

WORKERS WORLD

Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!

MARCH 4, 2010 Vol. 52 No. 8 50¢

March 4 protests coast to coast Fund education, not banks & war

By Larry Hales

On March 4 students and workers from all around the country will take action to defend education against increased privatization of pre-kindergarten through 12th grade schools, budget cuts, layoffs, furloughs and tuition increases at college and universities — especially the public institutions.

Workers and students have shouldered the brunt of the capitalist crisis, while bankers and corporations have been given hundreds of billions of dollars of public monies in order to be bailed out of a crisis that was made by the capitalist system, not the masses.

Young people in particular are faced with a grim future — one where well-paying jobs with benefits are becoming scarcer — and where the educational system is being increasingly privatized, teachers' unions busted and curriculums dumbed down to prepare future generations for the current and emerging social order of worldwide competition for low-wage jobs.

Colleges and universities are getting further out of reach, and those who are able to attend must mortgage away their futures.

It is the current political climate, on top of drastic measures being taken by state governments across the country, that helped give birth to the idea of having a national day of action to defend education.

California students and faculty, teachers and other workers first called for March 4 to be a statewide day of action at their conference on Oct. 24.

California students have taken bold action, occupying a number of universities — University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco State, to name only two. The action and energy from California has piqued the interest of many across the country, who began reaching out to California students to make the statewide day of action national.

Both the California Coordinating Committee and activists, students, educators and other workers from across the country released complementary statements agitating for a national day of action on March 4.

The statement from the ad hoc group reads:

“As people throughout the country struggle under the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, public education from pre-K to higher and adult education is threatened by budget cuts, layoffs, privatization, tuition and fee increases, and other attacks. Budget cuts degrade the quality of public education by decreasing student services and increasing class size, while tuition hikes and layoffs force the cost of the recession onto students and teachers and off of the financial institutions that caused the recession in the first place. Non-unionized charter schools threaten to divide, weaken and privatize the public school system and damage teachers' unions, which are needed now more than ever. More and more students are going deep into debt to finance their education, while high unemployment forces many students and youth to join the military to receive a higher education. And all of the attacks described above have hit working people and people of color the hardest.

“In California, students, teachers, workers, parents, and faculty have taken action against these attacks. They took to the streets in a one-day strike on Sept. 24th, organized strikes and actions across the state during the University of California Board of Regents meeting from Nov. 18 to 20, and have called for a statewide day of action on March 4th. These actions have created a broad mass movement in California, drawing in students from all over the state to create a powerful struggle. As the effects of the economic crisis continue to spread into the education system nationally, it's time to join our voices with students and workers in California and draw inspiration from their example.

“We support each group or coalition organizing in the manner

and for the duration of their choosing. In solidarity with those in California, we the below-signed individuals and organizations call on students, teachers, workers, parents, faculty, and staff across the country to join together on March 4th to Take A Stand For Education!”

Planning for March 4 is underway in Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin, and it will no doubt grow.

Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) youth group, along with many different student and community groups, socialist parties and unions, has been involved in planning and organizing for what could be a resurgence of a national student movement at a time when workers' organizations, antiwar and community organizations are becoming enraged at the loss of jobs, imperialist war and plunder, racism and police brutality, attacks against immigrant workers, and the other ills of U.S. capitalist society.

Hales is a leader of FIST, which is a national endorser of March 4.

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'FREE MUMIA!'**



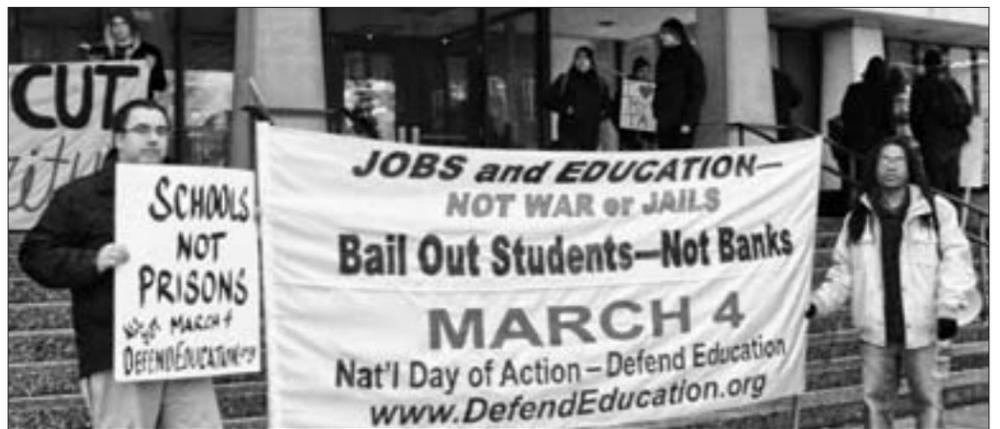
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Michigan State University students, workers rally and march on Feb. 3.

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SEBASTIAN PERNICE

1948-2010: A Stonewall rebel who embraced Marxism

By Rosemary Neidenberg
New York

Sebastian Pernice, who died Feb. 1 of lung cancer, was born in Militello, Sicily, in 1948. He came to the U.S. with his parents when he was eight. By the age of 14, he was fearlessly and unapologetically gay and had fled New Jersey for Manhattan three times, sleeping on the streets or in squats. His father, a textile worker, consulted friends who advised that “to make him a man,” Sebe should be sent to family in Sicily. His family had never heard the gay slogan, “We are everywhere.”

Sebe returned to the U.S. at 17, more rebellious and adventurous than ever, where he joined the community of gay street people in New York City. Eventually, his parents welcomed him and his partners to family holiday dinners.

He was an educated man, accepting only self-chosen education — a GED, auditing many classes at Columbia University, paying tuition for a few. He was intensely interested in ancient history, anthropology, linguistics, the geology of Manhattan Island, computer technology. “I went to college not to learn how to become successful and secure, but only to learn.”

Diagnosed as HIV positive in 1987, he for years refused AZT treatment because he had observed serious side effects. “I’m not sick,” he said. “Get that stuff away from me.” He remained strong and active until 2001, when he accepted anti-viral medications after a bout of pneumonia.

Sebe detested oppression and injustice with every cell and nerve in his body and at first considered himself an unaffiliated anarchist. Anti-racist and for free expression of sexuality, he identified with women, with workers, with the hungry. In 2008 he became a Marxist and part of Workers World Party, deciding to work in an organized fashion for a society that would allow the world’s peoples to flourish in every way.

And work he did. On Thursdays, Sebe enlivened the weekly newspaper mailing. Handsome and exotic in an Italian airline pilot’s long black coat, he would be greeted by cheers and hugs. After distributing fruit and sweets from his beloved Chinatown, the pot of pasta was put on to boil. Enlivened with different toppings each week, it was consumed by all with talk and laughter. Then Sebe went to work. There were bundle orders to send out, computers to maintain, mailing labels to run, Friday-night dinners to organize. He became indispensable.

Undeterred by painful hip-bone deterioration, he came to union pickets and anti-war rallies, and demonstrations in support of Palestine, Mumia Abu-Jamal and other political prisoners. He was on the line supporting the striking Stella D’oro workers in the Bronx. He spoke at the November 2009 Workers World Conference on widening Party lesbian, gay, bi, trans work.



WWPHOTOS: G. DUNKEL

Remembering Stonewall

Last year at a WW forum on the fabled Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, Sebastian recalled his participation. A video of that meeting captures his comments: “We grew up on the civil rights movement. Stonewall was the opening battle for our rights.” He recreated some of the sound and fury of that June night.

“Vans and police cars lined the block. The police had come to rescue those [cops] trapped inside. They formed a line in front of the bar. We filled the streets curb to curb. Then an amazing thing happened. Marsha [Johnson], Sylvia [Rivera], myself and a dozen others began to sing what had become our anthem. We gave them a little cancan. Tune: Tararaboomdeay. ‘We are the village girls, we wear our hair in curls, we wear our dungarees, above our bony knees ...’

“For four beats — utter silence. Then they charged. We ran. We had only our invective and anger against helmets, shields and billy clubs. The night was over but the struggle was not. We sustained sporadic activity for a year, culminating in the first Gay Pride march — ‘Out of the ghettos, into the streets.’

“Until the goals we set for equal rights and justice are achieved, Stonewall is not over.”

The video gives a taste of his fervor, his humor, and some understanding of why his comrades loved him so. (To see it, go to www.workers.org/tv/ and scroll to 6/19/09) or do a Google search for “06/19/09: STONEWALL LIVES!”)

In the West Village five-floor walkup where Sebastian lived with his partner Tim, there is an evergreen wreath with tiny lights, candles illuminating his collection of small ceramic houses, plants — color and beauty everywhere, half of the furnishings harvested from the streets by his ever-searching eye. Morning sun streams through unimpeded windows: the sweep of pigeon flights delighted him.

His childhood companion and cousin Rita from Europe joined his partner Tim in night-and-day loving care. His sister Sally, friends Francine and Ermes, step-daughter Sara, were there. Many comrades and friends came — most often Anne, Bill, Brenda, Dolores, Marie, Marsha, Mike, Tsehai, Sharon B., Sharon E., Toni.

The doctor had presented options: “With chemo, maybe a year; with palliative care, maximum three months.” Loving life so passionately, he left it as he had lived it, with courage, on his terms, and with thought for those who loved him most. □

Rainbow Solidarity

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By Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*

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After more than a decade of struggle

African-American farmers win compensation

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

On Feb. 18, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the latest settlement to provide compensation and resources to African-American farmers. An organization that represents African-American farmers, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund — founded in 1967 — welcomed the announced settlement.

Demonstrations took place during February in support of the demands put forward by African-American farmers seeking an end to land loss and the racist policies of the USDA, which have driven millions of people from the rural areas of the South for decades. Rallies were held in Washington, D.C.; Little Rock, Ark.; Memphis, Tenn.; Jackson, Miss.; Montgomery, Ala.; Columbus, Ga.; Columbia, S.C.; and Richmond, Va.

The farmers were demanding a resolution to the 1999 legal settlement which was supposed to provide compensation for decades of systematic discrimination by the USDA. However, the federal bureaucracy placed enormous roadblocks to the farmers receiving settlement funds.

Only 15,000 African-American farmers were able to navigate the complicated paperwork to collect compensation reported to have averaged a mere \$50,000 per family. Most of the farmers were excluded, and in 2008 the U.S. Congress acknowledged the problems and granted additional time for another 70,000 people to apply for compensation.

Despite this supposed commitment to speed up the processing of applications for compensation, Congress cut \$1.5 billion in funding that President Barack Obama had included in the first budget of

the current administration and specifically designated for Black farmers. Obama has included a similar amount in the budget for the next fiscal year that is now going before the Congress.

According to Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C., a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, “The primary issue now, I think, is that there’s not money appropriated to pay the successful claimants.” Despite the fact that the Democratic Party controls both houses of Congress, there is no real commitment to address the problems of African-American farmers.

In a demonstration outside the USDA on Feb. 15, John Boyd, the National Black Farmers Association president, presented legislators with 538 ears of corn and packets of forget-me-not seeds, demanding that each member of the House of Representatives and Senate include the \$1.5 billion in the 2010 budget for compensation. “Our long journey to justice should now

come to a successful close,” said Boyd.

