

A SOCIALIST ACTION

**Red-baiting
against the antiwar
movement**

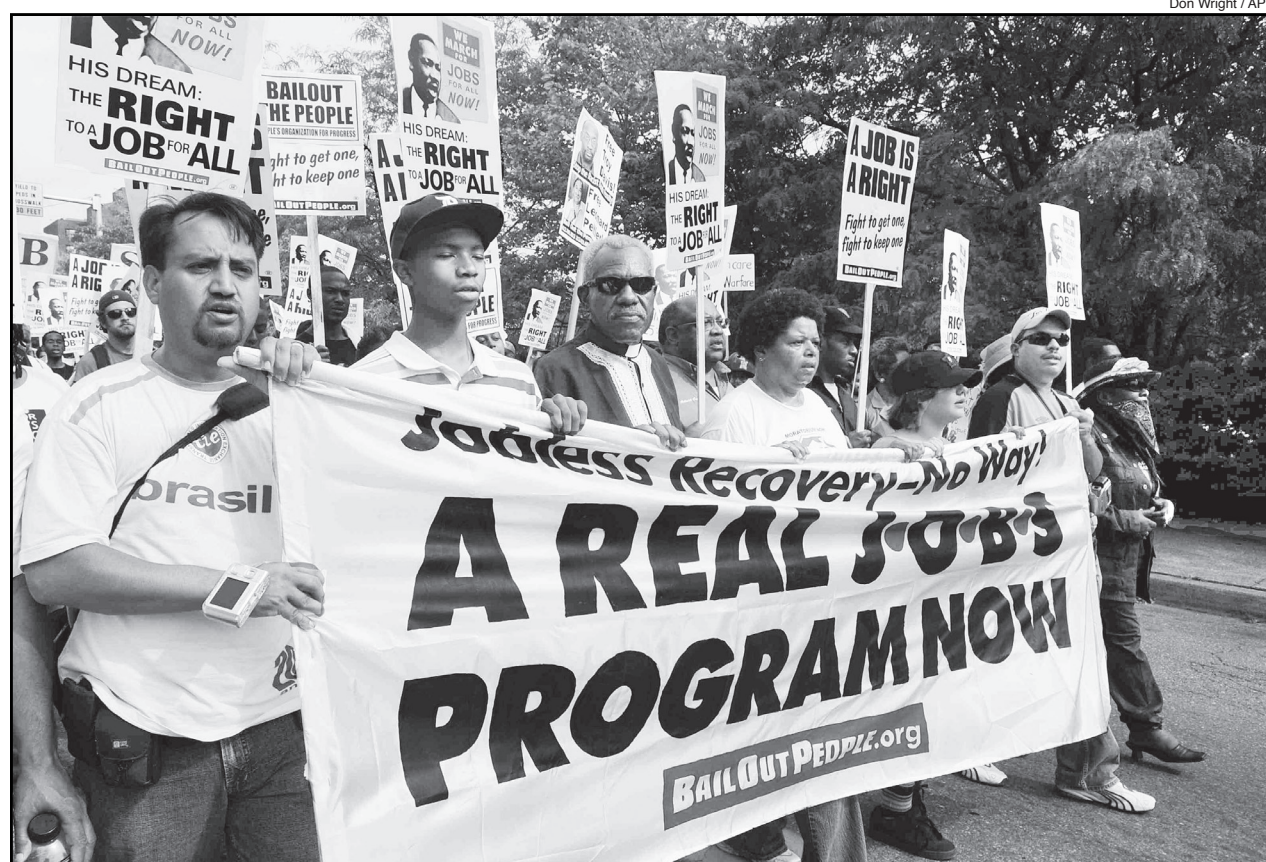
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As U.S. moves to send more troops to Afghanistan Join the Oct. 17 protests!



Don Wright / AP



Mark Ralston / AFP / Getty Images

UC students walk out
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Oct. 17 antiwar actions set in 30 U.S. cities

By STEPHEN REID

Antiwar mobilizations in some 30 cities across the country are set for Oct. 17. The October actions were initiated by the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations at a broad national conference last July.

The demonstrations will mark the date of the onset of the U.S. wars against Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the 40th anniversary of the historic 1969 Moratorium, which saw millions across the country engage in massive actions and work stoppages to oppose the U.S. war against the Vietnamese people.

According to the National Assembly's secretary, Jerry Gordon, more than 200 U.S. organizations and prominent individuals have endorsed the call for united Oct. 17 antiwar protests. National Assembly Oct. 17 Coordinator Alan Dale reports that the planned protests in several cities show promise of becoming sizable mobilizations—based on the renewed vigor and unity stemming from the now majority opposition to both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

A Sept. 25 Op/Ed piece in the *New York Times* by Bob Herbert captures the ruling-class dilemma following the grim assessment of U.S. prospects in Afghanistan. A combination of the exposure of massive election fraud orchestrated by the U.S.-installed Hamid Karzai regime, the deepening of Afghan resistance to the U.S. occupation, and the resultant increase in U.S. troop fatalities has given the word "quagmire" new meaning.

Herbert writes: "The public has not been prepared for a renewed big-time, long-haul effort in Afghanistan. And if American casualties increase substantially, support for the war will diminish that much more. There is very little tolerance in the U.S. for the reality of war, which is

(Above) Labor protest on Sept. 20 during the G-20 conference in Pittsburgh. On Sept. 25, close to 10,000 joined a protest march despite police repression.

why the images in the media are so sanitized...

"This disconnect between what the public is expecting, or willing to accept, regarding the war in Afghanistan, and what the White House and the Pentagon are in fact planning is vast. Americans want their politicians to concentrate on the economy here at home. After the long, sad experience in Iraq, and the worst economic shock since the Depression, they are not up for extended combat and endless nation-building in Afghanistan."

Similarly, "More Troops or 'Mission Failure'" is the headline of a Sept. 21 *Washington Post* article by staff writer Bob Woodward, who comments, "The top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan [General Stanley McChrystal] warns in an urgent, confidential assessment of the war that he needs more forces within the next year and bluntly states that without them, the eight-year conflict 'will likely result in failure,' according to a copy of the 66-page document obtained by *The Washington Post*."

General McChrystal's proposal to send an additional 45,000 troops to Afghanistan appears to an important section of the U.S. class to be throwing good money after bad. Even Obama has publicly queried, while the debate is in progress, whether there might be other reports out there with different conclusions. The momentary fissure among the warmakers has opened new opportunities to reach a layer of working people who have been long opposed to the U.S. wars but who believed that Obama's election would bring them to a reasonably rapid close.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the newly formed October 17 Antiwar Coalition now includes local chapters of all five of the nation's national antiwar coalitions and several other groups. The coalition is planning a major march and rally beginning at the city's United Nations Plaza in the heart of the city.

Organizations joining in the Bay Area effort include

the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations, the ANSWER Coalition, United for Peace and Justice, World Can't Wait, and the International Action Center. The American Friends Service Committee, the San Francisco Labor Council, Labor for Peace and Justice, Peace and Freedom Party, the Iraq Moratorium, and a number of socialist organizations are also active participants.

Marilyn Levin, a leader of New England United (NEU), reports that the Boston mobilization on Oct. 17 will include participation from antiwar organizations from six New England states. The Boston action is sponsored by a broad range of organizations that have previously been at odds. National Assembly and United for Justice for Peace activists are playing leading roles in this effort.

In Philadelphia, over two dozen antiwar and social justice organizations from the city and the surrounding region have endorsed an Oct. 17 march through the downtown shopping district to Independence Mall. Similar united efforts are underway for Oct. 17 in Albany, N.Y., Minneapolis, and New York City.

The National Assembly-initiated call recommends that the Oct. 17 actions focus on the following demands: U.S. out of Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan now! End U.S. support to the Israeli occupation of Palestine! End the siege of Gaza! No to U.S. wars and threats of war against Iran and North Korea! Money for human needs, not war! Self-determination for all oppressed nations and peoples! End war crimes, including torture! Prosecute the war criminals!

Several of the organizing coalitions have adopted all of the above demands and expanded the call to include and focus on, "Money for jobs, pensions, education, health care and housing—not wars and corporate bailouts!"

The National Assembly also mobilized support for an Out Now! contingent in the Sept. 25 Pittsburgh protest against the meeting of the G-20 Global Summit nations. As many as 10,000 activists joined this effort, sponsored

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UC students walk out

BERKELEY, Calif.—On Sept. 24, the first day of classes, University of California students and faculty across the state walked out against fee hikes, cutbacks in services and classes, increased class sizes, and faculty and staff layoffs, furloughs, and pay cuts.

Out of the 10 UC campuses statewide, Berkeley had the largest walkout by far; some 5000 students (out of a school enrollment of 35,000) joined a rally in Sproul Plaza that day. Observers said it was the largest protest gathering at the university since the Vietnam War days.

Also at the rally were students from local community colleges and from San Francisco State University, some faculty, and a fair number of workers from UPTE (on strike for unfair labor practices), and some from AFSCME, the UAW, AFT, and CUE. After the rally, students and workers joined a march through the campus and into the streets of downtown Berkeley behind a banner reading: "Solidarity with Students, Teachers, and Workers!" Marchers chanted, "It's our university!" and "Defend public education!"

The walkout was promoted throughout the UC system by a call signed by over 1200 faculty members. Some faculty members at Berkeley led "Teach-out" seminars inside and outside campus buildings on topics such as "The Free Speech Movement Was Just the Start" and "Confronting the Crisis."

The UC Board of Regents has ordered faculty and staff pay cuts of from 4 to 10 percent. In addition, UC President Mark Yudoff proposes raising student fees by close to a third—to



over \$10,000 a year. The university system faces a budget shortfall largely because of cutbacks in financing from the state. Many signs at the rally read, "Chop from the top." Yudoff, for example, has a salary of \$540,000 a year—plus lucrative benefits, such as free rent for his house.

In the evening, some 500-600 enthusiastic Berkeley students assembled at a meeting to decide what to do next. Plans were made for an Oct. 24 conference in Berkeley to coordinate the struggle to defend public education across California—from K-12 to community colleges and universities. — ARI KILPATRICK

... Oct. 17

(continued from page 1)

by the Pittsburgh-based Thomas Merton Center.

In addition to Oct. 17, several groups are focusing on other October dates aimed at deepening antiwar consciousness. The ANSWER Coalition has initiated a number of weekday actions on Oct. 7 to mark the eighth year of the Afghanistan War.

What has appeared in recent years as a marked retreat in the fight against imperialist intervention may be heading for a period of new opportunities to return the movement to the kind of united and massive mobilizations that are so sorely needed.

A case in point was the Sept. 24 one-day strike and student walkout on the University of California campuses statewide. At the University of California at Berkeley, 5000 students, faculty, and campus workers mobilized to protest drastic cuts in the state's education budget.

More than a few speakers at the rally on campus related the funds cut from public education to the massive increase in funds for the Afghanistan war budget. Oct. 17 activists distributed 2000 antiwar leaflets to the very receptive crowd.

Similarly, trade-union leaders from the Oakland Education Association and the San Francisco-based Here-United SEIU affiliate will be represented on the Oct. 17 speakers' platform, linking the antiwar struggle to the fight for jobs and against a broad range of cutbacks. ■

Stop death threats against militant trade unionists in Colombia!

More than 40 trade unionists have been killed this year in Colombia by para-military death squads. Every day, more union activists are threatened with death by these forces, who carry out the orders of big business and the political establishment.

On Aug. 31, Jairo del Rio, the president of SINTRATUCAR (the union representing workers at the Tenaris steel tube company in Cartagena) and a member of the Socialist Workers Party (Colombian section of the International Workers League), received a written message threatening death to him, his wife, and chil-

dren. The message said in part: "We would remind you that in this country guerrilla communists like you and your group die fast, so you better stop interfering in things that are not your business."

The following day, the union vice president, Deivis Blanco, received a similar note. The union is pushing for work stoppages of a few hours in response to the threats. International solidarity with these union activists is extremely important.

E-mail: Mr. Ruben Fidalgo, Gen. Manager, Tubos del Caribe Tenaris S.A., rfidalgo@tenaris.com. Copies: Alvaro Uribe Velez, president of Colombia, auribe@presidencia.gov.co, and sinttratucar@gmail.com. More information: www.litci.org. ■

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

We propose an EMERGENCY CONGRESS OF LABOR to discuss and take steps to implement the following demands —

- 1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers' committees.
- 2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.
- 3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.
- 4) Immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq & Afghanistan! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people's needs and to combat global warming.
- 5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to

55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.

