they were days from court hearings. "This means these men don't have access to their immigration paperwork, or the research they did on their case. Many of them are representing themselves and this makes it very difficult for them."

The Arellano family announced plans to file a wrongful death claim against the Department of Homeland Security and other U.S. government agencies.

Arellano was the third prisoner known to have died at the San Pedro center. Since Arellano's death, a pregnant Mexican woman in El Paso and a Brazilian man in Rhode Island have died in immigration custody. A total of 62 prisoners are known to have died in federal immigration detention since 2004.

Close to 30,000 immigrants are believed to be imprisoned in some 400 privately run and federal detention centers and jails. (Los Angeles Times, Aug. 11)

Confiscation of badly needed medication and refusing life-and-death medical attention are lynchings. Solidarity—the kind of unity that Victoria Arellano inspired—is a powerful weapon against this war of terror being waged against the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. □

Tucson protest demands 'Stop the raids!'

A protest of nearly 150 people gathered in downtown Tucson Aug. 28 to demand an end to Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, demilitarization of the border and an end to the inhuman border policy that has resulted in more than 200 deaths in the Arizona desert this year.

The crowd gathered amidst a collection of cardboard crosses, each with the name of an undocumented person whose body was recovered from the desert. "For each body recovered," explained activist Isabel Garcia, "we estimate that there are between five and 10 bodies that go unrecovered." Speaking about the recent deportation of Elvira Arellano and the inhumanity of separating her from her son Saúl, she told the crowd, "We are not going to let this happen anymore!"

A contingent of Tucson High School students marched from their school to join the rally. Leilani, a student leader, said: "We brought forth the youth of MEChA from Tucson High because the youth need to be involved. It's up to us—the people, the students, the youth, and the workers—to yell and march for our rights."

Michael Woodward of Tucson's lesbian, gay, bi and transgender rights group Wingspan expressed solidarity and recounted the story of Victoria Arellano, who was denied medication and died in detention [see accompanying article].

Standing beside her parents, Cynthia



Aug. 28 demonstration.

Bracamonte told of the brutal treatment her father and uncle received upon re-entering the U.S. at the Nogales border crossing after visiting a dentist in Mexico. Arnulfo Bracamonte and his brother Mario are U.S. residents, yet customs agents took them out of line at the crossing and beat them so badly that they were both hospitalized. Arnulfo asked repeatedly for medical attention, but the agents continued to beat him until they saw the row of stitches in his side from a surgery he had three weeks earlier. They then released the brothers, who had to wait for family members to pick them up and transport them to the hospital.

After performing for the crowd, a member of the Mexica/Azteca dance group Danza Mexica Cuauhtemoc stated: "We must organize from the barrios up. This is a war against our people. It is a war against workers and we must defend ourselves."

—Report and photos by Paul T.

New Orleans housing protest: 'We want to come home'



PHOTO: INDYMEDIA

On Aug. 31, two dozen activists from across the country, along with New Orleans public housing residents, entered the Housing Authority of New Orleans and the Federal Housing and Urban Development offices in the Gentilly section of New Orleans, protesting the lack of affordable public housing post-Katrina. They conducted a stand-in, shutting down the main offices and outpost offices across the city. Some of these same activists attended the International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, where they testified Sept. 1 on the housing crisis Katrina survivors still face and presented video footage of the takeover the day before.

—Monica Moorehead

Int'l tribunal on Katrina & Rita: We charge genocide

Continued from 1

The ten charges that the prosecution team requesting their presence at the tribunal to face various charges. Not only did they not show up for the tribunal; they never responded to the letters.

The tribunal judges came from Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, France, Guadeloupe, Martinique and the U.S. The conveners traveled from Algeria, Brazil, South Africa and different U.S. cities.

Opening the "casket" on human rights violations

Nkechi Taifa, a tribunal prosecutor from the Legacy Empowerment Center, officially opened up the first day of the tribunal proceedings Aug. 30. She spoke eloquently about how "the spirit of Emmett Till" was being felt at the tribunal. It was almost 50 years ago to the day that Hurricane Katrina hit that Till, a 14-year-old African-American youth from Chicago, was tortured and shot to death in Money, Miss., by racists for allegedly whistling at a white woman.

Emmett's mother, the late Mamie Till Mobley, demanded in 1955 that the casket of her murdered son be opened for the world to see his horribly disfigured body. Taifa stated that the tribunal is about "opening the casket"—the casket in this case being the racist, anti-poor treatment that Katrina and Rita survivors still face today.

The ten charges that the prosecution team would present at the tribunal with evidence and testimony were gross violation of the human rights: (1) to be free from racial discrimination, including discrimination based upon perceived immigration status; (2) to return, including the resettlement and reintegration of internally displaced persons; (3) to life, human dignity, and recognition as a person; (4) to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; (5) to freedom of association and assembly and freedom of movement; (6) to work, to adequate health care and adequate housing; (7) to an adequate standard of living, freedom from poverty and right to education; (8) to vote, including electoral rights and right to participate in governance; (9) to a fair trial, to liberty, security of the person and equal protection under the law; and (10) to privacy, family life, and missing relatives.

Roderick Dean testified on prisoners' rights abuses. His voice filled with emotion, Dean, who was falsely arrested in New Orleans before Katrina, talked about the subhuman treatment that he and other prisoners suffered when Katrina hit. Prisoners were not allowed to leave their cells and had to wade through feces-contaminated water; he and other prisoners were denied their medications; and prisoners had to endure languishing on a



WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

Left to right, Attorney Tracie Washington, tribunal witness Lillie Mae Stokes and Stokes' mother Rosie M. Bias.



Malik Rahim gives evidence on military occupation Sept. 1.

WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

bridge in 105-degree heat for days without food, water or toilet facilities. Dean was released from jail in early December 2005 with no charges.

Charlene Smith, a child nutritionist, was arrested and jailed for writing a bad check in Wal-Mart because her mother and children needed items to survive after Katrina. Some of her experiences in jail included being housed with 19 other women in one cell, hearing a prisoner scream while being beaten by a guard and being denied sanitary napkins and her medications.

Under the police brutality session, Romell Madison, a Black dentist, spoke on how his brother Ronald was shot five times in the back by white cops with assault rifles on the Danziger Bridge. Last December, white cops were indicted for shooting and killing several members of the Bartholomew family, including children, trying to flee the flood waters across the same bridge.

Impact of Katrina on women

Mayaba Levanthal, from the group Incite! Women of Color against Violence, gave testimony on how poor women, especially single mothers, are more unlikely to be able to evacuate during a hurricane because they don't have the means to do so. She also spoke on the failure to reopen public schools; the lack of shelters in the midst of a rise of domestic violence and sexual assault; and how stress disproportionately impacts Black and poor women, especially in New Orleans. An estimated 187,000 workers lost their jobs in New Orleans post-Katrina, and 50 percent of those jobs belonged to women.

Stephanie Mingo, from the St. Bernard section in New Orleans, gave testimony on her struggle to survive after Katrina as a single mother of four and a grandmother. Her 89-year-old mother died on a bridge waiting to be rescued. A food service technician, Mingo stated that she still couldn't get home because "she is not one of the rich folks." She stated that 90 percent of those living in public housing before Katrina were women, young and elderly. Mingo went on to say: "Thirty percent of your income goes towards living in public housing. My rent is higher than my income. I am discriminated against because I am a woman." In tears, she kept repeating over and over again, "I want to go home."