Boyd continued by stating, “We have endured many hardships, waited many years and traveled many miles. Now it’s time for Congress to do its part and fund fairness for black farmers. Thousands of farmers who can’t be in Washington showed their support by traveling long distances through snow and rain to join our rallies. We’re here to represent them and get the job done.” (PRWEB, Feb. 15)

In a Feb. 4 press conference, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs responded to a question related to the ongoing plight of African-American farmers. Gibbs said, “Clearly, it’s something important to him [Obama]. It’s been an issue that has been worked on by the federal government now in several different administrations and dating back many years. Obviously, ensuring that justice is done is important in this situation.” (PRWEB, Feb. 15)

Fund spokesperson Heather Gray said of the recent settlement: “After years of negotiations and questions, for Black farmers who have never been able to have their claims of discrimination against the United States Department of Agriculture settled, there is finally some hope. The Obama administration and attorneys representing Black farmers have reached a settlement in the second phase of the lawsuit originally filed by Black farmers against the USDA in 1999.” (The Federation/LAF, Feb. 18)

According to the Fund executive director, Ralph Paige: “The long-awaited settlement in this second phase of the Pigford lawsuit is a major step forward. The \$1.25 billion settlement proposed by the Obama administration is a vast improvement over the \$100 million offered by Congress in the 2008 Farm Bill. Now there is hope that the thousands of black

Continued on page 5

From Sean Bell to stop-and-frisks

Racist profiling is a U.S. tradition

By **Dolores Cox**

History has a way of repeating itself, it is said. This couldn’t be truer than in the racist differential treatment of Black men and youth by U.S. state and local police departments. Equal justice under the law has never been part of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Take the Sean Bell case. On Nov. 25, 2006, Bell, a 23-year-old African American, was killed by New York Police Department officers in a hail of 50 bullets while sitting unarmed in his car as he was

leaving his bachelor party at a local night club in Queens. He was to be married later that same day. Joseph Guzman and Trent Benefield, in the car with him and also unarmed, were seriously wounded.

On April 25, 2008, a state judge acquitted the three police officers of every charge of manslaughter and reckless endangerment in the shootings. Essentially the judge ruled Bell’s killing to be justified; no crime committed. This decision is a measure of how devalued Black life is and how easily Black men are demonized and disparaged.

Sean Bell’s case proves how deadly race can still be in a politically illusionary “post-racial” society. In the past wallets, candy bars, keys and packs of cigarettes were deemed sufficient cause to provoke such malicious responses. But now, nothing but race-based suspicion is required.

This past Feb. 16, ironically during Black History Month, the U.S. attorney general stated that the Justice Department investigation determined that there was insufficient evidence to pursue federal charges against the officers who killed Bell and wounded his companions.

Specifically, the Justice Department stated: “After a careful and thorough review, a team of experienced federal prosecutors and FBI agents determined that the evidence was insufficient to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the law enforcement personnel who fired at Bell acted willfully. Accordingly, the investigation into this incident has been closed.” (Daily Challenge, Feb. 18)

Later that day, the Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the National Action Network and representing the Bell family, held a press conference on the Justice Department’s decision in Washington, D.C. Present were Nicole Paultre-Bell, Sean’s widow; Trent Benefield; Joseph Guzman; and attorneys Michael Hardy and Sanford Rubenstein.

Sharpton stated, “We intend to pursue internal NYPD proceedings and the civil lawsuit to try and bring some justice to Sean Bell’s children and family, and to Joseph Guzman and Trent Benefield, whom I still feel had their civil rights violated. ... Fifty shots on an unarmed man who engaged in no crime is intolerable.” (Daily



Challenge, Feb. 18)

At a Feb. 20 rally in New York, William Bell, Sean’s father, asked, “Who are the laws made for? Are they made for us or the police?” (<http://tiny.cc/bILM3>) Since receiving the Justice Department’s verdict, the distraught family says they feel they’re reliving what happened to Sean Bell all over again.

Bell killing — not an isolated incident

A Feb. 17 report published by the Center for Constitutional Rights reveals new NYPD data for 2009 showing a significant rise in “stop-and-frisks.” (www.ccrjustice.org) For that year the reported number of New Yorkers stopped was more than half a million. The racial disparity in the number of stops had increased with 87 percent being Black and Latino/a — significantly more compared to whites.

The CCR is representing victims of stop-and-frisk policies from 2005 to 2008 in a class action lawsuit filed in 2008. During this period, approximately 80 percent of people stopped were Blacks and Latinos/as, who only made up 25 percent and 28 percent of the general population, respectively. Crime “suspects” are frequently stopped for vague, undefined reasons such as “furtive movements,” “casing a victim or location,” “inappropriate attire for season,” “wearing clothes commonly used in a crime” and “suspicious bulge.” However, only 1.3 percent of those stopped last year had weapons.

The CCR states that there’s a need for important reforms to the oversight of the NYPD due to the trend of racial disparities increasing. The CCR concludes that stop-and-frisks without reasonable suspicion violate the Fourteenth Amendment and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

That a travesty of justice occurred in the Sean Bell case is an understatement. Racist police oppression has been statistically documented. Continued racial profiling, harassment, beatings, shootings, killings, arrests and imprisonment of Black men and youth by the police reveal that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Everyone should be outraged at the Justice Department’s decision in the Sean Bell case and recommit to the struggle. We are all Sean Bell! □

Immigrants rally for justice

Teodoro Aguiluz, Central American Resource Center executive director, drew loud applause when he told the crowd of almost 800 immigrants and their supporters: “We’ve had enough. We are not criminals. We are not terrorists. We are workers who are here because we have to support our families. Enough with the indignity! Enough with the disrespect! We demand to be treated as the proud and dignified human beings that we are!”

Aguiluz was one of dozens and dozens of representatives of community organizations and activists attending the Texas Convention for Immigration Integration sponsored by RITA — the Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance.

More than 700 people showed up from Dallas, Fort Worth, the Rio Grande Valley, Houston, El Paso and Austin, where the convention took place at the Travis County Expo Center on Feb. 20. Houston sent 180 people and Dallas/Fort Worth brought four buses.

Aguiluz introduced a young boy to the convention and told the crowd: “We need comprehensive immigration reform now so that our families will no longer be separated by ICE. This little boy’s father was just deported to Mexico a few days ago. He is the face of why we are fighting. He needs his daddy here with him now.”

The determination for legal recogni-



Austin, Texas

tion was so strong among the crowd that it permeated the air. The will to organize, protest, lobby, hold press conferences and picket lines and travel and raise funds for the necessary campaigns to gain comprehensive immigration reform was palpable.

Two women attired in their colorful native dress, representing one of the activist Guatemalan organizations in Houston, took the microphone to speak about their organizing. One carried a bilingual sign written in Spanish and her Indigenous language saying they were speaking for those not heard.

Eliseo Medina, vice president of the Service Employees International Union, called on the crowd to go to Washington, D.C., for a March 21 action on immigration.

— **Report and photo by Gloria Rubac**

After three-year foreclosure struggle

Historic mint farm remains in family's hands

By Mike Shane
Detroit

After a nearly three-year struggle, owners of the Crosby Mint Farm were able to purchase back most of their historic farm from Greenstone Farm Credit Services, the bank that seized the farm on Aug. 28 from farmers Peppermint Jim Crosby and Linette Crosby. The Crosby siblings endured foreclosure, attacks on their Web site, a sheriff's sale, eviction and an auction of their farm before finally getting their farm back.

The 140-acre Crosby Mint Farm is the oldest continuously running mint farm in the United States and is located in the rural community of St. Johns, Mich., 20 miles north of Lansing, the state capital. Known as "Mint City USA," the St. Johns area once had 60 farms, but only four remain today. In operation since 1912, the Crosby Mint Farm was established by Jim and Linette's great-grandfather. Today, the farm is operated on a 100 percent organic basis with no pesticides, fungicides or herbicides.

The Mint Farm's troubles began in 2006. At that time, the Crosbys had four loans outstanding with Greenstone FCS, which were backed by the Farm Service Agency, a government agency similar to the Federal Housing Administration. When the annual payment for one loan was late, the bank called in all four loans, forcing the farm into "restructuring" through Chapter 12 bankruptcy.

Greenstone FCS convinced the judge to freeze the farm's cash, which, according to Peppermint Jim, "meant that 100 percent of all farm revenue went to the bank, nothing to live on, pay light and heating bills, or buy bottle inventory (for mint oil sales) to keep and maintain our customers."

The fightback begins

The Crosbys began to defend their farm. According to Peppermint Jim: "For three weeks I stayed up round the clock, always having my sister or me on the farm in case the bank came in before we could file for protection. We had gated up the

farm with large telephone poles creating only one point of entry, since our attorney had worked against these same folks in the past and knew what they were able to do. In that particular case they had repossessed the farmer's equipment during the negotiations and he had to pay to get his equipment back. We pulled keys, disconnected batteries, posted signs and set up a tight perimeter with a clear view of both entrances with the back somewhat protected by a large ditch every night."

Meanwhile, Linette Crosby began exploring ways to find support. Her son advised that she "go grassroots — deep grassroots. Stay away from the politicians." Interviews on radio and TV shows were arranged. The Mint Farm story appeared in newspapers and magazines around the U.S. Public support grew.

In early 2008, Linette attended a Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions, and Utility Shutoffs meeting in Detroit to explain the situation and get support. In August 2008, coalition organizers went to the farm to help with outreach at the Annual Mint Parade in St. Johns. Organizers arrived the night before and camped out on the farm. A month later Linette spoke at a statewide rally in Lansing in support of the demand for a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions.

The sheriff's sale took place on Aug. 14, 2008. The Crosby Farm continued to press forward, drawing increased interest and attention from around the country. A Web site, getmint.com, was established to generate mint oil sales, crucial to raising funds to pay off the bank. The site was attacked several times by an unknown party, hampering sales considerably.

With the eviction imminent in August 2009, local supporters stepped up the struggle. The Mint Jam, a benefit music festival, was held on the farm. For two weeks prior to the eviction, daily protests were held in front of the St. Johns office of Greenstone FCS. The Moratorium NOW! Coalition was invited to attend the protest before the Mint Jam. A press release was issued stating that supporters from

Detroit would be arriving, which caused Greenstone FCS to shut down its local office for the day.

When the eviction took place on Aug. 28, over 75 supporters arrived at the Mint Farm to help the Crosbys move. A caravan of 25 vehicles carried their possessions to a temporary home offered for free for the first month by another supporter.

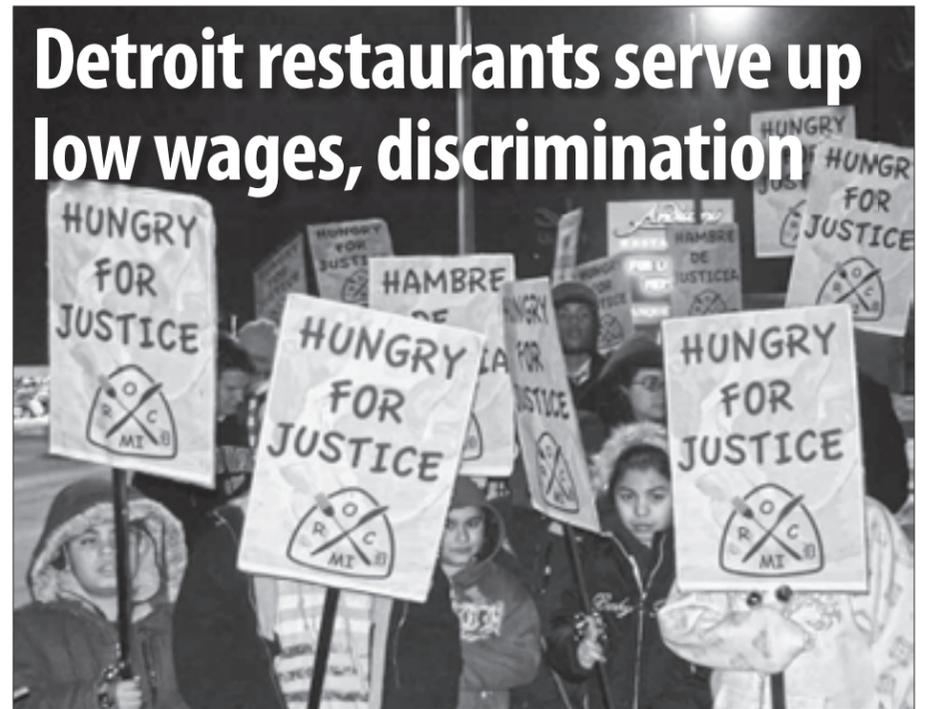
Mint Farm returned

An auction took place in December where the farm was split into a 100- and a 40-acre parcel and bids from other people were accepted by the bank. The Crosbys' bid, submitted in September and rejected by Greenstone FCS, was higher. By law, the

Crosby Farm had "the right of first refusal" to purchase both parcels. Another farmer stepped forward to purchase the 100-acre parcel, with all of the buildings, on behalf of the Crosby Farm, and on Feb. 5 the farm reverted back to the Crosbys' control.

