

U.S. antiwar groups call united national conference

**March 20 antiwar demonstrations:
San Francisco, L.A.,
Washington**

ALL OUT!

**Bring the troops
home now from
Iraq, Afghanistan!**

BY CHRISTINE MARIE

Since the beginning of the year, Washington mounted an offensive in Afghanistan that was disastrous for the civilians of Marjah, declared that Iraqi election violence might slow their partial withdrawal, demanded devastating sanctions on Iran, escalated military aid to Yemen, announced military assistance to the discredited government of Somalia, pushed Latin America to recognize the coup government of Honduras, and occupied Haiti.

The depth and range of U.S. belligerency has sparked a modest but hopeful upswing in antiwar organizing, most of it focused on building the important March 20 marches in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Los Angeles, which will mark the 7th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

A significant step toward broad unity in the antiwar movement was taken in Cambridge, Mass., when the regional network New England United organized a March 20 building conference attended by around 400 people. And this process of united action will take another important step on July 23-25, the dates of the National United Antiwar Conference in Albany, N.Y., called by a number of organizations to discuss and approve proposals for future nationwide antiwar protests.

Speakers at the Cambridge conference (held on Jan. 30) included Glen Ford of Black Agenda Report and Black is Back; Bruce Gagnon of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space; Adaner Usmani of Action for a Progressive Pakistan and the Labor Party of Pakistan; Pardiss Kebriaei of the Center for Constitutional Rights; Executive Editor of MediaChannel.org Danny Schechter; and Palestinian activist Salma Abu Ayyash. The speakers presented explanations of the roots of Washington's imperialist interventions and the real uses of Obama's so called War on Terror.

Workshops were held on "Global Warming and War," Haiti, Honduras and Columbia, the domestic costs of war, and other issues. The large attendance can be attributed to the nearly 45 endorsing groups, which included organizations from every

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—Soraya Chadrack, 16 (left), with her sister Menji, 8, in an encampment in Petionville. Soraya was buried for several hours in the rubble of their home, while Meni survived nine days. International NGOs bypassing Haitian government officials and grassroots organizations have failed in delivering basic aid to this and most other encampments in and around Port-au-Prince. (More on Haiti, page 9.)

Obama leads U.S. deeper into Afghanistan morass

By GERRY FOLEY

The first test of Obama's escalation of the war in Afghanistan, the assault on the small city of Marjah and its environs, has already drawn skeptical reactions from observers. For example, in the Feb. 22 issue of the web journal *Salon.com*, Juan Cole, president of the Global Americana Institute, wrote: "Even the *Wall Street Journal* admits that in Marjah, the Marines are not exactly feeling the love from the civilians they have supposedly just liberated. Since the Taliban are typically not as corrupt as the warlords, in fact, to any extent that the US and NATO re-install corrupt warlord types in power, they may alienate the locals."

The Marjah offensive was touted as an example of collaboration between the U.S.-led occupation forces and the Afghan army, which has been built up under the aegis of the occupiers for eight years. In that respect, most of the observers, including correspondents for the U.S. big-business press, have recorded negative impressions.

Thus, the *Washington Post* reported Feb. 25: "The operation against the Taliban in Marjah has been a major trial for the Afghan military, showing the army is still far from capable of operating on its own." The article con-

tinued: "Although NATO insists the Marjah offensive is Afghan-led, the Americans appear to make all the major decisions on the ground."

The article noted a U.S. commander's statements that the performance of the Afghan forces showed improvement. But it also pointed out: "As the Marjah assault progressed, [Marine Col. Burke] Whitman has had to increase pressure on Afghan troops, especially when they revert to their habit of thinking Americans will do everything for them. At times, Afghan soldiers with 1st Platoon have refused to go on the risky night marches for supplies. And Whitman threatened that those refusing to carry their own food rations would go without eating."

"Some Afghans have refused to stand guard at night, or slipped away during their post, leaving Marines to do all the work."

The Pakistani English daily *Dawn*—for obvious reasons, given Pakistan's stake in the Afghan war—was interested in *The New York Times* assessment of the performance of the Afghan army. In its Feb. 23 issue, it began its article on the Marjah offensive by quoting a Feb. 21 *Times* article: "Scenes from this corner of the battlefield,

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Student-worker protests challenge Calif. budget cuts

BY MARC ROME and JEFF MACKLER

SAN FRANCISCO—Tens of thousands of college and high school students, unionized campus workers, K-12 teachers, university faculty, parents, and trade-union activists participated in a March 4 day of strikes and mass actions across California to protest the \$18 billion bipartisan budget cuts that have devastated public education and other social programs.

Massive college and university tuition increases—32 percent in the state's university system—brought out tens of thousands of students across the state.

Picket lines were established at several of the state's universities and public schools. These were followed by mass marches and rallies, the largest of which was a 4 p.m. mobilization of at least 15,000 in San Francisco's Civic Center. At least 14 organizations endorsed the San Francisco mobilization, including the United Educators of San Francisco, several California Federation of Teachers/American Federation of Teachers locals, official City College organizations, the San Francisco Labor Council, and the San Francisco Unified School District.

The main organizing of the March 4 protests took place in democratic, united, and independent committees. In contrast to the officials representing state and local public institutions, who favored lobbying the state legislature for additional funding, most participants in the independent committees viewed the crisis in public education as a product of the bipartisan policies of both corporate parties and looked favorably at mass mobilizations of working people and their allies.

Almost 2000 University of California students, faculty, and campus workers rallied and marched to downtown Oakland's Frank Ogawa Plaza, where another 1500 activists had gathered for a united rally.

Mass pickets at the entrances to the University of Cal-



Robert Stuart Lowden / la.indymedia.org

ifornia at Santa Cruz forced officials to order teachers to refrain from entering the campus, effectively closing it down. Over 1000 rallied at Cal State Northridge, while 2000 from UC San Diego rallied and marched through the downtown area—with additional thousands joining in solidarity. Thousands more protested in Sacramento, Los Angeles, Davis, and Fresno. Protests were organized across the state at every level of public education.

Some 120 solidarity actions in 32 states were similarly organized by a broad range of forces from radical and socialist currents to trade union organizations.

The California actions aimed at reversing the massive budgets cuts mandated by state and city governments that have eviscerated education, health care, social services, mass-transit, and jobs during the past year. Meanwhile, working people throughout the entire country are facing almost exactly the same attacks from the federal government.

In San Francisco and virtually everywhere else, a sense of excitement and a fighting spirit prevailed

(Left) Thousands of students, parents, and teachers joined the March 4 demonstration in downtown Los Angeles.

among the protesters—largely a young and racially diverse crowd. A highlight of the day was the participation of thousands of students who had traveled from all over the Bay Area and formed their own contingents to join the Civic Center action. Students from several San Francisco high schools, including a feeder march of 200 from Mission High, joined the effort. For many, it was their first experience in mass protest.

The mainstream press initially attempted to divert attention from the largely peaceful Berkeley march and rally to an anarchist-led march that had attempted to block Highway 880 in Oakland. But it soon became clear that the corporate media locally and nationally was taking their lead from the last-minute endorsement of California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the state's superintendent of public instruction, whose "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" tactic was chosen to blunt the independent character of the concerted actions aimed at the policies they had implemented. An over-enthusiastic Associated Press release reported that "millions" had participated across the country.

At a March 4 rally in New York City, several hundred

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Socialist Action East Coast Educational Conference

— Philadelphia, April 17-18

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For information on speakers, location, housing, and prices, please contact philly.socialistaction@gmail.com. A full schedule will be printed in next month's issue of Socialist Action newspaper.

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!

SOCIALIST ACTION. Closing news date: March 5, 2010

Editor: Michael Schreiber International Editor: Gerry Foley Canada Editor: Barry Weisleder

Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. BOX 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — \$20. All other countries — \$30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor. It is printed by members of Local 583, Allied Printing Trades Council, San Francisco, Calif.



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By GEORGE SHRIVER

TUCSON, Ariz.—Last year Roberto Lovato spearheaded the campaign against anti-immigrant hate-monger Lou Dobbs, successfully pressuring the CNN television network to stop giving Dobbs a platform. Lovato was the keynote speaker at the annual fundraising dinner of *Coalicion de Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights Coalition) on Feb. 19, in Tucson.

Lovato explained that he grew up in the Mission district of San Francisco. His parents were from El Salvador and worked as union members, his mother at a hotel chain as a member of HERE and his father at United Airlines. His father's practical sense and his mother's dreams helped Roberto Lovato become the gadfly journalist he is today.

In his speech at the *Derechos Humanos* dinner Lovato focused on the situation in the immigrant rights movement today. The proponents of "comprehensive immigration reform," he pointed out, are backed by millions of dollars from foundations and by the political machinery of the Democratic Party establishment. Their main organization is Reform Immigration for America (RIFA, also spelled RI4A). These forces claim to represent the "Rational Center," supposedly promising legalization for undocumented workers in exchange for increased enforcement and border militarization.

RIFA is planning to hold a demonstration for "immigration reform" in Washington, D.C., on March 21. They are mainly interested, Lovato said, in winning Latino votes for the Democrats.

Immigrant rights movement debates Gutierrez 'reform' plan

RIFA's main focus is to campaign in support of a bill introduced in the House of Representatives in December 2009 by Luis Gutierrez, Democratic Congressman from Illinois. While outlining a complicated, many-years-long process by which undocumented workers in this country (estimated at 12 million) could apply for legal status, the bill confirms and strengthens all the existing enforcement and militarization policies, especially E-Verify, a program under which thousands and thousands of workers are being fired or have been fired from their jobs during the past year.

A network of more principled immigrant-rights groups across the country collaborated in drafting an Open Letter explaining the defects and drawbacks of the Gutierrez bill, which, as the letter says, "does not offer real solutions." Supporters of the Open Letter include Isabel Garcia, co-chair of *Derechos Humanos*, and immigrant-rights journalist David Bacon.

Open Letter supporters attended the Latino Congreso in El Paso the last weekend of January and succeeded in having the Congreso adopt a resolution based on the Open Letter, under the title "Let's Have a Debate on Immigration Reform." Readers can view the resolution on the Latino Congreso website at this address: www.latinocongreso.org/resolucionapproved.php?id=259.

Significantly, the Latino Congreso also took a strong position on three foreign-policy questions. One, it criticized President Obama's tacit support of the military coup d'état in Honduras. Two, it opposed the establishment of new U.S. military bases in Colombia. And three, it urged immediate release of the Cuban Five, anti-terrorist fighters who have been kept imprisoned in the United States for more than 10 years.

(Note: A few minor inaccuracies in the version of the Open Letter adopted in El Paso have been corrected, and a press conference to publicly launch the letter and seek more endorsements is scheduled for early March.)

As Roberto Lovato pointed out in his Tucson speech, the more principled immigrant-rights organizations do not receive the millions of dollars in foundation money that go to the police-state-minded border-wall-lovers of the "Rational Center." He appealed for funds to keep the radical wing of the immigrant-rights movement going, and he included in that "left pole" such groups as *Derechos Humanos*, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and (a less clear-cut example) the Latino Congreso itself.

To make individual or group endorsements of the Open Letter, readers can go to the website of the Grassroots Immigrant Justice Network. ■

UPS using E-Verify to fire immigrants

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—The package delivery giant UPS is on the verge of firing hundreds of workers in the Chicago land area as a result of the company's participation in the government's E-Verify program. These workers, some with more than 20 years seniority, are facing the prospect of losing a good union job with benefits and pensions and being forced into the mass of the unemployed due to the Obama administration's anti-immigrant policies.

E-Verify is a federal program that supposedly checks the employees' names and Social Security numbers against a national database to verify their work status. The Obama administration is mandating all companies with federal contracts to take part in E-Verify. Thousands of employers are participating in the program, putting tens of thousands of workers on the chopping block.

UPS began rolling out the program in Chicago in January. UPS will soon expand the process to its facilities across the country. Supervisors told workers they must fill out the government's I-9 authorization form and show documentation to HR of employment eligibility.

