

A SOCIALIST ACTION

**200,000 join
Washington march
for LGBT rights**

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Taliban extends war to wider region despite U.S. troop surge

Joe Raedle / Getty Images



By **GERRY FOLEY**

With the starting of a campaign of attacks across Pakistan, the Taliban and its allies have in effect extended their guerrilla war to a regional level. The Islamist militant response to the Pakistani army offensive against their redoubt in South Waziristan has pointed up another dimension of the political crisis in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government has no political credibility and the Pakistani government scarcely more. Both are notoriously corrupt. Both are seen by their respective peoples as stooges of U.S. imperialism. Both are confronted by an insurgency, which although it lacks a credible political program and conducts atrocities of its own on innocent civilians, is being waged by dedicated fighters against corrupt and weakly motivated local military forces.

Moreover, regardless of the military fortunes of the U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan and its ally in Pakistan, this war will mean great suffering to the populations of both countries (There are already more than 100,000 displaced persons from South Waziristan. From the Swat Valley, it was more than a million).

The experience of Iraq indicates that the local people will blame the United States even for the atrocities committed by the Islamist militants because the U.S. will be seen as responsible for the strife. The "oral history" of the Taliban published recently in *Newsweek* indicates the dynamic. The Taliban forces in Afghanistan were shattered by U.S. air power. They fled in disarray into Pakistan tribal areas also inhabited by the Pushtun people, on which they were based.

(Photo above) Helicopters drop U.S. Marines into Afghan territory held by the Taliban, July 2.

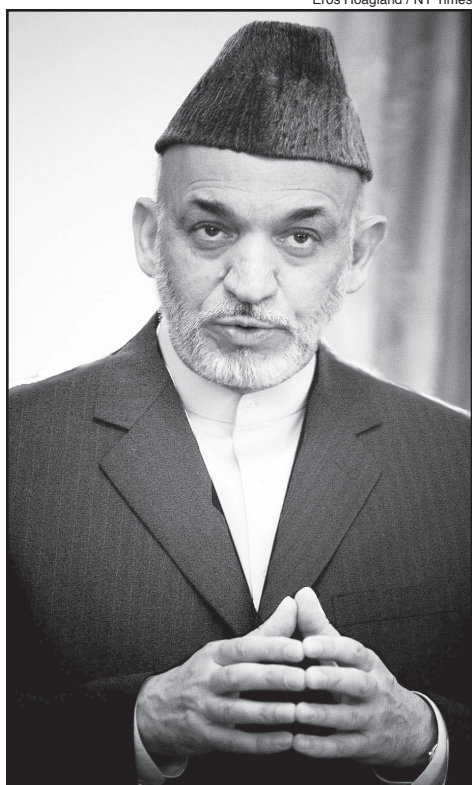
(Right) Hamid Karzai's administration is charged with corruption.

But the antagonism of the Afghan people to foreign occupation and resentment against the atrocities resulting from U.S. bombing of civilians revived support for the Taliban until it regained control of large sections of Afghanistan and became a serious contender for power in the country. The account of a *New York Times* journalist held captive by the Taliban in Pakistan for seven months, recently published in his newspaper, indicates that the Taliban also created a mini-state of their own in the Pakistani tribal areas, which the Pakistan government either chose or was forced to tolerate.

The Pakistani government only started launching major offensives against the Taliban when the Islamist militants appeared to be reaching the point of threatening the

(continued on page 8)

Eros Hoagland / NY Times



Oct. 17 in Boston, photo by James Frickey / Socialist Action

October antiwar rallies

The first round of U.S. and U.K. demonstrations to focus on the need to end the war in Afghanistan were mounted in October.

At least 10,000 marched in London on Oct. 24, motivated by the appearance of Lance Corporal Joe Glenton, the first serving soldier in the British Army to join an antiwar action. Glenton rallied the crowd in favor of British withdrawal from the conflict, while defying direct orders from the army brass against joining the Stop the Wars Coalition and facing court martial for refusing to return to Afghanistan.

In the United States, where actions took place in more than 50 locations on Oct. 17, the movement was grounded by the tour of Zoya, a leader of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), who argued forcefully that ending the occupation was the prerequisite to the advance of democratic forces in her country.

Within a week of the demonstrations, U.S. diplomat Matthew Hoh, a former Marine who was serving as the senior civilian representative for the U.S. government in Zabul province made public his resignation with the statement: "The U.S. and NATO presence and operations in Pashtun valleys and villages, as well as Afghan army and police units that are led by non-Pashtun soldiers and police, provide an occupation force against which an insurgency is justified."

Public figures like Glenton and Hoh are a reflection of the deepening opposition to the war among those who have not yet taken to the

streets or the airwaves. Recent polls have shown that 37 percent of the U.S. population thinks it was a mistake to send troops to Afghanistan, and two-thirds of the British public want troops withdrawn.

The Oct. 17 actions were called by the July conference of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations. In many areas, the coalitions that put together the marches were the united project of most of the different formations and tendencies that make up the current movement.

The demonstrations held around the United States on Oct. 17 were relatively small—only approaching 1000 in two cities, San Francisco and Boston. It seems clear that illusions regarding the intentions of the Obama administration still have a hold on the population. The brutality of the economic crisis has left many people disoriented and demobilized.

On the other hand, a substantial layer of young activists attended their first march and became part of the movement to end the wars. The geographic spread of the actions indicates that determined organizers are busy from one end of the country to another.

The National Assembly-initiated Oct. 17 demonstrations were crucial to the process of retooling the antiwar movement, and making possible the future moment when revulsion toward the human and economic costs of Washington's imperial adventures will once again be expressed by hundreds of thousands in the streets. — **The Editors**

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UC students mobilize

By ROBERT SIMONS

BERKELEY, Calif.—California's deep funding cuts in this year's education and social programs have not been taken as quietly as the state administration had hoped. Universities, community colleges, and K-12 schools are fighting back. On Sept. 24, some 5000 University of California at Berkeley students, faculty, and campus workers mobilized as part of a system-wide strike. They were joined by thousands more across all 10 UC campuses. That evening, a mass assembly at UC Berkeley voted to hold a statewide conference to coordinate the struggle to defend public education.

The resulting conference, held Oct. 24 at Berkeley's Pauley Ballroom, attracted 800 participants from schools, community colleges, California State Universities, and University of California campuses. For the first time, students, faculty, and campus workers organized a statewide open and democratic assembly to plan and prepare a concerted and long-term fightback.

After hours of discussion, the meeting set March 4 for a day of strikes, marches, occupations, teach-ins, and other forms of mass action. The date was chosen in anticipation of March 15, the official deadline after which state law prohibits public-school teacher layoffs.

In addition, Nov. 18-20 was selected for an action to shut down the scheduled meeting of the University of California Board of Regents at UCLA. Thousands are expected to converge on Los Angeles that day as well as hold demonstrations at other campuses. The Regents are scheduled to vote then to increase UC student fees 32% for next year, bringing fees up to \$10,302

per year. Already fees have been increased 9.3% for this year, or 250% in the last decade.

Dozens of custodians, physical plant workers, librarians, professors and others face layoffs and furloughs at UC. Meanwhile, UC President Mark Yudof gets paid \$828,000, plus a free mansion.

The body voted to allow each sector to organize its own constituency in the manner it thought appropriate. "It is one thing for students to strike for a day or more," said one UC Berkeley student activist, "it is quite another to organize the state's 1100 school district union teachers and workers to do the same. We are just at the beginning of this fight and how we achieve the unity to win is the critical question."

The Oct. 24 assembly showed that many students and education workers are well aware of the nation's skewed priorities. "Bail out working people and public education," said one student at an open microphone, "not the corporations and banks." Another added to loud applause, "Fund education not wars!"

What was most impressive was the spirit of open discussion and debate that permeated the day's deliberations. Everyone was welcomed, heard, and respected. A unanimous motion was approved to organize a follow-up statewide meeting in early 2010 to continue the struggle and to plan for March 4.



The (CCSU) Recorder

CCSU rally against racism

Students rallied at Central Connecticut State University on Oct. 14 to protest racist actions on campus. The demonstration addressed an alleged incident during the 2005-2006 school year in which a former student cross-country runner was forced by his coach to drink human blood in the presence of teammates. Charles Ngetich filed a lawsuit in September against his former coach, claiming also that the coach had subjected him to racist remarks.

The CCSU Recorder reports that the president of the NAACP chapter at the university, Martine Bernadel, told the crowd that in the two years she's attended CCSU, she has seen terrible acts of racism and discrimination acted upon students and friends. She asked the crowd to think about how it would feel to be far away from home and be treated in such a way that Ngetich has.

CCSU Black Student Union President Patrick Williams said, "This rally isn't just about one issue [of racism]; this is about a constant repetitive thing that happens on campus." CCSU Youth for Socialist Action President Marissa Blaszkowski began a chant by shouting, "When students' rights are under attack, what do we do?" The crowd responded: "Stand up, fight back!"

Socialist Action



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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200,000 march on Washington for equal rights for LGBT people

By MARC ROME

On Oct. 11, as many as 200,000 LGBT activists and straight allies descended on Washington, D.C., for the National Equality March (NEM), whose single demand on the federal government was “Equal protection for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states! Now!”

March participants and observers were inspired by the political potential embodied in the huge mobilization. It included a high percentage of newly radicalized young people, who created a sea of rainbow flags that could not be ignored. However, out Congressman Barney Frank drew ire from the LGBT community and others for his attempt to downplay the march’s significance. He had said that the only impression the march might leave behind would be upon the grass beneath the marcher’s feet.

Organizing for the weekend-long event was done primarily via the internet—the blogosphere, Facebook, Twitter, the NEM website, text messages, etc., and with no centralized office or staff. Equality Across America (EAA) orchestrated the event on a “shoe-string” budget of \$250,000, a fraction of what previous Equality marches had spent.

EAA is led by Democratic Party member David Mixner, gay liberals like Cleve Jones, and a more youthful layer, including Kip Williams of One Struggle One Fight. There were no corporate sponsors. According to *The Nation*, Williams said, “Every penny ... came from individual donors who believe in us.” No funding was received from national LGBT organizations: “They didn’t offer, and we didn’t ask.”

Prior to the march, on Oct. 9, President Obama addressed an exclusive \$250-per-head, black-tie event organized by the nation’s largest and best funded LGBT lobby, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). As the keynote speaker, Obama promised to end Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT), which since it was enacted 16 years ago has resulted in the forced dismissal of over 13,000 gay and lesbian members of the Armed Services. His remarks were often met with wild applause. But many leaders and activists in the LGBT movement

considered his speech similar to those he had given on the campaign trail—eloquent rhetoric with little substance. Obama offered no concrete proposal for ending the homophobic legislation.

With a decision pending to expand troop levels and to send between 40,000 and 80,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan, and with the situation in Iraq continuing to deteriorate, it seems that the administration is testing the waters in order to discern what kind of response it might expect from the Pentagon and Congress regarding the viability of ending DADT.

A protest was organized outside the HRC event, and although the crowd was small, the mood on the street was defiant, with demands to end not only DADT but also the Defense of Marriage Act (DoMA), and for the passage of the Employee Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The former effectively bars same-sex married couples from receiving nearly 1300 federal benefits that heterosexual couples already enjoy and also nullifies their marriages should a legally married same-sex

couple move to a state where their union is outlawed. The latter would ban employer discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identification. Virtually no progress has been made on DoMA. ENDA has been introduced in Congress and has 189 and 41 co-sponsors in the House and Senate, respectively. (See the October *Socialist Action* for more on DoMA and ENDA).

