



WOMEN FIGHT BACK

Mass outrage vs. rightwing attacks

By Kris Hamel

With the war on women in full swing, women are fighting mad and fighting back. Threats to health care and reproductive rights, especially safe, legal abortion and birth control, and reactionary attitudes toward women have been met with strong anger and resistance by women and male allies across the United States.

On March 1, the start of Women's History Month, the Democratic-majority U.S. Senate by a 51-48 vote narrowly rejected the so-called "Respect for Rights of Conscience Act," which would have allowed any employer or insurance plan, with or without religious affiliation, to refuse coverage for any health care service or provision they object to on the basis of "religious beliefs or moral convictions." Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri introduced this as an amendment to the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (the so-called national health care plan) and tacked it on to a transportation bill this year.

This came on the heels of February filled with congressional debate and public commentary about women's right to contraceptives in the health plan. Anti-woman, reactionary forces went head to head with women defending their right to basic health care, reproductive health care and birth control.

President Barack Obama had announced on Jan. 20 that all religious-affiliated institutions that serve the general population and receive federal and state funding must provide free birth control coverage as part of preventive health care in all employee health care plans. The all-male U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops went on a rampage, denouncing the measure as an attack on "religious freedom." They were soon joined by Republican presidential candidates, Christian and Jewish fundamentalists, reactionary politicians in Congress and other right-wing elements like Tea Party members.

This was a reactionary attack on working women's right to contraception coverage in their employer-provided health care plans and to all women's rights and autonomy.

On Feb. 10, the president caved in with a "compromise." He announced that the thousands of religious-affiliated schools, universities, hospitals, long-term health care facilities and charities affected by the health care plan would not be required to provide such coverage; instead, women working for these employers could obtain birth control directly through their insurance companies.

But even this "compromise" was not enough for the male-dominated Catholic Church and other reactionaries, who want to control and set back women and women's rights.

Millions of people were outraged by the spectacle of

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Gaza City march demands, "Free Hana Shalabi."



HAITI

Workers World statement

Afghanistan—the underlying crime

Not even the most vicious warmonger can defend the inhumane actions of a U.S. sergeant who stormed into the homes of Afghan civilians and blew away 16 people, including babies. But the war makers will try to find a way to use this as a reason to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan, which is the underlying crime.

There's only one way to stop the crimes of this occupying force: U.S. troops get out! And let's add: Washington, pay reparations!

So many horrible acts by U.S. troops have been blamed by the Pentagon brass on the individual soldier's state of mind. But they all fit a pattern characteristic of colonial occupations. Soldiers urinating

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PHOTO: HAITI LIBERTE

Detroit campaign launched to halt foreclosures

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Detroit

A coalition of forces in Detroit is building a broad network of organizations aimed at winning a moratorium on foreclosures. A series of actions in March is targeting Chase Bank, one of the major culprits involved in foreclosures and home seizures.

Attorney Vanessa Fluker, a leader in the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shut-offs, is currently litigating at least eight cases involving Chase Bank, one of the largest financial institutions in the U.S. Chase controls a large number of mortgages in Detroit, where it has refused to negotiate loan modifications and principal reductions for working people despite being under consent agreements with the federal government to do so.

One of Fluker's cases involves the threatened eviction by Chase of 82-year-old Alma Counts, who has owned her home in northwest Detroit for four decades. Counts is a disabled senior living on a fixed income. Although she had negotiated a loan modification, when Chase took over the loan they nullified the agreement and doubled her monthly payments.

At a press conference and rally held outside Counts' home on March 8, United Auto Workers Vice President Cindy Estrada pledged solidarity with Counts and encouraged all union members present to ensure that she was not evicted.

Other speakers at the rally and press conference included Jerry Goldberg of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, Steve Babson of the People Before Banks Coalition and the Rev. Ed Rowe of Central United Methodist Church. The action was organized by a coalition of groups including Moratorium NOW!, the Occupy Detroit Anti-Foreclosure Task Force, the People Before Banks Coalition, the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, and Jobs With Justice.

On March 13, protesters will target Chase Bank and its draconian policies against working people and seniors in Detroit by holding a demonstration outside the bank's downtown headquarters. This action is part of a national day of protests targeting Chase Bank for its refusal to impose a moratorium on foreclosures.

A statement issued by organizers says: "[We are] holding Chase accountable to the consent agreement that CEO Jamie Dimon signed with federal regulators committing the bank to special forbearances and mortgage modifications to keep people in their homes. The bank's failure to comply underlines the need for a moratorium on all foreclosures and evictions."

National conference March 31 in Detroit

The Moratorium NOW! Coalition will hold a national conference at Central United Methodist Church in Detroit on March 31. The event will bring together housing activists from around the U.S. to coordinate activities aimed at winning a national moratorium to foreclosures and evictions.

Organizers from Atlanta; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; Chicago; Milwaukee; and other cities are expected to attend. Organizers will exchange ideas on direct actions to keep people in their homes along with building the movement for a national moratorium. A cultural event will be held the evening of March 31 at 1515 Broadway.

1515 Broadway, a cultural hub in downtown Detroit, faced bank seizure in February until a citywide campaign was launched by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, Occupy Detroit and other forces that resulted in stopping the foreclosure and eviction of its owner. The site is where general assemblies and other activities for Occupy Detroit are held every week.

People can register for the conference by logging on to nationalmoratorium.org. □

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Fukushima catastrophe commemorated

Japanese author and anti-nuclear power activist Shoji Kihara was the featured speaker at "A Day of Remembrance and Warning" on the anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear catastrophe that followed an earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. From the grounds of Fairfield Missionary Baptist Church where the event was held, the steam cloud rising from the cooling towers of Georgia Power's twin nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle can be clearly seen. The Nucle-

ar Regulatory Commission recently gave a green light for construction to begin on two more reactors, the first such permission since the Three Mile Island meltdown on March 28, 1979. Organized by the anti-nuclear-power group WAND, the event brought out residents of Burke County, one of the poorest counties in Georgia and the site of the plant, as well as concerned people from Atlanta, North and South Carolina, and elsewhere.

— **Dianne Mathiowetz**



PHOTO: COURTNEY HANSON

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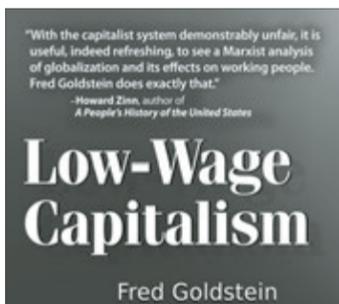
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Jobs news deceptive

Election 'dust' can't disguise deep economic crisis

By Fred Goldstein

At the end of the first week in March, the corporate print and electronic media were using the latest job creation numbers to try to drum up optimism about the capitalist economic recovery.

Trumpeting the news that the Labor Department reported 227,000 new jobs created in February, CBS, NBC, CNN, the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and the Obama administration all tried to convince the population that a true recovery was underway.

This exercise in "talking up the economy" was calculated to throw dust in the eyes of the masses, who are suffering from massive unemployment and underemployment, low wages, poverty, foreclosures and general insecurity. Of course, the establishment in general wants to give some form of hope to the millions of unemployed. But in addition the White House and the Democratic Party are trying to gain credit among the workers for allegedly "getting the economy going again" as the presidential election approaches.

The claim that these new numbers show a resurgent economy is patently ridiculous, even taking the government numbers at face value. What is not mentioned is that while 227,000 new jobs were supposedly created in February, during that same month about 125,000 new workers came into the work force. So the net gain for the month was actually about 100,000 jobs.

According to the same Labor Department, 13 million workers are totally unemployed. At this rate, it would take 12 years to put them all back to work — if no further crisis intervenes, which is an unlikely proposition.

Of course, any number of new jobs is welcome to workers who got hired. But this was a drop in the bucket. The big-business media left out the big picture.

Economy almost 10 million jobs short

Some 8.5 million jobs were lost in the downturn, while about 3.5 million jobs have been created during the recovery, leaving a deficit of 5 million. But 4.7 million new workers came into the work force in that period. Thus the economy would have to create an additional 9.7 million jobs to replace all those lost in the downturn and employ the new workers.

And even if these jobs were created tomorrow, unemployment would still be over 5 percent.

In addition:

- There are still officially 23.5 million workers unemployed or underemployed, including 8.1 million who need full-time work but are forced to work part-time, plus 2.5 million workers classified as "marginally attached."
- Official unemployment for African Americans and Latinos/as actually increased in February to 14.1 percent and 10.7 percent, respectively.
- Unemployment among young workers between the ages of 16 and 24 was officially at 16.5 percent.
- The number of first-time claims for unemployment increased by 8,000 to 362,000 last week.
- At least 3 million workers have totally dropped out of the work force since 2008. If they were counted, unemployment would be at 10.8 percent.
- Five million workers have been jobless for six months or more.
- Prices are rising at a faster rate than

wages. So wages that are already low are actually sinking.

- Fifteen percent of the population — that's one in every seven people — are on food stamps. Food stamp use shot up during the downturn, and has continued to rise even during the "recovery." It rose 5.5 percent in 2011 because of unemployment and low wages.
- There are 11.1 million homeowners who have "underwater" mortgages — they owe more money on their houses than the houses are worth. More than 4 million homes are in foreclosure.

Statistics showing the magnitude of the economic crisis for the working class could be extended to many other areas: school closings, lack of health care, etc. The mouthpieces of capital have little to say about this when they want to rouse cheers for the economy.

Meager cyclical upturn within a profound global crisis

The announcement of three consecutive months in which job growth hit 200,000 plus is a meager impulse of cyclical business activity amidst the pervasive general crisis of a system mired in stagnation and decline.

Such cyclical activity is inevitable. Sooner or later, inventories must go down and need to be replenished.

Frederick Engels, co-founder of Marxism along with Karl Marx, described the capitalist cycle over a century ago in his foundational work "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific."

Engels describes the capitalist crash: "Commerce is at a standstill, the markets are glutted, products accumulate, as multitudinous as they are unsaleable, hard cash disappears, credit vanishes, factories are closed, the mass of the workers are in want of the means of subsistence, because they have produced too much of the means of subsistence; bankruptcy follows bankruptcy. ... The stagnation lasts for years; productive forces and products are wasted and destroyed wholesale, until the accumulated mass of commodities finally filter off ... until production and exchange gradually begin to move again."

Engels described how the economy begins to pick up and accelerates into a boom. While the boom is not happening at this present declining stage of capitalism, the bust is familiar.

During the housing bubble, overproduction of housing took place — more than 1.5 million houses were built that could not be sold at a profit. Construction

ground to a halt. Workers in the industry and all related industries were thrown out of work. The same happened in the auto industry, the steel industry, transportation, mining and so forth.

And now, two and a half years after business began to recover, inventories are finally, gradually going down. No capitalist can afford to be left with low or no inventory, lest they miss a sale. So inventories must be restocked. That is what has happened in the U.S. economy over the past quarter.