The company has set a deadline for Chicago workers of March 31 to submit documentation, or else workers will be immediately terminated. Supervisors have harassed workers who have not done so, even singling out workers in pre-work meetings and posting lists of workers who haven't submitted documentation.

Management has targeted the suburban Addison facility in particular, where there is a large concentration of Latino workers. Workers there must often endure racist remarks from supervisors.

Teamsters Local 705 has stood behind their UPS members, working to save their jobs. The local's officers and staff participated in an open meeting called by the suburban-based immigrant-rights coalition, Immigrant Solidarity DuPage, and held a meeting at the union hall to educate the affected workers on their rights.

Local 705 has also sent extra union representatives to the Addison plant to stop the abuse of Latino workers, and has filed harassment grievances against supervisors. Recently, a group of workers in Addison who had not yet filled out the I-9 form were told by management when they came to work that they were laid off. The union filed a grievance in response, and a few days later the workers were called back to work. The local has



requested negotiations with UPS, but so far the company has refused. The union and affected workers have met with Congressman Luis Gutierrez, who has agreed to help urge UPS to meet with the union.

Local immigrant-rights activists have also taken on the workers' cause. A delegation of activists, church leaders, and community members will attempt to meet with UPS management on March 4 to demand a stop to all firings. UPS workers will participate in a march and rally called by local activists on March 10 in downtown Chicago to commemorate the mass march of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers held on that day in 2006 and demand just immigration reform and an end to the E-Verify firings.

Many of the UPS workers and other local activists are mobilizing for the national March 21 Washington, D.C., rally to demand immigration reform. Local 705 is planning on chartering a bus for the UPS workers to attend the action.

The E-Verify program was first introduced in the Clinton administration and then expanded under the Bush administration, which in 2007 mandated its use by all employers for newly hired workers. The Obama administration has adopted this reactionary tool as part of its so-called immigration-reform agenda, and implemented the federal contractor rule in September 2009. Many cases have been documented of U.S. citizens and other work-authorized employees being fired due to errors in the E-Verify system.

As a candidate, Obama promised (at least in front of Latino crowds) a just reform of the immigration process. Instead, Obama and Homeland Security Secretary

Janet Napolitano have increased the attacks on immigrant workers through a series of administrative directives. These have included the no-match-letter policy and the expansion of the 287(g) program, often called "polimigra," which authorizes designated local police to enforce immigration law. Polimigra has been granted to many ultra-right sheriffs and police departments that have used it to engage in mass round-ups of Latino workers. There have been more deportations of immigrant workers under Obama than under Bush.

Many activists have rallied around the immigration reform bill proposed by Rep. Gutierrez. While this bill contains provisions that will allow many undocumented workers to apply for legal status, removes barriers for others, and proposes to end the 287(g) program, it also increases border militarization and enforcement, including expanding the E-Verify program!

The bill also calls for the creation of a new federal agency to establish "employment-based immigration policies that promote economic growth and competitiveness while minimizing job displacement, wage depression and unauthorized employment." Such an agency could be used as a back-door method to create a guest-worker program—establishing a

permanent low-paid legal immigration labor force with no rights and the ability to drive down the wages of U.S. workers, both documented and undocumented. Senate proposals include the immediate creation of such a guest-worker program.

All the while, thousands of workers, as at UPS, will soon be fired from their jobs. While UPS and other companies claim they are only going along with the law, in truth they are all too happy to be "compelled" to remove thousands from their payrolls. For UPS, this means they can replace higher paid seniority workers with new hires, starting at \$8.50 with no medical benefits for one year. The firings also can have the effect of sending a collective chill down the backs of remaining workers as they see the company throw their fellow workers out into the street.

For the fired workers, who have dedicated years of hard work in a grueling and physically demanding job, E-Verify has thrown their lives into turmoil. The company they have helped to make billions in profits is now kicking them out the door. This same process is being repeated around the country at thousands of employers. Is this the "just" immigration policy promised by Obama?

The fight for immigration reform must start with a defense of fired workers. The entire labor movement, immigrant-rights movement, and their allies must come to the defense of the workers being targeted under the E-Verify system. Both the AFL-CIO and Change to Win labor federations have declared their opposition to E-Verify in resolutions; now is the time for them to put their words into action. This attack on immigrant workers is an attack on all workers—it deserves a response by all workers.

Instead of looking for help from Washington politicians, who have only worsened conditions for immigrants, the labor and immigrant-rights movement must return to the streets and picket lines to demand an end to all firings and for amnesty for all workers.

Mass marches such as those that occurred in 2006, and the 2008 worker occupation of Republic Windows and Doors, are examples of what can be accomplished when workers gain confidence to fight and mobilize to defend their rights. Such a return to action is the only hope for a change in immigration policies and the only hope for these workers under attack. ■

For further reading:

'What's at Stake in the Fight for Immigrant Rights?'

A 70-page pamphlet, \$4. Order from Socialist Action Books, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Please add \$1 per pamphlet for shipping.



... Obama leads U.S. deeper into Afghanistan morass

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observed over eight days ... suggest that the day when the Afghan army will be well led and able to perform complex operations independently ... remains far off.

"The effort to train the Afghan army has long been troubled, with soldiers and officers repeatedly falling short. And yet after nearly a decade of American and European mentorship and many billions of dollars of American taxpayer investment, American and Afghan officials have portrayed the Afghan army as the force out front in this important offensive against the Taliban.

"Statements from Kabul have said the Afghan military is planning the missions and leading both the fight and the effort to engage with Afghan civilians caught between the Taliban and the newly arrived troops. But that assertion conflicts with what is visible in the field. In every engagement between the Taliban and one front-line American Marine unit, the operation has been led in almost every significant sense by American officers and troops. They organized the forces for battle, transported them in American vehicles and helicopters from Western-run bases into Taliban-held ground, and have been the primary fighting force each day."

In his article in the Feb. 22 *Salon.com*, Juan Cole summed up such accounts: "The answer to the question about Afghan military preparedness—after nearly a decade of training and an investment of \$1 billion—[is] that Afghan troops are not ready for prime time. In the Marjah campaign, they showed no initiative, no ability to fight independently. They are poorly served by their junior field officers, and they are 90% illiterate. (*The Times'* reporter expected to see them with maps out planning approaches!)"

One account gave an example of a relationship between Afghan officers and soldiers typical of corrupt neocolonial armies. The soldier had gotten a can of Red Bull from a U.S. soldier. The officer just took it from him and drank it himself and gave what he did not want to another officer. Given that sort of relationship, obviously, loyalty is not going to be very strong among the rank and file soldiers.

The situation with the Afghan police, who are supposed to play the key role in maintaining Afghan government control of the area retaken from the Taliban is apparently even worse. On the eve of the Marjah offensive, 25 Afghan police defected to the Taliban.

The New York Times reported Feb. 19: "They [the policemen] left with all their weapons, two trucks and machine guns and heavy weapons," said Maj. Abdul Khalil, the police chief in the Jalrez district, just north of Chak. ... Major Khalil said there had been a dispute about pay. 'We don't know if they have gone over to the Taliban, or they just ran away, or what has happened,' he said."

The article continued: "About the same time Major Khalil was speaking, a Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said in a telephone interview that 24 police officers in Chak had surrendered to the Taliban, with their weapons and two trucks. 'They are safe now and will not be harmed and will be treated well, under our code of conduct,' Mr. Mujahid said."

The police commander said that the men had left over a "pay dispute." The article went to explain that there was a general pattern of police officers stealing the funds they received to pay the policemen. Thus, it is likely that it was this sort of corruption that led to the defection of the police, and it is therefore also likely that this is not going to be an isolated instance.

The British *Guardian* reported in its Nov. 6, 2009, issue: "Between 10,000 and 15,000 Afghan police have been killed in the past five years; four times more likely to be killed than their military counterparts, who benefit from better training and equipment. Not surprisingly, recruitment is at an all-time low. Corruption is rife, with senior officers commonly paying a fee to secure promotions. The fee is regarded as an investment because each time a junior officer takes a bribe or steals from the public, the boss gets a cut. The more senior the post, the higher the upfront fee. A regional commander paying \$100,000 can expect to pay back his investment in two years."

The Taliban at least, although they aroused a lot of resentment and hatred by their brutality and ruthlessness, have gained a reputation for being less corrupt than the Karzai government and the warlords of the Northern Alliance, who were the essential allies of the U.S.-led conquest of Afghanistan.

Furthermore, it is not only the Afghan officers who have been stealing from the police. At least one incident of major theft from the police by U.S. military contractors has come to light, and again it is not likely a unique incident. The *Guardian* reported Feb. 24: "Employees of American defence contractor Blackwater took more than 500 assault rifles that were intended for the Afghan police force and routinely carried weapons without permission, it emerged in a hearing of the Senate armed services committee today."

Actually, Blackwater had created a dummy corporation called Paravant to conceal its role, since it has already been so discredited. The Feb. 24 *Guardian* noted: "In May two Afghan civilians were killed in a shooting involving Paravant employees. Investigators later determined that the Americans had 'violated alcohol policies,' were not authorised to have weapons and had violated other policies."

Not only has the Karzai government been unable to clear itself of corruption (in fact, it lost the last pretense of legitimacy when it renewed itself by fraudulent elections and recently took over all the election monitoring institutions). But it has been incapable of delivering its basic selling point for the U.S.—that is, Karzai's alleged authority as a Pushtun tribal chief.

The Taliban continues to be based on the Pushtun and to dominate most of the Pushtun areas. Karzai's "victory" in the presidential elections, in fact, was based on an impossible vote in Pushtun areas, where few potential voters defied the Taliban boycott. But he is not trusted by non-Pushtuns either. He has been unable to overcome the national divisions in the country or to be seen as a representative of national unity.

The Afghan army is disproportionately made up of the nationalities on which the Northern Alliance was based—the Hazaras, the Uzbeks, the Tajiks—who live in the north of the country. Juan Cole pointed out in the article quoted above: "Almost no ANA troops hail

(Left) Afghan National Army soldier on patrol through a Taliban stronghold in Kandahar province, October 2007. Over two years later, allied soldiers are still trying to roust the Taliban from the area.

from Helmand Province, and Tajiks (native speakers of Dari Persian, often from towns and cities) are vastly over-represented in the army."

The national divisions in Afghanistan have loomed as an obstacle to the attempts of Karzai and the U.S. to make a deal with sections of the Taliban, a tactic that became an ultimate hope of the U.S. for achieving a favorable outcome to the conflict without incurring unsustainable costs.

The Feb. 21 issue of the British *Telegraph* reported: "Hamid Karzai's internationally funded scheme to lure Taliban fighters with land and jobs will undermine democracy in Afghanistan and alienate the peaceful population, his presidential rival Abdullah Abdullah has claimed." Abdullah's main base is among the northern peoples, who suffered under the Taliban when the latter ruled Afghanistan.

The maneuvering of the U.S. and the Karzai government toward the Taliban has also caused complications in their relations with the Pakistani military, which has had links to the Taliban, and now fears that the U.S. may be negotiating with the Taliban behind its back. The recent arrests of Taliban leaders in Pakistan have led to speculation that the Pakistani military finally decided to arrest these figures, most notably Mullah Baradar, because they were the conduits for the U.S. negotiations with the Taliban.

The Feb. 17 *New York Times* reported remarks by a "senior Pakistani intelligence official" that suggested that the arrest of the Taliban leaders were really aimed at the U.S. "We are after Mullah Baradar," the Pakistani intelligence official said in an interview three weeks ago. "We strongly believe that the Americans are in touch with him, or people who are close to him."

"The official said the American action of excluding Pakistan from talks with the Afghan Taliban was making things 'difficult.' 'You cannot say that we are important allies and then you are negotiating with people whom we are hunting and you don't include us,' he said."

The Pakistani military would have good reason to resent the U.S. negotiating with the Taliban behind their backs when they have taken big risks to ally themselves with the U.S. against the Taliban forces in Pakistan—tolerating U.S. drone bombings that have killed a lot of Pakistani civilians, pushing their repression of the Taliban and its allies to the point of civil war, and displacing millions of their citizens.

The brutality and ruthlessness of the Pakistani Taliban and their allies have, by all accounts, given the military a certain political cover for their assault on Taliban bases in some areas, but this political support, also by all accounts, is pretty thin.