A press release stated: "The brother and sister extend a message of gratitude out to all the supporters, friends, customers and family. ... This experience has changed our lives forever. It has confirmed our belief in the power of community."

During the closing process, a lawyer jokingly asked, "You're not going to have picketers outside are you?" in obvious recognition of the effect that the mass struggle had in winning back the farm. □



WW PHOTO: BRYAN G. PFEIFER

Restaurant workers' children protest at Andiamo restaurant.

By Bryan G. Pfeifer
Detroit

On Feb. 9 the Restaurant Opportunities Center — United of Michigan issued the most comprehensive report on the metro Detroit restaurant industry to date.

"It is more common for employers in the industry to break the law than to follow it," said Minsu Longiaru, coordinator of ROC-Michigan, to a packed forum of ROC members, allies and media at Slow's Bar-B-Q restaurant in Detroit.

The report, "Behind the Kitchen Door: Inequality and Opportunity in Metro Detroit's Growing Restaurant Industry," is the result of seven months of analysis in 2008-09 of industry and government data, academic literature and 501 worker surveys, 32 one-hour interviews with restaurant workers and 37 one-hour interviews with restaurant employers in metro Detroit.

On Feb. 9 similar reports by ROC, a national workers' center based in New York City with nationwide affiliates, were issued in Chicago, New Orleans and Portland, Maine.

The growing restaurant industry in Michigan accounted for over \$12 billion of the state's revenues in 2008. A significant portion of this is generated in metro Detroit, which has 7,700 food service and drinking places currently employing 134,000 workers, many of whom are people of color, women and students. Only 1 percent of the workers in the metro Detroit restaurant industry are unionized.

The ROC report states, "Presently, most of the jobs being generated by the industry are 'bad jobs' — characterized by low wages, few benefits, few options for upward mobility and illegal workplace conditions."

The report concludes that there is systemic discriminatory hiring, promotion and disciplinary practices in the metro Detroit restaurant industry. Seventy-nine percent of all white workers surveyed worked in "the front of the house," while just 51 percent of all African-American workers and 36 percent of Latino/a employees worked in the front. Workers also reported being disciplined more often or more severely based on their race, gender or sexual orientation.

Workers of color are concentrated in "back-of-the-house" positions in the kitchen and as bussers. Undocumented workers, particularly those of Latino/a descent, are almost exclusively found working in the kitchen only. These workers are often superexploited because of racism and immigration status.

Only 12.9 percent of jobs in the industry are living wage jobs and the majority of these are held by white workers. Eighty percent of the workers in the metro Detroit restaurant industry make less than \$10 per hour. For those who make only the \$2.13 federal tipped minimum wage, tips are supposed to fill the gap between this wage and the federally mandated \$7.40 minimum wage, but many times servers are robbed by management who steal the tips, or the servers are forced to "share" the tips with other workers already making the minimum wage or higher.

Health and safety conditions are abysmal. Over half of the workers interviewed had suffered work-related cuts on at least one occasion and had been burned on the job. Since 81.4 percent of restaurant industry employers don't provide health insurance, workers are often forced to work while sick, posing dangers to the public and co-workers. Ninety-five percent of restaurant workers don't get sick days. Sixty percent of workers reported

Foreclosure fighter honored

Attorney Vanessa Fluker, a leader of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shutoffs, was honored at a brunch held Feb. 20 at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. The Black Women Lawyers Association of Michigan presented Fluker with its prestigious Harriet Tubman Award for her legal services on behalf of children victimized by lead poisoning as well as her work representing homeowners fighting foreclosures and predatory lending. Coalition members and several of Fluker's clients were among the hundreds who attended the BWLAM program.

"For every home we are able to save there are a thousand families who are put out on the street. If you think this doesn't affect you, think again. Have your home appraised and see what it's worth," said Fluker. "The federal government is paying the banks to toss people out of their homes. Everyone must take up the fight for justice against the banks and lenders who continue to get billions in our tax dollars."

Judge Deborah Thomas received the Torch Bearer of Justice Award for her civil rights advocacy and leadership in demanding representative juries in Detroit,



WW PHOTO

Attorney Vanessa Fluker

a majority African-American city. Fluker and Thomas were also presented with citations from several dignitaries, including U.S. Rep. John Conyers Jr.

— Report and photo by Kris Hamel

COURAGEOUS ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN

The 1933 Funsten Nut Strike

By Martha Grevatt

In 1933 St. Louis, Mo., was the gateway to the segregated South. Here was the last train stop before passengers were reassigned to cars marked “colored” and “white.” While the city did not have apartheid codes on the books, St. Louis itself was in every other way a Jim Crow town.

Yet there, in the worst year yet of a depression that had gone on for four years, African-American women who shelled pecans all day led a victorious strike.

Because pecans grew naturally along the Mississippi River, they were shipped by boat to St. Louis, making the city a center for the nut shelling industry.

In her book, “The Funsten Nut Strike,” Myrna Fichtenbaum describes the situation of the workers: “Seated at a table, after obtaining a 25 pound bag of nuts, the women separated the meat from the shells with a knife. Halves were placed in one pile, broken pieces in another. The shells were also kept, so that upon completion all of it could be weighed once more, making sure that it all added up to the original 25 pounds.”

Workers were paid by the pound. Black women got two cents for pieces and three or four cents for halves. White women, most of them Polish, received two cents more per pound. The workplaces were dusty and unsanitary, but better jobs were not available to women of color. Black women comprised about 85 percent to 90 percent of the work force in the pecan shops.

Starvation pay — an average of \$1.80 per week for Black women and \$2.75 for

white women — meant that the owners of the Funsten Nut Company could earn a quarter of a million dollars in annual profit even during the Depression.

Overall unemployment and underemployment in St. Louis’ Black community stood at a staggering 75 percent — a hard economic environment in which to launch a strike, to say the least. By 1933, however, Black workers had acquired several years of class struggle experience specifically through the communist-led Unemployed Councils. It was a recent Black recruit to the Communist Party who first began talking strike with two members of his family who worked at Funsten. The Food Workers Industrial Union, affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League, began holding organizing meetings at the CP headquarters.

It was the women in the shops who developed the strike demands: equal pay for all, union recognition, and pay rates of 10 cents per pound for pecan halves and four cents for pieces. “We demand 10 and four” became the strike slogan. It was coined by Carrie Smith, a middle-aged Black woman described as “the heart and soul of the strike.”

On April 24, 1933, a committee of 12 walked into the office at Funsten’s west end plant — one of four in St. Louis. All but seven workers stopped working and waited outside the office for a report. A company executive told the committee he would get back to them at a later date.

Three weeks went by with no answer from management. On May 13 Carrie Smith addressed a mass meeting. “Girls, we can’t lose,” she implored, holding a

brick in one hand and a Bible in the other. The meeting voted to strike. The next day the committee went back to the company office. Their demands were rejected. The walkout began at the west end plant, after which workers gave the signal to walk out at the main plant. A day later two more Funsten plants plus the Liberty Nut Company and the Central Pecan Company were strikebound. Altogether 1,400 workers hit the picket lines. While Black women led the strike, most of the white women joined in.

Picket duty began promptly at 5 a.m. Each plant had a shop committee that met every morning. Nightly strike meetings were held at the CP headquarters. A negotiating committee was established, as was a relief committee, which fed about 1,200 strikers three meals a day. Often the women battled scabs with bricks and bats. About 100 were arrested.

Several days into the strike a committee went into the city hall to demand the mayor intervene. On May 23 the central strike committee met — at the CP headquarters, no less — with Funsten management, their attorney, and a committee set up by the mayor. The agreement reached in this all-day session was eight cents for halves and the four cents for pieces that the women had demanded. All workers were to be paid equally!

This would have been a remarkable achievement under favorable strike con-

ditions. Yet it took place in the first half of 1933. The National Recovery Act, with a Section 7(a) that on paper gave workers the right to organize, had not even been passed!

These heroic workers inspired others. Ralph Shaw, leader of the city’s CP branch, recalled, “This initial example by the most oppressed nut workers had a tremendous effect in St. Louis in bringing forward the clothing workers and ladies’ garment workers after the NRA was passed. Some of our people from the Food Union spoke and were greeted at some of their strike meetings. There was a tremendous feeling of solidarity.”

The main source for this article, including quotes, is from the book “The Funsten Nut Strike” by Myrna Fichtenbaum.

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working while sick and those who can’t are often fired. There is little or no OSHA or other government-certified health and safety training in the majority of restaurants in the industry.

The report states that 68.2 percent of workers in the metro Detroit restaurant industry do not receive regular raises; 31.7 percent worked off the clock without pay; and 51 percent were robbed of overtime pay. Many workers interviewed are paid “off the books” in cash, have had their bosses’ checks bounce and/or experienced other forms of theft.

Since the majority of “fine-dining” restaurants that pay living-wage jobs are in the suburbs, those workers who live in Detroit and lack transportation often don’t have access to those jobs unless they are willing to spend hours accessing public transportation to and from work. When they do live in the suburbs and have access to transportation, many workers of color find themselves being “occupationally segregated” in “the back of the house,” despite many times having the skills for “front-of-the-house” positions such as servers, bartenders, managers, etc.

ROC’s recommendations for improving conditions include the enforcement of employment laws in the restaurant industry; the providing of paid sick days and increasing the tipped minimum wage; the promotion of opportunity and penalization of discrimination; support for further industry research; and a demand for the right of workers to unionize.

ROC also promotes the use of direct action when necessary, such as their weekly protests at the Andiamo restaurant in Dearborn, Mich., against which ROC has filed wage claims and a discrimination lawsuit.

For more information on ROC Michigan visit www.rocunited.org/affiliates/michigan. □

African-American farmers win compensation

Continued from page 3

farmers whose cases have been pending can receive awards and damages after decades of discrimination.”

A history of discrimination and land loss

The plight of African-American farmers is by no means a new phenomenon and the claims against the federal government did not originate in the lawsuit filed during the 1990s. This problem stems from the legacy of slavery, the failure of reconstruction and the ongoing discriminatory practices of the USDA and the banks.

Although the abolitionist movement fought for decades to end slavery, it would take a bloody 4-year Civil War to bring about the collapse of this institution rooted in the extreme exploitation and oppression of four million people of African descent. The question of what provisions would be made for the former slaves, as well as for so-called free Africans, was discussed during the war but was never formally settled.

In 1862 some Union army generals began to break up plantations in liberated areas of the South and provide settlements for small African farmers.

In 1865 the first Freedmen’s Bureau Act developed plans for 40-acre plots of land to be sold to former slaves at cheap rates. This land would have come from evacuated plantations and areas that were unsettled during this period.

Nonetheless, by late 1865, President Andrew Johnson halted these initiatives by the Union army to allocate small farm settlements for the former slaves. Another agreement that was adopted in 1866 also made proposals for land redistribution, but these actions lacked an effective en-

forcement mechanism and consequently went largely unimplemented.

With the lack of governmental commitment to land redistribution in the South, the acquisition of farms by African Americans took place on a largely individual basis. Many African Americans were able to acquire land as a result of the dire economic conditions prevailing in the South after the Civil War.

In a study issued by Bruce J. Reynolds in 2002 entitled “Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000: The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives,” Reynolds says that “W.E.B. DuBois estimated 19th century progress in land ownership by black farmers: 3 million acres in 1875, 8 million in 1890, and 12 million in 1900. The Census of Agriculture shows a steady increase in the number of farm operators owning land in the South from 1880 to 1890 and again in 1900, but does not distinguish between white and nonwhite owners until 1900. Census figures show 1920 was the peak year in the number of nonwhite owners of farmland in the South. In terms of acreage owned, the census shows 1910 as the peak year for the South. More than 12.8 million acres were fully and partly owned, respectively, by 175,290 and 43,177 nonwhite farmers.”