Buried in the mountain of hoopla about the recovery are nervous admissions about slow growth. For the bosses slow growth means slow profits. For the workers slow growth means endless mass unemployment.

The Financial Times of Feb. 29 wrote that in the final quarter of 2011, "most growth was due to an inventory build-up and final consumer demand was sluggish." The Times pointed to "an economy in which credit conditions are easing and the labor market is starting to improve, but that has not fed through into a robust rise in consumption and investment, leaving doubts about the sustainability and momentum of growth in 2012."

The bankers are already expressing concern over inventories not being sold off.

"J.P. Morgan Chase economists lowered their overall projection for first-quarter [Gross Domestic Product] to 1.5 percent from 2 percent. They also cite downside risk to their current estimate that growth would accelerate to 2.5 percent in the second quarter, partly because the first-quarter data suggest higher business inventories heading into the second quarter," wrote the Wall Street Journal on March 9. Goldman Sachs and other institutions are also beginning to lower their growth estimates for the U.S. economy to a minuscule 2 percent plus or minus.

The root problem is that the bosses need fewer and fewer workers to accomplish production and perform services. Technology has replaced workers, reduced skills, lowered wages and made growing mass unemployment a permanent feature of capitalism.

That is the consequence of the steadily slowing growth of the capitalist economy. Karl Marx explained this development more than a century ago. He showed that as capitalism grows it eventually forces workers to become so productive through the use of technology that they produce more and more, faster and faster, which makes the products harder and harder to sell. This is what blocks the growth of

capitalism eventually. That is the point we are at right now.

From 2000 to 2009, some 5.8 million manufacturing jobs were lost in the U.S., yet manufacturing output in 2011 was almost the same as in 2000. This is also true in Germany, South Korea, Britain, Japan and other industrialized capitalist countries. And the productivity that has swept manufacturing has also invaded the service and knowledge industries.

Struggle against capitalism itself

For the working class, these dry statistics carry a tremendous warning. They shout that the crisis is not over and worse may be coming. They say workers must disregard all the hype of Obama, the politicians and pundits about things coming back to the way they were. The only course is to prepare for struggle.

Mass organization and struggle will get jobs. This is what the Republic Windows and Doors workers learned in 2009 and again just this past month when they reoccupied the plant to protect their jobs.

This is what the workers in Wisconsin started to do with last year's two-week occupation of the state Capitol in Madison, before they were derailed into electoral politics by the labor leadership and the Democratic Party.

Struggle was the message of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union when it took on the entire West Coast shipping industry to protect union jurisdiction and job rights at Longview, Wash. It got crucial support from Occupy Wall Street in that struggle.

This was the message in 2006 when millions of undocumented workers went out into the streets to stop reactionary anti-immigrant legislation.

And this will be the message this May Day in New York City's Union Square, across the country and around the world.

Workers in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Britain, Quebec, Romania and elsewhere are fighting the vicious austerity programs of the bankers and the bosses, who are trying to make the workers pay the price of their global capitalist crisis.

Workers here do not need just 227,000 jobs for a month — jobs which may come and go according to the fluctuations of the capitalist market and the profit system.

They need true full employment with tens of millions of jobs at decent pay with benefits that establish secure lives with futures for themselves and their children. It is time to say enough is enough and open up a struggle against capitalism itself. □



Hundreds of city workers in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Councils 47 and 33 rallied on March 8 in Love Park in Philadelphia near City Hall to demand that the city administration come to the bargaining table to negotiate a fair contract. The last wage increase that Philadelphia's 10,857 blue-collar and 3,500 white-collar workers received was on July 1, 2007. Health and welfare

contributions have been frozen as well. AFSCME President Pete Matthews estimated that the city has saved a total of \$145,637,489 during the four years that the workforce has been working under the terms of the old contract. After the rally, workers flooded the weekly meeting of the City Council to press for their demands.

— Report & photo by Joe Piette

Militant Oaklanders block foreclosures

By Dave Welsh
Oakland, Calif.

A bank and a real estate company thought they were going to auction off Nell Myhand's home at noon on March 8, but Myland and about a hundred of her friends had other ideas.

To the beat of drums, pots and pans, cymbals and Haitian shakers, an International Women's Day flash-mob stormed the steps of the county courthouse here and dogged the auctioneer until he finally gave up. So Myland, a movement veteran of Occupy Oakland and Global Women's Strike, was still in her Oakland home as of March 10.

"We have to fight tooth and nail for our homes," said Maria Poblet, executive director of Causa Justa: Just Cause, a Bay Area social justice organization. "For the banks like Wells Fargo, it's just an investment. But for us, these are our homes. Women's rights and housing rights, these are not separate things. The majority of foreclosures are on women-led households. But they're picking a fight with women that they will not win."

The Latino/a community and Occupy Oakland turned out in force for the action. They chanted, "No, no, no way, ain't gonna be no sale today" and "No se vende."

A sign read, "These are hard-working people's homes: We will not allow them to be sold." People jeered at the sheriff's deputies: "Why aren't you out investigating all this mortgage fraud?" (Go to youtu.be/cTXKuIt8pg for a video of the demonstration.)

Homeowner 'occupies' her own home

A day later, 40 miles away from Oakland in the foreclosure hotbed of Antioch, Calif., a real estate broker named Rick Fuller counted on seizing the home of Rosie Alvarado on behalf of investors. It was part of a foreclosure action that Alvarado says was full of irregularities.

But she is also a leader of a homeowners' group called the Bay Area Moratorium, which is fighting the foreclosure epidemic and calling for a two-year moratorium on all foreclosure actions so people can stay in their homes.

So Alvarado and about 20 of her friends "occupied" her home, in direct defiance of the foreclosure machine that has stolen so many thousands of people's homes in this region. When Fuller drove up to the house in his SUV, he was turned away by a group of angry homeowners shaking their fists at him.



Nell Myhand, holding a clipboard. To her immediate right, with bullhorn, is Maria Poblet.

PHOTO: JUDITH SCHERR

Resistance to the foreclosure mills is growing and spreading as people discover the power of collective action. On Feb. 29, a crowd from Bay Area Moratorium met in Sacramento to present a toughly worded "Notice and Complaint of Violation of Civil Rights" to California Attorney General Kamala Harris. It was signed by more than 70 homeowners, including Alvarado and Delia Pedroza-Aguilar, co-founder of the Moratorium group.

The complaint said that "national banks, debt collectors, law firms and investors are parties that have conspired ... against homeowners with their willful disregard of applicable law and willful collusion upon the court to evict and cheat homeowners out of their homes through a fraudulent foreclosure. ...

"This claim of ownership to our homes and land without a judicial trial by jury ... without access to an appeals process, constitutes an unfair final judgment by a court, represents a taking of property without due process, and is in violation of the 5th and 14th Amendments to our Federal Constitution.

"The national banks, law firms and investors have until now abusively used the organs and institutions of the government in their fraudulent quests to obtain court orders," knowing that judges would "rule in their favor and grant them, through fraud, illegal writ of possession to our private lands and properties."

The homeowners' complaint demanded that the state attorney general and county sheriffs cease and desist from enforcing fraudulent evictions and foreclosures, citing "the defrauding banks' improper securitization of promissory notes," "utilization of 'robo-signers' — essentially a forgery," and the banks' "inability to provide unaltered, original/wet ink signature copy on the note." □

On the Picket Line

By Sue Davis

FDNY must hire people of color, payback wages

In a class-action settlement announced March 8, the New York City Fire Department, which has historically been 97 percent white, must immediately hire 186 African-American and 107 Latino/a firefighters. The FDNY must also pay \$128 million, as well as compensatory damages and costs of medical coverage, to applicants who took the 1999 and 2002 exam but were not hired. Captain Paul Washington, past president of the Black firefighters' Vulcan Society, said, "This is a great victory for those who have been excluded from serving our City because of their race. We hope the FDNY moves quickly to welcome the 293 Black and Latino applicants who are entitled to be hired." He added that the Vulcan Society has been fighting for nearly 75 years to increase Black representation in the FDNY. The federal judge who issued the ruling noted, "It has been in the City's power to prevent or remedy the need for damages proceedings for a decade, and it has not done so." He added that paying damages now for all members of the affected class is a "consequence of the City's decision to ignore clear violations of federal law." In earlier rulings the court found that the FDNY test was racially discriminatory, the discrimination was intentional, and it was "a persistent stain on the Fire Department's record." (www.ccrjustice.org, March 8)

Columbia workers protest proposed cutbacks

Administrative workers at Columbia, Barnard and Teachers College, represented by United Auto Workers Local 2110 since 1985, held a rousing rally and march on March 7 in their fight for a decent contract. Columbia, with an \$8 billion endowment — yes, \$8 billion — and plans to keep expanding into the Harlem community, is demanding that the workers pay huge increases in health care costs, while offering zero increases in wages and reductions in pension and tuition benefits. No wonder about 700 union members, supporters and students turned out to protest these ruthless cutbacks, which represent blatant corporate greed in the guise of academia. Picketing on both sides of Broadway at 116th Street, the demonstrators, holding handmade signs, blowing whistles and chanting, let Columbia's administration know they're willing to fight for a just contract. Local 2110 President Maida Rosenstein told the Columbia Spectator, "We're dismayed at [Columbia's] proposals especially in light of the wealth of the institution. It makes no sense whatsoever. The ball's in their court. ... If there is not an agreement or substantial progress, then ... a strike action is on the table. It's not where we want to go, but our members are very, very serious about a fair contract." Local 2110 has a militant history. In 1995, the union went on strike for six months to stop a two-tier system of pensions. Stay tuned.

Immigrant car washers organize in New York City

Immigrant rights, community and labor groups announced on March 6 that they are starting a campaign to organize the 5,000 mostly immigrant car washers at about 200 sites in New York City. The industry's violations of workers' rights include lower-than-minimum wages, no paid overtime and failing to supply protective equipment to those working with caustic cleaners that burn their eyes and noses. A coalition of Make the Road New York, New York Communities for Change and the Department Store Union (RWDSU) plans to push for annual city and state inspections to make sure carwash companies follow labor laws, to set up a code of conduct for the industry and to hold government hearings to determine if legislation is need to safeguard workers. When the industry was last surveyed in 2008, 78 percent of carwashes in the five boroughs were in violation of minimum wage and overtime laws. (Crain's, March 5) The NYC campaign follows the successful one in Los Angeles led by the Steelworkers union. Workers at two carwashes in South LA celebrated their first USW Local 675 contracts on Feb. 21. They are getting pay increases, safety equipment and on-the-job training to prevent injury and illness. (afl-cio.now.blog, Feb. 21) □

A year after anti-worker onslaught

60,000 protest as Wisconsin uprising continues

By Bryan G. Pfeifer
Madison, Wis.