The U.S. government is hated by the overwhelming majority of the Pakistani people, and the complicity of the Pakistan military and government with U.S. forces in Afghanistan and U.S. covert forces within their own country is seriously eroding the control of a military and government discredited by corruption and their defense of brutal exploitation of the Pakistani people.

Inadvertently, one presumes, *The New York Times* evoked the longing of the Pakistani people for the overthrow of their oppressors and for an anti-imperialist revolution in an article in its Feb. 25 issue. It was an article devoted to a current of opinion opposed to Islamist fundamentalism: "Worse than the violence, Mr. Rizvi said, was the weakness of the government, which seemed unable to accomplish much of anything. Nor was a military takeover the answer. The only solution, he said, was a revolution by the people, like the one in Iran in 1979."

The author of the article tried to reassure his audience (and his editors and their sponsors) that such a revolution was a "distant" prospect in Pakistan, because none of the political leaders had any "vision." That is certainly true of the political leaders to which big press journalists pay attention. But under the pressure of civil war and U.S. intervention, Pakistan is a cauldron of political ferment out of which leaders of a very different sort can arise. Processes can develop that would be a far greater threat to U.S. imperialism than Islamist radicalism.

The U.S. military chiefs claim that their offensive in Marjah is a success, but that the Taliban resistance has been much more than they expected. Of course, there was no doubt that the U.S. military would prevail in the field. They qualitatively outnumber the Taliban fighters in the area, and their material superiority is overwhelming. That makes their acknowledged surprise more significant. It is an indication that more surprises are in store for them.

In fact, the successes that the U.S. officials have claimed in recent weeks, both in the Marjah offensive and the arrest of Taliban leaders in Pakistan, do not point the way out of the morass they have gotten themselves into Afghanistan and Pakistan but only deeper into it. ■



... Antiwar conference / March 20

(continued from page 1)

sector of the broad antiwar movement, and brought forces from the AFSC to ANSWER together with grassroots organizers from the unions, community groups, and solidarity initiatives with struggles the world over.

The subordination of antiwar organizing to the election of Barack Obama was repeatedly and scathingly critiqued by presenters and attendees alike, suggesting that the persistent illusions in the president are beginning to weaken.

At the March 20 antiwar events, organizers for the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations will be working to take advantage of this shift by working with others to publicize the United National Antiwar Conference, to be held July 23-25 in Albany, New York. (See adjacent announcement.)

The co-sponsorship of a major antiwar conference by a united force including veterans groups, Code Pink, Progressive Democrats of America, U.S. Labor Against the War, and the Arab American Union Members Council may create the kind of synergy necessary to expand the authority and size of mass action against Obama's wars in the coming period.

The selection of Albany as a location for the conference is especially meaningful, given that this area is the political home of the leaders of the Troy Area Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, which on Oct. 21, 2009, unanimously passed a resolution calling on the AFL-CIO to organize a national march on Washington for peace, jobs, and health-care justice. Organized labor in this region has been especially active on all these fronts and helped to sustain a stable regional antiwar movement comprised of many longstanding town organizations.

A conference with a sizeable labor attendance would serve as a strong antidote to a growing number of misguided calls for the antiwar movement to unite with rightist forces from the Ron Paul and Patrick Buchanan isolationist camps.

The call for the conference stresses the immediate and total withdrawal of U.S. military forces, mercenaries, and contractors from Afghanistan and Iraq and represents a united effort around this demand by the 16 co-sponsoring organizations. The co-sponsors have also agreed that the conference will entertain additional demands and resolutions for discussion and vote on key issues such as Palestine, Haitian and Honduran sovereignty, and war and the global climate crisis.

The conference will be organized to maximize the democratic discussion about the kind of plan capable of moving the largest layer of the U.S. population into action to oppose Obama's wars. Resolutions will be solicited from endorsing groups and posted on-line in advance of the conference. Much of the conference time will be devoted to plenary sessions, where these resolutions will be debated and voted upon. ■

'Stop the Occupation of Iraq!'

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... Students

(continued from page 4)

students and teachers protested. They mobilized in front of the governor's office and marched to a Municipal Transit Authority (MTA) hearing at the Fashion Institute of Technology. At that location, Transit Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 held a rally, also of several hundred. Both protests were overwhelmingly Black and Latin@.

At Hunter College in New York City, over 300 students participated in the protest, demanding "stop the budget and childcare cuts, halt tuition hikes, and revive CUNY's mission to provide access to public education for all."

The spark for the March 4 mobilizations was a rally of 5000 students, workers, and faculty at UC Berkeley on Sept. 24, 2009, with dozens of similar, yet smaller rallies at UC, State, and City College campuses throughout California. Organizers used the momentum from that day of action to build an unprecedented one-person-one-vote open general assembly at UC Berkeley on Oct. 24, where education activists from across the state joined in to lay plans for future united actions. The meeting, officially named the Mobilizing Conference to Save Public Education, drew nearly 1000 students, workers, and teachers from as many as 100 different schools, unions, and organizations across California and from all sectors of public education.

The breadth of this movement is owed largely to Sacramento's aggressive, broadsided campaign to solve California's \$21 billion budget shortfall on the backs of working people and students. The cuts have become generalized, and few among the working-class and student population have been unaffected by the \$17 billion slashed from California schools and colleges and another \$16 billion chopped from health and welfare programs.

These inspiring mobilizations took place at an important juncture at which antiwar activists throughout the country are organizing for the March 20 national day of action against the U.S.-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. With the U.S. government spending trillions of dollars to fund three wars and the occupation of two countries, in addition to nearly \$13 trillion that has been either given or pledged to U.S. banks and corporations, little or no money is left for maintaining social programs. Central demands for the March 20 mass mobilizations include: "Funds for jobs, education, housing, health care and human needs—not wars and occupations! Bring the troops home now!"

A challenge remains for the movements against budget cuts and wars to unite into a powerful national force to demand not only an end to state and local government cutbacks, but to demand an end to the federal government's multi-trillion-dollar wars and "welfare for the rich" programs at the expense of working-class jobs, education, and health care. ■

Announcing ... A National Conference To Bring the Troops Home Now!

July 23-25, 2010, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Albany, N.Y.

The purpose of this conference is to bring together antiwar and social justice activists from across the country to discuss and decide what we can do together to end the wars, occupations, bombing attacks, threats and interventions that are taking place in the Middle East and beyond, which the U.S. government is conducting and promoting. Attend and voice your opinion on where the antiwar movement is today and where we go from here.

In these deeply troubled times, Washington's two wars and occupations rage on, resulting in an ever increasing number of dead and wounded; more and more civilians killed in drone bombing attacks; misery, deprivation, dislocation and shattered lives for millions; and a suicide rate for U.S. service members soaring to unprecedented heights. At the same time, trillions are spent on these seemingly endless Pentagon conflicts waged in pursuit of profits and global domination while trillions more are lost by working people in the value of their homes, in the loss of their jobs, pensions and health care, and in cuts for public services and vitally needed social programs.

We are witness to the massive bailout of banks and corporations while union contracts are shredded, work is outsourced, jobs are shipped off-shore, workers are evicted from their homes and our youth and students face a bleak future of rising tuition costs, an ever-declining quality of education, and diminishing employment opportunities. They are offered instead the opportunity to become cannon fodder as the military serves as the employer of last resort while prison awaits many others.

The poor and working people in the U.S. suffer the horrors of unemployment, foreclosures, homelessness, untreated illnesses and unavailable health insurance, crumbling infrastructure, and temporary and part time work at starvation wages. These multiple crises impact communities of color with disproportionate severity. Meanwhile people in a growing number of countries around the world are subjected to death and destruction by the world's most powerful military machine.

There is another dimension to this tragedy. The U.S. is at war to control and plunder the very fossil fuel resources whose continued use threatens the future of the human race.

We demand the immediate and total withdrawal of U.S. military forces, mercenaries and contractors from Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, we recognize that the Middle East cauldron today also encompasses Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Palestine and Israel, while Haiti, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba and other countries in Latin America are targeted for intervention, subversion, occupation and control as a consequence of a militarized U.S. foreign policy. Our challenge is not only to end wars and occupations, but to fundamentally change the aggressive policies that inevitably lead our country to militarism and war.

The fight for better times, for a world of peace, justice and freedom, requires that we join together to make it happen, that we fight for the broad unity within the antiwar movement and across all the movements for social justice that has to date escaped us and that we collaborate to engage the American people in massive and united mobilizations against the warmakers and for the justice we deserve.

We have not forgotten the lessons of the civil rights movement, the struggle against the Vietnam War, the feminist and gay rights movements, and the monumental struggles that paved the way to the organization of American trade unions. History has demonstrated time and again that all critical social change is a product of the direct and massive intervention of the people.

We seek an inclusive conference where antiwar individuals and organizations come together to democratically discuss, debate and approve a plan of action aimed at winning the support and allegiance of the majority who have the power to compel a fundamental re-ordering of priorities.

We announce in advance that our goal is to develop strategies that unite us in action—for mass mobilizations and a variety of other tactics that suit the agendas of the constituent groups and individuals who participate in the conference proceedings. Our method is democracy. One person one vote! Our goal is unity in action while respecting our diversity and differences in political program and orientation.

Join us in Albany, N.Y., July 23-25

Issued by the United National Antiwar Conference (UNAC) Planning Committee

For more information: UNAC2010@aol.com; write UNAC at P.O. Box 21675, Cleveland, OH 44121. Or visit our website at www.nationalpeaceconference.org

Obama, Congress seek big budget cuts

Mark Wilson / Getty Images



By ANDREW POLLACK

Both major parties agree: old people are bankrupting the United States with their cushy Social Security and Medicare benefits! That's the message behind the establishment of a bipartisan commission by President Barack Obama on Feb. 18, tasked with finding ways to cut the national debt and balance the budget.

Congressional Republican leaders, Senator Mitch McConnell and Rep. John Boehner, after criticizing the idea as a backdoor to tax hikes, said they would participate in the commission without preconditions.

Obama picked as co-chairs former Republican Senate leader Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles, a centrist Democrat who as President Bill Clinton's chief of staff brokered a 1997 balanced budget agreement with Congressional Republicans. The commission will have 10 Democrats and eight Republicans. But since Obama proposed that 14 of the 18 would have to support any recommendations, this gives Republicans a veto.

Before agreement was reached on the commission, the media was full of complaints—in news or analysis stories, not opinion pieces—similar to the one in *The New York Times* complaining about “a dysfunctional Congress,” and the “unwillingness of the two parties to compromise to control a national debt that is rising to dangerous heights.” “After decades of warnings that budgetary profligacy, escalating health care costs and an aging population would lead to a day of fiscal reckoning, economists and the nation's foreign creditors say that moment is approaching faster than expected.

“Yet rarely has the political system seemed more polarized and less able to solve big problems that involve trust, tough choices and little short-term gain. The main urgency for both parties seems to be about pinning blame on the other, for deficits now averaging \$1 trillion a year, the largest since World War II relative to the size of the economy.” This and similar warnings were a clear sign from the ruling class—get down to business and cut, cut, cut!

In a Feb. 7 editorial entitled “The Truth about the Deficit,” the publishers of *The New York Times* wrote that “to truly tame deficits will require serious health care reform [i.e., drastic cuts in Medicare],” and demanded higher taxes and cutbacks in Social Security. They didn't bother to mention that those surviving solely on Social Security with no pensions from past jobs live in abject poverty, often surviving on dog food or handouts from food banks.

The Times insisted that politicians “gather the political will to do what must be done.” Yet the paper's own regular economics op-ed writer, Paul Krugman, complained about such scare tactics in the Feb. 4 edition: “These days it's hard to turn on a news program without encountering stern warnings about the budget deficit. The deficit threatens economic recovery, we're told; it will undermine our influence in the world. These claims ... [are] reported as if they were facts, plain and simple.

“Yet they aren't facts. Many economists take a much calmer view of budget deficits than anything you'll see on TV. Nor do investors seem unduly concerned: U.S.

