

Occupations unleash critical debate on capitalist crisis



Steven Senne / AP

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(Left) Occupy Boston, Nov. 2.
(Below) NY police clear Occupy Wall St. from Zuccotti Park on Nov. 15.

BY JEFF MACKLER

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement has proven to be the political spark that ignited the pent-up anger and frustration of millions in the United States. It has awakened broad segments of the great majority who have suffered deeply from a decades-long tidal wave of defeats inflicted by a degenerating world capitalist order that today has no room for concessions, even of the token variety. The long-awaited American fightback, which will take a myriad of forms in the years ahead, is off to an inspiring start.

Coupled with multiplying rallies, marches, and occupations of every kind, the Occupy movement has unleashed a national discussion and debate among working people to determine how best to challenge the morally and economically bankrupt system and win.

The capitalist system's elite and their government servants, the now increasingly despised "one percent," daily impose their solutions to the world economic crisis that they themselves created—more austerity, more cuts in social benefits, more layoffs, more wars, more assaults on the environment, more foreclosures, more racist attacks on the Black, Latino, and immigrant communities and youth.

Their "solution" to the challenge posed by the Occupy movement is to try to make it disappear—to physically remove, in coordinated military-style police actions, the tents and encampment supplies, food, medical facilities, books that have been set up in cities across the country. From New York, Oakland, Salt Lake City, Portland, Denver, St. Louis, Albany, Durham, and scores of other cities, to campus and neighborhood occupations, the spectacle of peaceful protesters—from youth to 84-year-old grandmothers—being brutally clubbed, pepper sprayed, tear gassed, and arrested en masse has not been lost on the public.



Lucas Jackson / Reuters

Daily conversations in workplaces and wherever people congregate register heightened interest in the occupiers and general solidarity with their goals. Wall Street bosses have threatened immediate dismissal for clerical workers who might peek out of the windows to view the protests or take a cell-phone snapshot of them.

Oakland, Calif., Mayor Jean Quan and other public officials have publicly recounted their participation in national phone calls initiated by the U.S. Conference of Mayors to discuss how to disappear the occupiers. An Obama spokesperson aboard Air Force One told media representatives, according to *The New York Times*, that the president believed that the right to protest itself had to be balanced by government concerns regarding "sanitation and public safety"!

Addressing a meeting of New York's business leaders on Nov. 17, the day of the first nationally coordinated actions initiated by the original Occupy Wall Street Gen-

eral Assembly, the perplexed and clueless billionaire Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-"Independent," Mayor Michael Bloomberg, could only note that "the protests were a dire sign of the public's economic fears." Said Bloomberg, as reported in the Nov. 18 *New York Times*, "The public is getting scared. They don't know what to do, and they are going to strike out. They just know that the system isn't working, and they don't want to wait around."

For Bloomberg and his bipartisan partners, who look to the bipartisan congressional "Super Committee" or Joint Select Committee [of 12 members of the House and Senate] on Deficit Reduction, there are no solutions other than massive austerity for working people and more trillion-dollar tax cuts for the rich. Theirs is the same logic applied the world over by a crisis-ridden capitalist order that has imposed draconian measures on the working masses in every sphere of social life to pay the debts of their failing banks, corporations and governments.

The OWS movement has cut deeply into the fabric of American life:

- On Nov. 2, in Oakland, Calif., in response to the brutal 4 a.m. police attack on the Civic Center Occupy Oakland site, a mobilization or "general strike" of 20,000 trade unionists, youth, and other supporters filled the city streets, forced the closure of banks and other financial institutions, and shut down the Port of Oakland with the support of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and some cheering and honking truck drivers.

- On Nov. 17, where two days earlier carefully planned and orchestrated police violence and mass arrests closed down the Zuccotti Square Occupation, 10,000 CUNY and NYU students, and other OWS supporters rallied at Union Square and marched down Broadway to Foley Square for a rally that grew to over 30,000. The same numbers crossed the Brooklyn Bridge to call attention to

(continued on page 4)

Storm blackout stirs public outrage

By DANIEL ADAM

Lesloyd F. Alleyne / Journal Inquirer / AP

HARTFORD, Conn.—On Nov. 17 Jeffrey Butler, the President of Connecticut's largest electrical utility company, Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P), resigned amid public outrage following the largest blackout in the state's history. The blackout was caused by a late-October snowstorm that stretched from West Virginia to Maine and broke October snowfall records throughout the region, cutting electricity to a total of 3 million customers. In Connecticut 955,000 CL&P customers lost power, 77 percent of the company's total customers. Full power was not restored for 12 days, with many in the dark for a week.

This autumnal nor'easter closely followed the late August tropical storm Irene, which also caused major blackouts. Both storms brought numerous CL&P practices to light and raised many questions about deregulation, infrastructure, and climate change.

The outage in Connecticut shut down grocery stores, traffic lights, schools, workplaces, and home heating. Affected gas stations were inoperable, creating fuel shortages throughout the state. Many cable and cell-phone services were also disrupted. Thousands of residents took shelter in community centers and schools as the temperature dipped below freezing at night. Halloween in many cities and towns was cancelled due to darkness and downed wires. At least 187 people were treated for carbon monoxide poisoning from using power generators.