6) To combat inflation: A sliding scale of wages and pensions that matches the rises in consumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.

7) Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimination; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orientation, skin color, or national origin.

8) Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transportation corporations and place them under the control of elected committees of workers.

9) To mobilize support for the demands it adopts, the EMERGENCY CONGRESS should organize ACTION COMMITTEES in every workplace and neighborhood threatened by the crisis. These committees can draw up more concrete demands than the ones outlined above.

10) To put all these measures into effect, we need a LABOR PARTY — based on a fighting union movement and all people who are oppressed and exploited. For a workers' government!

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Canada's Medicare system provides lessons for U.S. health-care debate

By ANDREW POLLACK and BARRY WEISLEDER

NEW YORK—In mid-September, Montana Democrat Max Baucus, leader of health-care “reform” efforts in the Senate, released his proposed bill, which was praised by the White House and will likely be the basic outline for the final law. It includes mandates forcing workers to buy health insurance from the private sector, and has no public option. Taxes on “premium” plans mean many workers will immediately pay more, as will even the average family in a few years as health-care cost inflation brings the typical plan above the limit allowed by Baucus.

Soon after, the AFL-CIO convention passed resolutions in favor both of a public option and single payer, a compromise representing a significant step forward for single payer advocates, but one unlikely to yield any action on that front from officials.

Meanwhile, the racist bipartisan consensus against providing care to undocumented workers and their families stands firm. After South Carolina Rep. Joe Wilson called President Obama a liar for failing to propose enforcement provisions against the undocumented, Democrats, with Obama's approval, rushed to add such provisions to their bills to prevent “illegals” from buying insurance even without subsidies, and are putting new barriers in the way of coverage of even “legal” immigrants.

In the middle of these developments, on Sept. 11, Socialist Action sponsored a talk in New York City by Socialist Action (Canada) Federal Secretary Barry Weisleder, based on research by fellow SA-Canada member Dr. Robbie Mahood, on the lessons of Canada's struggle for universal health-care coverage. We present a summary below, and the entire speech is at www.socialistaction.org/weisleder45.htm.

Canada's health insurance program, called Medicare, provides hospital and physician insurance to all



Socialist Action (Canada) Nat. Secretary Barry Weisleder speaks at N.Y. health-care forum.

residents without deductibles or co-payments. It does not provide care directly from public hospitals or physicians.

Canada pays for more hospital days and doctor visits per capita than the U.S., but spends about 40% less. Doctors and other medical personnel are paid less, and there are fewer very expensive equipment and services. Yet open heart surgery, for example, costs about 30% less in Toronto than in Chicago. Canadians wait somewhat longer for those services, but in recent years improved management has reduced waiting lists for them. Canada has more general practice doctors per capita than the U.S. does, so basic office visits are considerably less costly.

Financing is simple. Patients face no bills for acute services. Doctors are paid electronically each month at a set rate, and hospitals follow a set budget.

Of course, after 30 years of neo-liberalism the system is now a pretty leaky vessel, with the sharks circling. The weaknesses of the system include its being limited to insurance [rather than provision of care]; coverage was restricted and highly uneven regionally,

and has become increasingly so under the impact of austerity; and it failed to dismantle the fee-for-service payment system for physicians.

Contrast this with the British National Health Service (NHS), which from the beginning was a national service requiring conscious planning. Canadian Medicare, in contrast, is chaotic and uneven compared to the UK or indeed to private health-care conglomerates in the United States.

The current right-wing offensive in the U.S. against even the timid reforms advanced by Obama are reminiscent of the struggle for Medicare as it unfolded in Saskatchewan in 1962. Medicare was the product of class struggle. It was achieved only after a hard-fought battle by working people over several generations.

There was a massive campaign launched by business, the press, and the medical profession to defeat the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government and its Medicare plan, culminating in a month-long doctors' strike. On the other side were the unions, farmers, and the base of the CCF. A mobilization at the base of the CCF broke the doctors' strike by organizing a network of democratically controlled community health clinics, with the aid of pro-NHS physicians who came from the UK.

In the U.S. today, a class confrontation is also taking place, with a similar aggressive reactionary campaign but with a much weaker response from the left. The workers' movement is much more demobilized than 50 years ago, and the Democratic Party lacks even the limited reformist ambitions of Canadian social democracy.

The struggle to defend Canadian Medicare entered a new phase with the 2005 Supreme Court ruling upholding the right of a patient to pay his doctor privately for a hip replacement for which he lacked timely access through the public system. Subsequently, the Quebec Liberal government introduced legislation allowing patients to pay privately for three common surgical procedures, a small but significant step toward parallel for-profit care competing with an increasingly stretched public system reeling from 20 years of neo-liberal austerity.

Ottawa originally enticed the provinces to sign on to Medicare in 1968 by paying 50% of the costs. By 1998, the federal contribution had sunk to 10%. Medicare was somewhat shielded from provincial cuts to social services and education because of popular antipathy to attacks on health care and also because Canadian employers derived a significant competitive advantage from public health insurance.

Nevertheless, the system has been profoundly affected by the neo-liberal offensive. Hardest hit has been the hospital sector, with the elimination of scores of hospitals, bed closures, emergency room congestion, and increased wait times. The brunt of the cutbacks have been born by women, who provide most of the labor needed to keep hospitals running and who have taken on almost all of the informal unpaid or low-paid duties as care has been de-institutionalized and shifted onto individuals and families.

Service shortfalls in publicly funded hospital and primary care are undermining confidence in Medicare. Yet the majority of working people in Canada and Quebec are committed to a public system provided that reasonable quality of care can be maintained.

In the face of these attacks, Socialist Action (Canada) calls for a comprehensive program to restructure the health-care system, extend socialization, and open up the possibility for rational planning. The program includes:

- 1) Eliminate for-profit care; restore federal funding to previous levels (50%).
- 2) No contracting out of services to the for-profit sector. Fund public hospitals or clinics adequately to perform needed services.
- 3) Nullify private-public partnerships.
- 4) Expand Medicare to include comprehensive pharmacare, home care, and dental care.
- 5) Eliminate fee-for-service payment; bring physicians and other health professionals into salaried service under contract to multi-disciplinary clinics and hospitals accountable to their communities; expand the role of nurse practitioners, midwives, and other health care providers.
- 6) Nationalize the pharmaceutical industry.
- 7) Empower health-care consumers and workers to eliminate wasteful practices, monitor quality of care, and determine fund allocations based on the best clinical evidence and broader social needs and priorities.
- 8) Increase government revenues to fund these and other reforms by eliminating tax breaks for the rich and increasing the corporate tax share.

Medicare is widely associated with Canada's labor parties, the CCF and its successor, the New Democratic Party (NDP). Naturally, the tasks facing advocates of public health care in the U.S. are bigger, and are linked to the need to establish its own labor party.

Progress on all fronts is extremely important, not only for Americans, but for Canadians and everyone on this planet. When for-profit health care is put to rest in the U.S., it will reduce privatization pressure everywhere. It will be a blow to capitalist rule and a victory for the international working class. ■

Cuba makes strides in health care

One of the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution has been the great strides taken in health care. The foundation of this achievement was the decision to make health care free for all and the 1961 nationalization of health services when the government became the sole provider and implemented central planning and control.

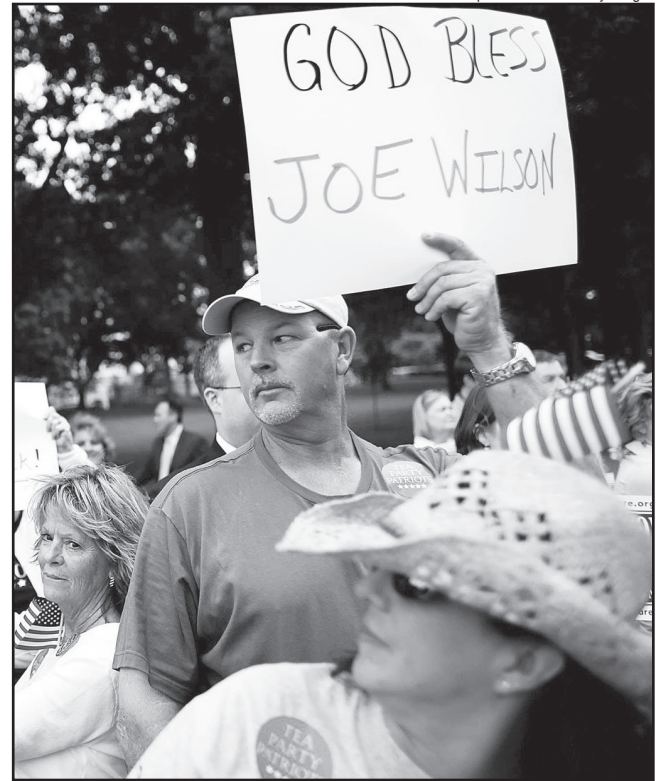
Socialized health care has led to significant improvements in Cubans' health status, which approaches that of many fully industrialized countries and in some cases even surpasses them, as famously in the case of the U.S.

Cuban medical education has been so effective that the country now has over 50,000 physicians, a large skilled nursing work force, and substantial increases in other health professionals such as dentists. Medical schools have accommodated thousands of students from developing countries, and the country has sent thousands of its own physicians and paramedical personnel to work in teams overseas.

Despite its dependence on the Soviet Union for almost three decades, the Cubans did not copy the Soviet model—with its hyper-centralization, low-paid, largely specialist physicians, and weak primary care sector. Instead, the Cubans built up a strong decentralized system of primary care linked to hospital-based specialist care, with public health mobilizations.

The U.S. embargo, which imposes acute shortages of important medicines and equipment, has stimulated a home-grown pharmaceutical and bio-technology industry, which has registered some important innovative successes. Nor did the Cubans allow the economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union to undermine their commitment to social equity in health care. In contrast, Vietnam, China, and the former “socialist” states in Eastern Europe introduced market reforms, with predictably negative consequences in the ability of all citizens to gain access to health care.

—BARRY WEISLEDER



Rightist D.C. mobilization poses grave threat to working people

By THE EDITORS

Capitalism's poisons in their myriad forms are injected into the broad worker's movement usually in small but steady doses. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant prejudice, anti-Semitism, and homophobia all serve to divide and conquer—to direct the anger and frustration generated by the system's inherent inequities and brutalities at its victims as opposed to its perpetrators. But advanced capitalist states usually prefer a "democratic" image and political forms, unless pressed by a real threat to their power.

Fascism in its full-blown form, on the other hand, capitalism's most virulent and obscene political expression, comes at the workers' movement with an ax rather than an apology. It is instituted when millions are mobilized and capable of a real challenge for power. Absent such a challenge, capitalism prefers and benefits more from the illusion of democracy as opposed to the Iron Heel.

This does not exclude, however, the employment by sections of the ruling rich of fascist-type formations, whose reactionary agenda serves to facilitate capitalism's overall right-wing trajectory.

The Sept. 12 Washington, D.C., right-wing march and rally of at least 60,000-75,000, according to most accounts, marked a turning point in U.S. politics. This was the first time in some seven decades that a reactionary mobilization with fascist overtones proved capable of organizing such an outpouring. Socialists, trade-union militants, and fighters for democratic and human rights will ignore the meaning of this phenomenon at their peril.

While some well-publicized rally photographs show crowds that far exceeded all of the above figures, these have now been exposed as fraudulent by the corporate media itself. One such photo included a scaffolded public building under repair when no such construc-

tion currently exists. The prominent Native American museum, constructed a decade ago, was missing from the same photos. These have since been attributed to a 1997 Washington Mall rally organized by Promise Keepers, an evangelical Christian men's group. A figure of 1.2 million attributed by rally organizers to the Parks Service was similarly discredited.

But exaggeration aside, the official sponsor, Freedomworks Foundation, headed by former Republican House leader Dick Armey, joined with an array of right-wing gutter talk show hosts, FOX News, and a handful of lesser Republican Party elected officials to mobilize a significant layer of right-wing "Tea Party" malcontents around a broad range of reactionary causes. The self-proclaimed neo-patriots came replete with "hand-made, not union-made" placards. These included racist caricatures of President "Obamacare" and others such as, "Yes, I am a right-wing terrorist," "Joe Wilson is a hero," "Stop Communism," "Jesus," "Obama Lies, Grandma Dies," "Armed and Dangerous," and "Revolution is Brewing."

Overwhelmingly middle-age and older and virtually 100 percent white, the crowd carried American flags and sang patriotic songs while demanding an end to big government, big taxes, and a "return" of their country, today's code words for the Black president's removal.

