

A ~~SOCIALIST~~ ACTION

**Layoffs at
General Motors**

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Iraq War intensifies as U.S.-Maliki government declares 'victory'

Maya Alleruzzo / AP



Brant Ward / SF Chronicle



All out July 10-12 for Pittsburgh National Antiwar Conference!

By JEFF MACKLER

Sure enough, the Iraq War is over! At least, that's the word from the corporate media. Eighty-five percent of U.S. bases and "outposts" in Iraq were slated to be closed as of June 30, according to U.S. military officials. U.S. forces were said to be withdrawing from Iraq's cities, "under cover of night," reported *The New York Times*.

In Orwellian double-speak, the U.S. puppet government of Nuri Kamal al-Maliki has declared a "great victory" comparable to the 1920 Iraqi rebellion against British troops, a "repulsion of foreign occupiers" no less! The cynical June 26 *Times* "news" article could not help but observe that "the Americans are going along with it, symbolically and substantively."

Maliki, desperate to demonstrate his independence from U.S. imperialism, declared June 30 a national holiday. He ordered U.S. troops to disappear, like "invisible genies," according to Ali al-Adeeb, a top leader of Maliki's Dawa Party, but only for a few days!

Meanwhile, bomb attacks killed many civilians, mainly Shiites. Hundreds were killed in late June; many more were wounded. Some residents of Sadr City charged that the Iraqi government had aided the bombings, though Sunni communities, American military, and Iraqi security forces also suffered losses.

Undoubtedly, and without Maliki's permission, Shiite militants will respond with the formation of their own militias. Few believe that the U.S.-trained and backed security forces have the capacity to quell either the mass hatred of the still present U.S. occupation forces or the internecine and U.S.-fueled rivalries among Iraqi groups.

U.S. helicopters continue to pockmark the Iraqi skies, operating out of U.S. bases in Baghdad and elsewhere. They and their bases have been excluded from the "withdrawal" agreements by virtue of a re-drafting of

(Left) U.S. troops conduct joint operation with Iraqi police in the streets of Mosul, June 8.
(Right) Afghanis in Fremont, Calif., protest against killing of civilians in U.S. strikes on Afghanistan.

the city's borders and in recognition that the presence of a U.S.-led rapid and deadly military response was absolutely essential.

Some 130,000 U.S. combat troops remain in Iraq, reclassified as non-combatants and trainers, though armed to the teeth. They have been momentarily removed from public view but remain entrenched in massively fortified and armed bases and airfields replete with the most modern weapons of mass destruction. They will remain in Iraq as long as necessary to assure the exploitation of the nation's resources and otherwise serve U.S. interests in the region.

Maliki insists, "We will not ask [the U.S.] to intervene in combat operations related to maintaining public order." But "public order," a term implying a police operation, is

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Iranian clericalist regime shaken by mass protests

By GERRY FOLEY

After a week of massive protests and street confrontations, the Iranian government appeared to gain firm control of the streets in Tehran and other large cities. To achieve control, the government appeared to rely mainly on the Basij, a large volunteer militia force. Reports from bloggers in Tehran claimed that the Basij who suppressed the protest demonstrations were largely unemployed youths from backward rural areas that had been highly paid to do their work.

There are reports that protests are continuing in non-confrontational ways—buyers' strikes, workers' stay-

aways from work, chanting from rooftops at night, turning on car lights, the releasing of balloons in the green color of the opposition. But such actions are invisible to the outside world given the tight censorship the regime has imposed on newspapers and even the new electronic media.

The main bourgeois opposition candidate in the presidential elections, Mir Hossein Mousavi, has announced that he is applying for permits to hold any further demonstrations. That could reduce his protest to a formal one, since there is no indication that the authorities will issue any permits for street protests. He has also said that the struggle can no longer be car-

ried on in the streets. That has shifted the attention of the commentators in the capitalist press toward rumors of a behind-the-scenes struggle among the ruling clerics.

It is likely that a layer of the rulers of the theocratic state have been frightened by the breadth and depth of the protests and fear that the Islamic Republic cannot be continued indefinitely in its present form. But it will be hard for the top leaders—in particular, Ayatollah Khamenei, the "Supreme leader"—to accept any compromises. So far, their response has been essentially stonewalling and threats of wider and more ruthless repression, even the execution of activists.

The newspaper that has been the ideological flagship of the regime, *Jumhuri Eslami*, has denounced Mousavi and the protesters as "anarchists" and "extremists." The Basij are combing the city for opposition activists. Hundreds have been arrested. The regime is trying to brand the protesters as allies or dupes of foreign enemies.

However, even the conservative speaker of the Iranian parliament, Ali Larijani, has declared that the majority of Iranians are convinced that the results of the June 12 presidential elections were faked. Actually, the government's response to the protests is evidence enough that it knows that

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Commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Michael Jackson — Master Entertainer

The shocking passing of megastar Michael Jackson has brought his music back to the minds of millions. Although his style of both dance and song may've been superseded by a whole new genre, there were few singers or dancers who didn't borrow something from the artist known as the "king of pop."

Among many of today's prominent artists are bits and pieces of Michael, just as he borrowed from the irrepressible James Brown. In Usher, Omarion, NeYo, Ciara, Genuwine (just to name a few), are glimpses of Michael Jackson's frenetic, almost robotic dancing style. As a commercial artist, he had no peer. His 1983 "Thriller" not only earned a Grammy award, but spawned a dozen hits. The album would go on to sell more than any single artist's: 27 million copies.

Years ago, I told my wife I didn't care for the artist; she told me to ignore all the criticism, the press -- all of it, and look at him as an entertainer, say, like Sinatra.

I did. She was right. He was a master entertainer, who moved millions not only with his distinctive vocals, but his dancing changed the art like Muhammad Ali changed the sport of boxing. I never failed to marvel at his sheer brilliance and artistry.

Recently, the prison station showed a video of Jackson's concert in Bucharest, Romania. An outdoor concert, with more people than any of us would care to count, Jackson was in rare form, transfixing the immense throng with a show that was unlike anything they'd ever seen.

For those who feel his music was mere bubble-gum pop, and thus devoid of serious social commentary, check out one of his post 'Thriller' songs; "They Don't Care About Us." Filmed in what ap-



pears to be a Brazilian favela, surrounded by thousands of dark skinned boys and girls, many drumming to the beat, the song is an anthem of how the rich world treats the poor of the world.

Michael Jackson was a master of his art. He may be gone; he certainly won't be forgotten.

The stateless 'state' of Palestine

The presidential election of Barack Obama has so electrified the world that expectations have swept past reality into the realm of the silly.

Some of this is surely driven by the corporate media, which no longer covers the news but engages in what might be called "pre-news," as it tends to predict what will (or may) happen, the better to not be scooped by competitors. And as news makes its hard turn to opinion, it sometimes builds up Obama as a world leader, in ways that are simply unreasonable.

This was seen in the run-up to the Iranian presidential elections, where news coverage all but

predicted the election of opposition candidate Mir Hossein Moussavi and the fall of the irascible Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The result predicted, talking heads opined about the global influence of Obama over the elections. (As for stolen elections, did millions of Americans take to the streets to protest the stolen elections here—in 2000?)

Similarly, much news coverage centered on Obama's hard-line on the Israelis, as in his Cairo address when he called for a freeze in settlements. So slanted is U.S. policy towards Israel that a halt in construction in illegal settlements is seen as somehow "hard-line."

For their part, Israeli right-wingers, many supporters of newly elected president Binyamin Netanyahu, have posterized Tel Aviv with images of Obama wearing an Arab headdress (known as a kaffiyeh), emblazoned with the words "Jew Hater" and "Anti-Semite" in English and Hebrew (an allusion to his Muslim name and family background).

To "freeze" a situation that is fundamentally unjust is to preserve the status quo—a state of affairs that leaves the Palestinian people in an unjust and untenable situation. On top of that, Netanyahu recently announced an essential rejection of Obama's "freeze," and an alleged support of the establishment of a Palestinian state—albeit a demilitarized one, with foreign affairs to be overseen by Israel. This is a state only in the sense that the old South African Bantustans were independent territories (that is to say, not at all).

The Palestinians have had their best lands seized and Swiss-cheesed by settlements, their parliament has been cast into prison, their water is rationed, and their homes have been bulldozed, all while Western leaders crow about a "peace process" that is, ultimately, a freeze in oppression.

Meanwhile, Israel, not only the most powerful military in the region, but an undeclared nuclear-armed state, accepts the idea of a Palestinian state, but only if demilitarized—and this is seen as progress! — © MAJ 2009

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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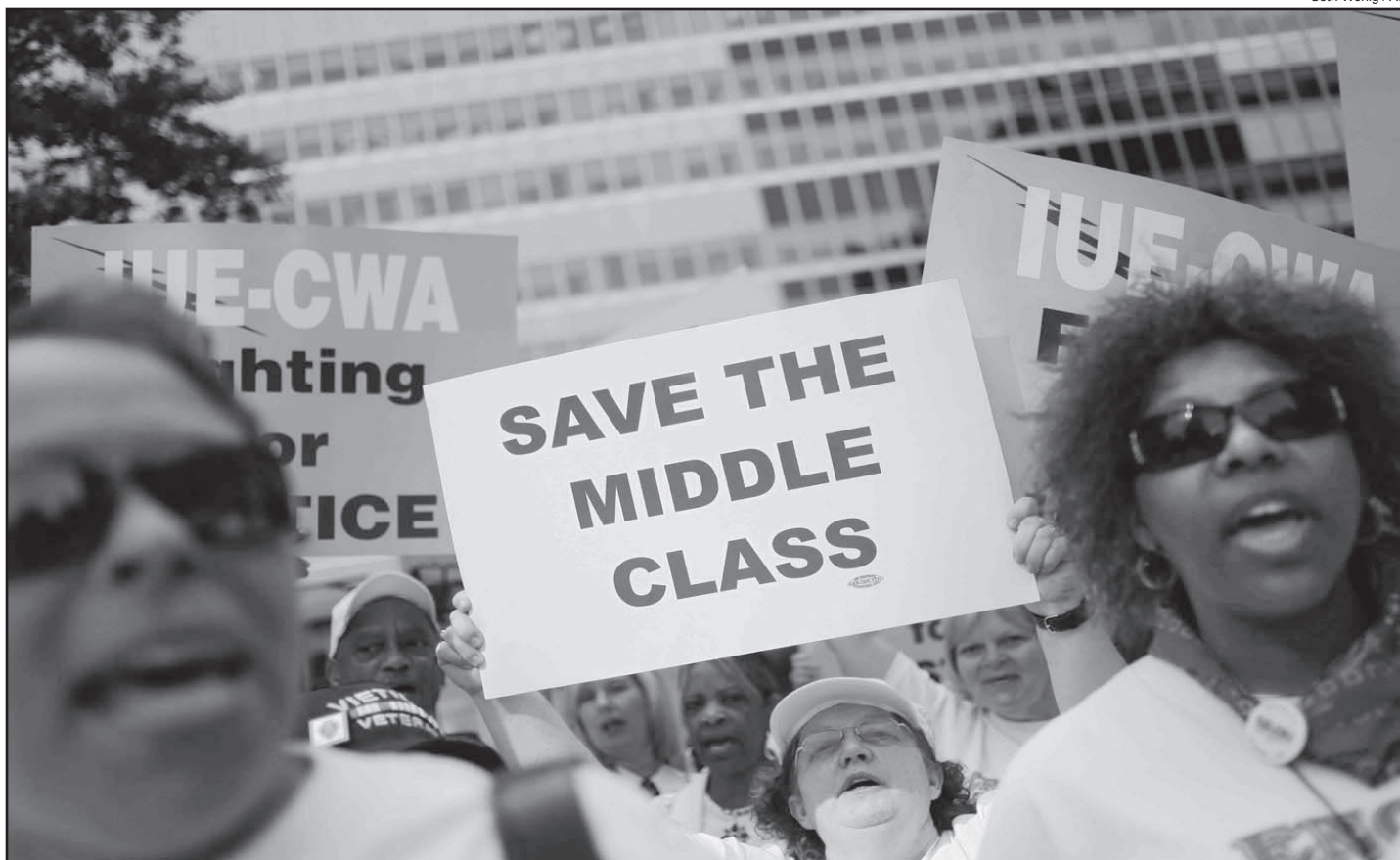
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(Left) Labor supporters of GM workers protest outside N.Y. bankruptcy court against cutting of pensions and retiree health benefits, June 30.

Obama-backed agreement at GM capped by layoffs

By MARTY GOODMAN

It's the most concerted union-busting drive in memory—and it is being led by Barack Obama, the auto bosses, and the Democratic Party. To the delight of the corporate elite, President Obama's "Auto Task Force" (ATF) has insisted on a "quick and surgical" restructuring plan for the ailing automobile industry, which includes deep cuts in wages, health care, and pension benefits.