While there are ongoing discussions among march organizers about organizational strategies for how to move ahead, it seems unlikely that a sustained movement can be created through decentralized on-line organizing. However, the political strategy is clear, which is prefaced by the following statement on in the “District Action Team Organizers Toolkit #1,” which can be found on EAA website: “This is the dawn of a new day. We have a Democratic majority in the House and the Senate. We have a president who acknowledges and respects our community and who has committed to be a fierce advocate for equality. That means that we have work to do! We have to hold them accountable and keep the pressure high.

“The National Equality March was a first step to build a national grassroots network to do the hard work of demanding equality and holding our government accountable.”

Cleve Jones can be seen on a Youtube video embedded in the EAA homepage, in which he says that “true equality can only come with decisive, unequivocal action from the United States Congress, the United States Supreme Court, and the president.” Thus, the major push nationally is to organize teams throughout all 435 congressional districts to “pressure” representatives and to campaign for candidates who are “friendly” to LGBT issues.

The sum total of this political strategy entirely ignores the potential independent strength of 200,000 who marched in Washington and the 8.8 million LGBT people in the United States. The challenge for the movement is to create an alternate political pole, to build a force that is independent of both the Democrats and Republicans, who have proven time and again that, as a whole, they are the political defenders of a system that treats LGBT people as second-class citizens (see the October SA for more on the Democrats and Obama). Viewed in this light, it is this type of strategy that earned the Democratic Party leadership the title of the “graveyard of social movements.”

Of course, with so many newly radicalized people in motion around LGBT issues, there is an opportunity for radicals to begin a discussion about why it is so important to build an independent movement for LGBT equality, and to win a layer to an anti-capitalist viewpoint based on the idea that equality can be guaranteed only when the capitalist system, which falls back on homophobia as part of its larger divide-and-conquer strategy, is replaced by an egalitarian socialist society. ■

Black is Back calls D.C. march

By CLAY WADENA and JOHN LESLIE

On Nov. 7, a national demonstration, called by the Black is Back Coalition, will be held in Washington, D.C. There will be a march and a rally in Malcolm X Park. People are marching under the call, “Resist U.S. Wars and Occupation in the U.S. and Abroad! Reparations Now!”

Some additional demands are “Free all political prisoners!” “Single payer health care/Medicare for all!” “Stop police violence and Black community containment policy!” “Stop gentrification, home mortgage foreclosures! Bail out the victims!” and “No AFRICOM!”

Endorsers include the African Peoples’ Socialist Party, former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, Mumia Abu Jamal, the hip-hop group Dead Prez, Pam Africa, Glen Ford of Black Agenda Report, Rosa Clemente (2008 Green VP candidate), the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations, Larry Hamm of the Newark, N.J., Peoples’ Organization for Progress, and others.

For Black people of various political viewpoints to state their opposition to the policies supported by both major capitalist parties is only natural on the heels of eight years of the reactionary and racist policies of the Bush administration, including the criminal neglect of New Orleans both during and after Katrina. For many, however, the election of Barack Obama increased illusions that somehow U.S. capitalism might be humanized by his administration and the Democratic Party.

Obama’s record in power is now clear: he is continuing the policies of the Bush regime with the wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. And again following in Bush’s footsteps, Obama has been quick to bail out the banks and big business with subsidies while leaving working people floundering in the economic crisis.

Black people have borne the brunt of the recession. Black unemployment, now 15.4 percent by official figures, has surged much more drastically than that of whites (9 percent). Continuing as victims of Jim Crow’s legacy, Black people continue to be the “first hired and the first fired.”

Recently, ultra-right mobilizations in opposition to Obama’s proposed (far from adequate) health-care reforms have taken on a racist, and at times proto-fascist, character. Anti-reform reactionaries raised the slogan of “take our country back”—their code for calling for the removal of the first Black president. This racist reaction to Obama’s policies has served to reinforce the tendency of reformists to take an uncritical stance towards Obama.

As the Black is Back “Call To Action” states: “Many well-meaning people in this country and around the world are afraid to take more progressive political positions for fear of being seen as anti-Black. ... The political paralysis now being experienced by anti-war and other progressive movements suffer from the lack of a Black-led anti-imperial movement to off-set the traps set by Obama’s so-called ‘post-racial’ politics that perpetuates the same oppressive militarist agenda well known during the Bush regime.”

Revolutionary socialists recognize the need for a multi-racial fightback against war, racism, and oppression. We also understand that the racist dynamics of U.S. society may require the self-organization of oppressed people into fighting organizations of their own.

Black workers have traditionally played a vanguard role in the U.S. class struggle—from the formation of the CIO, to the civil rights movement, to the auto strikes of the 1960s (i.e., Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement). Black is Back can be a step toward a revival of those goals. For more information go to <http://blackisbackcoalition.org/>. ■

Hate crimes

Obama recently signed the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes legislation. While the reform should certainly be supported, few think that it will add any meaningful protection to victims of homophobic attacks and has added to the illusion that Obama respects the LGBT community and is a “fierce advocate for equality.” Ironically, to guarantee the bill’s passage, it was made part of a broader bill authorizing an additional \$130 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Washington Post reported that “according to the FBI, law enforcement agencies around the country reported 7624 hate crime incidents in 2007, the most recent year for which data were available. More than half were categorized as racially motivated, and about 17 percent were based on sexual orientation.”

Oct. 17 antiwar protests take place in over 50 U.S. cities

z / indybay.org



By ANDREW POLLACK

(Above) San Francisco protesters take to the streets as part of nationwide Oct. 17 protests.

On Saturday, Oct. 17, protesters gathered in over 50 towns and cities around the United States to oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The date was chosen to mark eight years of war in Afghanistan and to oppose the continual escalation of that war, as well as to mark the 40th anniversary of the Vietnam Moratorium, in which millions marched to protest U.S. aggression in Southeast Asia.

The call for action came out of a summer national conference of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations.

The two biggest marches, of about 1000 each, were in San Francisco and Boston. While none of the events around the country came near in size to marches around the start of the Iraq war, they played an essential role in maintaining the continuity of the movement at a time when illusions in Obama still run rampant. And because the events were planned by broad, democratic coalitions, they set the stage for the widest possible participation of all antiwar forces and other social movements when those illusions dissipate.

In San Francisco, for instance, the October 17 Antiwar Coalition included all five national antiwar coalitions, plus Code Pink. While only 600 gathered at the kickoff rally, numbers doubled as the march proceeded through the city, picking up bystanders along the way.

Its demands were: Bring the Troops Home Now from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan! Money for Jobs, Pensions, Education, Healthcare and Housing, Not Wars and Corporate Bailouts! End US support for the occupation of Palestine! End the siege of Gaza!

The march itself was extremely spirited and colorful. It included many youth as well as experienced activists. Until the day before the march, the police tried to deny the coalition a permit, an unprecedented event in the Bay Area. But serious pressure from local groups and politicians caused the police to relent.

Quotes in the San Francisco *Chronicle* from marchers showed signs of a beginning awareness of Obama's

duplicity. Said the paper: "One thing most protesters seemed to share was disillusionment since President Obama took office. One woman carried a sign saying, 'You won the Nobel Peace Prize, we're here to help you earn it.' Many protesters said they'd expected more significant policy change from Obama by now.

The march in Boston was part of a regional effort involving over 100 peace and justice organizations from all six New England states. One organizer estimated that about half the participants in the march were brand new to the movement.

A letter from one of the organizers, Cole Harrison of UFPJ affiliate United for Justice with Peace, summed up well the way it was organized and the challenges facing the movement: "Together, we made a loud and proud statement that the peace and justice movement is alive and well! ... The Afghanistan war was in the forefront of everyone's minds. By calling for 'Troops Out Now' we registered beyond question that there is organized opposition to this war, a movement determined to dig in for the long haul.

In Boston, voices of beginning disillusionment with Obama were also heard. Suzette Abbott told a local paper she campaigned for Obama in New Hampshire and now expects results, especially since he got the Nobel Peace Prize. The retired kindergarten teacher held a poster reading: "Yes we can get out of Afghanistan!"

The broad character of the New England event, and signs that the coalition is becoming a pole of attraction, was shown in discussions held on buses from Connecticut to and from the march. On one bus were students who've been organizing support for the workers and students who launched a general strike in Puerto Rico against mass layoffs. These students want to work with antiwar groups to create a big solidarity event. Appeals for joint activity also came from Palestine activists.

In Albany, about 250 participated in a march and rally. Speakers included representatives of Iraq Veterans Against the War; Military Families Speak Out; a Presbyterian minister from Troy; Shamshad Ahmad, president of the Masjid As-Salam Mosque (the mosque from which two Muslim men were framed up and imprisoned, and around which an ongoing defense committee has formed); a leader of striking workers at a local Holiday Inn; and the vice president of the Albany Labor Council. Endorsers included a broad array of local antiwar, veterans', labor and religious groups.

About 400 marched in Minneapolis. Speakers came from groups representing labor, military families anti-foreclosure activists, as well as activists who work in solidarity with Honduras, Iraq, and Pakistan. A member of the organizing coalition told the crowd they should be prepared to respond to any escalation of the war in Afghanistan by coming back into the streets in the weeks ahead. Since then the National Assembly has encouraged all its affiliates to consider protests around the time of Obama's announcement of an escalation.

In Philadelphia, a broad coalition brought out 135 people in extremely nasty weather for

a march through downtown to a park near Independence Hall. Around 100 marched in Duluth around the theme, Fund Human Needs, Make Jobs Not War! Rockland County Peace and Justice, of upstate New York, has been holding peace vigils once a week for almost seven years, and sponsored a special vigil at which, despite chilly weather and threat of rain, more than 50 showed up.

A local newspaper reported that in Indianapolis 70 people "rallied against the escalating war in Afghanistan." While most protesters there and around the country demanded full and immediate withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan, Lori Perdue of Code Pink, speaking at the Indiana event, reflected the new and unfortunate stance of national leaders of her group. She demanded a negotiated solution to the war in Afghanistan and said she thinks that an "all-parties conference," with the participation of the United States, could help women's rights and peace. The question left unaddressed in this proposal is what right the U.S. or any other imperial power has negotiating anything involving the fate of the Afghan people.

Over 100 rallied and marched in McClellan, Texas. The surrounding Rio Grande Valley has had twice as many residents die per capita in Iraq and Afghanistan than the national average. About 50 members of antiwar and vets groups from around Florida gathered at the University of Central Florida, and passing drivers honked in support. Organizers chose UCF as the site because of its affiliation with the biggest military contractors.

In New York City, activists leafleted on Oct. 16 at three military recruiting stations, and encouraged New Yorkers to go to the regional demonstration in Boston on the 17th. The leafleting at the Harlem station turned into a picket, with participation from the Raging Grannies, the New Black Panther Party, and the Harlem Antiwar Coalition.

Many other towns held events, such as the 100 each in Fresno and New York's Hudson Valley, while 14 area peace groups came together for in Eau Claire, Wisc., for an event with a special focus on the billions going to war despite the health-care crisis.

The Oct. 17 actions followed Afghanistan-themed demonstrations and events on Oct. 5 in Washington and on Oct. 7 throughout the nation. About 50 activists from Vets for Peace, Military Families Speak Out, and other groups gathered in New York's Times Square to kick off a week of nationwide events in mid-October to educate the public about the epidemic of rapes and sexual abuse of women in the military. Said Ann Wright, "It is a responsibility of us as veterans to warn women that one in three women are sexually assaulted or raped while in the military."