Yet the rise of terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the abandonment of reconstruction by the federal government left African-American farmers and their families open to systematic campaigns by the racists that drove many people off their farms through force of arms and the implementation of state laws that favored the former slave-owning elites. This process would continue well into the 20th century, resulting in the

loss of millions of acres of land acquired by African Americans in the South.

These efforts to drive independent African-American farmers off their land was coupled with the systematic denial of credit and the corporatization of agricultural land that took hold during latter years of the 20th century. More farmers began to look toward cooperative agriculture as a means to maintain their livelihoods and access to land.

However, as Reynolds points out: “The population of independent farmers is declining through farm consolidations and through contracting systems that diminish decision-making requirements of farmers. As this trend continues, the usefulness of cooperatives, as well as the capacity of farmers to organize them, will decline.”

By 1992, the U.S. Census of Agriculture reported that there were only 18,000 African-American farmers remaining and land ownership was down to 2.3 million acres. Since the early 1990s the conditions for African-American farmers have worsened with the burgeoning economic crisis that has disproportionately affected nationally oppressed groups in the U.S.

The plight of African-American farmers constitutes an integral part of the overall question of national oppression in the U.S. It is inextricably linked to the economic crisis and its impact on African Americans, resulting in millions of job losses and home foreclosures. Consequently, the fight for justice for African-American farmers must be raised alongside other demands, including a real jobs program to employ the tens of millions of workers who are bearing the brunt of the deepening economic crisis in the world capitalist system.

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Lively meeting launches May Day 2010



An energetic and promising meeting to launch May Day 2010 was hosted by the Transport Workers Union Local 100 and its leadership at their union hall in New York on Feb. 18. The meeting was sponsored by the May 1 Coalition for Worker and Immigrant Rights, which has organized major marches on May 1 every year since 2006.

Organizers at the meeting counted 97 people in attendance, with every region of the world represented — from Africa, Asia, and Central and Latin America, including Haiti, to the African Diaspora in the U.S. Participants included members of a number of community, social justice, workers' and political left organizations, as well as individuals representing unorganized labor, women and youth. Women played the largest role in the organization and facilitation of the meeting.

Many were moved by the sight of a meeting that expressed so much unity, as well as the desire to participate in class struggle, working-class internationalism and multinational solidarity. The meeting not only discussed organizing for May 1 in the context of immigrant and worker rights, but also in the context of the day's radical anti-capitalist and socialist traditions. May Day is annually honored around the world as International Workers' Day on May 1.

Youth and student activists in the March 4 National Day of Action to Defend Education coalition in New York are enthusiastically taking up the building of May Day 2010.

To get involved with the May 1 Coalition for Worker and Immigrant Rights, visit www.may1.info.

— LeiLani Dowell



May 1 coalition leaders.

WW PHOTOS: MONICA MOOREHEAD

Activists stop family's eviction

An eviction blockade took place Feb. 19 in Dorchester, Mass. Women's Fightback Network activists from Boston

joined members of City Life/Vida Urbana, a housing activist organization, at the Nguyens' home to support the action, which helped to temporarily forestall

the family's eviction. Everyone was asked to keep in contact with City Life in case of another eviction threat by the bank.

— Report and photo by Liz Green



Need an ambulance? Don't call if it's snowing

By Sean Schafroth
Pittsburgh

A wave of bad weather swept over many parts of the country in February. Blizzards ripped through the Northeast, leaving residents without necessities such as electricity, in some cases for weeks on end.

One would logically assume that localities which normally receive snow in winter would be prepared for an enormous storm. After all, following the despicable government response to the Katrina tragedy of 2005, repeated assurances were made that the millions of dollars being pumped into Homeland Security would result in vastly improved emergency preparedness.

The reality, however, is that the U.S. government has lied yet again. In Pittsburgh, for instance, the government response to the recent blizzard has been horrendous.

As the snow continued falling, area residents found themselves unable to leave their homes to obtain food and medicine. Plows focused mainly on salting and plowing the main roads while most alleys and side streets were untouched as 20 inches of snow accumulated.

And as the days wore on with little headway, tragedy occurred. On Feb. 5, Curtis Mitchell, a 50-year-old African-American man residing in the mostly impoverished Hazelwood area, began experiencing severe abdominal pain.

Mitchell phoned 911, as he and his longtime partner Sharon Edge would do 10 more times over the next 30 hours. But the Emergency Medical Services never reached him.

The closest EMS would come was to the Elizabeth Street Bridge, four blocks from the Mitchell residence on Chaplain Way. EMS medics repeatedly told Mitchell that he would have to walk to the bridge to meet them, which he informed them he could not do as his pain was too great.

On Feb. 7, Mitchell died at his home.

Another shocking story has also emerged. Denene Hefflin, the foster mother of 11-month-old twins who have heart problems, said her daughter Jade developed a high fever on Feb. 8 and started vomiting.

After phoning 911 and hours later being informed that she would have to walk up a hill to meet paramedics, the ambulance simply drove away when Hefflin said she could not carry two infants and a diaper bag uphill in 20 inches of snow. Fortunately,

Jade is fine after her mother spent almost three hours digging her car out of the snow. Hefflin and her children reside in the largely people-of-color neighborhood known as the North Side.

EMS Chief Robert McCaughan has said an investigation has been launched. But the medics involved with both cases remain on the job receiving paychecks.

Many are claiming that city budget cuts are to blame for the outrageous lack of snow removal, but there were no such economic shortcomings in Pittsburgh last September when the richest and most powerful capitalist leaders met for the G-20. The city was placed in virtual lockdown and became a terrifying police state.

It seems emergency assistance is only available in Pittsburgh when the weather is good. If you're Black, working class and poor, a death sentence may result. □

Why young people free Mumia Abu-Jamal

By Larry Hales

"That said, it's important to work now to change the situation that people face today — the economic crises, the corporate wars, unemployment, underemployment, mass incarceration, foreclosures and a dangerous educational system that kills souls and minds. The problems are mounting. But there are also opportunities to struggle against many of these problems and create real, lasting change." Mumia Abu-Jamal from an interview in *Left Turn*, a FIST newspaper.

Mumia Abu-Jamal faces perhaps the most crucial period since 1999 when then-Governor of Pennsylvania Tom Ridge signed the last of the two death warrants for Mumia, the first being in 1995.

On Jan. 19 the Philadelphia District Attorney's office won the appeal before the Supreme Court to overturn a decision made by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals calling for a new sentencing phase trial for Mumia or for an automatic sentence of life in prison. The decision that was overturned was made in 2001 by Judge William Yohn, which vacated Mumia's death sentence.

Life in prison is no option over the death

Steelworkers rally for jobs



Michigan

It is "Time for U.S. Steel to do the right thing!" for 300 workers still on layoff; for the workers in the mill with understaffed jobs, long hours, no training and dirty lunch and locker facilities; as well as for the downriver Detroit communities suffering from high unemployment. That's the message that echoed Feb. 10 through the standing-room-only rally at Local 1299's union hall as the United

Steelworkers opened up a "movement of informational actions." After the rally, hundreds of workers and allies streamed into the street to march about a mile down Jefferson Avenue to the plant gate. The Steelworkers will take their fight to U.S. Steel headquarters in Pittsburgh on March 1. Go to usw1299.org for more details.

— Report and photo by Cheryl LaBash

TUCSON

High school youth fight racist attacks

By Paul Teitelbaum
Tucson, Ariz.

A coalition of students from high schools throughout Tucson held their first encuentro — a community meeting — on Feb. 19 to build support and alliances in the struggle against the mounting right-wing attacks on public education.

In addition to enacting extreme budget cuts to public education, the Arizona Legislature has taken up two racist anti-education bills. One would eliminate the ethnic studies program, while the other would collect the identities of all non-documented students.

The Social Justice Education Project student coalition addressed a crowd of 300 people, detailing the dangers of each of the legislative bills. House Bill 2281 states that a school district may not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that either are designed for pupils of a particular ethnic group or that “advocate ethnic solidarity” instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. State funds will be withheld from any school district that does not comply with this law. None of the bill’s sponsors has ever set foot in an ethnic/Raza studies classroom.

Senate Bill 1097 states that the Department of Education will collect data on school districts’ populations of non-citizen students and their identities. This bill will force teachers and other school employees to indirectly enforce immigration law by disclosing the identity of students who cannot produce residency documents.

SB1097 will deny many Latino/a youth the right to an education. Moreover, based on the collected data, the state superintendent of instruction can withhold funding from schools in proportion to the non-documented student population of the school.

Ethnic studies teaches Ariz. history before 1848

SJEP also countered the racist lies being made about the ethnic studies program,

explaining the importance of oppressed youth learning their own peoples’ history. At least a dozen ethnic studies students and alumni recounted how important the program is/was to their academic success.

Students explained that the ethnic studies program combats the mythology incorporated in euro-centric history books that does little or nothing to portray the lives and history of the Indigenous people of Arizona. Ethnic studies programs teach oppressed youth the true history of how their land was stolen, their lives uprooted and their culture all but destroyed. Studying the rich history of the Indigenous peoples reveals the actual historical events that led to the ceding of one-third of Mexico to the expanding U.S. empire, and the forced removal of peoples from their ancestral homelands. “What we learn is the unique experi-

ence of Mexicanos who lived through the circumstances surrounding the defeat of Mexico and theft of Mexican land in 1848,” one student explained.

Another student explained how the classroom was based on the Mayan tradition of “In Lak’ech’,” which means “I am you and you are me.” The students and teachers are equals, each learning from the other. This helps explain why so many graduates of the program remain committed to it long after they graduate from high school. The ethnic studies program teaches culture, which represents the life of the Latino/a people of Arizona. To eliminate the ethnic studies program and deny youth access to their history and culture is a form of genocide.

Organize the community

This encuentro was the first of many meetings planned by these students to

organize the Tucson community to fight back against the continuing right-wing attacks. Hated Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio continues his racial profiling and neighborhood sweeps while the Department of Homeland Security spends millions on technology and Border Patrol agents, in order to funnel border crossers into the deadliest part of the desert and then incarcerate those they detain in private prisons.

The 20,000 people who marched in Phoenix against Arpaio in January; the student movement that is now forming in Tucson; and the Tucson May 1st Coalition, which is gearing up for May Day 2010 — all are all signs that the attempts to divide workers based upon an arbitrary possession of documents is not going to succeed. People are uniting to oppose the economic crisis being dumped on their backs. “¡Ya Basta!” Enough! □

NYC RALLY & MARCH ~ PART OF THE

National Day of Action to DEFEND PUBLIC EDUCATION

THURS ► MARCH 4

Rally at Gov. David Paterson’s office
633 3rd Ave. @ 41th St.

4 p.m.- 6 p.m.

Then March to MTA Hearings at FIT
7th Ave. @ 27th St.

Support educators and students who will be marching from Governor Paterson’s office to the MTA to demand:

- **It’s not our crisis, we won’t pay!**
- **No school closures!**
- **No budget cuts, no tuition hikes!**
- **No layoffs, no salary or benefit reductions, no union-busting!**
- **Restore free student Metrocards!**
- **No privatization of public schools!**
- **Cancel all student debt!**
- **Eliminate racism in the public school system!**
- **Free public education for all from kindergarten to college!**

NYC website: march4ny.wordpress.com/

Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/groups.php#/group.php?gid=244000051960

Google group: groups.google.com/group/march-4-education-ny

E-mail: March4NY@gmail.com

National website: www.defendededucation.org

People must help U-Jamal

penalty, but the struggle to free Mumia has always been to fight to keep him alive while at the same time demanding his freedom.

At all costs, it is important to stop the plans of the state of Pennsylvania to kill Mumia.

The appeal by the DA’s office comes at a time of a furor against Mumia. Seth Williams, the new Philadelphia District Attorney, who is supported by the Fraternal Order of Police, has vowed to seek the death penalty.

