

Budget 'debate' conceals cuts for retirees & poor



(Left) Congress shut down the government for 16 days, denying jobs and services to millions, during phony budget debate.

BY JEFF MACKLER

With blazing hyperbole and drama, corporate America pulled off yet another multi-trillion-dollar rip-off of working people in the course of the fake "budget debate." This time, the consciously orchestrated scenario included a government shutdown that furloughed 800,000 federal workers and left another million working without pay.

Added to the mix was the Tea Party/Republican Party threat to prevent the government from raising the debt ceiling another trillion dollars or so to avoid an almost unprecedented default of the U.S. government to its creditors around the world.

The capitalist media played on these themes to the hilt, bringing in the top leaders of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to warn of the catastrophic consequences to the world economy of a U.S. default. The "liberal" *New York Times* attacked the Republicans and their Tea Party associates for brinksmanship and praised President

Obama for standing firm in refusing to de-fund his Obamacare. Obama swore that he would not budge in defense of his plan and took to the airwaves to denounce his "fanatic" Republican opponents.

The Oct. 17 *New York Times* captured the hype attendant to the debate in a six-column banner headline: "Republicans Back Down in Fiscal Standoff." The "news analysis" article stated, "For the Republicans who despise president Obama's health care law, the last few weeks should have been a singular moment to turn its botched rollout into an argument against it. Instead, in a futile campaign to strip the law of federal money, the party focused harsh scrutiny on its own divisions, hurt its national standing and undermined its ability to win concessions from the Democrats. Then they surrendered almost unconditionally."

All the while, the pollsters chimed in with near daily reports regarding who was scoring the most points and what that might foretell for the next election cycle. Wall Street's biggest bankers

threatened disaster—a plunging stock market, a damaging rise in interest rates, an end to the tiny housing construction "recovery," and the beginning of a worldwide economic meltdown.

But discounting the undeniable fact that U.S. and world capitalism do face an unprecedented crisis—which we will explain below—it was all a lie! In that regard, we recall that Shakespeare had the beleaguered Macbeth cry out in anguish over what he saw as the meaninglessness of our passage through this world: "Life ... is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." In the current context, Macbeth's cry would handily sum up life in Washington politics, except that, in the present case, it would signify almost nothing.

Bail-outs for the rich

This "almost nothing" took place in a series of secret and concluding negotiations between the representatives of the twin parties of capitalism to hammer out an agreement, already signaled by Obama himself, to impose massive cuts in Social Security, Medicare, Med-

icaid, and other social programs, while lowering the tax rates of the corporate elite and ruling-class few to virtually unprecedented levels.

Indeed, Obama had already signaled his intention to reduce corporate tax rates from 35 percent to perhaps 28 percent and to essentially reduce tax rates on the accumulated billions and trillions held by U.S. multi-national corporations in foreign banks to sufficiently low levels so as to entice their repatriation.

These provisions are expected to become law when Congress meets to "debate" the Tax Code Overhaul legislation now in preparation. To be sure, the fine print will reveal additional trillions in grants to the rich. Working people are never a party to preparing such legislation. This is left to the corporate elite, who literally draft the desired language that is ratified by their "democratically elected" representatives.

The result, as with the December 2012 Fiscal Cliff "crisis," wherein trillions of dollars were slashed from social programs—"sequestration" was the term employed at the time—and trillions more were gifted to the elite by extending the Bush-era tax cuts for the rich that "saved" them a neat \$4 trillion. This was yet another finger in the dike to prop up their failing predatory system.

In each and every instance U.S. and world capitalism's deepening crises are temporarily "solved" by robbing the working masses and bailing out the plundering rich.

George Bush's last days in office saw Federal Reserve chief Benjamin Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson rush into the Congress to proclaim that if the three-page \$700 billion bank bailout proposal they had drafted in consultation with the richest bankers in the nation were not approved immediately, the nation's entire banking and insurance systems would face a catastrophic meltdown. For those who might think that this image is a bit exaggerated, not long afterward, the *New York Times* published a photograph of these corporate titans sitting around the stereotyped long corporate board-

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Thousands march for immigrant rights

By LISA LUINENBERG

On Oct. 5, thousands of immigrants in 40 states marched in support of the comprehensive immigration reform bill that has been sitting stagnant in Congress since this spring. The marches were part of a National Day of Dignity and Respect, which was endorsed by religious groups, NGO-type groups including Presente.org and the ACLU, and many of the big unions, such as SEIU, the AFL-CIO, UFCW, AFSCME, and UNITE HERE.

The actions culminated in a march on the national mall in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 8, during which 200 people, including several Democratic politicians, were arrested for civil disobedience.

Legalization is desperately needed for the 11 million undocumented workers currently living in the United States. Despite Obama's promise to pass immigration reform legislation, over 1100 people are being deported every day, even during the partial government shutdown. Immigrants are daily being pulled over, jailed, and deported by racist cops, and undocumented workers endure exploitation, abuse, and the lowest wages in the country.

And yet, the "immigration reform" being offered by the Democrats and the reformist leadership of the trade unions doesn't offer a real solution to the crisis being faced by undocumented immigrants. Instead, it offers more of the same—millions of dollars to increase the militarization of the border, a mandatory biometric E-verify system that would be implemented nationwide, and an expanded Bracero-style guest-worker system.

And the "pathway to citizenship" being offered to



undocumented immigrants is so long, so expensive, and so difficult to comply with that it has been estimated that 4-5 million immigrants will not qualify for *any* kind of legal status. In short, the system being proposed ensures a legalized exploitation of the undocumented workers who will be given a temporary status, while life becomes even more difficult for everyone else who gets left "in the shadows" because they can't meet income standards or pay thousands of dollars in fines.

So why are immigrants supporting the reform bill by the thousands? The answer is evident in the tone of the protests. In Minneapolis, where over a thousand marched in the streets on Oct. 5, the speaker's stage was dominated not by local immigrant leaders who fight deportations in their communities or organize immigrant workers to fight for better pay, but by re-

ligious groups, the Chamber of Commerce, and the AFL-CIO.

When you speak with immigrants about immigration reform, it becomes clear that many don't understand what the comprehensive immigration reform bill would really mean for them and how it would affect their lives. What they hear every day is the misinformation provided by their churches, their unions, and the Spanish-language media. Faced by a lack of independent community leadership, they tend to follow the reformist voices that are now dominating the movement, acting on a desperate need for change.

It is clear by the thousands of people who marched in the streets that immigrants want an end to the deportations, to the separation of their families, and their exploitation at work. They have shown in the past that they have the power to demand

that change. The challenge in the coming months will be in educating immigrants about what the proposed legislation actually contains, and then building an independent movement in the streets to demand an end to the deportations and *unconditional* legalization for all—a legalization without chains.

Philadelphia, Nov. 10, 7 p.m.
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 * William Way LGBT Center, 1315 Spruce St. Sponsor: Socialist Action
<https://womensliberationforumsocialistaction.eventbrite.com>

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 withdrawal of all U.S. troops and mercenaries from Iraq & Afghanistan! No war on Iran! 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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Socialist Action newspaper editorial offices: socialistactionnews@yahoo.com
 Website: www.socialistaction.org

WHERE TO FIND SOCIALIST ACTION

- ASHLAND, Ore.: damonjure@earthlink.net
- BOSTON: bostsocact@gmail.com (781) 630-0250
- CARRBORO, N.C.: (919) 967-2866, robonica@lycos.com
- CHICAGO: P.O. Box 578428 Chicago, IL 60657, chisocialistaction@yahoo.com
- CONNECTICUT: (860) 478-5300
- DULUTH, MINN.: wainosunrise@yahoo.com, www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com
- KANSAS CITY: kcsa@workernet.org (816) 221-3638
- LOUISVILLE, KY: redlotus51@yahoo.com, (502) 451-2193
- MADISON, Wis.: Northlandiguana@gmail.com
- MANKATO, MINN.: Misshbradford@yahoo.com
- MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, socialistaction@visi.com
- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157

- PHILADELPHIA: philly.socialistaction@gmail.com
- PORTLAND, ORE.: (503) 233-1629 gary1917@aol.com
- PROVIDENCE: ADGAGNER@GMAIL.COM (401) 592-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610 (510) 268-9429, sfsocialistaction@gmail.com
- WASHINGTON, DC: christopher.towne@gmail.com, (202) 286-5493

SOCIALIST ACTION CANADA
 NATIONAL OFFICE
 526 Roxton Road, Toronto, Ont. M6G 3R4, (416) 535-8779
<http://socialistaction.ca/>

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Malalai Joya tour marks longest U.S. war

BY JEFF MACKLER

Afghan women's rights and antiwar fighter Malalai Joya toured the U.S. for three weeks in October on behalf of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) and the Los Angeles-based Afghan Women's Mission. Joya's national tour included 10 cities: New York, Boston, Amherst, Albany, Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

The tour focused on mobilizing opposition to the continuing U.S. war and occupation in Afghanistan, now in its 13th year—the longest war in U.S. history—and to increase awareness of the plight of Afghan women.

Joya, who survived seven assassination attempts during her near underground work in Afghanistan, explained to packed audiences that the U.S. government has no intention of leaving her country, regardless of the news media reports of "agreements" that the occupation is slated to end in 2014. Nine permanent U.S. military bases attest to U.S. intentions to maintain a strong military and geo-political presence in this critical Central Asian region and to be first in line to exploit Afghanistan's estimated \$3 trillion in copper and rare earth metals. Afghanistan's reserves of these critical elements are among the largest in the world.

Joya insisted that the Afghan people faced three lethal opponents: the U.S. occupation forces, the corrupt "mafia and puppet" Hamid Karzai warlord "government," and the fundamentalist Taliban, whose misogynist practices result in the degradation of women to a degree virtually unmatched in the world today. Afghanistan, Joya points out, is rated as the second most corrupt nation on earth and in the top 10 of the poorest nations as well.

She pointed out in detail that criminal elements in the Karzai government included the nation's leading drug lords (opium dealers), acting in collusion with the CIA, as well as fundamentalist warlords who differed little from the misogynist forces of the Taliban Islamic fundamentalists.

U.S. public statements labeling the Taliban as terrorist, for the public record, according to Joya, are contradicted by U.S. efforts to negotiate the imposition of a new government including the Taliban's elite capitalist warlords.

At 35, Joya has experienced war and intervention in her country for her lifetime, beginning with the 1979 invasion of the Soviet Union, when her family was driven into refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan where she was raised as a child under extremely difficult conditions and as a teenager became a teacher of



(Photo) Prof. Noam Chomsky with Malalai Joya after they both spoke in Boston.

women in underground schools supported by unregistered and essentially "illegal" NGO's. These are recounted in detail in her heartwarming 2009 book, "A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice." Hundreds of copies were sold in the course of the UNAC/AWM tour.