Staff Sgt. Sandra Lee of the Army Reserves spoke about being raped twice while in Iraq by members of her own unit. In a survey, nearly one-third of women veterans said they had experienced rape or attempted rape during their service. ■

Economic recovery?

Wishful thinking usually dominates the financial pages, especially after an economic crash. So goes the coverage of the current 'recovery'. Yes, in September, Canadian house sales jumped 17 per cent from a year ago. The Conference Board of Canada predicts the economy will grow 2.9 per cent next year, and up to 3.6 per cent in 2011. There's just one catch. The gains, as in the U.S., are largely the result of government stimulus programmes—which governments are now rushing to reel in.

Auto sales in the United States plunged 10.4 per cent in September. Overall retail sales were down 1.5 per cent, the worst decline since retail sales fell 3.2 per cent last December. A record number of U.S. homeowners were forced into foreclosure in the third quarter. More than 930,000 homes received a default notice or were repossessed, a jump of 23 per cent from the year before. Job losses rose another 263,000 in September, pushing America's official unemployment rate to 9.8 per cent, and that's not counting the 571,000 workers who simply gave up and stopped looking for work.

The number of Canadians filing for bankruptcy in August was up 17 per cent compared to the same period last year. Factory sales in Canada dropped 2.1 per cent in August, due largely to declining automobile shipments. Canadian exports and imports fell in August, and the trade deficit rose (for the fifth consecutive month), now at \$2 billion. New housing starts dropped 4.6 per cent in September.

So, while investors and brokers are cheering recent market gains, some observers are wondering out loud: Is it too good to be true, given the fragile state of the economy? Indeed, is this another wake up call ... for socialist measures?

— BARRY WEISLEDER

Troy Labor Council calls for march

The Wednesday after the nationwide Oct. 17 protests, the Troy Labor Council of Rensselaer County, N.Y., unanimously passed a "Resolution for a National March on Washington for Peace, Jobs and Health Care Justice."

It states in part: "The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, attacks on Pakistan, military aid to Colombia, Israel and many of the countries that use US aid for repression of indigenous and popular movements, are making the people of the US and the world less safe. These wars and military aid are bankrupting the people of the US, who are already suffering from staggering job losses, foreclosures and a broken health care system.

"The Troy Area Labor Council AFL-CIO calls upon the AFL-CIO to organize a national march on Washington for Peace, Jobs and Health Care Justice, to stop the wars and to use the resources freed up to end the jobs and health care crisis here at home."

Union activists are discussing sponsoring similar resolutions in other labor bodies. This effort, and the launching of similar ones in other social movements, could be a key next step.

Eight years ago during the run-up to the invasion of Afghanistan, the mass media was alive with graphic reports of the Taliban government's crimes against women. Not only was an invasion portrayed as an honorable act of vengeance for 9/11, but viewers were assured that the U.S. army had an additional duty to liberate the women of Afghanistan from Taliban rule—to reopen the schools to them, end the impunity for rapists, and lift the state-imposed restrictions on their private and public lives.

But Zoya, a spokeswoman for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, says that U.S. policy in Afghanistan, if successful, will only ensure that fundamentalist rule continues in that country. Zoya was invited from Kabul to address the Oct. 17 antiwar rally in Boston. After her speech, Zoya gave the following interview to James Frickey of *Socialist Action*.

"The Northern Alliance is no different from the Taliban," Zoya said. "Today the U.S. is supporting one fundamentalist group to defeat another."

"The Northern Alliance came to power before the Taliban, from 1992-94. There was no ideological difference between

them and the Taliban. They are equally fundamentalist. The Northern Alliance was responsible for child rapes, civilian massacres, and looting of museums. They murdered 80,000 civilians in Kabul in two years. They were the first to commit the kind of crimes that are now being associated exclusively with the Taliban.

"The U.S. is relying on a force that is totally discredited in the eyes of the Afghan people. The Northern Alliance is the same as the Taliban, only more hypocritical. They've shaved their beards and put on business suits to play the democrats in this U.S.-sponsored charade.

"The government of Afghanistan," Zoya asserted, "is a mafia of druglords. Ninety-three percent of the world's opium supply comes from Afghanistan. The Karzai family is involved in the drug trade; it was in *The New York Times*. Notorious war criminals right now are serving in the Afghan parliament with the blessing of the U.S.

"Women today—in the poor provinces as much as in Kabul—live in constant fear of rape, kidnapping, and murder. There have been cases of acid thrown in the faces of girls on their way to school, of schools burned to the ground. So though the doors to the school may be legally open to girls, most families won't send their girls to school because the risk of violence is too great and the government will not prosecute the violators."

Zoya says that the same disparity between law and social practice applies to women wearing the burka. "We're not obligated to wear it, but it is the only proven protection against rape and violence." When asked if she wore the burka in Afghanistan, Zoya nodded gravely.

She said that RAWA advocates for a "democratic front against the occupation and fundamentalism." "We are caught between many enemies," Zoya explained. "There is the U.S. and NATO, the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. The only

option for RAWA is for the democratic organizations to get united."

When asked to identify some of the democratic forces to which she was referring, Zoya specified the Afghan Hambastagi Party ("Hambastagi" means "Solidarity"). "Withdrawal of the troops should be the first step in addressing the crisis in Afghanistan. We don't think that democracy will be dropped from airplanes. Waging war and occupying Afghanistan will not bring liberation to its people."

Zoya's message is being absorbed by the antiwar movement in the U.S., where the occupation's central claim of having bettered the lives of Afghan women is being questioned as never before. "It's not helping the women like the government wants people to believe it is," Joan Ecklein of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom said at the Boston Oct. 17 rally. "The women want us out." ■

'U.S. relies on a force that's totally discredited with the Afghan people'

Participants in Boston's Oct. 17 rally speak out

James Frickey / Socialist Action

RALLY SPEAKERS

Sarah Fuhro, Military Families Speak Out, mother of a soldier in Afghanistan:

"We recently decided to broaden our focus to include the war in Afghanistan. It was very controversial at first with some of our members." Fuhro said that they had a lively debate in MFSO and that most of the families were ultimately convinced that Afghanistan is no more principled a war than Iraq is.

Matthis Chiroux, Iraq Veterans Against the War, discharged soldier who is refusing orders to redeploy to Iraq:

"Is Afghanistan the good war? Are we fighting terrorists over there? No! We're fighting the people who live there.

"We can't kill ourselves out of this problem. What the Afghan people need are solutions not more death. And since that seems to be Obama's policy then we will continue to resist. And we will keep driving this thing on all the way through to the end."

Sarah Roche-Mahdi, Greater Boston Code Pink:

Sarah visited Gaza and the West Bank in June 2009 and is promoting the Gaza Freedom March scheduled for the end of this year.

"Israel does not allow chocolate or school books into Gaza. White phosphorus was still smoldering. People were living in rubble. There is a shortage of water in Gaza; children are dying of kidney disease from drinking sea water.

"Israel has no intention of making peace. We have got to put pressure on this government to relegate Israel to outlaw status in the world."

Peter Knowlton, President, District 2 of the United, Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE):

"The privatization of the oil sector is the objective of all parties in the Iraqi government."

Tito Mesa, coordinator, Proyecto Hondureño:

"I want to address Barack Obama directly: No more coups d'états in Latin America! What's so difficult about saying you won't recognize a coup government?"

FACES IN THE CROWD

Karen Slater, founding member, Boston Stop the Wars Coalition:

"There are lots of young people out here today who are getting their first exposure to what the antiwar movement has to say. ... We are echoing the majority opinion in this country that the U.S. should get out of Iraq and Afghanistan."

Lyn Meza, coordinator, Chelsea United Against the War:

"We've had a change of presidents but the war goes on just the same. I believe the total troop levels have actually increased under Obama. Our mission remains the same—to stop the U.S. wars around the world and the war on workers at home.

"It's not going to be stopped by Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize or by people sitting at home answering opinion polls that they're against the war. We all have to get out in the streets and demand that the



war be brought to an end."

Bill Shein, newspaper columnist, Greater Barrington:

"During the campaign last year people didn't listen to Obama when he said he wanted to focus on Afghanistan and increase the size of the military."

Lisa Beade, Providence chapter, Progressive Democrats of America (she carried a sign reading "No troops, No bases, No delay"):

"I really believe that if Obama wants to be thought of as a Nixon or Johnson then he's on the right track. ... We've become the mercenaries of the oil companies and the technocrats and people's children are being killed for the meaninglessness of other people's profits."

Becca, a junior at Framingham State College:

"I heard about it from the Human Rights Activist Committee on campus. I came because I really don't know enough about the war and this seemed like a good place to come and learn. ... We haven't really done antiwar stuff on campus. But we're thinking about it after this."

Liza, junior at Brandeis University (she carried a trumpet to play in the New Orleans jazz band at the front of the march; she came as part of a group of 20 students from Brandeis):

"I think U.S. policy in the Middle East is entirely destructive.

"Afghanistan is the biggest disappointment of the Obama presidency for me. With health care and GLBT rights I can understand the difficulty. But not withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan is completely inexcusable.

"Obama needs to start listening to the will of the

people and the women of Afghanistan. The Afghans don't want us there. And the majority of Americans don't either."

Max, senior at Boston University, member of the Boston University Anti-War Coalition (One of 20 BU students at the march):

"We shouldn't send more troops to Afghanistan. It's not a good idea."

Andrew, 17, high school peace activist from Providence, R.I.

"It feels nice to be in a group of people who stand for peace. ... I'm here to show those in power that there are people out here who stand for peace."

Yliana, 25, originally from Querétaro, Mexico; Wheaton College student who heard of the march from the Latin Student Association):

"The speeches have been powerful. My heart rate is rising. This is what we need."

Said Ahmed, Roxbury neighborhood of Boston (marched with seven Ethiopians holding signs against U.S. support for genocide in Ogaden):

"Ethiopia is doing what the U.S. wants by attacking Somalia. The quid pro quo is that the U.S. will look the other way while Ethiopia genocides its ethnic Somali minority in Ogaden."

John Harris, Greater Boston Stop the Wars Coalition, New England United:

"We need to organize a united broad-based movement in the streets to demand the immediate withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and everywhere else in the world. ... We need to have a united spring action organized by the entire antiwar movement." ■

'A REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TO THE MARROW OF HIS BONES'

By JOE AUCIELLO

Tristram Hunt, *Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels*, (Metropolitan Books: New York, 2009), 430 pp., \$32.

Economic hard times, the current financial crisis of capitalism with rising and sustained unemployment and increasing social anxiety, has led to renewed interest in the critical theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. A harbinger of this trend was a laudatory and widely read *New Yorker* article, "The Return of Karl Marx" (Oct. 20 & 27, 1997), which attempted to recast Marx not as a revolutionary but as "a student of capitalism." A year later the 150th anniversary edition of "The Communist Manifesto" was a surprise best-seller for its publisher, Verso.

Since then, Marx's stern visage, like a specter haunting Europe, has frequently appeared on the covers of news magazines and new editions of his books, including "Das Kapital." The critical studies and popular biographies of Marx that have been published on both sides of the Atlantic have sold well.