In the absence of a fight-back strategy centered on independent mass mobilizations led by U.S. trade unions, civil rights groups, and social justice organizations, a tiny layer of racist bigots has for the moment taken the streets to press forward with a racist and reactionary agenda in response to capitalism's crisis.

President Obama, claiming without credibility that he had no idea that the D.C. rally was scheduled, took the occasion to fly to Minnesota to address a crowd of 15,000 on his "health-care" reforms. There is no doubt, however, that Obama was fully aware that Jimmy Carter hit the mark when he insisted that South Carolina Republican Congressman Joe Wilson's Sept. 9 "you lie" outburst while Obama was addressing a joint session of Congress was "based on racism." But Obama repudiated Carter and accepted Wilson's "apology," while the self-same Wilson toured the Southland basking in the "Liar, Liar, Liar!" chants of his narrow, bigoted base.

The dominant wing of the ruling rich today prefers to use the soft touch—not the racist or fascist club—especially when mass opposition in the streets to its anti-working-class policies has not yet materialized. But the same capitalists rarely object when the club is flaunted on occasion to serve their own interests—that is, to push their overall agenda further to the right.

Obama was the ruling-class choice and still is. After nearly a year in office he has exceeded all expectations in carrying out their policies. His website brags that he exacted more concessions from the UAW than Bush ever did. His record on virtually every promised reform—from global warming, card-check union recognition, health care, Patriot Act repeal, gay marriage, abortion rights, and U.S. wars abroad—indicates that he has not deviated from his predecessor Bush in the slightest. His multi-trillion-dollar bank and corporate bailouts were the largest government gifts to the ruling rich in history, putting Bush's gifts to shame!

Obama is the ruling class's view of change today—a Black mask on the white racist, brutal face of a capitalism in crisis, thrashing about to resolve an economic and inseparable social catastrophe. To date—with vel-

(Above) Thousands of "Tea Party" protesters gathered in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 12.

vet voice, pleasing tone, and reassuring rhetoric—the new president has proven successful in promoting the illusion that change is forthcoming, in due time.

He has been aided in part by the fact that Americans are less racist than at any time in the past half century, Obama received 97 percent of the Black vote and the largest percentage of the white vote, 44 percent, than any president since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. America is not moving to the right. But its working-class and oppressed peoples have yet to challenge their misleaders and discover a way back to the streets.

The gap between the anger of tens and hundreds of millions at the insult to their livelihoods, on the one hand, and their willingness to resist, on the other, has never been greater. As in the Great Depression era it will take some time until shock, disbelief, and vain hope give way to collective and massive action led by a new generation of fighters and aimed squarely at the boss class and its political representatives.

Meanwhile, the right-wing mass mobilization in Washington is a twisted reflection among a small minority of the ruling-class infringements on their lives. While politically unclear and lacking a sharp focus, the D.C. outpouring included some of the elements of a neo-fascist reaction. The Sept. 12 organizers took some care to limit the crudest expressions of hate that are still relegated to the backwoods. But such crudities are stirring nonetheless, as when a late September Austin, Minn., meeting of 11 immigrant rights activists was essentially disrupted when four jackbooted swastika-wearing Nazi skinheads "joined the discussion," spewing vile and racist insults, and generally preventing the meeting's completion of its agenda.

In a similar but less overt form, a carefully orchestrated right-wing show of force was the main feature of the disruptions of last month's Democratic Party-sponsored Town Meetings. As with Obama's repudiation of Jimmy Carter's condemnation of the Joe Wilson outburst, the Democrats chose to ignore the right-wing disruptions or minimize their significance.

Working-class activists will find no Democratic Party support for defense of their rights against fascist disruptions and attacks that will be employed in the years ahead. Our capacity to advance the cause of capitalism's victims lies solely in our collective strength and unity. The only effective means to advance this cause is the mobilization of the vast majority of the nation's working masses—our sisters and brothers in the organized labor movement as well as the unorganized, the oppressed, the vast immigrant communities, and all others who have nothing in common with an alliance with the capitalist rulers, their parties, or their reactionary, racist, and neo-fascist offshoots.

Working-class mobilizations against the capitalist war at home and the imperialist wars abroad are central to the fight against right-wing reaction in its new and emerging virulent forms—and even more so against the "mainstream" ruling-class offensive that comes disguised in the form of a peaceful contest between contending capitalist parties.

In the absence of a serious fightback and mobilizations based on a clear program that unites all of capitalism's victims, the ugly face of reaction will inevitably find takers for its base solutions. The organized labor movement has to date proved incapable of any significant mass response. Its misleaders remain tethered in a death grip with reaction of another kind—the Democratic Party. Working people more than ever need a party of their own, a labor party based on a reinvigorated, democratic, and fighting labor movement in alliance with all the oppressed and exploited. ■

Labor Day March

CHICAGO—As the Obama administration and Congress continue to delay action on an immigration bill, 800 workers marched here on Labor Day demanding real immigration reform and an end to raids on the immigrant community. The march was organized by the March 10th Coalition, Our Lady of Guadalupe Justice Mission, Du Page Immigrant Solidarity, and other supporters of the immigrant community.

Rally speakers pointed to the failures of the Obama administration on immigration, including the E-Verify system, the use of local police for immigration enforcement, and continued ICE raids. March 10th coalition leader Jorge Mujica noted that the number of deportations has actually increased under Obama.

Teamsters Local 743 members, on strike at SK Hand Tools in Chicago, mobilized a very spirited contingent. Du Page Immigrant Solidarity organized a pre-march rally at a suburban commuter rail station and mobilized a contingent of suburban-based immigrant workers to the march, including workers recently involved in struggles against no-match-letter firings at local Stake and Shake restaurants.

— DAVE BERNT

By GERRY FOLEY

It has become fashionable for commentators to say that the Obama administration has come to a crossroads in its strategy for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. It would be more accurate to say that it has come to the end of the road. It has no way to go forward except over a cliff, no matter how difficult the road back may be.

It has become clear that the U.S.-supported Afghan government is discredited and impotent and that the insurgency has reached the point where the commander of the U.S. forces, Gen. McChrystal, says it cannot be defeated militarily without a massive escalation of U.S. forces. Reportedly, McChrystal is asking for 40,000 more troops. The current U.S. contingent will soon be 68,000. The Soviet forces in Afghanistan reached 100,000 before the Kremlin decided to cut and run.

Some of the more astute commentators have noted that a U.S. "surge" is likely to fuel a countersurge of the insurgency, since a much bigger occupation force would be certain to arouse more local antagonism.

Public opinion polls are showing that the Afghan war does not have the support of a majority of the American people. And the war is apparently still more unpopular among the main allies of the United States—Britain, Germany, and Italy. Italian Premier Berlusconi is threatening to withdraw Italian forces. In Germany, the war was a major issue in the recent elections.

There the question is complicated by two factors. One: For economic reasons, German army recruits are drawn largely from the former East Germany, where social discontent remains high and is growing. Two: one of the worst atrocities of the air war was committed by German pilots.

The British *Guardian* reported Sept. 11 on a bombing by a German plane that killed up to a hundred villagers who had gathered around fuel tankers hijacked by the Taliban in order to take away free gasoline. In this desperately poor area, a little free fuel for the coming winter was a powerful attraction. But while the local people were collecting fuel, the tankers were bombed, causing a murderous explosion:

"At first light last Friday, in the Chardarah district of Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan, the villagers gathered around the twisted wreckage of two fuel tankers that had been hit by a Nato airstrike. They picked their way through a heap of almost a hundred charred bodies and mangled limbs which were mixed with ash, mud and the melted plastic of jerry cans, looking for their brothers, sons and cousins. They called out their names but received no answers. By this time, everyone was dead."

The remains were unrecognizable, and so the village elders simply gave out body parts to the various aggrieved relatives so that they would have something to bury. The *Guardian* quoted one of the local people: "I couldn't find my son, so I took a piece of flesh with me home and I called it my son. I told my wife we had him, but I didn't let his children or anyone see. We buried the flesh as if it was my son."

A tragedy like that will not be quickly forgotten. It is comparable to the Mylai massacre in Vietnam. It is hardly likely that the Afghan villagers are going to accept foreign occupation and the nominal rule of a corrupt government when they are in constant danger of being burned alive or blown to pieces by planes flying so high they cannot even see them.

The U.S. client ruler, Karzai, has often complained about the slaughter of innocent people in NATO bombing attacks. But he has been no more effective in stopping them than he has been in building a credible administration.

The recent elections sunk whatever was left of Karzai's credibility. In the first place, they were basically a tribal contest, pitting a Tadjik challenger against the Pushtun Karzai. The Tadjiks and Uzbeks were the base of the Northern Alliance, which was the military ally of the U.S.-led invasion. The U.S.-backed Karzai was a Pushtun tribal notable who Washington hoped would give a national image to the coalition that they were backing. But the Pushtun are the base of the Taliban, and Karzai's alleged election victory came from areas that were in fact dominated by the Taliban, and in which few if any people actually voted. Moreover, the Karzai supporters engaged in massive ballot box stuffing that has been easily documented.

The British *Guardian* reported Sept. 19: "The shaky footage [of a video made by election monitors] shows two election monitors inspecting a book of 100 ballot papers that are still stitched together, as they were intended to arrive at the polling station in rural fghanistan. But something is wrong; instead of being pristine, ready for the voter to make his or her mark, each paper bears a large blue tick next to the name of one candidate: Hamid Karzai.

"As the monitors flick through the pad, the back of the ballots clearly show the authorisation stamp of election monitors, validating them as votes ready to be put in the ballot box and counted.

"We found it the day after the elections," one of the monitors in the footage told me. "They were trying to put it in one of the [ballot] boxes but didn't have time, so we took it home and filmed it. If we had given it back to the election committee they would have used it again,

U.S. Afghanistan strategy nears the end of the road

Julie Jacobson / AP



(Above) U.S. Marines on rooftop attempting to push Taliban from key town of Dahaneh, Aug. 12.

so we burned it, but filmed it to protect ourselves if they come and threaten us"

The *Guardian* reporter talked to a local election official from Paktiya province who had fled to Kabul fearing reprisals from Kazai supporters who had seen him collect evidence of fraud: "He showed me a series of photographs taken inside a brown cardboard voting booth in a village in Paktiya province of Afghanistan. One shows a man marking a big pile of ballot papers in the name of Hamid Karzai. Another shows a pile of election ID cards spread in front of an unidentified man wearing black shoes. 'This man brought 120 cards and he used each of them to vote three times,' said the official.

"He had intended to hand his photographs to his superiors, he said, but as election day unfolded it became obvious that his superiors were themselves taking part in the fraud. 'I thought I would give the pictures to the election committee. But they were all working for Karzai.' Fearing he had been spotted taking the pictures, he fled to Kabul."

The man went on to say: "Everyone was cheating in my polling station. Only 10% registered; 100% turnout. One man brought five books of ballots, each containing 100 votes, and stuffed them in the boxes after the elections were over."

While some international commentators have given credibility to the claims of legitimacy of the presidential elections in Iran this summer, there can be none at all about the Afghan elections. They were obviously and undeniably a farce. Furthermore, the international press has reported many complaints by American military men that they do not find any representation of the Afghan government where they are fighting, and that the Afghan army is far from an effective force.

All of these factors were elements in the American defeat in Vietnam. And so, it is not surprising that many commentators are inclined to compare Obama's dilemma in Afghanistan with Lyndon Johnson's in Vietnam and to speculate that the current U.S. president may suffer the fate of his predecessor in the 1960s.

There is a difference between Lyndon Johnson and Obama, however. Johnson did not ascend to the presidency on the wings of hope that he would be fundamentally different from the other politicians of his day. In fact, he had a pretty unsavory reputation. But Obama, as the first Black president and the successor of a brutal right-wing administration, was the bearer of great hopes. He has a lot of lose if he leads the U.S. into a deeper quagmire in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the public tolerance for the waste of money and lives in an imbroglio in a remote third world country is far less than it was at the beginning of the Vietnam War. The support of the American people for foreign adventures is also being sapped now by the suffering caused by the deepening economic decline. Johnson could afford both "guns and butter." Obama cannot.

Columnist Eugene Robinson raised a ringing alarm in the Sept. 22 *Washington Post*: "It's hard to read Gen. Stanley McChrystal's assessment of the Afghanistan war without hearing one of those horror-movie voices that seem to come from everywhere and nowhere, a voice that grows louder and more insistent with every page: 'Get out. Get out. Get out.'