Butler estimated the storm would cost CL&P at least between \$75 and \$100 million. The company plans to make up the money through rate increases to customers. According to an early estimate by Kinetic Analysis Corp, damage covered by insurance for all storm-affected states will total between \$1 billion and \$3 billion. However, barely any of the revenue and income lost because of the power outage itself will ever be compensated since insurance policies



rarely cover such losses.

The two outages have brought home the impact of CL&P's staff reductions. CL&P had 430 linesmen in 1976 when they had 850,000 customers. By 2005 they had reduced their linesmen to 190 while their customer base grew to 1.2 million. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 420 requested meetings with Democratic Gov. Dan Malloy to discuss low staff levels after Tropical Storm Irene, but the governor never responded.

Meanwhile CL&P and its parent company, Northeast Utilities, are doing quite well. In the last four years NU's earnings per share have increased by 38%. NU's stock price grew by roughly 25% in the last year alone, and NU's top five CEOs presently earn a combined \$24 million a year. CL&P charges some of the highest rates in the country. The recent outages have raised opposition to deregulation. Cirillo, for instance, has pointed out that delays in turning on the power don't hurt CL&P's bottom line. Since, following deregulation, the company is no longer a provider of power the company gets paid whether or not power is on.

At a Nov. 19 rally against CL&P organized by the IBEW

and Occupy Hartford, some participants called for placing the utility under some form of public ownership. The logic of this proposal is increasingly difficult to escape.

In the recent blackout municipal and state workers did an unprecedented amount of the work normally performed by the utility company. Also, the restoration was significantly hampered by the recent proliferation of private companies that must negotiate the restoration of each stretch of line and pole. In addition to telephone and electricity companies are added multiple cable and internet providers. Even large numbers of the poles are now owned by private companies. Public ownership of all these services would cut major costs in redundancy and bureaucracy, and reduce restoration time.

In the midst of a nor'easter falling in an abnormally warm October, media outlets have managed to avoid nearly all discussion of climate change. And this was not the only extreme weather of the month. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that more than 500,000 acres burned in wildfires across the U.S., setting a new record for October. Far from a mere "freak" storm (as many accounts put it), climate research shows us that such storms are becoming the new normal due to dramatic climate change caused by industrial capitalism.

The last two months provide another glimpse as to what will happen when such climatic change meets a crisis-ridden capitalism with all its cuts to public services, privatization, deregulation, over-extended and under-maintained infrastructure, cost-cutting, impoverishment, structural dependence on ever-expanding production, and simple white-collar theft.

A report from the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection found that had Irene been a Category 1 hurricane when it hit Connecticut, it would have caused a near total outage of the state and—assuming the same number of crews available—would have required 67 days to restore all power. A Category 3 hurricane would cause a 100 percent outage of the state, requiring 157 days to restore all power. The National Weather Service says a Category 3 hurricane in Connecticut is inevitable. ■

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers' committees.

2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.

3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.

4) Immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq & Afghanistan! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people's needs and to combat global warming.

5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to 55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.

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

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

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

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

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

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Europe debt crisis is latest threat to global system

Michael Probst / AP



By ANDREW POLLACK

The foremost symptom in the last month of the deepening global economic crisis has been the sovereign debt panic in Europe—steadily increasing the odds of an explosion of the European Union and the death of the euro. The spillover would engulf the world, sinking to new depths a stagnant U.S. economy, as well as that of China and other “emerging” economies.

The European Union and its common currency, the euro, is a prime example of the contradictory phenomena inherently besetting the capitalist economic system. The EU was a product of the global unevenness of the post-World War II period, in which the leading European powers, having lost their global dominance to the United States, realized they had to combine forces. Yet they could only do so on the basis of political states reflecting the particular interests of individual ruling classes. And each of the latter was torn between the desire to outcompete its European revivals and the need to collaborate with the latter against the U.S.

The EU was built on a continent with wildly divergent levels of productivity, technical development, and levels of social spending. In prosperous times marginal efforts at unity were begun. But rather than harmonizing all parts of the country upward to prosperity, the EU became a way for its stronger members to deepen the dependency and subordination of the weaker by forcing open their markets, and taking advantage of cheaper labor (by migration of labor in one direction and capital in another).

Yet in a crisis it's everyone for himself. So although today's rhetoric from the stronger countries blames the poorest countries for their alleged wastefulness, this is just a dodge to cover the EU's failure in good times to overcome the centripetal forces acting against cross-national economic unity—now exacerbated by shrinking markets and vanishing investment opportunities.

The country that has benefited the most from imposition of a relatively common “free” market across Europe, Germany, is also the one least willing to yield its dominance or risk its own fiscal health to help its crisis-ridden neighbors. Instead, Germany, at least until the waves of the crisis began lapping at its own feet in recent days, has been lecturing its neighbors about the need for massive spending cuts and greater fiscal restraint.

This mantra is echoed by the IMF and European Central Bank figures, who portray the crisis as one of “sovereign debt,” i.e., the increasing inability of countries to find investors to buy the bonds that finance their shortfalls, thus supposedly requiring spending cuts to shrink their budget deficits. Lower wages and benefits are also recommended to increase these countries' competitiveness, thus shrinking their trade imbalances. All of this, supposedly, will shrink their accumulated debt and make their bonds more investment-worthy.