The Democratic and Republican politicians were quite generous in bailing out the banks. Now they call for 'austerity,' as working people pay more for diminishing services.

government bonds continue to find ready buyers. The long-run budget outlook is problematic, but ... much less frightening than the public is being led to believe. ... The sudden outbreak of deficit hysteria brings back memories of the groupthink that took hold during the run-up to the Iraq war.

“Running big deficits in the face of the worst economic slump since the 1930s is the right thing to do. If anything, deficits should be bigger because the government should be doing more to create jobs.”

The current sense of panic, concludes Krugman, “is a key part of Republican political strategy.” Left unaddressed by Krugman is the leadership role played by Obama and Congressional Democrats in beating the drums for austerity.

Krugman was one of many observers to note that one tune banged out on these drums was the financial crisis wracking Greece, which was “feeding into the narrative of our own deficit hawks, and hold Greece up as an object lesson of what will happen if we don't.”

Obama: “Pay as you go”

The bipartisan composition of the commission doesn't mean its proceedings will be harmonious. Republican elected officials are under intense pressure from their base to oppose any tax increases, an opposition symbolized by the right-wing terrorist who crashed his plane into an IRS building—and was hailed for doing so even by Republican members of Congress!

But anger is only going to increase, not just on the rabid right, but also among rational working people: Obama, ignoring his campaign promise not to raise taxes for households making less than \$250,000, said he would not impose that condition or any other on the commission. Echoing rhetoric used in Washington's war threats, Obama said that “all ideas are on the table.”

And the usual apologists for Obama have seats at that table: Andy Stern, head of the crumbling Change to Win union federation, proved once again that he never met a joint labor-management committee he didn't like by agreeing to sit on Obama's commission.

Meanwhile, in preparation for more drastic steps to be recommended by the commission, Obama has already taken steps to put the screws to workers,

(Left) A girl cries out after seeing the feet of her dead brother underneath the rubble of his school.

such as a proposed budget that would freeze spending on some categories of domestic spending for three years. His latest jobs “stimulus,” composed entirely of tax breaks for small businesses, will have even less impact than his first stimulus package on the unemployment rate.

Obama also restored a rule—commonly called “pay as you go”—requiring that new spending be offset by spending cuts or new revenue. His action went largely unremarked upon. But the very same principle was invoked by Republican Senator Jim Bunning when he used a filibuster to hold up spending for extension of unemployment benefits for 1.2 million workers—as well as salaries for some federal workers, health coverage for the jobless, etc.—unless Congress voted to find the money by cutting somewhere else. Once the vote was held Bunning relented, even though he lost the vote, as he mostly wanted to make a political point. But the incident is symbolic of how far Washingtonians of both parties are willing to go in holding workers' very lives hostage.

More proof of this came from *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne, who noted that Republican Senator Jon Kyl and Democrat Blanche Lincoln were simultaneously engaged in their own effort to hold up the benefits extension unless estate taxes for the wealthy were cut by \$138 billion.

In a domestic parallel to the Nixon-going-to-China routine (i.e. using a conservative to make piece with “Communists”), the ruling class often prefers to use a Democrat to strip away spending and services. Thus Bill Clinton was assigned to gut welfare, whereas Bush was allowed to abandon plans to “reform” Social Security when the rulers sensed that resistance would be too great. Now they are demanding that both parties cooperate, with a Democratic president at the helm, in a broader assault on a whole range of plans needed for workers' survival. That's why the ruling class so eagerly embraced Obama's presidential campaign with its focus on “bipartisan cooperation.”

One of the key voices arguing for austerity is billionaire Peter Peterson, whose Peter G. Peterson Foundation was one of several think tanks issuing reports in recent months demanding tax increases and spending cuts, especially in “popular entitlement programs.”

Peterson himself is no marginal right-wing crank. He is a longstanding figure at the core of the U.S. ruling class, and his ideas are similarly finding a comfortable berth in today's ruling class consensus. Peterson served as Richard Nixon's Secretary of Commerce. He co-founded the private equity firm, the Blackstone Group.

In 1994, Clinton named Peterson as a member of the Bi-Partisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform. He was also chair of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York between 2000 and 2004 and succeeded David Rockefeller as chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, serving from 1985 to 2007. He has carried out his campaigns for “fiscal sustainability” through cutting deficits and “entitlement programs,” and raising taxes, through such groups as the Concord Coalition, which he helped found, as well as his own Foundation.

So its worth paying close attention to the arguments made by Simon Johnson, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute (formerly the International Institute of Economics and renamed by the billionaire) in a co-authored article in *The Wall Street Journal* that also made the Greek connection.

Johnson, an MIT professor and former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, wrote: “Greece's dysfunctional economy is now at the heart of a rescue effort that could be disastrous for the entire continent—and the rest of the world.” They applauded efforts by various potential rescuers—from Germany and France to the European Central Bank to the IMF—to demand severe cuts in wages, jobs, services and benefits as the price for rescue (although preferring the more fine-tuned, longer-term approach of the IMF to the threatened hammer blows of Germany and France).

They used events in Greece to argue for similar austerity at home: “Unless the U.S. puts in place a process to take its own government debt off an explosive

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path—for example, through an independent but Congress-backed fiscal commission, with everything on the table—we are vulnerable to the same kind of debt dynamics that now plague parts of Europe.”

The unease of foreigners about whether to buy and hold our debt, they wrote, “is a major economic and national security risk.”

“Greedy Geezers”

In trying to scare us into accepting the coming cuts, politicians have not shied away from demonizing the elderly. Said Alan Simpson: “How did we get to a point where you get to a certain age in life, regardless of net worth or income, and you’re ‘entitled’? The word itself is killing us.”

In the Feb. 1 *New York Times*, columnist David Brooks wrote in concert with those politicians when he charged that “Greedy Geezers,” if they continue to accept their pensions and “costly” federal benefits, are robbing the younger generation of money, opportunity, and control.

Carl Bloice, an editor at *Black Commentator*, after also making the Greek Connection, noted that those demanding that “Greedy Geezers” stop feeling so entitled were the very ones who had initiated and profited from the last decade’s financial bubbles and swindles. “In each and every country in the European Union there is talk of ‘austerity.’ And in every one of them it means attacks on easy access to health-care and social security for those in their golden years. They call such programs, secured after decades of struggle, ‘entitlements.’ They are efforts to renew the project that Lady Thatcher and Ronald Reagan launched but couldn’t quite finish. In the U.S. that means eviscerating, and eventually doing away with, Medicare and Social Security.”

And he noted the favored mechanism for getting away with that: “When these people are divided amongst themselves as to how far to go, and not wanting to take personal responsibility for advocating a specific course of action, they propose a ‘commission.’”

He quotes George Will on how paying to keep “geezers” alive threatens national security: “By living longer, Americans will become susceptible to more health problems. By becoming richer they will be able to purchase more biotechnologies. This demographic destiny might entail starving every other sector of society—including national defense, at great cost to America’s international standing. ... While China in-

creasingly invests in its future, America increasingly invests in its past.”

These attacks on Social Security come as sky-high unemployment rates make increasing numbers of workers dependent on the program much earlier than they had expected. In January, 6.3 million workers had been jobless for six months or longer—twice as many as in any previous month in the last 35 years.



Greedy Geezers? In trying to scare us into accepting the coming cuts, politicians have not shied away from demonizing the elderly.

(Left) Seniors protest closing of San Francisco geriatric clinic due to city and state budget cuts.

Jobless rates for men and women age 55 and older were higher in 2009 than at any time since the government started collecting the data in 1948.

So it wasn’t surprising that record numbers of eligible Americans started receiving Social Security benefits in 2009. More than 2.7 million new beneficiaries were added in 2009, up 20% from 2008. Many did so at lower rates beginning at age 62, unable to wait until 66 to receive the full benefit rate.

Another reason, as explained by one early retiree: “To tell the truth, I wasn’t really sure if Social Security would be around when I’m 82.” Yet some older employees stay on the job longer than they would wish for, trying to recoup losses from wiped-out 401k accounts.

Despite the fear mongering, current projections show Social Security has sufficient funds to remain solvent until 2037. While it’s true that the baby boom generation will swell the Social Security rolls and require unprecedented funds to support them at current benefit levels, the problem is not inherent to the program itself. Rather, it suffers from the same problem as Medicare.

In both cases, the “market” is fragmented between private pensions and health-care plans and their public counterparts. Each component of the market is further made irrational and wasteful by disparities in funding and service levels, competition, duplication, administrative waste, and profiteering.

And when the economy as a whole hits the trough of a decades-long crisis of profitability, all of those the effects of market fragmentation are grossly magnified as each segment spurs on the others in a joint race to the bottom.

Just as single-payer advocates pointed out the efficiencies and equity of one, unified insurance pool, so too pension provision can only be both rational and just under one unified pool for all workers paid for by public funds and under workers’ control (with the best private pension plans grandfathered in to such a public fund, and the benefits of all gradually raised to those higher rates).

As workers in the United States discuss how to respond to the propaganda behind these coming attacks on our “entitlements,” we can take inspiration from the example set by workers in Greece (see related article below). ■

By ANDREW POLLACK

Greek workers show the way

Workers in Greece are not silently accepting demands for austerity, nor do they believe the rationales given by their rulers for it. During a three-day strike of public workers, a “river of fury” poured down the streets of Athens, said the *Guardian* newspaper, in a “seemingly endless flow of Greeks who marched over the government’s painful fiscal policies.”

“We are at war with the government because it is clearly at war with us,” said former Communist Party MP Dimos Koumbounis. “The working class will respond with ever greater force and intensity to overturn these unjust and antisocial policies.”

Socialist Prime Minister George Papandreou said he had no choice but to implement the “painful but necessary” policies,” including public-sector pay freezes, raising the retirement age, job cuts, slashing bonuses on salaries, fuel price increases, and tax hikes. Papandreou pledged to trim the deficit from 12.7% to within the EU’s permissible 3% limit by 2012. European finance ministers meeting in Brussels warned Greece it would have to prepare tougher budget cuts.

EU countries have pledged to help Greece if it makes big spending cuts. There are fears a Greek default could spark a wider European debt crisis.

These austerity measures come in the face of Greeks’ vote last fall by a large majority for Socialist candidates promising to make the rich pay more taxes,

to award above inflation pay raises for government workers, and to provide more support for the low-paid and pensioners.

During the strikes workers made clear that their desires as expressed in that election would not be flouted: “There should be no sacrifice for the plutocracy,” said union leader Vasiillis Stamoulis. “Those who are responsible should pay for the crisis: the bankers, industrialists, ship-owners, big merchants, the oligarchy of this country.”

“It’s a war against workers and we will answer with war, until this policy is overturned,” said a union member affiliated to the Communist Party.

(It must be noted that among the culprits in the Greek crisis was U.S.-based Goldman Sachs, which helped the government temporarily adhere to EU rules on deficit ceilings with a shady derivatives deal involving fictional currency exchange rates. And on Feb. 25 *The New York Times* reported that Greece is finding it increasingly hard to get bank financing—because those very banks are enticing investors into credit-default swaps which pay off if the country defaults on its debts!)

Again and again, protesters said they believed Greece would set an example for others in Europe to follow. “The mobilization of anti-capitalist forces here has already begun to spill over into other parts of southern Europe and it will



(Left) African migrant worker shakes fist during Dec. 17 protest by Communist-linked unions in Athens against government spending cuts.

spread even more,” said former Communist MP Dimos Koumbounis.

Some Greek public-sector workers extended the strike beyond the initial three-day plan so it would merge with the countrywide general strike planned for Feb. 24. On the 24th, private-sector workers joined public-sector workers who had already launched a general strike on Feb. 10. Airports, schools, rail, government offices, and other institutions were completely shut down on both days, and hundreds of thousands took to the streets.

On Feb. 23, hundreds of thousands struck in Spain against government spending cuts and threats to raise the retirement age. In February, airline workers struck in the UK, Germany, as well as in France—where oil workers also struck. Earlier in the month, workers shut down Turkey in a Feb. 4

general strike against privatization. And textile workers in Egypt continued their years-long series of strikes, rallies, and sit-ins against privatization.