"According to the confidential report prepared for President Obama—obtained by Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*—the situation in Afghanistan is 'deteriorating.' The Taliban insurgency is 'resilient and grow-

ing.' Afghans have a 'crisis of confidence' in both their own government and the U.S.-led NATO occupation force. The next 12 months will be 'decisive,' and 'failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum ... risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.'"

Even the dyed-in-the wool reactionary pundit George Will has started raising an alarm about the dangers of getting bogged down in Afghanistan, and has been crossing swords with other right-wing publicists who still call for "staying the course" in Afghanistan. But the right-wing phalanx is already threatening the Obama administration with denunciations of betrayal of the U.S. cause in Afghanistan. The lead in the chorus has been taken by Bush's former secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice.

Obama seems to be considering carrying out a tactical retreat—that is, giving up the strategy of occupying the entire country and instead concentrating U.S. forces around key centers. That is more intelligent than a go-for-broke effort to flood the country with troops so that there will be an American boot on every rock. But such a tactical retreat means recognizing de facto insurgent control of swaths of the countryside. That was the situation in Vietnam before the collapse of the U.S.-backed government. In a war of position like that, the U.S. would risk seeing a sudden collapse of its client government in the face of a consolidated insurgent regime in the rural areas. Then it would have either to escalate its intervention, without any significant local political cover, or accept a costly rout.

The only realistic option for the U.S. is to accept total withdrawal. That would not endanger American security anywhere near as much as getting more deeply entangled in a costly and hopeless war in a poor and remote corner of the world. The U.S. does not have the resources to occupy all the marginal backward areas where al-Qaida might establish bases. It can only secure itself against al-Qaida by political means, by drying up its base of support. That is true of the threat of terrorism in general, which can come from many sources.

But whatever the judgment of Obama and his administration, it will be difficult for them to retreat from Afghanistan and avoid expanding the war into Pakistan given the political investment they have made in these operations. Moreover, the ultra-right will wage a furious campaign against the Obama government for allegedly betraying American security.

Now that the ultra-right is in the streets, it is vital that democratic and progressive-minded people go into the streets in greater numbers to stop a slide toward militarization of the country. Ultimately, the radicalization and activation of the right raises the specter of fascism, and the basic program of fascism is war.

It's clear now that it is disastrously wrong-headed to rely on the good intentions of the Obama regime. The relationship of forces in the streets will determine whether and when the U.S. disengages from its disastrous foreign adventures. The right-wing mobilizations have made that obvious.

The sooner sane and humane people begin to act, the better the chances will be to avoid catastrophes, even if the actions start small. The nationwide October antiwar demonstrations can be a vital first step. ■

Red-baiting against Socialist Action & the antiwar movement

Mackler replies to Cockburn's smears



(Left) Socialist Action National Secretary Jeff Mackler, speaking at antiwar demonstration in San Francisco in March 2009.
(Right) Counterpunch co-editor and publisher Alexander Cockburn.

By JEFF MACKLER

Jeff Mackler is the National Secretary of Socialist Action and a national antiwar leader for the past 45 years.

Alexander Cockburn's Sept. 4-6 "CounterPunch Diary" hit piece against the U.S. antiwar movement, "Deeper into the Tunnel," merits the serious attention of all antiwar fighters and organizations. This is not so much because of the spurious accusations he hurls against Socialist Action and this writer, as well as others whose socialist politics offend him, but rather because of his serious misunderstanding of what it takes to build a united-front-type, democratic, and effective antiwar movement.

Here we are speaking of a movement powerful enough to organize a massive and successful challenge to the ongoing and expanding U.S. imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan as well as the ongoing U.S. support to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Cockburn's newfound libertarian bent, cheap-shot politics of denunciation, ad hominem assertions, and factual distortions are no substitute for the present discussion and debate over effective strategies and tactics to counter the warmakers, force them to "Bring the Troops Home Now!" and accede to the movement's powerful demand, "Money for Human Needs, Not War!"

I begin this response to what Cockburn describes as the "craven behavior of the leadership of the October 17 anti-war protest in San Francisco" with Cockburn's own words: "On August 29, the October 17 Coalition voted to endorse a protest at the Westin-St. Francis, one of the city's flashier hotels, the following Friday where San Francisco Congresswoman and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, was to be honored with a \$100 a plate breakfast. But by the end of the day the October 17 coalition leadership got cold feet when it learned that the host of the breakfast was none other than the San Francisco Labor Council."

Cockburn continues for emphasis, "There's nothing new here. Genuflections to the Labor Council has long characterized San Francisco's anti-war movement leadership when it comes to determining its public agenda." Cock-

burn's fury is unremitting, as his memories or misinformed sources summon him back to the 10-year battle against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean in the 1980s and early '90s.

Says Cockburn, "In the spring of 1985, Israel was in its fourth year of occupation of Lebanon after an invasion that had been publicly supported by the AFL-CIO with no dissent from San Francisco's labor bureaucracy. The main organizer of both of those marches (1985 and 1988) was Socialist Action. In its newspaper this group regularly boasted of its anti-Zionism and solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Nonetheless, in this instance Socialist Action promptly turned into Socialist Inaction. The group was adamant about not allowing any demand that referred to the Middle East to be added to the Mobilization's program. The limp excuse: 'labor will walk.'"

Cockburn adds: "It was considerably more difficult for Socialist Action and its allies to ignore the Palestinian intifada in 1988 but again they rose to the challenge, managing to appease the Labor Council by doing so. This required Socialist Action to cancel a general meeting of anti-war activists that quite likely would have led to the addition of a demand for an end to Israeli occupation."

"Today," Cockburn asserts, "we find the very same Socialist Action leader, Jeff Mackler, longer of tooth but no closer to socialism, taking unilateral action to prevent the picketing of the Labor Council breakfast for Pelosi."

For the record, the date of the meeting in question was Aug. 15, not Aug. 29, and the name of the organization mobilizing in the San Francisco Bay Area against U.S. wars and against U.S. support to the Israeli occupation of Palestine is the October 17 Antiwar Coalition—a new formation that is a component part of an effort to unify in action a badly-divided movement. To date, some 150 antiwar groups and prominent individuals across the country have called for antiwar demonstrations on Oct. 17. Each has determined its own demands, structure, and leadership.

The S.F.-based coalition includes Bay Area affiliates of all five major national

antiwar coalitions and networks—the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations (National Assembly), to which I am affiliated and help lead, the ANSWER Coalition, United for Peace and Justice, World Can't Wait, and the International Action Center.

Cockburn, the *CounterPunch* co-editor/publisher, objects to the fact that I set aside a motion presented by his

'How to approach the labor movement and engage its ranks in mass protests is a decisive question.'

apparent model antiwar leader, Steve Zeltzer, whom he praises to the high heavens. In fact, after consultation with the coalition's leadership, I did cancel the previously approved Nancy Pelosi protest—a decision I stand by.

Cockburn thinks it irrelevant that Zeltzer's motion, approved unanimously (30-0) on Aug. 15, failed to inform the meeting that the Pelosi protest was to be at a Labor Day breakfast sponsored by the San Francisco Labor Council—or that our coalition was not to be merely an endorser of the protest, as Zeltzer originally moved, but the one and only sponsor.

It was my view, shared by all of the above groups and virtually the entire coalition, minus Zeltzer, that the October 17 Antiwar Coalition had the right to know exactly whose event it was protesting. Zeltzer disagreed and later e-mailed his displeasure to all concerned as follows: "I did not mention that it [the Pelosi protest] was sponsored by the SF Labor Council and should have but I did not believe that this should make any difference since the protest was against Pelosi and not the SF Labor Council" [emphasis added]!

One can only wonder if Cockburn shared Zeltzer's view that our coalition's knowledge of what event we were to be picketing should not "make any difference." It occurred to me, however, as the coalition's co-coordinator, that I had a responsibility for full disclosure

once I learned of the protest's target. I premised my decision on the quaint concept that the ranks of a coalition have the fundamental democratic right to know what they had truly voted for. It seemed elementary that at least some, if not everyone in the coalition, would contest the delusional contention that we were picketing "Pelosi and not the SF Labor Council."

Indeed, Cockburn himself concluded that the Labor Council needed a good kick in the butt, or as he put it, to be shaken from "its apathy on the war questions and about its choice of Pelosi, a war supporter, as its breakfast honoree..." Apparently, he forgot to consult with Zeltzer on what the protest was about!

Cockburn seems qualitatively less concerned with the democratic functioning of the antiwar coalition than he is with reiterating his point that the "antiwar movement" is dead—that is, charging "Deeper into the Tunnel." The "Tunnel" allusion presumably means getting closer to the Democratic Party.

Here Cockburn misses the central point. The Oct. 17 mobilizations across the country are squarely directed against Obama's War, the war today conducted with the full support of the Democratic Party. Our coalition's program, demands, and mobilization are independent of and in direct opposition to the war policies of the Democratic Party.

Further, the construction of an independent, democratic, and "Out Now!" antiwar movement has always stood at the center of Socialist Action's work. As we will see, this is not the case with critic Cockburn, who found his way to supporting John Kerry's presidential run in 2004, the Democrat who trumped Bush's "surge" by demanding an additional 30,000 troops to imperialism's killing fields.

While Cockburn may mock the need for democratic functioning in the antiwar movement, I assert that democracy is critical to the movement's success. We will not advance our cause by either Zeltzer's devious tricks and maneuvers behind the backs of the ranks or Cockburn's twisting of the facts to advance his false claim that our coalition is subordinate to the Democrats.

Whether or not to picket a Labor Council Labor Day breakfast to which warmaker Nancy Pelosi was invited was

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an important but tactical question. Opportunities to protest Pelosi's pro-war politics and party are not infrequent in the city that she misrepresents. Indeed, October 17 Antiwar Coalition leaflets were distributed by coalition leaders at a Democratic Party-sponsored "healthcare reform" rally a few days before the scheduled Labor Council breakfast. Pelosi was the scheduled keynote speaker at that rally.

Including labor in mass protests

How to approach the labor movement and engage its ranks—and the vast numbers of unorganized workers as well—in the essential mass protests that are sorely needed today is not an unimportant issue. It is a decisive question. It seems eminently more reasonable to approach the organized labor movement patiently and with due care, as opposed to the prescription of the Cockburn/Zeltzer club—that is, a mass picket line outside the Labor Council breakfast, which would carry with it the implied demand: "Don't pass."

This applies doubly to the beleaguered San Francisco Labor Council, which is currently faced with an Andy Stern effort to disaffiliate three SEIU locals at a monthly loss of some \$17,000 in dues. Cockburn neglected to mention that key leaders of the Council, who were also leaders of our antiwar coalition (unfortunately not present when the controversial vote was taken), had gone to great lengths to express their disapproval of the Pelosi invitation.

It's true that the present bureaucratized labor movement will not be transformed overnight into a democratic fighting instrument of the working class. But it is equally true that the fight to win the active support of organized labor for mass protests to "Bring the Troops Home Now!" is important—extremely important.

Yes, there is a contradiction in the S.F. Council supporting the Democratic Party, as do virtually all labor organizations in the country, while at the same time supporting mass mobilizations against the same party. While labor's political break with the class enemy is not on the agenda today, the value of its involvement in action in the streets in opposition to the policies of capital cannot be underestimated.

Cockburn's sleight of hand in describing the Council's record understates the facts. The San Francisco Labor Council not only opposed the 1991 Gulf War—at the request of this writer and the mass-action coalition organized by the Cockburn-condemned Mobilization for Peace, Jobs and Justice—but it organized a contingent of 10,000 Northern California workers to march against that war.

More recently, the International Long-

shore and Warehouse Union initiated a one-day strike and closed down all West Coast ports from Canada to Mexico. They struck for a single demand, "U.S. Out of Iraq and Afghanistan." In 2006 five million immigrant workers shook the nation with a May Day strike against proposed reactionary anti-immigrant legislation.

In all these cases the same contradiction prevailed. The ever-deepening capitalist offensive moved millions of workers to the streets. They protested the reactionary policies of the Democrats and Republicans although the leaders of these mobilizations remained committed to the illusion that the war-mongering and anti-immigrant Democrats offered a way out.

This contradiction will not be resolved overnight and especially not by tricking honest antiwar fighters with devious motions to expose the S.F. Labor Council today and request its support tomorrow. I should add that we have recently been informed that the San Francisco Labor Council will support our October 17 action and make a good faith effort to mobilize Labor Council affiliate support for it. This is the same and rather unique Council that has supported virtually all major antiwar demonstrations in the Bay Area for the past 40 years.