But the alleged profligacy that put European governments in such situations, requiring them to take such remedial steps, is, when not an outright slander, merely a symptom—as was the supposed shortsightedness that led

(Above) Protesters hold banner, “Smash banks, redistribute wealth,” in front of European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Nov. 12.

U.S. homebuyers to take out mortgages they couldn't afford. In both cases, the underlying cause was a financialization of the global economy, encouraging if not forcing both consumers and governments to take on more debt

Supercommittee fails, cuts coming anyway

By ANDREW POLLACK

The austerity programs being forced by bankers and the IMF on European governments had their counterpart in the U.S. in the Congressional “Supercommittee,” the bipartisan effort at meeting demands by the ruling class to cut the country's deficits by slashing the social safety net for workers. Since the Supercommittee failed to reach consensus on a set of cuts and/or tax hikes, the legislatively mandated alternative of massive across-the-board cuts at arbitrarily set percentages will take place in 2013.

The Supercommittee's failure occurs against the backdrop of a still-stagnant economy, one in which corporations are still reluctant to invest, yet not at all reluctant to spend on their own executives' well-being.

The New York Times reported on Nov. 21 that companies laying off thousands of workers were using huge piles of cash not to expand production, but instead to buy back their own stock—and in the process, given the hefty weight of stock bonuses in compensation packages, stuffing their executives' pockets. After sliding since the outbreak of the financial crisis, buybacks have reached \$445 billion already this year, the most since 2007, when repurchases peaked at \$914 billion.

Even financial institutions, which bought back huge amounts of stock over the last decade at share prices far higher than they are today—and by doing so earned the wrath of many mainstream economists who asked why they weren't investing such sums—have reverted to buybacks. JPMorgan Chase, for example, spent \$4.4 billion repurchasing shares in the third quarter even as its stock fell more than 25 percent.

And the retreat back to speculative capital fantasyland goes on: On Nov. 3, social media giant Groupon held an \$805 million initial public offering. On its first trading day the company was valued at \$16.7 billion. Soon thereafter its stock price began to slide.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, several U.S. economic indicators were stable or showed little change in October, but one key index—orders for core capital goods, “a good proxy for business investment spending,” said *The Times*—experienced its sharpest drop since January.

The Wall Street Journal warned that the failure of the

to keep production going. That financialization in turn arose out of decades of falling rates of profit, coupled with increasing globalization as Western corporations fled further and deeper abroad to cut production costs.

The Wall Street Journal reported: “In the first steps toward the closer political and financial integration that many have come to believe is essential for the euro's survival, the European Commission on Wednesday went beyond floating the idea of euro bonds. It also proposed that countries surrender more power over their finances to the European authorities, giving Brussels the right to request a rewrite of spending plans that seem too profligate.”

Not even the wealthiest on the continent are going to be immune from such pressures. On Nov. 16, the bond sell-offs that had been plaguing the southern tier of Europe hit some of its healthiest economies—e.g., Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, and France. One week later it was Germany's turn. For months, said *The Wall Street Journal*, the worst-case scenario envisioned was that the crisis, “born in heavily indebted countries, would infect otherwise healthy countries at the heart of the monetary union.” That scenario is now being played out.

“If investors go on a buyers strike of European debt,” *The Journal* commented, that could raise borrowing costs and threaten the solvency of the euro zone, which in turn “could destabilize the global financial system and damage world-wide economic growth.” This would look something like the “buyers strike” after the demise of Lehman Brothers, when banks refused to lend to each other. The cause is the same underlying malady.

On Nov. 23, *The New York Times* noted, “Germany's stature as an island of stability in the European debt crisis was shaken when it fell far short of selling all the government bonds it put up for auction. Investors are beginning to question whether there are any havens left in Europe after German bonds got a surprisingly bad reception.” The failed sales, said *The Times*, also mean that Germany, which for months has been resisting EU-wide initiatives to help weaker economies, would have less prestige to dictate how the euro region will cope with the debt crisis.

The paper continued: “There is a growing sense in the region that unless the European Central Bank and big euro members like Germany and France agree to take major action to prop up the region's finances, the euro-currency union itself could start to crumble. The debt crisis has toppled five governments, including Italy and Greece, by raising those countries' borrowing costs to dangerously high levels. And now the crisis is prompting many investors to pull money out of the euro region altogether.” ■

Supercommittee meant that at the same time as investors were wringing their hands over the European crisis, they had to turn anguished gazes across the ocean. Standard & Poor's, which had already carried out an unprecedented cut in its U.S. rating on Aug. 5, warned that “downward pressure on the ratings could build” due to the Supercommittee's failure, and Moody's warned of a rating cut should Congress try to soften the mandated 2013 cuts.

In the same malevolent spirit, an economist at a French bank told *The Journal* that those cuts are “the only thing standing between us and a [rating] downgrade.” And French bankers have good reason to be concerned about the fiscal health of the United States.

The high marks France has gotten until now from ratings agencies for its fiscal rectitude is slipping as it tries to keep Italy from going under. Fears of being pulled down by sinking swimmers, as France is now, is why Germany held out so long against providing assistance, and instead sternly demanded austerity from Greece and the weaker countries. But France borrows heavily in the United States to finance its own debt—and now U.S. banks fear coming losses from overexposure to France's problems.