The bosses in the U.S. draw a parallel with Greece’s fiscal crisis to argue for more cuts at home. We argued in the accompanying article that workers in the United States can only solve the problems of pension and health-care market fragmentation by unifying and socializing these sectors. A similar approach is needed for the crisis in Greece and its continent-wide spillover.

European bosses want to drag Greek workers down as a prelude to cutting standards across the continent. We say that the solution instead is to bring all workers up to the standards of EU’s most developed countries.

U.S. commentators from Krugman to Johnson say a common EU currency is to blame, and argue for a regression, or at least postponement, of EU unification plans. Socialists, in contrast, say the way forward is not just currency unification, but a genuine, thoroughgoing economic, social, and political integration through establishment of a United Socialist States of Europe under workers’ control. ■

Commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Corporate Supremacy — Still!

The recent Supreme Court decision on corporate personhood, *The Citizen's United* case, has evoked considerable comment, and even some indignation: "Corporations have the right to spend unlimited amounts of money on politicians?!" "Outrageous!"

Really? While people have every right to be outraged, we should inform our outrage, for, in truth, corporate interests have owned the political process—and politicians—for the better part of a century. In the classic history book, "The Robber Barons," by Matthew Josephson (Harcourt: 1969), one encounters scenes of major industrialists buying politicians outright with satchels of money—on the floor of state Senates!!

The buying is not so overt now, but politicians are still being bought like hot dogs. What is a modern congressional, presidential or judicial campaign today but a race for the money? For the man (or woman) who gets money can buy media—and the media decides races.



In a real sense, all the court did was open up the spigot for more dough from corporate coffers. In essence, the court said, it's not enough to rent politicians; now you can own them. And they will own them.

And where will much of this money go, but into the pockets of corporate media? And what is this but a corporate media stimulus package?

What makes this case remarkable isn't so much the result (for this was politically predictable), but the court's reliance on precedent that actually wasn't precedential. For, in the case *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Co.* (1886), used as the foundation for the principle of corporate personhood, that principle appears nowhere—but the court clerk wrote it into the head notes of the case, which is not legally part of the case. And 124 years later an error became law, which became precedent, which guides decisions today, which favors corporate wealth and power over democracy.

In the 1880s, during the age of the captains of industry who came to be known as the "robber barons," multi-millionaire Andrew Carnegie, threatened with legal action to restrain his corporate excesses, remarked: "What do I care about the law? Ain't I got the power?" (Josephson, p. 15). Thanks to the Supreme Court, they've got even more.

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Mumia Abu-Jamal's Case Stuck in Legal Limbo

By DAVE LINDORFF

The recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to send convicted police killer Mumia Abu-Jamal's case back down to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, with instructions for a three-judge panel there to reconsider its decision to uphold the lifting of the prominent African-American journalist's death penalty, is only the latest in a long string of examples of how courts at all levels have made special exceptions to precedent in order to try and kill this particular prisoner.

The High Court found on Jan. 19, that Frank Spisak, a self-described Nazi and killer of three in Ohio, had been properly sentenced, because at the time the Ohio Supreme Court affirmed his death penalty on appeal, "settled law" was that the jury instructions given to his jury had been proper. And under the terms of the 1995 Effective Death Penalty Act, federal courts, including the Supreme Court, have to defer to the judgments of state courts unless those courts' decisions are deemed "unreasonable."

Where it gets complicated, though, is that subsequent to the conclusion of Spisak's state appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 1988 decision called *Mills v. Maryland*, ruled that ambiguously worded jury ballot forms and confusing or misleading jury instructions on sentencing by judges were grounds for reversing a death sentence. *Mills* was never made retroactive (one of the more repugnant features of many Supreme Court decisions), but Abu-Jamal's state appeals didn't even properly begin until after his 1995-96 Post-Conviction Relief Act hearing, and so the same finding made by the Supreme Court majority in Spisak's case—that the confusing jury instruction standards were "settled law" at the time—cannot be made in Abu-Jamal's case.

But the Supreme Court order sending Abu-Jamal's case back down to the Third Circuit, right or wrong, hardly means Abu-Jamal's battle is over, much less lost, despite his already having spent an astonishing 28 years in solitary confinement on Pennsylvania's hellish death row.

Even if the Third Circuit were to reverse itself, and decide against all logic that because of another Supreme Court decision made last month, re-imposing the death penalty on Frank Spisak, the self-proclaimed Nazi killer of three men, Abu-Jamal should also die, it would not mean he can simply be marched off to a gurney for a lethal injection.

As Hugh Burns, the assistant district attorney in Philadelphia who has been leading the effort by the DA's office to have Abu-Jamal executed for the last decade and a half, noted in an article in the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, there are at least three more avenues of appeal of Abu-Jamal's death sentence that still need to be considered at the district Federal Court level (actually there are four).

That's because when Federal Judge William Yohn, way back in 2001, issued his historic ruling revoking Abu-Jamal's death sentence on the grounds that the jury ballot form used to determine sentencing, and the instructions of trial judge Albert Sabo, had been confusing on the question of mitigating circumstances, he mooted those other avenues of appeal, saying that he didn't need to rule on them. The sentence was already lifted.

Now that Yohn has been reversed on that lifting of the death sentence, though, Abu-Jamal has a right to have Judge Yohn go back and look at the other three challenges to his sentence. And those challenges are very solid and serious.

(Actually, I've always considered it a measure of how confident Judge Yohn was in the correctness of his deci-

sion on the jury instructions claim that he didn't bother to deal with the other four appeals claims—something he could have done simultaneously.)

The first unresolved appeal claim goes to the heart of a defendant's right to representation and a fair trial. Abu-Jamal's attorney, Anthony Jackson, testified under oath at a Post-Conviction Relief Act hearing in 1995 to the obvious truth that he did absolutely nothing to prepare for the sentencing portion of the trial. He called no witnesses to testify to Abu-Jamal's character, an astonishing lapse which left the prosecutor free and unchallenged in portraying Abu-Jamal as a cop-hating terrorist.

Jackson prepared no witnesses, though Abu-Jamal's siblings and mother were on hand and ready to testify, as were many others in the community. Jackson, astonishingly, didn't even request a delay of a few days after the guilty verdict in order to prepare for the sentencing hearing. When the judge ordered the session to begin the next day, Jackson went along meekly.

It didn't help that on the morning of the sentencing hearing, Jackson was awoken first at 6 a.m. by fire trucks at his home—the result of a "prank call"—and that after he got to court, he received a frightened and frightening call from his 15-year-old son saying that someone had called his home telling the boy, "You are the one we want. We'll be coming over to get you!" (Any bets on who was making those calls?)

Abu-Jamal in his 1999 habeas appeal the federal court claims his constitutional right to representation was denied by Jackson's dismal performance at the sentencing hearing.

A second line of appeal, also mooted and left unresolved by Judge Yohn, was a claim that Abu-Jamal's First, Fourth, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights were violated when Prosecutor Joseph McGill improperly used Abu-Jamal's membership—as a 15-year-old boy—in the Black Panther organization in trying to portray him as a vicious cop-hater.

McGill came to court with a yellowed newspaper clipping from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* in which the young Abu-Jamal, quoting Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Tse-tung, had told reporters that "power flows from the barrel of a gun." It didn't matter that the article explained that Abu-Jamal had made that statement in the context of the murder days earlier of Panther leader Fred Hampton by Chicago Police, and that the context made it clear he was referring to the power of police.

McGill took the quote out of context and made it appear as though Abu-Jamal was advocating war on the cops. In any event, the quote had been made 12 years before, when Abu-Jamal was just a boy. The reality was that, far from being at war with police, Abu-Jamal as an adult had a sterling record of no arrests or convictions.

Here is a case where—although the Pennsylvania courts and federal courts in the Third Circuit have repeatedly overturned death convictions in which membership in allegedly anti-social organizations was cited by prosecutors in an effort to tarnish defendants before a jury—a special exception has been apparently been carved out for Abu-Jamal. Judge Yohn has yet to rule on this line of appeal.

Third, there remains to be considered an appeal on the grounds that prosecutor McGill improperly sought, in his final argument to the jury in the sentencing hearing, to diminish the jurors' sense of responsibility for their decision. McGill told the jury, "Ladies and gentlemen, you are not asked to kill anybody. You are asked to follow the law. The same law that I keep on throwing at you, saying those words—law and order.

"I should point out that it's the same law that has for

six months provided safeguards for this defendant. The same law, ladies and gentlemen, the same law that will provide him appeal after appeal after appeal. ... The same law, ladies and gentlemen, that has made it so because of the constant appeals ... nobody at all has died in Pennsylvania since 1962 for an incident that occurred in 1959."

Again, the courts at all levels—in Pennsylvania, in the Third Circuit, and the U.S. Supreme Court itself—have all overturned death-penalty sentences based upon just such statements having been made to juries at trials. Indeed, another case prosecuted successfully by McGill himself was overturned because he made exactly the same statement to a jury, claiming jurors need not feel they are personally ordering a man's death. So this appeal too needs to be considered in full by Judge Yohn.

Finally, there is a fourth avenue of appeal that was also mooted and left unresolved by Judge Yohn. That is the claim that the prosecutor knowingly withheld evidence in police files which showed that Abu-Jamal had no criminal record and no propensity for violence. Specifically, Abu-Jamal, years after his trial, obtained his FBI file—largely composed of materials obtained by the FBI from Philadelphia Police and the Philadelphia Police Department's so-called "Red Squad."

That file, 600 pages long, shows that surveillance of Abu-Jamal ended in 1973. A 1974 memo at the end of the file states, "In March 1973, per bureau instructions, captioned subject was deleted from ADEX [the list of people deemed subversive and slated as part of COINTELPRO to be rounded up and detained in the event of a national emergency] and no additional investigation conducted concerning his activities.

"Sources, however, have continued to report periodically on COOK [Abu-Jamal's family name] and, although he has not displayed a propensity for violence, has continued to associate himself with individuals and organizations engaged in Extremist activities."

Clearly this file, stating that Abu-Jamal did not appear to be a violent person, had been available to the prosecution, and should have been offered to the defense. This appeal of Abu-Jamal's conviction based upon a claim of prosecutorial misconduct must also be considered by Judge Yohn.

Once the Third Circuit has reconsidered its decision on the jury instruction issue—and the outcome there is by no means certain, with Abu-Jamal's attorney Robert Bryan planning a spirited argument that Abu-Jamal's case is substantively different from the Spisak case—and if it were to rule against Abu-Jamal, there would first of all be a new appeal of that decision back to the U.S. Supreme Court. Only if the High Court were to uphold such a decision would these four other issues finally go back before Judge Yohn.

It appears that even if the courts continue to rule against this now world-renowned journalist who has spent more than half his life sitting confined in a small cell on death row, his controversial case, dogged as it is by charges of judicial misconduct, racial bias, prosecutorial misconduct, perjured prosecution witness testimony and political interference, will continue to drag on unresolved for years to come.

First published in the Feb. 8, 2010, *Public Record*. Dave Lindorff is a Philadelphia-area journalist and has followed the Abu-Jamal case for more than 12 years. His book on the case, "Killing Time: An Investigation into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal," was published in 2003 by Common Courage Press.

Lindorff's work is available at www.thiscantbehappening.net.

By MARTY GOODMAN

Remaking Haiti under occupation

The devastation brought by Haiti's Jan. 12 earthquake was seen as an opportunity for U.S. policy makers to reshape Haiti as one big underutilized sweatshop. To insure that its corporate agenda succeeds—M16 in hand—the Obama administration scandalously blocked international humanitarian aid by giving top priority to an occupation force that reached 20,000 US troops (see www.socialistaction.org, February 2010).

When asked how long the troop presence would last, U.S. Army Lieutenant General Ken Keen said, "I'm not going to put a time frame on it." Thirty-three cents of every U.S. aid dollar to Haiti goes to military aid. This is the fourth U.S. occupation of the country. In solidarity with Haiti, we must demand U.S./UN troops out now!

On the ground before the quake were some 400 Cuban doctors. That number has increased to 1200. None carry weapons.

