

WORKERS WORLD

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Jan. 13, 2011 Vol. 53, No.1 50¢

Protesting inhumane treatment, death penalty in Ohio Lucasville prison uprising leaders go on hunger strike

By Sharon Danann
Youngstown, Ohio

Bulletin: As of Jan. 4, Siddique Abdullah Hasan and Jason Robb started their hunger strikes.

Four death-sentenced prisoners, wrongfully convicted of crimes following the 1993 prison rebellion in the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio, started a "rolling" hunger strike Jan. 3. The strike is to protest the highly restrictive solitary confinement where they have been placed in the super-max Ohio State Penitentiary, located in Youngstown, since 1998.

These prisoners, the majority Black, are starting to run out of appeals. They say they would rather die, if they must, on their own terms, rather than on a gurney by lethal injection. They intend for the hunger strike to help strike a blow against confinement conditions so inhumane that they amount to torture.

Bomani Shakur (convicted as Keith LaMar) was the first to refuse food. He writes in a public statement, "If we must die, we should be allowed to do so with dignity, which is all we're asking: the opportunity to pursue our appeals unimpeded, to be able to touch our friends and family, and to no longer be treated as playthings but as human beings who are facing the ultimate penalty." (Read his full statement on workers.org.)

The plan is that on Jan. 6, Iman Siddique Abdullah Hasan will join the hunger strike. Imam Hasan, a leader of the

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A PEOPLE'S VICTORY

Scott Sisters will be free



Jamie Scott



Gladys Scott

By Jaribu Hill
Greenville, Miss.

Dec. 30 — Governor Haley Barbour calls the impending release of the Scott Sisters an "early" release. A release from 16 years of wrongful incarceration is most certainly not an "early" release.

Elected officials like Barbour cannot be allowed to now claim that Jamie and Gladys Scott, who did not commit a violent crime or any crime for that matter, suddenly are no longer a threat to the safety and security of the public. Eleven dollars! The system

that allowed the Scott Sisters to languish in prison for an alleged "eleven-dollar" armed robbery must be challenged.

The wrongful conviction and incarceration of hundreds more must be challenged. They are victims of human rights violations, which the U.S. refuses to acknowledge. They are victims of the same types of human rights abuses which the U.S. is quick to identify in other countries. In fact, until it became politically expedient, no one, from the White House to the Mississippi State House, even bothered to "look into the matter."

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'Made in Dagenham'

Women workers lead victorious struggle

By Sue Davis

Called a "British Norma Rae," the recently released "Made in Dagenham" tells the story of how 187 women workers, who sewed seat covers at a Ford plant employing more than 55,000 workers outside London, stopped production with their 1968 strike and won huge raises. Their victory led to the Equal Pay Act of 1970.

This inspiring working-class story begins when the women find out they've been reclassified as unskilled workers at lower pay. After they vote unanimously to stage a one-day strike, there's a meeting between union and management. Shy but determined, Rita interrupts a class-collaborationist union bureaucrat trying to derail the strike and defiantly details the kinds of skills the women need to sew seat covers.

Flush from the strike, Rita upgrades the issue from skill levels to equal pay, and the strike continues. Soon the plant shuts down because cars can't be sold without seats. During a union meeting to vote on whether to support the women's strike, Rita again interrupts the bureaucrat and appeals to the all-male delegates: "We are the working class. We're men and women, and we are in this together. We are not divided by sex, only by those willing to accept injustice." Her militant appeal works — 79 in favor, 48 opposed.

A Ford bigwig, dispatched to London, threatens Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson: Either end the strike or we'll move the plant to Europe. Wilson so instructs his Employment Minister, Barbara Castle. But Castle, both demeaned in her position and won over by the women, negotiates behind closed doors with the Ford boss, who

agrees to a compromise: The women will be paid 92 percent of men's wages. Castle adds the promise about sponsoring the equal pay bill.

Made with a star-studded cast, the movie has been called timely, stirring, entertaining, but Hollywood predictable. A few scenes seem far-fetched, like the upper-class spouse of a Ford executive encouraging Rita to keep fighting for all women and then lending her an expensive dress to wear to meet with Castle.

Is the movie accurate? Did a male shop steward have to persuade Rita, a composite of several women leaders, to demand equal pay? There's also the question: Were all the women white? A few men of color are in some scenes.

A big question is: Why was this film made in 2010? U.S. and British reviewers see it differently. In a Nov. 18 New York Times review, Stephen Holden calls it "a grown-up feel-good movie plunked in a feel-bad age" and writes that it's "so smoothly written and well acted that its humanity and good will leave you with a 1960s buzz of hope that social justice might be at hand; that feeling wears off quickly."

MOVIE REVIEW

British reviewers take a more class-conscious approach. In the Oct. 4 Daily Mail, Chris Tookey describes the movie as "ordinary people finding their voice" and notes that it "has pertinent things to say to the modern generation about standing up for your principles." Writing in the Oct. 3 Independent, Nicholas Barber observes that it's "fairly radical for a contemporary film to be so squarely on the side of the strikers."

This reviewer wishes the movie could be shown around the clock on television so all working and oppressed people could be inspired to unite and fight back. □

Activists study revolutionary history

By Jay Rothermel
Cleveland

Readers and supporters of Workers World newspaper, Workers World Party and the revolutionary youth organization Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) held a 12-week educational class series this fall called "200 Years of Revolution."

The daunting scope of the classes was more than matched by the interest and enthusiasm of the participants, who met at a local independent bookstore that had earlier featured readings of Fred Goldstein's "Low-Wage Capitalism" and Karl Marx's "Capital."

The classes began with an overview of the development of scientific socialism in the 19th century by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Two weeks each were devoted to the USSR and China. Eastern Europe, Cuba, Latin America, Africa and Asia were covered. Two classes covered U.S. labor and Black liberation struggles. The class on Black liberation was led by a guest speaker from the New Black Panther Party who had participated in many of the struggles discussed.

WW newspapers and books provided reading on each week's topic. Books by Mao Zedong, Sam Marcy and Che Guevara, and FIST's "What is Marxism all about?" were snapped up as the classes progressed.

A presentation of 30 or 40 minutes by the class leader, Caleb Maupin of FIST, would be followed by lively discussion periods lasting anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. The presentation was recorded each week and posted to

Cleveland FIST's YouTube channel. The classes, which can be accessed from anywhere, can prove useful to anyone beginning to study the revolutionary continuity of Marxism.

The liveliest and best-attended class was "History has absolved Cuba." Participants eagerly shared their excitement, knowledge and long experience defending and supporting that country's communist course. They also related many useful and constructive personal anecdotes about local and national solidarity efforts. A class participant who had been to Cuba gave some concrete insights into daily life in that country.

Common to all the classes were the basic need for revolutionary mass work in existing working-class institutions (unions, oppressed peoples' organizations); the importance of independent working-class political action apart from and opposed to the capitalist parties; and the need for workers' organizations to build alliances with the struggles of nationalities, women, youth and the lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer communities against oppression.

The classes were advertised by leafleting on a local college campus and sending e-mails to contacts made at other local political activities. A Facebook page was also created. All these efforts attracted young people becoming interested in politics.

The scope, knowledge and confidence gained by looking at the world from a working-class perspective will be irreplaceable as we combat Fox News-style ruling-class slanders and move forward with a campaign to abolish capitalism and reawaken the struggle for world socialism. □

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Despite release, 'they will never receive justice'

Scott Sisters & Mississippi racism

By Monica Moorehead

The anti-racist movement celebrated an important victory when it was announced on Dec. 30 that the prison sentences of Jamie Scott and Gladys Scott would be suspended by Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour.

The Scott Sisters, who are African American, have spent 16 years of their lives at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility for the "crime" of taking \$11 from a convenience store in December 1993. At the time of their arrest, Jamie was 22 years old and Gladys was 19 years old and pregnant. Two African-American youth, who admitted taking the money, stated at the Scott Sisters' trial that they falsely implicated the sisters in order to receive a reduced sentence.

This testimony did not stop the Scott Sisters from being found guilty and sentenced to life in prison in 1994. Neither sister had a prior arrest record nor did any violence take place during the so-called robbery. They are now 38 and 36 years old, respectively.

Courts have turned down appeal after appeal. When the sisters first entered prison, they were healthy women. Due to inhumane prison conditions, including the lack of nutritious food and inadequate health care, one of Jamie Scott's kidneys is failing. The prison has denied her regular dialysis treatments, inaction that could have resulted in her death. Gladys Scott has offered one of her kidneys since Jamie is in need of a transplant.

How did the sisters find out about Barbour's announcement? Did the governor's office contact the sisters directly? No. Gladys Scott found out while looking at the news. Their mother, Evelyn Rasco, got the news when a reporter called her at her home in Florida.

Before the Dec. 30 announcement, any demands that the sisters be pardoned were ignored by the governor and the Mississippi Parole Board. Bob Herbert, the African-American op-ed writer for the New York Times, wrote two columns last fall in support of the Scott Sisters. He pointed out cases of prisoners who had been convicted of murder being pardoned or paroled in Mississippi.

Many demonstrations held throughout the state in support of the Scott Sisters have been led by the Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights; Southern Human Rights Organizing Conference activists; Chokwe Lumumba, a lawyer for the sisters; and others. In June 2010 Mississippi protesters traveled by bus to Washington, D.C., to demand that the Department of Justice put pressure on Barbour to release the sisters. Support from NAACP National President Ben Jealous and comedian-activist Dick Gregory, along with Herbert's columns, have helped to bring national and international attention to the racist injustice suffered by these two women.

Mississippi: a modern-day plantation

Barbour made it clear in his Dec. 30 statement that he was suspending the sisters' sentences, not pardoning them, because he wanted to avoid having taxpayers pay \$200,000 annually to sustain Jamie on dialysis.

A pardon would have led to an almost immediate release of the sisters. In fact, one of the main conditions for the suspended sentences is that Gladys Scott will have to give one of her kidneys to her sister, which she has already offered to do. It has not been determined what will happen if Gladys is not a match for her sister or if Jamie's body rejects her sister's kidney.

Activists say that the release of the sis-

ters could take another 45 days or more under the rules of this suspension. The parole board stated as of Jan. 3 that they have not received any orders to release the sisters.

Nowhere in Barbour's speech did he say that the sisters suffered a travesty of justice, nor did he apologize for their ordeal. Rather than even trying to sound remorseful, Barbour's statement was dripping with racist contempt for the sisters and dismissive of the hellish nightmare they and their family have dealt with for more than 17 years. Some commentators say that Barbour wants to use the Scott announcement to help clean up his image in order to make a run for president in the 2012 election.

Barbour's racist attitude should not come as a shock to anyone. It reflects Mississippi's racist history. Jaribu Hill, executive director of the Mississippi Workers' Center, told Workers World, "Governor Haley Barbour is cut from the same cloth as [Alabama Sheriff] Bull Connor and former Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett."

Mississippi is a modern-day plantation and Barbour is its main slavemaster. It is the poorest state in the U.S., with a high rural poverty rate and overall underdevelopment, especially for Black people, who are affected in highly disproportionate numbers.

The legacy of slavery continues in Mississippi with countless lynchings of young Black men, like Emmett Till in 1955 and

Frederick Jermaine Carter, who was founding hanging from a tree in Greenwood, Miss., on Dec. 3.

In a Dec. 20 interview with The Weekly Standard, Barbour heaped praise on the pro-segregationist White Citizens Council, which, along with the fascistic Ku Klux Klan, terrorized the Black community in the South, mainly by using economic intimidation to reinforce segregation at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. When asked about the Civil Rights era, Barbour stated, "I just don't remember it as being that bad." (The Clarion-Ledger, Dec. 21)

While Barbour gives credit to the WCC for integrating schools in his hometown of Yazoo City, Miss., Derrick Johnson, president of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP, refutes that notion: "If you look at Yazoo City, their approach to integration was very similar to other communities across the state, where the parents pulled their children out of the public school system so white children would not have to attend an integrated school system. They established a private segregated academy which still exists today." (Huffington Post, Dec. 20)

It is within this historical and social context that the progressive movement should not rest until the Scott Sisters are finally released. As Herbert stated in his Dec. 31 op-ed column, "The Scott sisters may go free, but they will never receive justice." □

A people's victory

Scott Sisters will be free

Continued from page 1

We cannot allow the Scott Sisters' liberation to be co-opted. The voices of thousands of outraged people were raised in protest. We kept the pressure on!!!

The Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights and the Southern Human Rights Organizers' Network salute the courage and perseverance of Evelyn Rasco, mother of Jamie and Gladys Scott, and all those who stood firm in these difficult times.

From Mississippi to Georgia, justice for all wrongfully incarcerated people! Human rights for all!

Hill is executive director of the Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights and Southern Human Rights Organizers' Network, 213 Main St., Greenville, Miss., 38701. E-mail workersrights@bellsouth.net.

Jaribu Hill at Black Workers For Justice banquet, April 3, 2009, Raleigh, N.C.

WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD



Support grows for Arab-American journalist Helen Thomas

By Workers World Detroit Bureau

Resistance is growing to stop the most recent attack by Wayne State University against renowned Arab-American journalist Helen Thomas. Demonstrations, petition drives, support statements and more continue to demand that the university restore the Helen Thomas Spirit of Diversity in the Media Award.

Thomas is a world-renowned investigative journalist and WSU alumna. She was fired in May from Hearst News Service because of her staunch anti-Zionist position and her willingness to challenge U.S. and Israeli actions regarding Palestine. WSU used Thomas' anti-Zionist comments made in her keynote talk at a Dec. 2 diversity conference in Dearborn, Mich., as a pretext to strip her name from the award.

The Arab American Student Union at WSU sponsored a well-attended protest at the administration building Dec. 10, supported by the Palestine Cultural Office, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice and others. The protest received widespread coverage in the local



WW PHOTO

media, including one of the largest Arab-American newspapers in the U.S., the Dearborn-based Arab American News.

"We strongly disagree with Wayne State University's decision," reads an editorial in its Dec. 11-17 edition of the newspaper. "We categorically reject equating Zionism with Judaism. ... Thomas was applauded when speaking truth to power until the power was Israel."

The newspaper warned, "Unless this issue is properly addressed and corrected, this hastily made decision will negatively impact relations between the university and the Arab-American community for many years." WSU has thousands of Arab-American and Muslim students, staff and faculty, reflecting metro Detroit's large Middle Eastern population. The National Arab American Journalists As-

sociation, an organization with 250 members in the U.S., has also issued a statement denouncing this and other attacks on Thomas.

Wayne State and U.S.-Israel

Besides the billions of dollars the U.S. government gives Israel annually, the apartheid state benefits from assistance by U.S. colleges and universities. Numerous academics, graduate students and others have been fired or had their careers sabotaged for questioning their universities' actions towards Israel, for supporting Palestine or even for just questioning U.S.-Israeli policies.

Wayne State is no exception. Former Wayne State president, Irvin D. Reid, joined at least 280 college and university presidents, the U.S. Congress and others in condemning a boycott against Israeli academic institutions by Britain's University and College Union. Reid called the proposed boycott "a fundamentally indefensible action." (Wayne State media release, Aug. 9, 2007)

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Bloomberg botches blizzard cleanup, scapegoats sanitation workers

By a City Sanitation Department worker
New York

A powerful storm system dumped heavy snow from the Carolinas to Canada on the U.S. East Coast during 36 hours starting Dec. 26. New York and the rest of the Northeast took the brunt of the blizzard, with snowfall totals measuring from 20 to 32 inches. The follow-up to this storm has raised the stakes as Wall Street and the banks are on the attack against unionized public service workers and insist on eliminating jobs.

New York City's regular army to battle snowstorms, the city's stalwart sanitation worker corps, worked for more than a week in 12- to 14-hour shifts to plow and clear away the snow and in the new year is attacking the monumental task of removing one week's backlog of uncollected garbage.

Despite this heroic effort from the sanitation workers, reckless decisions by Mayor Mike Bloomberg's administration disrupted normal snow removal operations, making his failed response top national news for much of the holiday week. Several New Yorkers died when ambulances failed to get through snow-covered streets. Mass transit was slow to nonexistent.

Hit by mass criticism, the Bloomberg administration tried to deflect anger by treating workers battling the snow like Public Enemy Number One. During the height of the storm crisis, right-wing Republican anti-labor NYC Councilperson Dan Halloran and the right-wing, anti-labor New York Post distributed an unproven allegation that a worker "slowdown" had impeded the snow removal operations. Other media repeated this slander.

For Wall Street, Bloomberg and New York State's new governor, Andrew Cuomo, attacking sanitation workers fits their campaign against all unionized public sector workers. With the city and state debt-ridden, before banks will buy mu-

nicipal and state bonds they demand cuts in the public sector workforce, and they are holding the public at large hostage to the cuts in the social contract.

Sanitation workers union leader Harry Nespoli answered this attack. He explained that the workers' own families and children depended on sanitation services just as the rest of the city does. He said his union members would never do anything to jeopardize public health and safety. During the 54 years of struggle of Teamsters Local 831, including strikes and slowdowns, there have never been slowdowns during a snowstorm.

It is not known widely that medical experts rate the job of sanitation worker as the second most dangerous job in the U.S., just below lumberjacks, and more dangerous than police — who get much government and media attention — and even firefighters. Just five days before the storm, Angel Roldan became the 11th sanitation worker killed on the job since 2003. Eight others died in work-related accidents and three suffered heart attacks while performing their extremely physically taxing and stressful assigned duties.

How Bloomberg, Goldsmith messed up

Last April 30, Bloomberg appointed Stephen Goldsmith as NYC deputy mayor for operations, who thus directly supervises the Department of Sanitation commissioner. The department chose not to replace the 400 sanitation workers it lost in the past year. Instead, on Oct. 21, six days after the official start of the snow season, the city announced it was implementing Goldsmith's plan to demote 100 sanitation supervisors to sanitation workers.

This left the city's snow removal work force at 75 percent of its size in 1996, when there was a huge blizzard that was cleaned up effectively. The cuts and demotions also lowered department morale, countering the department's tradition of

promoting the most dedicated and hard-working sanitation workers to supervise those on the job they know so well.

Unlike in 1996 and unlike other Northeastern cities this year, New York City refused to declare a snow emergency as it can after more than three inches of snow fall. On the first day of the 1996 storm, all city buses and nonessential vehicles were banned from city streets, so they would not get stuck in the snow and impede snow removal operations. When Goldsmith was Republican mayor of Indianapolis during a January 1994 blizzard, he had also refused to declare a snow emergency.

In Indianapolis, Goldsmith built a reputation as a "reinventor" of government, laying off many city workers and privatizing every city service he could. Goldsmith left Indianapolis to become chief domestic policy advisor to President George W. Bush in the 2000 campaign and later was special adviser to the Bush administration, which catastrophically failed to

handle the Hurricane Katrina emergency in New Orleans in 2005.

To add insult to injury, on the first day of the storm, Mike Bloomberg, Goldsmith's boss, advised New Yorkers to take public transportation to see a Broadway show. Workers at the Sanitation Department suggested with regard to the starving people of France: "Let them eat cake."

The Metropolitan Transit Authority also refused to declare its highest emergency alert. This would have meant sending subway cars back and forth across the tracks specifically to clear them of ice and snow. It would also have provided a diesel train at every depot to tow in extra subway cars as needed.

Instead of keeping the trains running, the MTA raised transit fares on Dec. 31 for weekly and monthly metro cards. New Yorkers will also be greatly inconvenienced and endangered by the drastic cuts in NYC bus and subway service made by the MTA since the last blizzard. □

Protest opposes fare hikes in wake of storm



atic dismantling of public transportation and other agencies that turned a midlevel storm into a crisis.

The Bail Out the People Movement took to the streets on Dec. 30 in the wake of the storm crisis that paralyzed New York City. Activists held a combination protest and news conference at the Metropolitan Transit Authority's midtown offices. BOPM's main demand was for an emergency repeal of the fare hike, which the group called "outrageous."

BOPM expanded its call to include a series of measures to reverse the system-

The group called for an emergency response from the city and MTA that would: 1) Repeal the fare hike; 2) Rehire transit workers and sanitation workers; 3) Create 10,000 jobs to help dig people out of the neighborhoods and deal with other catastrophes; and 4) Order employers to pay workers who missed work in the storm's aftermath.

For more information see bailoutpeople.org.

— Report and photo by John Catalinotto

Socialism, capitalism & natural disasters

It almost never snows in beautiful Cuba. The country's tallest mountain, Pico Turquino, was last covered with the white stuff in 1864 and 1900.

Cubans would probably rather have a series of blizzards instead of the terrible hurricanes they've endured. Capitalist climate change is making things worse. In 2008 alone, Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma ravaged the Caribbean island. Gustav and Ike struck 10 days apart and did \$5 billion worth of damage. Ike destroyed 840,000 acres of sugar cane fields.

But because millions of Cubans were evacuated, just seven people were killed in the 2008 hurricanes. (cubahurricanes.org)

What a contrast to President George W. Bush letting Black and poor people drown and starve in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Bush refused offers from Cuba and Venezuela to send help to New Orleans.

Despite a 50-year U.S. economic blockade of their country, Cubans can organize themselves so well because they live in a socialist society. Every member of the Cuban Communist Party is an organizer.

The capitalist party that runs the United States can't even deal with two feet of snow in New York City. Billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg was useless in the aftermath of the Dec. 26 snowstorm.

Socialism beats capitalism in dealing with cold weather. Throughout the Soviet Union, central heating stations were built that kept people warm in their homes. This sort of social organization is impossible under capitalism, in which housing, heating oil and natural gas are just commodities to be sold at a profit.

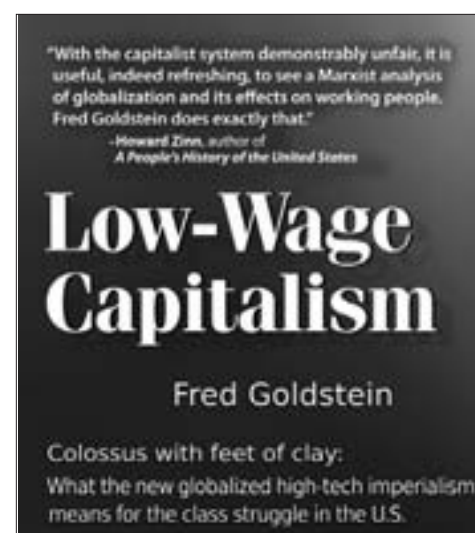
Central heating stations were a prime NATO target when socialist Yugoslavia was bombed for 78 days in 1999. President Bill Clinton wanted to freeze people into submission.

Socialism hasn't been able to prevent earthquakes yet, although Chinese scientists are working at making more accurate predictions.

When Tashkent, the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan, was struck by a huge earthquake on April 26, 1966, every nationality in the Soviet Union pitched in to help their Central Asian sisters and brothers. Within four years, 100,000 new housing units were built and a new subway system was started.

Capitalists actually profit off disasters. They gamble at the Chicago Board of Trade and other such casinos on crop failures. The British East India Company doubled its profits as 10 million people starved to death in Bengal in the 1770s.

— Steve Millies



LOW-WAGE CAPITALISM

An easy-to-read analysis of the roots of the current global economic crisis, its implications for workers and oppressed peoples, and the strategy needed for future struggle.