Malalai Joya's secular father lost a leg after stepping on a land mine at the time of the Soviet war, when tens of thousands of Afghans were brutally murdered by the would-be Russian conquerors. Following the Soviet withdrawal, Joya's family was again driven to seek refuge in Pakistan as a civil war erupted among opposing warlords for control of the nation's resources.

This was followed by the post-9/11 U.S. invasion and war, accompanied by a still-unending war against the

Afghan people including the deployment of the largest privatized, mercenary army in U.S. history. Death-squad private teams accompanied by bombings are the norm in Afghanistan today.

Joya described the almost unbelievable oppression, murder, rape and torture of women who do not comply with fundamentalist standards that relegate woman to near sub-human status. Along with that brutal mistreatment, pervasive poverty and the lack of adequate medical treatment make Afghanistan the worst place in the world for women, according to in-

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Rasmea Yousef Odeh, the associate director of the Arab American Action Network in Chicago, has been arrested by agents of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. She is charged with an act of immigration fraud from 20 years ago.

Rasmea, 65, was horribly tortured for 10 years in an Israeli prison, accused of being involved in a murder and of being a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She was released in a prisoner exchange and came to the United States.

After decades in the U.S., authorities arrested her on Oct. 22 for falsifying the papers she had filled out for immigration purposes. She apparently had checked a box stating that she had never been arrested, believing that the reference was to the U.S. and not Palestine. For this they have threatened to give her 10 years in prison.

She also faces being stripped of her citizenship, and of being deported after serving her sentence.

Rasmea is closely associated with the 23 Palestinian and antiwar activists who were victimized by FBI raids three years ago, and are still awaiting the decision of the government regarding their subpoenas. Both the Committee to Stop FBI Repression and the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) are supporting her case.

The following statement was issued by the Center for Constitutional Rights and Palestine Solidarity Legal Support, and signed by 64 other organizations, including Socialist Action:



Statement of Solidarity

The below-signed organizations are deeply disturbed by and stand opposed to the indictment yesterday of Rasmea Yousef Odeh, a Palestinian-American community activist who has dedicated 10 years to the Chicago Arab-American community, working with women on issues ranging from promoting literacy and political education to addressing domestic violence and anti-Arab and Muslim sentiment.

Rasmea's indictment for alleged immigration fraud comes at a time when advocates for Palestinian rights and immi-

gration rights activists have been facing increasing pressure all over the country. Exactly three years ago, 23 anti-war and Palestinian rights activists were subpoenaed to testify before a Grand Jury, and several of their homes were raided by the FBI. There have been no indictments against the 23 activists subpoenaed in 2010, presumably because of a lack of evidence. It is no coincidence that federal prosecutors are now targeting Rasmea, who is a pillar in the same community.

The 2010 raids, the Grand Jury subpoenas that accompanied them, and this indictment against a 65 year old woman who suffered for a decade in Israeli prisons before coming to the U.S. in 1995, are a clear signal that federal authorities, along with Israel and its supporters in the U.S., are continuing to search for ways to intimidate and silence those who are effective advocates for Arab American communities, and who speak out for Palestinian rights.

In the last year alone, Palestine Solidarity Legal Support, in partnership with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and in collaboration with the National Lawyers Guild and other organizations, has documented over 75 cases of intimidation and legal bullying. These include perceived surveillance, FBI contacts, and discriminatory enforcement of laws against advocates for Palestinian rights.

Rasmea's arrest and indictment must be viewed within this wider context

of widespread attempts to intimidate people into silence on one of the most pressing human rights issues of our time. Rasmea's indictment is also an illustration of increasingly draconian enforcement of immigration laws, which have left immigrant communities devastated at the hands of Obama's Department of Homeland Security.

Rasmea is an exemplary citizen who recently finished a Master's degree in Criminal Justice and has a law degree from Jordan. She has overcome amazing odds after being convicted by the Israeli military court system in 1969 for her alleged association with a leftist Palestinian nationalist group that the U.S. designated a terrorist organization.

The military courts operate exclusively to subjugate occupied Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. They routinely bypass all but a modicum of due process, and justify holding individuals without charge or trial for months and years, often in abusive conditions and subject to torture.

Rasmea's activism against the Israeli occupation in the 1960s resulted in her imprisonment in Israeli prisons for 10 years, and it is surely her community activism in the U.S. that has made her, and by extension, the community that relies on her, the target of this indictment.

We call for solidarity with Rasmea as she undergoes a difficult legal battle. Please support Rasmea at her November 1 appearance in federal court in Detroit, Michigan. For further action items, please see the Arab American Action Network alert. ■

Free Rasmea Yousef Odeh!

Dominican court denies rights of Haitians

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



(Left) Protest in the Dominican Republic against the new racist court ruling.

By TONY SAVINO

SANTO DOMINGO—A Dominican high court ruling on Sept. 27 denied citizenship to anyone born to parents “in transit” after 1929, thus affecting not only the children of migrants, but their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This is the latest attack by the racist, xenophobic sector of the ruling elite that includes the Catholic archbishop of Santo Domingo.

The modern state of the Dominican Republic was born of an elite seeking to differentiate themselves

from Haiti and things Haitian, especially skin color. Although the majority of Dominicans are repulsed by the latest court ruling, racism is deeply woven into Dominican society.

The vast majority of Dominicans display varying degrees of African ancestry, but one would be hard pressed to find somebody self-identifying as “Black”—a term used to refer to Haitians. Instead, there is a litany of adjectives used to describe various skin tones. Sociologist and human-rights advocate Hugo Cerena described Dominican society as being “Afrophobic.”

The ruling leaves thousands who identify themselves as Dominicans and have Haitian ancestry with an uncertain future. Already some 40,000 people have been told they will not receive identity documents. Without such documents, one cannot access services like health care and schools, and live in constant fear of being deported to a place they don’t know.

People of Haitian descent—including some 200,000 children—constitute about 10 percent of the population in a country of 10 million. Yet it is estimated that workers of Haitian background generate some 30 percent of Dominican production. Haitians have long been migrant workers, toiling in sugar fields and other low-wage jobs. Like migrants elsewhere, they are often accused of taking jobs from “native” workers. Ultra-nationalist politicians and media outlets speak of “Haitianization.”

Meanwhile, crimes against Haitian descendants often go unreported, and those working in sugar and other forms of agriculture face super-exploitation and dire poverty. Sugar workers recently interviewed by *Socialist Action* newspaper spoke of earning 400 pesos (U.S. \$10) every 15 days. And sugar production only lasts six months of the year; the rest of the year many workers are idle.

The new ruling by the Dominican high court will further enforce—and drastically worsen—the apartheid-like system that shackles workers and families of Haitian descent. And in the long run, this ruling-class strategy of “divide and conquer” will serve to drag down the wages and social conditions of all working people in the Dominican Republic.

It is important that Dominican and Haitian workers, and their supporters—here and in the diaspora in the United States—unite to demand that this racist decision be overturned, and that all working people of Haitian descent be given full legal rights. The solution to this crisis requires a massive fight for full employment and a living wage on both sides of the island—Haiti as well as the Dominican Republic. ■

NY candidate Bill de Blasio — another Obama?

By MARTY GOODMAN

NEW YORK—The Bill de Blasio mayoral campaign has garnered rapt comparisons to the excitement generated by the 2008 Barack Obama campaign. De Blasio has a history of support to the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution and spent his honeymoon in Cuba with his African American wife. But that was a long time ago. Like Obama, De Blasio will certainly let down his working-class supporters. He belongs to the Democratic Party wing of the U.S. capitalist class, the deathbed of all social struggles.

On Oct. 5, de Blasio, told the Association for a Better New York, a business group, “I’m a fiscal conservative.” He then repeated, “I’m a progressive activist fiscal conservative, but I’m still a fiscal conservative.”

Nevertheless, polls give de Blasio a remarkable 64% of the vote, a massive lead over his Republican opponent, Joe Lhota, former head of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The working-class majority is plainly disgusted with three terms of billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The vote is Nov. 5.

De Blasio’s popular narrative has been that New York has become “A Tale of Two Cities,” from the title of the Charles Dickens novel about 18th-century Paris and London, to make the point that New York is sharply divided by riches and poverty. It’s an apt characterization. New York is the most unequal city in the U.S. The richest 1 percent of New Yorkers claimed almost 39% of the city’s income share in 2012—up from 12% in 1980.

The city’s poverty rate rose to 21.2 percent in 2012. Over 1.7 million New Yorkers live below the official federal poverty line (\$23,314 for a family of four). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 31 percent of the city’s children live in poverty. Some 50,000 men, women, and children are homeless. According to the Economic



(Left) De Blasio and other Democrats share a laugh at press conference.

Policy Institute, an average family of four in New York needs a \$93,000-a-year income to live modestly. Yet, median household income in 2012 was about \$49,500.

There’s more. A racist police “stop and frisk” policy targets African Americans, overwhelmingly innocent youth, accompanied by high profile cop murders of African American youth like Marley Graham and Kamani Gray. According to 2012 NYPD “stop and frisk” data for 2012 New Yorkers were stopped by cops 533,042 times. 89% were found totally innocent; 55% were Black, 32% were Hispanic and 10% white.

De Blasio rode the popular outrage to political gain. He has stopped short of rejecting “stop and frisk” and has recently found himself in the company of the rich—including face-to-face sessions with Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs, Phillippe Dauman, the CEO of Viacom, and the owners of New York’s two major tabloids: Rupert Murdoch and Mort Zuckerman.

Moreover, de Blasio has expressed admiration for the Democratic politicians and the Democratic Party-aligned labor misleaders during New York’s economic crisis of the late 1970s who agreed upon a mass layoff of about 60,000 public workers and drastic public services cuts demanded by the banks.

Bloomberg has stonewalled every public union in contract negotiations. Many have been without a contract for years. De Blasio, who heavily courted and won support from big unions like SEIU 1199 hospital workers, has refrained from committing to a raise without the givebacks that Bloomberg demanded. “I’m not here to tell them how much they’re gonna hate me. I’m here to tell them that we are going to get to a deal and balance our budget,” said the Democrat.

De Blasio has positioned himself as a crusading “tax the rich” Democrat. Yet his only plan is to fund pre-kindergarten and afterschool programs with a puny 1/2% tax on those making over \$500,000. Tax-

ing Wall Street stock trades, for example, could bring in many more billions each month—a strategy de Blasio has refused to embrace. Like all Democrats and Republicans, de Blasio offers no mass jobs plan, stranding millions of New Yorkers to live in poverty and hopelessness—if they’re not cut down by racist cops.

When de Blasio’s wife Chirlane replied to media questions about the strange contrasts between her husband’s populist image and his many face-to-face meetings with Wall Street hedge-fund tycoons and media barons, she replied, “People change, because they have to grow in order to live.”