Displaying the mighty power of workers and the poor in Wisconsin and beyond, more than 60,000 protesters flooded the State Capitol grounds for a people's march and rally on March 10. Refusing to be beaten down by union busting and austerity imposed by Gov. Scott Walker and his 1% bosses, the rainbow of protesters made clear that the people's uprising in Wisconsin is in full fightback motion. March 10 was the one-year anniversary of when the state Legislature illegally rammed through, and Walker signed, the union-busting bill attacking public sector workers.

Sponsored by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, the rally and protest included union and community members, students and progressive faith-based participants from every corner of the state. Strong delegations came from Milwaukee, where the majority of people of color reside in the state. Numerous buses and car caravans were sponsored by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the American Federation of Teachers, the Laborers Union, Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, Service Employees Local 1 and other unions.

Other participants from Milwaukee included members of Students for a Democratic Society at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Voces de la Frontera and the WI Bail Out the People Movement.

Occupy Wall Street groups from Fondulac, Madison,



PHOTO: JENNA POPE

Milwaukee, Riverwest and elsewhere joined together in a powerful, diverse contingent. They marched around the Capitol with a massive "We are the 99 percent" banner and chanted slogans such as "Make the banks pay!"

Speakers at the main rally on the Capitol steps included Mahlon Mitchell, president of the Wisconsin Firefighters union, Mary Kay Henry, national president of SEIU, and Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO.

The rally was the culmination of a statewide, weeks-long tour by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO to expose the effects of the union-busting and austerity measures and continue building the people's movement, which includes the upcoming recall election of Walker and other right-wing racist politicians.

On the evening of March 9, candlelight vigils were held throughout the state in a symbolic gesture to shed light on all the lies of the Walker administration and its bosses on Wall Street. In a moving display of people's power, thousands at the state Capitol held aloft candles and then marched down State Street led by the Firefighters and their pipers.

To see photos and videos of the March 10 rally and for information on upcoming events, go to wibailoutpeople.org. □

'No cuts, no fees, education must be free!'

By Judy Greenspan
Sacramento, Calif.

Outraged by cuts in funding and the tripling of tuition at community colleges and state universities, students, faculty and other educators held protests throughout California on March 1. The local actions culminated four days later in a statewide demonstration in Sacramento and a brief sit-in, led by Occupy for Education forces, in the Capitol rotunda.

More than 50 people had marched the 99 miles from Oakland's Oscar Grant Plaza, the center for Occupy Oakland, holding rallies in several cities along the way. Demanding full funding for grades K-12 as well as higher education, they joined with thousands of students and education activists from all over California in Sacramento's Southside Park on March 5.

Many came from student government organizations to participate in the "March for March" protest. Occupy for Education, a statewide coalition of college students, faculty and union activists, brought the strong demands of the 99% to this protest.

Chanting "No cuts, no fees, education must be free!" the marchers blocked traffic and drew attention to the education crisis in California. A late-morning rally was held on the west steps of the Capitol. Speaker after speaker urged people to support the "millionaires' tax" initiative that unions and other organizations are trying to place on the ballot.

A politician who addressed the crowd was soundly booed and heckled when he expressed support for Gov. Jerry Brown's attempt to get funds for education by raising taxes on the 99%. The students and their supporters made it clear that working people and students should not bear the brunt of this economic crisis. "Banks got bailed out, schools got sold out" was the strong message brought to the State House.

Following the rally, hundreds of Occupy for Education activists, union members and other supporters stood on line for more than an hour to enter the Capitol. Despite a large police presence, protesters were able to occupy the Capitol rotunda and adjacent hallways for several hours.

Occupy organizers held a General Assembly by turning on the "people's microphone," the only sound system that can't be taken away by the state, and organized the crowd to formulate demands. After small group discussions and several "mic checks," protesters decided on six demands, including pass the millionaires' tax, cancel all student debt, fully fund all levels of public education, and full and equal access to education for undocumented students. Discussions were also held to decide on a long list of future actions.

Meanwhile, hundreds of local and state police mobilized to intimidate activists rallying outside the building. They took away protesters' signs, allegedly because

the "rally permit" had expired. Inside the Capitol, after most people had left and the building was officially closed at 6 p.m., 78 education activists were arrested.

Occupy for Education activists in Northern California are already organizing to continue this struggle. The next meeting will be held at noon on March 17 at 2070 Allston Way in downtown Berkeley. □

Cops oppose justice

A member of Occupy Oakland held a sign highlighting the racism of the U.S. "justice system" as part of the Occupy Education rally at the California Capitol building in Sacramento. Capitol police were so incensed by his sign that they sur-



WW PHOTO JUDY GREENSPAN

rounded him with riot cops and mounted police after the morning rally was over and most demonstrators had gone inside to occupy the building. The cops claimed he couldn't hold his sign without a permit on the Capitol grounds once the permit-

ted rally was over. Several other people were still holding signs, but he was the only one police threatened and harassed. When some demonstrators came to his support, the government unleashed even more riot police.

— Terri Kay

SELMA TO MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

Protest for immigrant, workers' rights

By Adriane Harden
Montgomery, Ala.

Demonstrators rallied at the Alabama State Capitol on the afternoon of March 9, after completing the final leg of the 54-mile, week-long march between Selma and Montgomery. Marchers protested Alabama's toughest-in-the-U.S. immigration law, for workers' rights and against laws in 31 states requiring voters to show some form of identification at the polls.

This year's commemoration of the historic 1965 march that forced passage of the Voting Rights Act brought together an impressive coalition of organizations committed to civil, immigrant and workers' rights.

The week began on March 5 with thousands of people reenacting the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where 47 years ago demonstrators were met with vicious police brutality so intense the day is known as "Bloody Sunday."

Two hundred people began the long march to Montgomery. Each day more people joined. By March 8, the day dedicated to the struggle for immigrant rights, more than 1,000 people, many undocumented, walked toward Montgomery with their children.

Upon arriving at the Capitol on March 9, thousands more — coming on buses



PHOTO: ADRIANE HARDEN

organized by labor unions, immigrant and civil rights groups from throughout Alabama, Georgia and other states — converged to demand an end to all the attacks on these diverse yet united communities.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the civil-rights group, National Action Network, and host of "Politics Nation"

on MSNBC, said, "Our fathers beat Jim Crow. We're going to beat James Crow Jr. We have awakened again. Black, white, Latino, Asian, workers, union members, young folk, old folk.

"The only voter fraud that we can find is the statement that there is widespread voter fraud," Sharpton said. "The fraud is to use nonexistent widespread voter fraud to try to suppress and stop people from voting."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson of the Rainbow Push Coalition voiced support for a federal bill that would provide paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children.

"Democracy is a path to citizenship, not deportation," Jackson said. "Democracy is the path of the DREAM Act, not the nightmare act of racial profiling, violence and family separation."

Other speakers included Bob King, president of the United Auto Workers, AFL-CIO Vice President Arlene Holt-Baker, who made the entire walk, and Service Employees Union leader Tony Lewis. □

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Maryland postal workers demand plant reopen

By Joe Piette
Frederick, Md.

Wearing blue and yellow “Reopen Frederick” shirts and waving blue “Save America’s Post Office” signs, about 80 workers gathered on March 11 to demand the reopening of the Frederick, Md., Processing and Distribution Center.

Located about 50 miles west of Baltimore, Frederick serves as an example of what could happen to towns across the country if the U.S. Postal Service is allowed to execute plans to close 223 more processing facilities, organizers say.

Since the Frederick center closed last Nov. 19, mail in the 217xx ZIP code area has been shipped by truck to Baltimore, where it is sorted and then shipped the 50 miles back. Postal workers say the Baltimore facility can’t handle that volume of mail, and yet more mail is slated to be sent to Baltimore when the Martinsburg, W.Va., processing plant closes later this year.

When the Frederick News-Post asked readers to report complaints since the plant closing, more than 50 people responded. “One told the News-Post that medication refills he ordered in November from an online pharmacy in Florida were delivered to his home a month later. A jew-



WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

Mobilization brought workers from different states to Frederick, Md.

elry designer said pieces she sent to mail-order customers in early December had not reached their destinations two weeks later, forcing her to remake the pieces and resend them via UPS. Other complaints described bills, insurance documents and invitations that arrived late or never at all, and sale flyers arriving after the sale was

over.” (fredericknewspost.com)

The plant closing forced 180 employees to take postal jobs in various other locations, including Baltimore and Linthicum, Md., both sites 50 miles away.

Occupy Baltimore and Occupy Frederick activists joined former processing plant workers and others to converge

March 11 on the closed Frederick plant. Postal workers from as far away as the Mid-Hudson processing facility — also on the closing list — in the town of Newburgh, N.Y., also came. They called for the USPS to reopen the plant and for a halt to further closures countrywide.

Speakers included Richard Shelley, who works at the Baltimore Processing and Distribution Facility and is director of organization for American Postal Workers Union Local 181; Sharon Black for Baltimore Occupy 4 Jobs; and Ken Lerch, branch president of National Association of Letter Carriers Local 3825, Rockville, Md.

Two town hall meetings are planned: March 13 in New Market, Va., and March 15 in Williamsport, Md.

In February, Shelley and five other workers filed a formal complaint to the USPS Inspector General, listing documented cases of severely delayed mail and serious safety violations.

The legal filing ended with “We, the below signed, request an immediate, thorough and objective investigation of the above allegations and the totality of effects of the closing of the Frederick P&DC, including possible crimes committed by Postal management officials up to and including the Postmaster General of the United States.” □

From 1986 book

Reorganization’s toll on the P.O. workforce

Following are excerpts from Chapter 5 of “High Tech, Low Pay,” the 1986 book by then-Workers World Party Chairperson Sam Marcy. It explains some of the changes the Postal Reorganization Act and new technology were imposing on the Post Office’s workforce and this development’s relationship to the oppressed communities of color. See workers.org/marcy/hightech/.

In the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the PRA was passed, AT&T carried out one of its devastating assaults on the mass of telephone operators, which took a huge toll on Black, Latin and women workers especially.

What happened at AT&T has exceptional relevance to the situation of the postal workers. Even at that time it had become clear that the telecommunications industry had tremendous influence in the government, and that the enact-

ment of the PRA would begin active competition between private industry and the postal service, in the process liquidating many thousands upon thousands of jobs.

However, the postal workers saw the Postal Reorganization Act in an entirely different context. They had just gone through their first and most important strike, which despite some concessions had won legitimacy for their union. This was accomplished even though Nixon sent the U.S. Army into the post offices of the great metropolitan areas of the country in an effort to intimidate and break the workers’ resistance. That the postal workers were able to survive this and grow in strength explains why they won subsequent gains and concessions from the government.