Military occupation vs. humanitarian aid

On Sept. 1, Malik Rahim, executive director of Common Ground Collective in New Orleans, gave close to two hours of riveting testimony on the racist military occupation of New Orleans post-Katrina. This occupation included the National Guard, state and local police, Blackwater mercenaries and local armed white vigilantes, all working in concert with each other. Many of the National Guard had just returned from Iraq.

CGC is a grassroots, multinational organization that provides free health care, clothing, tools and much more to Katrina survivors. Rahim spoke on seeing dead bodies, of Black men shot to death, in the streets. He recounted seeing military personnel driving by survivors, rather than rescuing them.

Portions of a documentary called "Welcome to New Orleans," directed by a Danish filmmaker, were shown at the tribunal. White vigilantes, with their guns drawn, "jokingly" spoke on how they were "protecting their neighborhoods and their city from Black men." Rahim reminded the tribunal that this reign of racist terror in New Orleans was sanctioned by Gov. Blanco, who publicly gave orders to the National Guard to "shoot to kill" to restore "order"—a codeword for protecting private property against "looters."

On Aug. 31, Dale Warren testified on the horror that she witnessed when the police forced her to stay in New Orleans. She ended up in the Convention Center with thousands of others. Lights and air conditioning were shut off. Dead bodies were found in the freezer instead of food. Toilets were overflowing. On the fourth day, she witnessed a man shot in the head by a national guardsman after he jumped on top of the jeep in motion. The man had told her that he wanted to commit suicide. The guardsman kept driving after the shooting.

Sobukwe Shukura, an Atlanta representative of the National Network on Cuba, gave testimony on how the U.S. government denied Cuba's gesture to provide humanitarian aid to Katrina survivors. This aid included close to 1,600 disaster-trained physicians along with medicines and equipment. The U.S. also denied relief aid from the Venezuelan government. The snubbing of this aid is further proof of how the U.S. government put politics before saving the lives of poor people, especially if they are African Americans.

Other tribunal sessions focused on gentrification and housing rights, children's rights, forced dispersal, environmental racism, health care, cultural rights, Indigenous rights, voting rights, labor and migrant rights, misappropriation of relief, education rights and more.

Chokwe Lumumba, a lawyer from Mississippi and a Republic of New Afrika member, gave a powerful talk summarizing the findings and putting the testimonies in a historical framework of resisting racist repression. He asked the judges to consider all the testimonies presented over the three days as nothing more than genocide. The final verdict by the judges will be made public in the coming weeks.

For updated information about the tribunal, go to www.katrinatribunal.org.

Next: *A visit to Algiers and the lower 9th Ward with Common Ground Collective; "neo-slaves"—immigrants in New Orleans; Indigenous rights.*

Email: mmoorehead@workers.org

Tribunal defends Legacy of cultural resistance in New Orleans

By Larry Hales
New Orleans

It has been two years since the tragedy along the Gulf Coast was unfurled by the winds of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and escalated by state neglect. This year, the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund decided to put the local, state and federal government on trial at an International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Testimony was given by many New Orleans residents attesting to the systematic racist oppression, going back to the days of slavery; the great poverty that existed there before the storms; the crumbling educational system; police brutality; and more. Indeed, every feature of capitalist society was on full display in New Orleans, and perhaps more intensely than in other areas.

One of the topics covered was the culture of New Orleans, how it is endangered and now being co-opted and commodified by those who despise the culture of the oppressed.

It is said that roots run deep in New Orleans; that a person is never separated from her or his connections to the city. Perhaps this can be said for all Black people who descend from Africans brought to the U.S. as chattel slaves, because the roots of Black culture—nourished by the sweat, tears and blood of African slaves and absorbed by the ground they tilled, kept and harvested—run thick as tubers to the core of the Earth.

Africans have been in New Orleans since before the city's establishment in 1718 and the culture of Black people can be found in the cuisine, the speak and has defined the music and dance of the city.

Unlike in most cities, especially in the South, Africans were allowed a space to gather, socialize and play music, albeit only on Sundays. This place is still known as Congo Square. A precursor to the banjo is on display in the square, as well as many other instruments.

According to the African American Registry: "Congo Square holds a special symbolic importance to African-Americans. It is significant because of the role the square played in New Orleans' musical heritage and as a symbol of the



Black and Indigenous cultural bond in New Orleans.

TRIBUNAL DOCUMENT

early African contributions to the origins of jazz and other American musical forms. In the twenty-first century, standing in tribute to the accomplishments of the tightly knit New Orleans musical community, Congo Square remains a memorial to the artists who transformed their sound and exported it throughout the world."

Mardi Gras

One of the traditions often misunderstood and that is in danger of being lost is the tradition of the Mardi Gras Indians. While never recognized as a cultural tradition by the Arts District of New Orleans, it is at the same time exploited as a draw for tourists.

Cherice Maria Harrison-Nelson, an educator for the Recovery School District, spoke about that tradition and the threat imposed by denial of the right to return of residents of the city. Harrison Nelson is a Big Queen in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, co-founder of the Mardi Gras Indian Hall of Fame and daughter of Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr. of the Guardians of the Flame "krewe," who died in 1998.

A movie about the tradition of the Mardi Gras Indians, "Tootie's Last Suit," is about Allison "Tootie" Montana, who "masked"

or donned his suit for 52 years and died in City Council chambers while protesting police brutality.

Mardi Gras itself is a tradition that can be traced back to European customs. In fact, the name itself is French and means "Fat Tuesday." (nola.com)

There had always been separate celebrations, one for whites and one for Black people, because of racism and the history of slavery.

The tradition of the Mardi Gras Indians and of "masking" grew out of a close relation of Black slaves with Indigenous tribes and a desire to pay homage to Native people for the assistance they gave to Black slaves in escaping and evading recapture. (mardigrasneworleans.com) It is an attempt to blend an homage with African traditions, and the people who carry on the tradition do their own beadwork and make their own costumes.

Traditions of resistance

Given that the tragedy of New Orleans before and after the storms in 2005 uncovers the conditions of the poor and oppressed in U.S. society, it is painfully obvious to those in power in New Orleans and the U.S. ruling class that the city may

become the rallying cry of the Black masses, along with Latin@s and Indigenous peoples, for freedom from oppression and the system from which that oppression springs.

New Orleans was home of the largest slave revolt, led by Charles, a slave on the Deslondes plantation. Nearly 500 slaves, inspired by the successful revolution in Haiti in 1804, fought for freedom.

The city stands as a testament to the will and determination of oppressed people—in its traditions, songs, dances, speak, ideals, hope, and as Amilcar Cabral once stated, "seed of resistance." One need look no further than the traditions of New Orleans—how the culture was forged from expressions of the enslaved, their desire for freedom and their resistance.

The attempt to deny the right of return—to make New Orleans a playground for the rich—is not merely about the land. It is also an attempt to break up communities and pockets of resistance to racist oppression. And it is playing itself out in cities across the country. This is not simply natural migration, but ethnic cleansing, and if not addressed for what it is by the broad movement, then a dangerous period in history may give way to more intense oppression. □



WWW PHOTO: LARRY HALES

Cherise Maria Harrison-Nelson testifies on Aug. 31.

Solidarity statement from BAYAN U.S.A to Tribunal on Katrina and Rita

The U.S. Chapter of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, or BAYAN USA, wishes to send its warmest and most militant greetings of solidarity to the organizers and participants of the International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in New Orleans this Aug. 29.