U.S. banks' connections to European banks are paralleled by close ties of U.S. manufacturers: Automakers depend on sales in Europe for 30% of their output. The equivalent figures for household products is 17.5%, and for pharmaceuticals and biotechnology 15.5%. And, of course, U.S. manufacturers are just as tightly dependent on Asian producers and consumers—dangerous connections given the decreasing ability of the latter to sell to Europe.

Unions, organizations of the oppressed, antiwar groups, and the Occupy movement are all trying to grapple with how to resist the attacks on workers stemming from the above-described phenomena. One place to start is with the demand for opening the account books of the banks and corporations, and on that basis proving the justness of demands to cancel the debts of workers, students, and consumers (and of the public agencies that provide their social safety net, but are now being strangled by the banks). Certainly, the Occupy movement and its allies in labor and other movements are well positioned to take up these demands. ■



... Occupations unleash critical debate on capitalist crisis

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the need to create jobs by repairing the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

• On Nov. 15, some 5000 students, faculty, and unionized campus workers were joined by a long march from Occupy Oakland for a General Assembly at Sproul Plaza at the University of California at Berkeley. Earlier in the day campus police used force and violence and scores of arrests to prevent students from setting up a handful of tents. Two California State Universities were shut down tight as almost all of the 600 scheduled classes were cancelled.

• Thousands in Portland, Ore., demonstrated a courage and discipline that forced the retreat of cops intent on breaking up their encampment. And a thousand more at the University of California at Davis, following the blatant pepper spraying of a few rows of peacefully demonstrating students sitting across a campus roadway, systematically humiliated and "escorted" a cordon of retreating club-wielding police off the campus.

Associated protests and occupations across the country in 1000 towns and cities gave testimony that this movement is here to stay. Placards and banners everywhere display the incredibly unifying and affirming credo, "We are the 99 percent." The movement rings out with declarations of confidence and clarity of purpose: We are the vast majority. We are the victims of the rule of capital, they all but state! Whatever differences there might be among us are nil as compared to ours with the one percent, with the corporate owners of everything, with the politicians and parties who represent them—with the ruling class!

However much one might quibble with the 99 percent figure, it stands in sharp contrast to the pathetic labor bureaucracy's often stated, "We are the middle class," or their complaints that "We are being driven from the middle class." The bureaucracy's allusion to the "middle class," now being shattered by the reality of life in capitalist America, implies that labor is no longer the broad working class, the poor, the unemployed, the oppressed nationalities—that is, the vast majority—but rather a more privileged layer defined by relatively higher wages.

Occupy is a movement that roars with contempt of the constituted authorities. It is not daunted by court orders demanding that its tent encampments be taken down or by the constant and often brutal application of police violence and repression. Given today's widespread use of cell-phone cameras and video recording devices, this is increasingly displayed worldwide in the form of peaceful Occupy crowds blinded and gasping from gas attacks, or stunned by deafening sound weapons and other modern day crowd-control devices aimed at dispersing and sometimes maiming or even killing the innocents who participate to express their just grievances.

One day, in the name of "law and order," in the name of "sanitation concerns" or other "legal" pretexts offered up by compliant judges, the encampments are declared illegal and destroyed. The next, they are often re-taken by the peaceful, planned, and massive exertion of a counterforce wherein protesters armed with a political cause supported by millions compel club-yielding SWAT teams to retreat or pay what remains an unacceptable political price—the likening of America, "the land of the free," to the repressive regimes that the U.S. promotes and protects the world over. Better to retreat, the cops are on occasion instructed, than to fully apply the repressive force on hand and risk the next wave of solidarity coming back in 10-fold or 20-fold numbers.

We should note here that New York City has been among the most repressive in the United States regarding the simple right to march down the street. Tedious and highly restrictive permit processes coupled with police barricades forcing demonstrators to walk miles to participate, the banning of sound systems, the denial of city parks to assemble, were the rule in this city—that is, until Occupy Wall Street.

Today in New York no activists ask permission to exercise

their constitutional rights. Whatever restrictive efforts have been attempted by the police have not been able to stop or deter protests by virtue of the massive and determined nature of the anti-government mobilizations. The ruling class understands that OWS has won support from millions who increasingly understand that this new movement is theirs.

The occupations have opened an unprecedented and long-awaited national debate while condemning the ongoing failures of the system itself. Students demand free education and the cancellation of their debts. Thousands march over bridges to mark the nation's deteriorating infrastructure and the need for jobs to repair or replace them. Hundreds in city after city re-occupy foreclosed housing in solidarity with the evicted poor. And the occupiers even strive, with deep compassion, to provide food and shelter for the homeless and destitute, while noting with contempt that the world's richest nation can't do what they are doing.

Students and faculty demand affirmative action for increasingly segregated universities, the resignation of university officials and student/worker control of the universities. Teachers demand a reversal of the massive layoffs that have taken the jobs of hundreds of thousands, reinstatement of cancelled classes, and quality education for all.

Public employees of every category and from virtually every trade union demand the reversal of the layoffs, salary cuts, enforced non-paid "furloughs," and the deterioration of public services. Millions demand that the rich be taxed to pay for all the above, that the bank bailouts be reversed, that the corporations be placed under public control or under workers' control. These demands and literally hundreds of others are the subject of General Assembly debates and in workplaces in every city.