In all this, the historical background of the Postal Service should not be forgotten. Like other institutions of U.S. capital-

ism, it has been profoundly segregationist since the beginning. It was not until 1865, the last year of the Civil War, that the laws prohibiting, yes prohibiting!, Black people from carrying mailbags from stagecoach to post office were abolished.

Racism has continued during the many decades thereafter, partly as a result of outright discrimination by white organized unions. The founding of the National Alliance of Postal Workers in 1913 marked a milestone in self-help organizational mediums by Black workers when the leadership of white organized unions would not open their doors to Black workers.

It was not until the 1940s that Black, Latin and women workers were more freely admitted to the unions under the impact of many profound social changes, most important of which was the civil rights struggle and the upsurge of the labor movement as a whole. This finally

made it possible for Black, Latin and women workers to take advantage of employment opportunities in the Postal Service.

Even now, despite attrition and pending future layoffs, “minorities [since 1978] have steadily increased as a proportion of total Postal Service employment.” Thus in the fiscal year 1981, a year of big layoffs as a result of the capitalist recession all over industry, “the Postal Service hired 10,064 Blacks, 2,765 Hispanics and 2,289 other minorities for a total of 15,118 or 27.6 percent of new employees.” (Henderson, Lenneal J. and Charles Murphy, “Perils of Black Postal Workers in a Technological Age: Some Strategies for Survival”: Urban League Review, Summer 1983, Vol. 7, No. 2.)

Of course, with anticipated future employment reductions, the picture is not encouraging, particularly if one takes into account the direction the government is tak-

Continued on page 7

‘Overtime breeds incredible stress’

Regarding developments in the Post Office, Charlie Twist, a 10-year Bronx letter carrier and assistant shop steward in Branch 36 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, told Workers World:

Of the 34 facilities targeted in New York City, 17 are in the Bronx, the poorest urban area in the country. This amounts to a racist attack and an attack on all poor people. So as early as last fall, I was active with community organizations going to hearings on this issue. I saw how people on my route were reacting and saw a need to speak up at the hearing and fight the closing.



Letter carrier sees post office for sale in Queens, N.Y.

WW PHOTO: CHARLIE TWIST

At work, there has been a hiring freeze for the past five years. The only people hired at all are given one-year contracts and don’t get benefits. Right now, certain routes won’t be covered on a given day. Instead of hiring a new worker to fill slots,

management has us work overtime, even if this means being paid double time.

With centers closed, the mail for the Bronx is processed in Manhattan. This might delay our last trip because we have to wait for the last load of mail — again increasing overtime. It takes an exhausting physical toll and creates a lot of stress. Management has unrealistic expectations, increasing the work load and at the same time telling us to come back earlier.

There’s a lot of verbal conflict with supervisors. But then, everyone goes back to work. The stress is incredible. The workers are beginning to think that management is purposely sabotaging the whole mail delivery process in order to

destroy the Post Office.

Now, because of the angry response and resistance in New York City and around the country, the Post Office was forced to declare a moratorium on any closures for the rest of the year. Now, we need to go on the offensive and on March 17, the 42nd anniversary of the 1970 strike vote, hit the streets.

My union local backs the action. Some co-workers said they’d call in sick to join the protest on March 17, despite threats from management. Some Manhattan shop stewards met with management, who because they wanted to avoid people calling in sick, agreed they could start their day early, so they could still join the action.

This is just one of many activities planned. There are postal workers and locals around the country that want to take action nationally. □

Postal workers determined to keep their jobs

By Joe Piette

Can postal workers and the communities that depend on postal jobs and services stop Congress from privatizing the highest rated government agency — the U.S. Postal Service?

“¡Sí, se puede! Yes, we can!” say letter carriers, mail handlers, clerks and other postal workers working alongside customers and neighborhood organizations in Community Labor United for Postal Jobs and Services.

In just a few months, the diverse CLUPJS coalition has organized hundreds of community and union members to voice their opposition to drastic postal cutbacks at dozens of hearings in the Bronx, Queens, Staten Island, Brooklyn and Manhattan, including Harlem. They’ve held community rallies, spoken at meetings in bookstores and passed out thousands of fliers.

They’re now building for a mass rally at Union Square and a march to New York City’s historic James Farley Post Office on March 17, which is the 42-year anniversary of the great postal wildcat strike of 1970 and the site where that labor action began.

An inscription on the front of that building reads, “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Several competing plans being pushed through the U.S. Congress, however, would dismantle the Postal Service, which was founded in 1775. If it were

to become law, H.R. 2309 would end Saturday mail delivery service, radically downsize the USPS and close thousands of post offices. In the Senate, S.1789 would phase out door-to-door delivery and eliminate Saturday delivery by 2014.

Without even waiting for votes on these laws, the USPS management has announced plans to eliminate 200,000 jobs, shut down 223 of 461 mail processing facilities by 2015, and close 3,700 local post offices. They also propose to withdraw postal employees and retirees from the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and create a new program, one with undoubtedly weaker benefits.

National Association of Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando warned that Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe is intent on attacking the collective bargaining rights of postal workers and that he wants to “override layoff protection provisions in the postal unions’ contracts.” (crooksandliars.com)

UPSP postpones closings

On March 7, the USPS announced that it will suspend mail processing plant closures scheduled to start Aug. 31 until early next year “to avoid any adverse impact on the November election.” This comes after some state election officials “had reacted with alarm to the possible disruption to vote-by-mail balloting.” (federaltimes.com)

Postal officials basically postponed making any controversial decisions until after a new Congress will be in session. Some processing plants may still close before Aug. 31 and others are still on the list.

The USPS also faces growing opposition to attacks on the service’s viability. Of the temporary suspension of mail processing plant closures, Johnnie Stevens of CLUPJS told WW, “This just gives us more time to organize the people to fight the extreme cuts.”

The postal workforce has already tumbled from 800,000 in 1999 to 560,000 today, through the use of more automation and increased exploitation of the remaining workers. So far, rules for delivering service have remained the same. New cutbacks would increase the time required to deliver first class mail from overnight to two or three days within most urban cities, longer in rural areas. In effect, these cutbacks would open the gate to private competitors to take over

valuable postal business.

The cutbacks would especially hit immigrants, seniors, veterans, impoverished neighborhoods and rural communities, since post offices are being tagged for closing based on the amount of revenue they generate.

Hardship for community, workers

People who depend on mail order prescription drugs, packages, magazines and other time-factored mailings would have longer waits. Immigrants, seniors and the disabled would travel longer distances to pay bills or send money.

The USPS employs one of the most diverse workforces in the U.S. Thus, massive job losses there will especially target African-American, Latino/a, Asian and LGBT communities. Since the 1960s, about 21 percent of the postal workforce has been African-American, with Black majorities in some cities. Living-wage postal jobs have provided an opportunity for better lives to oppressed people, opportunities that they are denied in many private sector industries.

The retrenchment would also negatively affect the \$1.2 trillion U.S. mailing industry, with its 9 million jobs.

Postal management claims that these draconian cuts are necessary because of the decline of first-class mail due to the Internet and because of the struggling economy, which has depressed advertising mail volume.

Labor leaders contend that the Postal Service, as currently required by Congress, has tied up more than \$100 billion in overfunded retirement and health benefit accounts, money that could be used to avert layoffs and cutbacks.

In 2006, Congress passed a bill which imposed a burden on the USPS that no other government agency or private company shares. It required the Postal Service to pay a 75-year liability in just 10 years to “pre-fund” health care benefits for future retirees. This impossible-to-meet mandate totals \$5.5 billion a year.

In addition to overfunding pensions, the Postal Service previously exaggerated their retirees’ health liability by using a 7 percent rather than a 5 percent health care inflation rate. Correcting overpayments and transferring any surplus to the retiree health fund would fully fund the Postal Service’s retiree obligations and eliminate

the need for further pre-funding.

Postal union leaders point out that the Postal Service would have made a profit of \$611 million over the last four years if Congress had not saddled the agency with unfair financial burdens.

Resistance growing

In an impressive show of solidarity, the American Postal Workers Union, the National Association of Letter Carriers, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association joined forces with other labor unions and community members last Sept. 27 with 492 rallies countrywide. They opposed the most serious threat to USPS jobs since President Richard Nixon called out the National Guard against the postal strike of 1970.

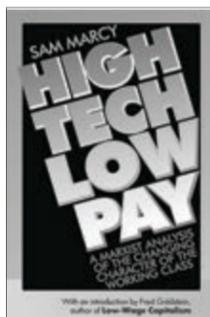
Since then, the NALC has collected over 1 million signatures on a petition in support of protecting the future of the post office. The APWU and the NPMHU have also collected hundreds of thousands of signatures on their own petitions.

And postal workers and community members in Bloomington, Ind.; Toledo, Ohio; Denver; Portland, Ore.; Tucson, Ariz.; New York; and dozens of other cities and towns from coast to coast have spoken out at hearings held by postal officials and shown overwhelming opposition to USPS plans.

The 5,600-member Branch 36 of the National Letter Carriers Union joins a long list of March 17 Operation Zip Code endorsers that includes the New York and Central Jersey branches of the American Postal Workers Union, Communications Workers of America Local 1180, the General Assembly of Occupy Wall Street in New York, the Labor Working Group of Occupy Philadelphia and the Queens St. Patrick’s Day for All Parade.

Johnnie Stevens, in a March 5 CLUPJS press statement, said, “Operation Zip Code aims to unite the struggles of those in the 99% who will be hit hardest by postal cuts with the raging postal union fight against cutbacks led by local leaders such as Clarice Torrence, president of the New York Metro Area Postal Union.”

Torrence and other postal union activists are calling for Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe’s resignation. CLUPJS says Donahoe’s policy will wreck the postal system and ultimately privatize it. □



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ing in pushing the replacement of workers with sophisticated technology. It is more and more geared to the telecommunications industry, of which the government is the principal supporter and promoter.

However, the future of women is a different matter. Female postal employment is predicted to rise while the proportion of Black workers as a whole is expected to remain constant.

The dispatch and delivery of mail are a component of the transportation and communications industry. Like railroad workers, truck drivers and waterfront workers, postal workers participate in the freight-handling process. Transportation facilitates the circulation of capitalist commodities and the scientific-technological revolution has accelerated this process. What automation has done in the Postal Service is another form of what containerization did in the shipping and maritime industries. The postal workers must view themselves as part of the communications, telecommunications and transportation industries with whom they have so much in common.

The employers and the capitalist state have a sustained and abiding interest in artificially keeping the workers in these industries apart and separated. They do this all the more to divide Black and white. However, the scientific-technological revolution has forged a new link between a variety of industries which hitherto seemed to be very separated. It has opened up a new vista, a new horizon which lays out and broadens the basis for working-class solidarity. □

‘Privatization of the P.O. is the first domino’

John Dennie retired 11 years ago from his 28-year stint with the Post Office and its management, split evenly between 14 years as letter carrier and 14 as mail handler while he helped raise two families, all on Staten Island, N.Y. He told Workers World this:

I still have many good friends in the P.O. and I strongly believe that the degradation of the P.O., leading to its eventual privatization, will not be good for our society. The privatization of the P.O. will be the first “domino”; Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid will soon follow.