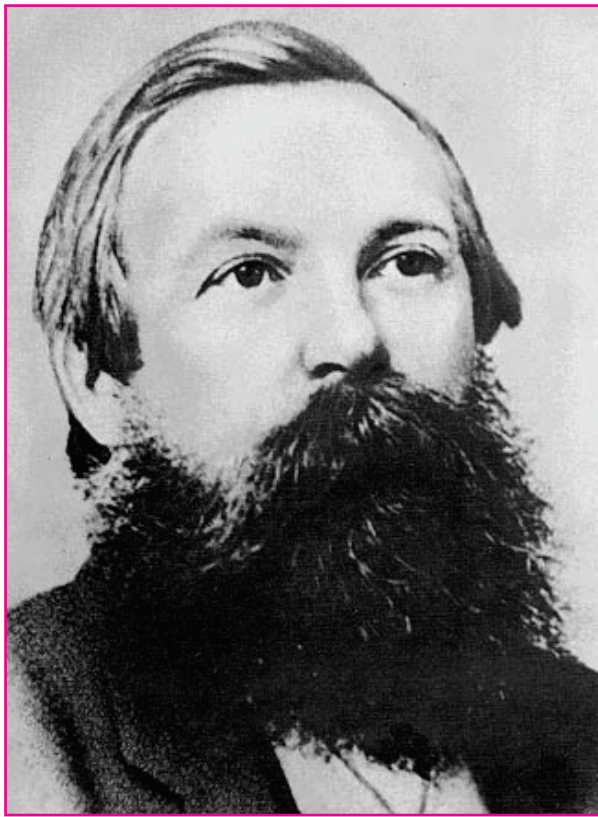
In fact, the circumstance today is much like what Engels described in an 1892 preface to his book "The Condition of the Working Class in England." "[V]erily," Engels noted, "that abomination of abominations, Socialism," has "become respectable." Naturally, though, Engels scorned "this momentary fashion among bourgeois circles of affecting a mild dilution of Socialism," the sort of flirtation with radicalism that recently led *Newsweek* to announce provocatively, "We Are All Socialists Now."

That fashion trend has brought Marx's closest friend, collaborator, co-thinker, and patron a popular biography of his own. As a socialist journalist and historian, as the author of the highly influential booklet, "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," to say nothing of his role in assisting Marx with the first volume of "Capital" and his work in preparing volumes two and three for publication, Engels certainly merits a major biography.

These aspects of Engels' life, as well as the decades spent managing the family business in Manchester, all receive due notice in "Marx's General" ("General" was a nickname for Engels, deriving from his interest in military affairs). Nonetheless, as with Marx, it is Engels the "student of capitalism" that most excites the interest of his biographer.

This biography, the first to appear in decades, is highly readable and generally informative though often inadequate in its specific political judgments. The author has made himself quite familiar with the primary and secondary sources and recounts these ably. The chapters on the political and intellectual ferment of 1840s Germany, the cauldron from which the young communists Marx and Engels emerged, are especially well explained.

As would be expected, the biography is not based on original research. No new manuscripts, letters, etc. have come to light in many decades. Instead, the author visits a Russian city named after Engels, beginning and ending his book there. This is the kind of hook a journalist would use to hang an article; it is not the starting point for scholarly investigation. To his credit, though, the author indulges in few of these ploys. He limits his suppositions and does not attempt



This biography of Engels blunts his revolutionary edge to make him more respectable ...

to recreate dialogue, confining himself to quotations from letters and previously published accounts.

In this biography much is made of the fact that Engels could as easily be found on the barricades as well as in a bank or a bar, that he was a capitalist oppressor of the working class who wrote tracts arguing for the liberation of the workers against the oppression of capital.

None of this information is new, and the conclusions to be drawn from it are, by now, trite: People do not create the private circumstances or the social world into which they are born. Engels used his favorable position in life to further his communist ideas. As the biographer himself admits, "for much of his adulthood he lived according to his beliefs" (p. 310).

A more telling flaw in the book is that the author is weakest regarding revolutionary politics and program; on these topics, the substance of Engels' life, the biographer cares little and understands even less. The idea, for instance, that a workers' party requires a coherent program is treated by this author as a joke or as a purely personal matter.

According to the author, Engels "would express his love and loyalty to Marx by gleefully enforcing party discipline, pursuing ideological heretics, and generally playing the Grand Inquisitor when it came to upholding the true communist faith" (p. 134). Further on, readers are told that Engels would "indulge in his and Marx's favorite pastime: ideological knockabout"

(p. 289). This kind of commentary is simply light-minded.

A more cogent argument has been made by Ernest Mandel: "In reality, all history confirms that theories and organizations can only advance through the clash of ideas and groupings that differentiate when faced with new events and problems ... it is obvious that tendencies and group struggles are inevitable in politics in general, and in workers' politics in particular" ("The Place of Marxism in History," p. 66).

The author's political failings are most apparent in the "Epilogue." Determined to refute the familiar but false theory that the totalitarian regime of Stalin originated in the pages of Marx and Engels, the biographer advances an argument that is neither original nor convincing. Engels, according to this theory, cannot be held accountable in any way for the Bolshevik revolution because Engels essentially would have favored Menshevism—that is, Engels would have supported the development of a strong capitalist state that would create a proletariat which, in some unspecified future, would rise against its capitalist oppressors. A socialist party would then base itself on a struggle for reforms via the ballot box.

In support of this position, the author cites a quote from Engels in 1891: "The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of the masses lacking consciousness is past" (p. 339). Indeed, that time was past, if it had ever had a present. But Engels was in fact criticizing, as he and Marx had done repeatedly, the conspiratorial revolutionary organizations proposed by earlier socialists like Babeuf and Blanqui who believed that a revolution could be carried out successfully behind the back of the working class. These words in no way condemn the revolutionary strategy followed by the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

The views of Marx and Engels on the need to overthrow the bourgeois state by revolutionary means can be seen in their writings on the 1871 Paris Commune: i.e., "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made machinery of the state and wield it for its own purposes." And Engels in an 1872 critique of the followers of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: "Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not relied on the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie?"

The issues raised by the biographer's erroneous criticism go well beyond the scope of a review, but interested readers will discover that the socialist revolution in Russia was based on the radical actions of politically conscious workers, peasants, and soldiers by reading Alexander Rabinowitch's "The Bolsheviks Come to Power" (a non-Marxist but thoroughly researched work) and Leon Trotsky's "History of the Russian Revolution." The theoretical disputes that divided Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and, later, Stalinists, are taken up in Trotsky's work "The Permanent Revolution" and his essay "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution."

As with recent books on Marx, this biography of Engels blunts his revolutionary edge to make him more respectable and thereby gain a wider audience. The make-over does not ring true. Leon Trotsky's assessment, written nearly 75 years ago, more accurately defines Engels: "The man of commerce, the possessor of a mill, a hunter's horse and a wine cellar was a revolutionary communist to the marrow of his bones." ■

... Hate group countered

(continued from page 12)

On the morning of Oct. 3, over 200 people attended the counter rally. Four members of the NSM showed up, carrying signs that said, "Help the white race." The protest itself was attended by mostly young people, who were full of positive energy. Many white people attended, as well as people from a diverse range of minority groups. Many different community organizations also had a presence, including antiwar groups, socialist groups, immigrant rights groups, GLBT groups, and the faith community.

In light of the huge community response, police escorted the members of the NSM to their car, while the protesters followed behind. Afterwards, protesters held a rally in front of the YWCA. Overall, this was a very successful action in Minneapolis, but the fight against hate is far from over.

In a powerful statement written for the occasion, the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Coalition

(MIRAc) said, "They [the NSM] believe that they can capitalize, during a period of economic crisis, on the confusion over dysfunctional immigration laws that mistake a legal status for the dignity of a human being. ...We uphold the dignity of every immigrant regardless of possession of papers, language spoken or color of skin."

As the economic crisis continues, groups like the NSM will continue to fuel a racist dialogue blaming immigrants and other working-class groups for many of the problems here in the United States.

It is up to the rest of us to continue to mobilize against their hateful message, joining together to declare, with MIRAc, "Down with racism! Down with homophobia! Down with the hatred of immigrants! Down with fascism!"

"We stand with all those whom the National Socialist Movement would oppress and eliminate." ■



On Oct. 24, a broad coalition brought over 600 people to counter a rally by about 20 neo-Nazis in Riverside, Calif. The white-supremacist NSM was hoping to intimidate the immigrant day-laborers who gather nearby to find jobs.



Mumia's life in danger as Court decides Spisak case

BY JEFF MACKLER

After 28 years on Pennsylvania's death row and innumerable battles in the U.S. criminal injustice system, Mumia Abu-Jamal—the innocent political prisoner, journalist, and world renowned "Voice of the Voiceless"—lost his final appeal on April 6, 2009. Ignoring its own precedents and those of the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals below it, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to affirm what had been the "law of the land" for decades, that the systematic and racist exclusion of Blacks from juries voids all guilty verdicts and mandates a new trial.

In Mumia's 1982 trial, presided over by the notorious "hanging judge" Albert Sabo, 11 of 14 Black jurors were so excluded. But as with virtually all court decisions over the past decades in Mumia's case (the "Mumia exception"), the Supreme Court employed a contorted interpretation of the "law" to reach a predetermined result. The Court refused to review the twisted logic of its subordinate bodies, thereby allowing Mumia's frame-up murder conviction to stand.

But what has caught the attention of both legal observers and human rights activists even more is the fact that the Court, while refusing to hear Mumia's appeal, chose to delay a ruling on a cross appeal filed by the state of Pennsylvania that seeks Mumia's execution. Pennsylvania prosecutors, twice rejected in their efforts to impose the death penalty on Mumia, may have found new support in the U.S. Supreme Court.

It appears that the Supreme Court's delay in ruling on the validity of Mumia's original execution sentence was due to its decision to grant a full review in the case of *Smith v. Spisak*. Frank Spisak, a neo-Nazi who confessed in court to triple hate-crime-type murders in Ohio, had his jury-imposed death sentence reversed in the federal courts when his attorneys successfully invoked a 1988 Supreme Court decision in the famous *Mills v. Maryland* case. *Mills* requires that in order to find mitigating circumstances sufficient to impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole, as opposed to the death penalty, the jury's majority decision (as opposed to unanimous decision) on each mitigating circumstance is sufficient.

In both *Spisak's* and Mumia's case the presiding trial court judges violated *Mills* and in essence instructed the juries that unanimity was required. In both cases the prosecution's appeal was rejected and *Mills* was upheld, thus voiding the imposed death sentences. In both cases the prosecution appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

An April 7, 2009 article in the *Legal Intelligencer*, the oldest law journal in the country, had this to say about the Supreme Court's decision to delay a ruling on Pennsylvania's request to re-impose the death penalty on Mumia: "In both cases, [Spisak and Abu-Jamal] the federal courts' decisions to overturn the death sentences hinged on *Mills v. Maryland*—a 1988 U.S. Supreme Court decision that governs how juries should deliberate during the penalty phase of a capital trial.

"The *Mills* ruling struck down a Maryland statute that said juries in capital cases must be unanimous on any aggravating or mitigating factor [emphasis added].

"The justices declared that unanimity was properly required for any aggravating factor, but that mitigating factors—those that weigh against imposing a death sentence—must be handled more liberally, with each juror free to find on his or her own." The effect of *Mills* was to make it harder for prosecutors to obtain death sentences in capital cases.

The *Intelligencer* concludes, "The question now be-

fore the courts is whether *Mills* requires that death sentences in other states be overturned if the juries in those states are misled by faulty instructions or verdict forms to believe that mitigating factors require unanimity" [emphasis added].

I emphasize the words "other states" because prior to this unexpected turn of events, *Mills* was applied to all states. That is, if a jury was mis-instructed and/or received faulty or unclear verdict forms that implied it needed to be unanimous with regard to mitigating circumstances sufficient to not impose the death penalty, the death penalty was set aside and a new sentencing hearing was ordered.