The quake death toll now exceeds 200,000, with one million homeless. The threat of diseases like malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, cholera, and dengue fever are exacerbated by still decomposing bodies and the onset of the March rainy season.

Cameron Sinclair, executive director of Architecture for Humanity, wrote, "When you look at the architecture in Chile you see buildings that have damage, but not the complete pancaking that you've got in Haiti." Unlike Chile, there are no Haitian building codes.

In contrast, the 8.8 intensity earthquake that hit Chile on Feb. 27 claimed 279 lives. Decades of U.S. support to the corrupt ruling elite sealed the doom of tens of thousands in Port-au-Prince who live in shacks in vast slums.

Paul Vilme, an unemployed teacher and actor in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, told the Brooklyn-based *Haiti Liberté* newspaper, "We are not at war. Why all the big guns? Why all the big tanks? Are they showing off or are they up to something? We need engineers, architects, equipment operators, people with shovels, not M16s."

New York photographer and activist Tony Savino was in Port-au-Prince during the last week of February. Savino told *Socialist Action*, "I visited about a dozen encampments around Port-au-Prince. The vast majority didn't have tents and all complained about not getting food or potable water."

"I've heard five different reports from colleagues of American doctors who flew to Port-au-Prince with suitcases full of medicine and they were turned away at the airport by the U.S. military. The aid is not reaching the people ... no aid or practically none actually reaching the people is beyond all expectations. That's genocide."

Much so-called aid will go to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Haiti, of which there are 3000. Critics say NGOs function as a political counterweight to the Haitian government and a means of co-opting worker/peasant movements. Some 70 percent of NGO funding is



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

from foreign governments, 30 percent from corporations.

Haiti is now the target of a modified World Bank (WB) plan based on the low-wage international assembly industry, supported by UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon and UN envoy Bill Clinton. The WB plan is known in Haiti as "the death plan" or "the American plan." The post-quake plan will be presented at a March 31 conference in New York.

Ki-moon wrote in *The New York Times* (March 31, 2009), "My special adviser on Haiti, the Oxford University development economist Paul Collier, has worked with the government to devise a strategy ... with particular emphasis on the country's traditional strengths—the garment industry and agriculture."

The New York Times also lauded Collier's recommendations in its Feb. 1 editorial, "Thinking About a New Haiti." It echoed Collier's view that Haiti should "encourage investments in industries like garment-making and tourism." Collier originally wrote a Haiti study for the International Monetary Fund, the WB's financial hit squad on debt repayment. Collier wrote, "Haiti is the only low-wage economy in the region."

Haiti's \$3.05 a day minimum wage is lower than any country in the area, less than half the Dominican minimum wage; 78% of Haiti's population lives on less than \$2 a day. Unemployment in the capital is as high as 80%. The assembly sweatshop model was promoted by the

WB in the 1980s. In addition, public utilities were to be privatized; tariffs on foreign goods dropped, which has already destroyed Haitian domestic rice production.

WB plans were accelerated by Bill Clinton in 1994 by an agreement signed by deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in exchange for the U.S.-led UN occupation that returned Aristide to power.

David Wilson, who was in Port-au-Prince during the earthquake and a co-author of "The Politics of Immigration," writes, "The leading proponents of development through sweatshops have been liberal Democrats in the United States. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus pushed hard for HOPE and HOPE II, the 2006 Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act and its 2008 extension; these acts make the plan possible by giving preferential treatment to U.S. imports of apparel assembled in Haiti. ... Bill Clinton provided much of the PR for the plan" (mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/wilson040310).

Last summer, a labor-based struggle erupted for a minimum wage increase to 250 gourdes a day [\$1 is about 40 gourdes]. In the end, Haitian President Rene Preval bowed to pressure from Bill Clinton to increase the minimum to 125 gourdes in 2009 and 200 gourdes in 2012. The 125 gourdes is worth less than half of the minimum wage in 1980 under U.S. backed dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. ■

Books: A world of advanced social decay

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Here is a reading for early spring that might stimulate your dissidence. Unsurprisingly, the fiasco of the climate-change summit in Copenhagen led me to Margaret Atwood's latest eco-dystopian novel, "Year of the Flood" (McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 2009, 431 pages). Not a watery deluge, but a

dry killer tide of disease (like an H1N1 on steroids) wipes out most of humanity. The imaginative prowess and literary skill of Canada's most celebrated fiction writer set the stage for the unspecified plague by presenting a dystopia just one remove from present-day late-capitalism in decay.

It is a world of advanced social disintegration and environmental ruin. Murder-

ous impoverished ghettos bump up against privileged gated communities whose members are numbed by mindless consumerism. And running amok, through town and country, is a bizarre assortment of bio-engineered animal species, not all of which are benign.

Giant corporations govern the fragmented world order with unabashed venality and total impunity. Their enforcement arm is aptly called CorpSEcorps, a lethal private security army and fitting successor to Blackwater-Xe and company.

"Year of the Flood" could be considered a sequel to Atwood's highly acclaimed "Oryx and Crake", except that it is a parallel tale that arrives at a common point—a handful of surviving ordinary people encounter a bizarre group of 'blue' mutant humans with a hyper-active libido.

The author has confected a tale that is half-prediction, half satire—like a blend of George Orwell and Jonathan Swift. So, through the eyes of the finely drawn protagonists Ren and Toby, a sex-club dancer and a waitress respectively, we learn of the suspect serums of HelthWyzer (rhymes with Pfizer), the immortality vending Cryo-Jeenyus, the soma-like HappyCuppa, the indulgent AnooYoo spas, and the notorious Painballers (inmates of a Survivor-reality prison camp). A malicious Painballer is hunting Toby, who earlier escaped his control when she fled the Sticky Zone where she was a hap-



Margaret Atwood.

less server of Secretburgers.

The disappointing aspect is that the foremost resistance to the pervasive repression and moral decay is a hippie vegetarian cult, God's Gardeners, who absurdly, self-righteously try to blend religion and science. Is this the author's conscious snub of the working-class movement and the materialist left, or is she prodding us to see what will be if the socialist movement doesn't soon gain more traction?

While "Year of the Flood" is very derivative of "Oryx and Crake", though more overtly feminist in its portrayal of personal relationships and gender oppression, that really constitutes an argument for reading both novels. Given Atwood's pungent satire of present trends, her latest writings, redolent with anti-capitalist implications, may leave you wondering why she is not a Marxist firebrand. ■

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Thursday, May 20: 7 p.m. Palestine, Afghanistan and Haiti: Occupation and Resistance

Friday, May 21:

4 p.m. Dialectical Materialism – a philosophy for radical change

7 p.m. From Copenhagen to Mexico City – the World at the Brink

Saturday, May 22:

10 a.m. Marx versus Malthus

1 p.m. Combatting the Corporate Agenda – Jobs, Pensions and Poverty

4 p.m. Women's Liberation Today

7 p.m. World Economic Disorder and the G8/G20 Summits

Sunday, May 23:

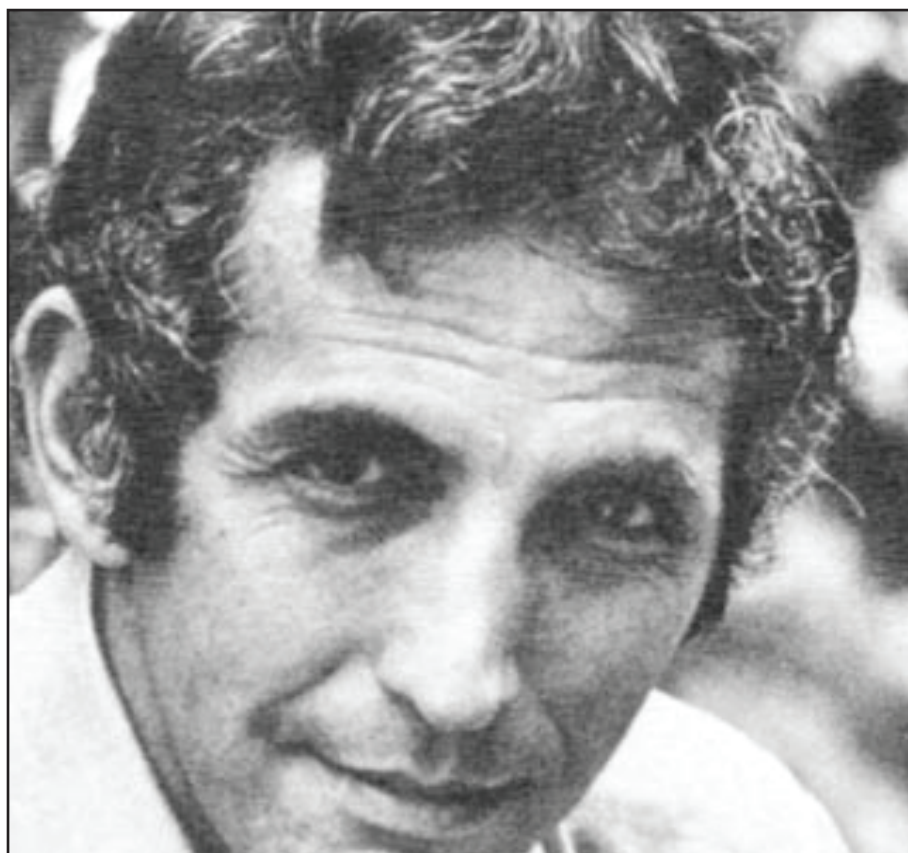
11 a.m. Civil rights under attack – Fight back!

2 p.m. Closed session for SA members and invited guests. SA/LAS Convention.

Tickets: \$20 in advance for weekend; \$30 at door for wkend; \$5 per session (or PWYC)

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A BRAVE MAN ACTS ON HIS CONSCIENCE



By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

Director Judith Ehrlich's documentary film, "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers," belies the current opinion that you can't equate Iraq and Afghanistan to the debacle that was the Vietnam War. Watching it, you can't help thinking about the similarities: the secret planning, the lies, the war and its effect on soldiers and their families.

Ehrlich interviewed Ellsberg and people closely associated with him, and used archival film footage in creating this stunning, thought-provoking work. The film, which runs more or less chronologically, takes us back to the Truman and Eisenhower eras, when Truman, in 1950, authorized \$15 million in military aid to the French colonialists in Vietnam; then Eisenhower sent American advisors along with military supplies there to help the French fight the liberation forces.

In the early 1960s, Kennedy lied about there being only "advisors" in Vietnam. He sent 400 Green Berets to help the Vietnamese soldiers fight the guerrillas. By the time of Kennedy's assassination in 1963, there were 16,000 American military "advisors" in South Vietnam. By the end of the war, more than 2 million soldiers had served in Vietnam in various capacities during the 15-year U.S. involvement; 500,000 saw actual combat; 58,261 were killed.

Daniel Ellsberg, born in 1931, graduated at the top of his class from the Marine Corps Basic School in Quantico, Va., and served as an officer for two years. He was deployed to Vietnam as a company commander. Film footage and still photos show him puffed up and grinning in full military gear, weapon ready. He admits that his favorite movie characters were the macho-men played by John Wayne.

At that time, as the film illustrates, Ellsberg was a staunch anti-communist. He believed we had to go to war in Vietnam to stop the Communists from taking over that country and other Southeast Asian democracies. After two years of leading troops into villages, shooting at and being ambushed by men wearing shorts and sandals, his eyes were opened to the fact that the war was unwinnable.

Once discharged, he became an analyst at the RAND Corporation, a non-profit think tank. He was given top security at the Pentagon. That he had access to all top-secret documents allowed him to discover the lie of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, a trumped-up event Johnson used as a valid reason for the U.S. military to launch the first bombing

"The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers," a documentary film directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith. Screenplay by Erlich and Michael Chandler.

of North Vietnam.

An archival clip shows Ellsberg on a private plane flying back to the U.S. with Robert McNamara, Johnson's secretary of defense, from a fact-finding mission in Vietnam. During the flight, Ellsberg thought he had convinced McNamara that in no way could the U.S. win this war. To Ellsberg, what the U.S. was doing was "justified murder." McNamara agreed, assuring him that he was going to tell the president to end it.