Certainly, the Internet has made and will continue to make inroads in mail volume. An imaginative, “outside the box” management would have foreseen this long ago.

I have the utmost respect for anyone who spends their entire career as a Letter Carrier. It is a grueling job which gets tougher as one ages. Also, the bosses are

sadists. Their attitude is that we are goofing off all day and they need to “catch” us. Current carriers tell me it’s even worse now.

My happiest years in the P.O. were as mail handler. Heavy lifting, but we worked in spurts, unloading it in a flash, but the bosses left us alone until the next one came in. Earnest cutbacks had not really begun by 2001, when I retired, but I saw creeping privatization, more work done by private, low-wage, nonunion contractors.

Morale is lower than ever. What bothers me the most is the comment: “It’s a done deal. There’s nothing we can do about it.” I feel like a football coach and want to exhorted them: “No, fight! Don’t give up. It’s not over until they pull the machines out of the building.” It’s not even over then as the Frederick, Md., workers are showing us.

I started four years after the 1970 strike, but to me the lesson of 1970 is the



John Dennie

power of the rank and file. Thanks to the rank-and-file militants, I was able to raise two families and I have decent health care in my retirement. For the opportunity to honor them alone, I am extremely grateful to Johnnie Stevens for organizing the rally March 17. And that’s only the beginning of the resistance. □

'Only you can stop the USPS from privatizing'

By John Catalinotto
New York

One of the speakers at the opening meeting of the People's Power Tour at Judson Memorial Church here on March 11 was retired postal worker and union organizer Eleanor Bailey, who has been putting in her time and enthusiasm organizing for a demonstration on March 17 to stop Post Office closings. Bailey began working at the P.O. just when both African Americans and women were flooding into the system, and her trade union activism represented the shift in the demographics of P.O. workers. Her talk, which we paraphrase here, gives a special perspective to the current struggle.

You might not know it, but the U.S. Constitution authorized the Congress to "establish Post Offices and post Roads." This led to today's United States Postal Service. The Post Office is one of the few institutions specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. And that document made it clear: the Post Office is a service. It is not



Eleanor Bailey

WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

supposed to be a money-maker. It is not supposed to be a cash cow. It is supposed to provide a service to the people.

I was there for the strike in 1970. But I was pretty new, and I was scared. There were a lot of Post Office workers — the generation before us — who were happy to have a job with a government agency,

and they didn't want to take risks. But we walked out.

Some who walked out had to walk up eight floors. That's how far below the surface we worked at the central P.O.

The government brought in the National Guard to do our work. They were supposed to do the sorting and delivering of mail. It was a good thing the strike didn't last too long. They had to call us back to straighten out the system after the National Guard got through messing it up.

[The strike lasted eight days. President Richard Nixon offered the workers a 14 percent raise and amnesty before they came back.]

Later the U.S. Congress needed a cash cow. It decided that the Post Office would have to pay \$5.1 billion a year to the Treasury to make sure there was enough money for federal pensions. The Post Office got 10 years ahead of itself in payments. That made it look like the Post Office was constantly losing money.

The Post Office knew long ago that the Internet would cut into mail volume. Management could have planned for it.

But they didn't.

Now they want to get rid of 200,000 jobs. You know what that will mean? Each job affects a family. It affects other businesses in the neighborhoods where Post Offices are located. It means at least a million people are hurt by this.

It also hurts the community. I live in Co-op City in the Bronx. Management planned to shut three Post Offices in our neighborhood. We held three massive rallies in the neighborhood. We managed to save one of the stations.

But we're not stopping. We plan another rally, this one citywide, on March 31 in Co-op City. If any of you are around, come on by. We need your help.

If management goes through with these cuts, it means your mail will pile up and will be delivered late. They want to privatize the Post Office. Don't let this happen. Only you — only we — can make the USPS change its plans. The U.S. Congress controls it, so contact them and make them stop.

Remember, the Post Office is a service. Never let anyone forget that. □

WOMEN FIGHT BACK — Mass outrage vs. rightwing attacks

Continued from page 1

a Feb. 16 hearing convened by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee on the new regulation's effect on women's health. The only woman scheduled to testify was prevented from speaking. Only male religious figures opposed to birth control coverage were allowed to testify. Two women representatives walked out of the proceedings, and photographs of the all-male panel went viral on the Internet, television and print media.

Democrats later arranged for the ejected witness, Georgetown University law student Sandra Fluke, to testify on Feb. 23 before the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. After her testimony, in a much-publicized frenzy, reactionary bigot Rush Limbaugh called Fluke a "prostitute" and "slut" on his national radio show and made other inflammatory, misogynistic comments about women's sexuality and contraception.

Outrage was swift. A mass movement

condemning Limbaugh and his anti-woman bigotry arose. His corporate sponsors were inundated with demands from women and men that they withdraw from Limbaugh's show or face the economic consequences. As of March 11, some 50 sponsors had pulled their ads, and two stations had dropped Limbaugh's show, despite his "apology" to Fluke — in which he claimed to have used the wrong words to describe her.

Attacks on right to abortion escalate in states

The right-wing offensive against birth control and abortion rights rages on in many states. Planned Parenthood, because 3 percent of its services are abortions, has been under attack not just on a national level, but in many states as well. Planned Parenthood is the only source of medical care for millions of low-income women around the U.S.

In Texas, for instance, a new law will take effect on March 14 that defunds Planned

Parenthood clinics. That state has also seen closure of "more than a dozen facilities that provided health care to poor women" due to budget cuts. (Associated Press, March 11) These medical facilities provided contraceptives as well as gynecological cancer screenings and other vital health care services for low-income women.

A new terror tactic of the right-wing in many states is forcing women to view unnecessary ultrasounds of the fetus prior to being allowed to have an abortion. Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell signed such a bill into law on March 7. However, it had been amended to allow a woman to refuse a "transvaginal" ultrasound. This invasive procedure is widely condemned and has been called "state-mandated rape" if forced on a woman. When 1,000 people rallied March 3 at the state Capital in Richmond to protest the legislation, they were met by police in full riot gear, who arrested 31 people at what was a peaceful demonstration.

In Georgia, the time when access to

abortion is allowed has been reduced from 26 weeks of gestation to 20 weeks. On March 7, the state Senate approved two other bills curtailing reproductive rights. One bans abortion coverage for state workers under their health care insurance, and another prevents workers at private religious institutions from demanding insurance payments for birth control, thus invalidating the compromise announced by President Obama. All eight of Georgia's Democratic women senators walked out in protest as the bills passed.

Loretta Ross, national coordinator of the SisterSong Reproductive Justice Collective, stated:

"[I]n Georgia, we're feeling the blows of this war on women that's sweeping across the country. And the women legislators who walked out last night in protest really stood up for us. And there were some men in the legislature who stood up for us, too. But to no avail, because the bills passed, and now we have to fight, fight, fight." (democracynow.org, March 8)

A march on the Georgia state Capitol has been called for March 12 "to protest the silencing of women and this war on women. We're calling it 'Walk in Our Shoes,' because they are not really paying attention to the situation that women are actually enduring," said Ross.

Working-class, poor women, women of color and women from oppressed nationalities have been singled out for attack by the right-wing and are now participating in a growing fightback demanding reproductive and health care justice for all.

In this presidential election year, the Democratic Party has confirmed that it is campaigning to win women's votes — which should not be difficult, given the anti-woman record of the Republicans.

However, the Democrats were responsible for one of the meanest attacks on poor women in recent times: so-called welfare reform, initiated under Bill Clinton, which has forced almost 2 million women and their children into "extreme poverty" — defined as trying to survive on less than \$2 a day. (See WW editorial this issue.)

The struggle must stay in the streets and address the crimes of capitalism — homelessness, unemployment and racism — which must be eradicated for there to be real reproductive freedom and justice for all women. □

Poet, activist Louis Reyes Rivera ¡presente!

By Sue Davis

Poet, essayist, editor, teacher, radio host, political activist and union organizer, Louis Reyes Rivera willingly served as a bridge between African- and Latino/a-American communities. No wonder his unexpected death on March 2 in Brooklyn, N.Y., initiated a crescendo of accolades and reminiscences from those communities as well as many cultural and activist groups.

Called "the dean of Nuyorica Poetica," Rivera was an internationally recognized poet, with four books translated into Russian, Latvian, Spanish and Italian. The Latin American Writers Institute gave his "Scattered Scripture" its 1997 poetry award. Rivera had just completed his epic poem, "Jazz in Jail," and was in the process of preparing it for publication.

Rivera began reading his poetry at jazz festivals and clubs in 1996 and appeared



WW PHOTO: LAL ROOJK

Rivera reading at Writers for Mumia event in 2010.

on the Peabody award-winning HBO show, "Def Poetry Jam." At his last public appearance on Feb. 11, Rivera was the featured poet at the American Jazz Museum's Black History Month Salute to Jazz Poetry in Kansas City, Mo.

The poet received dozens of awards, including a New York Foundation

for the Arts Fellowship (2003), a Lifetime Achievement Award (1995), a Special Congressional Recognition Award (1988) and the City College of New York 125th Anniversary Medal (1973) — each of which recognized his scholarship and impact on contemporary literature. Rivera's essays and poems appeared in numerous publications and several award-winning book collections, including "In Defense of Mumia" and "ALoud: Live from the Nuyorican Poets Café."

Over the past 40 years, Rivera assisted

in the publication of well over 200 books, including Adal Maldonado's "Portraits of the Puerto Rican Experience" (1984), John Oliver Killens' "Great Black Russian" (1989), "Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam" (2001), co-edited with Tony Medina, and "The Bandana Republic" (2008).

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on May 19, 1945, Rivera began studying the craft of writing in 1960 and was a leader in the successful struggle for "open enrollment" and against racism at City College of New York in 1969. He also founded the ongoing student publication, *The Paper*, there.

After graduation in 1969, Rivera started teaching and his influence has spanned several generations. He has been a distinguished professor of creative writing, Pan-African and Nuyorican literature, African-American culture and history, and Caribbean and Puerto Rican history at a number of colleges in the New York area.

A political activist as well as a cultural icon, Rivera participated in many progressive movements and activities. For

Continued on page 10



INDONESIA



VENEZUELA



HONDURAS

ON MARCH 8

RESISTENCIAHONDURAS.NET

Women resist ALL global oppression

By Kathy Durkin

International Women's Day, commemorated on March 8, was founded in 1910 by European socialist women, to demonstrate solidarity with women worldwide. The special day honors struggles against inequality, oppression and war.