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On the Picket Line

By Sue Davis

D.C. area unions organize to counter attacks on public sector workers

With attacks on public service workers threatened by all levels of government, unionists in the Washington, D.C., area met Dec. 17 to devise a fightback strategy. Metro Washington Council AFL-CIO President Joslyn Williams opened the meeting by showing a new video by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, "Stop the Lies." According to Williams, it shows "the only thing attacking public service workers does is divert attention from the real culprits of our country's economic troubles and inequality" — Wall Street, corporate CEOs and right-wing pundits and politicians. In fact, the Jan. 2 New York Times reports, "A raft of recent studies found that public salaries, even with benefits included, are equivalent to or lag slightly behind those of private sector workers." The D.C. unionists, who invite others to join them, agreed that a winning strategy requires support from both labor federations and all national unions. (Union City, Metro Council's online newsletter, Dec. 17)

Companies must post notices of workers' right to unionize

The National Labor Relations Board announced Dec. 21 that it was requiring companies to post notices on their bulletin boards — and maybe send out email — to inform employees of their right to unionize under federal law. This is the first time since Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 that the NLRB has made such a requirement (though it doesn't cover agricultural, rail and airline workers). The U.S. Chamber of Commerce immediately claimed that "these actions are consistent with a general ramp-up of enforcement against employers we are seeing across the board." (New York Times, Dec. 22) In what universe? In 2010 employers aggressively tried to break unions with demands for take-it-or-leave-it, poverty-level pay cuts and higher-cost benefits as well as interference in collective bargaining elections. Will the NLRB require notices to be posted in government offices as well?

EEOC sues to stop racial discrimination

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission sued the Kaplan High Education Corp. on Dec. 22 for discriminating against Black job applicants by using credit histories in its hiring process. This comes after mounting evidence that employers are using credit histories, often based on inaccurate data, though creditworthiness is not relevant to the job. Several states, including Hawaii, Washington, Oregon and Illinois, have banned or restricted use of such reports because they could prevent unemployed, financially-strapped workers from being hired. Other states and Congress are considering similar laws. The EEOC charged that since January 2008, Kaplan has rejected job applicants based on their credit history with a "significant disparate impact" on African Americans. The EEOC is seeking lost wages and benefits as well as employment offers. (New York Times, Dec. 22)

Locked-out Honeywell workers confront CEO

About 230 workers at Honeywell's uranium facility in Metropolis, Ill., have been locked out for more than six months because United Steelworkers Local 7-669 members refused to accept the company's proposal to eliminate retiree health care and pension plans for new hires and increase workers' out-of-pocket health costs to \$8,500 a year. Good health care coverage for retirees is critical; uranium workers suffer rates of cancer 10 times higher than the rest of the public due to daily contact with radioactive materials.

More than 100 workers traveled to Honeywell's headquarters in Morristown, N.J., to confront CEO David Cole in November, but he wouldn't meet with them. On Dec. 1 two members were prepared to confront Cole during a Deficit Commission hearing in Washington, but as soon as they stood, security hustled them out. Cole then testified about the need to continue the Bush tax cuts while cutting Social Security and called, so hypocritically, for "labor and business to work together." (A Nov. 30 report by U.S. Chamber Watch notes that Cole will pocket \$1.2 million from the tax cut extension.)

Local 7-669 estimates Honeywell spent \$48.8 million on scabs in the first four months of the lockout, but retaining current health and retirement benefits would only cost \$20 million over the three-year contract. Scab labor created scary leaks of toxic materials on Nov. 30 and Dec. 23. To support the workers, call the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Safety Hotline at 800-695-7403 and ask the NRC to shut the plant run by untrained scabs as a health hazard. For other ways to aid the workers, click on Take Action at www.usw7-669.com. (Mike Elk, blog.usw.org, Dec. 4) □

Workers face layoffs, wage freeze

Cuomo's putrid pension fund deals

By Deirdre Griswold
New York

The New York State Common Retirement Fund is the third-largest pension fund in the United States. Money gets taken out of every state worker's paycheck so that when they get older they'll be able to safely retire. The law says these funds must be invested securely and cautiously.

That's how it's supposed to work. But what happens when Wall Street investment firms decide they desperately need fresh capital and the billions of dollars in the fund are just what the doctor ordered?

They bribe the officials in charge of the fund with millions of dollars to take billions out of the old, stodgy stocks and bonds where these investments earned a little interest and put this money into their sexy hedge funds and other risky investments — just when the whole capitalist market is about to take a nosedive.

That's what happened in New York, and it cost the retirement fund at least \$170 million. It brought down the state comptroller and sole trustee of the fund, Alan Hevesi, and his top political aide, Hank Morris. They and six other officials pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to the kickback scheme.

Several Wall Street firms have been under investigation in this huge scandal, including the highly connected Carlyle Group, a private equity firm that has put such luminaries on its payroll as George H.W. Bush and former British Prime Minister John Major.

But it seems that the bigger you get, the more eager the New York state attorney general has been to cut a deal. So Carlyle paid back to the state \$20 million — a pittance for a company that size — and was spared the trouble of ever having to go to court.

The state attorney general who cut the deal with Carlyle was Andrew Cuomo, who became governor of New York on Jan. 1. During

his campaign, he emphasized that he was going to get tough with the unions representing state workers and that he was going to bring yet another kingpin in the pension swindle to justice — Steven L. Rattner. Cuomo intends to keep his first promise and axe thousands of workers' jobs. One of his first acts after his inauguration as governor was to put a year-long freeze on the wages of state workers. But on Rattner, he has already taken a pass.

Who is Steven Rattner? His connection to this scandal is through a company he set up called Quadrangle, which obtained a \$150 million investment from the pension fund. Quadrangle has paid \$6.2 million to the state for its role in this rip-off — but, like Carlyle, its rich executives have admitted no wrongdoing and have not been charged with any crime. It was all a "gentlemen's agreement" — they give back what is chump change for them, and then it's business as usual.

Sweet deal for superrich Rattner

But Rattner left Quadrangle after the state's investigation started. And although Cuomo in November was talking about making Rattner pay \$26 million and possibly face perjury charges, by the end of December the man about to become governor softened. He made a deal where Rattner paid \$10 million and, like Quadrangle and Carlyle, didn't admit to any wrongdoing. Rattner is also barred for five years from having any dealing with pension funds.

Rattner is a major fundraiser for the Democratic Party. He is also now the head of a new investment firm that deals exclusively with the personal fortune of Michael Bloomberg, who happens to be the Republican mayor of New York City. But hey, whether it's Democrat or Republican, money is green. And Rattner has plenty of it himself. His net worth, according to a financial disclosure report filed this year, was somewhere between \$160 million and \$500 million.

Two years ago, President Barack Obama named Rattner to head his

effort to "turn around" the auto industry. Now General Motors and other corporations are making even bigger profits, having pressured the UAW leadership to agree to tens of thousands of workers being axed and a cut in pay for the rest. Rattner, on the other hand, enjoyed a big celebration from his pals on Wall Street for that.

By the way, Rattner started his career as a reporter for the New York Times.

Bloggers and people who send e-mails to the Times are enraged over Cuomo's deal with Rattner. Some point out that the \$10 million Rattner "disgorged" — that's the legal term for giving it up without actually being penalized or fined — is peanuts to a man who's not sure if his net worth is \$160 million or \$500 million.

What gave Cuomo the right to cut these deals? Had these cases gone to trial, much information about the inner workings of Wall Street and its incestuous relationship with capitalist politicians would have come out. Now these secrets remain buried.

And how come a person charged with stealing \$10 or \$100 can't just pay it back? Why is it that only millionaires can do that? People who take \$10 or \$100 must really need it, but in the eyes of "the law," that makes them criminals. Two young Black women in Mississippi known as the Scott Sisters have spent the last 16 years of their lives in jail for the supposed theft of \$11.

The whole sordid story of Cuomo, Rattner, Carlyle and the rest of this gang is not some aberration. This is how capitalism and its political machinery work. Pamper the filthy rich and squeeze everything you can out of the workers — state workers, autoworkers, whoever can be exploited.

It's not enough to be shocked and angry. Capitalism has to be uprooted and replaced by socialism. Until that happens, the wealth created by the working class will continue to be funneled into the coffers of the capitalists and their cronies — by hook or by crook. □

How new 'golden rule' fleeces workers

By Cheryl LaBash

Capitalism has a golden rule: The class with the gold makes the rules. When public workers, their unions, pensions and benefits are blamed and pummeled for creating massive budget deficits, this is something to keep in mind.

For example, Detroit's 2010 overall deficit went up by \$692 million — an increase of nearly 80 percent over the 2009 reported shortfall. Why? A new accounting rule has been instituted.

The Government Accounting Standards Board — GASB — is not part of the government. It is "an operating component of the Financial Accounting Foundation," a private, not-for-profit corporation partially funded by the "municipal bond community." (See www.gasb.org and [\[foundation.org\]\(http://foundation.org\)\)](http://www.accounting-</p>
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GASB 53 estimates the future cost of speculative financial instruments heavily pushed by banks as a "creative solution to government costs."

In 2009 two new accounting rules, GASB 45 and 49, caused Detroit to report \$157.4 million in additional estimated future costs.

What is the result? Michigan Treasury spokesperson Terry Stanton stated the city would need to craft a new deficit reduction plan or update the current one to continue receiving state revenue sharing. (bondbuyer.com, Dec. 28) Deficit reduction equals cuts of workers and sales or privatization of city infrastructure — what accountants term "assets" — like power generation, water systems or roads.

Detroit is only one city of many where workers and communities

are being squeezed with job losses, reduced incomes, foreclosures and evictions. Cities across the U.S. are facing huge budget shortfalls and public workers are under attack.

The officers and board of the GASB have current or former ties to Microsoft; UBS Global Asset Management; Vanguard Group; Fannie Mae; the private bank, Brown Brothers Harriman and Co.; KPMG; LLC auditors; JP Morgan Fleming Management; and more. BBH employed such well-known individuals as former U.S. senator, Prescott S. Bush; former U.S. secretary of commerce and New York governor, W. Averell Harriman; and former U.S. secretary of defense, Robert A. Lovett.

GASB and FAF board members are not elected. There are no workers or labor representatives on the

Continued on page 10

New Year's Day vigil commemorates Oscar Grant killing

By Judy Greenspan
Oakland, Calif.

More than 100 family members, religious leaders and community supporters held a prayer vigil and speak-out Jan. 1 in front of the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid Transit station to commemorate the second anniversary of the 2009 killing of Oscar Grant, a young Black man. The rally also focused attention on Derrick Jones, another young unarmed Black man killed by the police in Oakland, and others killed by the police.

Grant was unarmed and restrained in the early hours of Jan. 1, 2009, when he was killed on the train platform by BART police officer Johannes Mehserle. His death sparked a series of protests and rebellions throughout California and around the country.

The vigil was led by Grant's uncle, "Uncle Bobby" Cephus Johnson, who thanked

the crowd for coming out to demand justice. "It's the community that enables us to continue. We believe you represent justice, and not just for Oscar Grant," he stated. Johnson has worked tirelessly since Grant's killing to bring a coalition together to fight for justice for all people impacted by police brutality.

Speakers at the vigil included Grant's mother, Wanda Johnson, and several other family members. "I want the police to take responsibility for taking my son's life and all the other lives," Johnson said. The family was very upset when Mehserle received a light sentence of two years for killing Grant.

Several religious leaders also spoke. Minister Keith Muhammad of Mosque 26B, located in East Oakland, spoke eloquently about who is to blame for Grant's death. He noted that it's not just one bad cop; it's the entire system that's to blame. He called on everyone to show with their

deeds that they are fighting for justice. "We are all Oscar Grant," Muhammad concluded.

According to Uncle Bobby, Grant's case is now before the Department of Justice. He called upon everyone to keep organizing and bring pressure on the department. "By standing together and having one voice, they will be forced to listen to us," he stated.

The family of Derrick Jones expressed their solidarity with the Grant family and with the fight against police brutality. Jones's father stated, "We are going to continue this movement for justice. The spotlight is on Oakland and justice will be served."

Many of Grant's family members and friends were introduced and brought to the front of the rally, including his daughter



WW PHOTO: GLORIA RUBAC

ter Tatiana, his sister and nephew, and Jack Bryson, a close family friend and another moving force behind the movement for justice for Oscar Grant and all victims of police brutality.

A community speak-out was held following the vigil. Dave Welsh, a local leader of the Bail Out the People Movement and a member of the Grant committee, invited everyone to attend the next meeting of the Oscar Grant Committee to Stop Police Brutality and State Repression (OGC), which will take place on Jan. 11 at 7 p.m. at the Niebyl Proctor Library, 6501 Telegraph Ave. in North Oakland. The committee meets every second and fourth Tuesdays.