As a national alliance of over 12 Filipino organizations in the United States, we grieved and stood indignant along with the rest of the nation and the world as the Bush administration embarked on state terrorism and martial law tactics against the predominantly African-American communities devastated by both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

We believe venues such as this historic tribunal are the muscles of the people's movement in full flex when government and its social services have failed its people, and we support the broadening mass movement led by the most oppressed and disenfranchised from the region to demand accountability from the U.S. government for the devastation and forced

impoverishment of their communities. We believe this will ultimately push for concrete change in a system [that] continuously fails the economically marginalized inside the world's most powerful imperialist country.

Imperialism is still at the heart and root of the so-called natural disasters that struck the innocent people of the Gulf Coast. While the Bush administration is playing the natural disaster card, the truth is the devastation against the people could have been prevented. It was the Bush administration's choice to protect and uphold multinational corporate interest over the safety of families that created the unsafe conditions that eventually struck the people of New Orleans. The government-approved development aggression that saw big oil companies occupying the wetlands surrounding the Mississippi delta weakened natural barriers needed to moderate flooding in the area.

While corporate greed destroyed the safety and security of the living areas

of the Gulf Coast, the negligent state answered disaster by pounding even harder on the evacuees once flooding got underway, with militarization and absence of genuine relief efforts.

As an alliance of mainly Filipino immigrants and U.S.-born Filipinos, our own dislocation from our homeland is also brought about by similar factors like corporate interests over people's interests. The Bush regime that turned rifles on the evacuees is the same Bush regime that allocates millions in U.S. tax dollars to Philippine soldiers that turn their rifles on the Filipino people back home, and sustains the most terroristic U.S. puppet regime our people have seen in years.

The state militarization of New Orleans parallels the undeclared martial law under de facto Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a martial law that surpasses the state terrorism of the former U.S.-Marcos dictatorship and has claimed nearly 900 lives and 200 abductees since 2001.

The national struggle of the majority of our people for land under a feudal agricultural system in the Philippines parallels the struggle of the people of New Orleans for land that has been seized from them.

We unite with the objectives of the Tribunal and hope this creates a broader and expanded movement to further isolate the Bush regime for its crimes against humanity.

We especially congratulate the organizers—Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, the Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the U.S. Human Rights Network—for their lead initiative in building and strengthening a powerful and significant struggle from within the belly of the beast. Your struggle is our struggle.

Justice for the People of the Gulf Coast Now!

No to Undeclared Martial Law in the Philippines!

Long Live International Solidarity!
Down with U.S. Imperialism!

Interviews with Iraq veterans

What's the mood in the U.S. military?

By John Catalinotto

After four-plus years of a failed occupation of Iraq and a U.S. regime that refuses to leave, two questions have become vital: What is the strength of the Iraqi resistance? What is the mood of the U.S. rank-and-file troops? This article discusses the latter question.

The Army's records show that among a half-million troops, there were 3,196 desertions in 2006, a considerable increase over the 2,543 in 2005.

On Aug. 19, the New York Times published a statement in which seven enlisted soldiers with the 82nd Airborne stationed in Iraq dared to challenge the whole chain of command by suggesting the best thing the U.S. could do is pull out.

Recruiting is way down among African Americans and contested throughout Puerto Rico. The military is drawing from an ever narrower base—small-town USA and immigrants desperate for a quicker road to legal status. Army, Marine and National Guard troops are sent for multiple and longer tours to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, organizers of the GI anti-war movement gathered in St. Louis from Aug. 15 to 19 for conventions of Veterans for Peace and Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). During the IVAW convention, IVAW elected a new board, and this board in turn selected by consensus one of the first war resisters, former Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia, as its new chair-elect.

To explore these developments, between Aug. 25 and Sept. 1 Workers World held individual phone interviews with four IVAW board members and other organizers. The following summarizes those conversations:

Workers World: What did the convention accomplish for the IVAW?

Mejia: Every time the IVAW has a conference or convention the organization comes out stronger. We meet and interact for a goal. In this case we held elections. We also talked about strategy. We will concentrate on a struggle campaign—one we call "truth in recruiting"—that will focus on young people considering joining the military. We also want to do something like the Winter Soldier hearing done dur-



Jonathan Hutto



Liam Madden

ing the Vietnam War [where veterans testified about their experiences—WW], but among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

Margaret Stevens of Newark, N.J., veteran of National Guard 1997-2004, new IVAW treasurer: It has political significance that Mejia is popular in the organization and respected as a war resister. It says a lot about what people think is the right way to challenge the problem. Camilo said three years ago: "I won't participate. It is a bad military and I won't help participate." It is a very courageous stand. He earned his stripes.

Mejia: There are now 575 IVAW members, double the number at the last convention. At least 10 new members are joining each month.

WW: Some of the media reports said the IVAW changed its position and now backs those who refuse to serve in Iraq. Is that so?

Mejia: The IVAW will support resistance in the military. This doesn't mean we are encouraging resistance, but if soldiers say they object to participating on grounds of conscience, we will support them.

Former Marine **Liam Madden**, IVAW organizer in Boston, co-founder of the "Appeal for Redress": We always supported war resisters and have educated soldiers and service members what their rights are. The IVAW wants soldiers and service members to make an informed decision. We were already on the track of stepping up active-duty organizing.

The IVAW's role is to shed light on the political implications of the war and what it means for those fighting it. We explain why the U.S. is there in Iraq. In effect, we are giving the active-duty troops the tools they need to resist, but in the end it is the soldier's decision.



Margaret Stevens WW PHOTO: JOHN CATALINOTTO



Camilo Mejia

due back at Ft. Drum in November after an extended tour in Iraq doing house-to-house searches. Now there are more hassles in town of soldiers who get into trouble because they are really upset. They've been through a lot.

Aliff: The number of AWOL troops and deserters is increasing. There is more drug use, people are escaping. They want to get out of the military and are finding many ways to do it. The majority don't want to go back to Iraq. It's taking a toll on the chain of command—the brass are finding they have to deploy people who normally would be discharged. On the other side there is growing resentment toward the brass.

I feel we are on the verge of a mass exodus. People are leaving their stations or leaving the Army because they don't want to go back to Iraq and be part of the occupation. We're on the verge of something significant because after four-and-a-half years the war is going so badly.

WW: Will the IVAW also confront recruiters?

Stevens: The IVAW will have a three-pronged approach: truth in recruiting; mobilization of active duty soldiers; defending war resisters.

Madden: The IVAW "truth in recruiting" campaign is designed to give a strong link to the communities that are vulnerable to the recruiting of the military. We do it not to tell people what to do—teenagers have enough people telling them what to do already—but we will help them make an informed decision.

Mejia: We will provide information about what life is really like in the military. We won't tell people not to join. But we know there are recruiters telling people about benefits and salaries. This might be

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In D.C. and L.A.

Encampment to stop wars gathers steam

By Scott Scheffer
Los Angeles

The mainstream media has been writing about the upcoming Congress sessions as if some epic battle between anti-war forces and the Bush/Cheney cabal will take place there.

Not many are as excited about it as the media is. After the last national election, newly elected Democrats wasted no time in making it clear that they would not cut war funding, and that calls to impeach Bush and Cheney for war crimes would be ignored.

The real momentum against the war comes from the people, and there is growing excitement over parallel anti-war/social justice mobilizations during the week of Sept. 22-29 in Washington, D.C., and in Los Angeles. Activists will set up 'tent cities' on the lawn of the Capitol in the week leading up to major demonstrations on Sept. 29. In Los Angeles,

there will be a three-day tent city at the Westwood Federal Building, followed by a 15-mile walk across Los Angeles on Sept. 25 to the Downtown Federal Building. Another tent city will be set up and will remain there until the mass march and rally on Sept. 29.