This is what happened in Mumia's case when Federal District Court Judge William H. Yohn in 2003 em-

Pennsylvania's governor is pledged to sign what could be the third and final warrant for Mumia's execution.

ployed *Mills* to set aside the jury's death penalty decision. Yohn gave the state of Pennsylvania 180 days to literally retry Mumia but limited the jury's finding to the penalty only—that is, the guilty verdict could not be set aside. Since then, Pennsylvania officials have effectively stayed Yohn's order by appealing to the higher federal courts.

In deciding to hear Ohio prosecutors' arguments in the *Spisak* case with regard to *Mills*, the Supreme Court has implied that one of the key issues they will consider centers on the interpretation of the concept of federalism—that is, that the exercise of power in the U.S. is shared in some measure between the federal government and the states.

The political pendulum has swung back and forth on this issue. In past decades, the "states' rights" interpretation was employed to justify racist state laws that denied Blacks access to public institutions and facilities. With the rise of the Civil Rights movement, federal power was used to compel the elimination of the same racist laws. In capitalist society justice is far from blind. It is applied to the advantage of the working class and the oppressed only to the extent that the relationship of forces, the class struggle, demands it and is prepared to fight for it.

Since *Mills* was decided in the state of Maryland, the would-be Ohio and Pennsylvania executioners might argue, based on the laws of those states, it cannot be automatically applied to the situation in Ohio where a different set of jury instructions and therefore jury deliberations were involved. Should this "states' rights" argument be accepted, and *Mills* effectively constricted, the Supreme Court could then uphold Spisak's death sentence and, with a mere citation to Spisak and the new interpretation of *Mills*, uphold Pennsylvania's attorney general's appeal seeking Mumia's execution.

Almost all legal observers previously considered a Supreme Court *Mills* re-interpretation a virtual impossibility, thereby clearing the way to execute Mumia. The stage has now been set for such an outcome. The state's longstanding effort in this regard has been giv-

en new legal avenues for success, with the top Court's decision to re-consider the *Spisak* case. Mumia's life is on the line as never before. Pennsylvania's governor is pledged to sign what could be the third and final warrant for Mumia's execution, which would order that his life be taken by lethal injection within 90 days.

The battle for Mumia's execution has not been limited to the courts. Last year's "Murdered by Mumia" book, co-authored by Maureen Faulkner—the wife of police officer Daniel Faulkner, who Mumia was falsely convicted of murdering—and right-wing talk-radio host Michael Smerconish, presents an outrageous account of Faulkner's murder. While having little or no basis in the facts of the case, the book has nevertheless been used to advance the Fraternal Order of Police's longstanding campaign to execute the "cop killer."

More recently, filmmaker Tigre Hill has produced a work scheduled for Philadelphia and international distribution titled "The Barrel of a Gun," wherein ex-Black Panther Bobby Seal's rhetoric about "offing the pig," is coupled with right-winger David Horowitz's assertions that Mumia was merely carrying out Panther policy. The three-minute preview or trailer to "The Barrel of a Gun" theorizes, without a shred of evidence, that Mumia and his brother Billy Cook literally planned the Faulkner murder, ambush style.

Those unfamiliar with Mumia's background and the facts of the case could only conclude that Mumia was guilty without question. That Mumia had left the disintegrating Panthers more than a decade before his frame-up trial is not mentioned.

Nor does the film acknowledge that he was an award-winning journalist and president of the Black Journalists Association, a leading reporter/critic of the Philadelphia Police Department, dozens of whose officers were indicted and convicted on Justice Department charges of involvement in drug-running, prostitution, planting and falsification of evidence, and intimidation of witnesses.

Today, having exhausted most all legal remedies, Mumia's supporters are engaged in an important campaign to demand a Justice Department civil rights investigation into charges presented by his supporters that demonstrate illegal collusion between Pennsylvania prosecutors and the judiciary. A delegation of Mumia's defenders across the country has planned a Nov. 12 visit to Washington, D.C., where a meeting with Attorney General Eric Holder will be sought for this purpose. Thousands of petitions demanding Mumia's freedom obtained across the world will also be presented to officials of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Similarly, the Black is Back protest in Washington, D.C., Nov. 7, is demanding Mumia's freedom in addition to the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the Middle East.

In the S.F. Bay Area, the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal is sponsoring a Nov. 6-8 tour with Amnesty International's Death Penalty Abolition Campaign leader Laura Moye. Entitled "Innocent but Facing Execution," the tour will focus on the cases of Mumia, Troy Davis, and Kevin Cooper—three innocent frame-up victims of capitalism's racist criminal "justice" system.

Troy Davis recently won a decision by the Supreme Court in which he was granted a new hearing in district court. Kevin Cooper is currently appealing his murder conviction before the Supreme Court with the aid of a 101-page dissenting opinion by U.S. appellate judge William Fletcher, stating that "the state of California may be about to execute an innocent man."

For information, in Philadelphia call (215) 476-8812. In San Francisco, (510) 268-9429. ■



(Left) U.S. Marines take cover as a 500-lb. bomb is dropped on a Taliban stronghold in Afghanistan, July 3.

... Taliban gains ground

(continued from page 1)

national government by occupying the Swat Valley, an economically important region close to the national capital. Pakistani military was previously linked to the Taliban, and in fact helped them to gain power in Afghanistan. It was bound to the Taliban by a common Islamist ethos and the conception that it was a strategic ally against Indian influence in the region.

Pakistan by its origins and the political needs of its rulers is a sectarian Islamic state. Other than Israel, it is the only nation-state whose existence is entirely based on religion. Pakistan's Islamist ideology, in fact, long made it a favored ally of the U.S., despite its successive repressive and inept military governments. It was considered a reliable ally against "Godless Communism," unlike its larger neutralist neighbor, India.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. has supplied Pakistan with over \$12 billion in military aid. This year, Washington has sent \$500 million in counter-insurgency equipment, plus 150 "advisors."

On its religious ideology, the U.S. based its proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The most repressive of the military dictators of Pakistan, Zia ul-Haq pushed a reactionary version of Islam as the justification of his regime and built up a network of religious schools that turned out crop after crop of Islamist enthusiasts.

The Taliban was only one of the Islamist militant forces sponsored by Pakistan. There were other groups formed in Pakistan's central province of Punjab to wage guerrilla war against India in parts of Kashmir claimed by the Islamist state. It was some of these groups apparently, such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, that have organized the recent attacks on Pakistani military targets in Punjab in retaliation for the Pakistani army's offensives in the Swat Valley and South Waziristan. The captured leader of the attack on the Pakistani version of the Pentagon, the most daring Islamist attack so far, was a long-serving member of the Pakistani military.

Following the attack on the central military headquarters, an article in *Time* in early October noted: "Nor is it clear if the Pakistan army has severed its links entirely with the outlawed terrorist group, as its presence in and around the southern Punjabi city of Bahawalpur grows undisturbed. A heavy concentration of madrasahs [religious

schools] in the area has become a breeding ground for recruits who are then taken to South Waziristan and trained as suicide bombers."

Within the Pakistani military and the intelligence service, the ISI, there are almost certainly still sympathizers with the Islamists. Such long associations cannot be wiped out overnight, even if the Pakistani rulers want to, which is by no means certain. It was only the strong U.S. pressure brought to bear on the Pakistani dictator, Pervez Musharraf, after 9/11 that forced him to turn against the Taliban.

Moreover, there is a process going on in Pakistan similar to the one that brought the Taliban back in Afghanistan. The U.S. pinpoint bombings of Islamist leaders have been effective militarily, but they have increasingly alienated the civilian population, to the point where hatred of the U.S. is now powerful and massive.

The Pakistani authorities collaborate quietly with the U.S. attacks, but the people cannot be reconciled to seeing their country turned into a shooting gallery. The mass hatred of the U.S. is surely undermining the political base and legitimacy of the parliamentary government that succeeded Musharraf's military dictatorship. The pervasive hatred of the U.S. undoubtedly also assures the Islamist insurgents contacts within the army and the security forces to facilitate their guerrilla attacks.

That has also been the case in Iraq, where, despite reverses, the insurgents were recently able to carry out new large-scale bombings in downtown Baghdad against government targets. There has been evidence of insurgent infiltration of the Iraqi police and army.

A columnist in the Pakistani English-language paper *Dawn* has pointed out that merchants readily sell Pakistani security forces uniforms that can be used by insurgents in attacks.

The Kerry-Lugar bill, calling for \$7.5 billion in additional aid to Pakistan for the next five years, includes conditions aimed at insuring the subordination of the Pakistani military to the civilian authorities and assuring that the aid to the military goes to the fight against the Islamists and not for arming against India, as most of the previous aid to the military did.

In the context of the widespread anti-Americanism, the military was able to denounce these conditions as attacks on Pakistani sovereignty. *Newsweek* reported: "It [the Pakistani military] has al-

ready started to stoke nationalist fervor by insinuating that the U.S. is behaving like a neocolonial power." (A columnist in *Dawn* dared the "defenders of Pakistani sovereignty" to refuse the money).

Nonetheless, the uproar demonstrated that the U.S. is not going to get any goodwill for its "largesse," at least not from the Pakistani military. An analysis of the situation confronting U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton on her visit to Pakistan in the Oct. 26 *New York Times* argued that the Pakistani rulers and military are still maintaining a two-faced attitude to the Islamists groups: "The special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard C. Holbrooke, said Friday that the Obama administration would be trying to find out whether the army was simply 'dispersing' the militants or 'destroying' them, as the United States would like.

"From the number of troops in South Waziristan, it was not clear that the army wanted to 'finish the task,' said a Western military attaché, who spoke on the condition of anonymity according to diplomatic protocol. The army would not take over South Waziristan as it had the Swat Valley, where the military is now an occupying force after conducting a campaign in the spring and summer that pushed the Taliban out, the officials said."

The 28,000 troops sent into South Waziristan against an estimated 11,000 Taliban is far less than what military experts consider an effective ratio in counter-insurgency warfare. The article cited Tariq Fatemi, a former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., as saying that the Pakistani military's objective was simply to "cut down to size" the insurgent groups, which had overreached themselves in threatening important cities and regions of the country. He argued that the Pakistani officials simply wanted to harness the Islamist groups better to their goals of combating Indian influence by changing their leadership.

In the assault on South Waziristan, the Pakistani military in fact sought to make a deal with Taliban factions less antagonistic to the Pakistani government. Associated Press reported Oct. 10: "Pakistan's army, in the midst of a major new offensive against Taliban militants, has struck deals to keep two powerful, anti-U.S. tribal chiefs from joining the battle against the government, officials said Monday."

U.S. Democratic Party leaders Rahm Emanuel and John Kerry have argued against another major escalation of U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan on the basis that it would threaten to destabilize Pakistan.

The foreign ministers of India, China, and Russia issued a statement on Oct. 27 saying that the conflict in Afghanistan is a regional problem that affects them and that it cannot be dealt with by the United States and Pakistan alone. They did not indicate what they proposed to do, but their statement was an indication of the danger of conflict spreading to the entire region.

Right-wing voices in the United States are stridently calling for military escalation, but many of them are the same that insisted that U.S. troops would be welcomed in Iraq and that it was an un-American slander to say that U.S. bombings were killing civilians and alienating Afghans. This current is characterized by a denial of reality. It is probable that the decisive wing of U.S. capitalism realizes that it can no longer afford such truculence. That is undoubtedly what is giving Obama some maneuvering room, as he tries to pursue the U.S. imperialist aims by more flexible means.

But as the Iraq situation shows, after bitter experience, U.S. governments can be caught up in their own toils. They have created a hornets' nest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in which they are going to continue to be stung no matter what they do. The only way out is complete withdrawal, but that would mean accepting limitations on American power, which the U.S. ruling class is obviously unwilling to do. Only the growth of a powerful and determined antiwar movement in the U.S. itself could force it to do that.