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, who was the DA when Mumia was framed and convicted and also the DA when the MOVE house was bombed in 1985, has said he will sign a death warrant immediately.

And Tigre Hill, a Bush supporter, will soon release the film “Barrel of a Gun,” a vicious anti-Mumia movie.

If it were not for a vigilant international campaign, Mumia would not be alive today. But much more vociferous action is required now — during this extreme economic downturn when millions have been laid off and are suffering and more and more people are being fed into the prison-industrial complex.

Students and young people are needed at the forefront of a movement to free Mumia. Mumia, who first became politically active at



WWW.PHOTO: LAL ROOCHK

the age of 15 when he joined the Black Panther Party, is a hero for young people.

Mumia has continued to be a member of the community of oppressed people fighting for a better world free from oppression, repression and exploitation. He has continued to speak for the voiceless, the hundreds of thousands who are locked in cages, removed from society, and the many more who are caught up in the so-called criminal justice system.

Mumia is a member of the community at large, and he is innocent. From the very beginning the stage was set so that he could not receive justice, and at every turn he and his supporters have been thwarted from seeing his freedom.

Fight Imperialism, Stand Together calls on all students and young people to revitalize the movement in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal and to organize a Youth and Students for Mumia campaign — to begin the task of helping to educate a generation of young people who do not know of Mumia or his case.

This is crucial as we mount the struggle to save Mumia and to free him. We must mobilize young people in anticipation of a national mobilization. □

Help to publish:

‘What is Marxism all about?’

World View Forum is publishing this guide for activists, which explains Marxist terminology in non-technical language. Terms like “imperialism,” “self-determination” and “socialism” are defined and illustrated. The Marxist definitions of these words help sharpen an understanding of society from a working-class perspective.

The book that was first published in the 1970s as a pamphlet, has been revised, updated and edited by young activists in Fight Imperialism, Stand Together — FIST. It gives relevant analysis about the conditions faced by millions of people in capitalist society today, as the economic crisis hits working and oppressed people, including students and youth.

It is also a guide to action. This book is a must-read for students and youth organizers involved in the many struggles going on today across the country. Its short, concise chapters make it very usable as an organizing tool as well as for discussion groups, classes and meetings.

FIST organizers are committed to getting this new edition of “What is Marxism all about?” to student and youth activists nationwide.

Your help is needed! All aspects of writing, editing, proofreading, cover and book design were done by voluntary labor. However, printing and binding costs are high, causing us to turn to readers and activists for financial support.

Your contribution to print this book will make a difference! **Everyone who donates \$20 or more will receive a copy of “What is Marxism all about?”**

Yes! I want to help with publishing costs.

Here is my donation of \$250 \$100 \$50 \$35 \$20 \$ _____ Other
(Write checks to World View Forum)

Name _____

Address _____

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Return to: **World View Forum**, 55 W. 17th St., Fifth floor, New York, NY 10011



Big business media finally admit

Mass unemployment is here to stay

Workers, students and youth must fight for jobs, education

By Fred Goldstein

The jobless recovery has been declared official by the New York Times, the newspaper of record for the U.S. ruling class. Its edition of Feb. 21 — the Sunday paper that is read in every capital, finance ministry, embassy, consulate, department of state, etc., in the capitalist world — carried the following two-column banner headline in bold: “Despite Signs of Recovery, Chronic Joblessness Rises — The Unemployed Face Years Without Jobs, Exhausting Savings and Benefits.”

The article that followed was a thinly veiled warning to Washington, to policy makers, and to pundits alike not to pay any heed to false optimism. The economy is in a new stage of crisis — economic recovery is rising alongside growing long-term unemployment. There is little to no prospect that the many millions of unemployed, many of whom are rapidly running out of unemployment benefits, will be rehired. Excerpts from the article give the sense of alarm intended.

It says there are “6.3 million Americans who have been unemployed for six months or longer, the largest number since the government began keeping track in 1948. That is more than double the toll in the next-worst period, in the early 1980s.”

A Times chart shows the racism of the long-term unemployment. Black men are 5.5 percent of the workforce but almost 13 percent of the unemployed. Latinos/as are also disproportionately represented among the long-term unemployed.

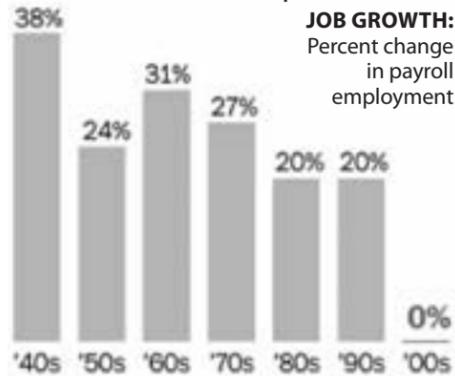
“Roughly 2.7 million jobless people will lose their unemployment check before the end of April unless Congress approves the Obama administration’s proposal to extend the payments, according to the Labor Department. ...

“Labor experts say the economy needs 100,000 new jobs a month just to absorb entrants to the labor force. With more than 15 million people officially jobless, even a vigorous recovery is likely to leave an enormous number out of work for years.

“Some labor experts note that severe economic downturns are generally followed by powerful expansions, suggesting that aggressive hiring will soon resume. But doubts remain about whether such hiring can last long enough to absorb anywhere close to the millions of unemployed.”

Of course, the Times minimizes unemployment. It does not refer to the millions of workers who, having dropped out of the labor force, are not considered part of the

There was **zero net job creation** in the first decade of the new millennium compared to healthy job growth in each of the previous decades



* 2000 extends only through November 2009
Charts: Washington Post, Jan. 2010

officially unemployed. Nor does it count the number of undocumented workers who were forced into the underground economy and are now laid off.

Youth suffer most from “jobless recovery” stage of capitalism

Above all, there has been no calculation of how many millions of youth cannot get into the labor force in the first place. Among those 16 to 24 years old who are counted, unemployment is in the 20 percent range. For African-American youth it is officially above 40 percent, but in reality is probably even higher.

For every available job, six people are looking for work. The connection between the economic crisis, the reduction in skills by technology and the loss of jobs in general falls hardest on youth, especially those who cannot afford to graduate from college because of unaffordable tuition and lack of financial support.

The Times knows that this jobless recovery did not come out of the blue.

“Large companies are increasingly owned by institutional investors who crave swift profits, a feat often achieved by cutting payroll. The declining influence of unions has made it easier for employers to shift work to part-time and temporary employees. Factory work and even white-collar jobs have moved in recent years to low-cost countries in Asia and Latin America. Automation has helped manufacturing cut 5.6 million jobs since 2000. ...

“American business is about maximizing shareholder value,” said Allen Sinai, chief global economist at the research firm Decision Economics. “You basically don’t want workers. You hire less, and you try to find capital equipment to replace them.”

“During periods of American economic expansion in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, the number of private-sector jobs increased about 3.5 percent a year, according to an analysis of Labor Department data by Lakshman Achuthan, managing director of the Economic Cycle Research Institute, a research firm. During expansions in the 1980s and ‘90s, jobs grew just 2.4 percent annually. And during the last decade, job growth fell to 0.9 percent annually.

“The pace of job growth has been getting weaker in each expansion,” Mr. Achuthan said. “There is no indication that this pattern is about to change.”

“Before 1990, it took an average of 21 months for the economy to regain the jobs shed during a recession, according to an analysis of Labor Department data by the National Employment Law Project and the Economic Policy Institute, a labor-oriented research group in Washington.

“After the recessions in 1990 and in 2001, 31 and 46 months passed before employment returned to its previous peaks. The economy was growing, but companies remained conservative in their hiring.”

In other words, the present jobless recovery, which is far worse than the last two, represents a sharp deepening of a profound trend in U.S. capitalism. But the Times and other “experts” can never admit that.

Marxists understand that this crisis is a natural outgrowth of the drive for profits. Profits are derived by the exploitation of workers. The use of technology is a fundamental way the bosses have of intensifying that exploitation. Technology takes the skills out of jobs, lowers wages, and makes workers produce more and more in less and less time.

For the last 30 years the bosses have engaged in a global restructuring of the capitalist system based upon the introduction of more and more modern technology. This leads to overproduction, because goods are produced faster and faster and workers are paid less and less.

In the present crisis, heads of the automobile industry and related industries claim they had to shrink their capacity and lay off hundreds of thousands of workers in order to stay profitable. The same is true of the housing industry, the aircraft industry and many others.

Thus there is a permanent reduction in the need to rehire the millions of workers who have been laid off — that is, so long as capitalist profits come before the needs of workers and the communities.

The basic contradictions of capitalism are at the bottom of this new stage of the jobless recovery. The capitalist system is not going to make some big comeback and rehire the workers. The only way the workers will get rehired is if they organize, mobilize and fight to override the

profit motive and put workers’ needs first.

Someone reading the New York Times headline alone, and not knowing that the Times is the mouthpiece of big business, might think at first that the article was written out of concern and sympathy for the workers. Indeed, there is a long lead-in about a 57-year-old woman worker in southern California who has been unemployed for two years and whose husband is disabled. She is running out of unemployment benefits and the family is on the edge of homelessness.

But genuine concern for the working class is hardly the motive of the New York Times or its news editors, and certainly not of its owners. Millions have been suffering this fate for years now, but their trials have not made the lead story of the Sunday Times. The suffering of the workers, particularly in this crisis, is hardly late-breaking news.

The workers have been suffering throughout the last period while the government has handed over trillions of dollars to the banks, insurance companies, auto companies, etc. In all this time the capitalist class has been slashing jobs and wages, putting people out of their homes and bankrupting communities.

So why is this being raised now? It is to sound the alarm that two things are staring the capitalists in the face if the jobless recovery goes on. First, they will have to shell out more money to keep the workers from starving en masse. And second, they could face a social explosion, a working-class rebellion.

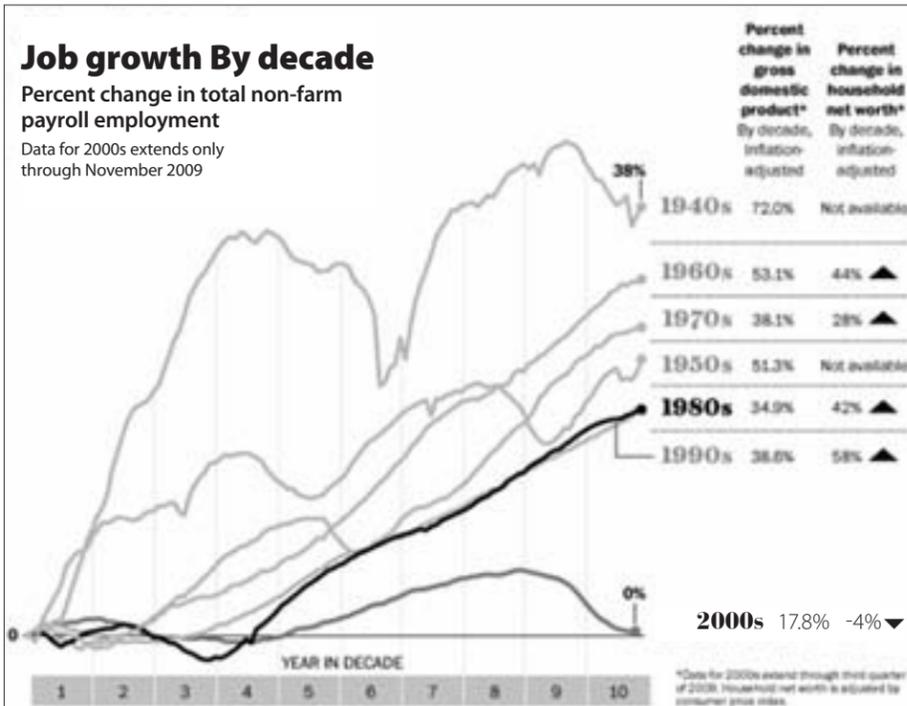
Yet in spite of all the warnings, neither the Times nor any other of the big business “experts” have any advice on how to solve their own contradictions. They have no way of resolving this crisis within the framework of capitalism and its profit-driven economy.