The walk across town itself will be a day-long protest with stops at the Israeli Consulate, to demand liberation and the right of Palestinian people to return to their homes, and at the Salvadoran consulate, where the local FMLN will demand that Salvadoran troops pull out of Iraq. Other stops may be added as plans develop.

The actions were called by the Troops Out Now Coalition to carry out an anti-war event that includes organizations and activists fighting for immigrant rights, those who are struggling against the heightening assault on workers, and all others affected by the war. This is reflected in the list of endorsers and participants (see troopsoutnow.org).

In Los Angeles, the events will be kicked off a day earlier with an important action at the Filipino Consulate to mark the anniversary of the imposition of martial law and to protest the arrest of Filipino people's leader Jose Maria Sison, organized by BAYAN-USA.

Code Pink plans actions in Washington, D.C., and in Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles chapter of American Friends Service Committee, which shut down a Hollywood military recruiting center last year, will carry out a civil disobedience action.

Healthcare will be a major issue at the protests, and some of the people who were featured in Michael Moore's film "SICKO" will organize a vigil in Washington on Sept. 28th.

Sept. 27 has been selected to be the day for major immigrant rights actions at both encampments.

As a result of efforts by the Los Angeles chapter of U.S. Labor Against the War, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

has endorsed. Union officials will join Ron Kovic, other anti-war veterans and military resisters such as Agustin Aguayo in a press conference to push the encampment next week. L.A. USLAW plans a teach-in on the war and labor solidarity.

Other actions will highlight the connection between racism and violence against the Iraqi people and others victimized by U.S. imperialism, and repression, racism and sexual and gender oppression in the U.S. In Los Angeles, there will be a special event to honor Victoria Arellano, a transwoman who was denied access to AIDS medication by jail officials and died as a result.

From across the country people are boarding buses, flying and driving long distances to get to Washington, D.C., or Los Angeles with their tents and their protest signs to join in these unique and important actions to stop the war against workers and the poor, and to stop the U.S. wars abroad. □

Activist attorney sees first-hand

Palestinian political prisoners defy occupation courts, prisons

By Greg Butterfield

Attorney Charlotte Kates co-chairs the Middle East Subcommittee of the National Lawyers Guild. She's also an organizer with Al-Awda NY and New Jersey Solidarity-Activists for the Liberation of Palestine.

In early August, Kates participated in a delegation to Palestine co-sponsored by Al-Awda and the Palestine Solidarity Group of Chicago, in conjunction with the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees and other grassroots organizations. Workers World spoke with Kates about her experience.

Workers World: What was the purpose of the delegation?

Charlotte Kates: There was a strong focus on Palestinian political prisoners. Eight activists from a variety of backgrounds participated. Three were attorneys and others who work on political prisoner issues. Two delegates had worked in the Irish movement, including one currently living in Ireland who works with former IRA political prisoners.

We had several meetings with former political prisoners to find out what was happening inside Zionist jails. At the same time, we also met with activists in other spheres of life: youth organizers, women organizers, agricultural and labor activists. Almost universally, everyone we met with had spent some time in an Israeli jail or administrative detention.

Over 25 percent of all Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 have spent time in Zionist jails, either as political prisoners or administrative detainees, which is a form of political imprisonment where they never have to present charges against you or classify why you're being held and you never receive a trial.

We also learned that Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship and live within the borders of Palestine 1948 are subject to similar repression.

There's a myth that the Israeli regime has moved beyond torture, that the high court has forbidden it, so there is now a more enlightened policy. But the reality is that when one form of torture is specifically outlawed, the government moves on to other, psychological tactics, that leave no marks on the body but can be physically and psychologically damaging.

We heard time and again about the methods that were used in an attempt to break prisoners' spirits: threats to family members, the use of stress positions, sleep deprivation, loud music, light. It's very similar to what the U.S. has been reported to engage in at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib and elsewhere.

One thing that was really amazing was that despite these horrible experiences universally shared by Palestinians under interrogation, they organized, spoke with their fellow prisoners, and once released, they continued organizing. The prison itself became a school for struggle.

WW: Were you able to meet with any current political prisoners?

CK: We were not able to go into any of the jails. But on Aug. 8 the three of us who were attorneys were able to attend the trial of Palestinian national leader Ahmad Sa'adat at Ofer military facility outside Ramallah. This was arranged by Addameer, the Palestine prisoner support network.

A commercial checkpoint by the Israeli apartheid wall outside East Jerusalem.

PHOTO: CHARLOTTE KATES



Sa'adat is the general secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He was kidnapped by the Israeli army on March 14, 2006, after a 10-hour siege on a Palestinian Authority prison in Jericho. Sa'adat, four of his PFLP comrades and another prisoner were being held there under guard by U.S. and British forces.

Sa'adat was elected to succeed Abu Ali Mustafa, who was assassinated by an Israeli missile attack in 2001. Fighters from the PFLP's military wing killed an extremist racist Israeli minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, in retaliation. From that time, the Zionist government had maintained that they sought to try Sa'adat for what they termed the murder of Ze'evi.

But after five years, Israel's Ministry of Justice was forced to admit there was no evidence to pursue the charge. Instead they came up with 19 charges against Sa'adat which are very political in nature—things like being a member of a banned organization, holding a post in an illegal organization, and incitement for making a speech after Mustafa's assassination.

The trial has been postponed numerous times. The prosecution has a list of 39 witnesses. These are political prisoners who are put on the stand and don't have anything to say. They don't even know they're being taken to Sa'adat's trial. They're taken out of their cells at 2 o'clock in the morning, put in a van, taken to Ofer and brought into the courtroom.

The prosecutors start barking at them and try to get some kind of incriminating statement by asking questions like, "How did you meet Sa'adat?" and "What is his

position?" One witness said he knew who Sa'adat was because he'd seen him on the news.

Three military judges were seated at the front of the room and barked out when they heard people translating the proceedings in the back, telling them to be quiet. At the end of the hearing, one judge said to a prosecutor, in a very buddy-buddy tone, "Why are you bringing all these witnesses? We don't need them." The implication was clear: they've already made up their minds.

While we observed this hearing, Sa'adat was seated in a box to our right. His feet were shackled. He would pay attention to the proceedings only when another Palestinian prisoner was on the stand.

Sa'adat has maintained throughout that he absolutely refuses to recognize the legitimacy of these courts. He refuses to stand for the judge. His attorneys observe and compile very detailed notes, but they will not participate in what is at its core an illegitimate process with no authority to pass judgment on Sa'adat or any other Palestinian.

WW: Did you see a connection between Palestinian prisoners and political prisoners held by the U.S.?

CK: Right now, the U.S. maintains a military prison at Guantánamo Bay on the basis of secret hearings devoid of any real process. The so-called war on terror has been the justification for holding hundreds of men there, in addition to thousands of people being held in Afghanistan, Iraq and secret CIA detention around the world.

Much as the Israeli military courts are illegitimate forces of occupation, we see

the same thing at Guantánamo, which is occupied Cuban territory. It's a prison camp for the international political prisoners of the U.S.

Increasingly we hear Guantánamo called a stain on U.S. history. But political imprisonment is nothing new here. There are many political prisoners, from Mumia Abu-Jamal and other veterans of the Black Liberation Movement to the Puerto Rican Liberation Movement and other struggles for social justice. It's certainly nothing new for U.S. proxy regimes like Israel.

Every day U.S. taxpayers are spending between \$10 and \$15 million to support the Israeli state. We're paying for the trial of Ahmad Sa'adat. We're paying for the detention and imprisonment of 11,000 Palestinian political prisoners, just like we're paying for the detention of thousands of Iraqis and the ongoing abuse of hundreds of men at Guantánamo. The torture is the same, the abuse is the same, and the injustice is the same.