Socialists point out that working people need a party of their own, a fighting labor party. The labor movement must reject supporting any Democrat. This “progressive” Democrat, if elected, is destined to disappoint and enrage his former supporters. ■

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Nov. 14, 6:30 p.m.

Chapman Hall Middlesex College, Connecticut

350 CT, Power without Pollution, Capitalism v. the Climate. Info: Daniel.adam.piper@gmail.com

By NICHOLAS BRANNON

Protesters demand justice in cop killing of Andy Lopez

SANTA ROSA, Calif.—On a Tuesday afternoon at 3 p.m., 13-year-old Andy Lopez was walking down the street from his home to a friend's house, carrying a BB gun that his friend had left at his house, when two Sonoma County sheriff's deputies saw him while driving around on patrol. Seconds later, one of the cops fired eight shots at Andy, seven of which hit him. Before pronouncing him dead, the cops handcuffed him.

Few details of the shooting have come out, beyond the police version of what happened, which is too ridiculous to print and has already begun changing, though it has only been a week. It includes the absurd claim that as one cop was yelling at him from behind to drop the BB gun, which was shaped like an AK-47, Andy turned and raised the barrel of the BB gun toward the cops.

In one of the few statements that has not come from the police, a witness, who lives across the street from where the shooting took place, has come forward to say that Andy was on the ground after two shots, after which the cop continued firing several more.

The killing, another of the many incidents in the U.S. of a Black or Latino falling victim to racist police violence, has led to an outpouring of anger and demands for justice from the Latino community in Santa Rosa. On the day after he was killed, Andy Lopez's family and some friends sat outside Santa Rosa City Hall in quiet protest. Later that evening, hundreds of friends and neighbors marched with his family to the spot where he died and held a memorial there.

For each of the next three days, 200 to 300 people marched each afternoon to the Sonoma County sheriff's office, located in Santa Rosa, and every night vigils were held at the site of his death. The support has only increased. Over 1000 people attended a memorial service in Andy Lopez's honor on Sunday. And on Tuesday, Oct. 28, marking a week after his death, well over 1000 people marched and held a rally in front of the sheriff's office.

Support for the demonstrations has been especially strong among the middle school and high school students who were the popular eighth-grader's classmates, neighbors, and friends. In the week since the shooting, students have twice walked out of school to march for justice, including in an all-student march to the sheriff's office on Friday morning, Oct. 24, with 100 participants, which surprised and energized the community. In the planned march on Tuesday, several hundred students walked out of school, and they made up a majority of the mostly Latino crowd rallying in front of the sheriff's office.

The cop that killed Andy Lopez, Erick Gelhaus, is a weapons instructor and field trainer for the Sonoma County sheriff's department. He is a frequent contributor to *S.W.A.T.* magazine and wrote an article in 2008



(Above) Over 1000 protesters march in Santa Rosa, Calif., on Oct. 28. Several hundred students walked out of their high school to attend the event.

about the importance of cops' having a willingness to kill. "If you find yourself in an ambush, in the kill zone," he wrote, "you need to turn on that mean gene." He added that one of the things he tells trainees is, "Today is the day you may need to kill someone in order to go home."

In addition to writing for *S.W.A.T.* magazine, Gelhaus was also reportedly a "prolific" contributor to its online forums. In one thread debating "whether the use of force is justified if someone brandishes or fires a BB gun at another person," Gelhaus wrote: "It's going to come down to YOUR ability to articulate to law enforcement and very likely the Court that you were in fear of death or serious bodily injury." He added, "Articulation—your ability to explain why—will be quite significant."

On the day after the killing, a police spokesperson said that Gelhaus had told them he "feared for his life, his partner's life, and members of the community" on account of the BB gun. Police now say that Gelhaus "couldn't recall" if he had identified himself to Andy Lopez as a cop before shooting him.

But media coverage of the killing, locally, in the Bay

Area, and beyond, has predictably focused instead on the supposed danger of BB guns that look "too realistic," accepting the cops' premise that Andy was a danger to the cop, rather than the other way around, and that the problems of police racism and violence are caused by a child having a BB gun.

These claims are belied by the frequent police shootings of Black and Brown people who have nothing in their hands at all. This is not to mention shootings such as one in San Jose in 2011, in which four cops shot more than 20 bullets into a Latino man who had a gold-colored toy revolver tucked into the waistband of his Halloween costume. So much for "realistic-looking."

But still, the mainstream press, in the name of "not letting this happen again," focuses on how people—including children with toys—can make themselves less threatening to the police, casually diverting attention from the actual threat. ■

A salute to Herman Wallace

By JEFF MACKLER

Herman Wallace, a murder frame-up victim, spent 41 of his 73 years in solidarity confinement at the notorious Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. He was released from prison just three days before his death from liver cancer, Oct. 4 in New Orleans. The prison warden had initially defied a federal court order authorizing Herman's release but finally relented after the judge threatened him with contempt of court.

In 1972 Herman Wallace had been serving a sentence at Angola for armed robbery, when a correctional officer was stabbed to death in a prison uprising. In

a trial two years later, Herman and two other prisoners were convicted of involvement in the killing despite a lack of evidence to that effect. Wallace and his co-defendant Albert Woodcox had been members of the Black Panther Party and consistent organizers for better prison conditions.

In a monstrously vindictive gesture, on Oct. 3—the day before Herman Wallace died—a grand jury in Louisiana's West Feliciana Parish re-indicted him for the killing of the prison guard.

Socialist Action is proud to have been a supporter of the freedom of Herman Wallace and the other Angola 3 members. We organized a jam-packed public forum in



San Francisco in 2001 for Robert King, also one of the Angola Three, who spent 29 years of his life in prison—an innocent man and victim of capitalism's racist and

monstrous "criminal justice system."

I spoke with Robert just a week after his release. A more gentle, insightful, intelligent, and dedicated fighter I have rarely met. His spirit remained unbroken as he continued the fight for the freedom of Herman and Albert Woodcox, the third member of the Angola Three. Woodcox is still in prison although a federal court has overturned his conviction three times.

Like Mumia Abu-Jamal, Herman has been a stunning example of why capitalism is incompatible with human freedom and dignity. We will never forget Herman Wallace. His exemplary struggle lives on in our daily efforts to mobilize the entire working class to abolish this predatory system and replace it with a socialist society, where the very concept of "criminals" will have disappeared from the earth. ■

... Malalai Joya tour

(continued from page 3)

ternational surveys. The dreadful conditions have led to a rise in self-immolation by desperate women.

Joya emphasized that all three Afghan oppressors—the U.S., the Taliban, and the Karzai government—collaborate to reduce or eliminate public education, especially for women. Public schools are increasingly privatized; young women who attend any schools are frequently murdered, and schools in general are subjected to terror attacks or bombings by all the forces of reaction.

And as if war, poverty, and repression were not enough, Joya cited reports that Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's opiate drugs and that over 1 million Afghans are addicts, the world's top per capita users. Many of the addicted people are women and children, while treatment facilities are woefully inadequate.

Joya concluded that after 12 years of U.S./NATO occu-

pation, rather than conditions improving for Afghans, particularly women and children, they are deteriorating in all areas, except for the gains in power and wealth by the U.S.-backed thieves and war criminals.

"In my country," she asserted, "It takes time, but the resistance of ordinary Afghans—students of the universities, democratic-minded intellectuals, and some political parties—is rising against the occupiers. More and more people are standing up against the U.S. and NATO, and their lackeys, puppets, the warlords, and the Taliban."

"Afghans have a proud history of fighting against all occupations," Joya repeatedly noted. "People are tired, wounded, and hate all kinds of these terrorists. But they will stand up one day more and more against them." She pointed to the hopeful demonstrations of "hundreds of thousands" of Afghans against the U.S./NATO occupation, the Taliban, and the Karzai government that have been initiated by the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan and several other resistance groups.

The UNAC/Afghan Women's Mission tour included

some 65 successful meetings and raised significant funds to benefit the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan. Thousands of people heard Malalai directly, and tens of thousands heard her through extensive media coverage, including interviews on "Democracy Now."

Highlights of the tour included a Boston meeting with Noam Chomsky; a New York City meeting initiated by Eve Ensler, playwright/author of "The Vagina Monologues"; and a standing-room-only meeting of 325 at the Berkeley City College auditorium.

UNAC's decision to organize a national speaking tour for Malalai Joya to call attention to the continuing U.S. war in Afghanistan—consistent with UNAC's opposition to all U.S. wars and interventions—represented an important additional effort in establishing it as the broadest and most active national antiwar coalition in the U.S. today. Hundreds of antiwar and social justice activists and organizations around the country joined forces to make the tour a success and win new forces for the ongoing struggle against imperialist war and for women's equality everywhere. ■

Feminism on the offensive — A ‘pro-life’ manifesto



(Left) Marcher in an anti-austerity protest in Barcelona.

By SANDRA EZQUERRA

BARCELONA—The debate in political circles and in the media in recent decades around the question of abortion has been accompanied by a growing monopoly ownership of the defense of the right to life by the Right, in a way that skillfully counter-poses it to the feminist demand of the right to choose.

Although we as feminists have defended ourselves against these Sibylline accusations of egoism and/or infanticide, coming from the propaganda machine of the Catholic Church and its secular followers, we should recognize that our attempts at questioning the defense of life as the exclusive instrument of the Right have so far produced very few results. As “anti-choice” as they may be, the anti-choice activists are known by everyone as “pro-life,” and as pro-life as it may be, the feminist movement is still identified as “pro-abortion”.

However, apart from its calculated polarization, this logic is wrong. Feminism defends life. And it always has done. And that is why at a time when the paragons of traditional morality come out of their burrows to attack once again freedom and the right to decide, in a context where the cuts and the caverns combine to resurrect the vision of women as submissive and full of abnegation, it is more than ever necessary from a strategic perspective to assert feminism as being profoundly pro-life and to get rid of the semantic corset that is being imposed on us from outside.

A feminist pro-life manifesto does not only strengthen the demand for women’s freedom and autonomy as key elements of women’s struggle: it also allows us, at a time when the Right is back on the offensive, criminalizing us and robbing us of our rights, to assert and substantiate our re-appropriation of life as emancipatory path and guiding principle. Here is a first draft:

A question of rights...

1) Feminism defends the right of women to terminate their pregnancies in a safe manner. As the World Health Organization stresses, the prohibition of abortion only serves to increase maternal mortality; today, on a world scale, 47,000 women die each year because they terminate their pregnancy in a clandestine way. Thirteen percent of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortions, and the majority of cases occur in countries with restrictive legislation on abortion.

The number of voluntary terminations of pregnancy does not diminish when legislation is harsh; on the other hand, the number of dangerous abortions increases. It is out of respect for the memory of all those women who, while trying to exercise their right not to have a child, have found themselves in unsanitary situations, have risked their lives or indeed died, that feminism is pro-life.