All this is taking place while the ruling capitalist parties stand mute, offering no solutions other than further incursions on the quality of life of everyone but the rich. The OWS assemblies overwhelmingly reject the notion—which is cautiously, but steadily, promoted by trade-union misleaders, Democratic Party front groups like MoveOn.org, and NGOs dependent on corporate funding—that the "lesser evil" Democrats are the only alternative.

However, in the absence of a mass independent working-class political alternative, based on a rejuvenated and fighting trade-union movement, there is no doubt that lesser-evilism still finds receptive ears. The U.S. political system is in fact meticulously designed to achieve public support in the electoral arena by constantly counterposing one evil to another—today by purposefully enlisting as candidates a gang of right-wing Republican fanatics in order to facilitate the Democrats and Obama moving as far to the right as the ruling class demands.

In truth, however, it matters not which of the twin parties are in power. Obama has far exceeded his predecessors in the scope and magnitude of cuts in social programs and reactionary policies, not to mention wars and attacks on civil liberties at home. The name of the game is to provide legitimacy to whichever party wins the rigged game, in which the pre-selected multi-billion-dollar-funded candidates of the rich "battle" for the title. As in any serious high-profit gambling casino, the house is always rigged against the people.

Mid-November marked an important challenge to the Occupy movement when several encampments in major cities were dismembered by mass police force on orders from compliant judges or city officials. These attacks have given further drive to the tactical discussions and debates among Occupy activists, who were already considering measures to deal with the onset of the cold winter months.

One question remains sharply posed to the movement's ranks and the emerging, but still vaguely defined, leadership: Are the encampments—the physical occupation of public or private space—envisioned as symbolic of the exercise of people's power, or are they conceived as the actual embodiment of such power, as mini-communes, and as a conquest that must be physically defended lest the move-

ment suffer a major defeat?

Many Occupy activists believe that the government's obliteration of various occupation sites, as in New York and Oakland, represents a serious setback. Others, more realistically, believe that however important the occupied sites might be, the value of this new movement lies qualitatively more in the unprecedented national political dialogue it has provoked, its emerging radical and anti-capitalist program, and the massive mobilizations that it has engendered.

The movement's power, it is now clear, lies in its bold ideas and actions and in the reverberation of these in the general population. Tens of thousands of trade unionists, working people, youth, and a broad layer of the oppressed communities flocked to the occupation sites less to confront the police and more to express their solidarity with the bold challenge to the status quo that had been posed.

It must be stated, however, that the physical power, the sheer numbers, of these mass actions in most cases served as an effective deterrent to police interference. It is one thing to remove a small group of occupiers and their tents in the early morning hours but quite another to take on an angry and determined mass of working people—and especially so when they are backed by the formal declarations of support of the nation's major trade unions, including the national AFL-CIO.

Even the hide-bound trade-union bureaucracy sensed that lending formal support and encouraging, however meekly, the mobilization of its ranks was far preferable to giving credence to the forces of "law and order," including the Democratic Party. They judged properly that turning their backs on the Occupy movement entirely could lead to a repudiation of their leadership and the emergence of an internal opposition with a mass following and a mind of its own. Better to join now, they calculated, and ride the wave, only to lead it down the line into the Democratic Party "graveyard of social movements."

The Occupy movement has set an example for the entire labor movement far exceeding its enthusiastic and welcome support for ongoing union struggles, including mobilizing OWS protests at Verizon stores organized by the Communication Workers of America, where workers are fighting against employer efforts to impose a new crippling national contract, or solidarity actions supporting Teamsters at Sotheby's Auction house who face similar assaults.

However important these and similar labor support activities are, they pale in comparison with the example in microcosm that Occupy has set in reminding working people that factory occupations, such as those in Toledo, Ohio, in 1934, and Flint, Mich., in 1937, pioneered a union-organizing drive that at one point in U.S. history had the potential power to challenge the capitalist system itself. Occupations of the giant General Motors and Ford Motor Company factories, and shutting down entire industries until the workers won union recognition and substantial contract-enforced gains, were among labor's most profound contributions to securing gains that endured for decades.

Today, labor's misleaders usually limit strike actions, if there are strikes at all, to essentially token one-day protests. And even these are met by the bosses with punishing lockouts, as when Kaiser Hospital responded to a one-day strike of 12,000 California nurses with a four-day lockout.

The growth in political consciousness stemming from the Occupy Wall Street example has sparked a long-awaited discussion among working people and their still potentially powerful unions. If young people and loosely associated workers can occupy a city park, why can't we occupy and close down the nation's factories, transportation systems—planes, railroads, trucking lines, power plants and all the rest? We have the power. Why don't we use it?

For now, the Occupy movement is the proud and courageous tail that is wagging the giant slumbering dog of American labor and other social movements that have subordinated class mobilizations to alliances or "partnerships" with the class enemy. But it is only a matter of time until the example set by a relative few becomes the norm for the broad working masses. Occupations of city parks will give way to a far more massive movement. We will see giant, united strike waves and new forms of political action and solidarity that can fundamentally change the present relationship of forces and launch a struggle that can change the world. ■

By MARC ROME

OAKLAND, Calif.—The Occupy Oakland movement reached a new height on Nov. 2 when a “General Strike” drew more than 10,000 working people, students, and trade unionists—the 99%—to downtown. The mobilization grew to upwards of 20,000 as a diverse sea of people marched to the port of Oakland, where the ILWU workers honored their picket line, effectively halting traffic for at least 12 hours at the nation’s fifth largest port.