We must confront head-on the responsibility the U.S. has for the political imprisonment it's engaging in and supporting and paying for around the world.

There's an international campaign to free Ahmad Sa'adat and all Palestinian political prisoners. Sa'adat's trial has been postponed again and is scheduled to reconvene on Nov. 4. The campaign is asking people to get involved, hold events, send letters and write statements to raise awareness about his case. Please visit www.freeahmadsaadat.org or email info@freeahmadsaadat.org for information.

To host a speaker from our delegation, please contact info@al-awdany.org. □

Condemn U.S. arrest of Iranian officials in Iraq

Statement of American-Iranian Friendship Committee (AIFC), Aug. 31

On Aug. 28, 2007, U.S. troops at a checkpoint near the Tigris River had verified the legitimate and legal traveling documents of the members of an Iranian Energy Ministry delegation and allowed them to proceed to their destination at the state-owned Sheraton Ishtar Hotel nearby. The entire delegation, which included two Iranian diplomats, was officially invited by the government of Iraq to help resolve Iraq's electrical power crises, which condemn a great majority of the people of that country to 110-degree heat of the day and darkness of the night.

Barely an hour had passed from their arrival at the hotel and meeting with the Iraqi Energy Ministry officials for dinner that U.S. military forces, following orders, raided the hotel, blindfolded and handcuffed eight of the Iranians and paraded them in front of rolling cameras of reporters already stationed there for the 'event.'

Although Iraqi representatives had clearly informed the U.S. troops that the Iranian delegation was invited by the Iraqi government and all documents were in order, the U.S. military hauled the eight Iranians off to U.S. interrogation chambers. To justify their criminal enterprise and flagrant disregard of all international laws governing the relations between nations and sovereign states, the U.S. military officials at first claimed that the Iranian delegation had unauthorized weapons, but were forced to retract that excuse when the Iraqi government publicly announced that the weapons belonged to the Iraqi officials. Regardless of the facts, the U.S. government does not admit guilt or wrongdoing and pays no cost for its illegal, aggressive acts.

It is crystal clear that these arrests and the harassment of the Iranians were directly guided by President Bush's statement made a short time before at the American Legion Convention that he had given the order for U.S. troops to "con-

front" Tehran's activities in Iraq.

The American-Iranian Friendship Committee (AIFC) urges all honest and fair-minded Iranians and Americans to protest this latest act of instigation to raise tensions and animosity and conflagrate more crises in the war-weary Middle East. Our unified response protesting the Bush Administration's insatiable drive to continue the war in Iraq and expand it into Iran is urgently needed. AIFC, along with millions of other Iranians and Americans, holds President Bush and the Congress of the United States responsible for these provocative acts of war.

Let us not forget that the U.S. government has not released the five Iranian diplomats taken hostage by a U.S. commando raid in Irbil, Iraq, in January of this year, again in violation of the international rules governing occupying powers.

Please contact: American-Iranian Friendship Committee (AIFC), 914-589-0744 or email AIFC@optonline.net



We salute NY taxi drivers

To the general public, taxi users and organized labor:

Workers World Party and newspaper hail the heroic effort made by tens of thousands of New York City taxicab drivers who went on strike Sept. 5 to keep from being forced by the Taxi and Limousine Commission to accept global positioning systems and touch-screen monitors for credit card payments in the cabs they drive.

The New York City Taxi Workers Alliance, which represents more than 10,000 of the city's 44,000 licensed drivers, says the GPS amounts to spy-ware, since the TLC can use it to track every trip the cabbies make.

Bhairavi Desai, executive director of the NYCTWA, says her members describe GPS as robbing cabbies of their privacy. One driver compared it to the ankle bracelets used in house arrest. They also oppose the credit-card system because, they say, paying fees for card processing would deprive them of hard-earned cash. She characterized the strike as "a resounding success" and said the majority of drivers stayed home.

The drivers work for franchise owners who own medallions—a metal plate issued by the city that shows the taxi is licensed. These medallions are selling for as high as \$600,000 apiece.

The Taxi and Limousine Com-

mission, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, franchise owners, and the Wall Street banks and brokers that profit from financing the purchase of taxi medallions are all determined to have the new system installed beginning Oct. 1.

The cost of the GPS will be added to the exorbitant fees franchise owners charge the drivers, who must also pay for gas and maintenance. It all adds up to hundreds of dollars out of their pockets each day before they even pick up their first fare. The drivers work long hours in health-threatening conditions for poverty-level wages and no benefits.

The NYCTWA has been fighting the law that defines the drivers as independent contractors. They are workers, like those in transportation and every other service industry, and deserve the right of collective bargaining to negotiate decent contracts with health care, pensions and other benefits.

The NYCTWA voted for a two-day strike, but the struggle is part of an ongoing campaign that the labor movement, community organizations and other groups must continue to support. The majority of the drivers are immigrants from many different lands. When they win economic and social justice, all workers, organized and unorganized, will win. An injury to one is an injury to all. □

Mortgage crisis and inequality

More than managers are at fault

By Deirdre Griswold

As the fallout from the mortgage crisis continues to spread throughout the economy, more attention is being paid to the enormous and growing gap between the incomes of corporate executives and those of the workers who keep their companies running.

According to a new report by the Institute for Policy Studies, that gap is now 364-to-1. In other words, a worker earning the average wage would have to stay on the job for 364 years to take in what an average chief executive earns in one year.

In the housing mortgage business, this gap is even larger. The CEO of Countrywide Financial, which has been foreclosing on homeowners left and right, is Angelo Mozilo. Over the past three years he has made a staggering \$142.4 million. Just last year, he earned \$42.9 million, making him the sixth-highest-earning CEO in the country. And, as it became clear that his company was headed for big trouble, he got busy cashing in \$100 million in stock options. It was Enron all over again.

As the impact of housing foreclosures has begun to be felt in other areas of the economy, and both private banks and the Federal Reserve rush to make easy credit available to mortgage companies in order to keep them from going bankrupt, indignation has risen over the huge salaries paid to managers like Mozilo.

Behind the front-men

However, while it is easy to hate the greedy executives whose decisions may have hastened the debacle, and who line their pockets when it is clear that the Sword of Damocles is about to fall on the heads of their customers, reducing executive salaries is a picayune approach to the problem.

The problem is capitalism. Rather than focus just on the high-profile executives who rake in millions during their often brief stints in the high-paid hot seat, take a look at the real owners of the big corporations—those who may never step inside the luxurious corporate offices but earn vast fortunes as they while away their idle hours.

For it is to please them—the super-rich property-owning class—that the managers do their dirty deeds, all to show a bigger profit at the end of the year.

Back in the early days of capitalism, companies often sported the names of their owners and the workers knew exactly who exploited them, who was responsible for the dirty and dangerous conditions of their workplace, who kept them toiling away for 12, 14 and more hours a day. But capitalism has long ago evolved past the stage where most enterprises are managed by those who own them.

Today, the CEO gets all the publicity, but that doesn't mean the owning capitalist class has withered away.

Last year, for the first time, every single person on the Forbes 400 list had a net worth of more than \$1 billion. Collectively, these 400 richest U.S. individuals had assets of \$1.25 trillion—that's one trillion, 250 billion dollars, or an average of more than \$3 billion each.

Compared to them, Angelo Mozilo of Countrywide is a small fry. At compensation of only \$42 million a year, he would have to work for almost 80 years and not spend a cent to have that much wealth salted away.