The Jan. 1 vigil was organized by OGC, ONYX, New Years Movement for Justice, Community Action Project and many other groups. □

NORTH CAROLINA

Rally in solidarity with Georgia prisoners

By Cathey Stanley
Raleigh, N.C.

Around 35 individuals representing Raleigh Fight Imperialism, Stand Together; Workers World Party, Durham branch; Chapel Hill Prison Books Collective; NC Heroes Emerge Among Teens; Black Workers for Justice; and Bull City Insurgent gathered at Central Prison in Raleigh on Dec. 17 for a solidarity action with prisoners participating in a six-day prison strike in Georgia. Those at the action played drums, rang bells and used whistles and shakers to make noise in support of the strikers, who had engaged in one of the largest prison strikes in U.S. history.

Solidarity activists shouted chants such as, "Free all prison rebels!" "No work for no pay! Georgia prisoners rise today!" and

"Jail the cops and burn the prisons! Anarchy and communism!" Signs read, "Solidarity with Georgia prisoners," "Georgia prisoners shut down the system: you can too!" and "Repression breeds resistance."

Several people spoke at the rally, making connections between the actions of the Georgia prisoners and the overarching prison-industrial complex. One person said, "There has been a continuous line from slavery to the prison system that has remained unbroken. The striking Georgia prisoners are North Carolina prisoners, are prisoners everywhere."

Erin Byrd spoke to one of the nine demands being made by the striking prisoners — that the prisoners be paid a living wage for their labor. Byrd reported that in some instances, prisoners make less than 40 cents an hour for their work.



Raleigh, N.C., Dec. 17 protest.

PHOTO: ZEPAKTLI ARAGON

"The prison-industrial system is modern day slavery. The United States incarcerates more people than any other country

in the world."

The rally lasted for two hours, displaying high energy and solidarity. □

Lucasville prison uprising leaders go on hunger strike

Continued from page 1

Sunni Muslims during the 1993 rebellion, was one of several negotiators for the prisoners. The resulting settlement prevented a reoccurrence of the massacre that took place during the Attica, N.Y., prison rebellion in 1971. Hasan's "reward" was a death sentence.

Jason Robb is scheduled to start refusing meals on Jan. 9. Robb, an anti-racist leader of the Aryan Brotherhood, was also a negotiator during the 1993 uprising. Finally, Namir Abdul Mateen (aka James Were) will join the hunger strike to the extent that his health permits.

As seen in the recent prisoner strike in Georgia, the once-hostile Ohio prisoner groupings forged a powerful unity during the 1993 rebellion that has stood the test of time.

The four prisoners went on another hunger strike together in 1996 with George Skatzes, the fifth prisoner to receive the death penalty following the uprising. This hunger strike achieved its aim: Skatzes was transferred out of OSP for medical reasons.

The current hunger strike is up against a warden, David Bobby, who has publicly made it known that he will not give any ground to the hunger strikers.



Bomani Shakur, Imam Abdullah Hasan, Jason Robb and Namir Abdul Mateen

Ohio executions on the rise

The bigger picture is that Ohio is inaugurating a new governor, John Kasich, who is an extreme right-winger. Ohio could set a new record for executions, which is already second only to Texas. Ohio was the only state to perform more executions in 2010 than in 2009.

The severe sensory deprivation that the four prisoners have suffered for so long is vindictive punishment for the death of a guard in the 1993 uprising. They have been deliberately kept at the most restrictive security level, Level 5, since they were brought to OSP, in spite of good behavior and cooperation with prison programs. During one of the annual reviews, prison authorities stated

in writing, "Your placement offense is so severe that you should remain at the OSP permanently or for many years regardless of your behavior while confined at the OSP." (<http://tinyurl.com/3aywndt>)

Supporters of the hunger strikers will gather at the gates of OSP on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Jan. 15, for a rally and press conference. There will be reports on the status of the hunger strikers, statements from the prisoners and solidarity messages from across the country and around the world.

These prisoners' convictions should be re-examined immediately given that in recent years key witnesses have recanted damaging testimony against them. These convictions need to be overturned and

new trials granted. Attorney Staughton Lynd has provided proof that these convictions relied almost exclusively on witnesses who perjured themselves in exchange for reduced sentences. (Capital University Law Review, Spring 2008, vol. 36, no. 3, p. 559, "Napue Nightmares: Perjured Testimony in Trials Following the 1993 Lucasville, Ohio, Prison Uprising")

An international movement to support these hunger strikers and to end all inhumane treatment of prisoners is gathering momentum. Now is the time to get on board. Sign the electronic petition in support of the Lucasville hunger strikers at the International Action Center website, www.iacenter.org, to demand that the Ohio prison authorities and elected officials allow these heroic prisoners to have their security levels fairly evaluated and reclassified so that at the very least they can have the same privileges as other death row prisoners.

Daily updates will be posted on the Facebook site "In Solidarity with the Lucasville Uprising Prisoners on Hunger Strike," as well as on the IAC website.

Free all political prisoners, including the hunger strikers! Humane treatment for all prisoners! Dismantle the profit-making prison-industrial complex! □

Anti-war activists Ahlam Mohsen and Max Kantar charged with felonies

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

Indictments were handed down against Ahlam Mohsen and Max Kantar by a federal grand jury in western Michigan on Dec. 30. Each was charged with felony counts of forcible assault on a federal officer and assault on a member of Congress. The charges carry a penalty of eight years in prison.

Among the federal statutes cited in the indictments is one for "attempting to kill any officer or employee of the United States or of any agency of the U.S. Government." This serious charge, which carries a penalty of up to 20 years in federal prison, has been leveled against Mohsen and Kantar, both age 23, because of actions they allegedly took against U.S. Senator Carl Levin while he attended a Democratic Party meeting in Big Rapids, Mich.

At that Aug. 16 meeting, Kantar read a prepared statement denouncing Levin, chair of the Armed Services Committee, for his complicity in the many war crimes carried out by the U.S. and its proxies against the peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. When Kantar finished, Mohsen allegedly "threw" an apple pie into Levin's face.

Mohsen, a senior at Michigan State



Max Kantar and Ahlam Mohsen

University, was arrested and held on a quarter-million-dollar bond requiring \$50,000 in bail. She was incarcerated at the Mecosta County Jail for more than a week. She was released on Aug. 24, while state charges were suspended pending an FBI investigation. The state charges for "stalking" and assault could still be pursued at any time.

The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice sprang into ac-



WW PHOTOS: KRIS HAMEL

tion immediately following Mohsen's arrest, organizing a protest outside Levin's office at the federal building in downtown Detroit to demand the senator get the bond and the charges dropped. Levin has maintained that it is beyond the scope of his influence and abilities to have the charges dismissed.

Debbie Johnson, a leading MECAWI activist who is helping to organize defense activities on behalf of Kantar and

Mohsen, told Workers World: "That these youth are facing fines and imprisonment for a pie in the face is an outrage. The act of pieing has a long history as a form of protest in the U.S., and this is yet another attack by the federal government to deny civil liberties and the right to protest against war, poverty and racism. Our tax dollars would be better spent if the government pursued the real criminals in society — the bankers, politicians and corporate honchos who have conspired to steal billions from working people."

Johnson noted these indictments "should be viewed as part of the intensified campaign by the Obama administration to stifle dissent and jail and subpoena anti-war and solidarity activists. We strongly denounce the anti-Arab racism and anti-immigrant bias that are also at work here in terms of Sister Mohsen, who is of Yemeni origin."

MECAWI is planning to mount a strong campaign to get the charges dropped against Mohsen and Kantar, and will hold a press conference and protest outside the federal courthouse in Grand Rapids, Mich., whenever the first hearing is held. The Committee to Free Ahlam Mohsen and Max Kantar is in formation. Visit www.mecawi.org for further updates. □

Zionist vigilantes attack Black youth

By Steven Ceci
Baltimore

Community groups are responding to a racist attack by members of a Zionist vigilante group called Shomrim against a 15-year-old African-American student in northwest Baltimore. They are demanding that the group be disbanded, that hate crime charges be brought against it and that more resources be provided to the predominately African-American community of Lower Park Heights.

On Nov. 19 a student from Northwestern Senior High was assaulted by three members of the Shomrim, which calls itself a community patrol group (the name means "watchers" in Hebrew). Only one of the attackers, Eliyahu Eliezer Werdesheim, has criminal charges pending.

The student, whose family has requested that his identity be withheld, told the court he was walking that afternoon when a vehicle began driving next to him. The vehicle, he said, followed him a short distance before the two men inside jumped out and surrounded him. (Baltimore Sun, Dec. 2)

According to the teen, the passenger grabbed him and threw him to the ground. Then Werdesheim, the driver, hit him on the head with his radio and asked if he "had anything on him." The teen said Werdesheim yelled, "You wanna [expletive] with us. You don't belong here. Get outta here!"

A third man got out of a van, the student said, and kned him in the back, then pinned him to the ground as the others patted him down. The men then fled the area. Court records show that the teen's wrist was broken and that he had cuts and bruises on the back of his head.

Shaquille Carbon, a Northwest Senior High student, told Workers World: "The story does not add up. It does not take three adult men to apprehend a 15-year-old. I can't help but think this could have been me or someone close to me. I don't want this to happen again."

Nnamdi Lumumba of the Ujima People's Progress Party told Workers World: "The UPP condemns this attack as a colonialist and racist attack on African people. The attack on this young African student

is but one of many assaults on the impoverished African community of Park Heights by Zionist forces. ... We have to go beyond frustration and build a grassroots workers' movement that goes to the core of the contradictions and overturns the parasitic relationships that currently exist in that community, supported by elected capitalist stooges in City Hall."

Werdesheim, a 23-year-old former Israeli special forces soldier, worked for an elite unit of the Israeli Defense Forces, where he specialized in urban counterter-

rorism, hostage rescue and high-profile apprehensions.

It should come as no surprise that a person with such a background would assault and attack an African-American youth. Werdesheim was trained by the Zionist Israeli state, which terrorizes the Palestinian people. Zionism was equated to racism in the U.N. Durban conference on racism in 2001. The U.S. boycotted the conference. Attacks by IDF on Palestinians are a daily occurrence and breed racism toward Arabs and other people of color. □

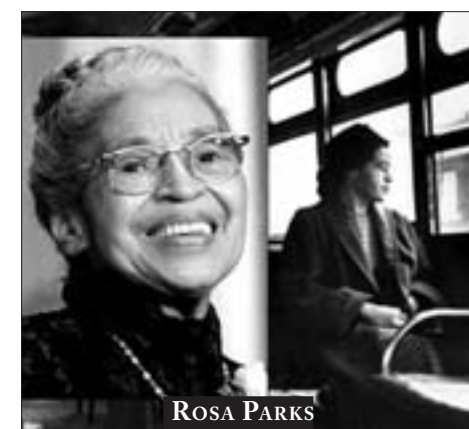
Rosa Parks Day highlights anti-racist struggle in South

By Catherine Donaghy
Springfield, Mass.

A standing-room-only crowd heard Ramsey Clark, former U.S. attorney general and founder of the International Action Center, give a keynote speech at the sixth annual Rosa Parks Day observance held at Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield, Mass.

Clark recounted the struggles to reverse the racial segregation laws in the South and to desegregate public schools, universities and private businesses. He gave accounts of the extremely violent reaction to these efforts.

In response to a question from the audience, Clark emphasized the need for unity and vigorous organizing to counter the problems faced today, including heightened U.S. militarism and anti-Muslim bias. He received a prolonged standing ovation after the Freedom Choir, an African-American choral group, led the audience in several verses of the Civil Rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." The choir opened the program with their rendition of "Eyes on the Prize."



ROSA PARKS

The STCC Mobilization Against Poverty, Racism and War, a student group, co-sponsored the event, which was moderated by Dr. Arlene Rodriguez, the college's first Latina dean. Clark was introduced to the largely youthful African-American audience by Professor Nicholas Camerota, co-chairperson of Springfield's Rosa Parks Day Organizing Committee.