2) According to the UN, the term “clandestine and

Feminism defends the right of women to terminate pregnancies in a safe manner.

unsafe abortion” refers not only to risks to the health and the lives of women, but also to the negation of their right to information, to life and to freedom. Thus, this type of abortion does not just represent a health problem; it is first and foremost a question of human, social, and economic rights.

The many obstacles that prevent women from accessing abortion in a free and equal way—for example, the fact of having the means necessary to travel and/or pay for a discreet private clinic, their age, place of residence, country of origin or administrative position—are not only patently hypocritical, they are also discriminatory. If all of these barriers still exist in the present legislation of the Spanish state concerning abortion, they will increase if the Popular Party carries out its threat to reform that legislation. It is because it is determined to eliminate these barriers that feminism is pro-life.

3) The main factors that promote the reduction of unwanted pregnancies and abortions among young women are the increased use of contraceptives, better access to information and better sexual and relationship education: all that has been demanded for years by the feminist movement.

In spite of the fact that this same Right that calls us “anti-life” is opposed to our young people having safe, free, and intelligent sexual relations, it is necessary and urgent to create and transmit a model of sexuality that is rewarding, mature, and safe. We will not succeed in doing that by hypocritically advocating abstinence or by silence, but rather by ensuring that young people’s choices are increasingly based on information, freedom, and mutual respect. It is by its firm defense of the prevention of unwanted pregnancies—and therefore, of abortions—on the basis of the transmission of values of equality and autonomy that feminism is pro-life.

... for everyone, men and women!

4) In his delusional crusade against women’s right to choose, the minister Gallardón threatens to make the present legislation even more restrictive than it was in 1985, and he proposes suppressing the criterion of fetus malformation as a reason for abortion. He does so with the argument that all those people who have

been born or are “about to be born” with any kind of disability must have the same rights as other citizens.

As feminists, we can already wonder how the right-wing forces at the head of and in the shadow of the government have the impudence to proclaim themselves heroic saviors of a section of society to which they deny any kind of dignified existence through their measures of austerity and privatization in the services, programs and other forms of support to people with limited autonomy.

Is the Popular Party not rather seeking to create a situation where it is families, and women in particular, who take sole responsibility for those that the PP forces to be born, but in whom it loses interest from the very first minute of their lives? The same families and the same women that they drive into poverty because of their fraudulent rescue of the banks and their destruction of the Welfare State?

It is by its firm denunciation of this imposture, which pretends to defend social rights from Monday to Thursday while destroying them by their decrees just before the weekend, that feminism asserts itself, today more than ever, as pro-life.

5) The Popular Party not only forces women to become mothers against their will, it also prevents many other women, who want to be mothers and feel prepared for it, to actually become mothers. It does this through the defense of forced sterilization of people with psychic disabilities, despite the opposition of social organizations and the recommendations of the UN. It does so by opposing before the Constitutional Tribunal marriage between people of the same sex, because it considers that only the heterosexual family is the “natural” framework for raising children. And it does so by preventing women living alone and lesbians from having access to public services of medically assisted reproduction in order to have a child without the direct intervention of a man.

The government thus divides women into “good” and “bad” mothers, good and bad women, and it decides who can start a family and who cannot. Gallardón says that motherhood makes women really women, but he forgets to make it clear (such forgetfulness!) that he is only talking about those women who have an adequate sexual orientation, who want to form the correct type of family (nuclear, heterosexual, etc...), and who do not have any kind of mental disability.

Only the God of Rouco Varela (Archbishop of Madrid and president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference) knows what might happen if we allow children to be brought up among “queers” and “dykes” or if we guarantee that persons with physical handicaps will have full autonomy in decisions concerning their bodies and their sexuality. It is, finally, in its determination to defend the rights and freedoms of all people, and to do so from Monday to Sunday, that feminism is pro-life.

A more just and a freer society

Feminism is pro-life because its *raison d’être* is to build a more just and a freer society, one which places welfare and common good at the centre of everything; a society which does not condemn its poorest, youngest and most vulnerable women to bleed to death because of a clandestine abortion; a society which does not aspire to domesticate people’s bodies and their lives and to force them into moralistic little pigeonholes; a society that educates its young people in principles of reason, responsibility and truth, so that their actions will not have negative impacts on themselves or on other people; a society that integrates, cares for and genuinely respects people with functional diversity: that accepts freedom for all human beings to make decisions concerning their feelings and their desires and that does not say one thing and do another.

Nevertheless, it is the prohibitive and anti-choice discourse that has the advantage today. We do not have much time: new attacks are being prepared. Let us take to the streets, let us take back possession of what is ours and go on the offensive. Feminism, today and always, is pro-life. ■

Letter to Obama on the Cuban Five

Dear President Obama:

I am a Midwesterner, born and bred. Like most of the people around me, I believe in hard work and fair play. That's why, since my first visit to Cuba right before starting law school at the University of Wisconsin in 1972, I've been troubled by the contrast between people of Cuba who universally seem to love and show generosity to visitors from the U.S., and our government's policies designed since 1962 to impose "hunger and hardship" on the Cuban people.

This letter is about the Cuban Five, asking you to act promptly to free them; still incarcerated are Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando González, plus René González was recently freed after serving over 13 years in prison.

As a lawyer in Wisconsin, I had the opportunity visit and get to know personally one of the Five, Fernando Gonzalez, when he was held at the Oxford Federal Correctional Institution a bit north of Madison, WI. I cannot imagine a more temperate, reasoned and educated individual, and I joked that if he ever got out, he could be the Cuban ambassador to the U.S. Let me first explain a bit about his role, which I think exemplifies what the case of the Cuban Five is all about. Then I'll show evidence that even U.S. authorities have treated them as being political prisoners.

I. Fernando was only in the U.S. a short time before being arrested with the rest of the Cuban Five. They were all working for Cuba, to try to prevent further acts of terrorism and mass murder. Fernando in particular was attempting to monitor Orlando Bosch, who not only advocated murder of civilians for political purposes, but Bosch acted as well, most notoriously in engineering the bombing of a Cubana civilian airliner in October 1976, killing all 73 on board, including a victorious team of young fencers and medical students coming from South America.

Joe D. Whitley Acting Associate Attorney General, and later the first General Counsel to the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, wrote in 1989 that "for 30 years Bosch has been resolute and unwavering in his advocacy of terrorist violence. ... His actions have been those of a terrorist, unfettered by laws or human decency, threatening and inflicting violence without regard to the identity of his victims."

But despite that and his illegal entry, Bosch was allowed to remain in the U.S., and without prosecution or confinement until he died in Miami in 2011. His partner in engineering the 1976 Cubana bombing, Luis Posada Carriles, still lives unfettered in Miami, where they have both been publicly honored, and your administration has failed to either try Posada for terrorism or honor an extradition request for him to face trial in Venezuela.

On Aug. 16, 2006, while Fernando and the rest of the Five were finishing their eighth year in jail, Bosch continued to publicly justify this bombing, in an interview in Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* newspaper, where he also declared that "a bomb is a proof of rebelliousness, a proof of bravery."

Contrast that with your own remarks on April 16, 2013, after the bombing of the Boston Marathon, that "anytime bombs are used to target innocent civilians, that is an act of terrorism." But that was Boston. Cuba claims to have lost over 3000 of its people due to terrorism, much of it CIA inspired. The Cuban Five were sent to Miami, which the FBI had labeled as the "terrorist capital of the U.S.," to try to prevent further



"I've been troubled ... by our government's policies designed since 1962 to impose 'hunger and hardship' on the Cuban people."

deaths and mayhem.

To do this dangerous undercover work, most of the Five adopted aliases, and used false identification to match. Fernando's alias is listed as the lead defendant in the court papers and on the appeals. Although when the U.S. media mentions this case at all, it often refers to the Five as "convicted spies," that is not true. Their trial of over six months did not include any claims or evidence of any classified U.S. information, so none of them were ever charged with actual espionage, and only three of them were charged with "conspiracy"—supposedly, planning to do something which the evidence showed they did not actually do. For that, the judge initially gave them life sentences.

The Five all acted as agents of Cuba, and like the U.S. contractor Alan Gross, now held in Cuba on a 15 years sentence, none of them registered with their host government to report their undercover work. On Sept. 12, 2013, the four who remain in jail will begin their 16th year of imprisonment.

II. You have gone to Miami and publicly called for "justice for Cuba's political prisoners..." But the imprisonment of the Cuban 5 in the U.S. was clearly a political act as well. Here are a few examples of decisions in their case which were clearly "political":

1) The decision to arrest them in violent, pre-dawn raids on Sept. 12, 1998, while still allowing the career terrorists whom they were monitoring to live and operate freely in the U.S.

2) The decision to charge and later try them on grounds that for nationals of other countries, such as Russia, would lead to sending them home; and the extraordinary decision by Janet Reno to add a "conspiracy to commit murder" charge against Gerardo Hernandez, prior to her return to Florida and her run for Governor.

3) The decision to force their trial to take place in Miami, rather than let it be moved even to another county in Florida. The Miami jurors in the trial expressed strong feelings against the

Cuban government these defendants all admittedly worked for; and the U.S. Justice Department in another case noted that a fair trial with less direct Cuban government involvement could not be held in Miami because of such sentiments.

4) The decisions to hold each of the Five in solitary confinement/special isolation for 17 months, to seek and obtain maximum sentences unheard of in a case where no U.S. interests or secrets were compromised, as well as to consistently deny two of their wives and children visas to visit them. These have been criticized by Amnesty International, and by the relevant body of the United Nations. The trial and confinement of the Cuban Five is the only U.S. domestic criminal proceeding to be found unjust by both these bodies.

5) Although the Cuban Five have been held in separate U.S. prisons and their conduct in prison has been exemplary, every one of them was simultaneously put and held in "the hole" around the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003; they were eventually returned to their respective prison populations after a public campaign on their behalf. No justification for these simultaneous actions has ever been provided to my knowledge.

6) Despite a unanimous three-judge panel decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals in 2005 that the Cuban Five's conviction was the result of a "perfect storm" of hatred towards the Cuban revolution combined with intimidation, violence and threats in Miami, and prosecutorial misconduct, the Bush administration refused to accept a new trial outside of Miami, and instead pursued an unusual review by all members of that circuit, which then set aside the unanimous appellate opinion. That original court decision footnoted some of the extensive history of "exile" violence that the Five were attempting to deter.

7) The subsequent revelation that the U.S. government had paid the reporters for the Miami media who contributed to the prejudice against these Cuban

agents and defendants, was a fact unknown to the defense or the judge at the time. The editor of one of the influential Miami dailies that was implicated, *El Nuevo Herald*, then explained that serious compromise of journalistic ethics was not significant, because it was one of the paper's founding principles to oppose the Cuban government.