Many capitalist governments have tried to co-opt the day and erase its militant history and meaning, holding ceremonies and issuing proclamations. The U.S. government's March 8 ceremony at the State Department smacked of hypocrisy, as U.S./NATO bombs and drones have devastated women and their families in Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia and elsewhere, and the war drive is only growing.

Moreover, capitalist globalization and the economic crisis have affected women enormously: 81 million are jobless, millions more have part-time, low-wage jobs, are forced to migrate and face poverty and abuse. Women and girls are 70 percent of the world's poorest people. This is all ignored by Washington.

Yet, women daily struggle throughout the world against oppression. Many of their efforts, including for workers' and union rights, are hidden from public view by the corporate media. However, from Honduras to Haiti, from Egypt to Indonesia, women commemorated International Women's Day. Here are some highlights.

Carrying Palestinian flags and photographs of Hana Shalabi, hundreds of women marched in Gaza City and in the Occupied West Bank cities of Qalandiya and Burqin. They demanded that Israel free the 29-year-old political prisoner, who, since being jailed on Feb. 16, has been on a hunger strike, protesting the administrative detentions of Palestinians without charges or trials.

Israeli military troops fired tear gas and water cannons at the peaceful rally near Ramallah. The next day, the U.S.-backed Israeli military began air strikes on Gaza.

Since the Arab Spring last year, women have played leading roles challenging U.S.-supported autocratic regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. This year on March 8, Egyptian women marched under the name, "Women with the Revolution," denouncing the military ruling council in front of Cairo's Journalist's Syndicate and demanding full political participation at the "new" Parliament.

Women workers' power

Elsewhere on the African continent, women also marked this special day. Their labor movement participation was recognized, as by the Ghana Trades Union Congress. The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union — South

Africa's biggest public sector union and a Congress of South African Trade Unions' member, which joined the March 7 strike — called for condemning "those who exploit women in their workplaces" and pushing for "equal pay for equal work." NEHAWU reaffirmed its "commitment to fight for [women's] full emancipation" and urged governments to respect international labor laws and ensure women full human and labor rights.

Throughout Asia, women are organizing — in and out of labor unions. In the capital of Colombo, Sri Lankan women, including left forces, railed against rising fuel costs and protested anti-woman violence. Bangladeshi women countrywide

marched for equal rights, rural women's empowerment and an end to hunger and poverty.

Jobs and decent, equal wages were rallying cries of South Korean women workers in Seoul and women unionists in Nepal. Labor unions in Bangkok, Thailand, and other Asian cities pressed for domestic workers' rights.

Nestlé corporation's exploitation of workers was the focus of demonstrations in six Indonesian cities and a solidarity action in Karachi, Pakistan. Women demanded the world's largest food corporation stop anti-worker policies

under the slogan, "Stop Nespessure," and called for the rehiring of fired union members.

Thousands in downtown Manila, Philippines, organized by the women's alliance, GABRIELA, denounced the Aquino government and the big three Filipino oil companies for price hikes. They insisted that the U.S. must end intervention in the Philippines, militarily and economically.

Women also marched in India, Pakistan and Turkey.

The Greek masses, among others, are suffering from the brutal austerity policies instigated by the so-called Troika — the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank — and their own wealthy 1%. The Greek Parliament's IWD statement was lip service only, and took no blame for damaging women and their families, even causing some desperate mothers to place their children under government care.

On March 8, among other protests, the



PHILIPPINES

PHOTO: IVAN PHELL T. ENRIE

PAME, a labor union front, and the Greek Federation of Women massed at Athens' Alexandra hospital to demand free health care and maternity rights, which have been undermined by austerity. They called for the unity of women's groups and labor unions to promote working women's struggles.

The Athens-based World Federation of Trade Unions' IWD statement, in light of the economic crisis' horrific impact on women, stressed the urgency of fighting for women workers worldwide.

Women resist in Caribbean, Latin America

Also on March 8, hundreds of women and men marched from the Solidarity with Haitian Women offices through Port-au-Prince to the Parliament building, demanding no renewal of the U.N.'s mandate to occupy Haiti and for U.N. troops to get out. They called for justice to be leveled against former U.S.-backed dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier, for all his crimes against the people and for reparations from the U.N., whose troops, Minustah, introduced cholera into Haiti. Women have been hit hard by the epidemic and by Minustah soldiers' sexual violence, yet the U.N. has impunity.

Landless women workers marched in São Paulo, Brazil. A 10,000-strong demonstration of women's groups, unions and other social forces took to the streets of Santiago, Chile, demanding equal rights and facing off against police tear gas and water cannons.

Honduran women have been key in the resistance movement opposing the U.S.-

backed, repressive Lobo government, since democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya was ousted. Since then, women have lost rights. Even the sale or use of emergency contraception has been criminalized.

IWD saw Indigenous, Black and peasant women marching in the capital of Tegucigalpa for legal access to land and assistance for rural workers, with women's equal participation. They demanded an end to landlord violence against rural communities and the prosecution of those — many of them coup forces — who have killed 500 women in the last 12 months.

Venezuelans celebrated IWD events countrywide and held a large march in Caracas. They highlighted women's gains made under the Bolivarian Revolution, including for Indigenous communities, and submitted proposals for gender equality to be included in the new labor law, expected to pass on May 1.

Socialist Cuba concretely promotes women's rights in every sphere, under the leadership of the Federation of Cuban Women [La Federación de Mujeres Cubanas]. This year's IWD celebrations honored women workers, leaders, retirees and students. The FMC points out that progress has been made despite the U.S. blockade, the biggest source of violence against Cuban women.

Antonio Guerrero, one of the Cuban Five — heroes unjustly held in the U.S., four of them in prison — hailed the women of Cuba and the world on International Women's Day and thanked them for their solidarity. □



> 25 months in "administrative detention" without charges or trial
> Released in October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal
> Kidnapped by the Israeli Occupation Forces again on Feb. 16, 2012 and has been on hunger strike since then.

freehana.org



EGYPT



BRAZIL

‘Extreme poverty’

What is “extreme poverty”? It is defined by the World Bank as living below \$2 a day per person, and is usually associated with countries struggling to dig out of the underdevelopment imposed by colonialism. Yes, \$2 a day.

A report released in February by the University of Michigan’s National Poverty Center finds that the number of U.S. households living in extreme poverty more than doubled between 1996, the year of Bill Clinton’s “welfare reform,” and 2011. There are now 1.46 million households in the U.S. whose members — mostly women and their children — live on less than \$2 a day. Some 2.8 million children in the U.S. are starting life under these wretched conditions.

Because the safety net was shredded under a Democratic administration, “Neither political party is showing any interest in tackling this problem because both parties have hung their hat on this whole idea that welfare reform was a success,” commented Jack Frech, who

directs the Department of Job and Family Services in Appalachian Ohio.

Everyone would agree that hunger and extreme poverty in a society where all things, including food, are produced in super-abundance is deplorable. Where they would disagree is on what causes this. In this richest of all capitalist countries, the have-everythings are not above blaming the have-nothings for their poverty. Society-page philanthropists who give away a weensy part of what they have, and get a nice tax break doing it, may pity the “less fortunate,” but they will rear up and snarl when confronted with the charge that their wealth comes directly as a result of from the impoverishment of millions.

Fortunately, there is now a broad social movement that connects the sufferings of the 99% directly with the excesses of the 1%.

The desperation for millions is at Depression levels and getting worse. Nothing short of mass, militant struggle will turn things around. □

Workers World statement

Afghanistan the underlying crime

Continued from page 1

on the dead bodies of Afghans showed the utmost contempt for the people the Pentagon claims to be helping. Burning the Quran showed contempt for their beliefs. And now, breaking into their homes and murdering children breaks down all boundaries to horror.

This act is the culmination of 10 years of U.S. war crimes against the Afghan people. It’s not that shooting babies up close is more criminal than bombing them from a helicopter or a drone. But it has brought the true nature of the crime of occupation before the world — even before the people of the United States.

Editorials in the ruling-class press express the fear that the people of the U.S. are fed up with this war, and will demand it stop. The top generals and politicians are making a desperate attempt to buy more time in Afghanistan by talking about executing the soldier charged with this heinous slaughter.

The generals may try to scapegoat the sergeant, but the higher the rank, the more true responsibility exists for the crime.

This was the inevitable result of 10 years of occupation. Every day the U.S.-

NATO soldiers feel the hatred of the Afghan people. The generals and politicians have told them their only moral choice is to be “professional” — professional killers.

On the contrary, their only moral and political choice is to refuse criminal orders to oppress the Afghan people — and mutiny.

Mobilize to end occupation

At home, we have a simpler choice. Let’s test the fears being expressed in ruling-class editorials that the people are fed up. Let’s get out to the people and mobilize them to demand that U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan now.

On March 23-25, organizers will attend the United National Antiwar Coalition’s national conference in Stamford, Conn., to plan the next steps against this war.

On May 20, all anti-war forces of this continent will gather in Chicago to confront the top meeting of NATO. U.S. and other NATO generals and leaders — those who give the orders — will be there in one place.

Tell them: U.S.-NATO troops get out. Washington, pay reparations.

It’s only over when it’s over. Let’s mobilize to make that happen. □

Louis Reyes Rivera ¡presente!

Continued from page 8

many years, Rivera hosted the radio talk and interview show, “Perspectives,” on New York’s WBAI 99.5 FM. After joining the National Writers Union (United Auto Workers Local 1981), he soon became chair of the New York chapter in 2004, and co-hosted two Writers for Mumia programs, with founder Sue Davis, to demand freedom for longtime political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Most recently,

Rivera supported the establishment of the Freedom Party, which ran candidates in the 2010 New York state election.

Revered by all who knew him, this word warrior — a contemporary griot, that is, a storyteller, praise singer, poet and musician in the West African storyteller tradition — will sorely be missed. But his insightful, compassionate, fighting words will live on to inspire future generations.

Louis Reyes Rivera, ¡presente! □

Israeli forces launch criminal attack on Gaza

By Gene Clancy

The U.S.-backed Israeli war machine has launched a new criminal attack on the beleaguered people of Gaza. As of March 11, Israeli bombs and rockets had killed 16 people, including a 12-year-old boy, and the Israeli government apparently plans to continue the violence.

“This round in Gaza is far from being over,” Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in a visit to southern Israel. “They will pay a heavy price, and no one will have immunity.” (AP, Mar 11)

An eyewitness reported hourly on the carnage underway:

“The hospitals in Gaza are already in dire need of medicine and equipment, blood supply runs shorter, the water is polluted, the fuel has all but finished, the electricity is intermittent at best, the siege is strangling the people and now this.

“The drones fly low over the night sky, the explosions are now less frequent but nobody is relaxing or being lulled in to any false sense of security, Gaza is awake and will not sleep tonight. Two more loud explosions to the west, medics report difficulty reaching the injured and possible dead because of the power outage.