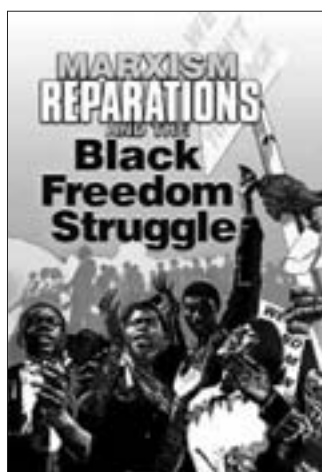
The Dec. 1 event was covered by all three local television stations, and Mr. Clark was interviewed by other media outlets, including WAMC Northeast Public Radio. □

MARXISM, REPARATIONS and the Black Freedom Struggle

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COVER GRAPHIC: SHAU BARRON

La Via Campesina caravan to Cancun

WW interviews participant in climate change protests

Workers World interviewed Che Lopez, organizer with the Southwest Workers Union in San Antonio, Texas, at the Dec. 9-12 Southern Human Rights Organizers Conference in Birmingham, Ala. Lopez had just returned from La Via Campesina caravan and protests at the U.N. Forum on Climate Change (COP 16):

WW: Tell us about the La Via Campesina caravan that protested against the U.N. Forum on Climate Change.

CL: The La Via Campesina caravan started on Nov. 27 from Guadalajara. Six caravans from across Mexico traveled through the country and converged on Cancun on Dec. 3.

At the El Salto de Jalisco forum, farmworkers, youth, working class and Indigenous people testified about big business' contamination of the Santiago River and connected it to the struggle for food sovereignty. All were members of La Via Campesina as well as the National Assembly of Affected Peoples, the National Liberation Movement and the farmworkers union UNORCA. Members of the Mexican electricians union (SME) testified. But SME was smashed by the government when 44,000 workers were laid off.

On Nov. 28 in Morelia, Michoacán, we met with Siglo XVIII, which is composed of unions of teachers, public and electrical

workers. About 4,000 workers marched and rallied at Lázaro Cardenas' monument, then marched to Morelia's plaza, demanding environmental justice, the right to unionize, and against liquidation of the electrical workers' union.

On Nov. 29 we went to Tepuxtepec and rallied with community people. We met with students and organizations at the university in Puebla. That is where Smithfield, the hog industry and other multinational corporations have displaced Indigenous and poor communities, although they have united in protest.

On Dec. 1 we went to Mexico City where caravans from San Luis Potosi and Acaapulco joined us. We did an action in a Toluca market.

We met with petrochemical industry workers in Veracruz and with OilWatch and other organizations.

On Dec. 2 we went to Coatzacoalcos. We stopped at a roadblock where pineapple and sugar workers had taken over the road because the government promised to fix the roads for the farmworker communities.

In Merida another caravan from Oaxaca and Chiapas joined us, and we did an action there. We were hosted by UNORCA in Temozon del Norte, where we rallied. We went to Chichen Itza, a Mayan temple, where we joined in a ceremony

led by Indigenous people.

In Cancun we went to the Via Campesina Camp, where the six caravans united with nearly 2,000 people. We stayed in a tent city. There were meetings and panels with people from different movements and daily actions, including at the World Bank and at Green Spaces where CEOs and industry bosses were meeting.

WW: Did you have an impact on the meeting?

CL: Yes, we had people inside with credentials as well as outside. We commemorated Lee, the Korean farmworker who committed suicide at World Trade Organization meeting in 2003. There was discussion of the Cochabamba Accords that came out of the Rights of Mother Earth Conference held in April in Bolivia and against carbon trading, carbon sinks, and the U.N.'s REDD plan (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation).

The REDD plan includes the right to buy clean air. Negotiators go into clean communities and undeveloped places, and they buy communities' carbon credits. They then force people to move out of their communities. Corporations get the right to pollute more where they already are, surpassing their parts-per-million pollution rate. REDD is promoting dams and flooding and displacing many communities.

WW: Were there people there other than from Mexico and the U.S.?

CL: Yes, there were people resisting with us from Dakar, Copenhagen, China, India, Japan, Korea and from all continents, including Latin America, Africa and Europe, and they represented many struggles. Dec. 7 was the Global Day of Action for the Rights of Mother Earth, Climate Justice and Life in respect for the Cochabamba Accords. We marched for six miles to ground zero where Lee committed suicide.

On Dec. 9 we hosted Evo Morales and other international diplomats at the Via Campesina camp to promote ALBA, the Latin American and Caribbean alternative to free trade.

WW: What was the main message you wanted the COP16 bosses to hear?

CL: That the capitalists, with their neoliberal agenda of globalization and transnational organizations, must stop their ways of making money, polluting and creating global warming. People are rising up and demanding alternative ways of finding energy, food sovereignty, an end to the displacement of Indigenous nations and calling for working class people to unite. So-called "free trade" and borders are creating divisions. There must be connections to the immigrant rights movement and grassroots mobilizing. □

U.S. seeks to influence Sudan referendum

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

A referendum on the future of southern Sudan is scheduled for Jan. 11. This referendum is a key component of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, in which the ruling National Congress Party in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement of the South ended hostilities after 20 years of civil war.

A former British colony, Sudan was divided during the period of imperialist rule when London established provinces that effectively isolated the northern regions from the South.

Since independence in 1956, the country has undergone two civil wars and an armed conflict in the western Darfur region between the SPLM and the NCP. Many, both inside and outside of Sudan, are anticipating the referendum's outcome, which could result in a declaration of separation by the southern regions from the central government in Khartoum.

Within the U.S., it appears that the general thrust of Washington's policy is in favor of secession in the South, further destabilization in Darfur and the removal of the NCP and President Omar Hassan al-Bashir from power. For the last two decades, successive U.S. administrations have taken a hostile position toward Sudan.

History of strained relations with the U.S.

During the military build-up to the Gulf War in 1990, Sudan would not go along with the commencement of a war against Iraq that would continue sanctions, no-fly zones and air strikes until the toppling of the government in Baghdad. Just five years earlier, the Sudanese people had revolted and overthrown a U.S.-backed regime headed by former military leader Jafar al-Numeri.

The present U.S. administration is exercising unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of this African state and the region as a whole.

On Dec. 19, the leaders of Egypt and Libya visited Sudan to hold talks with President Al-Bashir on the impact of the referendum on the future of relations between their respective countries. The visit was also in response to a letter sent by U.S. President Barack Obama outlining Washington's priorities in the region and its focus on the southern referendum and the military situation in Darfur.

White House National Security Council Spokesperson Mike Hammer said the letter expressed that "Sudan is one of the administration's top priorities," and that the letter was a part of "an ongoing diplomatic push to emphasize the importance that Washington places on a peaceful Sudan." (Sudan Tribune, Dec. 19)

Applying a strategy of both regime change and diplomacy, the U.S. appointed a special envoy, Scott Gration, to continue dialogue with Khartoum. When Gration commented recently that the security situation in Darfur had improved 90 percent, the more openly hawkish elements accused the Obama administration of being soft on Al-Bashir.

Author Eric Reeves, who has written a book accusing the Sudan government of genocide in Darfur — an accusation disputed by Khartoum — asked, "Will the U.S. be asked to concede more to Khartoum than it already has?" (Sudan Tribune, Dec. 9)

Reeves attacked former South African President Thabo Mbeki, the African Union-designated mediator for the CPA and the referendum, criticizing U.S. policy for allowing Mbeki to have a prominent role in the process.

According to Reeves, "The African Union has now superseded the U.S., as well as the East African nations of IGAD, and other key partners in the negotiation of the North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) — Norway and the U.K. ... U.S. diplomatic failure has left the door open for the ambitious Mbeki, even as the U.S. is still expected by Khartoum to pro-

vide the biggest carrots." (Sudan Tribune, Dec. 9)

These views, in all likelihood, reflect an internal debate within the administration and U.S. ruling circles, who want to seize the oil fields in Sudan that are already producing more than 500,000 barrels of oil per day.

Eighty percent of the oil concessions are established in partnership with the People's Republic of China, a close ally of the Sudanese government. China has blocked attempts by the U.S.-dominated U.N. Security Council to impose further sanctions on Sudan.

Unity, stability key to Sudan, Africa's future

The division of Sudan into three separate states — which U.S. foreign policy is pursuing — poses grave dangers for the people of North, Central and East Africa. If disagreements related to oil and other mineral resources, border demarcations, defense and economic policy are not mutually resolved, the resumption of civil war in Sudan could take place. Such a situation would provide the rationale for even greater, and perhaps direct, U.S., British and EU intervention in Sudan and neighboring states.

In efforts to ease apprehension and tensions, Sudan Vice-President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha has reiterated that the central government is committed to holding the referendum. According to the Sudanese Media Center, Minister of Internal Cooperation Dr. Gala Al-Degair said, "Taha has affirmed the government commitment to protect the Sudanese citizens regardless of the outcome of the referendum as well guaranteeing their rights of freedom of movement, work, stay and ownership." (Nov. 11)

Although there are significant oil resources that exist in the south of the country, SMC states that President Al-Bashir "has downplayed the consequences of oil on the North in case South Sudan opted for secession through the upcoming ref-

erendum, announcing that oil reserves in the north of Sudan far exceeded those in the south." (Dec. 20) Under the previous Jafar al-Numeri regime, Chevron had been involved in exploration and extraction in the South.

At a recent conference in Khartoum, thousands of children signed a map of the country in support of unity and peace and not for separation. The children reportedly chanted, "Yes for unity, No for separation," "Our strength rests on our unity, our dignity is in our unity," and "No North without South and No South without North." (Sudan News Agency, Dec. 16)

The conference was organized by the Al-Ghad Foundation and was held at the National Museum of Sudan under the theme, "We want to inherit one united Sudan." The final communiqué from the children's conference declared, "We want to guarantee shelter, food and drinkable water to our brothers in south Sudan and we want them to study and play in schools." (Sudan News Agency, Dec. 16)

Nonetheless, other outstanding issues must be resolved during the post-referendum period, such as the status of border areas such as Abyei and whether the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile will ultimately join an independent South or remain linked to the North of the country.

Sudan is the largest geographic nation-state on the African continent. The country has vast oil reserves and tremendous hydroelectric power resources. The division of Sudan and the intensification of military conflict can only enhance the capacity of the imperialist states to set the terms for the future of the region. □

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Solidarity with Gaza on second anniversary of Israeli aggression

By John Catalinotto

The movement in solidarity with the people of Gaza has grown rapidly since the Dec. 27, 2008, bombing and invasion of Gaza that killed 1,450 Palestinians, almost all civilians. The ongoing Israeli blockade of the 1.5 million people living in the small territory and the continued Israeli threats have accelerated this movement's growth. Behind this development is not only the exposure of the crimes of the Israeli occupation regime, but also the courage of Palestinians both in Gaza and the West Bank who keep on struggling against all odds.

Many meetings and other actions of solidarity are taking place in recognition of the two-year anniversary of the Israeli aggression. Such solidarity actions have grown in importance since the Israeli military continues to threaten a new invasion. Israeli planes aggressively attacked

inside Gaza on Dec. 18, 24 and 25. Both the Israeli regime and Washington refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the Hamas government in Gaza, a government that clearly won the last election.

Many young people as well as older activists have organized aid delegations by land caravans and sea flotillas that bring material assistance to Gaza. Currently the Asian aid ship Salam, which started in India, is making its way toward Gaza, tracked by two Israeli warships. The growing understanding of the oppressive character of the Israeli state has also given rise to the struggle for "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" against the regime there.

Among the solidarity actions is one where international human rights activist and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark is leading a delegation that is scheduled to cross into Gaza on Jan. 4. Among those with Clark are co-director

of the International Action Center Sara Flounders. Egyptian and U.S. authorities stopped the delegation for more than 12 hours on the border before allowing it to proceed.

"We are part of an active global movement," Flounders told Workers World, "but even more must be done. It is especially urgent at this time to speak out, write, demonstrate and take all kinds of actions in every possible way in defense of the still-blockaded territory of Gaza. That Israel outrageously continues to bomb and Israeli officials talk openly of a new offensive call for a determined response."

Flounders also called attention to the solidarity activists in Minneapolis, Chicago and other Midwestern cities who the FBI has targeted. "The efforts by the U.S. government and its repressive forces to shut down solidarity with the heroic Palestinian struggle must be met by ever stronger solidarity actions."