Only the workers can find the way out. As a first step, it is time to demand that the trillions of dollars held by the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve Board, plus the bloated profits of the banks and the hundreds of billions of dollars handed over to the Pentagon for war and war preparation, be used to create a massive government jobs program.

This program must include reopening closed factories and stores, as well as creating new jobs so that every worker who needs a job gets one at a living wage. The money is there. But it will only be made available through the struggle of the mass of people in the streets.

The long-term solution is to get rid of the capitalist profit system itself and establish a system where the economy is socially owned and run on a planned basis for human need and not for profit — that is, on a socialist basis.

The writer is author of “Low-Wage Capitalism,” a Marxist analysis of the effect of globalization on the U.S. working class, which highlighted the jobless recovery in 2008 as the present crisis was first unfolding.



“With the capitalist system demonstrably unfair, it is useful, indeed refreshing, to see a Marxist analysis of globalization and its effects on working people. Fred Goldstein does exactly that.”

—Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*

Low-Wage Capitalism

Fred Goldstein

Colossus with feet of clay:
What the new globalized high-tech imperialism means for the class struggle in the U.S.

LOW-WAGE CAPITALISM

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As phony election approaches

U.S. occupation behind Iraq's turmoil

By John Catalinotto

As the March 7 national election approaches in Iraq, the number of U.S. troops occupying the country has slipped below 100,000 for the first time since the U.S.-led invasion seven years ago. The Pentagon plans to change the name of its Iraq effort on Sept. 1, from "Operation Iraqi Freedom" to "Operation New Dawn" when 50,000 troops remain.

The play with words and numbers hasn't changed the basic reality in Iraq. There are still 98,000 U.S. troops there. They still have the leverage on power. A sovereign election can't be held in an occupied country.

If and when the last U.S. troops are ushered out, the best name for that effort would be "Operation End the Nightmare." Seven years of invasion and occupation have brought neither freedom nor the promise of a fresh start, but have brought Iraq to the brink of destruction as a country.

A report from the BRussels Tribunal, resulting from an attempt last October to raise a legal case against U.S./U.K. aggression and occupation, gives a bleak picture of where life is at today in Iraq:

"From the start of the implementation of a U.S.-instigated and dominantly administered sanctions regime [August 1990] up to the present day, an approximate total of 2.7 million Iraqis have died as a direct result of sanctions followed by the U.S.-U.K. led war of aggression on, and occupation of, Iraq beginning in 2003. Among those killed during the sanctions period were 560,000 children.

"From 2003 onwards, having weakened Iraq's civil and military infrastructure to the degree that its people were rendered near totally defenseless, Iraq was subject to a level of aggression of near unprecedented scale and nature in

international history."

This took place along with "funding of sectarian groups and militias that would play a key role in fragmenting the country under occupation, ... the collapse of all public services and state protection for the Iraqi people, the further destruction of the health and education systems of Iraq, and the creation of waves of internal and external displacement totaling nearly 5 million Iraqis;" overall there are "5 million orphans" and "3 million widows." (brusseltribunal.org)

Those are the numbers that should be kept in mind when the Pentagon and war criminals like former Vice President Dick Cheney and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair boast of the achievements of the Iraq occupation. What the U.S. and Britain have achieved is fomenting an internecine battle among different groupings inside Iraq. This has prevented the Iraqis from waging a united struggle to liberate their country from the occupation.

The imperialists have left Iraq in shambles. And they have not yet left Iraq.

An electoral sham

The March 7 election — should it take place as scheduled — will be as much a farce as the one held in Afghanistan last summer. A complete client state, which was only able to take power with the force of the occupation behind it, is organizing the elections. It is organizing them in order to consolidate power for the groupings that support Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

These are parties that opposed the Ba'athist government led by Saddam Hussein. Al-Maliki signed the papers hurrying the execution of the Iraqi leader on Dec. 30, 2006. At that time Saddam Hussein was a symbol of struggle for a significant section of the Iraqi resistance to the U.S.-led occupation.

During the electoral campaign, al-Maliki's government outlawed the candidacy of 454 people who were running for national office, claiming that these individuals were too close to the Ba'ath Party. Some 171 of these candidates appealed the decision disqualifying them. In February a panel of judges appointed for the purpose rejected

the appeals of all but 26 candidates.

Following this decision barring the most secular of the candidates, the Iraqi National Movement coalition led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi announced it would temporarily suspend its campaign and demanded that the bans be reversed. On Feb 21, one of the parties in this coalition, the mostly Sunni National Dialog Front, announced that it would boycott the election.

There is still a chance the election will fall apart. Even if the vote takes place, as in Afghanistan, it will be a fraud having nothing to do with democracy. U.S. troops — even if they are not engaged in daily battles in Iraq — still remain the final arbiters of Iraqi politics.

Washington may prefer a stable puppet regime in Iraq so it can move most of its troops to Afghanistan. But the U.S. forces will continue to try to play off one sector of Iraqi society against another — whatever the consequences for the Iraqis — if the U.S. dominates the region.

E-mail: jcat@workers.org

'German troops out of Afghanistan'

More than 4,000 people from 70 different German cities came to Berlin Feb. 20 to demand that German troops be withdrawn from Afghanistan. Following a rally at Bebel Square, they marched past the Brandenburg Gate to the Reichstag or German Federal Parliament, where they laid down their placards. Among the demands displayed were "Afghanistan for the Afghans, Troops Out" and on the big banner of the Left Party, "German Army out of Afghanistan."

— Report and photo
by Gabriele Senft



Connecting the dots between war & poverty

Two street meetings held on Feb. 19, one in Los Angeles and the other in New York City, confirmed mass opposition to the war in Afghanistan and disillusion with the government by a population reeling from unemployment, foreclosures and budget cuts.

That week the U.S. had started a new offensive in Afghanistan. There were already reports that the Air Force had "accidentally" bombed civilians, killing children and adults in their homes. Here are brief reports on these two anti-war meetings.

Los Angeles: A question gets a response

It would have been a typical Friday evening in the city of Los Angeles at the busy intersection of Vermont Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard last week except for about 10 protesters holding a well-observed and well-received street meeting.

Participants in the protest were members of the Al-Awda Coalition, the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the SEIU Labor-Community Coalition and the International Action Center/Bail Out the People Movement.

This metro station daily serves hundreds of thousands of a very multinational and working-class ridership. Commuters on their way home, to the next shift or to other appointments at first avoided getting a leaflet or making eye contact.

But then a banner was put up reading, "Money for jobs, not war in Afghanistan," while a speaker asked a question of the commuters: "Why is the govern-

ment spending \$100 billion to bomb and kill children in Afghanistan, like those 12 Afghan children killed last week, when that money could have produced 3 million jobs here in California — a state where one out of every five people is either unemployed or underemployed?"

Many then began asking for leaflets and to be informed about the next meeting. Not one leaflet was seen discarded on the sidewalks or at the entrance to the metro station following the conclusion of the street meeting.

— John Parker

NYC: Putting two and two together

It was more than a protest. It was an educational street meeting that showed how the vast Pentagon budget and U.S. corporate exploitation of workers abroad is intimately connected with the dire economic situation at home. The nods coming from many in the dense crowds of workers and shoppers passing by on Manhattan's Sixth Avenue and 33rd Street showed they understood. Some stopped, exchanged views and signed up to take part in future meetings.

New York City has always been made up of many nationalities. The tabloids —



New York City

WWW PHOTO: JOHN CATALINOTTO

and the "moderate" media, too — try to tear down unity among the workers that could threaten the city's control by bankers and billionaires like Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The street meeting, in English and Spanish, was a direct challenge to this racism and xenophobia.

Students talked about how young people face grim choices — poverty, the military or jail — as jobs disappear and education is cut back. They assailed the planned

closing of 19 public schools and the raising of tuition in the once-free City University of New York system. They called for taking the bailout money and the Pentagon budget and spending it on education and a real jobs program.

Workers World Party, the Troops Out Now Coalition, the International Action Center and the Campus Anti-War Network were among the groups participating.

— Deirdre Griswold

WORKERS WORLD
editorial

Health care & profits

Shockwaves rippled through California when Anthem Blue Cross, the largest for-profit health insurance company in the state, announced increases in premiums of up to 39 percent. This would affect 800,000 individual policyholders.

Why the increase? To increase profitability! WellPoint, of which Anthem Blue Cross is a subsidiary, promised its shareholders higher earnings. Although the company claims it has to charge higher rates because it's losing healthy clients and paying out more for sicker policyholders, it won't disclose any information to validate this claim.

There has been such a loud uproar over the rate hike that state officials and the Obama administration have criticized it and are investigating the corporation's action.

What angers policyholders and health care activists even more is that WellPoint earned record profits of \$4.7 billion last year, twice what it garnered in 2008. It raked in \$2.7 billion in profits in the last quarter of 2009 alone.

National Nurses United, the largest nurses' union in the U.S., blasted Anthem Blue Cross and said the rate increase is "not out of character for an industry [that] engages systemically in price gouging and denial of care." (www.nationalnursesunited.org)

Anthem Blue Cross is notorious for canceling policies of pregnant women and chronically ill people. The NNU says the company denied 27 percent of claims in the first nine months of 2009.

WellPoint, the largest insurer in the U.S., annually pays its CEOs millions of dollars. The corporation spent \$9.5 million in 2009 to lobby against any federal health care plan, however modest, and utilized 33

lobbying groups in Washington, D.C., to do so.

These huge rate hikes are not unique to California. They are occurring across the country, along with increasing claim delays and outright denials by insurance company administrators whose sole purpose is to do just that in order to boost profits.

And profits are skyrocketing. The top five insurers — UnitedHealth Group, WellPoint, Aetna, Humana and Cigna — have had soaring profits during the economic crisis. In 2009 they had the best year ever, setting record profits totaling \$12.2 billion.

Meanwhile, another 2.7 million people lost health care coverage last year, as layoffs cut workers from employer-sponsored plans and incomes decreased for others who could no longer afford private policies.

Nearly 50 million people in the U.S. are uninsured and millions more are underinsured. They go without critical medical care because they can't afford it. At least 45,000 people will die in 2010 due directly to lack of health care because they don't have insurance.

These tragic numbers will also rise because Medicaid is on the chopping block in many states, which will harm millions of poor, unemployed and disabled people.

The health care system is terribly broken. We join with activists across the country who are organizing and calling for a single-payer system: improved Medicare for all.

We'd like to see the end of private, for-profit health care altogether and the demise of insurance companies, which serve no useful social purpose. We support a health care system where human needs always come first, where all people get the maximum medical care they need, simply because they need it. We struggle for socialized medicine because health care is a universal human right. □

Mossad gangsters in Dubai

Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, credited with organizing the fighting force of the Palestinian liberation group Hamas, was assassinated in Dubai by Israeli Mossad agents, perhaps working together with other professional killers. That, at least, is what everyone believes and is the most reasonable explanation of his murder.

A myth has grown about the Mossad — a Hebrew word meaning Institute, short for Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations. Its professional killers are supposed to work flawlessly, expertly, with dedication and ruthlessness. The ruthless part is true and obvious. The rest is a myth useful to the Israeli rulers. The Israeli army created this myth before its 2006 defeat in Lebanon and last year's failure in Gaza.

Like its counterparts in the "dirty-tricks" departments of imperialist spy agencies like the CIA, Britain's MI6 and France's General Directorate, the Mossad carries out murders. It operates much like killers trained or hired by organized crime gangs to rub out someone refusing to pay protection money.

The Mossad operates under the Israeli flag, a flag tied up completely with the brutal suppression of an entire people. Thus these gangsters have become specialists in suppression and repression of popular rebellion. Mossad agents are sent all over

the globe, providing advice and training to repressive states, for example, to Colombia and other pro-U.S. countries in Latin America where a large U.S. presence in this role might awaken mass anger.

The Israelis offer this training as part of their contribution to maintaining imperialist domination over the world and in return for other support. The imperialists and their Israeli clients stick together in jointly suppressing liberation struggles.