The biggest danger is that the "surge" being advocated so aggressively by the right will lead to a regional war far greater in scale and implications than the present conflict. In fact, the argument for a "surge" is based on a false assessment of the effectiveness of the so-called surge in Iraq. It was not the increase in U.S. forces that isolated the insurgents but the ruthlessness of al-Qaida, which alienated the population and local leaders.

To a certain extent, a similar process has started in Pakistan. It may be accelerated by the atrocious Oct. 27 bombing of a market place in Peshawar, in which over 100 people were killed. But it is still far from the point it reached in Iraq. The resentment against the U.S. has apparently been growing faster and more powerfully than revulsion against the ruthlessness of the Taliban and its allies.

In the April 24 issue of *Newsweek*, Farid Zakaria pointed that there has already been more than one "surge" in Afghanistan, and that has not improved the situation for the U.S. but made it worse: "The real question we should be asking in Afghanistan is not 'Do we need a surge?' but rather 'Do we need a third surge?' The number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in January 2008 was 26,607. Over the next six months, the Bush administration raised the total to 48,250. President Bush described this policy as 'the quiet surge,' and he made the standard arguments about the need for a counterinsurgency capacity—the troops had to not only fight the Taliban but protect the Afghan population, strengthen and train the Afghan Army and police, and assist in development.

"In January 2009, another 3,000 troops, originally ordered by President Bush, went to Afghanistan in the first days of the Obama presidency. In February, responding to a request from the commander in the field, Obama ordered an additional 17,000 troops into the country. In other words, over the past 18 months, troop levels in Afghanistan have almost tripled."

Zakaria argued: "It is not dithering to try to figure out why previous increases have not worked and why we think additional ones would."

The alternative being projected by

(continued on page 11)

By BARRY WEISLEDER

When Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan declared Oct. 22 that his Liberal provincial government faces a \$24.7 billion deficit this year, it was a signal that a major assault on public service wages and programmes for the poor is in the works.

This is the major challenge facing delegates at the biennial convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Nov. 23-27 at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto.

Firebrand CUPE Ontario leader Sid Ryan is set to replace retiring OFL President Wayne Samuelson. Many labour activists wonder whether this will mark a shift towards mass action to challenge labour concessions, disappearing pensions and benefits, and rising unemployment (expected to stay above 9 per cent, officially, in Ontario for the next three years).

A Workers' Agenda is urgently needed to oppose the coming attacks on the Ontario public service, and to support the strike of the Vale Inco workers, now in its fourth month at Sudbury and Port Colborne, Ont., and in Labrador. Required is a programme to reject further labour concessions in the auto sector, to nationalize industry instead of dishing up corporate bail-outs, and to demand steeply progressive taxation of big business and the rich.

A good place to start would be a commitment to mobilize labour's strength in numbers alongside the 115,000 member Ontario Public Service Em-

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Will OFL join IPSEU to fight Ontario cuts?

ployees' Union as it takes on the Liberal McGuinty government's likely targeting of wages, jobs and vital public services.

OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas issued a statement on Oct. 23. Here are some excerpts: "Finance Minister Dwight Duncan promised a 'sweeping review' of government spending. Premier Dalton McGuinty would not rule out unpaid days off for the million Ontarians who earn their bread in the provincial public sector. And the spectre of privatization now looms over every public service worker.

"The Liberals' plan is to make us pay... Dwight Duncan won't have much luck looking for waste in public services (except, of course, for the hundreds of millions he's throwing away on private consultants). We already had a 'sweeping review' from 1995 to 2003. It was called the Common Sense Revolution (of Tory Premier Mike Harris), and public services still haven't recovered from the brutal trauma of those years.

"As far as unpaid days off, a lot of us remember [then-NDP Premier] Bob

Rae's 'Social Contract' all too well. But much has changed since the Rae days. For one thing, the Social Contract would be struck down by the courts today. In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that (British Columbia) Premier Gordon Campbell was wrong to tear up the collective agreements of health workers in that province. Since then, collective bargaining has been recognized as a protected right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"McGuinty can't legislate his way out of this. If he wants to use public employees to buy Ontario out of the recession, his two main options are: (a) privatization, and (b) mass layoffs.

"Privatization is a stupid idea. It cuts services, it destroys jobs, and it usually comes with major cost overruns. And from a budget standpoint, selling off assets like the LCBO [Liquor Control Board of Ontario]—which right-wingers are already barking for—would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

"As for more layoffs, they can only weaken local economies, destroy the services people need, and generate

headlines the Liberals really don't want to see.

"So what's their plan? My guess is, they think that just the threat of layoffs and privatization will force public employees to agree to the wage cuts or 'Dalton Days' he wants.

"How is it fair that a part-time secretary at a community college, who makes maybe \$27,000 a year, should be the one paying off the deficit when

the Bay Street banker is not? Which is more important, providing professional help to a child with a mental illness, or giving income tax breaks to profitable corporations and obscene bonuses to their CEOs?

"Public services aren't just for public employees. They exist because we all need them. And that's why saving them is not the responsibility of public employees alone.

"We chose careers in public service not to get rich, but because we care—for people, for families, for communities. It's time our commitment got the respect it deserves. We are already planning a bold strategy to fight the coming attack. It will take courage, commitment, brains, resources, and leadership.

"Working together as we have done so many times before, I know we will do whatever it takes", Smokey Thomas concluded. Will the Ontario Federation of Labour do whatever it takes? Will OPSEU undertake mass job action, and invite all workers and allies to join the struggle? Therein hangs a tale. ■

Manitoba NDP chooses new premier

According to the business media, Manitoba Finance Minister Greg Selinger, 58, became NDP provincial Leader and Premier-elect by defeating a challenger from the left, MLA Steve Ashton, 53. "Race for top job in Manitoba pits centre against left", read a headline in the *Toronto Star*.

Not so, according to long-time socialist Harry Paine. He was one of the 2003 delegates who packed the Winnipeg Convention Centre on Oct. 17 for the party leadership vote. The difference wasn't left versus right. The issue was who is best able to keep the labour-based NDP in government in Manitoba, the prairie province (population 1.2 million) just north of Minnesota and North Dakota.

In a report to the NDP Socialist Caucus, Paine wrote: "More significant for anyone attempting to gauge the level of consciousness of the NDP membership and consequently how that reflects the consciousness of Manitobans was the fact that the first candidate out of the gate, Andrew Swan (a younger cabinet minister), chose to drop out of the race after a couple of weeks. There was some speculation that the Third Way (neoliberal) machine that had been running the party for the last couple of decades had been grooming Swan to wear the mantle of Gary Doer (the 10-year Premier who left office to become Canada's ambassador to the United States), but the first few NDP delegate selection meetings indicated a much stronger intervention by community activists and Swan was unable to get more than a handful of delegate supporters.

"In the few short weeks of the campaign leading up to the delegate selection meetings the membership more than doubled and therein was the first serious controversy. The Steve Ashton campaign was accused of signing up hundreds of new members from within ethnic communities, many of whom had little or no real loyalty to the NDP. This raised the whole question of voting process and the ugly head of 'One Member, One Vote' arose once again.

"Ashton tried to present as the more traditional left candidate, but surrounded himself with some questionable and opportunistic public face supporters. The Chair of his campaign committee was maverick City Councillor Russ Wyatt who has joined, and quit, the party depending on his need for assistance from the NDP electoral machine. Main union support came from the Firefighters Union, which is often just as comfortable supporting Tory candidates as it is backing the NDP.

"Greg Selinger was able to garner support from a much wider sector of the working-class organizations that included almost all of the MLAs, the Manitoba Federation of Labour, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives staff and most of the constituencies' traditional activists. He was seen as a leader who could bring the party together into the 'Renewal' mode.

"Before being elected to the Legislature, Selinger had a history of being a popular City Councillor and a key contributor to CHOICES, a coalition of leftist independent community activists. As Finance Minister he has brought in ten fairly progressive and balanced budgets and was seen as largely responsible for Manitoba being relatively able to fend off the effects of the current global financial crisis. He also instituted an open community consultative process in the period leading up to budget production.

"Renewal' was the slogan adopted by the Provincial Executive going into this Leadership Campaign and that was probably an accurate choice as the departure of Doer marks a shift to a greater involvement of community based influences in the party and the government. How that will reflect itself in policy is hard to say at this time.

"Poverty is still a big issue in Manitoba especially in much of the rural farm areas, for those on a fixed income, and in almost all of the First Nations reserves and communities. At the same time there is a shortage of skilled labour and fairly dramatic population growth. While the effects of the latest crisis of Capitalism have not been felt as much in Manitoba as other provinces, there is considerable nervousness and discussion among those looking for answers.

"Community activism that doesn't pose a clear socialist alternative is little more than a band-aid solution to cover the open sores of capitalism and make life a little more tolerable. On the positive side there is a growing consciousness that there needs to be a fundamental structural change in the distribution of wealth in society. Interest is renewed in the lessons of the past, and Marxism is very much on the discussion agenda."

I asked Harry Paine about grassroots involvement. He responded, "Activists in Manitoba are not so much in political party life, as they are involved in community organizations. I think that is becoming somewhat universal as capitalism declines dramatically; the working class has to rely more on its defensive organizations. The challenge for socialists is how do we integrate the transitional demands of a socialist program into the pragmatic concerns of these defensive community organizations?"

"Manitoba has one of the highest rates of volunteerism in North America. One in three Manitobans volunteer in their community. Of course that includes sports coaches and Girl Guide leaders, but there are huge numbers who are working with the homeless, the aged, in food banks, and so on.

"These people often support the NDP because it is a lot easier to get grants and legislation passed with them than it was with the Tories in government. The fact that community representatives are listened to and consulted does more to keep our membership figures up than

anything.

"For instance, I am president of the Manitoba Society of Seniors, and was appointed by the Cabinet to the Council on Aging as an advisor to the minister and on the boards of half a dozen other community-based organizations and as such have access to all the relevant ministers and their departments even though I am constantly reminding people that I am a Trotskyist, and believe the only real answer is to overthrow capitalism.

"Last year I was the Campaign Manager for our MLA Rob Altemeyer and ran the most successful campaign, next to Greg Selinger's in St. Boniface. I publish an online community newsletter that goes to most of the local NDP members once or twice a week, which has some pretty radical stuff in it sometimes, and I have never been challenged because of my leftist slant. Actually I get lots of fan mail from people who think that is the strength of the NDP riding association.

"In spite of his popularity, Gary Doer was seen as being inaccessible and out of touch with this growing and powerful sector of activists. There are some members who are concerned and upset because they feel abandoned by big daddy, but most members feel honoured that he was chosen as ambassador and will do a good job. Then again, there are a lot of us who believe that either there [Washington], or in the [appointed Canadian] Senate, is where Doer properly belongs."

What about Ashton's so-called leftist stance, including his pledge to freeze/reduce university tuition and ban strikebreakers?

"Ashton's base was to some extent in the northern areas of the province where he comes from, although Selinger cut into that with support from First Nations' delegates. Community activists seem to be divided into those who basically support the NDP and those who stand aside and are somewhat cynical about politics; the latter provided the main active base of Ashton's support. Some were traditional leftists, but for the most part were an unprincipled combination.