Finally, and getting back to my Midwestern roots, the political nature of their imprisonment was also demonstrated by the authorities' reaction in Oxford, Wis., when information about Fernando and the Cuban 5 started reaching the public. Each summer more than 10,000 Wisconsin progressives gathered just 20 miles away, in Baraboo, WI, at "Fighting Bob" Fest, named after the famous "Fighting Bob" LaFollette; and for several years we worked to educate them about this case. By September 2007, hundreds of people came up to sign our petitions, under a banner with picture of Fernando and the caption "What Do You Know About Wisconsin's Most Famous Political Prisoner?"

We had a prison visit scheduled and confirmed by prison authorities to meet with Fernando that next week, but within 3 days of that gathering a prison representative called and said the visit was cancelled for no reason that could be disclosed, but it would be rescheduled.

In fact, Fernando was being shipped away to Terre Haute, Ind., where the case of the Five was not nearly so well known. I asked Sen. Russ Feingold to inquire as to the reason for the transfer, and was advised that the warden requested it based on alleged security concerns—even though there had never been the slightest infraction asserted against Fernando. When our government authorities act in fear of the public becoming educated, something's not right.

So fair play is all we ask. The continued incarceration of any of the Five is not fair. When the people in the Heartland hear about this case, they agree. But it is both your job and your power to make things right, sooner rather than later.

Sincerely,
Arthur Heitzer, Attorney at Law
Milwaukee, Wis.
Chair, National Lawyers Guild Cuba Subcommittee

From the International Committee for the Cuban Five, www.thecuban5.org.

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Senate scandal upstages CETA and Omnibus Bill C-4

By BARRY WEISLEDER

How ironic would it be if Prime Minister Stephen Harper's ultimate downfall occurs due to a scandal involving some rip-off artists he appointed to the Senate, rather than as a consequence of Harper's bestial record on the economy, the environment, First Nations and Canada's wars of occupation abroad? Very ironic, eh?

But as things go in Ottawa, where both an ominous trade deal with Europe, and a meandering but menacing Throne Speech were quickly eclipsed by the deepening Senate imbroglio, anything seems possible.

The Conservative P.M. dug in his heels, and fired back at blistering Opposition attacks on his credibility. Harper insists that he knew nothing about the scheme to bail out Senator Mike Duffy. He coldly disowned Senators Duffy, Pamela Wallin, and Patrick Brazeau when scrutiny of their mis-spending habits became too hot and too damaging to the Conservative Party.

Harper even prorogued Parliament in a vain effort to ride out the storm. Still the crisis persists, undiminished by the so-called free trade triumph, or the baubles offered to consumers in an otherwise toxic Throne Speech.

While the political crisis, now six months old and

deepening, widens rifts in Tory ranks, it is important not to lose sight of the threat to the common good posed by the still-gestating deal known as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the European Union.

In the first place, like its predecessor "free" trade deals, NAFTA and the FTA, CETA is not primarily about trade. Tariffs and duties between the two regions are, on average, less than four per cent. Nor will we see a major impact on sales of beef overseas, or cheese here. CETA is overwhelmingly a corporate bill of rights. It will jack up Canadian drug prices (by \$2 billion a year) by extending patent protection for multinational pharmaceutical companies, mostly based in Europe. It will be harder for provinces and cities to favour local businesses when they buy goods or services. And it will enable corporations to sue governments if their owners think that environmental, labour or other regulations interfere with the maximization of profits. (Canada is facing \$2.5 billion worth of corporate lawsuits under NAFTA.)

Secrecy marked the CETA negotiations, and still shrouds the contents. Progressive economists say Ottawa's claim that the pact will create 80,000 new net jobs is entirely bogus. Europe's 500 million consumers are enduring an economic recession, worsened by austerity measures that curb workers' ability to buy much of anything beyond essentials. Unifor economist Jim Stanford predicts that CETA will, over time, vaporize up to 150,000 Canadian jobs.

Since 28 EU countries have to endorse the deal, and Ottawa needs to get the provinces on side by guaranteeing compensation for higher drug prices and for any harm done to home industries, there is thus time to defeat the deal before CETA is entrenched.

Likewise, there is an opportunity to challenge the pernicious plans outlined in the Oct. 16 Tory Throne Speech. Harper's endeavour to change the channel on his Senate problems includes promises to cut cellphone roaming costs, to unbundle cable-TV channels to allow consumers to pick and choose, and to allow people to carry booze across provincial boundaries for personal consumption.

But Harper's mailed fist is revealed in core measures, such as a federal budget freeze, and curbing costs in the public sector by shedding staff. Legislation to require balanced budgets aims to entrench austerity. New laws to ensure life sentences for those convicted of major crimes, and to bar the release of serious repeat offenders, would help the Conservatives to posture as "law and order" enforcers, as does their

plan to shut down centres that provide drugs to addicts to wean them off dope dependency.

Then there is Omnibus Budget Bill C-4, tabled in the House of Commons on October 22. Part of the 321-page compendium of assorted, but unrelated items is a piece that would give the federal government the power to decide which of the 187,000 members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada are "essential" and who therefore will be denied the right to strike.

Forty thousand of them presently lack this right; many of the rest are likely to be deprived as well. Not only that, the new law would exclude dispute arbitration, except when the government agrees to it, and arbitrators would be obliged to give a "preponderance" of weight to the government's claims as to what it could afford. Say good bye to the right to strike and to any semblance of fair arbitration in the federal public service. And this is buried in a bill that includes changes to employment insurance, workplace safety, veterans' affairs, conflict of interest, immigration policy, and more.

But where there ought to be concern about corporate criminality in the shipment of hazardous substances, in ravaging the environment, in violating indigenous peoples' land rights, in hiding billions of dollars in offshore banks to avoid tax obligations, 'law and order' seems to be missing in action.

That brings us back to the parliamentary crisis. It operates on many levels. One more dimension is evident in Harper's bid to ram through his appointment of a judge to the Supreme Court. The latest high court vacancy had to be filled, as a constitutional requirement, by a judge from the Quebec bar. Harper's choice (for ideological reasons we can only imagine), is Marc Nadon, who once practiced maritime and transportation law in Quebec. But Nadon spent the last 20 years at the Federal Court's appellate and trial divisions in Ottawa. So Harper aims to jam a square peg into a round hole. How? By amending the Supreme Court of Canada Act.

Like suspending Parliament four times over the past seven years, like trying to bully out of the Senate his own mangy appointees, those whom he shielded and defended until recently, Stephen Harper's actions on labour and the economy are those of a man who doesn't take no for an answer, regardless the spirit or the letter of the law.

The saddest aspect of this ugly chapter is that most of the media attention focuses on the misdeeds of certain powerful individuals. But those potent hacks can be replaced by the ruling class when push comes to shove. A superficial approach to corruption, rather than a serious examination of the system that drives its minions to do what they do to perpetuate human exploitation, social oppression and the devastation of nature, is what passes for politics in the mainstream.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the workers' movement, including those who sit atop the unions and the labour-based New Democratic Party, are complicit in this artful misdirection. They demonize Harper. This in turn tends to foster a "get rid of him at all costs," lesser-evil, unprincipled politics. The net effect is the mis-education of the many, helping to keep the criminal elite class in charge of the sinking ship, weighed down as it is by stupendous capitalist greed.

Urgently needed is mass job action to stop the Tory attack on the right to strike, to defeat CETA, to reverse the public service cuts, to uphold aboriginal land rights, and of course, to abolish the Senate and the monarchy. ■

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Jobless Youth in Ontario: Canaries in a coal mine?

By YASIN KAYA

The rate of Ontario youth unemployment rivals those of the European Union and the U.S. Rust Belt states. So says the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in its recent report, "The Young and the Jobless." Joblessness among people aged 15 to 24 in Ontario is 16.9 per cent, which is higher than that in Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The actual employment rate is significantly worse. It ranges from 50 to 52 per cent in the province, meaning half of all youths don't have jobs.

The gap between youth and adult employment in Toronto is the largest in the province, at 21.8 per cent. The report states that "young workers are subject to the negative consequences of the same

macroeconomic forces that are affecting the rest of the population. However, young workers are the labour market's canary in the coalmine. When there are hiring freezes, they remain out of work. When there are layoffs, it is newer, younger workers who often feel the brunt of the job losses."

Many believe that education is the key to success. Not quite so, at least not in our times. As the Toronto Star reports, a typical student makes about \$26,000 a year, between four part-time jobs. Most of the earnings go towards tuition. And according to the Canadian Federation of Students, average student debt after graduating with a four-year degree is \$37,000.

Yet, having a degree does not always increase your chance of getting a job. The 17.1 per cent unemployment rate among adults with advanced (above bachelors)

degrees is higher than young workers who have completed high school (16.0 %).

Youth make up 17 % of the world's population. According to the International Labour Organization, there are 73 million young unemployed people in the world, an increase of 3.5 million since 2007. At the same time, informal employment among young people remains pervasive and transitions to decent work are slow and difficult. For example, informal employment accounts for half of the jobs of young workers in the Russian Federation.

Against this backdrop, socialists argue: The youth are the backbone of production. But young workers need to unite to become the brain of production as well. More jobs, higher wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions are achievable only through organized struggle.

Education is a right not a privilege. Post-secondary education should be free. Drop fees and cancel student debt—now! To achieve these goals, get involved in the

student unions, and challenge students' union officials to lead the struggle. Follow the example of the Quebec students' strike in 2012!

Bridge the gap between youth and the rest of the working class. Replace the labour leaders who accept divisive conditions, such as the two-tier wage system (lower starting pay) that increases the exploitation of youth.

Youth unemployment, like mass unemployment among adults, can be overcome if new jobs are created, such as by launching massive public works to provide housing and to modernize infrastructure. Expropriating the banks and giant corporations, and placing them under workers' control, is necessary to finance and implement massive public investment projects.

Today's rotting capitalism resembles a coal mine before a methane gas explosion. Youths should not be the canaries in that mine. They should organize, join workers' struggles, and smash the cage in which they are trapped. ■

Corporate raiders target post offices

By MARTY GOODMAN

Corporate raiders targeted the United States Postal Service (USPS) for privatization as far back as the Nixon administration, and they are about to gain ground today unless working people stop them. Some 100,000 postal jobs are thought to be at risk, jobs that are overwhelmingly union.

A sinister part of the privatization drive is the over 50 post offices nationally that are up for sale or already sold as of February of this year. Corporate hustlers are hoping to convert post offices into restaurants, malls, and condos. Many post offices up for sale have been designed National Landmarks for their architectural beauty and/or the works of art they contain.