The Treasury-run ATF is stacked with top corporate execs. ATF chief Steven Rattner is a former "superstar" investment banker and Democratic Party insider—a friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton.

The administration wants a "new" auto industry, and, in the words of the president, one that is, "mean, lean, and competitive." That means breaking the back of the United Automobile Workers (UAW). One auto analyst with Barclays Capital of Chicago says, "Improvements in liquidity for GM will come out of the UAW."

The administration's goal is to slash labor costs to that of non-union auto manufacturers like Honda and Toyota, especially in health and pension benefits. History is now punishing the UAW for not organizing those mostly non-union companies.

The ATF clearly supported bankruptcy for GM, under which contracts and workers' rights can be tossed out the window. The ATF strategy was, as with the Chrysler agreement the month before, to threaten bankruptcy and thereby extort massive concessions from the union. Bankruptcy court can rip up contracts and destroy worker rights.

Their ploy worked. It is estimated that the May 21 ATF-brokered GM-UAW agreement contains over \$1 billion in union concessions per year. The "job security" provisions of the 2007 GM contract were suspended. Armed with a concessionary agreement, GM filed June 1 for bankruptcy protection in a New York Bankruptcy Court. The agreement gave the court the green light to cut, cut, cut.

GM hopes to emerge from bankruptcy protection by mid-July. After filing for bankruptcy, General Motors announced that it was cutting a whopping 21,000 jobs, about 34% of its workforce, and closing 14 U.S. plants. Since 2006, the GM bosses have cut an astounding 60,500 jobs.

After GM's announcement, Don Skidmore, president of UAW Local 735 in Ypsilanti, Mich., said, "I was angry at first, then I cried, then I got angry again." Local 735 represents 1100 workers at a plant built in 1943 to make bombers during

World War II and now facing closure. "I'm hurt for the people. The looks on their faces are horrible."

One could argue that Obama and the UAW bureaucrats were in on the recent layoffs from the get-go. Their lack of opposition says it all. According to the March 30 *Wall Street Journal*, at the ATF-brokered talks, "Both GM and Chrysler are negotiating with the UAW to accept a range of cost-cutting measures, including a greatly reduced work force, lower wages and a revamped health-care fund for retirees."

By any rational criteria, layoffs and concessions are completely unnecessary and are the product of an inhuman system in deep crisis, a system based on profits for the few—capitalism. Moreover, union workers are being made scapegoats for the crisis by auto bosses, the capitalist parties, and corporate media despite the fact that only 10 percent of production costs go for labor.

Bottom line, the greed and stupidity of the Big Three bosses produced millions of gas-guzzlers since the 1970s, which lost out to smaller, more fuel-efficient imports. No worker had a say in that.

Socialists say, "No to all layoffs! Nationalize the entire auto industry under the democratic control of working people! Money for jobs, not war!"

Is Obama pro-union?

Obama's campaign promises to Midwest voters that he would "save jobs" as president rings as hollow as his promise to "renegotiate" the job-killing sweatshop agreement with Mexico (NAFTA). The layoffs violate the 2007 GM contract on job security, about which the UAW and Washington have revealingly remained silent.

Washington conditioned the release of some \$50 billion in bailout funds for GM and about \$12 billion for Chrysler on cost savings.

In April, the ATF rejected the two companies' reorganization plans as not going far enough. Obama's ATF moved into the GM headquarters and, as a joint UAW-GM press statement says, the negotiators made "modifications to the collective bargaining agreement to satisfy the Treasury Auto Task Force." The press revealed that Washington's plans were even more brutal than what auto bosses themselves had been willingly initially to try.

A White House briefing boasted, "In virtually every respect, the concessions that the UAW agreed to are more aggressive than what the Bush administration demanded in its loan agreement with GM."

As the June 1 *New York Times* observed,

the agreement contains, "steps that most analysts thought could never be pushed through by a Democratic president allied by organized labor."

New York Times labor reporter Steven Greenhouse wrote on June 2, "The Obama administration structured the GM and Chrysler plans to lessen the union's voice in management." In other words, the boss class figured that only a so-called "progressive" Democrat could get the UAW, which had backed Obama, to swallow the rotten deal!

More fallout from the deal

On the chopping block are also 1100 GM dealerships, with up to 2600 going next year. Chrysler is closing 789 dealerships. Dealers claim that closures will eliminate 100,000 jobs. Auto-parts manufacturers were also warned that 49 major suppliers would collapse in 2009 and 60 more in 2010. Being cut by GM are the Pontiac, Saturn, Opel, Vauxhall, and Hummer lines. Some 37,000 out of Canada's 100,000 auto-parts workers are estimated to lose their jobs.

Mass pickets, organized by the UAW leadership, or certainly a plant occupation would have likely stopped the layoffs and givebacks cold. The equally lifeless AFL-CIO bureaucracy sat idly by, trusting in their candidate, Barack Obama.

Chrysler workers are also on the chopping block (see the May 2009 *Socialist Action*). Chrysler was first targeted by the administration to wring concessions from the smaller company to be used as a precedent with the larger GM. With the approval of the White House, Chrysler has been taken over by the Italian automaker Fiat, headed by CEO Sergio Marchionne, who has spearheaded cuts that sparked worker protests and strikes. So far, Ford has not asked for a bailout, but Ford bosses are using the Chrysler-GM pattern to re-negotiate at least some, if not all, aspects of its' UAW contract.

Within days, the Chrysler and GM agreements were overwhelmingly ratified by a fearful membership, who saw only treachery and surrender by their leaders. There were no recognized rank-and-file movements seen as capable of waging a serious fight.

The United Automobile Workers has gone from 1.5 million members in 1979 to 431,000 in 2008. In 1991, GM employed 304,000. The total number of GM's current U.S. employees is set to shrink from 88,000 to 63,000. The unemployment rate in Flint, Mich., the scene of militant autoworker plant occupations in 1936 and 1937, is 15.3 percent.

According to the magazine *In These*

Times, the most recent GM plans call for a 98% increase in autos produced in Mexico, China, South Korea, Japan, and other overseas countries bound for the U.S. market. The UAW and the Steelworkers union launched a campaign against Chinese truck imports based on reactionary "Buy America" chauvinism (not cross-border organizing) and succeeded in having imports slowed by Washington.

The high price of surrender

The new GM agreement, which is a modification of the 2007 contract, includes a wage freeze and a suspension of cost-of-living allowances. Performance bonuses and some holidays were also lost. It also includes job title consolidation, much like "broad banding," which gives bosses the right to assign a worker any job almost at will.

The "job security" provisions of the 2007 contract are suspended. Part-time "flex employees" will be hired as needed. Pensioners will be paying \$76 a month in Medicare contributions, formerly paid by the company, and worse, retirees lose vision and dental care.

A no-strike pledge will be in effect until 2015, thus stripping the union of power. Unresolved issues in 2011 concerning the expiring 2007 contract, including wages, will be subject to binding arbitration. The framework for arbitration is likely to be non-union standards at Honda and Toyota. Workers cannot vote on an arbitrator's decision.

Perhaps the biggest travesty is the payment of half of GM's \$20 billion health-care obligation to the union's already underfunded Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA) in nearly worthless GM stock. In fact, it's presently so worthless—about 75 cents a share at one point in June—that it has been taken off the stock exchange. The VEBA underfunding seriously endangers health care for retirees, who outnumber active members.

The VEBA was created to offload GM's health-care obligations onto the UAW. The \$20 billion owed the VEBA will likely go to repay debts to banks, not workers. Veteran journalist Greg Palast writes, "its illegal," and cites the 1974 Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), which prohibits seizing pension funds, which are already paid for by workers in lieu of wages. Now, the UAW bureaucrats must consider any serious protest against management as undermining the market value of its own health-care fund!

The UAW deal is another reason to struggle for the passage of the single-payer (health care for all) bill, HR 676, now before Congress.

UAW in corporate boardroom

In exchange for health-care funding in GM stock, Obama-GM offered the UAW 39% of equity and a single representative on the GM board. The UAW settlement provides for a 60% U.S. Treasury stake in the "new GM." The union's healthcare trust or VEBA will have a 17.5% stake; the Canadian government 12% and GM bondholders 10%.

Can having a union member on a corporate board change things for the better? Never has, never will.

The June 2 *New York Times* reported, "The retiree's health fund has 6 public-appointed trustees and five union appointed trustees. Though the union health trust owns 55% of Chrysler, it will hold just one seat on the Chrysler board. And, at both automakers, the health fund's shares will be non-voting."

Newsweek summed it all up: "A shrinking union accepts stakes in shrinking companies. It promises not to strike. The governance system muffles the union's voice by restricting its board presence. Its sounds like an arrangement a union-hater like [notorious corporate boss] Jack Welch would have cooked-up."

Right now Welch, Obama, the auto bosses and the UAW's Gettlefinger are sounding an awful lot like each other. Just ask any laid-off auto worker. ■

Supreme Court rejects review of Cuban Five case

BY JEFF MACKLER

On June 15 the U.S. Supreme Court denied a writ of certiorari (appeal for a hearing) to the Cuban Five—Gerardo Hernandez, Rene Gonzalez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez. As in its recent decision in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the court offered no explanation for its refusal to consider the legal and factual issues that demonstrate the innocence of these Cuban patriots, who infiltrated Miami-based reactionary terrorist organizations that had actively planned and carried out murderous attacks on Cuba.

A series of frame-up trials and hearings orchestrated by various Florida prosecutors, judges, and then federal courts—conducted in the atmosphere of lynch-mob hysteria—essentially obliterated all evidence that the Five had presented to prove that their actions were solely aimed at exposing and preventing illegal terrorist activities conducted against Cuba from American soil. During one point in the trial proceedings, the Five proposed to conduct part of the proceedings in Cuba itself so that jurors could observe and take account of the results of the essentially U.S.-encouraged, if not sponsored, terrorist attacks. Their request was denied.

The Five, through official representatives of the Cuban government, formally reported their findings of illegal activities to U.S. authorities. Instead of prosecuting the guilty, U.S. officials sought to punish the innocent. The world's leading purveyor of terror, the U.S. government, sought to clothe itself in the mantle of defending itself against Cuban espionage while it covered up its own complicity with the murderous acts perpetrated against the people of Cuba.

One of the Five was charged with complicity with murder because he had informed the Cuban government that U.S.-based airplanes piloted by armed anti-Cuban thugs were planning illegal flights over Cuban territory. Despite repeated Cuban government complaints to U.S.



Christian Veron / Reuters

(Left) Irma Gonzalez, daughter of Cuban Five prisoner Rene Gonzalez, while attending the World Youth and Students' Festival in Venezuela in 2005.

officials regarding the violation of their airspace, the provocative flights continued and after a final warning, one of the planes was shot down by the Cuban Air Force and its pilot perished.

Years later, complicity with "murder" was included in the mountain of manufactured charges hurled at the

Cuban Five. The Five have already served 10 years in prison and face long-term vindictive sentences, including decades of imprisonment.

The Five's Supreme Court appeal was endorsed by 10 Nobel Prize winners, hundreds of elected officials throughout the world, and by noted jurists, professional bodies, and a broad range of academic, cultural, faith-based, and human rights organizations. Amnesty International has condemned the brutal treatment by prison officials of the Five, who have been incarcerated in prisons scattered across the U.S. and frequently have been subjected to long periods of solitary confinement and denied visits by their families.

The five Cubans, justifiably considered heroes by the Cuban people, posed no threat to the United States or to any U.S. citizen. Ricardo Alarcon, President of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, immediately commenting on the Supreme Court's decision properly proclaimed, "The struggle must be multiplied until the U.S. government is forced to put an end to this monstrous injustice and restore freedom to Gerardo, Ramon, Antonio, Fernando, and Rene."

The Five are represented by prominent human rights attorney Leonard Weinglass and by other attorneys who have labored long and hard for their release and freedom. Based on new evidence proving their innocence, plans are underway to file a second appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. This will be accompanied by renewed efforts by U.S. and worldwide organizers of their struggle for freedom to mobilize broad public support for their ongoing quest for justice and freedom.

For further information on the case, google the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five. ■

Connecticut forum discusses strategy in women's abortion rights movement



By CHRISTINE MARIE



Charlie Riedel / AP

(Above) Anti-abortion protest at the June 6 church funeral of Dr. George Tiller (left) in Wichita, Kan.

HARTFORD, Conn.—The shocking May 31 murder of Dr. George Tiller, one of a handful of U.S. physicians still performing late-term abortions, provoked a sober discussion of strategy among pro-choice advocates here. A June 25 Socialist Action forum entitled "The Murder of Dr. Tiller and the Fight for Abortion Rights" drew over 50 people, mostly female, to hear Jillian Gilchrest from Connecticut NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League), Gretchen Raffa from Planned Parenthood, recovery-room nurse practitioner Kazia Luce, and Socialist Action spokeswoman Alissa DeRosa. They gathered to remember the contributions of Tiller and to join in producing an assessment of the battle ahead.