"As for his 'left' policies, for the most part it was seen as posturing. It is easy to talk about strikebreaking legislation in a province that hasn't seen a scab situation in years and where strikes that last more than a few days are pretty rare. Unions haven't suggested anti-scab legislation and only the Firefighters and the Steelworkers from Thompson (the area Ashton represents in the Legislature) supported him. The main bulk of the Manitoba Federation of Labour supported Selinger. Students were divided about 52/48 for Selinger. I don't think they really believed Ashton was serious about his program."

The Manitoba NDP convention was over in three short hours; no policy debate, no election of officers. The leadership vote was Selinger 1317 and Ashton 685. The regular annual party provincial convention will occur in the spring. By then, in the face of the deepening global economic crisis, the direction of the new NDP Premier may be clear. The question is: what will the new crop of Manitoba NDP members have to say about it? ■

Union-busters close Stella D'Oro factory

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



By MARTY GOODMAN

NEW YORK—What began in August 2008 as a strike at the Stella D'Oro bakery in the Bronx became an 11-month protracted war and one of the great labor battles in recent New York history. The Stella D'Oro workers became a national symbol of resistance to a heartless economic system.

Stella bosses had demanded slashing wages as much as 25 percent, making insurance premiums unaffordable and eliminating holidays, vacation, and sick pay. During the strike not one of the 136 strikers crossed the line, a rare achievement.

After 78 years, on Oct. 8, Stella D'Oro's owners, Brynwood Partners of Connecticut, closed its doors and laid off all of its workers in an act of outright union busting. Brynwood sold the bakery Sept. 9 to Lance, Inc., a non-union junk-food company, for an undisclosed amount, estimated at \$12 to \$17 million. Lance is moving all production to its non-union plant in Ashland, Ohio.

After a Stella boss announced the closing, one worker, George Kahassi, shouted into his face, "The workers united will never be defeated!"

About 90 workers chanted along with Kahassi for several emotion-filled minutes. The workers then

cleared out their lockers and filed out, some in tears, but as labor heroes nonetheless. In a personal tragedy, one Stella worker of 29 years lost his father the day before he also lost his job.

The Stella workforce is mostly Latino, but also Italian, Greek, Albanian, West African, Eritrean, and Indian. They are represented by Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM). About a week after the shutdown, workers received contractual severance pay, although one estimate puts outstanding compensation at 40 percent.

Typical of the capitalists that have thrown millions into unemployment lines, Brynwood is a Wall Street hedge fund that boasts of delivering high profits to wealthy investors—meaning, of course, profits on the backs of working people!

The investment firm of Goldman-Sachs, the largest recipient in federal bailout funds (\$12.9 billion), is a major investor in Brynwood Partners. Goldman-Sachs plans to distribute \$16 billion in employee bonuses in 2009.

Over the years Brynwood received \$425,000 in city tax breaks to keep production and jobs in the Bronx. City officials claim that there is no legal recourse un-

der New York laws to prevent bosses from absconding with machinery paid for, in part, by New York's working class. Moreover, capitalist law is so rigged that it is legally difficult to stop companies from closing plants in retaliation for a union's unwillingness to accept concessions, although a Local 50 appeal is pending.

What is needed to stop company shutdowns and save jobs is mobilizing the power of the labor movement to stop scabs in their tracks and shut down production cold. Reliance on the boss-friendly court system is a trap for workers.

On June 30, in response to a union appeal, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that Brynwood had "bargained in bad faith" and ordered the company to take back the workers and negotiate a contract. In an act of retaliation, the company announced the day the workers returned on July 7 that it would close in 90 days. Throughout, the local City Labor Council affiliate of the AFL-CIO did nothing to mobilize workers.

Stella workers assess their struggle

Emile Dorsu, a Ghanian immigrant and Stella packer, told *Socialist Action*, "I was thinking it's been a failure. But, after speaking to some people, they say that we motivated them. We proved that we can stand up and fight. That makes me feel like, 'OK, even if we didn't win now, we have set some example for people to fight for what they believe in.' She added, "That makes me feel good."

Shop steward Mike Filippou said, "If we had 20,000 workers around Stella, the bosses couldn't win. The labor movement is so weak. When we wanted to sit-down to get what we earned, they said they were afraid of lawsuits. The bosses take advantage of that, and the laws are made for them."

He added, "Our Stella D'Oro Support Committee was a great thing. We had many rallies. We had people from every corner of the labor movement." Filippou was suspended during the final month in retaliation, although there may be a negotiated deal on his status soon.

"I'm very proud of my co-workers," Filippou told *Socialist Action*. "We stayed out and fought. But, it's not over yet. We have to convince the city to allow CITGO petroleum [owned by the Venezuelan government] to make Brynwood sell it and make it into a worker co-op, as they've said they're still willing to do."

Only the physical Stella plant remains, owned by Brynwood. Thus far, Brynwood has not responded to CITGO. For a complete history of the Stella D'Oro struggle go to www.stelladorostrike.com. ■

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Bipartisan gov't statements embolden anti-abortion forces

HARTFORD, Conn.—On Oct. 25, women awoke to read that opponents of abortion were preparing an auction on eBay to raise funds for Scott Roeder, the man charged with the murder of later-term-abortion provider Dr. George Tiller. While eBay eventually canceled the auction, the incident reveals the confidence that the perpetrators of extra-legal violence against abortion clinics and doctors currently feel.

This confidence flows not only from the unrelenting press attention to the right-wing disruptions of health-care reform rallies and the extreme right's ability to mobilize tens of thousands of rightists Washington, D.C., on Sept. 12 but from the bipartisan misuse of abortion as a political football in the health-care debate.

A few days before the House was scheduled to consider a merged health-care bill, anti-abortion Democratic Congresspersons, led by Representative Bart Stupak of Michigan, threatened to hold up a vote on rules. In return for allowing the bill to come to the floor, they demanded the insertion of a Hyde Amendment-type clause that prohibited the use of taxpayer funds for abortions.

Stupak's initiative is only one of many efforts to use the health-care debate as an arena for the dissemination of anti-abortion propaganda. As the House prepared to discuss a bill, Conferences of Catholic Bishops from Texas and Louisiana came out supporting only legislation that banned funding of abortion.

While there have been widely disseminated refutations of the assertion that current bills actually provide public monies for abortion, pro-choice advocates feel that they must continue to campaign against the introduction of amendments that might actually prohibit abortion cov-

erage by *private* insurers. The cascade of anti-abortion proclamations and legislative maneuvers tied to the health-care reform debate began with the July threats of former Operation Rescue head Randall Terry, who said to a Nancy Pelosi aide: "If you force people to pay their money, there are people who will resort to acts of violence."

More subtle but equally dangerous has been the response by Obama aides to the right-wing initiative on reproductive rights. Instead of challenging the ideologues and clearly defending women's rights, White House spokesperson Robert Gibbs reinforced the anti-abortion hysteria permeating the discourse in Congress by pointing to the reactionary Hyde Amendment as an obstacle to the public funding of abortion.

Combined with Obama's Notre Dame proclamation that he supported the "right" of medical personnel to refuse to perform abortions, his administration's positive referencing of the Hyde Amendment is surely a big disappointment to the women who looked to his presidency to defend and expand choice. And the lack of a vigorous public defense of abortion has resulted in a drop in public support for legal abortion. In an April 2009 poll, Pew Research found that only 46% say that they think that abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

In Connecticut, the Hartford GYN health clinic was evacuated on Oct. 29 when a suspicious package was found at the front gate, the location of an anti-abortion prayer vigil connected with the national "40 Days for Life" campaign. The bomb threat has intensified building ef-

orts for a Nov. 8 Speak-Out for Reproductive Rights that is to be held at the Vernon Center at Trinity College in that city.

Speakers at the speak-out will include Gretchen Raffa, a community organizer for Planned Parenthood; Jillian Gilchrest, the executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice CT; Susan Campbell, a journalist for the Hartford *Courant* and author of "Dating Jesus"; Joan Chrisler, a member of the CT-NOW Board of Directors; Clair Kaplan, a Nurse Practitioner and Assistant Professor at Yale University; Regina Dyton, a community activist; Abbey Willis, the CT Workers Solidarity Alliance; and Alissa De Rosa of CT Socialist Action.

Testimony from those victimized by reactionary abortion legislation and other restrictions of reproductive rights will complete the program. Endorsers include CT NARAL, NOW, Planned Parenthood, the Women and Gender Resource Action Center of Trinity College, the National Council of Jewish Women-CT, FADGE (Feminism, Autonomy, Diversity, and Gender Expression) Fest Committee, CT Coalition for Choice, UCONN Women's Center, and the CT ANSWER Coalition.

Organizers hope that the speak-out will lead to a larger public action in January around the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973. ■

For more information, call (860) 297-2408 or write ctreprojustice@gmail.com.

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By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

NO CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

It is unfortunate that the excellent, low-budget, allegorical, sci-fi film, "District 9," is no longer in theaters, especially now that ugly anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise here and in Europe—the Netherlands, particularly. Director Neill Blomkamp, a native of South Africa, had witnessed apartheid first hand. His film transcends the big-budget sci-fi blockbusters in many ways, most importantly in its message.

The set-up is that a monstrous impenetrable, mysterious space ship is hovering over Johannesburg. For two decades, its thousands of human-sized, crustacean-like beings from another planet have been quarantined by the South African government in a township-like compound called District 9. Guarded by the military, they live on bare land in shacks of corrugated iron, wood, and scrap.

Unlike South African Blacks during apartheid, the beings, called prawns by the Joburgians, have not been given work passes or ID cards, and so can never leave. They can't get jobs, so scavenge; the government allows them crates of canned cat food to which they not only have become addicted but use it to barter. Now their population has outgrown the district; they are to be evicted and moved to a larger compound.

The film is shot partly in documentary style as cameras follow Wikus Van De Merwe (Sharlto Copley), an inept, naïve low-level government bureaucrat who works for MNU (Multi-National United), and who has been put in charge of the relocation (think Steve Carrell of "The Office"). Accompanied by a translator and military back-up, they enter the compound smashing in doors, and forcing unwilling tenants to sign a form authorizing their move.

The aliens, with shrimp-like faces, speak in a clicking gibberish (subtitled) with an Arnold Schwarzenegger cadence. It's evident not only by the fact of the space ship but also by powerful weapons that they have built and only they can operate that the aliens have a superior intellect. Of course, the government and the military want to tap into it. Aliens begin "disappear-



ing" and end up in on slabs in labs for study.

De Merwe enters the alien Christopher's shack while he and his "mini-me" son are away; he finds a pile of old computers and other sophisticated electronic equipment along with a canister of some strange black liquid, which he inadvertently squirts in his face, resulting in his gradual transformation, thus making him more valuable to his employers.

Blomkamp gives us an inside look at life in such a place, where rebel Nigerians exploit the aliens, and prostitution is rampant. The issue of such alien and Nigerian sexual unions (and there are hints of this), like mixed-race kids in the U.S. since forever, face discrimination. (Recently, in Louisiana, a justice of the peace refused to marry a Black man and a white wom-

an, based on concerns for hardships their kids would face. Then someone gave an example: Barack Obama.)

"District 9" was written and directed in such a way as to have audiences sympathize with the aliens. The white South African bureaucrats are lying, small-minded, compassionless and cruel; the military, faceless thugs. You feel compassion for Wikus by the film's end and develop an affinity towards Christopher and his small son, whom he treats like any protecting dad, warning him away from danger. Still, at a crucial moment, his son demonstrates the technical skill to run a space ship.

Currently, the film is not on DVD. Until it is, go to the official website at www.district9.com for trailers and more information, and push for a re-issue. ■

Kinder, gentler capitalism?