A further note should be of interest here. Cockburn was perhaps not informed that the S.F. Peace and Freedom Party, which had also endorsed the Pelosi protest, revoked its endorsement when informed that it was directed against the S.F. Labor Council. Cockburn might not have known that S.F. Peace and Freedom was also Zeltzer's party and that it had disassociated itself from Zeltzer's motion.

Palestine and the united front

Cockburn found it convenient to ignore the fact that the October 17 Antiwar Coalition in San Francisco included in its several demands one that stated, "End U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine!" That demand, along with "U.S. troops out of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan!" "Money for jobs, pensions, healthcare, housing and education not wars and corporate bailouts!" and several others, were proposed by this writer.

These were also the demands recommended to the antiwar movement for the October 17 local and regional protests initiated in Pittsburgh by the summer conference of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations. They were duly considered by the coalition and adopted unanimously.

Unfortunately, historian-journalist Cockburn felt that this was insufficient for me to atone for my "sins" of 25 years ago. I judged at that time, along with hundreds of others in a coalition that I

had helped to found—the Mobilization for Peace, Jobs and Justice—that the united-front-type mass-action movement that was needed and possible at that time could not be effectively built with the formal inclusion of a Palestine demand.

Coburn, a bit of a red-baiter when it suits him, prefers to place the responsibility for this decision solely on me and Socialist Action rather than on the regular mass meetings of 300-500 activists and organizations—including all seven Bay Area Central Labor Councils and 100-plus union presidents, faith-

'Today, much of the antiwar movement has included a key Palestine demand.'

based groups, and scores of others—who democratically voted to do so.

Then as now, Mr. Zeltzer and a few of his cohorts cast the handful of dissenting votes. Then as now, Zeltzer believed that the construction of a united-front mass-action coalition against imperialist war was subordinate to the need to denounce the union bureaucracy, that a movement that included all his demands was preferable to the mobilization of the working class and its allies to prevent U.S. intervention in Central America.

Cockburn's view was not that of the Salvadoran FMLN and Nicaraguan FSLN of the 1980s, whose representatives always supported our coalition and used its mass-action rallies to defend their right to self-determination. They understood the constraints on our movement at that time. And likewise, the Palestinian fighters understood the centrality of the Central American revolutions in progress, which were in the immediate gun sights of U.S. imperialism. Some 400,000 Guatemalans, 80,000 Nicaraguans, and 80,000 Salvadorans lost their lives at the hands of U.S.-backed death squads and armies in these struggles.

Moreover, although the united-front mass mobilizations of that period focused on the immediate threat of U.S. intervention in Central America, they hardly excluded the active and full participation of the Palestinian movement. They joined our mass actions, were prominently represented on our speakers' platforms, and were more than encouraged to participate with their contingents, banners, and placards. The cause of the Palestinian struggle was advanced, not retarded, for the simple reason that it was incorporated into powerful mass mobilizations that engaged in action qualitatively more forces than would have been the case had our coalition been sharply divided.

Cockburn distorts the record of 1980s Peace, Jobs & Justice marches in San Francisco (above) and diminishes labor movement's role in their sponsorship.

Walter Johnson (left), head of S.F. Labor Council, and Jack Henning, head of California AFL-CIO, are shown at a rally for movie theater workers, cc. 1990s.

Yes, we could have marched down the street with a full "revolutionary" program and a hardy few behind us. We chose instead to bring along hundreds of thousands whose participation informed them, far better than any slogan or demand, that we represented the majority, that the government did not represent us, that we were independent of them, that we had power, that we were not an isolated few but the conscience of the nation. This is the stuff that makes history—not rhetoric. Mass action empowers those who engage in it. It opens the gap wide between government lies and the people's truth. It is the essence of the united front.

Today, much of the antiwar movement *has included* a key Palestine demand. One can only wonder what is to be gained by attacking Socialist Action for fighting for its inclusion. I confess to Cockburn's "accusation," that Socialist Action's newspaper regularly championed the Palestinian cause. I would add that we were virtually alone in championing the historic Palestinian demand for a democratic and secular Palestine with the right of return. We rejected and still reject a "two state solution" as a violation of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Then as now, Socialist Action denies the legitimacy of the Zionist state—as our movement did since 1948. Such a Zionist, colonial, racist settler state would be codified, along with the establishment of a Bantustan-like Palestine, essentially under Israeli control, should the "two-staters" have their way. That was not the position of "two-state" Alexander Cockburn in the 1980s, and perhaps today as well.

Contrary to Cockburn's allegations, Socialist Action's support to the Palestinian revolution was not limited to articles in our press. We took the cause of the Palestinian people to as broad an audience as possible and through a variety of vehicles. During the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians at the hands of Israel and the neo-fascist Lebanese forces it aligned with, we led an international solidarity campaign that reached scores of countries, and we helped publish a full-page, \$50,000 ad in the *New York Times* entitled, "End All Aid To Apartheid Israel!" Coupled with our conscious efforts to include the Palestinian community in the mass actions during those years to the maximum extent possible, our record exceeds any-

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... Cockburn redbaitis antiwar movement

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thing that Cockburn and his past or present sideline critics ever dreamed of.

The antiwar movement in the 1980s, as with all social movements, had its own peculiarities. Some 17 national unions had joined the Labor Committee for Democracy and Human Rights in Salvador led by trade unionist David Dyson. It was not uncommon in those times for the movement against U.S. intervention in Central America to receive support, funding, and active participation by trade-union leaders and members, who were motivated by the fact that the U.S.-backed Salvadoran dictatorship's death squads regularly murdered trade unionists, and who were still fresh from the experience of mobilizing against the Vietnam War.

Similarly, the Salvadoran government's murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the related slaughter of Cleveland nuns based in that country brought a cry of outrage and mass mobilization from the Catholic Church and others in the religious community.

The anti-nuclear weapons movement, demanding, "Freeze and reverse the arms race!" was likewise energized when Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, Gen. Alexander Haig, threatened to use nuclear weapons against the USSR. Similarly, the South African government's racist apartheid policies were hated in every corner of the progressive movement. As a result, demands on the U.S. government relating to all these issues were based on social foundations capable of mobilizing tens of thousands in the streets, thus exposing the contradiction between what the American people demanded and what the government delivered.

Although the formal inclusion of a demand on Palestine was not possible at that time, we struggled to find a myriad of ways to integrate the fight for Palestinian self-determination into the mass mobilizations that were on the order of the day. We did not denounce the movement in progress and stand apart from it, as is Cockburn's preference today.

Socialist Action's modest forces were not capable of overcoming the reactionary prejudice against the Palestinian people and the prettification of the Zionist colonial settler state of Israel. Had we made Palestine the dividing line between us and the forces that were prepared to mobilize, we would have lost the united-front coalitions that were a prerequisite for the mass challenge to imperialist war. Rather than abandon the Palestinian cause, as Cockburn charges, we found numerous ways to include it and advance the process of educating those who were not yet prepared to understand its importance.

Cockburn is correct in stating that Socialist Action believed in the 1980s that "labor would walk" if a Palestine demand were added. Sadly, many other groups that were critical to the movement would have done the same. How to deal with this fact of political life was what was under consideration. Cockburn and his cohorts considered the same equations and concluded that the united front and mass action to defend revolutions in progress and immediately threatened with U.S. intervention were of little consequence.

Today, Cockburn chooses to howl at Socialist Action once again. He rejects my judgment that "the time bomb was ticking" in San Francisco. He mockingly quotes me to make his point. He rejects my view in the same e-mail to wit: "Had we not acted as we did, we might have lost the coalition or a good portion of it." Unfortunately, he offers no proof to substantiate his rejection.

For Cockburn, proof is unnecessary. But for me, the choice was obvious. I had consulted with all the major forces in the coalition and all were opposed to the Pelosi Labor Council protest. Had we pressed forward with the protest, we would have lost the fragile unity and coalition that is so sorely needed today. We would have also risked the formal support of the S.F. Labor Council and all other councils in the Bay Area for the Oct. 17 action.

Today, the October 17 Antiwar Coalition remains united, and with it the prospect remains of organizing a sizeable demonstration against Obama's and Pelosi's war in the most difficult of times for the U.S. antiwar movement and other social movements.

Mass action vs. individual action

Cockburn opens his Sept. 4-6 "CounterPunch Diary" tirade against the antiwar movement and Socialist Action with a long quotation from his libertarian co-thinker John Walsh. Walsh, who today speaks from the *CounterPunch* platform, slams sectors of the antiwar movement, including its pro-Democratic Party and more reluctantly antiwar components, for not joining Cindy Sheehan in her call for a Martha's Vineyard protest against Obama's wars—the same kind of protest that Sheehan initiated at George Bush's Crawford, Texas, residence. Walsh attributes the "deafening silence" (the title of his *CounterPunch* piece) that Sheehan asserts was the reaction to her Martha's Vineyard call, to

the subordination of the movement to the Democratic Party.

There is significant truth to this view. The Obama-mania factor—that is, the massive but now diminishing illusion that an Obama presidency would bring an end to U.S. imperialist wars—has served to dampen the immediate potential to realize the majority sentiment against the war in mass mobilizations against it.

But there are other factors involved in the movement's decline in the past several years that have been fruitfully analyzed by many. They include the momentary paralysis of millions in the face of unprecedented attacks stemming from the current capitalist economic crisis, and the demoralization of many in the movement who should know better, resulting from the apparent absence of a national liberation movement in Iraq and Afghanistan that shows promise of a united anti-imperialist struggle based on a program of social liberation.

As important as the latter is, socialists and other longtime antiwar fighters understand that the potential for the emergence of such a movement in the Middle East can best be realized by the forced withdrawal of imperialist troops. Or, put another way, the defeat of the world's greatest superpower at the hands of the oppressed people of the Middle East and the U.S. antiwar movement would open the door wider than ever to the unification of the imperialist-divided forces inside Iraq and to the emergence of social forces capable of reorganizing and strengthening the present resistance on a more advanced social and political basis.

In the meantime, the vast majority of Iraqis and Afghans despise the U.S. intervention and have every reason to fight back with any means at their disposal.

Cockburn's championing of Cindy Sheehan's heroic and individual example, however meritorious, serves no useful purpose when it is counterposed to the building of united-front-type formations aimed at mobilizing millions. However important the individual in history might be, the collective and massive actions of the many have proved to be history's mechanism for every progressive social change—anti-capitalist revolutions included.

Indeed, Cockburn tips his hand when he cites and publishes libertarian John Walsh as a source of justified dismissal of the antiwar movement, which Walsh charges as refusing to announce and support the Sheehan protest. Says Walsh in *CounterPunch*: "However, not everyone has failed to publicize the event. The Libertarians at antiwar.com are on the job. And its editor in chief Justin Raimondo wrote a superb column Monday on the hypocritical treatment of Sheehan by the 'liberal' establishment.

"As Raimondo points out, Rush Limbaugh captured the hypocrisy of the liberal left in his commentary, thus: 'Now that she's headed to Martha's Vineyard, the State-Controlled Media, Charlie Gibson, State-Controlled Anchor, ABC: "Enough already." Cindy, leave it alone, get out, we're not interested, we're not going to cover you going to Martha's Vineyard because our guy is president now and you're just a hassle. You're just a problem. To these people, they never had any true, genuine emotional interest in her. She was just a pawn. She was just a woman to be used and then thrown overboard once they're through with her and they're through with her. They don't want any part of Cindy Sheehan protesting against any war when Obama happens to be president.'"

With Rush Limbaugh as a source, it must be true! Walsh continues: "Limbaugh has their number, just as they have his. Sometimes it is quite amazing how well each of the war parties can spot the other's hypocrisy. But Cindy Sheehan is no one's dupe; she is a very smart

and very determined woman who no doubt is giving a lot of White House operatives some very sleepless nights out there on the Vineyard. Good for her."

Cockburn's source and Walsh's libertarian disciple, Justin Raimondo, also praises neo-fascist Pat Buchanan's isolationist foreign policy views while neglecting to mention that their libertarian credo espouses: "No to U.S. government intervention abroad, and no to U.S. government intervention at home!" (see Raimondo at antiwar.com).

One will not find website mention among these libertarian right wingers of any demands for "Money for human needs, not war." These free-market laissez-faire capitalist libertarians, who originated in the Libertarian Caucus of the Republican Party, believe that Adam Smith's "invisible hand" regulates all and serves all. Government must stay out of the way, they insist. They reject outright any demands that corporate profits or government funds be allocated to those whose labor creates all wealth and who are daily robbed by the capitalist system. Liberty for the reactionary social Darwinist libertarians today means every person for themselves! Rhetoric aside, when push comes to shove they are warhawks of the first order to boot!