Meetings, protests scheduled

For three days the delegation will visit representatives of the Palestinian people in Gaza and will see the situation on the ground first hand.

Delegation members plan to speak at public meetings when they return to the U.S., which should be the second week of January, to help bring the truth about Gaza to the people here.

The first such meeting is scheduled for Jan. 12 at 7 p.m. at 55 W. 17th Street in New York City. This meeting will coincide with the release of the new book "Gaza: Symbol of Resistance."

That meeting comes three days after a protest set for Jan. 9 in New York at 1 p.m. at 33rd Street and 6th Avenue in Manhattan sponsored by Al-Awda NY — The Palestine Right to Return Coalition — and many other organizations, including the IAC. □

FALLUJAH, IRAQ

Evidence shows U.S. weapons cause birth defects

By Gene Clancy

Zainab Abdul Latif moves wearily among her three children, wiping their foreheads and propping them up in their wheelchairs. "Every day, they need intensive care," the 29-year-old Fallujah mother says. Neither her two sons, Amar, 5, and Moustafa, 3, or daughter, Mariam, 6, can walk or use their limbs. They speak two words — "mama, baba" — between them. All are in diapers.

Zainab is one of many faces of Fallujah's battle aftermath. She is overwhelmed by a situation that she has no way to change. "They cannot eat or drink by themselves, and every day I have to take Mariam to the hospital. She is very sensitive to flu and regularly gets diarrhea and other ailments. The doctors have told me they are mentally [impaired] and have nerve paralysis. They say it is congenital. I really can't take care of them like this and I need help." (Guardian, Nov. 13)

Dr. Bassem Allah, the senior obstetrician who is chief custodian of Fallujah's newborns, finds the cases both perplexing and disturbing. During medical school he had to search Iraq for a case study of an infant with a birth defect. "It was almost impossible during the 80s," he told the Guardian. "Now, every day in my clinic or elsewhere in the hospital, there are large

numbers of congenital abnormalities or cases of chronic tumors. Now, believe me, it's like we are treating patients immediately after Hiroshima."

Birth defect rates in Fallujah have become increasingly alarming over the past two years. In the first half of 2010 the number of monthly cases of serious abnormalities rose to unprecedented levels. In Fallujah's general hospital, 15 percent of the 547 babies born in May had a chronic deformity, such as a neural-tube defect — which affects the brain and lower limbs — cardiac or skeletal abnormalities or cancers. (Guardian, Dec. 30) In addition to these conditions, research has shown startling increases in children born with cleft palates, multiple fingers and toes, encephalitis and leukemia.

The Dec. 30 Guardian reports that no other city in Iraq has anywhere near the same levels of reported abnormalities. Fallujah sees at least 11 times as many major defects in newborns as world averages, research shows.

The United States government, of course, denies that the appalling spike in birth defects in Fallujah has anything to do with its illegal and brutal invasion of Iraq and the U.S. assault that led to the virtual destruction of the city in 2004. Washington has quickly pointed out what it calls the lack of comprehensive

scientific studies and claims that the unprecedented rise in birth defects is "anecdotal" and "inconclusive."

As the new year began, however, the callous aplomb of the Pentagon war directors was shaken by a report published in the January issue of the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. The research confirms earlier estimates of the major, unexplained rise in cancers and chronic neural-tube, cardiac and skeletal defects in newborns. The authors found that malformations rose to unprecedented levels in the first half of 2010.

The report says Fallujah has been infected by a chronic environmental contaminant. It focuses on depleted uranium, used in weaponry during two U.S. assaults in 2004, as a possible contaminant. Depleted uranium has long been suspected as a deadly contaminant of battlefield areas going back to the first U.S.-Iraq war. (See "Metal of Dishonor," 1999, 2nd ed.)

The report acknowledges that other battlefield residues may also be responsible for the defects: "Many known war

contaminants have the potential to interfere with normal embryonic and fetal development. The devastating effect of dioxins on the reproductive health of the Vietnamese people is well-known."

The findings come prior to a much-anticipated World Health Organization study of Fallujah's genetic health. They follow two alarming earlier studies, one of which found a distortion in the sex ratio of newborns since the 2003 invasion of Iraq — a 15 percent drop in births of boys.

"We suspect that the population is chronically exposed to an environmental agent," wrote one of the report's authors, environmental toxicologist Mozghan Savabieasfahani. The report identifies metals as potential contaminating agents afflicting the city — especially among pregnant mothers. "Metals are involved in regulating genome stability," notes the report. "As environmental effectors, metals are potentially good candidates to cause birth defects."

"It is important to understand that under normal conditions, the chances of such occurrences are virtually zero," wrote Savabieasfahani. □

Support for Helen Thomas

Continued from page 3

Wayne State is fast increasing its partnerships with the garrison settler state of Israel, at a time when Israel is becoming more of a pariah throughout the world for its brutal apartheid actions against Palestine, attacks on Lebanon and other countries such as Iran.

Over the last year, three delegations of Wayne State officials have visited Israel. The latest included Wayne State provost, Ron Brown, the university's chief academic officer and Medical School dean, Valerie M. Parisi. The first was in 2009 under the auspices of "TechTown," essentially a research and patent bonanza for corporations mostly funded by taxpayers, student tuition dollars and cheap gradu-

ate student labor power.

Partnering with TechTown to prop up and cleanse Israel's actions, as well as to consolidate and develop U.S. capitalist-imperialist plunder, is the Michigan Israel Business Bridge. A Dec. 8, 2009, presentation invited participants to "listen to [TechTown executive director, Randal Charlton's] observations on the country and his thoughts on how TechTown and the surrounding community can partner with Israeli companies, entrepreneurs and scientists." The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice protested the event, demanding Wayne State divest, sanction and boycott Israel instead of "partnering" with the apartheid state. (mecawi.org) □



GAZA: Symbol of Resistance

WW compilation, edited by Joyce Chediak.

The compelling story of how Gazans withstood blockade and bombardment only to stand tall, refusing to give up the right to determine their own lives and to choose their own government; how Gaza's courage inspired a worldwide solidarity movement determined to break the blockade and deliver aid; exposes the forces behind the punishment of Gaza, and how a growing people's media is breaking the mainstream media's information blockade on this event.

Send \$25 per book to Worldview Forum, 55 W. 17th St., 5th floor, NY, NY 10011. Include your name and address.

All out Jan. 25 to stop FBI repression

Workers World newspaper places its full support behind the proposal from the Committee to Stop FBI Repression for everyone who can to join the day of action set for Tuesday, Jan. 25. The challenge is serious. Every movement activist and every class-conscious worker should be ready to take part — if they are serious about defending the right to show solidarity with those around the world who oppose imperialism.

In December the FBI delivered nine new subpoenas to anti-war and solidarity activists in Chicago. Since September the state has served 23 subpoenas. The new subpoenas order the nine people to appear at a grand jury in Chicago on Jan. 25.

The Stop FBI committee calls for solidarity protests around the country: “Hundreds of organizations and thousands of people will be protesting at federal buildings, FBI offices, and other appropriate places, showing solidarity with the nine newly subpoenaed activists and with all the activists whose homes were raided by the FBI.” (StopFBI.net)

The subpoenaed activists have earned the entire movement’s support as they refuse to cooperate with the grand jury’s vicious probe. Last October all 14 activists from Chicago, Minneapolis and Michigan decided not to participate in the secret grand jury proceedings. Each signed a letter invoking their Fifth Amendment rights. Three of them, all women from Minneapolis — Tracy Molm, Anh Pham and Sarah Martin — now face reactivated subpoenas. But they are all still standing strong, despite the risk that the jury can jail them — even if they are not convicted of any crime, but simply for refusing to testify.

The repressive capitalist state apparatus has also targeted others besides these political activists.

Ahlam Mohsen and Max Kantar, two young anti-war activists from Michigan, were indicted on criminal felony charges on Dec. 30 for “pieing” Sen. Carl Levin. Free speech, the right to protest and common sense have gone out the window. The federal government is threatening the pair with eight years in prison for their anti-imperialist solidarity action. Mohsen and Kantar deserve the support of all anti-war and progressive forces.

Since 9/11, the state apparatus has stepped up repression of the entire Muslim community in the United States. This includes not only immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries and Muslims from the Caribbean, but their descendants and African-American Muslims. Many people have been framed up by FBI and police informants who set up an entire alleged “terrorist” conspiracy. It is 21st-century Cointelpro. They lure people with money, lies and other means in order to entrap them.

Among those unfairly convicted and sentenced are the Fort Dix 5 and the Newburgh 4. For a full list of the hundreds who have been victimized, see projectsalam.org. The victims of this ethnic targeting deserve the full support of the movement. So too do dedicated attorneys like Lynne Stewart, who in December was sent to a prison in Texas to serve her unjust sentence.

The next step in fighting this wave of injustice is to make Jan. 25 a day of struggle and stand with those who refuse to submit to grand jury intimidation.

As the Committee to Stop FBI Repression writes:

“Defend free speech! Defend the right to organize! Opposing war and occupation is not a crime! ... Tell Federal D.A. Patrick Fitzgerald to call off the grand jury!” □

Mumia Abu-Jamal from death row on

‘War against ourselves’

Taken from a Nov. 24 audio column at www.prisonradio.org. For up-to-date information on Mumia’s case, go to www.millions4mumia.org.

As the 20th year passes since the West waged war against the late Saddam Hussein, and the state of war slips into greater violence in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is another war being waged today, one which gets little coverage on TV, radio and/or newspapers.

That war has its own psychic and physical carnages, its losses, its losers — and, yes, its winners.

The losers have been forced out of their homes. They have been forced out of their jobs. Some have been driven to the mouth of madness and beyond. And, yes, there has been death; but again this has been hidden from published view.

That’s because this war has been essentially a class war — a war against the poor and working classes on behalf of the ruling classes and the financial industry.

The weapons of this war have been joblessness, foreclosures and tightening of credit lines. And while money has been withdrawn from the purses and pockets of millions, public monies have been used to top off the coffers of the banks, but also to fund mad wars abroad — like the almost \$3 trillion to fund the forays into Iraq and Afghanistan, often to undergird the corrupt and narco-kleptocratic governments in power.

It bears repeating: Trillions in public monies are being spent to fund utterly unnecessary wars abroad, and hundreds of billions are doled out to private banks and financial institutions, while joblessness, homelessness and hopelessness swell to truly epidemic levels — not seen for generations.

Schools are crumbling, when they function, which is rarely; libraries are closed; public services dry up like rain on summer bricks. And prisons burst at the seams.

Wars are always against both sides — the victors and the losers. And in the age of the military-industrial complex, war



becomes the fuel of wealth for a narrow ribbon of businesses.

But it has costs far beyond the beflagged caskets, the shattered limbs, the howling winds blowing through damaged minds, and something so banal as body counts of any imagined “enemy.”

It brings about the very woes of the instant recession: joblessness, foreclosures, homelessness and, yes, hopelessness. It is a war against ourselves. □

‘Golden rule’ fleeces workers

Continued from page 5

board. There are no representatives that guarantee that the rights of African-American, Latino/a or other oppressed communities are respected.

GASB rules are rarely enforced by any state law or regulation, but rather by auditors. A bad audit lowers bond ratings for municipalities. A bad bond rating makes credit more expensive.

The new accounting rules make the cuts seem reasonable and cast in stone, but they are not. And accounting rules don’t erase the right of every person to a decent and good-paying job or income, health care, education and a home. □

Tunisians protest unemployment, repression

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

A series of demonstrations struck Tunisia beginning Dec. 17. A 26-year-old university graduate, Mohamed Bouazizi of Sidi Bouzid in the southern province, who reportedly set himself on fire to protest the dire economic circumstances in the country, served as a catalyst for the recent outbreak of protests that have hit the capital and several other cities throughout the country.

A former French colony, Tunisia has been considered a close ally of Western capitalist states. Developments since mid-December have highlighted the impact of the world economic crisis on the North African nation of 10.4 million people.

Unemployment has been cited as hovering above 30 percent among the youth in a nation where many people are literate and Western-oriented in their values and social outlook. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has been in office since 1987. Serving his fifth term, with the possibility of standing for reelection, he recently fired several key governmental officials in a cabinet reshuffle due to political fallout after the nationwide demonstrations.