The privatizers hope that remaining USPS jobs and services will fall into the greedy hands of Fed-X, UPS, and other corporate outfits hell-bent on profits. The current estimated value of USPS facilities nationwide is approximately \$110 billion, a bonanza for corporate vultures. That inventory includes designated architectural and artistic landmarks from San Francisco to New York City, and Salem, Ore., to Stamford, Connecticut.

Behind the corporate privatization drive are forces like "The Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service," created in 2004 as the stealthy name for the large mailer association whose industry is estimated at \$1 trillion. Members include Time Warner (*People Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, CNN, etc.), Bank of America, American Express, Pitney Bowes, and AT&T. Another player is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a group of state lawmakers across the country, backed by donors like the Koch brothers—funders of the right-wing Cato Institute think tank—and big oil, pharmaceutical, and tobacco interests.

Benefiting from the corporate raid is CBRE, the world's largest commercial real estate broker and sole manager of Postal Service property sales. CBRE's chairman is Richard Blum, husband of California's powerful U.S. Senator, Democrat Dianne Feinstein.

The USPS employs over 500,000 workers; it is the second largest employer in the nation after Walmart, and represents a potential powerhouse of working-class resistance. Its two biggest unions are the American Postal Workers Union (APWU)—representing trucking, mail processing, and clerks—and the National Association of Letter Carriers. USPS workers are about 40% African American, Hispanic, and Asian. Women are about 36% of workers.

The corporate media have repeated the campaign of right-wing lies against the USPS. A so-called "White Paper" was released in January and paid for by the Fortune 500 Company Pitney Bowes, Inc., which is heavily involved in corporate packaging and mailing. The "White Paper" outlines a program of massive downsizing, privatization of all aspects of postal work, and half-pay for many workers.

The public hears only that the USPS is going broke because it is being replaced by the internet. While the internet has decreased first-class mail, internet-driven USPS parcel deliveries are way up because the postal service is less expensive than private carriers like UPS and Fed-X.

But the internet is only part of the story—the cover story. The real deal has been bipartisan legislation, which acts to make the USPS's survival extremely difficult, if not impossible. Introduced by right-wing



(Above) Berkeley, Calif., tent city and rally to save the central post office building, service, and jobs.

Congressman Darrel Issa of California, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 (PAEA), mandates the USPS to fund health benefits 75 years into the future—for employees not yet born—an obligation that no other federal agency or private corporation has. (Can you imagine your boss being so concerned about your health benefits?)

USPS must make yearly contributions of \$5.6 billion toward the fund and complete the funding by 2016. Without being saddled with this burden the USPS has had a surplus in the last several years. On top of that, says the USPS Inspector General, the USPS has overpaid \$80 billion dollars to the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System, which the federal government refuses to return.

The USPS receives no tax funding and survives on the service it provides. Even so, the USPS heavily discounts large volume corporate bulk mail—that is, mostly junk mail.

General Postmaster Patrick Donahoe, in addition to selling and closing post offices, has tried to break the union by appealing to Congress to remove the no layoff clause. Donahoe has cut hours of operation, reduced thousands of employees by attrition, subcontracted to private firms, threatened to end six-day delivery, and degraded service, in part by closing and consolidating processing centers, thus delaying mail. Such service cuts can be deadly for the elderly, especially in rural areas, where reliance on mail deliveries of medicine is critical. For the poor who cannot afford the internet, the U.S. mail is a lifeline.

Saving post offices and their art

In a number of cities, coalitions of community activists have joined hands with postal workers to save post offices, many of which are listed as National Landmarks for their architectural beauty and the artwork that they contain. In New York City, there is a renewed effort to save the Bronx General Post Office, up for sale since February of this year.

INSURGENTS TAKE OVER APWU

An insurgent caucus in the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), called the "Members First" slate, won union-wide leadership in a vote counted on Oct. 8. Workers were fed-up with inaction in the face of massive attacks on their 2010 contract. Seven of the slate's nine candidates boot-ed out the old guard. Mark Dimondstein of Members First was elected president, with 27,000 votes compared to incumbent Cliff Guffey's 21,000. The APWU represents 196,000 postal workers.

The new leadership will take over on Nov. 7 and has pledged to organize resistance to privatization and plant closures.

In a heavily craft-divided workforce, the APWU represents maintenance workers, truck drivers, and clerks in functions like processing mail and selling stamps. The new leadership intends to mend fences with the National Alliance of Letter Carriers (NALC), a union of some 300,000 members. Both unions have shown disunity and an unwillingness to mobilize the ranks against attacks.

The Oct. 18 issue of *Labor Notes* magazine reported, "Dimondstein had been lead organizer for the union's private sector organizing, an effort to unionize subcontracted trucking and private mail-sorting firms that was mandated by delegates at APWU conventions. That effort was shelved by the incumbents. Dimondstein also co-founded the Greensboro, North Carolina, Jobs with Justice chapter and helped initiate a local coalition, Postal Customers and Workers United to Save the Postal Service."

"Two of the new officers were part of a 2012 hunger strike to save the post office, started by the grassroots network Communities and Postal Workers United (CPWU). Several have experienced firsthand the effects of plant shutdowns in their own locals. What they had in common was frustration with the national union's failure to stem the attacks on postal jobs."

Will the new APWU leadership usher in a new era of postal worker militancy? Will it break with the Democratic Party or remain bound to the 1%? Time will tell, but time is short. — M.G.

Socialist Action spoke with retired postal worker John Dennie, who is active in the movement to save the Bronx General Post Office, which went on sale in February. Said Dennie, "I believe that the people of the South Bronx deserve to have this building, which has been here since 1935 with these beautiful Ben Shahn murals in the lobby. There is no reason to sell off this building other than greed.

"This building has been landmarked, and more recently these paintings have been landmarked. We don't want this to become a cornerstone of gentrification in the Bronx. The most likely use of this building (if sold) would be condos, they've already re-zoned this side of the Grand Concourse. We've got to stop them."

Ben Shahn, a renowned artist and Jewish anarchist, completed the murals for the public Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, with his companion and later wife, Bernarda Bryson. Shahn also worked with Mexican artist Diego Rivera on a mural in New York's Rockefeller Center, later removed because of its inclusion of an image of Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin.

Dennie continued, "The reason this building is being sold is because only the lobby is being used for mail. This building used to be, until 2011, a processing center. They moved the processing to Manhattan. The post office is lying when they say that closing these processing centers doesn't affect service."

Jacquelyn McCornick, from the National Post Office Collaborate (www.Nationalpostofficecollaborate.com), told *Socialist Action*, "We were able to get a court appearance (Oct 24) on a preliminary injunction to stop the sale of the Stamford, Conn. Post Office. We expect the judge to rule on the case next week. If we are successful, that should stop the sale of the Stamford P.O., based on violation of National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. We are hopeful that this is just the beginning, that this will set a precedent for other like cases throughout the country, including the Bronx, Berkeley, La Hoya, Glendale, Redlands, and others."

McCornick explained, "The Post Office really hasn't looked at the cumulative impact of closing these post offices around the country, what was promised us in the constitution concerning postal service, and we hope that this will elevate the discussion and the legacy of the WPA. The properties are part of the public domain and they should stay that way."

The corporate buyers in Stamford were going to tear down the rear portion of the PO and build condos. In another case in Venice, California the real estate corporation that bought the post office, allows public viewing of its art works just six times a year by appointment—but only for one hour a week!

In Berkeley, Calif., activists set up a tent city from late July through August to save their post office. The Beaux-Arts building was constructed in 1914 and contains a WPA mural and sculpture. Unfortunately, while protesters had gone to another action, cops shut down the tent city, in line with the increased repression under the Obama administration, such as the cop attacks on Occupy Wall Street. For more news, go to www.savethepostoffice.com. ■

... Budget

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room table! Paulson himself had left his position as chairman and chief executive officer of Goldman Sachs, the fifth largest bank in the country, to take the Treasury post.

The two high stakes players, Bernanke and Paulson, top guns at the pinnacle of the financial pyramid, took just a minute or so to tell George Bush the bad news before they entered the awaiting corporate legislators. Bush's few words spoke volumes regarding who really rules America. "Why didn't they tell me?" he uttered pathetically, according to on-the-scene reporters.

A few days later, when it became clear that the money trough was wide open for the taking, Congress upped the bank bailout figure to \$840 billion and called the new law, TARP, the Troubled Asset Relief Program—a device wherein the government bought near worthless mortgages at full value. In the months and years that followed, Obama's new Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner added \$20-\$25 trillion more to give to the same elite bankers to keep their failing system afloat. TARP did include \$50 million (not billion!) to help working people avoid foreclosure. To date less than \$5 million of this has been allocated.

In the meantime, the Republican/Tea Party sound and fury about cutting Obamacare came to nothing. Neither Democrats nor Republicans had any intention, rhetoric aside, of gutting this proposal, which in its essence granted private health insurance corporations, whose monopoly profits are among the highest in the nation, \$2 trillion in additional rip-offs. This was done with full knowledge that a simple single-payer system would have saved \$1 trillion in taxpayers' money while providing qualitatively better and cheaper coverage for everyone.

The \$3 trillion differential in real dollar savings between Obamacare and single payer was a vital concern to the twin parties of capital. They sought to avoid it at all costs! In this particular instance, Obama's plan was the preferred choice of the health insurance corporate elite, who contributed far greater sums to the president's campaign coffers than to his Republican "opponents."

Indeed, Obama had already agreed in behind the scenes negotiations to amend his plan in several places to further advance the financial interests of the rich. Very telling, in contrast, was the pathetic spectacle of the recent AFL-CIO national convention's sending its president, Richard Trumka, on a hurried mission to the White House to demand that Obama amend his plan to avoid drastic reductions in some of the comprehensive medical plans unions had negotiated over decades. Obama told Trumka that he didn't play favorites and would not bend to "special interest groups"—that is, trade unions that represent millions of working people.

Thus, the well-orchestrated charade over Obamacare was nothing less than the smokescreen behind which the ruling elite negotiated how much to steal from working people. Obama's 2014 budget proposal already includes proposed cuts in Social Security and Medicare to the tune of \$630 billion. This is the starting point on the sum to be cut.

To be sure, the final figure, as "both sides" of these "reasonable" negotiators reach agreement, will no doubt be in the trillions! The agreed upon amount will, of course, be transferred to the pockets of the billionaire and trillionaire few, qualitatively more to help save their stagnating and declining system than to satisfy the inherent qualities of greed and avarice that are sometimes alleged to be their prime motivating factors.



The transfer of \$ trillions from working people to the bosses is the iron law of failing capitalism today.

An October *Wall Street Journal* article had Tea Party presidential candidate Paul Ryan more truthfully stating, "let's focus more on general spending and entitlement cuts," as opposed to Obamacare. Similarly, Tea Party billionaires like the Koch brothers explained that Obamacare was subordinate to entitlement spending and corporate tax cuts. Tennessee Republican Senator Bob Corker told *Bloomberg News* that "for the past two months we've been focused on the wrong subject." His real priority was entitlement cuts.