Cockburn's last-minute advice on the 2008 elections marked a break from his 2004 admonition to support Democratic Party billionaire John Kerry, who sought the presidency with a campaign to the right of Bush on imperialist war and "national security" issues.

Reluctantly rejecting a vote for Obama, he concludes his column by condemning this "far from socialism" writer by urging his *CounterPunch* devotees to "read the portions of the Libertarian Party Bob Barr's platform on *foreign policy* and constitutional rights." The libertarian's pseudo-radical anti-interventionist foreign policy, equating fascism with socialism and ranting against all "collectivist" ideologies (See Raimondo at antiwar.com), bases itself on the view that an unimpeded capitalist individualism is essentially humanity's way forward. (*CounterPunch* conveniently highlights "foreign policy" within the article for an easy click to the Libertarian Party website.)

Libertarians increasingly find their way into *CounterPunch's* pages and website, including joining with Cockburn's oft-stated and dangerously reactionary view that the "Jewish Lobby" and or AIPAC—as opposed to the U.S. ruling class—weighs heavily in the determination of U.S. foreign policy.

As with all left liberals, "lesser evil" politics remain central to their political arsenal. Cockburn is no exception. He concludes his "CounterPunch Diary" with some advice on "How Obama Can Save His Presidency." "Now it should be payback time," says Cockburn. "Obama's pledge to the American people [should be]: Cheney and Bush behind bars by 2012, plus Gonzales, Yoo, Addington and the rest of the pack. We crave drama. From Obama we're not getting it, except in the form of racist rallies. This is his last, best chance."

For lesser-evils, Democrats always get one more chance! For socialists and all serious antiwar activists, the building of an independent, democratic, united, mass-action, "Out Now!" antiwar movement is a more serious alternative—as is joining the socialist movement to challenge the capitalist system as a whole.

I conclude this response by cautioning readers to pay close attention to Cockburn's politics, an eclectic combination of self-proclaimed "left-leaning" radicalism with an increasing dose of carefully camouflaged right-wing libertarian demagoguery. As for Cockburn's unsubstantiated charges that Socialist Action used bully tactics 25 years ago to prevent a Lebanese speaker from expressing her views or that Socialist Action cancelled mass antiwar meetings to prevent consideration of the Palestine issue, I suggest that Cockburn be more careful with his sources in the future. All such accusations are patently false. ■

... LGBT march

(continued from page 12)

prised of genuine grassroots activists that is politically independent of the twin parties of homophobia leaves the dominant LGBT organizations to determine the strategy and tactics of the movement unchallenged.

Therefore, in the coming period, the LGBT struggles risk being knocked off of a forward-moving course by the Democrats, who determine politics based on what might be advantageous for them, vis a vis the Republicans. The greater part of their political calculation is how they can best balance between concessions and cutbacks (on rights or social services) without agitating 8.8 million LGBT people in the country to the point that they fight back.

It should be noted, however, that reactionary laws—against LGBT people, against Blacks and Latinos, against women, against all working peo-

ple—aren't a product of any one political party or any one president, but stem from unequal social relations inherent in the system itself.

These social inequities are built upon an economic foundation that is similarly unequal, in which the lion's share of all wealth is controlled by a small number of capitalists who control the economy and rule society. This inequality is enforced by artificial social constructs that divide people on the basis of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

Until the LGBT movement collectively becomes their own "fierce advocate" and begins building their own independent, mass organizations and a movement capable of fighting back, the energy for achieving full LGBT equality will have a tendency to dissipate into mainstream politics. But, should a struggle develop to unravel a certain thread—LGBT oppression—of the larger fabric of inequity, there is potential for the whole system to come undone. Then a new society can be built upon the tatters of the old. ■

Stella D'Oro workers face October shutdown

By MARTY GOODMAN

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

NEW YORK—After an heroic strike that lasted 11 months, bakery workers at the Stella D'Oro company in the Bronx face imminent plant closure and the loss of 135 jobs. The shut-down has been ordered by the new Stella D'Oro owners, the non-union Lance, Inc. of North Carolina, makers of snack-sized junk food. Lance, which will now own the Stella D'Oro brand name, is moving production to its non-union plant in Ashland, Ohio.

At press time, Stella D'Oro is expected to begin layoffs around mid-October and to completely close by the end of the month. The Bronx plant, a fixture for over 70 years in the working-class neighborhood of Kingsbridge, is the sole producer of Stella D'Oro cookies and breadsticks.

Over the years, Stella D'Oro company is said to have received millions in tax breaks from New York City to maintain its facility in the Bronx. Stella D'Oro is one of the last factories in the city and represents a loss of union jobs when unemployment has reached over 10%.

On June 30 the National Labor Relations Board ruled that Stella D'Oro, owned by Brynwood Partners, had bargained in "bad faith" and ordered the company to take workers back under the old contract and pay back wages. The Stella workers, organized by Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) struck in August 2008 against company demands for a 25 percent cut in wages and making health care unaffordable. Not one worker crossed the picket line during the entire 11 months.

In retaliation, Brynwood declared—the same day the workers returned—that the plant would close in 90 days if the union did not make big concessions or if a new owner were not found.

Brynwood is a hedge-fund outfit that seeks high returns for its wealthy investors. In court testimony, the company stated that it specialized in acquiring "iconic brand names" like Stella, "turning them around" (read, attacking workers), and selling them off in five to 10 years. Local 50 attorney Louis Nikolaidis told the *New York Daily News*, "Last year, they told us up front, because we're a hedge fund, our investors expect a higher rate of return, and your members should



(Left) Strike activist Sara Rodriguez speaks outside Brynwood Partners' home office in Connecticut last spring.

expect a wage cut."

The struggle of the Stella D'Oro workers has become a symbol of the fight against union busting and capitalism at its most brutal. Many BCTGM members have worked for Stella D'Oro for over 20 years. Most are women immigrants from Latin America, but also immigrants from Italy, Greece, and Ghana—as well as African Americans.

At a Sept. 23 press conference sponsored by the Stella D'Oro Support Committee, plans were announced

for a Sept. 25 demonstration at the investment firm Goldman Sachs, the largest recipient of bailout funds (\$12.9 billion), and then a march to City Hall.

Mike Filippou, a Stella strike leader, said, "Goldman Sachs is one of the main investors in the Lance company. Lance has no union and pays people very little. They [Goldman Sachs] are taking the people's tax money from the stimulus package and moving operations to Ohio. It's all in retaliation for our strike." Filippou was suspended in mid-September in what he says is clear retaliation for his organizing activities.

About 300 Stella workers and supporters joined the protest on Sept. 25, chanting, "Keep Stella in the Bronx! Fight, fight, fight!" all the way to City Hall. Prominent were many members of the Professional Staff Congress, representing college and university teachers. However, the New York labor movement, bound hand and foot to the Democratic Party, was absent once again, having done scandalously little to mobilize in support of the Stella workers.

Every worker in New York City and beyond, organized or unorganized, needs to come to the defense of Local 50. Those in unions must demand that the leadership take action and mobilize the ranks to do whatever it takes to save jobs at Stella D'Oro. Labor has the power to stop the Brynwood and Lance criminals in their tracks. An injury to one is an injury to all!

In related news, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, mentioned the struggle at Stella D'Oro in his Sept. 25 address to the United Nations. Chavez referred to a direct appeal by Stella D'Oro workers and supporters the day before at a labor meeting featuring Chavez.

Chavez told the UN, "One of them said to me, 'Why don't you buy the company?' I said, 'I'm going to look into it.'" Chavez continued, "We could turn it into a socialist company if Obama authorizes me. The company can be bought and handed over to the workers." For more information about the Stella D'Oro struggle, go to stelladorostrike.com. ■

SK Hand Tools workers strike

By DAVID BERNT

Scott Olson / Getty Images

CHICAGO—As Congress debates health-care reform in Washington, members of Teamsters Local 743 here are taking the fight for health care to the picket line. On Aug. 25, some 75 members walked off the job at SK Hand Tools, which supplies for Sears' Craftsman brand, in response to the companies' suspension of health-care coverage for the SK workers.

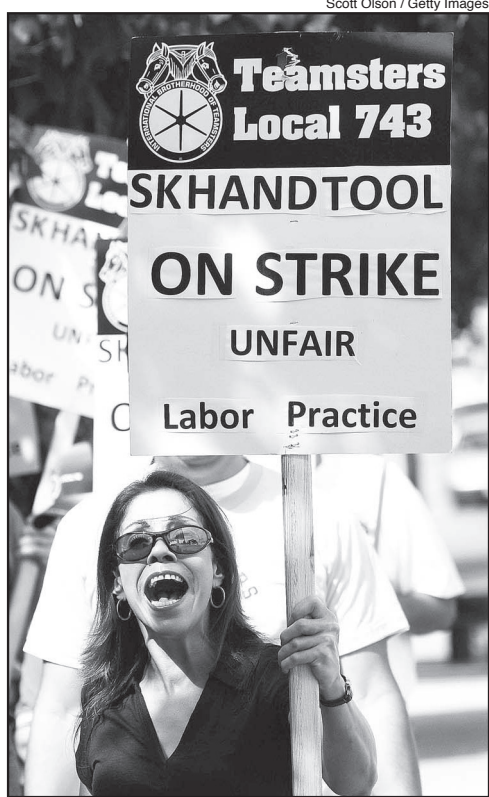
The company and the union have been involved in contentious negotiations for months. The union contract expired on Feb. 28. Management has asked the workers, who make on average \$14 per hour, to take a 40 percent pay cut and severe cuts in health-care and pension benefits.

Management was used to getting its way with Local 743. However, that changed in 2007 when the corrupt old guard that ran the union was thrown out by the members in favor of the rank-and-file New Leadership slate, headed by Richard Berg. Since then, the old guard president has been convicted of election fraud and cocaine smuggling.

Teamsters Local 743 made it clear that workers wouldn't accept the draconian concessions demanded by SK management. In retaliation, SK unilaterally suspended health-care coverage for the workers in May without notifying workers or the union. Instead, workers found out with a trip to the doctor or pharmacy. The loss of their health-care coverage has caused great hardship for the workers, with some owing thousands of dollars to doctors and hospitals.

The workers walked off the job on Aug. 25, declaring an unfair labor practices strike. The union has filed charges against SK with the National Labor Relations Board. Workers have maintained 24-hour picket lines at SK's two locations.

The strike has received support from



across the labor movement, including The Chicago Federation of Labor, Teamsters Joint Council 25, AFSCME District Council 31, United Electrical Workers, and many others. Rank-and file workers and activists are visiting the picket lines to show their solidarity with SK workers, whose struggle has highlighted both the broad assault on workers' wages and benefits and the health-care crisis.

Local 743 is taking this fight to Sears, the primary outlet for SK Hand Tools. The union has held pickets at Sears's flagship downtown store and plans to launch a national campaign to pressure Sears to stop doing business with this union-busting company. The SK workers will need broad support from the labor movement to win this fight.

For more information on how to support the SK workers, visit www.743teamsters.org. ■

Duluth restaurant workers defeat union-busting campaign

By ADAM RITSCHER

DULUTH, Minn.—On Sept. 21, the Pickwick Restaurant here agreed to settle with the union, and re-hire the workers it had illegally fired for union activity. This huge victory came on the heels of 12 grueling weeks of daily picketing by Workers United Local 99—the region's hospitality workers' union.

The labor dispute began earlier this summer when contract negotiations between Local 99 and Pickwick owner Chris Wisocki broke down. Despite the fact that the Pickwick has been union for 85 years, it became very clear early on that Wisocki was determined to end that.

When Local 99 began informational leafletting and picketing to alert the public of this, Wisocki fired two of his workers, Sandy Reinhold and CJ Cannon, for exercising their right to picket—despite the fact that it is clearly illegal to fire workers for union activity. These firings sparked a union-sponsored boycott of the restaurant backed up by daily pickets, as well as charges being filed against the Pickwick with the National Labor Relations Board.

The NLRB, after two months, finally handed down its ruling in early September. It sided 100% with the union, ruling that the firing of Sandy and CJ had been illegal, and demanding that they be re-instated with full back pay.

It also found that the Pickwick had illegally imposed its own unilateral

contract on its employees and revoked recognition of the union—and that it was stealing from its employees by collecting union dues from them for the past three months but failing to turn the dues over to the union.