Organizing for this historic phase of a still nascent mass popular movement began at a 3000-strong General Assembly on Oct. 27, which reasserted the movement’s democratic right to peaceably assemble, only one night after Oakland’s 1% attempted to smash the movement by coordinating a nighttime police raid that violently removed from Oscar Grant Plaza hundreds of peaceful protesters from their tent encampment at the foot of City Hall.

“Tonight, we took back Oscar Grant Plaza!” reported an Occupy activist. “We tried to get to Occupy SF, but the trains would not stop and the police kept us from the freeway! We stand in solidarity! If you lose tonight, we will fight again tomorrow and every night!! It was as if the San Francisco Bay Area’s 99% had arrived in downtown Oakland on Nov. 2 with this exact sentiment fueling their collective spirit of resistance. They greeted a warm, sunny day with an electric mood, celebratory and militant.

The action wasn’t a general strike in the strict sense, insofar as organized labor did not organize the action and the labor movement throughout the region did not walk off the job, en masse. But it captured a growing global sentiment that the interests of the 1% are absolutely opposed to that of the 99%—and took it to the point of capitalist production.

However limited a one-day and largely symbolic action of a major U.S. port may be, it’s an inspiration to the victims of capitalism; and it’s what the 1% hope to contain, lest the example lead to more militant actions by workers across the country.

Many expressed amazement by this glimpse into the heightened political imagination of millions of Occupiers, from Oakland to Cairo, who are losing or have completely lost faith in corporate politics to solve their problems. The idea of hitching the movement’s hopes to another billion-dollar campaign candidate, though it was certainly lurking, could not find much favor among the crowd in Oakland, composed largely of newly radicalized young people and workers.

In fact, the day’s organizers sent a clear message that both the Democrats and Republicans were one in the same—both are owned and controlled by Wall Street’s billionaire and trillionaire rulers of society—by invoking a principle of the day’s events: no elected official was permitted to speak from the stage.

Highlighting the potential for Occupy to spill over and breath new life into beleaguered struggles was evidenced by the fact that speakers addressed many of the social ills endemic to capitalism: the vastly expanded militarized U.S./Mexico border and mass immigrant deportations, skyrocketing tuition costs, food justice, climate change, city budget cuts (five Oakland

Occupy Oakland shuts down port and calls for blockade



Noah Berger / AP

(Left) A truck with Occupy Oakland activists approaches port area on Nov. 2.

violence against the movement in Egypt, Occupy Oakland marched through downtown on Nov. 22 with a banner reading: “Oakland and Cairo are One Fist.”

Occupy Oakland made an important gesture of solidarity on Nov. 15, by marching to UC Berkeley’s student strike and general assembly, where 5000 assembled to protest the regents’ proposed 81% free hike and to vote on a number of proposals, including to tax the rich to fund education.

Repression by police, defenders of the 1%, has certainly been the most aggressive and violent on the West Coast. Using paramilitary-style tactics, orchestrated with the assistance of the Obama administration’s Department of Homeland Security, their victims have ranged from Iraq War Veteran Scott Olsen (Occupy Oakland), to a 70-year-old former poet laureate of the United States, Robert Hass (Occupy UC Berkeley). Police have “evicted” Occupiers from three or more sites in Oakland, including the original encampment at Oscar Grant Plaza.

A small layer of Occupiers in Oakland has been accused of a number of acts of destruction (smashing bank windows, setting ablaze dumpsters, spray painting store fronts). At the Nov. 15 Occupy UC GA, speakers were clear that similar tactics had no place in their struggle on campus, insofar as they are un-

democratic, extremely atomizing, set up the movement for more police attacks, and tend to alienate many students and working people—not to mention the ranks of organized labor, the essential human material necessary for the movement to advance and more effectively challenge the system as such.

On Nov. 18, the Occupy Oakland General Assembly, in coordination with leaders of ILWU, called a port blockade from Canada to Mexico. This action is being organized “In response to coordinated attacks on the occupations and attacks on workers across the nation. The 1% has disrupted the lives of longshoremen and port truckers and the workers who create their wealth, just as coordinated nationwide police attacks have turned our cities into battlegrounds in an effort to disrupt our Occupy movement.”

The GA was careful to use language in the call that did not imply that this was a “strike” initiated by ILWU, itself. However, this action will be an important measure of the movement as it moves toward its fourth month. All out on Dec. 12! Drop the charges against the 185 jailed Oakland Occupiers! ■

schools were shuttered in late Oct.), police brutality, the Prison Industrial Complex, home foreclosures (30,000 Oakland properties are in foreclosure and 10,000 people are without homes), and massive, unemployment amidst one of the deepest economic crises that the system has ever known.

SEIU 1021, which represents some 50,000 government and service workers in Northern California, “encouraged” their membership to attend, hastening to add that due to “no-strike” clauses in their contract, rank and filers should opt to use sick time or get permission from their supervisor to attend. Other unions used similar formulations (five unions and the Alameda County Labor Council endorsed Nov. 2), and none staged a real strike.