The forum opened, as have many Tiller memorial meetings around the country, with the reading of testimony from the Kansas physician's grateful patients, several of whom mentioned his mantra: "Trust Women." Tiller was known not only for his courage in continuing to provide second and third-trimester abortions after being wounded in both arms by an antiabortion shooter in years past, but also for his expressions of support for women's rights. These sentiments, often expressed in unconventional ways, were celebrated by the women in the audience, many of whom donned buttons with the Tiller quote: "Until one understands the heart of a woman, nothing else about abortion makes any sense at all."

Tiller was a special target of the right because he was an unabashed supporter of feminism. The anti-

abortion movement, he asserted more than once, was not really motivated by concern for unborn children, but by the desire to control women and to control their sexuality.

Jillian Gilchrest, the Executive Director of Connecticut NARAL, lectured directly on the difficulties of speaking as Dr. Tiller spoke in the current political climate. Although NARAL takes credit for electing two pro-choice candidates to the Connecticut legislature last year, she said, since the first election of George Bush, it has become more difficult to speak openly about abortion. In order to overcome the reticence, Connecticut NARAL has moved to organize discussions in the more private small-group settings provided by house parties.

Gretchen Raffa, Community Organizer for Planned Parenthood in the state, began her presentations about strategy with an emotional recounting of her own experience with the antiabortion right. A bomb scare at her clinic once forced patients to recover after surgery outside on the sidewalk.

Raffa's experience was not unusual. Since 1977, according to NARAL, anti-abortion vigilantes have directed 5800 acts of violence at abortion providers and attempted 143,000 disruptions of clinic activity. And since 1993, eight clinic workers have been murdered. This violence, Raffa asserted, along with aggressive organizing by people who oppose a "woman's right to

control her reproductive destiny," has put the pro-choice movement on the defensive. We carry on the abortion political discussion "without talking about the woman," she said. Everything is discussed except "how women feel."

Rarely mentioned, she stated, is the fact that women need the right to have abortions as part of their regular reproductive health. The discussion should not be about "reducing the number of abortions," but about listening to women and knowing that "no matter what, there is a need for abortion."

Luce, a nurse practitioner who works in several clinic recovery rooms, developed this theme further. Any strategy or language of compromise with the right, she argued, is not in the interest of people who support women's reproductive choice. "Anti-choicers," she said, "do not want compromise. They want to control our bodies and control our sexuality and that is that." Positioning ourselves as a group that wants abortion to be "safe, legal, and rare" is not the most effective approach, she suggested. Our main argument instead, Luce contended, should be that abortion is a basic health requirement and right.

The decision by some of the most important pro-choice organizations to publically identify with the reactionary idea that abortions be reduced, as if the procedure were a disreputable choice instead of a normal part of women's medical lives, is not slowing the drastic decline in pro-choice sentiment among the U.S. population, argued Alissa DeRosa from Socialist Action.

In 1973, at the height of the second wave of U.S. feminism and the unapologetic abortion rights movement that won *Roe v. Wade*, 75 percent of the population registered support for abortion rights. A recent Gallup poll, on the other hand, found that only 53 percent of those asked said that abortion should be legal "in certain circumstances." The main reason for the decline, according to De Rosa, is that the anti-abortion forces are regularly mobilizing, presenting their arguments, indicting women, and becoming legitimized as part of the mainstream discourse. "We, on the other hand," she said, "are nearly invisible."

It has been five years since the 2004 March for Women's Lives and that is far too long." Pro-choice activists, De Rosa continued, need to build a living, breathing movement of mass educational campaigns that reach the grassroots. "Why are we not putting resources into the effort to mobilize students and the vast majority of working women in their own defense in massive demonstrations?"

We cannot, in the absence of mass actions, expect that sophisticated legislative and electoral campaigns will keep abortion accessible, De Rosa asserted. Obama's speech at Notre Dame, which reassured the anti-abortionist politicians that his administration would not end the right of physicians to refuse to perform abortions and would continue to seek to reduce abortions, is proof of that, she said. ■

Right wingers v. Judge Sotomayor

If President Obama could have foreseen the controversy over his nomination of Judge Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court, he might well have nominated her even sooner. Not that the president expects this Latina judge to champion the causes of minorities and the poor. As one profile of her noted, "Sotomayor may disappoint activists on the left who were hoping that Obama would choose a two-fisted progressive..." (*Time*, June 8, 2009).

Mr. Obama said much the same, though with far less candor, when he explained that Judge Sotomayor "understands that a judge's job is to interpret, not make, law." The president was trying to downplay Judge Sotomayor's two most controversial comments: that "policy is made" in the court of appeals, and a widely-circulated excerpt from a 2001 speech in which she said, "I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experience would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life."

When Sotomayor's nomination was announced in May, the conservative movement, reeling from defeats and divisions within its ranks, sensed an opportunity for an easy victory against a vulnerable target. With overheated rhetoric, complete with ethnic slurs and slander, designed to galvanize a right-wing base sorely in need of a rallying point, the far right Republicans went on the offensive.

Talk-show host Rush Limbaugh compared Sotomayor to David Duke, a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Former House speaker Newt Gingrich called her a "racist," while former Republican Party presidential candidate Pat Buchanan labeled her "an affirmative action baby." By comparison, Fox's Sean Hannity seemed almost moderate when he claimed that

Sotomayor was part of the "far left" and that her positions on race put her at odds with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

These were not thoughtless words spoken in the heat of the moment, at least not judging by the smears that were published in the print media. One writer in the *National Review* complained about Ms. Sotomayor's name: "[P]utting the emphasis on the final syllable of Sotomayor is unnatural in English." The magazine also used words like "dumb" and "obnoxious" to describe her. Again, by comparison, a *New Republic* author seemed almost moderate when he called the summa cum laude graduate of Princeton and *Yale Law Journal* editor "an intellectual lightweight."

Despite the ferocity of the verbal assault, and perhaps because of it, the repulsive right-wing attack backfired. Sotomayor endured taunting by powerful white men that was so dishonest, so sleazy, that Americans in large numbers turned away in disgust from the crude racism of the Republican Party's unofficial leaders. These attack dogs had lunged too far on their leash. When popular opinion yanked them back, they had little choice but to slink away in silence.

Surveying the retreat, Congressional Republicans were forced to distance themselves from their unhelpful allies. After all, Republicans are well aware that Latinos are the largest growing minority in the United States and even more aware that their presidential candidate in 2008 won less than a third of the Latino vote.

The groundswell of sympathy for Sotomayor strongly affected the left-liberals, social-democrats, and the Communist Party. Their battle cry is "Support Sotomayor, defeat the right!" On its website,

the Communist Party even suggests ways that its supporters can help Sotomayor win the Supreme Court nomination.

This false logic—the enemy of our enemy must be our friend—attempts to find a common agenda or program where there is none. It is proper and necessary to oppose the racist attack on Sotomayor; but it is wrong to lend her political support. This strategy chains the left to its lesser-evil enemy, the Democrats, and stifles the development, on the political field, of an independent, working-class organization.

Real hope for progress and change requires an entirely different strategy. The Supreme Court does not initiate social change; it ratifies the changes taking place in the society at large. It is wishful thinking, then, to place one's hopes on this or that court appointee.

In 1973, abortion rights for women were not granted because a majority of the Court was female. In fact, the first female Supreme Court justice was only appointed eight years later by Republican President Ronald Reagan. Women in the United States won the right to abortion because of the strength and depth of the feminist movement. Women's liberation was a cause that profoundly transformed American culture in every sphere of life. The Supreme Court recognized this social change in 1973.

The famous *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling that outlawed segregation in public schools confirms the same point by different means. Following the Court's decision, American schools did not desegregate with all deliberate



Sonia Sotomayor at White House, May 26, following announcement of her nomination. Vice President Joe Biden looks on.

speed. The Court's decision was brought to life by the growth of a powerful civil rights movement, which created progressive change in American society.

Where a civil rights struggle was weak, such as in a Northern city like Boston, segregation was firmly entrenched 20 years after the Supreme Court's ruling. Again, a powerful social struggle was required to bring words to life.

The U.S. legal system today is hardly—and has never been—the fair and neutral arbiter that its supporters claim. As left-wing attorney William M. Kunstler observed, "The law is nothing other than a method of control created by a socio-

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Labor Briefing

Stella D'Oro strikers return to work

Marty Goodman reports from New York: Strikers at the Stella D'Oro bakery in the Bronx received a favorable ruling from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on June 30. The NLRB ordered the company to "bargain in good faith" and to allow strikers to return to work under the old contract. Accordingly, on July 7, the workers resumed work.

However, the 10-month-old strike by 136 workers is not over. The Stella D'Oro strikers are encouraged by developments but remain determined to win a new contract. And they are resolved to fight company threats to sell the plant. The Stella D'Oro Strike Support Committee is organizing more pickets and boycott activities.

The Stella D'Oro workers are members of Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain-Millers International Union. For more information, see Stelladorostrike2008.org.

Casting workers challenge Wells Fargo

Dave Bernt reports from Chicago: Over 80 members of UE Local 1174 in Moline, Ill., are taking on banking giant Wells Fargo in an effort to save their jobs. The UE members work for Quad City Die Casting. The company recently lost its normal line of credit from Wells Fargo, which it needs for daily operations. Wells Fargo was the recipient of a \$25 billion bailout from the federal government.

On June 23 workers in 20 cities took part in a national day of action in solidarity with the Quad City Die Casting workers. Trade unionists, Jobs with Justice, and community organizations throughout the country held rallies outside of Wells Fargo branches, chanting, "You got bailed out, we got sold out!" In Chicago, UE Local 1110 members who participated in the successful Republic Windows and Doors occupation rallied with their Local 1174 sisters and brothers.

NUHW homecare workers vs. SEIU

Fresno, Calif., homecare providers have filed a formal complaint with the California Public Employees Relations Board exposing extensive violations committed by SEIU in a recent representation election. The homecare workers are supporters of the National Union of Health Care Workers (NUHW), which was formed when the SEIU international undemocratically put into trusteeship the California statewide health-care local United Healthcare Workers West (UHW). The local's leadership was expelled and formed NUHW with the goal of building a militant, democratic union. NUHW has sought representation at several UHW shops.

The June 19 representation election for the Fresno homecare providers resulted in an official victory for SEIU of 2938-2705. However, the complaint by NUHW supporters details how SEIU used organizers to physically intimidate homecare providers and NUHW organizers, erroneously claiming that if workers voted for NUHW they would lose health-care coverage, wages and even their jobs. They also state that SEIU used a county manager with supervisory powers over homecare workers to visit workers homes to urge them to vote for SEIU, among other charges.

Regardless of these charges, the actual result of the election is still in doubt; as many as 400 ballots have still not been counted. NUHW supporters have vowed to continue their fight for the right to choose their own union representation.

Financial & transit crisis turns deadly

Bill Onasch reports: It wasn't supposed to be possible. Nine dead, 80 injured when one Metro train rear-ended another in Washington. The DC Metro is fully equipped with computerized Automatic Train Control designed to prevent such catastrophe.

One thing I learned driving a bus for 14 years is that the reflex response in transit management to any accident is to blame the operator. The operator of the moving train could not defend herself—she was fatality one. Fully prepared to speak ill of the dead an anonymous management source told the *Washington Post* the night of the tragedy,

"It doesn't look like she hit the brakes," said a train safety expert, who asked not to be identified because the crash is under investigation. "That's why you have an operator in the cab. She should have been able to take action. That's what they're there for."

But by the next day it had to be acknowledged that as soon as "novice" operator Jeanice McMillan realized to her horror that the Automatic mode was taking her at 59 miles-per-hour toward a train stopped around a curve she desperately hit the emergency brakes. She didn't try to jump to save herself; paid the princely wage of 18.20 per hour she stayed on duty to the end. ...

Failed computer circuits, inadequate brakes, and poorly designed rolling stock appear to be the primary factors that came together to cause the worst accident in Metro history. The first two factors may well be connected to "deferred maintenance" so common in cash-strapped transit agencies. ...

The *New York Times* reported, "...federal safety officials had [three years ago] warned that the Washington train cars could be unsafe in crashes, and called for them to be

replaced, or at least strengthened. Transit officials there said they could not afford to replace the cars, which make up more than a quarter of their rolling stock, and added that they were obliged to keep them in service until 2014 because of the terms of a complicated tax shelter."

We wrote last fall about these scams that became quite common among transit, and other public sector bodies. The authorities sell their trains and buses to banks and then lease them back. The banks get to deduct depreciation and other charges for the equipment—something public agencies that don't pay taxes can't do.

Most of these schemes were insured by AIG. When that giant, now "nationalized," collapsed, the banks demanded many transit agencies—including the Washington Metro—pay the total owed for the balance of the deal immediately or else find another AAA-rated insurer. With some nudging from the courts, deals were negotiated by most to dodge the bullet. The Metro had to pay 14 million in penalties. Under the present rules they are obligated to maintain the bank tax shelters for another five years.