The NLRB declared that it would take the Pickwick to federal court to force compliance with its ruling. Facing mounting legal costs, and with business visibly affected by the daily union pickets, the restaurant caved—agreeing to re-hire Sandy and CJ, and signing a document declaring their intent to come back to the table and negotiate a new contract in good faith with Local 99.

This is a victory not only for Local 99 but for hospitality workers and all labor throughout the region. And it was a victory that couldn't have been won without the dozens of activists from AFSCME, the Building Trades, the Northland Anti-War Coalition, Socialist Action, and other organizations that regularly and consistently walked the Local 99 picket lines throughout the labor dispute.

What happens next remains to be seen. Hopefully, the Pickwick and Local 99 will be able to successfully negotiate a new contract. If the Pickwick fails to do so, however, the pickets will go back up. Union supporters are urged to be prepared to hit the streets again if need be. We've shown that labor solidarity is alive and well in the Northland, and that it has the power to succeed! ■

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Fear that a Fall Canadian federal election would decimate the ranks of New Democratic Party MPs drove Leader Jack Layton to a self-inflicted act of desperation—voting for a rotten Tory budget.

Months of failing to advance socialist policies to meet human needs and differentiate the NDP made Layton's parliamentary caucus more vulnerable to a tactical shift by the Liberal Party. On Sept. 18, Michael Ignatieff had his Liberal MPs vote non-confidence in the Conservative minority government of Stephen Harper. But it would take a vote by all three opposition parties in the House of Commons (Liberals, NDP, and Bloc Quebecois) to defeat the government and force an election. Worried that NDP support would bleed towards the Liberals, and that voters would punish the NDP for precipitating a fourth federal election in only five and a half years, Layton and company opted to prop up the more rightist Tories.

According to opinion polls, 60 per cent of Canadians don't want an election now. Many want employment insurance reform and the \$6 Billion home renovation tax credit in the budget Harper tabled. But 40 per cent do want a federal vote to dump the labour-hating, Tar Sands-loving, war mongering Tories. That segment of the electorate is much more likely to consider supporting the NDP than the anti-election crowd—provided the party gives them some good reasons to do so.

By selling out so cheaply (that is, for E.I. changes that won't help most of the 1.5 million unemployed), and by propping up the Conservatives just to avoid an election, Layton comes off pretty badly. He looks like a hypocrite and alienates the NDP base (of 2.5 million voters) at one stroke.

The labour-linked NDP, the left, and the workers' movement as a whole are squandering a golden opportunity to put capitalism on trial, and to seize upon the global capitalist crisis as a tailor-made platform to fight for public ownership and green energy conversion through workers' and community control of industry. If Jack Layton isn't up to the task, which was evident at

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Layton's hypocrisy undermines NDP

the federal NDP convention in Halifax in August, he should step aside. The sooner, the better.

Toronto labour must dump Miller

The mayor of Canada's biggest city, David Miller, betrayed labour, disappointed his business allies, and was so low in the polls that he announced on Sept. 25 that he will not seek a third term in office. Although the next Toronto municipal election is more than a year away (Nov. 10, 2010), the megacity's corporate elite has been busy auditioning potential candidates for the

mayor's chair. The labour movement should get busy too. It's time to replace Miller and find standard bearers who will fight for a Workers' Agenda, rather than fight workers.

Miller began his electoral career as a labour-based, New Democratic Party-backed councillor for the west-end ward of High Park in 1994. Before his successful run for Toronto mayor, in 2006, he hooked up with Liberal Party fundraisers, got Conservative Party strategist John Laschinger to run his campaign, and subsequently let his NDP membership lapse.

Miller's policies were implemented by an informal Liberal-NDP alliance that controlled the 44-member Toronto city council. Those policies included corporate subsidies, tax incentives, and/or deferrals for costly environmental clean-ups, and tax rebates and minimal property taxes for major commercial developers. At the same time, City Hall imposed steeply rising taxes, rents, and fees for small homeowners and tenants, and serious cuts to services like street cleaning, snow removal, public access to swimming pools, arenas, community centers, and libraries. Welcome anti-corruption reforms were coupled with an economic assault against the majority of residents that still left the city short of operating funds.

The class collaborationist coalition hit a big bump in the road when city hall bosses tried to squeeze the wages, benefits and work place rights of Toronto civic workers. One hundred and twenty pages of management take-away demands precipitated a 39-day strike by 30,000 inside and outside employees, members of Canadian Union of Public Employees Locals 79 and 416, in June and July.

The workers won a partial victory by resisting most concession demands and making modest gains (see *Socialist Action*, August 2009). Then Toronto and York Region Labour Council served Miller and several other city politicians their just desserts by telling them they were not welcome at the 27,000-strong Toronto Labour Day Parade, Sept. 7.

Meanwhile, some of Miller's Liberal backers, including lawyer/bagman Ralph Lean, and fund-raising co-chair John Ron-

son, jumped ship. Prominent bourgeois politicians, led by Ontario's Liberal Deputy Premier George Smitherman, former Ontario Conservative leader John Tory, and several right-wing city councillors are testing the water for a mayoral run. The class forces they represent resent Miller for not punishing city workers enough, and for not privatizing services. In the game of municipal musical chairs, the ex-NDP sell-out realized that he would have nowhere to sit.

Labour Council should learn the bitter lesson from backing a gaggle of Liberals and NDPers in 2006 who went on to legislate in favour of rich developers, bankers, and businessmen, at the expense of working people. It's time to assemble a team of NDP and Labour activists who will fight for a socialist City Hall in 2010.

To make that team accountable, the NDP should convene a Toronto NDP municipal convention, open to all Toronto members. It should debate policies, adopt a programme, and determine a method for the selection of candidates for all municipal offices—and find a way to hold them all accountable to that programme. This is how the NDP functioned officially in Toronto up to the 1970s, before a wave of liberal opportunism and populist reform sidelined open and honest labour party politics at the local level. Hard times demand that labour and the NDP head back to the future.

Family: soldier's death "useless"

For once, the corporate media felt compelled to feature an opinion critical of the Canadian military intervention in Afghanistan. It is a view shared by over 60 per cent of the population, but it took the expressed grief of a slain soldier's family to get it reported.

Jonathan Couturier, a 23-year-old private in the Canadian Forces, in mid-September became the 131st fatality of the Canadian intervention. As his body was being flown back to his home in Montreal (in Quebec, where opposition to the war is over 80 per cent), his brother and sister-in-law lambasted the mission.

"That war over there, he found it a bit useless – that they were wasting their time over there," Nicolas Couturier told the Quebec City-based daily *Le Soleil*. His wife agreed: "(Jonathan) didn't want to know anything about going there," said Valerie Boucher. "He didn't want to talk about it, he stayed positive, but at some moments he said he was fed up."

Military booster, retired Maj.-Gen. Lewis Mackenzie downplayed the family's reaction; he insultingly portrayed it as marginal. But Bloc Quebecois defence critic Claude Bachand endorsed the comments of the soldier's family. The fact that such poignant criticism of the intervention is prominently reported, even though impugned by militarists, reflects the wavering resolve of Canada's ruling business and media elite for the failed imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. ■



(Above) Zarchy Stevenson performs at Socialist Action-sponsored Toronto concert for striking workers at INCO, Sept. 25. Workers have been on strike at the mining corporation since July.

Big Canadian banks set buying spree

While the average person is coping with lost income, a vanishing pension, shrinking benefits, inaccessible unemployment insurance, and double-digit joblessness, the Big Five Canadian banks are flush with capital, thank you very much. And you know what? They're preparing to go on an international shopping spree.

Canadian bank executives dropped strong hints in mid-September that, having weathered the global financial crisis, they are ready to make some "once in decades" acquisitions—especially in the United States, where more than 90 U.S. banks have been closed so far this year.

Gordon Nixon, chief executive of Royal Bank of Canada, told a bankers' summit, "Over the next few years, there will be significant acquisition opportunities in wealth and asset management." The RBC has businesses in the U.S. and Caribbean, and global custody and investor services through 50 per cent ownership in RBC Dexia Investor Services.

Scotiabank has operations in about 50 countries, including the U.S., Caribbean and Central America, Europe, Middle East, and Asia, with 5.5 million customers, 1500 branches and 2660 ABMs. It is eyeing expansion in Chile, Japan and Mexico.

Toronto-Dominion Bank has 1100 retail locations from Maine to Florida,

wholesale bank offices in the U.S., Mexico, U.K., Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, and South Korea. Brokerage TD Waterhouse also operates in the U.K.

Bank of Montreal owns Harris Bank, a major U.S. Midwest financial services organization with a network of banks in the Chicago area. It also operates across the U.S. with BMO Capital Markets, its investment banking division. BMO highlighted buying troubled consumer banks to bolster its Midwest footprint.

The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce is in 17 regional markets in the Caribbean through First Caribbean International Bank. CIBC's wholesale banking division also operates worldwide.

The Big Five apparently didn't need a government bail-out, but just in case, the feds did initiate a programme to aid them. Conservative Finance Minister Jim Flaherty in October said Ottawa would spend up to C\$25 billion (US\$19.6 billion) to buy mortgages from banks in an effort to keep them lending to homeowners. The size of the program has been increased twice, most recently to C\$125 billion.

Workers' tax money funded aid to banks, auto, forestry, and other corporate giants. But we are still waiting to see the public works and job-creation spending promised by the federal government last fall and winter.

— B.W.

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By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Amreeka," a film written, directed, and produced by Cherien Dabis. In English and Arabic.

"Amreeka," which is Arabic for "America," is a heartwarming and often humorous look at family love and support in stressful circumstances. It concerns a Palestinian woman who emigrates to the United States with her son around the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Without being heavy-handed, the film touches on prejudice, paranoia, terrorism, the plight of Palestinians living on the West Bank, 9/11, and the U.S. attack on Iraq—and it should help foster a public dialogue on those issues. A few years ago, a film that was so understanding of the Palestinian cause could not have been made for general release in the United States. First-time feature filmmaker Cherien Dabis's own Jordanian-Palestinian parents emigrated to Illinois before she was born.

Divorced, single mother Muna Farah (Nisreen Faour) and her son, Fadi (Melkar Muallem who is excellent in his film debut), live in Bethlehem. Muna, a *zoftig* woman always on a diet, has two college degrees, yet works in a bank in Jerusalem, while 16-year-old Fadi goes to a private school nearby. Muna's nag of an aging mother lives with them. Driving home in what was once a 15-minute commute is now three hours because of the newly erected Israeli apartheid wall. Frustrated, Fadi keeps talking about moving to America.

An approval for a visa arrives in the mail, based on a long-forgotten application. Concerned about her mother, Muna is reluctant to leave. But Fadi tells her, "It's better to be a stranger in a foreign country than a prisoner in your own." Her mind is made up; she notifies her sister in Illinois to expect them.

Mother and son face hours of intense investigation by airport security agents in Chicago, who employ a snarling bomb-sniffing dog. When an officer asks her "occupation," a smiling Muna, thinking he means the state of her country, naively answers, "Yes, for over 40 years." In the background, radios and televisions broadcast endless updates on the Iraq invasion.

Nisreen Faour's portrayal of Muna comes almost palpably across the screen. We feel Muna's strength,

STRANGERS VS. PRISONERS



(Above) Facing a grilling by an airport customs agent: Nisreen Faour (left) and Melkar Muallem portray Palestinian immigrants to the United States.

warmth, and endearing personality, regardless of her disappointments and the homesickness that her sister tells her will never go away. She is turned down for jobs in white-collar offices. On one interview, her potential employer jokingly asks, "You're not going to bomb us, are you?"

Relegated to serving burgers at a White Castle in a strip mall, and feeling humiliated, she lies to her family, telling them she works in a nearby bank. Her ruse is uncovered when she has an accident at work. A sign outside the White Castle bears a few missing letters, lending the film an ironic touch. It reads: "SUPPORT OUR... OOPS!"

Fadi suffers discrimination at school although his cousin Salma (Alia Shawkat) tries to defend him. The

discussion on his first day of class is about the U.S. attack on Iraq. The boys hurl racial slurs at Fadi while the girls giggle and the teacher tries to maintain order.

Unfortunately, while "Amreeka" hits a broad range of the problems befalling the Palestinian immigrants, it fails to explore these issues as profoundly and sensitively as it might have. Some characters appear as virtual stereotypes. Ultimately, this well-intentioned film loses fire as it spirals down to a super-sweet kumbaya finale, with Muna's family dancing in a restaurant with a new Jewish Polish-American friend. ■

Education we can believe in

By JOE AUCIELLO

The conservative/liberal conflict over President Obama's Sept. 8 speech on education, a prelude to the larger fight over health care, is both superficial and foolish. Neither side comprehends the real issues and the real problems with public education; more importantly, neither side can offer a real solution.