In the best tradition of building linkages to struggles nationally and internationally, the motivation for the Nov. 2 mobilization was, in part, in solidarity with the ILWU dockworkers in Longview, Wash.—facing union-busting tactics by port owners, EGT—and striking Argentinean truckers demanding higher fees and better working conditions from the same corporation.

In a clear response to the U.S.-funded military

Wall St. criminals attack OWS; workers, students fight back!

By MARTY GOODMAN

NEW YORK—On Nov. 15, Wall Street’s front man, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, launched an early-morning blitzkrieg-style police raid on Zuccotti Park, the site of the two-month old Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. New York’s “thugs in blue” evicted and arrested some 250 non-violent protesters at 1 a.m. and seized their possessions. The growing OWS “people’s library” was thrown into a dumpster.

Nine journalists were arrested while covering the raid, some assaulted and thrown to the ground while displaying city-issued press passes. A New York 1 TV reporter, Lindsey Christ, said, “Those 20 minutes were some of the scariest of my life.” Rosie Gray, a *Village Voice* reporter, recounted telling a cop, “I’m press!” The officer responded, “Not tonight.”

Legal observers were also not allowed in the Park during the raid. Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York ACLU called it part of a planned “media blackout.”

City Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez, who represents the mostly Hispanic Washington Heights, claimed he was bloodied by a police club blow to the head and thrown to the ground by police

goons as he approached Zuccotti Park three blocks away.

Court action against the eviction by the N.Y. Lawyer’s Guild won a Temporary Restraining Order, later overturned the same day by Michael Stillman, another State Supreme Court Judge. The ruling declared that the park’s rules against overnight camping—added after the occupation began—were reasonable. Protesters were allowed back, but not allowed to sleep there. The Transport Workers Union Local 100, an early union backer of OWS, also took court action against the eviction, but without success. Since OWS began Sept. 17, about 1700 OWS protesters have been arrested and, of those, almost all are out of jail awaiting trial on misdemeanors. Mayors and top cops across the country have recently held several conference calls on how to handle OWS. Clearly, the U.S. ruling elite is terrified at the prospect of European-style mass strikes and worker protests.

Early on, President Obama said OWS reflected “broad-based frustration” with the economy. After the New York raid, an Obama spokesman said, “It’s up to New York and other municipalities to decide how much force to use in dealing with OWS demonstrations,” giving Bloomberg back-handed support.

Moreover, constant warnings about dire OWS so-called “quality of life” were raised by Bloomberg and in corporate media reports. Yet, most were issues that were not the fault of OWS or were in the process of being addressed. The complaints were in sharp contrast to Wall Street’s real-life indifference to inequality and poverty, urban filth, and the lack of proper health care for millions of New Yorkers—conditions OWS fought to overcome!

On Nov. 17, over 30,000 demonstrated in Foley Square, near City Hall, as part of an OWS-initiated national “day of action.” The raid two days before had galvanized trade unionists, which added to the rage against massive attacks on public workers.

In the morning of the 17th, about 170 protesters were arrested in a non-violent attempt to “Shut Wall Street down.” Another 60 or so were arrested later in the day, according to a National Lawyer’s Guild observer.

Later, teams of OWS supporters rode trains to the rally. On the way, the teams testified about their oppression as workers to other riders. Present at the rally

were the United Federation of Teachers, 1199 SEIU, the Hospital workers, as well as contingents from the TWU, the United Auto Workers, and 32 BJ SIEU, building services workers.

The spirited rally culminated in tens of thousands of demonstrators marching over the Brooklyn Bridge to signify work needed on our decaying infrastructure. OWS provided small LCD lights. A giant Batman-style beam was projected onto the side of the union-busting Verizon phone company building, which simply read, “99%.” ■



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

New Greek government accelerates march to capitalist barbarism

Milos Bicanski / Getty Images



(Left) Oct. 19 protest in Athens against new austerity measures.

By ANDREAS KLOKE

ATHENS—The farce and the arguments of the “political elite” of Greece, along with the “power play”—mainly of the two large system-supporting parties, PASOK (Socialist Movement) and the right-wing New Democracy (ND)—to support a government coalition with the participation of the far-right LAOS, finally led to the formation of an “interim government” in November. Elections are scheduled for February. The reformist parties KKE (KKE) and SYN/SYRIZA demand immediate elections.

After days of sordid wrangling, intrigues, and backroom conversations, an agreement was reached on Nov. 1 to appoint L. Papadimos, a top banker who enjoys the absolute confidence of the ruling classes of Europe and of the IMF, as the new head of government. The fight over the new government and its prime minister began when the down-and-out PASOK parliamentary group (down from 160 to currently 152 votes) confirmed its “confidence” in the Papandreou government on Nov. 4. But then Papandreou announced a coalition government. The whole procedure was unconstitutional (but who cares under today’s conditions?), since Papandreou had not even submitted his resignation.

With the installation of the new government it becomes clear that even the last remnants of the so-called democracy (“rule by the people”), in the modest and familiar framework of bourgeois parliamentary rule, are about to be eliminated—effectively and ruthlessly. This tendency toward authoritarianism reaches a level no one would ever have predicted.