The same *Times* article says, "More than a third of the equipment in the nation's seven largest rail transit agencies was rated in marginal or poor condition by the Federal Transit Administration this spring. Replacing all the equipment that has exceeded its useful life and finishing all outstanding station rehabilitations for just those seven large systems would cost roughly \$50 billion, the agency estimated, and keeping the systems in a state of good repair after that would cost an estimated \$5.9 billion a year. By contrast, the \$787 billion stimulus law contains only \$8.4 billion for transit capital improvements across the nation."

Capital equipment expansion or replacement is not the only challenge. Gridlock and soaring fuel prices led to an explosion of transit ridership in recent years. But operating funds to keep workers on the job and buses and trains running and maintained have declined because of the crisis.

Only 10 percent of the meager transit stimulus package can be used for operating expenses. Most agencies have sharply curtailed service and some have laid off workers. ...

All this comes at a time when we sorely need to greatly expand transit if we are serious about tackling global warming. But as transit crumbles dangerously, Congress offers Cash for Clunkers—to buy new cars. Last month, the White House urged Congress to stop considering a \$500 billion transportation bill in committee and instead continue present funding levels until after the 2010 Congressional election. ■

See Bill Onasch's full article at kclabor.org.

Solidarity with the Iranian people! U.S. hands off Iran!

Olivier Laban-Mattei / AFP / Getty Images



A statement by the Political Committee of Socialist Action (June 23, 2009)

1) A division in the ruling elite has opened up the way for an explosion of discontent with the reactionary clerical capitalist regime in Iran. The massive mobilizations clearly reflect the deep hatred of the government by the masses.

Even the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Ali Larijani, a leading conservative, has declared that a majority of Iranians are convinced that the June 12 presidential election results were invalid. The fact that the official victor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was credited with a score similar to his victory in 2005 did not provide any credibility; in that year and in the previous parliamentary elections the opposing faction largely boycotted the vote because its candidates had been rejected by the Council of Guardians—that is, they were denied the right to participate in the elections.

The arguments of some commentators in the West that only or primarily the upper class supports the mass protests against the officially declared election results are clearly false. Mass demonstrations have been held in the poorer, working-class southern districts of Tehran as well as the north. These protests have obviously been an outpouring of discontent of the general population with an undemocratic and oppressive regime. In no country and at no time in history have privileged sections of the population defied murderous repression in the streets.

2) There is no clear difference between the two major candidates, Ahmadinejad and Mir Hossein Mousavi. Both represent factions of the ruling bourgeois elite, divided only by competing ambitions and perhaps by tactical differences (although even this is unclear.). Both support the continuation of the present theocratic regime.

The June 12 presidential elections offered no real choice. The theocratic bourgeois rulers would not allow any candidate opposed to the continuation of the present system to enter the election. Only four of about of 400 nominated candidates were permitted to run.

Thus, Mousavi was also vetted by the authorities of the present system. He has in the past served as prime minister of the Islamic Republic and as such assumed responsibility for its repressive policies. It is simply because he offered a legal cover for expressing opposition to the present regime that he has emerged, at least in part and momentarily, as a symbolic leader of the mass movement. The extent of Mousavi's control of the opposition movement or whether he will be able to maintain leadership are far from clear.

The previous experience with the "liberal reformer" president, Khatami, who collapsed when the reactionary clerics clamped down, was deeply demoralizing for the masses who wanted a change. He is now a supporter of Mousavi. The outcome of the

Khatami period also made it clear that the Iranian president had no real power, that the real power was vested in the "Supreme Leader," Ayatollah Khamenei. It is he who has issued the orders for suppressing the protests. But he is unelected by the people and has little personal credibility. His decision to mobilize the repressive forces to crush the demonstrations inevitably tends to turn the movement against the Islamic Republic as such.

3) It is in the interests of the Western bourgeoisie, who claim to rule on the basis of democracy in their own countries, to identify themselves publicly with the movement for democratic rights in Iran. But that does not mean that they really think that it would be in their interests for the movement to win. There have been a number of indications, most egregiously by the head of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, that they think that it will be more difficult for them to deal with the threat that Iran represents to their interests if the country is headed by a less discredited regime.

In any case, the more intelligent U.S. leaders, represented by President Obama, have acknowledged that the U.S. has little credibility in Iran, especially because of its role in overthrowing the elected government of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, and installing the repressive dictatorship of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Shah's military shot down 50,000 Iranians who were peacefully demonstrating against his rule and brutally tortured and murdered tens of thousands opposed to his regime. The attempts of Republican Party politicians to wrap themselves in the mantle of the Iranian protesters are clearly a self-interested domestic political ploy and only make them look ridiculous.

4) Socialist Action defends the mass struggle in Iran against the government's violent repression, and we wholeheartedly support the demands of the Iranian people for democratic rights. We encourage the masses to organize themselves in their own interests and to not trust or subordinate themselves to any bourgeois politician or representative of the ruling elite.

The present struggle shows the essential fallacy of bourgeois elections. This is a process the masses cannot control. They need to trust in their own organizations, in which they can participate and control. The rise of shoras (popular councils) in the 1979 revolution was an example that needs to be followed and taken further.

Khamenei's claim that the elections were a glorious victory of the Iranian people is an outrage—especially when his own henchman, Larijani, says that most Iranians think they were a farce and hundreds of thousands of Iranians have shown a determination to denounce them in the face of threats of mass repression. It disastrously discredits the regime. We call for the people insulted by Khamenei's claim to reject the entire process, and to find ways to express their real aspirations.

Since the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution, the workers have been denied any right to organize themselves and to fight for their demands. Democratic rights are an essential demand for them, and it runs counter to the fundamental objectives of the Iranian capitalist class and the imperialists, who remain its big brothers, despite their demagogic pretences.

Socialist Action stands on the side of the masses. We know that there can be no socialism unless the masses and the workers have the freedom to express themselves.

5) The attempts of the dominant clerical faction to demonize the protests as manipulated by foreigners or pro-imperialists are obviously self-interested demagoguery. But it is nevertheless certain that the United States and other imperialist states will seek opportunities to exploit or intervene in the present conflict—including taking possible military action.

Iran is surrounded by U.S. military bases, and there is abundant evidence that plans have been drawn up for aggression against Iran. It is an open secret that the U.S. has covert military teams operating in the country, even if so far only in remote frontier areas among marginalized ethnic groups.

Nothing could be more deadly to the aspirations of the Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands than U.S. intervention. For that reason, the primary task of socialists, progressives, and friends of democracy in the United States, the imperialist state that bears the principal responsibility for the miseries of the Iranian people, is to

expose, denounce, and mobilize against any attempt by the U.S. government to intervene in Iran.

Clearly, the Iranian government's ruthless repression of the mass movement demanding democratic rights increases the threat of U.S. intervention. Such policies will inevitably deepen divisions among the Iranian people. The best and ultimately the only effective defense of the gains of the Iranian Revolution and of the sovereignty of the Iranian people is the unity of the masses of the country behind a leadership that is prepared to once again mobilize in the millions to challenge and provide a real revolutionary and socialist alternative to the present repressive clerical capitalist state. ■

... Judge Sotomayor

(continued from page 5)

economic system determined, at all costs, to perpetuate itself by all and any means necessary, for as long as possible."

The belief in some court-appointed savior is a self-delusion. Real change results from the hard work of political organizing in communities, unions, social movements, and the society as a whole. The courts protect the overall interests of the ruling class. That this class consists largely of white males is entirely to the point. So, despite 17 years on the bench, including 11 years on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, a Latina woman nominated to the Supreme Court must still pass a loyalty test to prove that her heart and mind align, not with her gender or ethnic group, but with the rich and powerful men the law was created to serve. Her judicial record must show that she will not be particularly friendly to women, Latinos, or the working class.

Since Obama presented Judge Sotomayor as his nominee, all her public statements and the statements of her political allies have gone to placating the fears of the right. Senator Patrick Leahy (Dem.-Vt.), the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, quoted her as saying to him "as a judge you follow the law' ... And she said, 'ultimately and completely' a judge has to follow the law no matter what their upbringing has been" (*The New York Times*, June 3, 2009).

The democratic ideal of "equality before the law" is all too often undermined by the reality of social inequality. Justice, willfully blind, fails to see the effects of poverty and discrimination and fails to weigh the consequence of oppression and opportunity denied. The rhetoric of equality, loudly proclaimed by every politician of the ruling-class parties, justifies and perpetuates a society founded on inequality, and on ethnic and class oppression. ■

... Mass protests shake Iranian clerical regime

(continued from page 1)

two-thirds of the population (the announced majority of the government candidate, Ahmadinejad) do not support it. If the government had that kind of support it would not need the massive and ruthless repression it is mobilizing.

Furthermore, it would have nothing to lose in calling a run-off election, whereas it has a lot to lose by brutally repressing and demonizing the protests against election results that masses of Iranians are convinced were faked.

The two principal arguments advanced by the opposition that the election results were faked is the rapidity with which the results were announced and the fact that Ahmadinejad's vote was the same everywhere, without any regional variation. That argument puts in question any attempt to try to assess what Ahmadinejad's real base is.

Supporters and apologists of the regime claim that the popular layers voted for him, and only the middle class voted for Moussavi and the other opposition candidates. But the protest demonstrations in Tehran obviously brought out a broad spectrum of the population, and they were held in south Tehran, historically the poorer section of the city, as well as in the north, where the middle class is centered.

Some defenders of Ahmadinejad have argued that he was more popular than Moussavi among the poor because the opposition candidate favored privatization of the economy. However, the quotes from debates between Moussavi and Ahmadinejad cited on internet blogs focused on the question of inflation.

Moussavi did make some bows in the direction of an increased role for private enterprise. But Evrand Abraminian, a scholar who has written on recent Iranian history, said in an interview with the Israeli daily *Haaretz* of June 27: "Moussavi was able to reach the classes who supported Ahmadinejad for populist reasons. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the gap between rich and poor in Iran actually narrowed, because Moussavi—who was prime minister at the time—initiated price controls and was responsible for nationalization. It's no coincidence that many on the left supported him. The trade unions support him too."

"He cannot be called leftist or socialist, as several articles have described him, but rather a statist."

In any case, it is unlikely that Moussavi's nods in the direction of private enterprise discredited him in the eyes of the poor since the economy has deteriorated so disastrously under Ahmadinejad and the incumbent president has failed notoriously to improve the standard of living of the masses. Moreover, privatization has been going on rapidly already under Ahmadinejad. No components of the clericalist regime have ever had an anti-capitalist discourse.

The fact is that inflation is the curse of oil-based economies. The oil income provides a lot of money for subsidies, but unless it is used for productive projects it simply feeds inflation that undermines the development of the economy in general.

As long as Iran remains a capitalist state, without a planned economy or state monopoly of foreign trade, it is inevitable that populist subsidies will be abandoned and that the nationalized enterprises will eventually be re-

absorbed into capitalist business.

It is true that the elite military corps of the government, the Revolutionary Guard, has extensive economic interests that it may consider better defended by Ahmadinejad. But it is unclear how much the Guard's control of enterprises is actually public control or how it is viewed by the masses.

Growing disillusionment

The determination of the protesters in the face of an unyielding regime has indicated a deep disillusionment with the institutions of the Islamic Republic, despite the attempts of their nominal leader, Mir Hossein Moussavi, to keep his opposition within the framework of the established system. In fact, Moussavi in his time as prime minister presided over repression of opponents of the regime. He could only run for president after being approved by the Council of Guardians as loyal to the Islamic Republic.

But Moussavi's candidacy offered a

The brutal suppression of mass protests and the totalitarian style of the state-controlled media weakens Iran against imperialism.

legal cover for all shades of discontent with the status quo, and as the protests continued despite the intransigence of the conservative majority in the ruling clerical institutions, they have tended to radicalize. The most obvious symptom of that is the chants of "down with the dictator" that became prevalent after the supreme authority of the theocratic state, Ayatollah Khamenei, had pronounced that the election results were "a divine victory" that it was treason to question.

An Iranian reporter, Azadeh Moaveni, wrote in the June 19 British *Guardian* that the recent revolt had been brewing for a long time. Ahmadinejad was originally popular because of his defiance of Western sanctions against Iran's nuclear program. But his popularity faded with a catastrophic increase in inflation (now 26 percent) and the deepening of a repressive atmosphere: "The economic downturn began turning people against the president, but his fate was sealed when he reintroduced the molesting social controls...."

"Late that summer [2007], authorities launched a full-scale campaign of intimidation against young people they accused of un-Islamic appearance. Within a few short weeks, police detained 150,000 people, and all the women in my life went out to buy the shapeless, long coats that we had worn back in the late 1990s."