Conservatives have let themselves be convinced that the president is unveiling a series of programs that will lead, step by step, to "socialism." Parents who were afraid to let their children hear the president speak kept them home from school or pressured administrators to prevent them from showing the speech.

Liberals replied that the president's message on education would not be controversial or even political. An editorial in *The New York Times* stated, "There is, of course, nothing socialist in any of Mr. Obama's policies, as anyone with a passing knowledge of socialism and its evil history knows" (Sept. 5, 2009).

Unfortunately, the "newspaper of record" answered conservative hysteria with liberal nonsense. In regard to education, the statement by *The Times* is quite false on one level, yet profoundly true on another—more than *The Times* itself may realize. That is, socialists value education and educational reform even more than does the president.

First, though, the offhand reference to an "evil history" requires comment. The phrase is hardly a matter of objective facts but an interpretation of them congenial to the capitalist point of view. Given the ever-widening crisis of the profit system, liberal apologists are compelled to disparage the revolutionary alternative of socialism. It insinuates that the political struggle for socialism only results in the tyranny of Stalinism, as represented for decades by the Soviet Union. The conclusion, then, is that sensible political activity must be limited to the creation of reforms within capitalism.

Anyone "with a passing knowledge of socialism" would know that the history of socialism in the 20th century is a record of struggle against capitalist rule in all its forms, including fascism, and a struggle against the bureaucratic caste that overturned or denied workers' rule in countries like the Soviet Union.

Despite the assertions of liberals, capitalism is not synonymous with democracy. In fact, in order to preserve itself, capitalism will discard its democratic shell whenever a more direct and brutal totalitarian rule is required for its self-preservation.

Capitalism means much more than abundant consumer goods in the industrialized West. The social evil of capitalism has brought oppression, suffering, racism, and war to the peoples of the earth. Socialism, on the contrary, means the expansion of individual liberty, public freedoms, and material prosperity for the world's majority—and offers the best possible hope for humanity's future.

Schooling and public education have always held a significant place in the socialist platform. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in "The Communist Manifesto" of 1848, outlined a revolutionary program that included a demand for "free education for all children in public schools."

At the time, it was typical for children—even young ones—to labor in factories alongside adults. Education was reserved for the children of the upper classes; a worker only learned enough to labor as a "hand." A human being was thus debased and reduced to what Marx called "an appendage of the machine."

Following the October 1917 revolution in Russia, the Bolshevik party was determined to rebuild and greatly expand the educational system. A country suffering from the devastation of the First World War, a civil war, and famine still pledged to educate its citizens more thoroughly than the United States does today.

The Bolshevik program of 1919 pledged to create free, compulsory general and

technical education for all up to the age of 17. This included the creation of state funded public institutions (kindergarten, child care) that would educate preschoolers and provide "for the freeing of women." Beyond 17, professional and college education was to be made available with "attention to the material welfare of the pupils, so that it may become practically possible for proletarians and peasants to attend the universities."

The Bolsheviks also pledged to "supply to all pupils, at the cost of the State, of food, clothing, footwear, and scholastic requisites."

No, President Obama did not present a socialist solution to the problems of education. It is true, though, that the president's speech was deeply political: it promoted capitalist values. Disregarding the crucial social context of schooling, the president treated educational achievement as primarily a personal matter, telling students to "fulfill your responsibilities." For those who do, there is the promise of success "because here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future."

He criticized students who are trapped in crumbling, overcrowded schools with too few textbooks, too little technology, and too few teachers, instead of condemning the political and economic system that cannot educate them with the abundance they deserve.

He did not mention that the unemployment rate for Hispanics is 13 percent and that the unemployment rate for Blacks is more than 15 percent. He certainly did not tell students that the unemployment rate for teens is more than 25 percent. Nor did Obama mention what *The New York Times* reported two days earlier, that a "Surge in Homeless Pupils Strains Schools" (Sept. 6, 2009). According to this article, the rise in the number of homeless schoolchildren "is driven by relentless unemployment and foreclosures" that currently affect "more than one million students."

The solution to the crisis of public education doesn't rest solely with the schools. Reforms in the educational system can only succeed as part of a larger, far-sweeping set of changes in society as a whole. Students must be guaranteed the right to a job upon graduation. They must have the certainty that education will lead to employment.

A massive public works program is already a necessity in the United States. Research and construction is needed in green and alternative sources of energy. Medical and dental facilities must be expanded to all areas of the country. More jobs can be created by reducing the work day with no loss of salary. The demand of 30 hours work for 40 hours pay has never been more timely.

Socialists would agree that the president was correct when he told students, "What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. The future of America depends on you."

What's more, unlike the president, socialists would treat those words with the seriousness that they deserve. Public education today needs to be extended beyond high school to include free university education or technical training, including the cost of books and public transportation.

With capitalism, public education is subordinate to private profit. Elementary and high schools provide basic training; colleges and graduate schools (including law and medical schools) provide more specialized education—all at relatively little cost to business. Highly skilled, highly productive workers can produce more costly commodities with potentially higher profits; low-skilled and less educated workers are used to keep wages down and are often used as a barrier to union organizing. Consider Wal-Mart, for example.

With socialism, on the other hand, education will provide socially beneficial labor while reducing the hours spent on work. Socialism will provide individuals with the means to develop their own abilities and interests to achieve their full potential as human beings. ■

Supporters of LGBT rights march on Washington

Mike Kepka / S.F. Chronicle

By MARC ROME

The struggle for gay and lesbian rights surged forward last November with near spontaneous mass mobilizations throughout the United States following the passage of an anti-gay ballot measure in California. Rather than be deterred by a California Supreme Court decision on May 26 to uphold Proposition 8, activists launched organizing efforts to fight back almost immediately.

The energy generated from these largely youthful marches and rallies culminates in an Oct. 9-11 weekend of activity in Washington, D.C., including a mass march. A solidarity march is scheduled for San Francisco on Oct. 11.

The outpouring into the streets promised by the National Equality March (NEM) shows the way forward for how to build a movement to effectively combat the oppression of LGBT people. A similar strategy of mass mobilization was employed by other movements in the United States and was a decisive factor in the victorious struggles against racist Jim Crow laws, for an end to the war against Vietnam, for universal women's suffrage, and for a woman's right to control her own body.

The National Equality March will take to the streets at a time when LGBT rights struggles in two states and one city—Washington, Maine, and Kalamazoo, Mich.—will be put before voters this November. What's at stake in each individual case is an expansion of same-sex domestic partnership laws, a reversal of same-sex marriage previously approved by voters, and a legal prohibition against discrimination of LGBT people, respectively.

The NEM's central demand is "equal protection for LGBT people in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states. Now!"

On the national level, two efforts have been made this year—first by Massachusetts and then by California—to challenge the constitutionality of the Clinton-era Defense of Marriage Act (DoMA). In both cases, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) defended the law, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

In a June 2009 brief filed by the DOJ, their attorneys argued that the law did not discriminate against gays and lesbians and was a valid means of saving money that governments would otherwise spend on [same sex] marital benefits. DoMA bars same-sex couples—even those married in the 6 states where same-sex marriage is legal—from enjoying over 1300 federal benefits belonging to heterosexual married couples. Some of those benefits are Social Security, veterans' benefits, health insurance, Medicaid, hospital visitation, estate taxes, retirement savings, pensions, family leave, and immigration law.

Obama has since filed a brief saying that the law is discriminatory and that Congress should repeal it. However, the DOJ is mandated to continue defending the law, as it is mandated to defend every other law passed by Congress.

Another Clinton-era law, Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), which for the past 13 years has allowed the military to conduct a witch hunt for homosexuals, has resulted in the dismissal of 265 gay and lesbian service members. Following consultation with Pentagon officials and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Obama said he will enforce DADT but seeks to "change" it. No details were offered, but among defenders of LGBT rights, most desire total abolition of DADT. A CNN/Opinion Research Corp. poll conducted in December 2008 indicates that 81 percent of respondents



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believe that homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the U.S. military.

A scorecard recently published by *The Advocate*, a major national monthly LGBT magazine, gave the current administration a C-minus on DADT and an F on DoMA. Moreover, little has been done on the federal level to end workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identification. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would prohibit this discrimination, has been introduced in nearly every Congress since 1994—only to die. Today is no exception, with a version of ENDA languishing in Congressional committees.

Meanwhile, 30 states still discriminate based on sexual orientation and 38 discriminate based on gender identification. This discrimination has been grounds for firing gay and trans people in these states. Obama has not urged haste for ENDA's passage.

"Change" that we need?

The "change" that many LGBT people voted for this past November was based on their hopes, but also their fears.

The Bush administration and a majority Republican Congress presided over the passage of same-sex-marriage bans in the vast majority of the 30 states where bans currently exist. Regarding this issue alone, voting for the "lesser-evil" seemed more appealing than ever.

After all, the reasoning went, Democrats finally won a majority in both branches of Congress. Combined with candidate Obama vowing to be the LGBT community's "fierce advocate", the time had finally come to repeal DoMA and DADT and to achieve full equality, more generally.

After Obama was elected, many in the LGBT community refused to acknowledge his open opposition to same-sex marriage as a harbinger of a Pyrrhic victory.

Unfortunately, the fact that many of the key leaders of the march are tied to the Democratic Party has opened the door to strategic compromises with outright

opponents of the LGBT movement.

For example, David Mixner, one of the NEM's lead organizers, is a gay former advisor to President Bill Clinton. And Clinton, for his part, has rudely suggested what the political orientation of the movement should be. During his keynote address to a major liberal/Democratic Party event known as Netroots Nation Convention this past August, someone from the audience interrupted him to ask if he would call for the repeal of DADT and DoMA. Clinton responded by blaming the LGBT community themselves for the passage of legislation that he signed.

"You want to talk about 'Don't ask, don't tell?'" Clinton lectured. "I'll tell you exactly what happened. You couldn't deliver me any support. All most of you did was to attack me instead of getting me some support in the Congress. Now that's the truth."

Cleve Jones, who worked closely alongside Harvey Milk in the late 1970s during his successful campaign to become San Francisco's first openly gay member of the Board of Supervisors, is one of the NEM's national spokespersons. Jones has appeared on many radio programs, blogs, in LGBT print and on-line publications, and on the stages of prestigious forums like the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco to publicize the NEM.

Jones has used the exposure to also expound its political strategy. It is summed up on the march's website: "We support community organizing in all 435 Congressional Districts toward the goal of full federal equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people."

From Obama—"Congress should repeal DoMA"—to Clinton, to Jones, each one has made it clear that following the NEM, in order to achieve reforms that benefit LGBT people, the movement should begin campaigning in congressional districts to ensure that Democrats win contested congressional races in 2010. Their case is bolstered by the carefully sown illusion that the Democratic Party is a "friend" of LGBT people.

The reputation of Democrats as a

"progressive" party is ill-gotten, but it is one that, at least since the FDR administration, has effectively disoriented mass movements or prevented them from developing at all. Between the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York City—which gave birth to the modern LGBT movement—and today, Democrats have controlled the White House for 12 years under one Carter and two Clinton administrations. For at least six years, Democrats controlled both Houses of Congress as well. The outcome has been DoMA and DADT; under Carter, more gays and lesbians were kicked out of the military than under the previous post war Republican administrations.

On Oct. 10, the NEM has several workshops scheduled on topics including how to lobby elected representatives and how to run for office or elect an "out" candidate. "Change your government from the inside!" reads one of the workshop titles. Leading the lobbying workshop is a former advisor to Los Angeles Democratic Mayor Villaraigosa and a former field organizer for Obama for America. People with similar backgrounds and viewpoints are leading the other political strategy workshops.

After the weekend of events, the organizational options for LGBT activists will be mostly limited to a number of dominant NGOs and non-profits, which, with a few exceptions, have an electoral strategy. For example, the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national LGBT rights organization, is a powerful multi-million-dollar lobby of over 750,000 members comprising their "grassroots force." Since 1980 they have endorsed "fair-minded" candidates, including Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Courage Campaign, based in California, was founded and is currently directed by the former chair of Howard Dean's presidential campaign in California. Some of their clients for their on-line organizing tools include Obama for America and the Democratic National Committee. Equality California, the state's largest LGBT rights political organization, includes paid staff who led local organizing drives for Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Which way forward for LGBT rights?

The Democratic Party's history of selling out the struggle for LGBT rights speaks for itself. And certainly the absence of any national organization com-

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