Although investments in the national economy have resulted in a high literacy

rate, an increase in health care facilities, and access to potable water, electricity and transportation, the government has not been able to create enough jobs to absorb the growing labor market. Adding to the country’s social problems is the fact that growth has been concentrated in Tunisia’s north and eastern coastline regions.

Demonstrations began peacefully on Dec. 18, but were met with police repression that led to efforts to occupy the government headquarters in Sidi Bouzid. Youth threw stones at the building and police vehicles, allegedly injuring several cops. (Magharebia.com, Dec. 30)

Youth unemployment is a major source of discontent in Tunisia. The Magharebia.com website reported: “According to official statistics, the number of jobless people in the country is about 500,000.”

This same source continues: “The figures also show that a breakthrough in the situation is not likely to take place soon as the number of university graduates rose from 40,000 to about 80,000 during the last five years. To tackle the problem, the state must create 425,000 jobs in the next five years and reduce the unemployment rate by 1.5 percent to ensure at least one source of income for each household.”

Background to the current crisis

Tunisia is the site of the ancient city-state of Carthage. Its location placed it historically near strategic shipping routes. France’s direct colonial rule ended in 1956, and the country was headed by Habib Bourguiba until 1987. President Ben Ali took control and has been the leader for the last 23 years.

Western imperialist states consider Tunisia to be one of the most stable countries in the North African and Middle Eastern region. The country is a producer and exporter of olive oil and an important tourist destination for Europeans.

During the 1990s the government attempted to establish controls over the working class movement. There is one large federation, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), which has not engaged in any significant militant activity over the last two decades.

However, in the current period, growing numbers of organizers in the trade union movement have sought to take a more independent stance by initiating demands for wage increases and better working conditions. In 2008 as well as in early 2010, union activists were successful in staging protests against conditions in the Gafsa mining basin.

The December protests followed a pat-

tern similar to those in 2008 and 2010. Education unions, which have been some of the most militant and outspoken within the UGTT, took the lead by organizing students and the unemployed to demand job creation and an end to official corruption. (mideast.foreignpolicy.com, Jan. 2)

Despite Washington’s regular criticism of governments that it has targeted for regime-change in Africa for their purported lack of democratic institutions, it has expressed only satisfaction with authoritarian rule in Tunisia.

In an article by Intissar Khreeji published Jan. 3 by Al Jazeera, the author states: “U.S. and European governments have consistently privileged one limb of the ‘stability-democracy’ equation, on the grounds that the repression of entire populations in the Arab world is but a small price to pay for the stable conditions necessary for us to benefit from the vast economic opportunities in the region and the counter-terrorism assistance they can give us.” □

Mumia Abu-Jamal’s book,
JAILHOUSE LAWYERS:
 Prisoners defending
 prisoners v. the U.S.A.
 Available at Leftbooks.com

Behind calls for intervention in Ivory Coast

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

A dispute over a recent election in the West African state of Ivory Coast has prompted calls by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for President Laurent Gbagbo to step down. According to the U.N. head, the electoral commission has determined that opposition leader Alassane Ouattara won the election.

This echoes the position of the U.S. State Department, which says that Gbagbo must go and that Ouattara is the legitimate leader. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is reported to have threatened military intervention in Ivory Coast if Gbagbo does not leave office.

These pronouncements and other actions, such as leveling sanctions against the Gbagbo administration by freezing credit and bank accounts through the international banking system, have emboldened Ouattara's supporters inside the country. In December a group of Ouattara supporters attempted to seize control of the television station in Abidjan, but were repelled by government forces, leaving at least 18 people dead.

Why have the U.N. and the Obama administration taken such an interest in developments in Ivory Coast, a former French colony of 30 million people who have been through civil unrest, a military coup and a civil war for at least a decade? Why should Ivory Coast be viewed as a test case for Africa, the African Union and ECOWAS, when similar developments in Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Madagascar and Kenya were not?

These economic sanctions, public vilifications and threats of invasion are taking place without any serious efforts by the U.S. and France to reach a diplomatic solution. Ivory Coast cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall U.S. and French policy of increasing military involvement in West Africa under the guise of the so-called "war on terrorism."

Background of Ivorian crisis & breakdown of neocolonial rule

During the period of French colonialism as well as the first three decades of its independence (1960-1990), Ivory Coast was promoted as a model of imperialist rule. Even under colonialism, when the Rassemblement Democratique Africain and its trade union counterpart, the Union Generale des Travailleurs de l'Afrique Noire, engaged in militant, mass organizing, France in 1958 offered its colonies in West Africa to either formally accept a subservient political role under France or strike out independently.

Only Guinea, under the leadership of the Democratic Party of Guinea headed by Ahmed Sekou Toure, voted overwhelmingly to become an independent state. Guinea would pay a severe price for its challenge to French imperialism, while Ivory Coast under Felix Houphouët-Boigny was rewarded with capitalist investment and tourism.

Ivory Coast continued as an outpost of France, albeit with a facade of independence. French author Guy de Lusignan in his book "French-Speaking Africa Since Independence" gushed: "The Ivory Coast could not be what it is today without the presence of a large body of Frenchmen, both in administration and in private business. [President] Houphouët-Boigny and his team have been policymakers of undeniable worth."

The author continued, "They staked their all on big business and foreign capital." By 1964 Ivory Coast "was the largest

African producer of bananas (114,000 tons), of raw timber (1,450,000 tons), and of coffee (261,000 tons), making it the third largest producer of coffee in the world; in that year its output of cocoa reached 98,000 tons, making it the fourth largest cocoa producer in the world."

After a sharp decline in cocoa prices and other agricultural commodities in Western markets, Ivory Coast shifted to a more diversified economy. By the late 1960s, industrial production in the Ivory Coast expanded with the establishment of light electrical plants, chemicals and oils, timber, textiles, building materials and shoe factories.

This state of affairs served as an ideological challenge to revolutionary armed struggles in other parts of Africa, as well as the socialist experiments in Guinea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique, Congo-Brazzaville and other states. The Western imperialists maintained that capitalism was the best model for development in post-independence Africa.

However, during the early 1990s, severe problems within the French currency zone had a tremendous impact on Ivory Coast, as well as other African states aligned with Paris. Unrest, which was thought to have been crushed in the early 1960s, arose again.

By the end of the 1990s, a coup had brought the military to power and fomented north-south political division of the country. An election in 2000 led to the presidency of Gbagbo, while Ouattara, a northerner, was disqualified over claims that he was not of Ivorian origin.

Increasing regional divisions in Ivory Coast had been a factor during the mid-1990s, when the presence of a large immigrant population as well as the country's national diversity were deliberately politicized. Such divisions helped create the conditions for civil war, which erupted in 2002.

The civil war further exacerbated national divisions. France, which deployed its military forces during the war, was accused of supporting both sides in the conflict. In 1995, under Gbagbo, Ivorian military forces bombed areas in the rebel stronghold city of Bouake and killed nine French troops. France claimed the attacks were deliberate, and has continued to hold the deaths of its soldiers against Gbagbo.

ECOWAS forces intervened in the Ivory Coast in 2002, but were later replaced by forces under U.N. control, which still remain. They claim their role is strictly to monitor the movement of military units of both the central government and rebel troops in the north. The threat of resumed military conflict could lead to greater involvement in the internal affairs of Ivory Coast by France and the U.S.

Military conflict & role of imperialism

The role of the U.S. in Africa has been growing, along with its reliance on oil from the continent and the increasing presence of Pentagon forces in the region. In West Africa the U.S. has developed partnerships with Mali, Ghana, Morocco and other states in the so-called "war on terrorism."

Washington, stung by revelations related to the release of classified military documents and diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks, has taken up the Ivorian crisis as a major focus of its foreign policy in Africa. This conflict provides an avenue for the State Department to re-emerge as a "legitimate force" in purportedly resolving an African political crisis.

WikiLeaks diplomatic cables revealed that through successive U.S. administrations, including that of President Barack Obama, the same imperialist aims and

objectives have determined the character of its foreign policy toward Africa. Obama has increased funding for U.S. military operations there, and is seeking to influence developments in Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Somalia.

Therefore, U.S. imperialism is motivated to further penetrate the economic, political and military affairs of the continent. The threatened intervention by ECOWAS would inevitably translate into large-scale deployments of both Nigerian and Ghanaian troops to Ivory Coast.

Such an intervention would require logistical support from the U.S. and France. This would place the imperialists in a position to more closely monitor events in Nigeria, which has its own political problems of regional and intra-religious conflict, as well as Mali, Sudan and other states.

Nigeria, which has undergone an escalation in violence in its northern states as well as in the oil-rich Niger Delta, is under severe U.S. pressure. Just recently the U.S. forced the government to abandon a civil suit against pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and a criminal complaint against former Vice President Dick Cheney and his firm of Halliburton/KBR.

Anti-war and peace movements inside the United States must oppose any U.S. effort to utilize the Ivorian crisis as an excuse to indirectly invade through funding, coordinating or transporting ECOWAS troops there. Such a course of action could spark even more bloodshed in West Africa.

The mediation efforts of former South African President Thabo Mbeki provide some hope of resurrecting a political solution to the crisis. Why should Gbagbo be given an ultimatum while other states in the region have been able to work out internal problems through political intervention and negotiations?

The U.S. military presence, known as Africom, has over the last year conducted large-scale maneuvers on the continent.

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los días, incluyendo una frente al Banco Mundial y en Espacios Verdes donde se reunían los ejecutivos y jefes corporativos.

WW-MO: ¿Tuvieron un impacto en la reunión?

CL: Sí, teníamos gente adentro con credenciales y también afuera. Hicimos un homenaje a Lee, el trabajador agrícola coreano que se suicidó durante la reunión de la Organización Mundial del Comercio en 2003. Hubo discusión de los acuerdos de Cochabamba que resultaron de la Conferencia por los Derechos de la Madre Tierra que tuvo lugar en Bolivia en abril y contra el comercio de carbón, los sumideros de carbono, y el plan de la ONU de Emisiones Reducidas de Deforestación y Degradación de los Bosques (REDD).

Este plan REDD incluye el derecho de comprar aire limpio. Los negociadores entran en comunidades limpias y lugares no desarrollados y compran los créditos de carbono de las comunidades. Entonces hacen que la gente se salga de sus comunidades. Las corporaciones entonces tienen el derecho a contaminar más donde ya están, excediendo su tasa de contaminación de partes-por-millón. REDD está promoviendo diques e inundaciones y está desplazando a muchas comunidades.

WW-MO: ¿Había gente de otros países aparte de México y Estados Unidos?

War games have been conducted in West Africa under the guise of enhancing the security capacity of African states.

In the Horn of Africa, U.S. imperialism is propping up the fragile and corrupt Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu. Off the coast of Somalia, the U.S. and the European Union are leading flotillas of warships under the guise of fighting piracy.

Both the U.S. and France have military bases in the nation of Djibouti. The U.S. presence in the region, WikiLeaks has confirmed, is at the root of one of the worse humanitarian crises in the current period. In Somalia more than 200,000 people have died in the last four years and more than 2 million have been displaced as a direct result of intervention by both the Bush and Obama administrations.

There is fundamentally no difference in U.S. imperialist policy under Obama. The current administration has not only escalated U.S. military involvement in Africa but has expanded the war in Afghanistan and spread it into neighboring Pakistan.

It has shielded members of the Bush administration from civil suits and criminal prosecution by both domestic and international plaintiffs who have fallen victim to U.S. war policy, as well as to corporate and official state corruption.

It is now targeting anti-war organizations at home with illegal searches and seizures as well as subpoenas to appear before federal grand juries under threat of prosecution and long-term prison sentences. The only "crimes" carried out by these activists is to have spoken out against U.S. foreign policy in Colombia and Palestine.