“12.30 am, the Area close to Palestinian Legislative council building has just been targeted, three dead, many more injured. Gaza City under repeated attack Warplanes now attacking northern Gaza.” (Irishgaza’s blog, Mar. 9)

The Israelis chose to disregard interna-

tional law when the Palestinians showed they had the temerity to resist their oppressors. In the latest episode, Palestinian militants fired rockets into southern Israel following Israel’s illegal assassination of two Palestinian leaders on March 9. This recent Israeli outrage occurred immediately following a highly publicized meeting of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with President Barack Obama.

The attack, which used U.S.-supplied drone aircraft, also occurred the day after Israeli Defense Forces sprayed tear gas at Palestinian women near the West Bank town of Ramallah. The women were celebrating International Women’s Day, March 8, and protesting the illegal detention of Hana Shalabi, who has been on a hunger strike since Feb. 16..

Shalabi had spent more than two years in administrative detention before she was released in October 2011 as part of the prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. Less than four months later, Israeli authorities again arrested her at her home near Jenin, and an Israeli soldier beat her with his rifle butt. She was then beaten again, blindfolded and later forcibly strip-searched and assaulted by an Israeli male soldier.

Ordered to spend six months in administrative detention, Shalabi spent the first three days of her internment in solitary confinement. She was later sentenced to solitary confinement for a further seven days as punishment for her continuing hunger strike. (Al Haq.org, Mar. 11) □

Occupy the NYC LGBT Center

By Dolores Cox
New York

A large rally to end a ban on Palestine solidarity organizing at the Manhattan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Center was held on March 3 during Israeli Apartheid Week. It was initiated by NYC Queers Against Israeli Apartheid.

Since March 2011, the LGBT Center has barred Palestine solidarity activists (LGBTQ groups and others) from meeting and renting space at the Center, and has imposed a moratorium on any discussion of the Palestinian struggle there. Activists say this censorship is in response to pressure from some wealthy Zionist supporters of the Center. The Center board has ignored petitions, calls, letters and requests to dialogue for repeal of the ban.

The ban mandates that LGBTQ Palestinians, Muslims and Arabs must promise not to mention an issue deeply affecting their communities; namely, the conditions of occupation, inequality and exclusion that Palestinians confront daily as a result of Israeli government policies. The ban brands anyone who even discusses the racism and violence of the Israeli government as a “terrorist sympathizer” and a safety threat.

Protesters say that the wealthy and powerful 1% should not be allowed to silence the voices of the 99%. Sponsors of the rally say the board has failed the diverse LGBTQ communities and must be held accountable.

Among the rally speakers were LGBTQ people who traveled to Palestine/Israel this past January. They reported on the ethnic, religious and racial discrimination, and oppressive treatment they

witnessed against the Palestinians. This includes checkpoints that control Palestinians’ movement and access to education, employment and housing.

The message of the rally participants was that LGBTQ liberation and Palestinian self-determination are inseparable issues. They also said that “as allies of queer Palestinians, we recognize that our solidarity includes opposition to Israel’s illegal occupation and colonization.” Rally participants also spoke about the ongoing global campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel and corporations that profit from the occupation.

National Lawyers Guild Executive Director Heidi Bogosian stated that the NLG was disheartened to hear that the Center was excluding pro-Palestinian meetings. She stressed the seriousness of these discriminatory actions, which, she said, violate everything that the Center stands for, including free speech and compassion for other communities.

Protesters’ demands include an end to the ban on LGBTQ organizing for Palestinian human rights at the Center; an end to the moratorium on any discussion of the Palestinian struggle; that all who support the stated mission of the Center be welcomed there; an end to the Center’s actions that have alienated so many Palestinian, immigrant, progressive and activist LGBTQ people and LGBTQ people of color; transparency from the Center; and that the Center open its board meetings and decision-making processes instead of excluding the community.

Other protests were held throughout the city during Israeli Apartheid Week to emphasize that there’s “no pride in occupation!” □

AFRICA ROUNDUP

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

As the United States and the European Union escalate their military and economic roles on the African continent, mounting political crises have resulted in much social unrest. From Libya and Kenya to Nigeria and Somalia, internal turmoil, labor unrest and mass resistance illustrate the interconnectedness of events throughout the international scene.

In the North African state of Libya, the U.S.- and NATO-backed National Transitional Council is still unraveling given the autonomy declaration by elements based in the eastern regions. In Benghazi where the rebellion began a year ago against Moammar Gadhafi's government, elite elements aligned with the former monarchy have declared that Barqa (Cyrenaica) has established its own self-rule within a broader Libya.

The Tripoli-based TNC leadership immediately renounced this declaration of autonomy by Western-backed forces and pledged to maintain the "unity" of Libya even by force of arms.

Most keen observers of the rebellion and subsequent imperialist war against Libya characterized the anti-Gadhafi campaign as a war for oil and an attempt to partition Africa's most prosperous state. Such a division can only benefit the imperialist governments and their domestic and regional allies who are now in total control of Libya's petroleum and natural gas resources.

The internal rebellion and massive seven-month bombing of Libya last year have displaced and relocated hundreds of thousands of people inside and outside the country. In Mali, Niger and other countries in the Sahel, conflict has escalated and food deficits have worsened the humanitarian crisis stemming from the drought.

Inside northern Mali, the Tuareg rebellion has spread due to the flight of Gadhafi government allies who had lived in Libya. Better armed and experienced in combat, the Tuareg fighters have intensified their struggle against the central government in Bamako.

The escalating conflict in Mali has also pushed tens of thousands across the border into neighboring Niger and worsened the food deficit crisis there.

Massahudu Ankiilu Kunateh wrote in the Ghanaian Chronicle, "Several countries in the Sahel region of western Africa



need urgent support to prevent a full-blown food and nutrition security crisis, and to protect and restore livelihoods of communities dependent on livestock and crops, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations." (March 12)

This article notes, "15 million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity in the Sahel, in part due to ... declines in agro-pastoral production. This includes 5.4 million people in Niger (35 percent of the population), 3 million in Mali (20 percent), around 1.7 million in Burkina Faso (10 percent), around 3.6 million in Chad (28 percent), 850,000 in Senegal (6 percent), 713,000 in Gambia (37 percent) and 700,000 in Mauritania (22 percent)."

Invisible Children & 'Kony2012': cover for further intervention

During the week of March 5, the Invisible Children project launched a massive Internet public relations campaign aimed at building support for further U.S. and European military intervention in Central and Eastern Africa. The project purportedly targets Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, a paramilitary organization that has operated in northern Uganda for more than two decades.

Reports from northern Uganda indicate that the LRA has been largely defeated in recent years and that the remnants of the organization have fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. In October,

the Obama administration announced that it was dispatching 100 Special Forces and military advisers to these countries to assist governments in defeating the LRA.

Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan are rich in oil and other strategic minerals that are vital to ruling-class profits in North America and Western Europe. The U.S. and NATO have escalated their presence in various regions of Africa. These military forces in the last year were involved in the naval blockade and bombing of Libya, the war against Al-Shabaab in Somalia and other so-called "anti-piracy" efforts in the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea.

B. E. Wilson wrote at AlterNet, "What does Invisible Children share in common with the Discovery Institute, the leading organization promoting 'intelligent design,' ... [in] public schools — or with The Call, whose leader Lou Engle claims homosexuals are possessed with demons? All of these ministries — the Discovery Institute, Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, The Fellowship Foundation, The Call, Ed Silvoso's Harvest Evangelism, and Invisible Children — received at least \$100,000 in 2008 from what has emerged in the last decade as the biggest funder of the hard, antigay, creationist Christian right: the National Christian Foundation." (March 11)

Invisible Children has issued a video about Joseph Kony, "Kony2012" that aims to raise support for his arrest and set a precedent for international justice.

International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Louis Moreno Ocampo says that he supports "Kony2012." Ocampo has issued arrest warrants for African leaders including Sudan President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Moammar Gadhafi and Joseph Kony.

Filmmaker Jason Russell, who crafted the 30-minute video that allegedly has been viewed 58 million times, has been criticized because most of the money raised for the project does not go to victims of LRA violence but back into the coffers of this right-wing group. Russell replied, "They hear the word charity and they don't understand why all of our money isn't going to Central Africa. We have found that putting money towards our media and our movie changes lives." (Christian Science Monitor, March 12)

Kenya Fires 25,000 Health Care Workers

The pro-Western government in Kenya of Prime Minister Raila Odinga has fired 25,000 nurses who have been striking for better pay and working conditions.

Union representatives told them to return to work amid ongoing efforts aimed at negotiations, but when many of them did that, they were rebuffed with letters questioning their absences since the strike began on March 1. A Medical Services Permanent Secretary letter read, "Absence from the place of work without permission is viewed as a gross breach of discipline and a contravention of the Employment Act." (The Standard, March 12)

The nurses sought a meeting with Odinga at a rally at Uhuru Park on March 12, but to no avail. Capital FM in Kenya reported, "One team led by National Nurses Association of Kenya Treasurer Jeremiah Maina camped at the PM's office for four hours before joining their striking colleagues at Uhuru Park where they chanted slogans expressing their solidarity." (March 12)

In that report, Tom Odege, secretary-general of the Union of Kenya Civil Servants, said, "[P]eople are receiving 'show-cause' letters. ... [W]e ... ask the government not to go in that direction because forcing over 25,000 people to write response letters to them would amount to intimidation which I do not think is good for our relationship."

The Kenya Health Professional's Society, the Kenya Union of Civil Servants and several civil society organizations condemned the government's actions. □

Cindy Sheehan speaks out to free the Cuban Five

By **Cheryl LaBash**

Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and Rene González, known as the Cuban Five, have been unjustly held in U.S. prisons since 1998.

Their freedom became an issue for anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan at the 2006 Caracas World Social Forum. On March 4, she carried her commitment to campaign to free them to Ireland and Sweden.

The fifth of each month has been designated as an international Day of Action to free the Cuban Five. On March 5, Sheehan read a letter to President Barack Obama in front of the U.S. Embassy in Dublin. She concluded, "You have the power, Mr. President, to grant permission for the Cuban Five to return home to Cuba where they belong. You have the power, Mr. President, to make sure that Olga gets a visa to enter the U.S. to see her beloved husband, Rene. You have the power, Mr. President, to make sure that René Gonzalez goes to Havana for two

weeks to see his dying brother. For the sake of humanity, Mr. President, exercise that power."

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union Cuba Solidarity Forum hosted Sheehan on International Working Women's Day, March 8. On that day, she also finished the Ireland leg of her tour with a public meeting of students and activists organized by Amnesty International Society at Trinity College after meeting with Irish legislators earlier in the day.

In a packed two-day visit to Belfast and Derry, Sheehan met with Irish Nobel Peace Laureates Mairead Maguire and John Hume. She launched the Cuban Five mural at the International Wall in West Belfast, accompanied by Jimmy Kelly, president of the trade union Unite and Danny Devanny, the mural artist. The Cuba Support group in Belfast commissioned the mural.