While carrying out the murder of Al-Mabhouh, the Mossad agents were recorded on closed-circuit videos that abound in Dubai. The local police publicized this on YouTube. They also revealed that the suspect Mossad agents used passports from Britain, Canada and Ireland. These countries, also part of the imperialist world, lodged diplomatic complaints, which the Israelis discount as public relations.

But for the Israelis it is bad public relations. With each blatant murder and war crime the Israeli state commits, the propaganda attempting to support its legitimacy loses the little force it retains. Israeli war crimes in Gaza a year ago propelled a movement demanding boycott, divestment and sanctions against the Zionist state. The Dubai assassination, which once more exposes Israel's criminal character, is sure to push that BDS movement another step forward. □



The Cuban Five: Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, René González Sehwerert, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez and Fernando González Llort.

Int'l campaign demands family visits for Cuban Five

By Teresa Gutierrez

More than 10 years ago, the U.S. government jailed five Cubans after one of the most unjust and ludicrous trials that has ever occurred in this country.

Many people, especially people of color, are behind jail doors unfairly in this country. Many of them are innocent or never had a fair day in court, to say the least.

But the case of the Cuban Five — like that of Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier and the Puerto Rican political prisoners — stands out as one of the most insidious acts of injustice ever perpetrated by U.S. imperialism.

The Cuban government was forced to send Cubans to Florida to monitor the actions of the far-right-wing Cubans who have carried out a U.S.-promoted, nonstop war of aggression against Cuba for more than 50 years. This war includes violent acts of terror, such as the bombing of tourist sites and assassination attempts, all with the knowledge and complicity of the U.S.

The Cuban government informed the U.S. government of the presence of the Cuban Five in the U.S. It even gave the U.S. government some of the dangerous information the Five had gathered. But instead of working with Cuba to prevent acts of terror against the island nation, the U.S. arrested the Five.

A sham of a trial occurred in a city where not even the Latin Grammys could take place if Cubans from Cuba were performing. How could a fair trial occur in such a partisan and venomous city?

It could not. The Cuban Five have been in federal prison since 1998. They must be freed.

A national and international campaign to free them continues. Today that campaign is specifically addressing the issue of family visits for the Five.

The International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five, as part of its International Campaign for the Right of Family Visits, announced last week that key voices from Argentina have joined the demand for humanitarian visas for Olga Salanueva and Adriana Pérez, the spouses of Cuban Five members René González and Gerardo Hernández, respectively.

The announcement states, "Argentinean personalities have sent a letter

to Hillary Clinton and Janet Napolitano demanding visas for two Cuban women so they can visit their husbands imprisoned in the United States for more than 11 years."

The letter, which was delivered Feb. 16 to the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, is signed by Nobel Peace recipient Adolfo Pérez Esquivel; Estela de Carlotto, president of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo; Nora Cortiñas, Mother of Plaza de Mayo — Founder Line; writer and journalist Stella Calloni; Graciela Rosemblum, president of the Human Rights Argentinean League; jurists Beinusz Szmukler and Carlos Zamorano; Fray Antonio Puigjané; Capuchino Priest; sociologist Atilio Borón; and philosopher León Rozichtner.

"The signers denounced the United States for violating the right of family visits and for denying visas to the wives of Gerardo Hernández, serving two life sentences, and René González, serving 15 years.

"In the letter, which can be seen on several websites, signers asked: 'Where is justice and the sense of humanity in the U.S.?'"

For a full list of the letter's signers, or to find out more about the Five, visit www.thecuban5.org or e-mail info@thecuban5.org.

The International Committee is urging everyone to send letters, faxes, e-mails or make a phone call to contacts listed below. Ask them to do the following:

- 1) Immediately grant a humanitarian visa to Adriana Pérez to visit her husband, Gerardo Hernández, in prison and end the violation of the right of family visits.
- 2) Grant multiple visas to all family members of the Cuban Five so they can visit their imprisoned loved ones in the U.S.

U.S. State Department
Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520
Fax: 02-647-2283
Phone: 202-647-4000

Janet Napolitano
U.S. Depart. of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528
Fax: 202-282-8401
Phone: 202-282-8000
Comment line: 202-282-8495 □

OAKLAND

'Free 'em all' Prison Radio benefit

On the 45th anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X, over 150 people came out to champion U.S. political prisoner and freedom fighter Mumia Abu-Jamal and other political prisoners of the U.S. colonial empire. The Feb. 21 benefit in Oakland, Calif., for Prison Radio — which carries commentaries online of political prisoners — also highlighted the cases of J. R. Valrey and Holly Works, the two remaining defendants in the police crackdown against the protests last year following the police killing of Oscar Grant. On Feb. 22, all charges were dropped against Valrey in a courtroom full of his supporters.

Speakers included Pam Africa, national spokesperson for International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Chairman Fred Hampton Jr., founder of the Prisoners of Conscience Committee and son of Fred Hampton, the heroic assassinated Black Panther leader; Ramona Africa, survivor of the 1985 police bombing of the MOVE house in Philadelphia, a former political prisoner and the minister of communication of the MOVE organization; Jack Heyman, Local 10 executive board member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and Labor Ac-

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From Bangladesh to the Balkans

Microloans = Mega-profits, not development

By Sara Flounders

The fraud and failure of microloans and micro-financing as the bankers' solution to global poverty can most clearly be seen in Bangladesh today, where microloans first gained international fame and support.

For 25 years a steady drumbeat of rhetoric from international bankers, major corporations, the United Nations and the World Bank has promised that small loans of \$10 to \$150 to totally destitute people to set up small handicraft and home businesses is the solution to global poverty and underdevelopment. Micro finance was applauded as the way to increase educational levels, promote gender equality and empower women.

Nicholas Kristof declared in a recent column: "Microcredit is undoubtedly the most visible innovation in anti-poverty policy in the last half century. In the three decades since Mohammad Yunus gave his first loan to a group of Bangladeshi women, the number of microcredit borrowers has crossed 150 millions." (New York Times, Dec. 28, "The Role of Microfinance")

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been pledged to the microcredit movement by tens of thousands of NGOs and Western governments, as well as by financier George Soros, eBay co-founder Pierre Omidyar, Wall Street banks and hedge funds that see a new source of profit. The United Nations designated 2005 as the International Year of Microcredit, while the Nobel Committee awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to Yunus and his Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

The World Bank has set up a division to channel funds through its Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest. The Asian Development Bank and other international financial institutions now channel billions of dollars — which once went to development projects like irrigation projects, dams, roads and industries — into tiny loans through a vast lending and collection infrastructure that reaches its tentacles around the world.

In Bangladesh, as microcredit and other neoliberal market "solutions" have grown, poverty has not lessened. It has grown to staggering proportions.

At the time of independence in 1971, 20 percent of the population was landless. By 2009, this had risen to more than 70 percent of the rural peasant population. After 30 years of the microloan panacea, banking institutions and a whole apparatus of nonprofit financial NGOs funded by the West today reach into every village and smallholding in Bangladesh.

Is it just a coincidence that more than 100 million peasant workers have been reduced to day laborers and indebted sharecroppers? Overwhelmingly, peasants lose their lands through inability to repay loans. One drought, flood or sickness spells disaster for a whole family.

By every standard, poverty has worsened in Bangladesh over the past two decades as microloans became the all-pervasive "solution" to poverty. Grameen Bank, the institution that initiated microcredit, claims to have 2,500 branches covering 80,000 villages, or more than 95 percent of all villages in Bangladesh. Loans are as small as \$10 and \$20.

A web of loans

Community and peasant organizers in Bangladesh recently described to this reporter how the web of microloans at the village level breaks down a collective approach and consumes millions of desperately impoverished people in competitive individual tasks. The weight of debt demoralizes millions and leads to new debts to pay off old ones. High rates of suicide and violence follow when the cycle of debt crashes.

The Socialist Party of Bangladesh, in a recent convention document, condemned the manner in which Western industrialized countries have cut allocations for educational programs, basic health programs and funds for social welfare and instead created a network of NGOs and microcredit systems. "Practically speaking, using the microcredit system brings the labor power of poor people, especially the labor power of women, under the exploitation of banking capital," said the document.

"In the name of capitalist development in industrially backward countries the financial institutions of imperialism provide surplus capital as loans in exchange for huge interest and impose conditions of liberalization, privatization, reduction of expenditures for public welfare, commercialization of health care, education and other social sectors, and the removal of tariff barriers for the investment of imperialist capital in the industrial and agricultural sector. ... Unemployment is growing far more than ever."

Economics journalist Gina Neff of Left Business Observer has written, "In Bangladesh, 30 years after Yunus's invention, poverty statistics are worse than they've ever been. ... After eight years of borrowing, 55 percent of Grameen households still aren't able to meet their basic nutritional needs - so many women are using their loans to buy food rather than invest in business.



Pam Africa

the San Francisco 8 case, said, "I am living proof that the power resides in the hands of the people." Brown and four other SF8 defendants had all charges dropped. He urged people to come to court in San Francisco on April 19 to demand that charges be dropped against the last remaining defendant, Francisco Torres.

Go to www.prisonradio.org.

— Report & photo by Judy Greenspan

"Turning peasant women into mini-capitalists is just furthering the reach of finance capital and shifting the burden of risk to a class who already bear the brunt of poverty without safety nets."

Aneel Karnani, a professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, argues that microcredit does not empower women or increase the number of people with jobs or the gross domestic product of a country.

The U.N.'s International Labor Organization explains that "creating opportunities for steady employment at reasonable wages is the best way to take people out of poverty. Nothing is more fundamental to poverty reduction than employment."

Microcredit interest rates are widely heralded as being lower than those of traditional money lenders, but still range between 40 percent and 100 percent per year, far more than loans to middle class borrowers or traditional bank loans.

Local field officers are usually paid on commission and repayment rates are their measure of success. This leads to violent forms of debt collection.

The most brutal forms of loans - Joint Liability Loans — are now the most common. A microloan is made to a group of five to eight borrowers, who then hold joint accountability for the repayment. A default by any one individual means ruin for the group and risk to a whole village. In desperation, the group becomes the enforcer of the loan. This saves the bank having to handle uncollectible debts. Neighbors or other family members, fearful of default, will strip the home and all the belongings of anyone in a group who is unable to repay even a small debt.

Debt, not development

Rather than providing decent and stable jobs building desperately needed infrastructure like roads, ports, dams, irrigation, schools, clinics and social services, the goal is self-employment as petty entrepreneurs.

Imperialist countries have cut public financing of health, education and other social services. Western aid is now focused on grants for microcredit loans. This leads to privatization at every level and the shredding of what minimal social safety programs exist.

This is not a mistake. It is the heart of the capitalist ethic. Financier Yunus, seeking Western funding for his Grameen Bank, has declared that "All people are entrepreneurs."

But home-based piece work, "casual labor" and self-employed petty production schemes are not security or a step out of poverty. Debt is not liberation.

Peasants forced off the land, women and men, find the same debt trap in the densely populated cities. Millions of tiny loans mean millions of unemployed laborers frantically leasing bicycle rickshaws, setting up tiny kiosks, buying a few chickens, a hand loom, a sewing machine, setting up another one of the tens of thousands of snack and tea shops or hawking a few articles of clothing or food on crowded streets.

All this petty production does not lead to prosperity or to increased production. It means the country will not develop nor will poverty be sustainably reduced.

Expanding market

The profits from hundreds of millions of tiny microloans are only the smallest part of the imperialist looting of developing countries. The theft of resources and the vast exploitation of labor through the lowest possible wages are what allow in-

ternational finance capital to survive. But the financiers have found a new way to reach into the most isolated villages and threadbare hamlets and further channel the misery they have created into still greater profits.

And the capitalists admit it. Wrote the Wall Street Journal last Aug. 13: "What began as a social experiment to aid the world's poorest has also shown it can turn a profit. That has attracted private-equity funds and other foreign investors, who've poured billions of dollars over the past few years into microfinance worldwide."

In the poorest countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, micro-financing is increasingly profitable to the largest banks but deadly for the development of these countries.