"Though the campaign targeted young men as well, authorities singled out women with particular brutality. The government's disdain for women increased by the day. Though Iranians fretted about the impact of Western sanctions, the government turned its attention to a bill that would facilitate



(Above) Police officer attacks a man near Tehran University, June 14.

polygamy. Soon after, it announced a plan that would supposedly solve Iran's marriage crisis. It called the scheme 'semi-independent marriage', and it amounted to a hollow version of the institution that would secure men legal and piously sanctioned sex, while denying women the security and social respectability of conventional marriage.

"On internet news sites and newspapers, women reacted scathingly. A girlfriend of mine, whose English classes had recently been segregated by gender, complained the government was imposing seventh-century rules on modern women. To add to Iranians' frustration, interminable queues accompanied the government's petrol rationing scheme, unveiled that summer. In the evenings it could take several hours to fill our car, and when our local petrol station was torched by rioters furious with the new plan, we stopped using the car."

Pictures of the demonstrations that came out of Iran over the internet have showed women playing a prominent role, in some cases boldly confronting the repressive forces.

An upsurge of labor organizing that began in recent years has been brutally repressed but apparently not stamped out. The most important of the new independent unions, Vahed, the Tehran bus drivers, issued a statement June 18 in support of the protests:

"As previously expressed in a statement published on-line in May of this year, since Syndicate Vahed does not view any of the candidates support the activities of the workers' organizations in Iran, it would not endorse any presidential candidate in the election. Vahed members nevertheless have the right to participate or not to participate in the elections and vote for their individually selected candidate."

"Moreover, the fact remains that demands of almost an absolute majority of the Iranians go far beyond the demands of a particular group. In the past, we have emphasized that until the freedom of choice and right to organize are recognized, talk of any social or particular right would be more of a mockery than a reality."

"The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company fully supports this movement of Iranian people to build a free and independent civil society and condemns any violence and oppression."

Vulnerability to imperialism

In the past, as Azadeh Moaveni described in the British *Guardian*, Ahma-

dinejad has been able to unite public opinion behind him as a spokesman of Iranian national pride. But it seems unlikely under the present circumstances that playing the nationalist, anti-imperialist card is going to have the same effect.

In fact, the brutal suppression of mass protests and the totalitarian-style intoxication of the state-controlled media weakens Iran as an anti-imperialist force and can make the country more vulnerable to imperialist attack. That is the possibility that socialists, democrats, and progressives have to be alert to, despite their revulsion at the brutality and undemocratic character of the Iranian regime.

The Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq was more brutal and repressive than the Iranian regime has yet been, but the imperialists were not welcomed as liberators but became the objects of almost universal hatred.

A columnist in the June 27 issue of *Dawn* warned: "The brutal nature of the Iranian leadership makes it easier for Israel to sell a pre-emptive attack to Washington, and for Obama to sell it to the American people. None of this can be good news for the Iranian people, who, while steeped in the lore of martyrdom, want to live normal, peaceful lives."

But an attack on Iran by the U.S. government would also be bad news for the American people, as the Iraqi fiasco makes evident. A war with Iran could be a far greater disaster. The Western capitalist regimes in normal times like to identify themselves with democracy (although when their system is threatened they can turn to dictatorial or even totalitarian means). But a U.S. intervention in Iran would produce even less democracy than it has in Iraq, where the result has actually been clericalist rule.

In fact, any U.S. intervention would be designed to forestall democratization rather than promote it. The 1979 revolution released a deep-going dynamic of social radicalization. The imposition of a clericalist regime froze it. But the present upsurge indicates that these processes have continued under the surface.

There is no way that the United States would want a resumption of the Iranian workers, peasants, and popular revolution of 1979, and there is hardly any limit to what it would do to head it off. ■

... Antiwar

(continued from page 1)

far from what U.S. officials in Iraq have in mind. Deadly force levels are still a requirement for Iraq "stability." Indeed, the recent wave of bombings could well provide yet another pretext, along with the original claims of "Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and "collaboration with the Taliban in the 9/11 bombings," to justify the continuation of the occupation force.

In addition, 150,000 or more U.S.-paid American mercenaries of every variety continue their deadly deeds unimpeded, the largest privatized army in U.S. history. Last month's bipartisan Congressional "supplementary" appropriation of almost \$100 billion for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars stands in sharp contrast to all assertions that stability and victory for the U.S. and its puppets is at hand.

American imperialism faces an insoluble dilemma in Iraq. It is hated by the vast majority of the population and the world's people for its near-genocidal superpower interventions (1.5 million have already been murdered since the first U.S. Persian Gulf War in 1991). And at the same time, enmeshed in the greatest U.S. and world economic crisis of the capitalist order since the Great Depression 80 years ago and challenged by its international capitalist competitors for access to and domination of the world's markets and resources, it has no exit strategy from Iraq or Afghanistan.

The U.S. is driven by the nature of its exploitative system to ever expanding wars and long-term occupations—today in Pakistan, where its dependent allies are threatened by their own peoples, and perhaps tomorrow in Iran, where the insurgent mass movement threatens to break out of the framework of clerical capitalist reaction and chart a new course independent of U.S. and world imperialist domination.

Indeed, the rise of the Iranian masses and the ongoing discrediting of all of the pre-selected candidates in the recent rigged elections pose a greater threat to U.S. imperialism than either of the Ahmadinejad or Moussavi pro-capitalist camps. Nevertheless, the Obama administration, initially understanding that U.S. threats against Iran or advice to its government regarding its conduct largely falls on deaf ears, was cautious in its approach, referencing Obama's rhetorical and deceptive Cairo speech as its new and "humane" guidepost.

The Iranian people have not forgotten the 1953 U.S.-sponsored coup that removed the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh government nor the U.S.-financed 10-year war waged against Iran by Iraq, when the latter was under the tutelage of the U.S. government. Two million Iranians and Iraqis died in that war.

U.S. officials are also mindful that on June 29 six of



(Left) Activists unload medical supplies in New York for the Viva Palestina convoy, aiming to break through Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza. The National Assembly also calls for an end to U.S. support to Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Iraq's largest oil field were up for auction to the world's oil giants. Iraq sits on the world's third largest oil reserves, after Saudi Arabia and Iran. Backed by the U.S. occupiers, there is little doubt that U.S. oil corporations will have the inside track against its imperialist competitors. Few have forgotten that among the first acts of the U.S. "victors" in 2003 was the tearing up of the oil contracts signed by the Saddam Hussein government with U.S. rivals in France, Russia, and elsewhere.

National Assembly conference in Pittsburgh

The second national conference of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations (National Assembly) comes at a propitious time, when the notion that the Obama administration would fulfill its promise of "change" is beginning to crumble against the reality of the policies implemented under his reign. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which are now Obama's wars, have been extended to Pakistan, and new threats of aggression and war have been added to the mix with Obama's belligerent stance toward Iran and North Korea.

The recent military coup in Honduras, with that nation's newly-elected president forced into exile, cannot be understood without factoring in the role of the U.S. military. U.S. military bases in Honduras have long been used as a launching point for U.S.-sponsored wars and interventions. The Honduran military has been historically armed, financed, and trained by the United States.

The National Assembly's July 10-12 conference in Pittsburgh is expected to draw over 200 leading antiwar activists from cities across the country. An ambitious nine-point Action Proposal has been prepared by the Assembly's Coordinating Body (CB) for the consideration of all attendees. One-person-one-vote will be the operative decision-making principle. Everyone opposed

to U.S. wars and occupations is welcome. The strategic and political goals of the National Assembly are a united and independent antiwar movement focused on mass mobilizations and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The National Assembly also calls for an end to U.S. support to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and support to the right of self-determination of all oppressed peoples and nations.

Tens of thousands of conference brochures have been distributed nationally to outline the conference's objectives and to solicit additional Action Proposals for the consideration of the Pittsburgh conference. Three lengthy plenary sessions are scheduled to discuss and debate all proposals and amendments presented to the conference, which will also elect a new National Assembly leadership to help implement the network's decisions.

The Coordinating Body's Action Proposal centers on a call for nationally coordinated local and regional antiwar actions on Oct. 17, a month that includes the dates of the beginning of the U.S. wars against Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the 40th anniversary of the massive antiwar mobilizations initiated by the Vietnam Moratorium in 1969. Leaders of the present Iraq Moratorium organization have joined with the National Assembly in calling for the Oct. 17 mobilization.

The CB's Action Proposal also includes the organization of a National Assembly "Out Now!" contingent in the Sept. 24-25 protests at the third G-20 summit meeting in Pittsburgh. Other prominent parts of the Action Proposal that will be discussed and debated include a coordinated week of student protests, a national speaking tour of prominent antiwar figures, the establishment of a Working Committee to "ensure that the antiwar movement stands in solidarity with the people of Palestine and integrates the issue of Palestine in the broader antiwar struggle," and the continuation of National Assembly efforts "to engage all organizations and constituencies ... in nationally coordinated mass demonstrations in selected sites, including Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the spring of 2010, the seventh year of the U.S. war on Iraq."

The Pittsburgh conference includes two important panel discussions and rallies where leading activists from many antiwar and social justice organizations are slated to present their views. Central leaders of the ANSWER Coalition and United for Peace and Justice will be active participants, along with representatives of Palestinian, Iraqi, and Iranian groups and individuals organizing against Washington's wars and threats of war.

Eighteen workshops covering a broad range of issues have been confirmed. In light of ongoing U.S. threats against Iran and developments in that country, the Iran workshop is expected to attract a large audience with a diverse range of opinions. The National Assembly has adopted a position of unconditional support to the fight of self-determination for the Iranian people and for "U.S. Hands Off Iran!"

Conference participants include leading labor and social activists, from the president of the South Carolina AFL-CIO, two leaders of the recent successful general strike in Guadeloupe, and leading social activists from Canada.

The July 10-12 conference is another important effort organized by the National Assembly aimed at re-building a national antiwar movement capable of uniting around clear "Out Now!" political demands in coordinated and massive national antiwar protests. These are a pre-condition for the organization of the kind of struggle necessary to halt present and future U.S. wars and re-order the nation's priorities in the interests of working people and their allies.

All Out for Pittsburgh, July 10-12! For further information, e-mail: natassembly@aol.com or check the National Assembly's website at natassembly.org. ■

Obama's wars

National Assembly organizers have taken note of the fact that Obama's large Democratic Party majority turned a blind eye to even a pretense of winding down the Afghanistan war when the House of Representatives in late June overwhelmingly rejected the recent McGovern amendment that posed so-called timelines for a U.S. withdrawal.

The Assembly demands the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, mercenaries, contractors and the dismantling of all U.S. bases, and has always rejected such "timelines" and other schemes to defuse antiwar sentiment and channel the movement into the framework of the two-party corporate system.

Obama's pre-election promise that Afghanistan was the real place to fight a war to "end terrorism" has become a bitter reality. It is a signal that more, not less, wars are to be expected from his administration.

Similarly, the promise of a serious health-care reform has been replaced with yet another bill to tax working people to the hilt while gifting the health-

care industrialists with proposals for mandatory coverage at working people's expense. Torture under another name remains government policy while the previous administration's torturers, from government officials to the executioners themselves, have been granted immunity from prosecution.

Trillions have been allotted to the banks and related ruling-class institutions, additional trillions to the military while working people increasingly suffer the effects of the capitalist crisis to a greater extent than at any time in the modern era.

The illusion that the Obama administration has signaled a significant shift away from Bush-era brutalities is slowly but steadily fading. That Obama has no choice but to represent the same corporate interests as his predecessor is a reality that is increasingly penetrating the consciousness of antiwar and social movement activists.

It is only a matter of time until the great expectations that millions had for the Obama White House, now steadily diminishing, will give way to a resumption of powerful mass movements that have the capacity to effectively challenge the U.S. corporate warmakers.

— J.M.

Canada's Afghan war comes home

TORONTO—The war of occupation in Afghanistan is coming home with a stunningly high incidence of spousal abuse, suicide attempts, assaults in bars and drunk driving by Canadian soldiers who survive one or more tours of duty. From privates to warrant officers, light-armoured-vehicle drivers to snipers, those with physical injuries and those without, the proportion suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is skyrocketing.

According to a Toronto *Star* study, at the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families, 170 km northwest of Ottawa, the military family caseload has soared from 12 in 2005 to 85 today, with 20 on the waiting list. The Centre is grappling with issues from bed wetting and aggression, to domestic violence, depression, and marital breakdown.

In the seven years the Canadian state has been part of the imperialist occupation of the mineral-rich, oil, and gas

crossroads of Afghanistan, 26,800 Canadians have been deployed and 120 have died. This is the most of any Canadian intervention since the Korean War. More than 400 have been injured by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, rocket attacks and direct combat. At least 1000 have suffered severe psychological trauma.

More than one in five Canadian soldiers and police officers who spend time in Afghanistan leave the force with psychiatric problems, a number that has rapidly risen in the last 12 months.