On March 10, Sheehan continued on to Sweden.

FREE THE CUBAN 5
unjustly held
in U.S. prisons
for more than
13 years



Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez and Fernando González Llort. René González Schwerert, while recently released, is still being forced to remain in the U.S. against his will.

The pledge by Irish and British unions to reach U.S. workers with the story of the injustice being carried out against the Cuban Five resulted in a California meeting organized by the Service Employees Union last August that featured the retired UNITE the UNION leader Tony Woodley, and another meeting on March 10 in Chicago.

During the VII International Colloquium for the Freedom of the Five Cuban Heroes and against Terrorism, held in Holguin, Cuba, last November, Sheehan presented a necklace to the mothers of

the Cuban Five to hold until their sons come home. The necklace has special significance to Sheehan, as her son, Casey, who was killed in Iraq during the horrific U.S. occupation of that sovereign country, gave it to her. Casey's death propelled Sheehan to use every method within her reach to expose and oppose injustice and the U.S. war drive.

In April, Sheehan will be part of the Five Days for the Freedom of the Cuban Five in Washington, D.C. She has agreed to serve as a judge at a tribunal on the Cuban Five in Toronto in September. □

Entrevista con Cacica panameña

Pueblo indígena en Panamá defiende sus recursos

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

Aunque ausente en los medios de comunicación de Estados Unidos, en Centroamérica se está gestando una lucha en contra de los intereses de empresas estadounidenses. Una mujer indígena, la Cacica Silvia Carrera, está liderando esta lucha.

El 11 de septiembre pasado, Carrera fue elegida por voto popular como cacica de la Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé, la nación indígena más grande de Panamá, ubicada en la costa noroeste, cerca de Costa Rica. La comarca Ngäbe-Buglé es la más extensa de las cinco comarcas indígenas de Panamá.

Antecedentes del conflicto

La lucha actual es el resultado del último de una serie de ataques contra los pueblos indígenas de Panamá. Se trata de los planes del gobierno para explotar minas de cobre y establecer plantas de energía hidroeléctrica para beneficiar sobre todo a las empresas transnacionales a expensas del medioambiente, la tierra y la supervivencia de las 200.000 personas Ngäbe-Buglé que habitan en la región.

En el 2010, el derechista presidente de Panamá, Ricardo Martinelli, un aliado de EE.UU., aprobó una "reforma" que modificó más de 60 artículos de la Carta Orgánica Administrativa del Congreso General Ngäbe-Buglé, para efectivamente aniquilar la autonomía política de este pueblo.

Y hace un año, Martinelli propuso a la Asamblea Nacional una reforma de la Ley de Minas con el fin de arrendar a intereses extranjeros, una extensa mina de cobre, Cerro Colorado, que se encuentra en territorio Ngäbe. El pueblo Ngäbe-Buglé, con el apoyo de la mayoría de los movimientos sociales de Panamá, defendió su autonomía en febrero del 2011 bloqueando la carretera Panamericana. Desafiando una terrible represión por el Estado que costó varias vidas, la nación Ngäbe-Buglé prevaleció, obligando al gobierno a un acuerdo que prohíbe la explotación minera y los proyectos hidroeléctricos en la Comarca.

Pero esta victoria fue efímera. Como es habitual, el gobierno rompió su palabra y una vez más el pueblo Ngäbe-Buglé se levantó. Durante seis días bloquearon la carretera Panamericana para obligar al gobierno a sentarse a la mesa y negociar, pero el 5 de febrero Martinelli ordenó de nuevo violencia policial en contra de miles de residentes que estaban bloqueando la carretera, matando a dos personas, hirriendo a decenas y deteniendo a muchas.

Esta lucha es crucial no sólo para los pueblos indígenas de Panamá, sino para todo el pueblo pobre y trabajador. Esta lucha por la autodeterminación y en contra de la opresión nacional es también una lucha contra el capitalismo y el imperialismo con todos sus crímenes.

Entrevista con la Cacica Silvia Carrera

Tarde en la noche del sábado, Workers World/Mundo Obrero tuvo el privilegio de conversar durante una hora con la



Cacica Silvia Carrera y las personas Ngäbe-Buglé.

Cacica Carrera. La Cacica se mostró muy interesada en la difusión de la lucha de su pueblo a la comunidad internacional, a pesar de haber tenido un día con reuniones continuas y lo avanzado de la hora.

Carrera había salido de una reunión en la Oficina de las Naciones Unidas en la Ciudad de Panamá, donde dijo que el intento de restablecer las negociaciones con el Gobierno a través de la mediación de la ONU y otros, al parecer comenzó fructíferamente. Dos días antes, a través de una conferencia de prensa, ella hizo dos demandas centrales al Gobierno: celebrar reuniones en un lugar neutral y que el mismo presidente Martinelli, con un equipo nuevo, sea parte del diálogo.

Esta mujer, dignidad personificada, ha enfrentado constantes humillaciones por el Gobierno y sus medios corporativos de comunicación. Habla claramente y sin ambigüedades, mostrando una persistencia a través de todas sus acciones, de su visión de justicia e igualdad para su pueblo y por ende, para todos/as los/as panameños/as.

Al preguntarle sobre el propósito de la reunión, ella dijo: "Tuvimos que llamar al mediador y a la relatora de la ONU, porque el gobierno no se había pronunciado. Nada más que salió [el gobierno] con que el diálogo es importante, y tenía que hacerse pero no dijo más nada. Estábamos preocupados y tuve que llamar al mediador y la observadora de la mesa, y entonces les solicitamos qué mensaje tenía el gobierno y ellos dijeron que tampoco sabían. Le planteamos esa solicitud y dijeron que podían apoyar que el diálogo fuera en la ONU, en su oficina en Ciudad de Panamá. Llamaron al gobierno y aceptó. Fue hoy y por eso nos trasladamos allá".

"... Lo único que se pudo hacer fue ponerse de acuerdo en formar dos mesas [de diálogo]". "Una donde se va a discutir sobre el Artículo 5, que se trajo a la mesa de diálogo porque el pueblo se tuvo que manifestar para que se eliminara...el pueblo solicitaba no explotación minera dentro

de la comarca y áreas anexas y comunidades adyacentes". "La otra es sobre la hidroeléctrica que está en construcción".

Martinelli rehúsa cancelar la planta hidroeléctrica, afirmando que beneficiará al pueblo de Panamá. Sobre esto Carrera comentó: "es porque hay interés del gobierno en este recurso, entonces el gobierno decía que cancelar la hidroeléctrica sería condenar al país. Y no es así. Mira, ahorita mismo la generación eléctrica que sabemos que hay 1.700 mega watts, y ¿tú sabes qué es lo que se usa? Solamente 1.200. Y los 500 que quedan en reserva, entonces, eso lo venden a otros países. Por eso el gobierno tiene interés, y hay un sinnúmero de hidroeléctricas en construcción. En Panamá, tan chiquito, está lleno de hidroeléctricas".

"Igualmente la minería; así que no es necesario para el país. Para estas empresas, la vida del ser humano no tiene protección, el día 5 [de febrero] hubo 2 muertos y muchos heridos graves que todavía están en el hospital, que el gobierno no ha dado cuenta. Y el gobierno se mantiene firme, porque tiene interés en esos recursos".

WW/MO preguntó a la Cacica sobre un mapa que ella había puesto en su cuenta de Twitter que refleja los tres proyectos de energía hidroeléctrica cuya cancelación exige el pueblo Ngäbe-Buglé. "Muchos de los empresarios vienen de afuera, de EE.UU., hondureños, canadienses, de diferentes países. Y con el gobierno de aquí, son un grupito, como 10 personas".

Una de las plantas está operada por la empresa AES Changuinola S.A. Su sitio en el Internet muestra que es parte de "las operaciones en Latinoamérica de la Corporación AES, una de las empresas de energía global más grande en el mundo", y se jacta de que "La Corporación AES es una compañía global de energía con el negocio de generación y distribución" que utiliza "nuestra amplia gama de fuentes de combustible renovable y térmico" para proveer energía a 27 países a través de la fuerza laboral de

27.000 personas. (www.aes.com)

El gobierno de EE.UU. dice que "Panamá es una de las economías que está creciendo más rápidamente en Latinoamérica, expandiéndose un 6,2 por ciento en 2010, con semejante crecimiento anual pronosticado hasta el 2015." (www.ustr.gov)

La expansión de esta economía, sin embargo, no está beneficiando a la mayoría de la población, y mucho menos a los pueblos indígenas. Las cifras del gobierno muestran que un 84,2 por ciento de la población indígena en Panamá vive debajo del nivel de pobreza. Para los Ngäbe-Buglé, el pueblo más pobre, la tasa de pobreza es aún más alta.

Pobreza, educación, y cuidado de salud

La Cacica Carrera habló sobre las condiciones sociales: "El gobierno le dice a otros países que aquí anda bien pero no es así. Los millones [de dólares] que entran son sólo para unos cuantos grupitos". "Todo ha subido, es caro, la canasta básica ha subido, Ahora estamos confrontando graves problemas aquí en Panamá".

"La educación, el gobierno la ha privatizado. No hay libertad para las instituciones, todo está condicionado. Aquí se habla de billones y billones, pero la población Ngäbe-Buglé no se ha beneficiado directamente". "A los niños Ngäbe-Buglé se les tiene discriminados, no saben hablar en el idioma castellano, y por ello no tiene oportunidades. Porque si los niños no saben hablar bien el español, no aprenden nada, y por tanto no tienen derecho a nada. Aunque se les de beca universal, diferentes becas. Pero si los niños no saben hablar, no las pueden aprovechar. Y es por la distancia, por la falta de escuelas en la comarca; los niños tienen que caminar 4 ó 5 horas, y si tienen que cruzar el río, y el río está hondo, entonces ellos no pueden. Así que los que no pueden completar [estudios], no tienen derecho a nada".

"Hay índices de mortalidad infantil y por parto muy altos. Aquí en la comarca no tenemos centros de salud. Hay que caminar 3, 4 ó 5 días si se está enfermo, para llegar a un centro de salud. En el centro de salud no hay ni siquiera una pastilla para un dolor de cabeza, aquí en Panamá se usa mucho el acetaminofén, y ni eso hay. No hay nada".

Cuando WW/MO preguntó sobre el papel de la mujer, ella contestó: "La mujer está en todo. Si hay una reunión de la escuela, de la educación, los que llegan son más mujeres. Igual en la manifestación, pura mujeres. En todas las luchas siempre está la mujer junto con el hombre. El papel de la mujer es estar constantemente en la lucha".

Nota: Para la entrevista entera, visite Mundo Obrero en MundoObrero.org ó escriba a bjceci@workers.org

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