Catastrophic rise in U.S. debt

None of this is to say that there were not immediate consequences to working people during the government shutdown. While the furloughed federal workers and all the others will likely receive back pay, local small businesses undoubtedly suffered, and millions who relied on a variety of public services and facilities suffered from the disruption.

But the single and most critical issue during the phony budget debates was never seriously addressed. The ever-mounting U.S. debt, currently standing at a historic high of \$16.8 trillion, a figure that now exceeds the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the United States, was absent from virtually all the flame wars.

Since the beginning of the present recession in 2008, when the U.S. debt stood at \$10 trillion, the debt has increased, on average, by an astounding yearly sum exceeding \$1 trillion. In order to "balance" every year's budget shortfall to have sufficient funds to pay its bills, including the interest owed to U.S. and foreign creditors, Congress is required to pass legislation to increase the debt ceiling, that is, to approve legislation adding yet another trillion dollars to the debt. The \$16.8 trillion owed will now be increased to \$17.5 trillion, give or take a few billion.

This increase was essentially approved in the final bipartisan agreements just concluded; or more accurately, an agreement was reached to fund the deficit for at least three months, with the expectation that the full trillions of dollars that are required would flow from continued negotiations over how much to cut from entitlements and to reduce corporate taxes.

The Bush era tax cuts alone, continued

by the Obama administration, gifted the ruling rich some \$2 trillion annually, an amount sufficient to more than balance the budget and to therefore avoid and need to raise ceiling. Similarly, the massive military expenditures, annually exceeding another trillion dollars, if eliminated, would have more than balanced any budget on record.

But these sacred cows of capital are central to the functioning of the system. In short, what Congress annually steals from the income side of the budget, whose largest component is the taxes paid by working people, they seek to compensate for by austerity measures imposed at the expense of the general population.

This direct transfer of trillions from us to them is today the iron law of a failing capitalism. Literally, 99 percent of all new income generated since 2009 goes to the top 10 percent of the population, an undeniable statement that working people are suffering an attack of greater proportion than in any time of the modern era. This scenario is generally repeated throughout the world. In the U.S. the total present debt, \$16.8 trillion, represents roughly 100 percent of the GDP, in Japan the figure is 192 percent; in Italy, the ratio of the debt to the GDP is 240 percent!

Everywhere in the world, capitalist budgets are "balanced" either at the direct expense of the working class or by "borrowing" money from other nations or banks. I use the term "borrowing" in quotation marks because in the U.S. what this really means is that the government effectively prints money or sells bonds to pay its bills. Since 2008 this has amounted to some trillion dollars annually.

The question of questions is therefore: How long can the government print money or sell bonds to pay its debts until a limit is reached? Most of capitalist economic history was based on the previously indisputable assumption that money, in paper or coinage form, had real value—that is, it was based on gold or on real commodities manufactured by working people in the course of capitalist production. The expression that "the dollar is as good as gold" rang with a certain truth. Gold itself is a commodity whose value, like all others, is based on the amount of human labor power needed to extract it from the earth.

Nations printed money to facilitate the purchase and exchange of real commodities—to aid in the normal circulation process. One could practically go to a bank to exchange cash for gold. In 1944 the U.S. held gold reserves that covered 75 percent of the cash in circulation, although by 1971 the figure had been reduced to 18 percent due to the printing of excessive dollars.

Those nations that violated this fundamental economic principle and printed paper money without regard to its representing real commodities suffered the consequences—massive inflation

wherein what cost x amount in a currency one day, cost $100x$ or $1000x$ shortly after.

The fact that the U.S. inflation rate has been relatively low in recent years is due to the fact that the paper money printed has not been circulated to the general population, therefore increasing demand for new products. Instead, the printed paper money circulates among the elite few—the banks and other speculators who play the capitalist casino game.

The U.S. formally abandoned the gold standard under the Nixon administration in 1971, when the first serious signs of the weakening of the economy appeared as U.S. hegemony was increasingly challenged by competing international rivals. The price of gold has since risen from about \$35 per ounce in

1971 to today's levels, when the dollar's price madly fluctuates from close to \$2000 per ounce to its present value of \$1450—an approximate increase of fifty times its original value. Put another way, the value of the U.S. dollar today is one-fiftieth of what it was in 1971.

In time, printing billions and trillions of dollars, none of which are based on real commodities, i.e., real production in basic manufacturing industries, must eventually end in a catastrophic meltdown that will shake the economic foundations of the entire world.

The present stock market boom, with the Dow Jones index reaching an all time high in 2013 while the overall economy is stagnant or in decline, is nothing less than the product of today's casino capitalism. The government or Federal Reserve prints what amounts to fake money and loans it at near zero interest rates to banks and other speculative investors, who in turn invest in all varieties of new financial instruments at rates of return far greater than the government's zero percent loan rates.

With average manufacturing profit rates in the real economy on the decline in the U.S. and around the world for decades due to ever-intensifying international competition, the corporate elite much prefer gambling in speculative instruments than investing in new technologies to beat their rivals. This "financialization" of capital—the shift from producing real commodities for sale in ever stressed and increasingly glutted world markets to speculative investments—has resulted in the present worldwide crisis of the capitalist system itself, wherein pain and suffering must be inflicted on the vast majority everywhere to pay for the system's inherent contradictions.

Since World War II, when the U.S. emerged as the preeminent world economic power, with its enemies and allies alike destroyed in a cataclysmic war that killed 60 million people, the U.S. has been the leading and unchallenged world power. Even today 60-70 percent of world trade is conducted in dollars, and a similar figure holds for the debt in dollars held by the rest of the world. But today, as the U.S. is increasingly challenged by the European Union, China, and elsewhere, its domination of the world economy is on the decline, with China, for example, now the leading manufacturing nation.

In time, the endless printing of dollars, not backed by anything other than the "good faith and credit of the U.S." cannot but lead to an inflation that reduces the value of the dollar much closer to its real value. China, for example, the world's leading holder of U.S. debt (treasury certificates, bonds and cash)—to the tune of \$1.3 trillion—can only wonder if its holdings will evaporate due to inflation.

Indeed, China has begun to dump

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Bay Area Rapid Transit workers settle strike

By CLAY WADENA

OAKLAND, Calif.—Workers of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system went back to work Oct. 22, as the second work strike in one year came to an end following an agreement on a tentative contract between negotiators. At press time the contract has yet to be ratified by the rank-and-file. The train operators and station agents are members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1555, while other workers belong to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

BART workers, who shut down the fifth busiest mass transit rail in the U.S. for four days in order to defend their quality of life, proved they were strong enough to weather the storm of slander and hate directed at them by politicians and the corporate media.

While full details of the contract are unavailable at press time, it appears that union negotiators made concessions, including an increase in employee pension contributions from zero under the old contract to 4% (in 2017). Unions in June had initially offered to contribute 0.5% to pensions, while management had asked for 6%. This will significantly offset the wage increase that workers were given.

The tentative contract would give workers a 3.85% raise each year through 2017, for a total of 15.38% total raise over four years. Initial proposals from management included keeping wages nearly flat, but the offer was up to 12% in mid-October; while initial union proposals included a 29% wage increase, according to reports. The tentative agreement includes new rules that make it harder for workers to earn larger overtime checks as well.

Health-care costs would increase for BART workers from \$92 per month today to about \$130 per month, a larger flat rate that was not the 9.5% percentage cost that management proposed shortly before the second strike. BART workers' family members are still covered at no additional charge.

Interestingly, it was reported that BART management and the unions had already come to an agreement on economic, health-care, and pension issues before going on strike again on Oct. 18, and the unions had even offered to send the remaining issue—work rules—to arbitration. Yet management refused, thus forcing part two of the labor strike. Some have taken this to mean that management thought it had more to gain by the workers' going on strike a second time, perhaps believing that public opinion was so solidly in their favor that it could obtain even more concessions.

It is not known what management had up their sleeves, but when two workers inspecting a track were killed by a train operated by a trainee, on Oct. 19, it cast suspicions that management was preparing to replace BART workers instead of seriously negotiating to end the strike.

When the workers first went on strike on July 1, before Gov. Jerry Brown ended it with a 60-day cooling-off period, workers' complaints of unsafe working conditions had been lost amid the media hysteria about "greedy" BART workers. It was only after the two workers were killed that worker safety once again made it into the news.

Management immediately increased safety standards; BART trains travel at speeds up to 70 miles per hour, but management will now begin restricting their speed to 27 mph through job sites. But why did workers have to die for these standards to be implemented?

When track inspector James Strickland was killed along the same set of tracks in 2008, BART officials promised to look into available digital technology that would alert workers when trains approach; but they claimed to have found nothing suitable. In the meantime, BART policy for workers' safety doesn't include warnings that trains are coming; instead, it amounts to one worker focusing on the track while another watches their back for trains (so they



can see an approaching train 15 seconds away). This is the best policy according to management because with a digital warning system "workers become overly dependent on the devices."

Basic safety issues like bullet-proof glass in stations, warnings that trains are approaching at 70 mph, and staffing two station agents early in the morning and late at night were rarely discussed in mainstream news stories; rather, the workers' wages were constantly evaluated and inspected—apparently for evidence that they were far too privileged to have any complaint whatsoever.

The class positions of corporate profiteers, politicians, newspapers, and the media in general are rarely as apparent as during a work strike by organized labor. The responses in this instance were overwhelmingly against the strike, but sometimes painted in the liberal trappings of pity for the inconvenience that the strike caused to so many people.

A Democratic city councilman and candidate for state assembly from Orinda, Calif., Steve Glazer, called for a prohibition of transit strikes because strikes "cripple our economy, hurt workers getting to their jobs, limit access to schools and health care, and damage our environment." Calif. State Senator Mark DeSaulnier, a Democrat, said he was looking into legislation to prevent future strikes. Richard White, CEO of UserVoice, said, "Get 'em back to work, pay them whatever they want, and then figure out how to automate their jobs so this doesn't happen again."

Politicians and newspapers quibbled about banning strikes; CEOs and people writing blogs explored ways to automate train operation and eliminate jobs (as if the unions were composed entirely of train operators), but many workers remained grounded in the fact that behind all the hype they weren't asking for much, since wages have been frozen since 2009.

"BART is running a surplus," train operator Eddie Turner said. "This system works and we are the people who make it work." Kay Wilson, a BART worker on the picket line, said, "I make no apologies for wanting to go to work, do my job well, and get paid for that."