Anti-war and peace activists must look beyond Washington's claims that it is concerned about "good governance" in Africa when prominent U.S. officials commit crimes and are then shielded from civil liability and criminal prosecution. □

CL: Sí, había gente resistiendo con nosotros/as de Dakar, Copenhague, China, India, Japón, Corea, y de todos continentes, incluyendo Latinoamérica, África y Europa, y representaban muchas luchas. El 7 de diciembre era el Día Global de Acción por los Derechos de la Madre Tierra, la Justicia Climática y la Vida respecto a los Acuerdos de Cochabamba. Marchamos seis millas hasta el lugar donde se suicidó Lee.

El 9 de diciembre recibimos a Evo Morales y otros diplomáticos en el Campamento Vía Campesina para promover la ALBA, la alternativa latinoamericana y caribeña a los tratados de libre comercio.

WW-MO: ¿Cuál fue el mensaje más importante que querían que escucharan los jefes corporativos?

CL: Que los capitalistas, con su agenda neoliberal de globalización y organizaciones transnacionales, deben detener su manera de ganar dinero, de contaminar el medioambiente y crear el calentamiento global. Los pueblos están levantándose y demandando medidas alternativas para crear energía, soberanía alimentaria, terminar con el desplazamiento de pueblos indígenas, y llamando a la gente de la clase trabajadora a unirse. El llamado "libre comercio" y las fronteras están creado divisiones. Tiene que haber una conexión con el movimiento por los derechos de inmigrantes y la movilización popular. □

EEUU trata de influir sobre referéndum de Sudán

Por **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Editor de Pan-African News Wire

Un referéndum sobre el futuro del sur de Sudán está programado para el 11 de enero. Este referéndum es un componente clave del Acuerdo General de Paz (AGP) del 2005, en el que el oficialista Partido Congreso Nacional (PCN) en Jartum y el Movimiento Popular de Liberación de Sudán (MPLS) terminaron las hostilidades después de 20 años de guerra civil.

Habiendo sido colonia británica, Sudán fue dividido durante el período de la dominación imperialista cuando Londres estableció provincias que efectivamente aislaban las regiones del norte de las del sur.

Desde su independencia en 1956, el país ha sufrido dos guerras civiles y un conflicto armado en la región occidental del Darfur entre el MPLS y el PCN. Muchos, tanto dentro como fuera de Sudán, están anticipando el resultado del referéndum que podría terminar en la declaración de una separación de las regiones del sur del gobierno central en Jartum.

Dentro de los EEUU, parece que la orientación general de la política de Washington está a favor de la secesión en el sur, una mayor desestabilización en Darfur y la eliminación del PCN y el presidente Omar Hassan al Bashir del poder. En las dos últimas décadas, las sucesivas administraciones estadounidenses han adoptado una posición hostil hacia Sudán.

Historial de las tensas relaciones con EEUU

Durante la acumulación de las fuerzas militares en el comienzo de la Guerra del Golfo en 1990, Sudán no estuvo de acuerdo con el inicio de una guerra contra Irak que continuara con sanciones, zonas de exclusión aérea y ataques aéreos para lograr el derrocamiento del gobierno en Bagdad. Sólo cinco años antes, el pueblo sudanés se había rebelado, derrocando a un régimen respaldado por Estados Unidos encabezado por el ex líder militar Jafar al-Numeri.

La actual administración estadounidense está ejerciendo una injerencia in-

justificada en los asuntos internos de este país africano y en la región en su conjunto.

El 19 de diciembre, los líderes de Egipto y Libia visitaron Sudán para mantener conversaciones con el Presidente Al-Bashir sobre el impacto del referéndum en el futuro de las relaciones entre sus respectivos países. La visita fue también en respuesta a una carta enviada por el presidente estadounidense Barack Obama delineando las prioridades de Washington en la región y su enfoque en el referéndum del sur y la situación militar en Darfur.

El portavoz del Consejo de Seguridad Nacional de la Casa Blanca Mike Hammer, dijo que la carta expresa que “Sudán es una de las prioridades de la administración” y que la carta era parte de “un continuado impulso diplomático para destacar la importancia que tiene para Washington un Sudán pacífico”. (Sudan Tribune, 19 de diciembre)

Aplicando una estrategia conjunta que incluye el cambio de régimen tanto como el uso de la diplomacia, EEUU nombró a un enviado especial, Scott Gration, para continuar el diálogo con Jartum. Cuando Gration comentó recientemente que la situación de seguridad en Darfur ha mejorado un 90 por ciento, los elementos más abiertamente belicistas acusaron al gobierno de Obama de ser blando con Al-Bashir.

El autor Eric Reeves, quien ha escrito un libro acusando al gobierno de Sudán de genocidio en Darfur — acusación disputada por Jartum — preguntó “¿Se le pedirá a EEUU que conceda más a Jartum de lo que ya ha concedido?” (Sudan Tribune, 9 de diciembre)

Reeves atacó al ex presidente sudanés Thabo Mbeki, mediador designado por la Unión Africana para el AGP y el referéndum, criticando la política de EEUU por permitir que Mbeki tuviera un papel destacado en el proceso.

Según Reeves, “La Unión Africana ha superado a EEUU, así como a las naciones del África Oriental de la Autoridad Intergubernamental sobre el Desarrollo (AIGD), y a otros socios claves en la negociación del AGP Norte - Sur - como

Noruega y Reino Unido ... , la falla de la diplomacia estadounidense ha dejado la puerta abierta para el ambicioso Mbeki, aún cuando Jartum espera que EEUU proporcione el mayor incentivo”. (Sudan Tribune, 9 de diciembre)

Estos puntos de vista con toda probabilidad reflejan un debate interno dentro de la administración estadounidense y los círculos gobernantes que quieren apoderarse de los yacimientos de petróleo en Sudán, los cuales ya están produciendo más de 500.000 barriles de petróleo al día.

El 80 por ciento de las concesiones petroleras se han establecido en colaboración con la República Popular de China, un aliado cercano del gobierno sudanés. China ha bloqueado los intentos del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, dominado por Estados Unidos, de imponer nuevas sanciones a Sudán.

La unidad, clave de la estabilidad en Sudán, el futuro de África

La división de Sudán en tres estados separados — que la política exterior de EEUU está llevando a cabo — plantea graves peligros para los pueblos del Norte, Centro y Este de África. Si los desacuerdos relacionados con el petróleo y otros recursos minerales, la demarcación de fronteras, la defensa y la política económica no son mutuamente resueltos, se podría reanudar la guerra civil en Sudán. Esta situación podría ofrecer la justificación para una mayor y quizás hasta directa, intervención por EEUU, Gran Bretaña y la UE en Sudán y los estados vecinos.

Para tratar de aliviar la aprensión y las tensiones, el Vicepresidente de Sudán Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, ha reiterado que el gobierno central se ha comprometido a la celebración del referéndum. Según el Centro Sudanés de Medios, el Ministro de Cooperación Interna Dr. Gala Al-Degair dijo, “Taha ha afirmado el compromiso del gobierno para proteger a los ciudadanos sudaneses, independientemente del resultado del referéndum y garantizar sus derechos a la libertad de movimiento, trabajo, estancia y propiedad”. (11 de noviembre)

Aunque existen importantes recursos de petróleo en el sur del país, el Centro Sudanés de Medios declara que el Presidente Al-Bashir “le ha restado importancia a las consecuencias del petróleo en el norte, en caso de que el sur de Sudán opte por la secesión a través del próximo referéndum, anunciando que las reservas de petróleo en el norte de Sudán son mucho más que las del sur”. (20 de diciembre)

Bajo el anterior régimen de Jafar al-Numeri, la Chevron había estado involucrada en la exploración y extracción en el sur.

En una reciente conferencia en Jartum, miles de niños/as firmaron un mapa del país apoyando la unidad y la paz y rechazando la separación. Se reporta que los/as niños/as gritaron, “Sí a la unidad, no a la separación”, “Nuestra fuerza se basa en nuestra unidad, nuestra dignidad está en nuestra unidad”, y “No un norte sin el sur y no un sur sin el norte”. (Agencia de Noticias de Sudán, 16 de diciembre)

La conferencia fue organizada por la Fundación Al-Ghad y tuvo lugar en el Museo Nacional de Sudán bajo el lema “Queremos heredar un Sudán unido”. El último comunicado de la conferencia de niños/as declaró, “Queremos garantizar vivienda, comida y agua potable para nuestros hermanos en el sur de Sudán y queremos que estudien y jueguen en las escuelas”. (Agencia de Noticias de Sudán, 16 de diciembre)

No obstante, hay otras cuestiones importantes que deben ser resueltas durante el período pos-referéndum, como el estado de las regiones fronterizas tales como Abyei y si las Montañas Nuba y el Nilo Azul últimamente se unirán a un sur independiente o se quedarán ligadas al norte del país.

Sudán es geográficamente el estado-nación más grande en el continente de África. El país tiene enormes reservas de petróleo y tremendos recursos de energía hidroeléctrica. La división del Sudán y la intensificación del conflicto militar lo único que podrán hacer es acrecentar la capacidad de los estados imperialistas a decidir el futuro de la región. □

Caravana de La Vía Campesina a Cancún

WW-MO entrevista a participante de las protestas sobre el cambio climático

Por **Dante Strobino**

Workers World - Mundo Obrero entrevistó a Ché López, organizador de la Unión de Trabajadores/as del Suroeste de San Antonio, Texas, en la Conferencia de Organizadores/as por los Derechos Humanos del Sur, en Birmingham, Alabama del 9 a 12 de diciembre. López acababa de participar en la caravana de La Vía Campesina y en manifestaciones en el Foro de la ONU sobre el Cambio Climático.

WW-MO: Cuéntenos sobre la caravana de La Vía Campesina que protestó contra el Foro de la ONU sobre el Cambio Climático.

CL: La caravana de La Vía Campesina empezó el 27 de noviembre desde Guadalajara. Seis caravanas de todas partes de México convergieron en Cancún el 3 de diciembre.

En el foro de El Salto de Jalisco, campesinos/as, jóvenes, trabajadores/as e indígenas testificaron sobre la contaminación del Río Santiago por las corporaciones y lo conectaron a la lucha por la soberanía alimentaria. Todos/as eran miembros/as de La Vía Campesina al igual que de la Asamblea Nacional de Pueblos Afectados, el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional y el sindicato de trabajadores/as agrícolas UNORCA. Testificaron miembros/as del Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas. El SME fue duramente golpeado por el gobierno cuando despidió a 44.000 trabajadores/as.

El 28 de noviembre en Morelia, Michoacán, nos reunimos con Siglo XVIII, el cual está compuesto por sindicatos de maestros/as, trabajadores/as públicos/as y electricistas. Cerca de 4.000 trabajadores/as marcharon y se manifestaron ante el monumento a Lázaro Cárdenas,

marchando luego a la plaza de Morelia, exigiendo justicia ambiental, derecho a organizarse en sindicatos y en contra de la destrucción del SME.

El 29 de noviembre fuimos a Tepic y participamos en una manifestación con la comunidad. Nos encontramos con estudiantes y varias organizaciones en la universidad de Puebla. Allí es donde Smithfield, la industria del cerdo y otras corporaciones multinacionales han desplazado a las comunidades pobres e indígenas, aunque éstas se han unido en protesta.

El primero de diciembre fuimos a Ciudad de México donde nos unimos a las caravanas de San Luis de Potosí y Acaapulco. Montamos una acción en el mercado de Toluca.

Nos reunimos con trabajadores/as de la industria petroquímica en Veracruz y con miembros de OilWatch y otras organizaciones.

El 2 de diciembre fuimos a Coatzacoalcas. Nos detuvimos en un retén donde trabajadores/as de la piña y el azúcar habían hecho una toma de carretera porque el gobierno había prometido arreglar los caminos para las comunidades de trabajadores/as agrícolas.

En Mérida una caravana de Oaxaca y Chiapas se nos unió y tuvimos una acción allí. UNORCA fue nuestro anfitrión en Temozón del Norte donde celebramos una asamblea. Fuimos a Chichen Itzá, un templo maya, donde asistimos a una ceremonia dirigida por gente indígena.

En Cancún fuimos al Campamento de La Vía Campesina donde se unieron las seis caravanas con casi 2.000 personas. Nos quedamos en un campamento de carpas. Había reuniones y paneles con gente de varios movimientos y acciones todos

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