Microfinancing is an expanding market. According to the Microcredit Summit Campaign, there are presently 150 million borrowers, more than two-thirds of them women. Citibank is a major financier of the annual Microcredit Summits, which estimate that more than 500 million poor people worldwide need their financial services.

Although the loans were originally considered risky, the attraction in this period is that the rural developing world has remained largely insulated from the global economic slump.

The Wall Street Journal article explained that over the previous year, investors had poured more than \$1 billion into the largest microfinance funds managed by companies, a 30-percent increase. The extra financing will allow the industry to loan out 20 percent more this year than last, much of it to countries such as Ukraine, Cambodia and Bosnia, the World Bank's CGAP says.

Across Eastern Europe, the Balkans and in the former Soviet republics, the end of socialist central planning has meant the shuttering of thousands of industries. It has also meant massive cuts in social programs. The solution of Western banks and thousands of imperialist-sponsored NGOs is programs of similar microloans and informal-sector microenterprises. Formerly unionized workers, scientists, engineers and teachers can now obtain "liberating" small loans to sell kabobs, pastries, phone cards, used clothing and knitted scarves on street corners and in tiny kiosks.

However, the Wall Street Journal also warned that the microdebt bubble could burst. This financial publication went on to describe how in India, poor neighborhoods were being "carpet-bombed" with loans. India is a country where 79 percent of the people live on less than \$2 per day and 39 percent of adults are illiterate. Yet profiteers are attracted by the big returns to be extracted from loans there.

The Journal article described a debt revolt that broke out in the city of Ramana-garam. Local mosque leaders started telling people in the predominantly Muslim community to stop paying their loans. Borrowers complied en masse. They also demanded that banks give an accounting of their finances. The repayment revolt has spread to other communities, including the nearby city of Channapatna. Wall Street is worried that this could spread further across India.

Mass movements to cancel the debt — both national debts that are sinking whole economies and microdebts that are sinking millions of already destitute and unemployed people — are the only possible approach to the debt trap. Organized, planned development and collective ownership of all resources is still the only way out of poverty. □

tion Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal member; and J. R. Valrey, POCC minister of information. Valrey showed a sneak preview of his film about the Grant killing, "Operation Small Axe."

Pam Africa brought the crowd to its feet when she said, "Mumia's life is not in the hands of the government. It's in our hands." That sentiment was echoed throughout the night. She talked about the long history of struggle to free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Ramona Africa reminded everyone that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the police bombing in which 11 people were killed. "There's no one sitting on death row for the bombing of the MOVE house," she stated.

Richard Brown, a former Black Panther Party member and a former defendant in

El cambio de gobierno en Honduras trae más represión

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

El 27 de enero José “Pepe” Lobo fue inaugurado como el nuevo presidente de Honduras. Su inauguración fue producto de unas elecciones ilegítimas sostenidas bajo un golpe de estado, con una persistente represión de las fuerzas de oposición y con la participación de tan solo el 30 por ciento de los/as votantes.

La ceremonia de inauguración tuvo lugar en un estadio que aloja hasta 35.000 personas, pero que ese día estuvo casi vacío. Solo tres presidentes asistieron: Ricardo Martinelli de Panamá, Leonel Fernández de la República Dominicana y Ma Ying-jeou de Taiwán. Colombia, Perú, Malta, Japón y Estados Unidos enviaron representantes.

La resistencia, liderada por el Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP), llenó las calles con más de 300.000 personas que marcharon manifestando su oposición y su no reconocimiento del nuevo gobierno. También despidieron a su querido y legítimo líder, el ex-Presidente José Manuel Zelaya. Después de cuatro meses de estar encerrado en la embajada brasileña, Zelaya viajaría a la

República Dominicana acompañado por el presidente de ese país.

En una conmovedora ceremonia, el líder de la resistencia Juan Barahona recibió la legítima banda presidencial de Zelaya. En su discurso “Honduras ha cambiado para siempre”, Barahona formuló las nuevas tareas para la resistencia: “organización, movilización y formación”, “para poder fortalecerse como instrumento de poder popular, para la conquista del poder”. Esto, dijo Barahona, se debe hacer de una manera unificada e inclusiva “de todos los sectores explotados, oprimidos y marginados de nuestra nación, sin excepción alguna”. (www.radaccionpopular.com)

El nuevo gobierno de Lobo ha comenzado como un régimen furiosamente represivo, similar al del fascista Álvaro Uribe en Colombia. De hecho, Uribe fue el primer presidente en visitar a Lobo después de su inauguración para poder firmar acuerdos de cooperación en materias de seguridad. Otros tratados han sido firmados desde entonces entre éstos dos países en cuestiones de defensa, vigilancia, terrorismo, secuestros, tráfico de drogas, etc. Los paramilitares colombianos han estado operando en Honduras en coordinación

con el ejército y la policía del país. Ellos fueron invitados por el previo y fraudulento gobierno de Micheletti, del cual el régimen de Lobo es solo su continuación.

Ilustrando el carácter represivo del nuevo régimen y su declaración de guerra contra la resistencia, varios campesinos pertenecientes al Movimiento Unificado de Campesinos del Aguán fueron heridos por disparos del ejército y la policía el mismo día de la inauguración de Lobo.

El 2 de febrero, dos camarógrafos que cubrían la resistencia fueron temporalmente secuestrados y torturados. Al día siguiente, el cuerpo de la líder sindical de 29 años de edad, Vanessa Zepeda, fue encontrado después de haber desaparecido y sido torturada. El 10 de febrero, Edgar Martínez, su esposa, dos hermanos y una amiga, fueron temporalmente secuestrados/as y torturados/as. Dos mujeres fueron violadas.

El 11 de febrero, dos hombres allanaron el hogar de Porfirio Ponce, líder de la resistencia y vicepresidente del STYBIS, el sindicato de trabajadores/as de la industria de bebidas, cuyo edificio sirve de cuartel general de la resistencia en Tegucigalpa. Los hombres se llevaron la com-

putadora de Ponce y mancharon de sangre su cama como una advertencia. Ponce fue anfitrión de una delegación solidaria del Centro de Acción Internacional de los Estados Unidos que visitó Honduras en octubre.

Hermes Reyes, miembro del Movimiento de Artistas en Resistencia, fue temporalmente desaparecido y torturado el 12 de febrero. Tres días después, Julio Fúnez Benítez, miembro activo de la resistencia y del Sindicato de Trabajadores del Servicio Autónomo Nacional de Acueductos, Alcantarillados y Similares, fue asesinado por dos paramilitares en una motocicleta.

Este es el gobierno que Estados Unidos reconoce como “el camino a la democracia” en Honduras, al igual que hace con el presidente paramilitar Uribe en Colombia.

A pesar de la represión, la resistencia está decidida a prevalecer. Su lema es ¡Resistimos y Venceremos! Es la tarea de toda persona progresista del mundo entero continuar con la petición directa de la resistencia: Exponer a estos criminales y rehusar reconocer al gobierno de Pepe Lobo.

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Países sudamericanos suministran ayuda concreta para Haití

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

La Unión de Naciones Suramericanas UNASUR — celebró una reunión de emergencia el 9 de febrero en Quito, Ecuador, para examinar la situación en Haití luego del terremoto y hacer planes para su asistencia a corto y largo plazo. Los cancilleres y enviados especiales de Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Guyana, Surinam, Uruguay y Venezuela, y los presidentes de Colombia, Paraguay y Perú se unieron al actual presidente de UNASUR, Rafael Correa del Ecuador, y al presidente de Haití, René Prével.

Esta reunión tuvo lugar 11 días después de que Correa visitara Haití para evaluar personalmente la situación. Estuvo acompañado por la ministra de Salud y la secretaria de Gestión de Riesgos y una delegación de médicos, socorristas, expertos en terapia intensiva y clínica y en la gestión de desastres naturales, y especialistas en cirugía plástica, vascular y cirugías de emergencia.

Plan Integral de UNASUR

Estos países, muchos de ellos ricos en recursos naturales pero empobrecidos por siglos de colonialismo y neocolonialismo de los países del Norte, particularmente Estados Unidos, acordaron por unanimidad ayudar en la reconstrucción de Haití en las tres áreas principales propuestas por Prével: infraestructura y energía, agricultura y salud. Su trabajo es-

tará plenamente coordinado y aprobado por el gobierno y el pueblo de Haití. “Ellos nos irán marcando los avances y las necesidades” declaró Correa. (Telesurtv.com, 9 de febrero)

Algunas de las acciones concretas incluirán el suministro de materiales, maquinaria e ingenieros para trabajar en la infraestructura, particularmente en la construcción de carreteras y redes eléctricas, además de estudiar el impacto del gas como una fuente alternativa de energía. Los países proporcionarán especialistas, semillas, fertilizantes y otros recursos para la reconstrucción del sector agrícola. Aumentarán las actividades ya realizadas por el Consejo Suramericano de la Salud y ayudarán a canalizar en acciones conjuntas, la ayuda humanitaria y la reconstrucción coordinadas por el gobierno haitiano.

Estas medidas son adicionales a la aportación de otras necesidades como tiendas de campaña y la construcción de refugios de emergencia, así como el desarrollo de un programa de reforestación.

UNASUR también está exhortando a los estados miembros que aún no lo hayan hecho, a que apliquen procesos especiales para regular el estatus migratorio de los/as haitianos/as en sus países, contribuyan al sector educativo, eliminen temporalmente los aranceles a los productos de exportación haitianos, estimulen la inversión de empresas suramericanas que utilizan mano de obra haitiana y

cancelen la deuda externa de Haití.

En lo que Correa calificó como “Cooperación Sur-Sur,” UNASUR aprobó \$100 millones para ayuda, y pedirá una cifra adicional de \$200 millones en un préstamo al Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, que se abonará, no por Haití, sino por los países de UNASUR en un plan de pago de 15-a-20-años con interés mínimo.

En otra muestra de solidaridad del Sur, la ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para las Américas), de la cual Ecuador es miembro, decidió recientemente cancelar cualquier deuda que Haití tenga con sus países.

Amnistía migratoria firmada por Ecuador

Para facilitar la vida de los/as haitianos/as indocumentados/as que viven en Ecuador, el presidente Correa firmó un decreto el 9 de febrero para legalizar su estatus migratorio. Además, los/as haitianos/as que llegaron a Ecuador antes del 31 de enero recibirán su visa de inmigrante completamente gratis. Estas medidas legalizarán la situación de 15.000 inmigrantes procedentes de Haití. Esto también ayudará a abrir las puertas a sus familias que aún estén en la nación caribeña.

Otro tipo de ‘ayuda’

El 25 de enero, otra reunión muy diferente se celebró en Montreal, Canadá, en materia de asistencia para Haití. Con los Estados Unidos y Canadá liderando el “Grupo de Amigos de Haití”, una decena

de otros países “donantes”, incluyendo Japón y la Unión Europea, se reunió en conferencia para “contribuir a establecer una visión clara y común dentro de la comunidad internacional para la recuperación inicial y reconstrucción a largo plazo de Haití”. (www.international.gc.ca)

A la conferencia también asistieron representantes de las principales instituciones financieras imperialistas que estrangulan a Haití con la deuda — el Fondo Monetario Internacional y el Banco Mundial. No se hizo mención de ninguna condonación de la deuda o de cómo la deuda ha prevenido el avance de Haití.

El 5 de febrero la Representante Maxine Waters introdujo legislación en el Congreso para aliviar la deuda de Haití solicitando que “el préstamo de \$100 millones del FMI fuera otorgado al gobierno de Haití en la forma de una subvención”.

Según standwithhaiti.org: “La deuda de \$709 millones de dólares de Haití a las instituciones financieras internacionales se desglosa de la siguiente manera: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID), \$447 millones, el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI), \$165 millones, el Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola (FIDA), \$58 millones, el Banco Mundial, \$39 millones”.

La conferencia de Montreal pidió la “convocatoria urgente” de una conferencia internacional de los principales donantes y asociados que se celebrará en las Naciones Unidas en Nueva York en marzo. □