They are shown after landing and being met by reporters and White House correspondents on the tarmac. Ellsberg watches as McNamara, in front of a bank of mikes, lies through his teeth that in Vietnam "everything was going well."

President Nixon wanted to increase the war power and did, authorizing a secret bombing of Cambodia and moving in thousands more troops. Nixon comes off almost as comic relief. Thank the comic gods that he left his tape recorder on all the time so that we get to see and hear him swearing, using the foulest language, going ape-shit over Ellsberg, Watergate, Vietnam, and more, as he rails and spumes to Kissinger and other aides.

Even knowing what the Pentagon documents contained, Ellsberg just went along—for a while. Several film clips, his occasional narrative, as well as those of his friends and colleagues, illustrate just how conflicted he was about the Pentagon and the White House secret: There was no basis for the war in Vietnam. Soon Ellsberg became completely disillusioned.

One interesting fact the movie brings out is that Ellsberg, while still a self-avowed hawk working at the Pentagon, fell in love with a pacifist. Their first date was at an antiwar rally. He then joined the War Resisters League. He says he "felt ridiculous" at rallies and hoped his bosses wouldn't see him on camera.

A clip shows him in a crowd listening to a speech by a draft resister say he was going to prison, proudly. Ellsberg narrates that he felt as though "an ax split not only his head in two, but his life." He found himself in a men's room, on his knees, sobbing, wondering how he could have done what he did (in Vietnam). He knew he had to act. It was a life-changing experience.

Many associate Ellsberg with the



leaked Defense Department documents, which came to be known as "The Pentagon Papers." The film recreates the process by which he obtained them. His security clearance allowed him to keep the files, detailing the facts of and plans for the Vietnam War, in his safe. He borrowed them a few at a time over several months, took them home in his bulging briefcase, and xeroxed the 7000-page, multi-volume documents marked "Top Secret" with the help of his son and daughter, then returned the originals.

He had a sworn, dedicated accomplice at RAND, Anthony Russo, who ended up being arrested and going to trial with Ellsberg in 1971 on espionage charges. (If convicted, they would have faced 115 years in prison.) Fortunately, because of Nixon's admitted Watergate screw-up and earlier break-in of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office, a mistrial was declared in 1973. Ellsberg and Russo were free. He and Russo, like the draft resister who had impressed him with his dedication, had been willing to put their lives on the line for the truth.

Ellsberg had approached several politicians, including Democratic "antiwar" presidential candidate George McGovern, to make the documents public. None would risk their careers. He went to *The New York Times*. Recognizing the importance of the documents, it began printing them in June 1971 until a court injunction ordered it to quit. The *Washington Post* took over the job, and it too was ordered to cease.

The court was overturned and several major newspapers across the U.S. began printing excerpts. However, enough material was already in the hands of the general public, who were shocked by its content exposing the atrocities, the numbers of troops deployed and plans for more, those slaughtered, and the dispassionate, cold-hearted attitude of the administration in ordering the death sentences of millions.

The Pentagon Papers revealed that the government had knowledge, early on, that the war was unwinnable and that continuing would lead to more casualties than was ever admitted publicly. Moreover, the papers showed the cynicism toward the public that Pentagon officials held, and its blatant disregard for the deaths and injuries suffered by soldiers and civilians. We watching the film, of course, couldn't help thinking about the lies that got the US into Iraq.

Ellsberg also gave a copy of over 4000 pages to Alaska Senator Mike Gravel,

who agreed to read them as a way of prolonging his filibuster in Congress. An in-house taping of Gravel reading the document, included in the film, shows Gravel breaking down and sobbing as he read.

Today, because of the economy and cultural changes, major newspapers like *The Times* struggle to stay afloat. Corporate-owned, mainstream broadcast news media producers are beholden to corporations and to their sponsors. If classified information were leaked to any major news outlet today that exposed the truth about the U.S. actions in and plans for the Middle East (or anywhere else), it would not be published.

We have to thank the alternative press (this paper for one) and independent media outlets, the internet, antiwar websites, and military veterans and defectors for speaking out. Ignorance of reliable information keeps the general public from aligning with peace and antiwar organizations and staging demonstrations equaling those joined by the hundreds of thousands who had protested the Vietnam War—people who had risked being shot at, killed, beaten, and/or arrested by National Guard troops, as shown in the footage of this documentary.

Ellsberg had been a consultant for the government at the Pentagon since 1958 through the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and, in 1964, Johnson. He has since stated: "I had seen a lot of classified material by this time—I mean, tens of thousands of pages—and had been in a position to compare it with what was being said to the public. The public is lied to every day by the president, by his spokespeople, by his officers. If you can't handle the thought that the president lies to the public for all kinds of reasons, you couldn't stay in the government at that level, or you're made aware of it..."

"The fact is presidents rarely say the whole truth—essentially, never say the whole truth—of what they expect and what they're doing and what they believe and why they're doing it and rarely refrain from lying, actually, about these matters."

Still active in the antiwar movement, Ellsberg was arrested in November 2005, at age 74, for violating a county ordinance for trespassing while protesting against George W. Bush's conduct of the Iraq War. Though not a hero in the John Wayne sense, he is a true hero nevertheless. ■

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By JOE AUCIELLO

Howard Zinn, historian and author of the renowned "A People's History of the United States" and other books and essays, died on Jan. 27.

In 1971, I was a nervous 19-year-old who intruded anxiously up the stairs of Boston University's Political Science Department on Bay State Road for a meeting with Howard Zinn. My task was to obtain his agreement to serve as faculty advisor for the newly formed Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) chapter at B.U. I had prepared what I hoped would be a compelling series of arguments with someone who I feared might not be friendly, considering our political differences.

Zinn's political outlook was a mix of Marxism, New Left theory, and anarchism, which often did not align with the Trotskyist views of the YSA. Nonetheless, he was the professor we counted on to help us even though he did not share our perspectives.

Zinn's official signature that day on a BU form would do him no good with the administration, of course. He must have realized it. After all, in the 1960s, when he insisted that Atlanta's Spelman College take a role in the struggle for civil rights, he was fired for "insubordination." Later, in Boston, his willingness, his compulsion, to speak up on issues that confronted the campus and the country at large would make him a target for the local police and college bureaucrats. Before too long, university president John Silber would freeze the salary (denying pay raises) of Zinn and a handful of his colleagues as a matter of course.

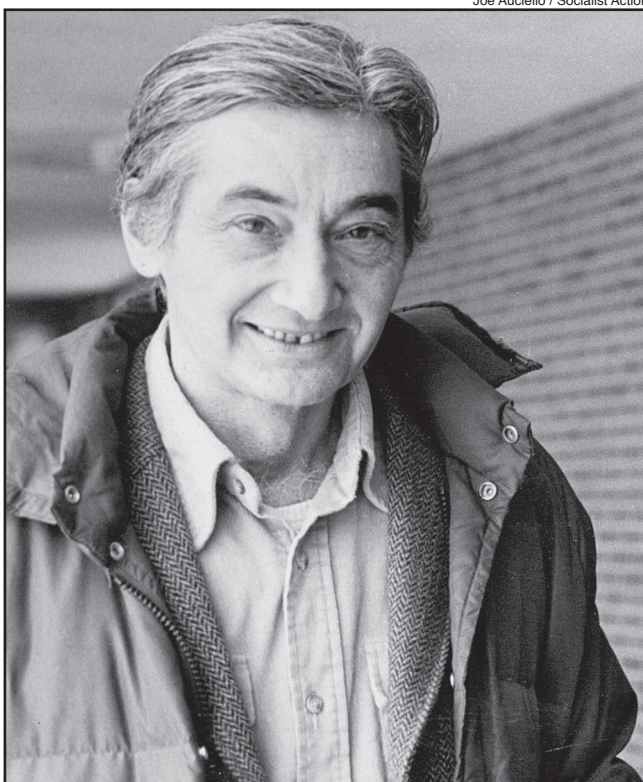
None of these risks were of any concern to Professor Zinn. Nor was there any need for my well-rehearsed appeals. He agreed cheerfully and readily to help us with his signature, which enabled our YSA chapter to make use of BU facilities for a variety of activities. That we would be trying mightily to recruit to an organization with which he had some disagreement made not a bit of difference.

The important point for Zinn was that we were on the same side of the struggle against the Vietnam War; we called for an end to class oppression, for socialism—that was agreement enough. We were, in the larger sense of the term, comrades. Zinn acted on one of his core principles: nonsectarian support to people motivated to act against a powerful, corrupt, and dehumanizing social system. And so, Zinn was glad to assist us as a step in aiding the larger struggle for political and economic justice.

Zinn always supported that larger struggle. He walked picket lines, he sat-in, he got arrested. He was often a keynote speaker at antiwar rallies and teach-ins, large or small. His speaking style was personal, conversational, and quite effective. He could address thousands as if he were chatting with a few friends. He used humor fre-

Remembering Howard Zinn

Joe Auciello / Socialist Action



quently to drive home the principled points about which he was deadly serious.

After his retirement from BU, Zinn became Boston's "professor-at-large," writing even more frequently and speaking even more often. He was a featured speaker at a Harvard University rally in support of the P-9 union in its strike against the Hormel meatpacking company. There, Zinn situated the strike in the context of American labor history, linking it to past victories and even more recent defeats. Above all, he counseled the audience to listen to the stories that the P-9 workers brought of their struggle. It was in the accounts of everyday people, he said, where history was really being made.

Zinn also spoke to high school students throughout the country, especially after the publication of "A People's History of the United States," which was taken up by secondary school teachers everywhere.

Twenty years after he agreed to help the YSA at BU, Zinn agreed to speak to a class of my high school students. The history teacher and I had worked out a special assignment together. Students would read three conflicting historical accounts of the Columbus discovery of the New World, including one from Zinn. Students would then write an analysis of these accounts, explaining why they felt one version of history to be more accurate than the others. The finished assignments were sent to Profes-

sor Zinn, who read them and came to speak with the class about their essays.

As expected, Zinn's talk was conversational, friendly, and humorous as well as insightful. It was no trouble for him to connect with a teen-age audience. I was also, struck, though, by his generosity. When one young woman, eager to impress, cited Hobbes on human nature, she mispronounced his name as "Hobbies." This error drew the immediate and predictable response from classmates: derisive laughter.

Zinn did not ignore the situation or even chastise the students. There was no condescending smile from him. He simply told the young woman, "It's okay. He's not alive and he won't mind how we pronounce his name." Then he encouraged her to continue with her question. In this unscripted moment, Zinn's kind response countered the sarcasm of her classmates and gave her the encouragement she needed to continue. It was a simple gesture, humane, and profoundly right. So much that is essential to good teaching spontaneously revealed itself in that brief exchange.

No wonder, then, that when I recently found myself writing a polemic for *Socialist Action* newspaper against Zinn's critical endorsement of Barack Obama's candidacy, my criticisms were presented in a tone that was respectful and comradely. After all, I was following Zinn's own example.

Now that Howard Zinn has died, now that the voice of an outstanding public intellectual who nourished the spirit of opposition in the United States is finally silenced, it still seems like a good idea to follow his example.

Some instances immediately spring to mind. Zinn wrote often about the Constitution and especially the First Amendment. His fundamental idea, expressed in his 1968 book, "Disobedience and Democracy," was that "the law is congealed injustice."

As he said in a speech delivered in Boston's Faneuil Hall, "The guarantees of the Bill of Rights" have little meaning as long as we have a class society with enormous differences of wealth and income. The rights of free speech and press depend on having the resources to use them" ("Failure to Quit," p. 65).

Zinn surely would have had a lot to say about the recent Supreme Court decision that increased free speech for corporations at the expense of everyday people. He would, simply and effectively, have pointed out the difference between law as an abstraction in the courtroom and law as it affected people in real life.

That article remains to be written; arguments in the cause of justice still need to be made. Those who do so will be following in the tradition of social critics like Howard Zinn. The best way to honor our fallen heroes is to continue their work. ■

Twilight of the Thunder God, not of music

By LEVI TURNER

Amon Amarth. It's loud. It's Heavy Metal. It's centered on Viking lore and mythology. It is inspired by European folk music from the ancient times. It's Viking Folk Metal—and no, it is not a band that is going to carry the same legendary impact as The Beatles, or even Metallica for that matter. But that most certainly does not mean it is bad music. Amon Amarth's eclectic and power-driven music merits an entire reality check on the music of the emerging generation and the culture it creates.