In today's worldwide climate of austerity, capitalism is attempting to set back public-sector workers and their unions to an unprecedented degree. This will undoubtedly force many more strikes from workers struggling to main-

tain their standard of living. All working people should know which side they stand on, and show their solidarity, according to the principle of "an injury to one is an injury to all!" ■

... Fukushima

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ity that Fukushima represents is being unnecessarily prolonged because those profiting from nuclear power do not want to admit how truly daunting and complex the problems are in this unprecedented situation or to come clean about what it will take to solve them.

Contrary to Prime Minister Abe's proclamation before the International Olympic Committee, the situation is not under control. Far from it, and this malignity of capitalism must end now. The best scientific and engineering minds on the planet should be devoted to dealing with the problems of decommissioning and cleaning up the mess at Fukushima.

Because Northern Japan has been rendered uninhabitable, the entire population should be humanely relocated. The populace and Fukushima workers should be compensated and given the best remedial medical care available. Thorough monitoring of all food stuffs should be conducted by governments—with nothing unsafe being allowed in the markets.

All nuclear reactors should be nationalized in every country and taken out of the hands of the private utilities to begin the process of decommissioning them immediately under the control of democratically-elected committees of workers and local residents. Long-term permanent dry-waste storage facilities should be found that are ecologically and geologically sound and are socially acceptable. ■

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some of its large dollar holdings while opening the first debates that question whether the dollar should remain the world's reserve currency, as per the Bretton Woods agreements that so established the dollar in 1944.

The concept is simple enough: What would happen if the U.S. government ordered its money printers to print \$1.3 trillion in cash and ship it to China, marked, "paid in full." Or suppose the U.S. did the same with regard to its entire debt of \$16.8 trillion, soon to become \$17.8 trillion!

In effect, the U.S. would be exchanging a large box of paper for real commodities that it had purchased around the world. Every nation that today loans money to the U.S. does so on the basis that, as the world's leading economy, it

will pay its debts in full and with *interest*, since the dollar, albeit declining, is still the most reliable currency on earth today.

The growing divergence between a U.S. economy on the decline and the value of its credit does frighten the most informed layers of the capitalist elite. Yet their only solution, as with their rivals the world over, is to resolve their inherent crises at the expense of working people while printing seemingly endless dollars or bonds, to the tune of \$89 billion per month in the U.S., the so-called QE or Quantitative Easing that began in 2008 wherein the government purchased near-worthless bank mortgages at face value.

U.S. capitalism's global dominance is rapidly coming to an end. The "full faith and credit" in its dollar and economy is today undermined not only by the mere thought that it might default in the context of the present congressio-

nal wrangle over the debt ceiling, but in its essential stability itself.

The speculative real estate frenzy leading to the present recession/depression, which shook world markets beginning in 2008, was qualitatively more a reflection of capitalism's general decline rather than of the stupidity or corruption of greedy bankers. A sick system reached the point where average profits were significantly declining in the real world of manufacturing.

The 2008 bankruptcy of General Motors, once the world's largest corporation, is a prime case in point. Why invest in yet another new auto plant that would become obsolete in a matter of months? It's better to invest, America's ruling rich calculated, in a stock market or related speculative instruments, where government money could be had at close to zero interest rates and speculative insurance companies like AIG guarantee against any losses!

That house of cards came tumbling down; capitalism's leaders then intensified their shift, considering that the only way out of the crisis was on the backs of working people. Needless to say, the stock market has now even exceeded its highs of five years ago—but again, based on unprecedented speculation as opposed to investment in real production. Wherever capitalism does invest, aside from speculation, is more often than not in low-wage, non-union, service sector, part-time industries, which give zero benefits to workers. Whether this is done in the U.S. or in a poor and oppressed nation where workers can be had at a fraction of the cost is a matter of indifference to those who make the decisions.

The present budget, debt-ceiling, default, ObamaCare hullabaloo represents "much ado about nothing" except how best to inflict yet another blow against us. ■

Fukushima radiation leaks are poisoning soil and oceans

By CHRISTINE FRANK

The crisis at Fukushima Dai'ichi, the crippled nuclear power facility that was severely damaged by an M 9.0 megathrust quake and 40-foot tsunami in March 2011, is deepening. Every living thing in the Northern Hemisphere, if not the entire planet, is in peril from radioactive contamination. It is clear that the steadily deteriorating situation is out of control, and those responsible are in way over their heads, coming up with one knee-jerk response after the other, which often brings more harm than good.

Radioactive wastewater has been hemorrhaging from the facility daily for 2 ½ years. It is pouring out of storage tanks and buildings and into the sea at a phenomenal rate. In August, officials from TEPCO, the company that is presiding over the cascading catastrophe, admitted that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from one of its hastily and poorly built on-site storage tanks. In fact, that much is being released into the ocean on a daily basis!

The tanks are used to contain two kinds of wastewater: (1) the millions of gallons used to cool Units 1, 2, and 3, which melted down within days after the accident and the extremely hot spent fuel rods lying in pools; (2) groundwater, which is flowing through the basements of the irradiated containment buildings.

TEPCO constructed the tanks in miserly fashion, having only bolted rather than welded them together. Consequently, they are anything but watertight, and the company, clueless as usual, has no idea from where exactly the leaks are coming among its 1000 tanks, which hold an alarming 430,000 tons of poisoned water. Part of the difficulty is the deadly level of radiation all around the facility, which prevents engineers and workers from examining the problem up close and getting an accurate assessment of what is going on.

The groundwater flushing through the containment buildings is due to their having been heavily damaged by the shaking from the earthquake, so it is routinely entering through numerous conduits—ruptured pipes, trenches, and cracked foundations. The water is coming into contact with irradiated objects everywhere and becoming contaminated. TEPCO's woefully inadequate decontamination system filters only about 100 tons of water per day, with 300 running through the complex and out into the Pacific.

In order to block the groundwater from reaching the sea, the company is going to build a "frozen wall" at taxpayers' expense, adding to the nine-trillion-yen bailout it has already received. A chemical solution will be injected into the coastline embankment in an effort to solidify it. Independent nuclear engineers suggested the move immediately after the earthquake, but the skinflints did not want to spend the money for fear of putting off their investors.

Over the last 31 months, this deliberate contamination of the ocean now amounts to 280,000 tons of radioactive water. The marine ecosystem is being poisoned with tritium by as much as 20 to 40 trillion Bequerels, along with iodine, cesium, strontium, americium, and other dangerous radioisotopes. They are steadily bioaccumulating and biomagnifying through the food web, both terrestrial and aquatic. As a result, the Japanese fishing industry has been destroyed, suffering several billion yen in economic losses. In the first year of the disaster, oceanographers found that all bottom-feeding fish off the Japanese coast consistently showed high counts of cesium-137, which concentrates in the muscles. The contamination began to spread immediately across the Pacific Ocean.

The hydrogen explosions released a radioactive plume that blew with the prevailing winds. The fallout rained down on the U.S. West Coast, and then washed into the sea. As a result, the giant kelp forests off the California coast showed high iodine-131 levels two weeks later.



All of northern Japan has been contaminated. Fukushima clean-up is expected to take 40 years.

This undoubtedly concentrated in the thyroid glands of the fish that fed off the kelp.

Also full of cesium are top predators such as salmon and albacore and bluefin tuna. Yet, the U.S. government is issuing no warnings against eating irradiated seafood. More alarming are the fish on the West Coast found bleeding from the gills, bellies, and eyeballs, which are showing obvious signs of radiation sickness.

The geographic scope of the contamination is enormous. There is a debris field from the tsunami roughly the size of Texas floating in the Pacific in radioactive seawater. It includes people's personal possessions and the detritus of capitalist civilization as well as a lot of hazardous materials. Some of it has already reached the Pacific Northwest Coast. Observers have reported a frightening scarcity of seabirds, fish, and healthy marine mammals. Instead they've spotted whales suffering from hideous tumors. With many species being overfished, other forms of industrial pollution intensifying, and seawater warming and acidifying from climate change, the marine environment is in a steep and rapid decline, and the ocean appears to be dying.

All of the buildings and ventilation stacks in the Fukushima complex have suffered structural damage from the quake and are in danger of collapse if there is another severe one. On Oct. 25, Northern Japan experienced a significant M 7.1 in the subduction zone off of its coast. TEPCO's on-site cameras showed the entire complex shaking; there was a mild one-foot tsunami, and employees were evacuated. More aftershocks were predicted. The ground under the facility is becoming more and more unstable and subject to subsidence and liquefaction of soils made soggy by groundwater. Japan has been battered by 27 storms this year, so saturated soils add to the instability.

Clean-up efforts at the site have amounted to a series of futile stopgap measures. For instance, the ruined, rickety reactor buildings have been wrapped in Kevlar shrink wrap in a pathetic attempt to reinforce and prevent them from crumbling. This does nothing to keep radiation from escaping from the triple meltdowns.

Of greatest immediate concern is the spent fuel rod pool above Unit #4, whose structural integrity has been

(Above) Nurses check children who live in vicinity of Fukushima reactors for radiation.

severely compromised with a concrete wall buckling and on the verge of collapse. Plus, it experienced a hydrogen explosion, loss of coolant, and subsequent zirconium fire.

TEPCO is planning to begin the removal of over 1300 heavy and unwieldy fuel rods, weighing 2/3 ton each, to another pool in November. Ordinarily, when rods are removed from a cooling pool, it is done with a crane guided by a computer that knows down to the millimeter where they are located. Those technologies were destroyed in the accident, so the operation will have to be done manually.

TEPCO has erected a mobile crane above Unit #4, and the spent fuel rods will be pulled from their racks and inserted one by one into a heavy steel chamber while the assemblies are still under water, and then removed from the building. This game of radioactive pick-up sticks by remote control is extremely risky. One false move on the part of the operator could result in the zirconium cladding being exposed to oxygen and catching fire or the fuel heating up, reaching criticality and setting off an unstoppable chain reaction.

The situation is even more precarious because the racks and rods have become brittle and bent due to loss of coolant during the accident and corrosion from saline seawater that was used for emergency cooling. Stress and heavy radiation exposures among the workers will add to the challenge.

All of northern Japan has been contaminated by this horror, and is uninhabitable. All attempts at decontamination are a cruel joke. The air, water, soil, crops, and seafood have been poisoned beyond redemption, and the land should be abandoned. The body burden of the people is increasing daily with the ceaseless ingestion and inhalation of radionuclides and repeated bombardment of their bodies' cells with ionizing radiation. Children are the most vulnerable. With the clean-up and decommissioning of Fukushima expected to take well over 40 years, the nightmare will continue well into the next generation. There seems to be no end in sight, and we may anticipate that things will only get worse if we do not stand up and fight back.

We must counter the lies and cover-ups from the industry, government, and apologists in the scientific community who keep telling us that nukes are harmless, and accidents rare. Nuclear power is a horrible perversion of human knowledge, and all humankind should rue the day scientists ever engaged in the Faustian bargain of splitting the atom. The crime against nature and human-

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