By JOE AUCIELLO

"Capitalism: A Love Story" is Michael Moore's most ambitious but not most successful film. He wants to show how capitalism in America today does not work as well as it did in the past due to mismanagement, corporate greed, and the failure of government oversight. He hopes for "a kinder, gentler" capitalism. Unfortunately, Moore is not radical enough; he does not grasp the root cause of economic oppression.

Still, there is much to applaud here. In this film Moore puts a human face on the victims of the system. He shows people losing their homes, fired from their jobs, jailed without cause, and swindled by the despicable schemes of employers and insurance companies. He shows the devastation left behind on cities and towns when companies collapse or move away in search of higher profit.

Perhaps even more important, Moore shows people banding together and fighting back, preventing housing foreclosures and, in the case of Republic Windows and Doors, preventing companies from throwing workers out like trash. The old slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all," comes to life in this film.

Moore continues his unique style of confrontational



comedy, where simple common sense runs afoul of corporate greed. His effort to retrieve misused bailout money and return it to the federal treasury, for instance, is flat-out hilarious. So too with his failed attempts to seek interviews with people in power so that he may speak truth to them. Their arrogant silence conveys an essential lesson: power means never having to say anything to anybody. From these humorous situations

Moore draws out his essential theme, that America needs more democracy.

Though Moore excels in portraying the symptoms of oppression—no small achievement—he does not grasp the nature of exploitation within capitalism. It's as if everything went wrong with federal deregulation and the election of Ronald Reagan, while capitalist oppression will end if Obama adopts the crusading spirit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and implements a steeply progressive tax code. Moore fails to distinguish between bad policies and a bad system. He does not recognize the fundamental and irresolvable social antagonism between capital and wage labor.

Workers must produce more value than they earn. The extra value which they produce goes into the hands of capitalists. Without profit founded on inequality, a form of theft perpetrated every day on millions of people, capitalism could not exist.

Since exploitation is built into capitalism, the system cannot be altered fundamentally by reforms, no matter how thoroughgoing, no matter how necessary and just. To survive, capitalism must expropriate profit from workers. Real democracy means that "the expropriators must still be expropriated."

Few other films put social oppression on the screen and ask whether the economic system that creates and thrives on human alienation and suffering should continue to exist. Credit Moore for raising the essential questions, ones that will linger in a viewer's mind long after the closing credits. ■

... Taliban

(continued from page 8)

some U.S. military and political leaders is giving up trying to control the entire area of conflict but continuing to stage strikes to keep any important threat to U.S. interests from developing—creating a "Chaosistan," an area of permanent chaos, would not remove the dangers either. Such would create a festering sore, like Gaza or Somalia, that would drive more and more of the local population to desperation and foster deeper and deeper hatred of the United States.

On a world scale the political costs for the U.S. would steadily increase, as they have grown for Israel because its similar policy toward Gaza. The area of conflict in Afghanistan and western Pakistan is too big and strategic to be kept in chaos.

It is on a scale incomparably greater than Gaza, to say nothing of remote and forlorn Somalia. The Oct. 27 statement of the regional powers makes that clear.

Moreover, the prospects for achieving stable neocolonial regimes in Afghanistan and Pakistan look more and more remote. In its Oct. 28 issue, *The New York Times* revealed the depth of the U.S. involvement with corruption and gangsterism in Afghanistan, by reporting that Hamid Karzai's brother has been on the payroll of the CIA for eight years and that he runs a Mafia-like operation engaged in the opium trade.

A large percentage of the Pushtun, on which Karzai depends, will probably not vote again if an election proceeds. Much of this area is controlled by the Taliban, who are threatening reprisals against anyone who goes to the polls.

The farcical nature of the Afghan elections on Aug. 20 forced a reluctant

Hamid Karzai to accept a run-off vote. But on Nov. 1, Karzai's main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, pulled out of the new election on grounds that Karzai had refused his demands on changes to the electoral commission to prevent fraud. The electoral conflict had threatened to divide the country on civil war lines between the Pushtun and the peoples of Persian language and/or culture in the north and west of the country.

Abdullah appeared to offer no alternative to the present regime other than a different sectional interest, undoubtedly even more dependent on the warlords of the old Northern Alliance.

In the Oct. 27 *British Guardian*, Nushin Arbabzadah wrote: "Given that only a third of the population chose to exercise their right to vote in the first round, there are strong grounds to believe that the disenfranchised represent a majority of the Afghan population."

In Pakistan, the army offensive in South Waziristan prompted some questions about whether it was possible to finally integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into the Pakistani state. The conclusion was that this was unlikely because it would require a social revolution, for which the Pakistani government has neither the will nor the means. The structure of the country remains an unwieldy hybrid of feudalism and gangster capitalism. It will not change without a real social revolution that sweeps away the bourgeois structures as well as the feudal ones.

Such an upheaval would change not only the region but the world. If it approaches, its footsteps would resound around the globe. It will obviously be a difficult process. But for the Pakistani people, as well as for the Afghans, the only alternative is deepening chaos and fratricidal civil conflict. ■

Honduran mass movement: 'Nobody here surrenders!'



By CLAY WADENA

On Oct. 26, the media announced an agreement between ousted Honduran President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and the right-wing coup-makers who overthrew him. The agreement will restore Zelaya to power (pending the Honduran congress' approval) and pave the way for peaceful late November elections.

The agreement was brokered by the Obama administration's representative Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon and is being widely lauded by bourgeois figures in politics and the media as a qualitative breakthrough.

"It is a triumph for Honduran democracy," stated ousted Honduran President Zelaya. "[It's] an historic agreement," crowed U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

For the people of Honduras, who have risked life and limb to oppose the coup through the use of strikes and mass mobilizations, this is indeed a victory, because without their struggle the Honduran ruling class wouldn't have felt it necessary to come to any kind of accord with Zelaya.

By practically shutting down Honduran society, the resistance forced international powers to declare that they would not recognize the victor of the November elections unless Zelaya was returned to office. This in turn forced the national bourgeoisie of Honduras to at least maintain the appearance of allowing the restoration of Zelaya.

Hondurans have not fought against the coup and police terrorism only to give up the struggle because Zelaya will be restored in a limited capacity.

The negotiations between the coup-plotters and the democratically elected Zelaya administration had not reached any success previously because they couldn't agree on restoring Zelaya to power. Under this new agreement, both sides have agreed to abide by a congressional vote on the matter. The Honduran congress will likely approve the new agreement so as to guarantee diplomatic recognition of the November elections, but it is entirely unclear when they will do it and what type of power-sharing arrangement Zelaya will be forced into.

Either way, Zelaya will only serve until January, and it is widely believed that he will only serve in a very limited capacity. All in all, this is political theater at its highest form. The Micheletti coup government claims they have made a major concession, even though they don't actually believe the congress will restore Zelaya in any meaningful way. Meanwhile, the United States and Zelaya can both save face, claiming to have forced a concession from the coup government.

But it was the masses that forced the concession (limited as it is), and it will be the masses that will have to bear the

burden of the right wing's continued domination of Honduran politics.

The proposed constituent assembly, for which Zelaya was supposedly deposed for supporting, cannot even be discussed until after January, as part of this new agreement. The constituent assembly proposal is very popular among the Honduran people, which is the second poorest country in all of Central America. The masses see the constituent assembly as a means to break the right-wing stranglehold over Honduran society that has existed for decades.

The only group that still seems to actively demand a constituent assembly is the National Front of the Resistance to the Coup d'Etat, which has coordinated the largest and most recent mobilizations and strikes in Honduras against the coup.

The National Resistance Front recently released "Comunicado Number 32." The communiqué states, "We reiterate that a National Constituent Assembly is an unrenounceable aspiration of the Honduran people and a non-negotiable right for which we will continue struggling in the streets, until we achieve the re-founding of our society to

convert it into one that is just, egalitarian and truly democratic! At 125 days of struggle, nobody here surrenders!"

This portion of the communiqué reflects the revolutionary sentiments of the masses of poor Hondurans, represented in the National Resistance Front by campesino and union organizations.

These Hondurans have not fought against the coup and ensuing police terrorism only to give up the struggle because Zelaya will be restored in a limited capacity. They aspire to re-found the entire society, as they clearly understand that no matter who is elected president of Honduras, the military and ruling elite will still wield the vast majority of institutional power.

Regardless of whether or not Zelaya is restored, regardless of who is elected, the masses of Hondurans need to stay mobilized and organized. Any "peace" that is reached without real fundamental change in Honduran society will ultimately mean more of the same.

As Malcolm X once said, "You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom."

And Hondurans will not know freedom until the oligarchy is overthrown. To do that they must organize independently of the capitalists and stay mobilized regardless of what crumbs are thrown their way. Even the constituent assembly can be manipulated by the capitalists and turned into a dead end, which is all the more reason for the masses to keep flexing their social power. To the extent that they demobilize or maintain illusions in the bourgeois institutions of government they will be defeated.

Zelaya is no longer prominently supporting the constituent assembly, and hasn't since the coup took place. Although the masses view this new agreement between Zelaya and the coup-plotters as a victory, it must be noted that it has come at a certain time, in a certain form, and to perform a certain function: to break the mass movement and restore faith in the bourgeois institutions of Honduras. While the agreement that has been reached is certainly a result of the masses' valiant struggle against the coup; it is only the beginning of the path to real democracy and social justice.

The poor peasants and workers of Honduras aspire to change their country into a society that is "just, egalitarian and truly democratic" from the corrupt, highly stratified dictatorship that it is today, and this aspiration will lead them to a confrontation with capitalism itself. They would be well advised to be armed with the ideological tools of Marxism and organized into a politically independent group that truly represents the workers and poor peasants of Honduras. ■

Community out-mobilizes hate group in Minneapolis

By LISA LUINENBURG

MINNEAPOLIS—On Oct. 3, a cold and rainy Saturday morning, hundreds of people gathered in front of the Midtown YWCA here to oppose the presence of the National Socialist Movement (NSM), a neo-Nazi fascist hate group that openly displays swastikas. The local branch of the NSM had advertised on its website that it would be protesting an anti-racism workshop that was being held at the YWCA that morning. According to the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, the workshop was called, "More Than Skin Deep: Uprooting White Privilege and White Supremacy One Cell at a Time."

The Midtown YWCA is located in the heart of a working-class neighborhood that is heavily populated by immigrants and people of color. It seems to be no accident that the NSM chose to hold their protest in this

particular location.

This was only the second in a string of attempts by the NSM to gain a public forum for its hateful views in Minnesota. In mid-September, the same members of the NSM had attended a workshop on immigrant rights in Austin, a small farming community in Southern Minnesota, where their branch is based.

They wore steel-toed boots, black clothes, and swastikas to the meeting. While they stopped short of openly attacking anyone in the room, they were still able to deliver their hateful message. In fact, one woman who was supposed to speak on a panel about her experience as an immigrant felt too intimidated to come to the meeting. In this way, the NSM was able to accomplish their goal of physical and psychological intimidation.

The community response to the NSM presence in

Minneapolis was much more organized. In the 1990s, community groups worked hard to organize a resistance to the presence of hate groups in Minneapolis. They used peaceful strategies to prevent groups like the NSM from using public spaces in the city to deliver their message. Because of these efforts, hate groups were not able to gain a foothold in Minneapolis in the same way that they have been able to do so in other cities. In light of the economic crisis and the recent debate over immigration reform, it seems as though the NSM is once again testing the waters in Minnesota in an attempt to gain a wider public hearing.

When the NSM announced they would be protesting the anti-racism workshop at the YWCA, community members responded by holding several emergency meetings to organize a response. According to the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, at least one of these meetings was attended by over 100 people.

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