And this is to say nothing about the devastation caused to Afghanistan and its people. Nearly 8000 Afghan civilians have died from insurgent and foreign military action, 50 to 60 per cent killed directly by NATO forces. In addition, up to 20,000 Afghan civilians died as a consequence of displacement, starvation, disease, exposure, lack of medical treatment, crime and lawlessness resulting from the war.

The time has come to demand: Canada Out of NATO. NATO Out of Afghanistan. Now! — B.W.

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The never-ending drive for concessions by the big auto bosses is right back in the face of car workers at the Ford Motor Company of Canada. Canadian Auto Workers' President Ken Lewenza is deep in discussions with Joe Hinrichs, vice-president of global manufacturing and labour affairs for Ford. The automobile giant employs about 7000 workers at plants in Oakville, St. Thomas, and Windsor, Ontario.

Ford wants labour concessions comparable but not necessarily identical to those given by the union for some 20,000 GM and Chrysler workers in Canada. These will include, though not be limited to a freeze on wages and pensions, an extension of the two-tier wage structure, contracting out of some in-plant work, cuts to vacation time, and reduced benefits until 2012.

GM and Chrysler demanded concessions as a convenient condition to receive almost \$15 billion in loans from the federal and Ontario governments amid the industry's worst sales slump in decades. Ford asked for up to \$2 billion in a line of credit last December, but later withdrew the request. Still, it demands the rollbacks to 'remain competitive'.

When the next deal is done, Ford auto-workers will be asked by the CAW tops to ratify it. Anyone paying attention can see that this has nothing to do with 'economic recovery', and has everything to do with lowering workers' living and work standards, and raising profit margins, for the anticipated post-depression period.

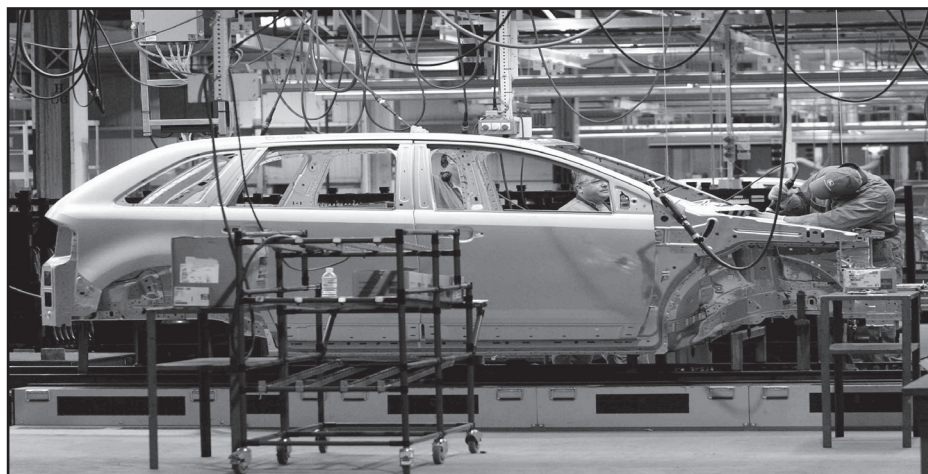
This pattern is now evident in numerous disputes, from strikes involving rail-

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Bosses' drive for concessions can be stopped —

Ford workers must say NO!



Ford plant in Oakville, near Toronto. Like GM & Chrysler, Ford now seeks a wage freeze and other givebacks.

way car builders in Hamilton to civic employees in Windsor and Toronto to newspaper workers in Montreal. Windsor city workers have been on picket lines for over 10 weeks as of early July.

Toronto's 24,000 inside workers and 6200 outside workers, including garbage collectors, walked off the job on June 22. The strike was provoked by city bosses who insist on clawing back long standing sick leave benefits and seniority rights, and on providing a lower pay raise than the city gave several other a

groups of municipal workers. These anti-concessions strikes are a crucial test of wills that labour cannot afford to lose.

Yet another battle taking shape is at the Globe and Mail newspaper, where union members voted 97 per cent in favour of a strike. The Globe workers could be out soon because management is seeking to reduce the wages of 30 per cent of the

staff, and to cut up to 50 per cent in pension benefits for future retirees.

While officials at the Canadian Labour Congress and its major affiliates limply campaign to 'fix E.I.', 'protect pensions' and 'put people before banks', a more proactive struggle to reject backward steps and to make capital pay for its crisis is sorely needed.

One positive sign now comes from members of Air Canada's technical, maintenance, and operational support unit. On June 30 the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers announced that its largest Air Canada bargaining unit voted 50.8 per cent to reject a deal reached in early June that would freeze pensions and wages for 21 months.

If Ford workers, who are in a stronger position than many on the economic battle front, say no to the latest round of concession demands, it would be a powerful indictment of the policies of the CAW leadership and might have an electrifying effect on the entire workers' movement. It could be a positive turning point. That is why socialists and militant unionists are campaigning for a clear and resounding "no" vote at Ford. ■

Breakthrough for NDP in Nova Scotia

Since the Atlantic Coast province of Nova Scotia joined Canadian Confederation in 1867, only the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties have held the reigns of government there. That changed on election night June 9 when the labour-based New Democratic Party emerged with 31 of 52 seats on the strength of 45.3 per cent of the votes cast. Voters reduced the PCs to 10 seats. The Liberals, with 11 seats, form the official Opposition. The turnout was at a record low of 58.8 per cent.

The first-ever NDP premier in Atlantic Canada, Darrel Dexter, a lawyer and former journalist, pledged to balance the budget, despite the global economic crisis. He also promised action on rising gas prices, health-care wait times and emergency room closings. Under Dexter, the party won 15 seats in 2003, and 20 seats in 2006. Prior to 1998, the NDP was mired in a distant third place.

The self-serving lesson NDP officials want everyone to draw from the breakthrough in Nova Scotia (population 940,000 in 2005) is that conservative, 'good government' promises and dogged electoral perseverance bring victory.

The truth is that working people in Nova Scotia, and across Canada, are

looking for something better. Otherwise, they would have replaced Rodney MacDonald's Tories with Stephen McNeil's Liberals, as they have done so often in the past. Keep in mind that the conservative policies of the British Columbia NDP helped to re-elect the right wing B.C. Liberal government of Gordon Campbell in mid-May.

The Nova Scotia election result challenges the claim that voters are turning to the right everywhere. But the question remains: what will the NSNDP do with this victory? If it makes Capital pay for the crisis created by big business and the banks, the NDP will win the admiration and support of the working class and poor. If, like the treacherous Bob Rae-led NDP government in Ontario 1990-1995, it places the burden of 'recovery' on the shoulders of workers, women, youth and the unemployed, it will leave little behind other than wrecked public services and a very bad taste.

Another important lesson from the Ontario Rae-days is that labour and the social movements should not give the Dexter team a honeymoon of any duration. Now is the time to press Nova Scotia's first NDP government to tax the rich and move quickly to provide jobs, housing, and decent incomes for all who need them.

Rally shows need to step up labour action



Heather J. Walker

While CBC-TV fatuously reported that only 500 demonstrated, in fact nearly 2000 people rallied and marched on June 13 in downtown Toronto at the call of the regional labour council to demand "Good Jobs For All" and to Fix E.I., Protect Pensions, Strengthen Public Services, and Put People Before Banks.

After a selection of labour activists addressed the crowd at Metro Hall, the assembly paraded through the financial district, concluding in a rally outside the Delta Chelsea Hotel, the scene of a bitter labour dispute with hotel management.

The only party banner that expressed political slogans directed specifically to the current economic crisis and which offered socialist solutions was that of Socialist Action. The SA banner read: "No Corporate Bail-out! Make Capital Pay for the Crisis. Nationalize Auto, Steel & Big Banks—Under Workers' Control!"

Meanwhile, the local labour scene is heating up. Toronto is presently seized by a major civic workers' strike. Workers barricaded entrances to an auto parts manufacturing plant slated to close in Ajax, east of Toronto, demanding severance pay and salaries owed.

The need to step up the struggle against the employers' offensive on a wide scale, and indeed, to put the failed system of global capitalism on trial is sharply posed. That is precisely what the NDP Socialist Caucus endeavors to do at the federal NDP convention in Halifax in mid-August.

— B.W.

Who's calling the shots for Iggy and the Liberals?

What's behind the ignominious retreat of Michael Ignatieff? The federal Liberal Leader backed off the threat to cause an election this summer over the lack of job creation and access to unemployment insurance. And he voted for the corporate bail-out budget of the federal Tory minority government in January.

We got a behind the scenes glimpse of how the Canadian elite exert their power thanks to the well-connected federal Conservative Minister of Natural

Resources, Lisa Raitt. It comes from the secret recording by her aide in which Raitt famously describes the shortage of medical isotopes as "sexy" and as politically advantageous to her career.

According to Toronto *Star* columnist Linda McQuaig, who quoted from the tape, Raitt describes how three major bank presidents stood up at a meeting of the Canadian Council of (Chief) Executives in January and said, "Ignatieff, don't you even think about bringing us to an election. We don't need this. We have no inter-

est in this. And we will never fund your party again."

While Raitt was not at the meeting, she suggested that she may have heard the account from CEOs who claimed that Ignatieff was forced to tow the line. And what was that line?

The bankers were keen to have Parliament pass the Conservative budget, which included a measure called the Extraordinary Financing Framework that provided banks with up to \$200 billion in loans and asset swaps. Once again, the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie prevails over bourgeois democracy.

— B.W.

Sri Lanka wages war of annihilation against Tamil national rights

By GERRY FOLEY

The scope and ruthlessness of the Sri Lankan government assault on the independent Tamil areas made it evident that the campaign was not simply aimed against the Tamil Tigers. Some 300,000 Tamils are still being held in concentration camps.

An AP dispatch reported May 26: "A military-sponsored tour for journalists to a small corner of the camp revealed scenes of heartbreak and misery among the 200,000 displaced crammed into the vast tent city hastily constructed on scrub land. Tens of thousands more war-displaced people are scattered in smaller camps near Vavuniya, which used to be the army's northern garrison on the edge of the territory ruled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The United Nations says together the camps house nearly 300,000 internally displaced people in wretched conditions."

The dispatch continued: "The Sri Lankan military has refused to release the internal refugees, saying they must be screened to weed out any Tamil rebels who may be hiding among them. Access for international aid agencies has been restricted for the same reason."

"Many told reporters about relatives taken away for questioning who so far have not returned. 'They are calling most of the Tamils LTTE [Tamil Tigers],' said a man who identified himself as Seevalingam, a former worker at the hospital at Killinochchi, once the rebel capital. He feared the displaced masses would be held here a long time."

The June 11 issue of *The Economist*, the leading journalistic voice of British capital, hailed the destruction of the Tamil Tigers, but expressed worry that the Sinhalese chauvinist triumphalism of the Sri Lankan government leader would perpetuate the conflict: "The president also harked back to ancient Sinhalese martial heroes. Marking victory with plans to build stupas [Buddhist monuments, often containing relics] all over the mainly Buddhist country, and relishing songs, posters and newspaper articles hailing him as a 'king,' Mr Rajapaksa seems to be cultivating the image of an elected monarch. In particular, he likes to recall Dutugemunu, a famous warrior-king of the second century BC, who defeated Elara, a Tamil usurper from India."

The alienation of the Tamils (about 20 percent of the 21 million total population of the country) has a very long history. The British colonial government did its part to inflame communal conflicts. With the onset of



Sri Lankan independence, bourgeois politicians basing themselves on Sinhalese chauvinism began an assault on the Tamils.

The first discriminatory legislation was adopted by the Sri Lankan government in 1948. It stripped the Tamils imported as plantation workers of citizenship, creating a mass of stateless persons. The moves against the so-called estate Tamils reduced the Tamil population from 33 percent to 20 percent and gave the Sinhala parties a two-thirds majority in parliament. The government subsequently tried to expel the estate Tamils from the country.

The Tamil population is in fact multilayered. One layer is descended from Tamils who have lived in Sri Lanka since prehistoric times. Another layer are the laborers imported by the British plantation owners. Most Tamils are Hindus, as opposed to the Sinhalese, who are Buddhists. But there are also many Muslims and Christians. Basically, the religious divide is that the Sri Lankan Tamils are not Buddhists. (The Sri Lankan Buddhist com-

munity became isolated by the waning of Buddhism on the Indian subcontinent, and so the Sri Lankan Buddhists developed a sort of siege mentality.)

The next discriminatory legislation was the adoption of Sinhalese as the sole official language in 1956. (Sinhalese is a language of northern Indian origin, and therefore Indo-European; Tamil is a southern Indian language, and not Indo-European.) Protests organized by Tamil politicians were broken up by Sinhalese chauvinist mobs. Then in 1958, hundreds of Tamils were killed by Sinhalese mobs and 25,000 were forced to flee from Sinhalese majority areas.