Amon Amarth's album, "Twilight of the Thunder God," contains everything that a Metalhead would want in music, and Amon Amarth manages to stand out as a Heavy Metal band without challenging the very legitimacy of the style itself.

Like most Heavy Metal bands today, Amon Amarth, and the album itself, are not 100 percent pure in their subgenre. Most Folk Metal bands incorporate Melodic Metal or Melodic Death Metal. "Twilight of the Thunder God" has no shortage of the Death Growls that we all love—and better yet, some of the best instrumentals in Heavy Metal today back the extreme growling with an epic aura. For subgenre-freaks, the album could be said to be Epic-Viking-Folk-Melodic-Death-Metal. That is a mouthful, so why don't we just call it for what it's worth: exceptional.

Opening with the song whose title is

the album's namesake, elation fills the heart. For the first time, one might feel tears of impression swell up even in the most macho of music fans because of this heroic-sounding anthem. The songs "Free Will Sacrifice," and "Where is Your God" are arguably less melodic and have more in common with the likes of Pantera than Agalloch. They focus on the more extreme aspect of death metal, which can admittedly be a little boring since we have heard Cannibal Corpse more than too many times.

But "Twilight of the Thunder God" more than redeems itself with epic ballads such as "Guardians of Asgaard," an extreme vocal style Doom Metal song about the legendary spiritual warrior guarding the sacred city of all Viking Gods. Maybe the Leif Ericsons of metal music have a special throne reserved with them behind those glorious, Nordic walls.

Every song on this album has its own place in Asgaard, I believe, but taking a more mortal look at things, many would say that this very album is a sign that music is condemned to the lofty gates of some Viking heaven to die. Listening to Amon Amarth and feeling reborn, your reviewer is perplexed as to why so many others are trying to say that music is dead.

This is not to say, though, that Amon Amarth is for the masses, or that it ever will be. First, the Swedish Metal band remains



mostly in its home continent of Europe, where a vanguard of modern metal is being developed right underneath the American listeners' noses (or better yet, ears).

And of course, your reviewer understands that he is not the embodiment of the youth of the world and is more than comfortable—in fact, feels at home—in the world of extreme metal. And yes, "Twilight of the Thunder God" will never be as palatable as "Avenged Sevenfold" or "Black Label Society," but it will more than satisfy those who are curious. And that's just what drives our generation today: curiosity.

No, you won't hear bands as varied as John Legend with Amon Amarth on the same radio wave. In fact, you'd be hard

pressed to find any station nowadays that plays music popular amongst younger people. Most of them have gone to classic rock (don't get me wrong, I love the classics as well) or nineties pop or to ranting right-wing radio fascists (did I say that out loud?).

This phenomenon of music "retreating" to the underground has caused every music snob to raise the alarm of music's death. "Music is dead and we have killed it!" scream the Nietzsche complex of reviewers and musicians alike. It's all underground, there is no commonality in music, there are no legendary labels like Mercury records staying afloat.

But music is far from dead. Music is not a corporate record label—it is an art form. Music is not a multi-million-dollar firework-spewing glam concert; it is how sound adds vibrancy to our culture.

The condemners of music are the true enemies of music, not the raging undergrounds. Some of us like punk, some metal, some bubble-gum pop, some all and none of the above. What we all have in common is that we give music its immortal breath every single day, and cursed be those who will oppose us.

This is what Amon Amarth's *Twilight of the Thunder God* will do for a listener like your reviewer. So what if it is obscure European metal? It breathes life, and that makes all the difference. ■

Amon Amarth will be touring the United States and Canada in April. See www.amonamarth.com.

U.S. occupation of Iraq leaves lasting poisons

By GERRY FOLEY

Disastrous pollution caused by the U.S.-led assault on Iraq has become another example of “blowback.” The disregard for the health of the Iraqi people shown by the U.S. military and the corporations parasitizing on it has been matched by a similar disregard for the health of U.S. personnel.

David Isenberg, author of “Shadow Force: Private Security Contractors in Iraq,” noted in the Feb. 22 *Huffington Post*: “That is why this article in the *Los Angeles Times* earlier this week grabbed my attention. It described how numerous returning veterans have reported leukemia, lymphoma, congestive heart problems, neurological conditions, bronchitis, skin rashes and sleep disorders—all of which they attribute to burn pits on dozens of U.S. bases in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Isenberg continued: “Military leaders originally saw the pits as temporary, the simplest way to dispose of trash before troops quickly exited Iraq. But as the war continued, they burned because it saved money, according to subsequent lawsuits, allowing U.S. contractors to avoid having to install costly incinerators.

“It is KBR (formerly Kellogg, Brown & Root) which ran the pits. Last October a class action suit combining 22 lawsuits from 43 states was filed in US District Court in Maryland against KBR, Halliburton, and other military contractors for damages to health from open air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to plaintiffs’ lawyers, KBR had been paid millions of dollars to safely dispose of waste on bases but negligently burned refuse in open pits, spewing toxins, including known carcinogens, into the air.

“What was KBR’s defense? Earlier this month it sought to challenge its liability for any ensuing problems. According to KBR’s press fact sheet on the suit, the Army, not KBR, decides if a burn pit or an incinerator will be used, where it will be built in relation to living and working facilities, and what it can burn. KBR insists it was and is still just ‘performing under the direction and control of military commanders in the field.’ In short, they were only following orders. Where have we heard that before?”

As ironic and outrageous as this abuse is, it is only one small example of the essential truth that inhumanity by U.S. forces cannot be limited to foreigners, that it will eventually rebound against Americans themselves. And it is an illustration of the fact that the logic of capitalism is deadly even to forces employed to defend it.

As the privatization of U.S. war proceeds, it rebounds more and more against U.S. soldiers. As in the Spanish-American war—the major U.S. military adventure in the age of the robber barons, to which the capitalist offensive known as “neoliberalism” wants to return us—the war profiteers were worse enemies of the U.S. soldiers than the opposing armed forces.

The nature of the system is that private profit always tends to prevail over any social interest. And in fact, today in the conditions of declining capitalism and neoliberal ideology, the capitalists have even less social concern than their forbearers in the age of unregulated capitalism. For them, there is no such thing as collective interests, only private interests—that is, the extreme individualism trumpeted by their deluded tools in the “tea parties” and the rabid protests against “Obama’s socialism.”

The environmental disaster inflicted by the U.S.-led assault on Iraq will be a long-lasting effect of massive ruin inflicted on the people of the country and a huge waste of American resources. Apparently, the only ones to profit from the trillion dollars and the more than 4000 lives expended in the U.S.-led invasion and occupation will be the U.S. corporations like KBR that got fat contracts for “reconstructing” the country and supporting the U.S. military and took the money and ran.

The invasion of Iraq was the most notable example so far of an attempt to roll back the colonial revolution and return toward outright colonialism. It has been a resounding failure that demonstrates this imperialist ambition is futile. However much third-world peoples may be disappointed by their neocolonial governments, they will never let themselves be exploited and humiliated again the way they were in the 19th century when they were surprised by imperialism.

Even lacking a leadership with a positive program in the interests of their own people, Iraqi resistance frustrated the schemes of U.S. big business and their political representatives. A dispatch in the Feb. 2 *TomDispatch* documented the step-by-step defeat of the plans of the would-be U.S. robbers.



Marwan Ibrahim / AFP / Getty Images

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For example: “In one dramatic episode, Bremer announced the pending transfer of the control of the southern port of Basra (which then handled 80% of the country’s oil exports) from a state-run enterprise to KBR, then a subsidiary of Halliburton, the company Vice President Cheney had once headed. Anticipating that their own jobs would soon disappear in a sea of imported labor, the oil workers immediately struck. KBR quickly withdrew and Bremer abandoned the effort.”

In the first two years of the occupation, more than 200 acts of sabotage were registered against the Iraqi oil pipelines and facilities. By 2007, there were 600 acts of sabotage. The U.S. oil companies found that instead of a happy hunting ground, Iraq had become a minefield for them. And so they have largely walked away and ceded the territory to other oil companies, mostly state owned, including, notably, Chinese. In 2007 the U.S. managed to pressure the Maliki government to endorse an oil law favorable to U.S. interests, but it has been stalled in parliament every since.

TomDispatch noted: “This stalemate continued unabated through the Obama administration’s first year in office, as illustrated by a continuing conflict around the pipeline that carries oil from Iraq to Turkey, a source of about 20% of the country’s oil revenues. During the Bremer administration [the original occupation government], the U.S. had ended the Saddam-era tradition of allowing local tribes to siphon off a proportion of the oil passing through their territory. The insurgents, viewing this as an act of American theft, undertook systematic sabotage of the pipeline, and—despite ferocious U.S. military offensives—it remained closed for all but a few days throughout the next five years.

“The pipeline was re-opened in the fall of 2009, when the Iraqi government restored the Saddam-era custom in exchange for an end to sabotage. This has been only partially successful. Shipments have been interrupted by further pipeline attacks, evidently mounted by insurgents who believe oil revenues are illegitimately funding the continuing U.S. occupation. The fragility of the pipeline’s service, even today, is one small sign of ongoing resistance that could be an obstacle to any significant increase in oil production until the U.S. military presence is ended.”

To this day, attacks on the pipelines are continuing, and insurgents pledge to pursue them until the U.S. forces are entirely out of Iraq. There have been 26 attacks on pipelines since September 2009.

Furthermore, the U.S. has been no more successful

(Above) U.S. soldiers survey rubble from truck bomb in Kirkuk, June 21, 2009.

in using its military domination of Iraq to establish a secure material and political base in the Middle East. In an article in the Feb. 22 *Huffington Post*, Michael Brenner, a senior fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, wrote: “The primary features of what Iraq is becoming are marked out by recent developments. Three stand out. The Maliki government used the military police to force the demission of elected officials in Ninevah province who were political opponents of the current regime. That is one.

“The shadowy Accountability and Justice Commission that vets candidates for the upcoming elections has succeeded in removing from the lists leading Sunni figures along with a potpourri of secularists and dissident Shi’a. That is two.

“The mastermind of this operation has been Ahmed Chalabi, erstwhile paladin of the neo-conservative schemers who instigated the entire tragic affair [that is, the invasion of Iraq]. That is three.

“Chalabi has had intimate ties with Iranian leaders, especially in the powerful security services, from the outset. He always was Tehran’s man insofar as he placed his largest bets for gaining personal power on his Iranian co-conspirators. His key role in passing to them information that compromised American secret codes back in 2005 led to his being blacklisted by American officers in Baghdad—for awhile. Nonetheless, he has remained a powerful behind-the-scenes figure. Now, General Odierno pronounces himself shocked by the discovery that Chalabi and his protégé, Mr. Lami, are the sharp edge of mounting Iranian influence in Iraqi politics.”

The U.S. government used the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, whom it helped to power, as a weapon against the Iranian anti-imperialist revolution. The irony is that in overthrowing Hussein, it installed a Shi’ite religious coalition in government in Iraq that is moving closer and closer to Iran. Of course, the Iranian regime is not anti-imperialist in the fundamental sense, since it remains basically capitalist, but it is the product of an anti-imperialist revolution.

This is the vast undercurrent in the Middle East that the U.S. hoped to reverse by its occupation of Iraq and which it has manifestly failed to do. It continues to well up in many ways, however, distorted and deflected. It will eventually overwhelm the imperialists and their allies. But the question is how much ruin the imperialists will inflict on the region in the process, and how much they will drain and poison the people of the countries on which they are based.

In the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Iraqi people have suffered terrible losses, but Americans have also suffered needlessly and been more effectively robbed by the big corporations that were the principal beneficiaries of the operation, even if their gains are proving short lived. The Iraqis are defending themselves as well as they can. Americans need to defend themselves also by demanding an immediate and complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and measures against the corporations that supported and benefited from this adventure. ■