And who are these wealthy individuals? Some have last names associated with the family fortunes that have dominated the U.S. since the 19th century—like Rockefeller, DuPont and Hearst. But others are obscure and want to keep it that way.

Among the less-than-household names on

the list are Jack Crawford Taylor (Enterprise Rent-A-Car), Abigail Johnson (Fidelity) and John Werner Kluge (Metromedia). And these three are among the top 25 richest of the very, very, very rich, with fortunes ranging from \$14 billion to \$9 billion.

The super-super-rich may not sit behind a CEO's desk and give the orders that have resulted in wages in this country having dropped over each of the last three years; they may not have devised the precise schemes by which aspiring homeowners have been lured into subprime mortgages that turn into millstones around their necks; but the super-rich, the ruling class, approve of the results: higher profits and higher dividends on their investments.

Until it all comes crashing down. Then they can sound surprised and indignant that "greedy" managers have pushed things over the brink in their quest for quick money and can lament about the loss of integrity since the good old days.

But the truth is that what the managers of corporations like Enron and Countrywide have been doing is not that new. Remember the Roaring Twenties, when money flowed like wine, followed by the Crash of 1929?

The misery that came with the Depression changed a lot of people's minds about capitalism. It led to an upsurge of the working class that wrestled union contracts out of a lot of bosses, who labeled the organizers "Bolsheviks" and feared that without some concessions there'd be a workers' revolution.

Today, the housing market is approaching a Depression-level crisis. Some 15 percent of the subprime loans, with a total value of about \$67 billion, are already in default. Many more are about to "reset," that is, begin to charge a much higher interest rate that will be unaffordable for those whose incomes haven't kept pace.

While foreclosures are already high, some 2 million more families are estimated to be at imminent risk of losing their homes. They include many who qualified for prime mortgages, which are also seeing a rise in defaults and foreclosures.

'Gift to Wall Street'

Into this turmoil has stepped President George W. Bush, fresh from dealing with his "victories" in Iraq. He says he has an initiative to get Congress to pass legislation giving the Federal Housing Administration more flexibility in assisting mortgage holders with subprime mortgages. This plan will supposedly help some 80,000 families—out of the more than 2 million at risk.

Bush was careful to say that his initiative is not a bailout for the mortgage industry or the equity firms that loaned it money and are now also in big trouble.

But the business journal *Forbes* sees it otherwise:

"In a Labor Day gift to Wall Street, President Bush on Friday announced plans to expand the Federal Housing Administration so that an additional 80,000 risky borrowers can benefit from its mortgage insurance program. In doing so, he sent a signal that the federal government would act to keep the market turmoil brought on by the implosion of risky mortgage lending from damaging the economy in an election season." (*Forbes*, Aug. 31)

The stock of Countrywide Financial went up after Bush's announcement. So did that of Bear Stearns, which had loaned a lot of money to companies dealing in subprime mortgages.

What will happen to the 1,920,000 families who won't be eligible for this "help"? And what about those who have already lost their homes?

One thing is for sure. Whether it's in an elec-
Continued on the next page

UAW negotiations

Continued from page 4

much the company saves on VEBA, retirees and workers will have to pay through higher premiums, co-pays, and wage cuts. ... An under-funded health care plan is a prescription for disaster."

SoS has also produced a leaflet urging workers to watch for "red flags" such as VEBA, a lucrative signing bonus, a "rush to ratify" and "two tier wages and abuse of temp workers." The flyer concludes with an appeal: "If you see a Red Flag, VOTE NO!"

All of these red flags and more are likely to be facing the UAW's Big Three membership.

Arm-twisting by the UAW leadership and Big Three management has already begun. "The UAW's lead Chrysler negotiator addressed local union presidents Thursday in a conference call," reported the Aug. 31 *Detroit News*. "UAW Vice President General Holiefield told the local leaders to move ahead with plant-level talks as bargaining occurs on the national level. Holiefield, who hosted the roughly five-minute phone call with Kenneth J. McCarter, vice president of union relations operations at Chrysler, told union leaders that the goal is to wrap up local and

national contract talks by Sept. 14, when the existing master agreement expires."

What kind of negotiations are these, where a representative of the enemy camp is invited into a union strategy session? Especially with the new Chrysler CEO Robert Nardelli making noise about accelerating planned cuts of 13,000 jobs and being open to cutting deeper?

Many local officers, struggling to hold on to the gains they have made over the years and fighting a seemingly losing battle to stave the hemorrhaging of jobs, are wondering of their International leaders, "Which side are they on?" The rank-and-file is wondering the same thing.

SoS, formed in the midst of the Delphi bankruptcy struggle, is showing the way in organizing sentiment against a concessionary agreement. A "No" vote would be just the first step in forging a grassroots movement in the plants—in alliance with retirees—to defend autoworkers' property rights to their jobs, wages and benefits.

Martha Grevatt has worked for 20 years at Chrysler's Twinsburg, Ohio, stamping plant and serves on the executive board of her local union.

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Workers take to the streets in Chile

By Jaimeson Champion

On Aug. 29, hundreds of thousands of workers took to the streets of Santiago, Chile, to protest neoliberal economic policies and demand wage equality, better pensions, and greater access to healthcare and education.

The demonstrations were billed as a "National Day of Action," and were initiated by the largest federation of trade unions in Chile, known as United Workers Central. Simultaneous demonstrations in other cities and towns across the country were also attended by hundreds of thousands of union members and their supporters, and included union organizing activities in addition to street protests.

Central among the issues raised by the workers at the demonstrations was the issue of wage inequality. In many Chilean industries it is not uncommon for a supervisor to earn more than 200 times the wage of the average worker. In the mining industries, particularly copper, profits have soared by double digit percentages over the last decade yet wages for most workers have remained stagnant. Demonstrators condemned the practice of subcontracting in the mining industries, which is essentially a way for the capitalists to avoid providing workers with health insurance and other benefits.

The demonstrations also denounced the neoliberal economic policies that the imperialist powers have attempted to force on the countries of Latin America for decades. These policies include greater privatization in key industries, the opening up of markets to the imperialist powers, and strict limits on spending for social

programs. In many instances, the U.S. has made emergency aid and loan packages conditional on Latin American countries implementing these policies.

Demonstrators asserted that these neoliberal policies have helped to enrich foreign corporations and the Chilean oligarchy at the expense of Chilean workers. They demanded that the government focus on the needs of Chilean workers instead of the predatory desires of the imperialist corporations.

The huge demonstrations in Chile are yet another indication of the growing resistance to neoliberalism that is surging across Latin America. Workers across Latin America are bringing to the forefront the fact that neoliberalism and free market economic policies have brought misery and suffering upon the masses

while fattening the pockets of the imperialist corporations. An increasing number of governments in Latin America are shunning these policies. Governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador are in open revolt against neoliberalism and imperialism.

The demonstrators in the capital city of Santiago endured the violent tactics of the infamous Chilean riot police. The police lived up to their reputation for brutality by launching volleys of tear gas and firing water cannons into the crowds of demonstrators. More than 200 demonstrators in Santiago were injured. The police unwarrantedly arrested more than 700 demonstrators.

Despite the unprovoked violence and arrests perpetrated by the police, the countrywide demonstrations were her-

alded by many labor leaders as a huge success and an indication of the growing movement for fundamental economic, social, and political change that is sweeping across Chile.

The demonstrations come on the heels of huge student protests last year, where students occupied and took control of 13 schools in Santiago, and a series of strikes initiated by subcontracted mine workers that have shown the ability to effectively cripple production in the mines.