The government adopted colonization schemes, trying to flood Tamil-majority areas with Sinhalese settlers. In the 1970s, the Sri Lankan government banned the importing of Tamil language materials from India, using the deceitful argument that this was a socialist policy designed to assure the economic self-sufficiency of the country. The Sinhala-only policy led to closing higher education and therefore civil service jobs to Tamil youth.

By 1973, the established Tamil political leaders began calling for a separate Tamil state. A bloc of Tamil parties was formed, the TULF, or Tamil Liberation Front. In 1976, it campaigned for a separate Tamil state. It won the election but was later banned.

In 1983, an armed struggle began for the establishment of a Tamil homeland in the northeast of the island. From 1987 to 1990 India maintained a "peace-keeping" force in the area of conflict, which attempted to disarm and put down the Tamil resistance movement. But India was unable to end the civil war, in which 80,000 people have been killed.

The war against the Tamil people caused desperation, especially among the Tamil youth, and promoted the rise of an armed organization, the Tamil Tigers, that was often ruthless in its tactics. The Sri Lankan government and the major capitalist powers cited the armed struggle of the Tigers as an excuse for isolating them as a "terrorist" organization. But they did nothing to address the desperation of the Tamil people that created them.

All defenders of democratic and human rights must condemn the Sri Lankan government's war of extermination and its chauvinist intoxication against the Tamil independence movement. The fact that Sri Lanka is a third-world country cannot be used as an argument against denouncing the actions of its government. Humanity is one. The violation of the human rights of any people lowers the level of civilization for everyone. ■

U.S. court rejects Kevin Cooper appeal

By REBECCA DORAN

On May 11 innocent death-row prisoner Kevin Cooper lost his bid in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit for a rehearing en banc of crucial evidence that would have exposed a decades-old police frameup and set Cooper on the path to freedom from California's San Quentin State Prison.

Up to 28 judges of the 9th Circuit Court can vote on an en banc (or full panel) hearing application, and Cooper just barely failed to receive a majority in his favor. Dissents published by the court reveal that at least 11 justices were in favor of a rehearing, and one judge suggested that the vote was even narrower, as not all dissenting judges signed the published opinions.

The decision was a blow to Cooper and his supporters, who have passionately rallied for his release, but the 114-page decision is also a powerful testament to the overwhelming evidence that Kevin Cooper, a Black man, is the victim of a racist police frame-up.

The court mulled over Cooper's application for more than 500 days and was petitioned in March by the state of California to expedite its decision to uphold or overturn the 2007 ruling that denied Cooper a new day in court. A rehearing of Cooper's case would have exposed at least six violations of his constitutional rights regarding exculpatory evidence that had been withheld from Cooper by the prosecution. Further, a mounting hill of evidence that three white men were responsible for the 1983 murders would have set police and prosecutors on the defensive.

The move by California to pressure the

court was an obvious tactic to clear legal hurdles that could delay the issuance of a death warrant as the state moves closer to lifting its court-ordered moratorium on executions. The temporary suspension of executions was ordered after San Quentin executioners botched the December 2005 execution of Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and death-row inmate, Stanley Tookie Williams. California officials are working to reinstate the death penalty on the grounds that a new method of injecting a lethal cocktail into inmates is more "humane."

The 9th Circuit decision to deny Cooper a rehearing was issued with four separate lengthy dissents against the official decision. The most notable of the dissents was written by Judge Fletcher, who opened his opinion with the line, "The State of California may be about to execute an innocent man." The following 105 pages of dissenting opinions detail the mangled police investigation, evidence of a frame-up, and the failure of the courts to provide Cooper a fair day in court.

Cooper has now exhausted his appeals in the lower courts and his next and possibly final legal step will be to petition the U.S. Supreme Court. It should be noted that the high court upholds the vast majority of decisions against death-row inmates. If the high court denies Cooper's appeal, he will join a growing number of California inmates who will be moved, one after another, to a segregated death holding cell where the lifting of the moratorium will signal their move to the execution chamber. This places incredible weight on Kevin Cooper supporters and the anti-death penalty movement to mobilize the worldwide movement that halted Cooper's February 2004 sched-

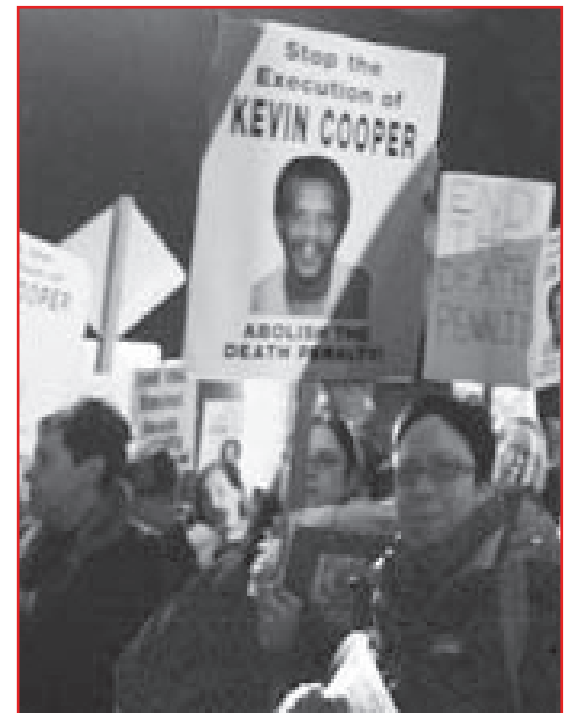
uled execution.

Socialist Action has long defended Kevin Cooper's struggle for freedom and has helped expose the overwhelming evidence of a frame-up that was detailed in the dissenting opinions in the 9th Circuit decision.

Cooper supporters point to important issues such as the fact that the lone surviving victim of the massacre stated that three white men had killed his family. A police log from the night of the murder shows the victims' car being driven away from the scene by three white men. A spot of blood, which police claim is Cooper's, was found at the crime scene. The police lab tested this evidence under suspicious circumstances, and altered its records when results seemed to favor Cooper. This same spot of blood has been completely exhausted in testing, but somehow keeps replenishing itself for new tests.

Police also destroyed exculpatory evidence, such as a pair of bloody coveralls owned by a local man who was a murderer-for-hire, and a bloody t-shirt that could have freed Cooper from these charges decades ago. Further, a California inmate confessed to committing these crimes with two other men. However, this inmate recanted his confession after receiving pressure from the prosecution.

A quick search on socialistaction.org will lead the reader to a list of articles that go into greater detail about the frame-up and Cooper's struggle for abolition of the racist death penalty and release from prison. It is crucial that the movement



to defend Cooper's struggle for justice raise the important demand to free him. The fundamental issue of the abolitionist movement is to stop executions, but Cooper supporters should not stop there. Stopping his execution but accepting life in prison without parole for this innocent man would be a betrayal of basic human morality.

Cooper's supporters should create a mass-action-oriented, democratic movement with open arms to every layer of society that seeks to end the death penalty and free Kevin Cooper. For more information on how to get involved in the Cooper case, contact the author at rebecca_doran@yahoo.com, or call (415) 264-6622. Kevin Cooper can be reached by mail at Kevin Cooper C65304 - 4-EB-82, San Quentin Prison, San Quentin, CA 94974. ■

FATHER GERARD JEAN-JUSTE: A HAITIAN HERO DIES

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

By MARTY GOODMAN

MIAMI—Haitian human-rights activist Father Gerard Jean-Juste passed away on May 27, leaving thousands—perhaps millions—who knew and loved him heart-broken, myself included. Jean-Juste died of a stroke and leukemia. He was 62.

Known simply as “Gerry” to his many friends and supporters, he was a tireless community organizer for refugee rights and democratic rights in Haiti. I worked with Gerry while I lived in Miami in 1979-1986, years of intense struggle for the Haitian community. Gerry shook up Miami’s conservative political climate like no one else.

Rules Jean-Bart, a long time Miami Haitian activist told *Socialist Action*, “Gerry gave a voice to the Haitian movement.”

Beginning in Miami in the late 1970s, Juste-Juste led so many demonstrations that many remember him bullhorn in hand. Jean-Juste, along with a collective of Haitian leftists called “Konbite Liberte” (Working together for freedom), denounced U.S. immigration policy as racist and demanded “political asylum” for Haitian refugees.

The Reagan administration had declared Haitian refugees “economic,” not political, refugees, despite the abysmal human rights record of the Duvalier regime. In contrast, Miami’s Cuban exiles, mostly white and fervently anti-communist, were deemed “political” refugees and given automatic asylum and citizenship. Gerry coined the term “Black Boat people” to highlight the blatant double standard.

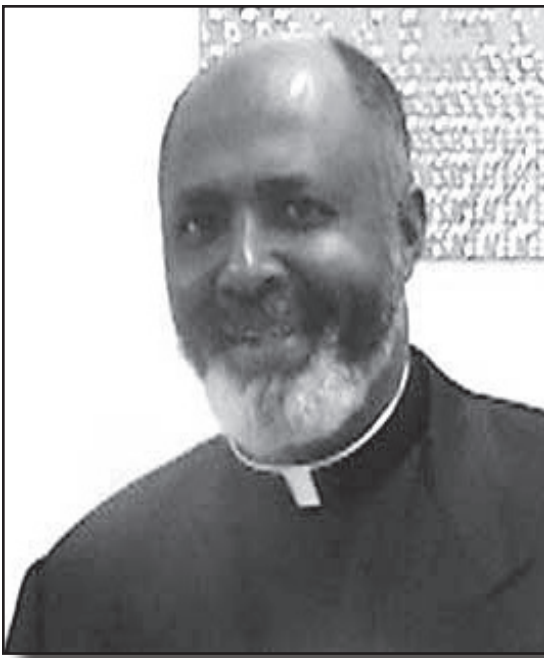
What’s more, Gerry never failed to link refugee demands with ending Washington’s decades-long support for the brutal family dictatorship of Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier (1971-1986), son of the notorious Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier (1957-1971).

For imperialism, granting Haitians political asylum would mean discrediting a loyal anti-communist ally. Haitians were making the journey to Miami in shark infested waters, in which hundreds, probably thousands, died. Refugees who made it to Miami were often deported back into the arms of Duvalier’s thugs, where many were jailed, tortured, and sometimes murdered as dissidents.

In 1980, Jean-Juste’s overtly political message got him into trouble as director of the Catholic Church-run Haitian Refugee Center (HRC). They tried to fire him. In response, the HRC was physically occupied for two weeks by Haitian activists. Finally, Gerry was reinstated. The HRC’s funding source changed to the left-of-center National Council of Churches, whose Haitian Refugee Project was then headed by Cuba activist Rev. Lucious Walker.

With help from New York radical attorney Ira Gollobin, the HRC acquired talented lawyers such as Ira Kurzban and Steve Forrester, both still active defending Haitian rights. They won many influential court battles. However, Gerry believed the political struggle—particularly mass mobilizations—framed all legal battles and created the conditions for a favorable court decision. The HRC’s politically astute attorneys agreed.

Early in the Reagan administration, an “interdiction” policy began in which U.S. Coast Guard vessels would seize Haitian refugee boats in international waters, in clear viola-



tion of U.S. and international refugee law. Refugees were given

(Above) Residents of Miami’s “Little Haiti” at funeral procession for Father Gerard Jean-Juste (at left).

farical asylum hearings in the middle of the Caribbean.

Reagan also began a long-term detention and deportation policy specifically designed to punish and exclude Haitians. Haitian refugees were placed in the Krome Detention Camp on the edge of South Florida’s everglades, left to languish in “legal limbo” for up to a year or more awaiting hearings. Many were deported anyway. In stark contrast, Cuban exiles intercepted under similar circumstances spent a brief time at Krome. They were quickly released into the custody of friends or family. None were deported.

Hunger strikes by Haitians at Krome were numerous; suicide attempts not uncommon. One Krome camp chief quit and denounced conditions there. Gerry led innumerable pickets at Krome and held as many press conferences. Some activists committed civil disobedience.

Rules Jean-Bart repeatedly met in Miami with a representative of the Reagan administration. “The fear of Gerry was very real. What was this guy going to do to our community? That would drive them crazy!” explained Jean-Bart. “They asked us what did Haitians want? We always said “refugee status” and they wouldn’t go for it.”

The fall of Duvalier

After a mass uprising forced Duvalier to flee Haiti on Feb. 7, 1986, Jean-Juste spent more time in Haiti. He joined with other proponents of “liberation theology” such as future President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Jean-Juste returned to Haiti before the election of Aristide in December 1990, whom he supported. Gerry was made head of the “10th Department,” the exile community.

Although extremely popular amongst the masses, Aristide did not have a revolutionary program. In 1994 and 2004, Aristide called on U.S. imperialism, not the masses, to rescue his regime from two CIA-backed military coups. A World Bank economic policy was imposed, which has meant deepening misery for the masses.

After both coups, Jean-Juste stayed in Haiti when most well-known Aristide supporters fled. “Gerry was fearless,” said Jack Lieberman, a long-time Miami activist and friend of Jean-Juste. Many Haitians wanted Gerry to run for president while Aristide was living abroad. It was assumed by everyone that he would win. He never decided.

In 2005, while in Miami, Gerry led many protests against the Brazilian military’s role in Haiti, which was helping

prop up a U.S.-backed dictator, Gerard La Tortue. Afterward, Gerry received threats on the radio, adding that he would be arrested in Haiti.

He soon went to Haiti anyway and was arrested on absurd charges of killing journalist Jacques Roche. He became an Amnesty International “prisoner of conscience. Jean-Juste was subjected to beatings and deprived of medical care. In jail, he was secretly diagnosed with leukemia by U.S. doctor Paul Farmer. After international protests he was released and flown to Miami for treatment.

When I last saw him in 2006 he looked great and had responded well to treatment. In the last few weeks of his life, however, he had fallen into a coma. Gerry’s funeral in Miami was attended by thousands from the “Little Haiti” community, his coffin taken on a symbolic procession back to where the former HRC had been on 54th St., now headquarters of Ve Ye Yo, an organization founded by Jean-Juste.

The real Father Jean-Juste

The bourgeois press and Haitian politicians would like to whitewash Jean-Juste’s legacy, as was done to Dr. Martin Luther King. Jean-Juste backed the struggle against the U.S.-supported Salvadoran military and opposed U.S. aid to the CIA-backed counter-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua.

Moreover, says Jack Lieberman, “Gerry never sought privileges. In Haiti, he lived with his sister, he didn’t have a car; the community gave him a car. Gerry didn’t have any money. When Aristide was in power, he never lived high off the hog. He never benefited materially in any way.” Said Jean-Bart, “Gerry’s time was the people’s time.”

Lieberman recalled for *Socialist Action*, “I’ll never forget a couple of years ago during the big student-worker protests in France, the biggest since May 1968. I went to where Gerry was staying at his sister’s house in Fort Lauderdale.

“Gerry was watching the protests on CNN. We both sat watching it and they showed people battling the police and shutting things down. Gerry was so happy to see French workers and students reclaiming their revolutionary heritage. Both of us were reminiscing about May ’68. He talked about how ’68 inspired progressive Haitians. We both really enjoyed it. We were both laughing. I’ll never forget it.”

Jean-Juste was buried in his hometown of Cavaillon, in the south. Goodbye Gerry, dear comrade and friend. Merci anpil. (Many thanks.) ■

... Honduras

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... it’s a legal matter,” said the State Department spokesman Ian Kelly. This is a primary consideration because the U.S., on making the determination that a coup has taken place, is required by its own laws to suspend all military and economic assistance to Honduras. The Obama administration is searching for a plausible legal argument to continue its long history of funding the Honduran military.

Honduras has long been a bastion of U.S. military might in Central America, as it was a staging ground for the Reagan-era Contra attacks on the Sandinista-led revolution in Nicaragua, and has long been a training ground for death-squads that operated in many places around Central and Latin America, including Honduras itself. Hundreds of Honduran military officers participate in the counter-insurgency training programs at the U.S. School of the Americas (nearly 1000 from 2005-07) and this relationship is one of the most extensive that the U.S. enjoys with any Latin American nation.

Moreover, the Pentagon has maintained a constant presence in the country, where its Joint Task Force Bravo for the Southern Command coordinates joint exercises with Central American militaries. The U.S. shares the Soto-Cano air base in Honduras with the Honduran air force. It is becoming increasingly clear that while

the U.S. government is working publicly to isolate the Micheletti regime—and endorsing similar efforts in the UN and the Organization of American States, it is privately setting terms on Zelaya’s return to power. Obama has notably declined to join in the call for Zelaya’s “unconditional” restoration to power, instead advocating “negotiations” with the coup-makers on the terms of the democratically-elected president’s return.

The *Guardian* newspaper in the UK published an article titled, “Does the US back the Honduran coup?” which observed, “the Obama administration claims that it tried to discourage the Honduran military from taking this action. ... Did administration officials say, ‘You know that we will have to say that we are against such a move if you do it, because everyone else will?’ Or was it more like, ‘Don’t do it, because we will do everything in our power to reverse any such coup?’ The administration’s actions since the coup indicate something more like the former, if not worse...”

The Mexico City daily *La Jornada* reported that representatives of the Obama administration warned the press that the negotiations will be “complicated” because they seek to resolve conflicts that have been festering in Honduras for some time prior to the coup. All of this indicates that the Obama administration intends above all to ensure that should Zelaya return to the presidency of Honduras, he will do so as a hostage of the military and the oligarchy, and at the mercy of the U.S. government that was responsible for restoring him.

The specific price for Zelaya’s return has been sug-

gested in recent reports that his defense minister had suggested a possible “peaceful arrangement” to the dispute in which Zelaya would be willing to drop plans of pursuing a rewrite of the constitution in return for serving out the remainder of his term—a mere six months.

Socialist Action condemns the coup d’etat in Honduras and stands in solidarity with the Honduran workers and farmers and their supporters in the broad masses as they wield the weapons of mass street mobilizations and the political mass strike to cripple the putschist government of Robert Micheletti and the Honduran bourgeoisie. We support the self-determination of the people of Honduras and completely oppose any attempt to “negotiate” with the coup-makers or any similar disguise that imperialism designs for what is only its imposition of a government on a sovereign nation.

The explosive situation in Honduras brings sharply into focus once more the crisis of leadership at this phase of the international workers movement. No eccentric bourgeois politician has the political wherewithal to lead the masses in a determined struggle against the class that is responsible for the depredation of the land, the exploitation of the workers, and the impoverishment of the broad masses. With every subsequent crisis, and every “symbolic” leader who finds him or herself momentarily surging on the might of the discontented masses, the need for a revolutionary socialist party becomes increasingly clear to the best fighters in Honduras, who mean to make a permanent break with their ruling elite. ■

Support the general strike in Honduras! Down with the Micheletti government!



By JAMES FRICKEY and CLAY WADENA

The following article reflects the views of the Political Committee of Socialist Action.

On June 28, the Honduran army deposed the elected president of that nation, Manuel “Mel” Zelaya, waking him in the dead of night, abducting him from his bed in the presidential palace, and expelling him to Costa Rica, where he held a press conference in his pajamas alerting the world to the coup. The army replaced Zelaya with the president of the Honduran Congress, Roberto Micheletti, a move that met with near-unanimous approval from the Congress and Supreme Court. The latter had “authorized” the coup as a legal measure taken in defense of the national constitution.

The coup-makers have acted in accord with the wishes of a Honduran oligarchy that is unified in its hatred for the unexpected populist turn of Zelaya, whom it loathes for his minimalist reform program and his association with the Chavez regime in Venezuela and other left-populist leaders in the region.

Viewed through the reckless actions of the oligarchy, the Honduran state has shown itself to be structurally incapable of weathering even minimal bourgeois liberal reforms. The unity of its state institutions in favor of the overthrow is not a sign of ruling-class strength, but an acknowledgement that it is totally alienated from the conditions of the masses in Honduras and incapable of relating to them in any but the most predatory ways.

Honduras is one of the poorest and most economically polarized countries in the Western Hemisphere, with half its population living below the poverty line. Since the military restored formal democracy there in 1983, the country has been ruled by two political parties sustained by ties to the national oligarchy.

Voter turnout in Honduras was 46.0 percent in 2005, the lowest of any national election in Central America in the past four years—significantly lower than any of its neighbors. Regional experts have attributed the high rates of voter absenteeism to the extreme indifference with which the Honduran masses regard the two oligarchic parties, which have presided over a pauperized nation with no semblance of real political differences between them.

The coup-makers have gone to great lengths to prevent the Honduran masses from expressing their discontent with the toppling of the democratically elected government. The state-run television network and another network known for its loyalties to Zelaya were immediately blacked out by the coup-makers when they seized the presidency. Zelaya’s ministers and political allies have been detained.

The BBC reports from Honduras that soldiers are blockading the highways to the capital, preventing the arrival of caravans of protesters. Jose Antonio Zepeda, president of the Central American Union Movement, recounted in a video posted on YouTube that at one roadblock soldiers shot out the tires on buses carrying peasants and union members to Tegucigalpa (the capital city). The protesters continued the rest of the trip on foot.

The Honduran coup-makers have acted in accord with an oligarchy that is unified in its hatred for the unexpected populist turn of President Zelaya.

Despite the ruling class’s efforts, the masses have braved severe repression from the police and military to take to the streets in opposition to the coup. The BBC reported that anti-coup protests occurred in the majority of Honduras’ departments, and that protesters blocked major highways in Copan and Tocoa.

CNN quoted Oscar Garcia, vice president of the Honduran water workers’ union SANA, as saying that three major public-sector labor unions launched an indefinite general strike pending the restoration of Zelaya to power on June 30, claiming the participation of over 100,000 workers. “We don’t recognize this new government imposed by the oligarchy,” declared Garcia. “It will be an indefinite strike.” TeleSur reports that the teachers union has declared an open-ended national strike of the schools, also pending the restoration of Zelaya to power.

The Bolivarian News Agency reports a march of 4000 in Tegucigalpa July 2, and other sources put the number at 6000. A report coming out of Tegucigalpa from the Socialist Workers Party of Argentina claims that the banana workers have joined the national strike along with sections of the maquiladora workers.

In response to these demonstrations the government of coup leaders revoked the right to freely assemble at night and gave the police the power to detain anyone for longer than 24 hours without charge. There are reports that electricity has been cut to working-class districts, where anti-coup sentiments are highest.

Zelaya “converted” to populism

Zelaya was elected in 2005 as the candidate of the Liberal Party, one of two parties that has alternated in power in Honduras for the last 25 years. He is part of the elite of the country, having amassed a fortune as a rancher and landowner. Moreover, his populist credentials are belied by allegations that he supported the death-squads in their dirty war against the Honduran left in the 1980s.

It wasn’t until Zelaya was elected to the presidency in 2005 that he showed signs of populist conversion. Until then he had advocated for Honduras to enter into the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., and was considered a reliable tool of the oligarchy, which had endorsed and funded his candidacy.

The rift opened when Zelaya began accepting shipments of subsidized petroleum from the Chavez government, and thereafter guided Honduras into the regional trade block known as the ALBA. These initiatives, along with some domestic reforms like raising the minimum wage, established a social base for Zelaya among the peasantry and some trade unions, but fomented the hatred of the oligarchy against him.

The fact that Zelaya’s own party was complicit in his

(Left) Honduran soldiers take aim at people near the presidential palace protesting the coup.

(Right) Soldiers threaten part of the crowd.

overthrow is a clear indication of how isolated he has become. Micheletti, the army’s choice to replace Zelaya, is a member of the same Liberal Party.

The immediate cause of the coup is being widely attributed to Zelaya’s plan to reform the Honduran constitution, which opponents contend was simply a maneuver by Zelaya to stay in power beyond the one-term limit specified under the current constitution.

Zelaya was deposed from office on the eve of a non-binding national referendum that he had proposed as a means to measure popular support for a constituent assembly. Based on what he presumed would be a clear victory on that vote, Zelaya was planning to hold a legally binding second referendum during the upcoming November presidential elections.

Though Zelaya was noncommittal as to what type of constitutional reforms he proposed, the call for a constituent assembly had attracted the attention of Honduran farmers, workers, and leftist radicals. The oligarchy’s false cry of “dictatorship” was only a cover for its real pervasive fear that a constituent assembly could lead to numerous reforms (driven by involvement of the masses) that would curtail its economic and political domination of Honduras.

The Honduran oligarchy attempted to obstruct the referendum prior to the coup through various institutional means—from legislating against it in the Congress, to issuing a ruling from the Supreme Court declaring it unconstitutional, to instructing the army brass to refuse Zelaya’s order to conduct the vote. Zelaya responded, in turn, by firing the defense minister and the senior military commander, and then leading a dramatic march of peasant farmers and unionists to an airforce base to seize the ballot boxes that had been suppressed by the military.

Within days the Supreme Court reinstated the senior military commander and issued an arrest warrant for Zelaya that military personnel “served” to the president on the night that they overthrew his government.

A bastion of the U.S. military

U.S. officials—both civilian and military—were well aware that a coup was being plotted within Honduras, as they had been participating in high-level discussions between the Honduran Congress, military, and president in the weeks leading up to the overthrow. But the American government did not use its immense power—as Honduras’ leading trading partner and as a major donor of military and civilian aid—to prevent the coup from taking place. The claim by an anonymous Obama administration official that the army broke off the talks is convenient to the U.S., but otherwise impossible to verify and therefore unreliable.

Despite statements by President Obama expressing disapproval for the coup, his administration continues to quibble over whether the term “coup” is applicable to the nighttime abduction of the Honduran president by the army. “There is a process that we need to follow

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