The increasingly militant stances taken by the unions and students are indications that the endless promises of reform offered up by Chilean politicians over the past few years have worn thin. Chilean workers and students are taking to the streets in growing numbers to demand fundamental change, not token reform. □

Operations now in Mali

U.S. military interventions arouse African suspicions

By G. Dunkel

U.S. troops are currently engaged in military exercises in northern Mali in Africa. Called Operation Flintlock, the exercise involves troops from the former colonialist powers Britain, France and the Netherlands, as well as from Mali, Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Senegal, Tunisia and Nigeria. The U.S. military ran the first Operation Flintlock in 2005 in northern Mali.

Mali, which is among the 10 poorest countries in the world, is Africa's third largest gold producer, after South Africa and Ghana. Mali's gold mining is dominated by Canadian, European and South African firms. Northern Mali, which shares a long border with southern Algeria, may contain vast pools of oil.

Operation Flintlock, scheduled to end Sept. 8, reinforces the U.S. goal of setting up a new African Command (AFRICOM) somewhere inside Africa. This goal defies the position taken by many African countries, including South Africa.

After the meeting of the defense and security ministers of the Southern African Defense Community (SADC) at the end of August, South African Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota briefed the press.

Questioned regarding AFRICOM, Lekota said: "The SADC Summit did adopt the position that it is better if the United States were involved with Africa from a distance rather than be present on the continent. That creates a sense of uncertainty. ... The SADC defense and security ministers took a decision that sister countries of the region should not agree to host AFRICOM and in particular, armed forces, since this would have a negative effect. That recommendation was presented to the Heads of State and this is a SADC position."

Regarding AFRICOM and the African Union, Lekota said: "My understanding is that this is a continental position. We have no quarrel with AFRICOM as such, but the issue of its location in Africa is of concern. The continent has said that it would not like to see new forces in Africa."

The SADC's members include Angola, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and nine other smaller countries in the region.

Africa's vast resources and labor have enriched and developed capitalism in Europe and North America for centuries, while leaving most Africans impoverished. Thus it should be no surprise that African media are also expressing suspicions

about the U.S. goals with AFRICOM.

In the Kenyan newspaper *The Standard*, a July 8 article analyzed U.S. motives: "Last week, Tanzania announced that it had hit commercially viable oil deposits along its coast. This comes just over one year after Uganda struck its own black gold in the west. And suddenly rumors of Americans calling on the region are rife."

The article notes that the U.S.'s traditional sources of oil in Latin America and the Middle East are "tightening grip on their resources. Which is why East Africa is believed to be the next oil frontier the West appears determined to hold onto." The article emphasizes not only that Africa can supply the U.S. with oil but that its economy is growing so fast, with the increasing price of oil, that Africa will become an important market.

In the midst of Operation Flintlock, a revolt among the Tuareg, a nomadic ethnic group living in northern Mali and Niger, and southern Algeria, suddenly flared up after a peace agreement had been reached in July. *La Tribune*, an Algerian newspaper published in Algiers, asked in an editorial published on its website Aug. 29 if this revolt was going to be an "alibi for the U.S. to militarily install itself in the region." □

Continued from page 10

tion year or not, the "turmoil" in the economy is going to get a lot worse. Workers are going to have to fight hard to put food on the table, let alone have a roof over their heads.

There's no fix for an outmoded economic system that has developed an immense web of production which envelopes the globe but is designed to create profits for a tiny minority who control its center.

But, through great struggle, the vast productive apparatus can be taken over by the millions who do the work that created all this wealth in the first place, and be restructured to provide for the good of society rather than for the pathological profit-needs of the gold-encrusted few.

E-mail: dgriswold@workers.org

Interviews with Iraq veterans

Continued from page 8

true or false, but it only represents a small part of the picture.

We're going to tell about war, about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, about stop loss orders that can extend your contract. We'll tell what it's like to be in combat. This is unpleasant information, but these are important parts of the military experience. We say if you join the military, you should be making an informed decision.

Madden: On Sept. 17 Adam Kokesh [who is co-chair of the board—WW] is organizing a National Truth-in-Recruiting Day.

WW: Did the convention change the IVAW's political orientation?

Madden: What the convention did is show that the IVAW members were all more or less on the same page.

Stevens: The political statement Mejia made at the convention was that we need to look at the root of the problem—not just

the war but the capitalist system. People responded positively to this.

My own position is that the movement is limited if it says only, "Get the troops out of Iraq." The GI movement should also be an anti-racist movement. It should oppose not only U.S. intervention in Iraq but U.S. intervention in Sudan.

What Hutto is doing is important. He's in the military now, on active duty. He's saying, "I'm going to build the movement from within."

The real measure of the organization will be not in the leaders but in what the chapters do. I'm organizing a New Jersey chapter of IVAW at Essex Community College.

WW: Jon, you spoke at the convention. What was your message?

Able Seaman **Jonathan Hutto**, co-founder of the anti-war "Appeal for Redress":

Even though 2,000-plus GIs signed the

"Appeal for Redress" and IVAW convoys toured military bases and people have demonstrated and voted against the war, the government has been relentless in its decision to continue this war and occupation. I told the IVAW convention that when the government closes off those routes for redress and frustrates political will, then the people will seek other routes. They will move beyond an appeal to a demand. This is the history of the Declaration of Independence.

Thomas Jefferson—and he was a slaveholder—wrote that when a government becomes destructive then the people have an obligation to replace or overthrow that government.

The frustration can make you cynical. I learned though from Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] at Howard University 10 years ago how to combat this. He said you don't join the struggle to mobilize around an immediate issue, and then once you have resolved the issue, you move on with

the rest of your life. "The struggle is eternal. ...You have to take a long-term view, to be able to stay in the struggle."

We have to look at what a GI/vet movement has to be. It should not be just to end the war but it should fight all forms of oppression. It should be interconnected with the fight against racism, sexism and the struggle of oppressed people all over the world. The whole call to send the troops home is limited unless it also includes reparations to Iraqi people. The GIs must understand that the average GI has more in common with people of Iraq than with the U.S. government.

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Catalinotto was an organizer during 1967-1971 for the American Servicemen's Union, which opposed the war against Vietnam.

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EDITORIAL

El problema del Pentágono

Las ocupaciones fallidas de Irak y Afganistán están llevando el problema básico del Pentágono al punto de ebullición. Tal cambio de cantidad en calidad puede afectar el papel del Pentágono por décadas, a pesar de su abrumadora ventaja en estrategia guerrillera y poder aéreo.

La guerra todavía requiere seres humanos. Esta es la raíz del problema del Pentágono.

Los movimientos de resistencia en Irak y Afganistán siguen atrayendo personas listas a luchar y morir para liberar sus países de la ocupación de parte de los EEUU. La mayoría de los soldados e infantes de marina, por otro lado, solamente de mala gana y resignadamente obedecen las órdenes de combatir en una guerra que cada vez más ven como el crimen que es, un crimen en contra del pueblo de Irak y el pueblo de Afganistán, y un crimen en contra de ellos mismos.

Un indicio de la creciente desesperación en las fuerzas militares estadounidenses es que los suicidios de las tropas en los últimos 26 años alcanzaron su punto más alto en el 2006, y que la tasa de suicidios está subiendo en los escuadrones estacionados ahora en Irak y Afganistán.

La combinación de turnos de servicio más largos en Irak — ahora los soldados tienen que cumplir 15 meses — y el saber que la guerra había perdido el apoyo de la población estadounidense, condujo a las tropas estadounidenses no solo a desesperarse sino a expresiones de disensión sin precedente. Un artículo de opinión que apareció en el New York Times el domingo y que fue escrito por siete soldados inscritos en la División Aerotransportada 82, ofreció su propio análisis de la guerra que era totalmente diferente a la de la comandancia y el presidente, y llamó a que los Estados Unidos se salieran de Irak.

Quienes están comprometidos a terminar las ocupaciones de Irak y Afganistán podrían aplaudir la reciente decisión de los Veteranos de Irak Contra la Guerra (VICG) de apoyar activamente a los resistentes a la guerra. La elección del Sargento Camilo Mejía, un héroe resistente a la guerra en el 2003, como director de la junta del VICG, subraya ese paso de promover la resistencia de soldados en servicio activo.

Hay que añadir a este hecho la dificultad del Pentágono de atraer nueva carne de cañón. El rechazo de casi el 100 por ciento de la comunidad afroamericana a la guerra, ha conducido a que el alistamiento de nuevos reclutas negros esté en un nivel bajo. En Puerto Rico, un movimiento popular ha estado impidiendo a los reclutadores militares estadounidenses tentar a los estudiantes de las escuelas secundarias.

Como resultado, las regiones estadounidenses que proveen la mayoría de nuevos "voluntarios" son los pueblos rurales pobres y ciudades pequeñas, donde aún las bonificaciones de \$20,000 para reclutamiento y una campaña de \$3.2 mil millones para reclutamiento apenas mantienen los números proyectados como objetivo.

El "zar de guerra" de Bush, el Teniente General Douglas Lute, ofreció una solución para el problema de reclutamiento en una reciente entrevista radial. Lute habló de reinstalar la conscripción militar de los jóvenes estadounidenses: el servicio militar obligatorio. Aún la administración de Bush, la cual arrogantemente ha ignorado la oposición creciente de las masas a la guerra en Irak, tiene miedo del servicio militar obligatorio y ha negado que pasara — hasta ahora. Teme que el servicio militar obligatorio vaya a volver a 40 millones de jóvenes estadounidenses opuestos pasivamente a la guerra imperialista, en apasionados activistas políticos en contra de la guerra.

Las tropas han ido de sumisión a desmoralización, a desesperación y ahora a disensión. Están yendo hacia la resistencia militar. Esas tropas que resisten merecen el apoyo total del movimiento contra la guerra. El problema del Pentágono es una oportunidad para la humanidad. □

Frente de la lucha global sobre la privatización del agua

Por Heather Cottin
San Salvador, El Salvador

Es la cosa más simple. En el mundo industrializado, mil millones de personas lo hacen diez veces al día. Abren la llave del agua y la beben, también lavan con ella, se lavan los dientes con ella y hasta cocinan con ella. Está siempre ahí, caliente o fría, potable y barata.

Aún así, en estos países, la gente compra agua embotellada. No es necesario comprarla pero de todas maneras lo hacen. La venta de agua embotellada solamente en los Estados Unidos llegó a producir \$8.3 mil millones en el año 2003. No es un agua especial. Recientes informaciones muestran que el agua embotellada vendida por las principales compañías productoras, Coca Cola, Pepsi y Nestlé, obtienen este producto de los acueductos municipales. Sus ganancias son astronómicas.

El año pasado los seres humanos gastaron \$100 mil millones en el consumo de agua embotellada. Esto excede tres veces la meta de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para dar a todo mundo acceso al agua para el año 2015. (Michael Blanding, "The Bottled Water Lie," ("La mentira del Agua Embotellada") Alternet, Oct. 26, 2006)

Si estas compañías se salen con la suya, tomarán el control de los sistemas de agua, ríos, lagos y manantiales en todo el mundo.

Y ya han comenzado. Miles de millones de personas no tienen acceso a agua potable.

No les llega. Cargando vasijas pesadas en sus cabezas, mujeres y niños caminan largas distancias hasta sus hogares en América Latina, el Caribe, Asia, el Medio Oriente y África. Según investigadores de la Universidad de Cornell, las enfermedades que resultan de beber agua contaminada causa el 40 por ciento de las muertes en el mundo.

En el Tercer Mundo, como en los países capitalistas industrializados, las compañías drenan los manan-

tiales, lagos y ríos y venden esa agua obteniendo grandes ganancias.

En países como Bolivia, las Filipinas, los Estados Unidos y El Salvador la gente se está organizando para luchar contra la privatización del agua.

A comienzos de julio En El Salvador, campesinos y trabajadores del Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional protestaron en Suchitoto el día en que el presidente Antonio Saca llegó a esta ciudad para promover la ley que privatizaría el agua.

El ejército que acompañó a Saca utilizó el acta antiterrorista salvadoreña creada bajo el modelo del Acta Patriótica de los Estados Unidos, para reprimir la protesta. Catorce personas enfrentan sentencias de hasta 60 años por marchar en contra de la privatización.

El cercano Lago Suchitlán no tiene una planta para el tratamiento del agua; la mayoría de los residentes tiene que pagar dos dólares por una botella de agua que puede durarle dos días a una familia. Aunque El Salvador tiene muchos ríos y lagos, los desperdicios industriales y de aguas sucias contaminan el agua y no hay leyes que protejan el medio ambiente.

En El Salvador, un 60 por ciento de la población está desempleada y el salario promedio es de \$5 al día. La privatización ha triplicado los precios de luz y del servicio telefónico. La privatización del agua sería un desastre. Desde las detenciones en Suchitoto, El Salvador ha quedado tenso con una ira reprimida. El 25 de julio, estudiantes que se manifestaban en la Universidad Nacional en San Salvador en apoyo a los 14 de Suchitoto, fueron brutalmente atacados. Los estudiantes respondieron pintando murallas y graffiti con consignas revolucionarias: "No a la Ley Antiterrorista". El partido derechista de Saca, ARENA está aumentando la presencia policial y militar a través de todo el país.

Las protestas contra la privatización del agua se han extendido

alrededor del mundo, desde Bolivia, donde acciones militantes anticiparon el avance hacia el poder de Evo Morales, hasta Stockton del Estado de California, donde activistas del agua derrotaron un plan de privatización. Recientemente unos manifestantes rompieron sus cuentas del agua en la Ciudad Quezon en las Filipinas.

La privatización del agua es el acto más cínico y cruel. La gente necesita del agua, de modo que el Banco Mundial, el Fondo Monetario Internacional y todos los acuerdos de "libre comercio" dictan que los pobres tienen que pagarla. Pero las ganancias de un solo año de la industria del agua embotellada serían bastantes para proporcionar dinero suficiente para pagar la construcción de la infraestructura para proveer agua potable a todos los habitantes del mundo.

Durante una reciente lucha contra la privatización del agua en las Filipinas, un activista dijo, "El agua, como la libertad, es esencial para que los seres humanos vivan con dignidad. Desafortunadamente, hoy día este líquido que da vida está siendo comercializado como un producto para consumidores por empresas privadas en búsqueda de ganancias con la colusión de este gobierno lleno de deudas, lo que significa que el derecho al agua del pueblo ahora depende del contenido de sus bolsillos". (GMA-TV Noticias)

Esta lucha por el agua está en la vanguardia de la lucha contra la reestructuración capitalista neoliberal. Y mientras que los privatizadores se jactan de la efectividad de las fuerzas del mercado para apoderarse de las fuentes del agua del mundo, las detenciones en Suchitoto demuestran que cuando no pueden recuperar lo que quieren por "el mercado libre", pueden depender de la brutalidad del estado capitalista.

Las revoluciones se producen cuando la gente se da cuenta que tiene que organizarse para defender sus derechos humanos básicos. ¿Y qué es más básico que el agua? □

Marcha en Washington, D.C. y Los Angeles

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