Papandreou’s announcement of a referendum on the agreements reached on Oct. 27, as a result of a negotiation process for the payment of the 6th installment of the infamous loans by the “troika”—the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, and European Commission—was quickly called off after the intervention by Merkel, Sarkozy and Co. ND, which has always distanced itself from the memorandum policies, was compelled by the troika to form a coalition government with PASOK under a new prime minister.

Thus the Hellenic Republic becomes, even officially, a government committed exclusively to the profits of national and international bankers. Essentially, no one wanted to accept responsibility for the steamroller measures to be taken by the new government in accordance with ultimatums from Brussels and Berlin. The whole affair is particularly embarrassing for ND, which, as opinion polls show, is at least 7 percentage points ahead of PASOK, expected to get 22%. But it will soon lose this favored position as a result of its government participation.

After a long time and without having been asked, the Greek population is once again confronted with ministers representing the far right wing (three deputies), plus one overtly fascist minister (by the name of M. Vouridis), members of the racist LAOS party. The failed PASOK luminaries, among them the particularly hated Minister of Economy V. Venizelos, keep all important ministerial posts. The ministerial team is expanded to include some already discarded former PASOK and ND ministers. So it is clear that only a very ordinary cabinet shuffle has

Nobody can tell how the euro will be saved in this situation, and how other EU countries can avoid impoverishment.

been successfully carried out and nothing really new can be expected.

For the first time, the three pro-system parties—PASOK, ND, and LAOS—are collectively responsible for the memorandum policies, considered by the great majority of the population to be failed and fraudulent. This does not bode well for the future of the Greek bourgeois political system, especially not for its democratic facade. It is also a bad sign that this government is committed to keeping Greece in the euro zone, since it is very likely that the euro can no longer be saved. This government will wear out very soon, and there is much reason to fear that the elections will be “postponed” to an undefined point in the future.

Memorandum policies bring catastrophe

The PASOK government plundered the country in less than two years by means of an unprecedented devastating raid, driving it to the brink of ruin with the co-leadership of the troika—i.e. the ruling classes of Europe and the United States, and their governments. This monstrous fraud, a theft in the tens of billions at the expense of working people, the socially disadvantaged, and also the previous “middle class,” served nobody but the creditors—the national and international financial oligarchy that shamelessly continues to enrich itself.

At the same time, the rulers and the mainstream media deliberately spread the illusion that the failing global financial system, and thus the global capitalist system, can be saved by this sort of maneuvering. It can already be foreseen that other countries—such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Great Britain, and even France—will follow the Greek “model” step by step. But nobody can tell how the euro will be saved in this situation and how the rest of the EU countries can avoid the general impoverishment process. The next European recession has already begun.

In Greece, the economic decline has reached 15% in the last two years. The loss of wages, salaries, and pensions is up to 40% or more. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, unemployment gallops, and workers rights such as collective bargaining have recently been abolished in favor of unrestricted employer arbitrariness. State property, in principle national property, will be privatized and completely liquidated under intolerable conditions. The public health system is dismantled, and 50% of the country’s hospitals will close. Austerity is imposed on the public school system. Universities are to be sold to big capital. The young generation has no prospects, and the “lucky” ones who get a job are to be offered paltry sala-

ries between 400 to 700 euros.

Since September it is clear to everyone that the memorandum policies—allegedly aimed at the rescue of the euro and the banking system but also at protecting Greece “from bankruptcy” and insolvency, etc.—is a bottomless pit. It means nothing but endless bloodletting of workers and serves as a kind of grave robbery of the Greek economy, which has been expertly run into the ground. Only the parasites of the ruling system, the 10% who at most who are beneficiaries of the rapid intensification of exploitation and redistribution from bottom to top, along with the rich who hold €560 billion deposited in foreign accounts, are exempt from the effects of the crisis and manage largely to increase their incomes.

However, the overall situation of Greek capitalism remains hopeless. The austerity policy has proven to be a cycle of evil, as the recession causes falling tax revenues and thus

higher national debts. This in turn requires new “measures” at the expense of the Greek population, supposedly “living beyond their means,” exacerbating the recession and so on—creating a perfect infinite feedback loop, a spiral into the abyss.

In September new taxes, especially on property (flats and houses), were announced, making the situation even more unbearable. For an approximately 100-square-meter apartment, around €700 must be paid in order to satisfy the appetites of the creditor-lenders (i.e. the international banks etc.). This poll tax will be assessed along with the electricity bill, and in the case of non-payment the current of the household will be switched off! And in February, the next installment of the same tax will become due.

Resisting capitalist plunder

Given the fact that a significant percentage of the population has already reached a point below break due to the various austerity measures, unemployment, debts etc., many people will simply not be able to pay. Greek society as a whole is reaching a breaking point.

In this new situation, the majority of the population has lost the last illusion that despite the memorandum policies there might still be some individual solution or possibility to survive. This is the real reason for the extraordinary success of the general strike of Oct. 19-20, when 500,000 protesters took to the streets in Athens alone, though this success was significantly diminished by counter-productive tactics of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and their union formation PAME on the one hand, along with the Molotov cocktail-throwers of the “black block” on the other. Approval of the new package of measures in parliament could not be prevented.

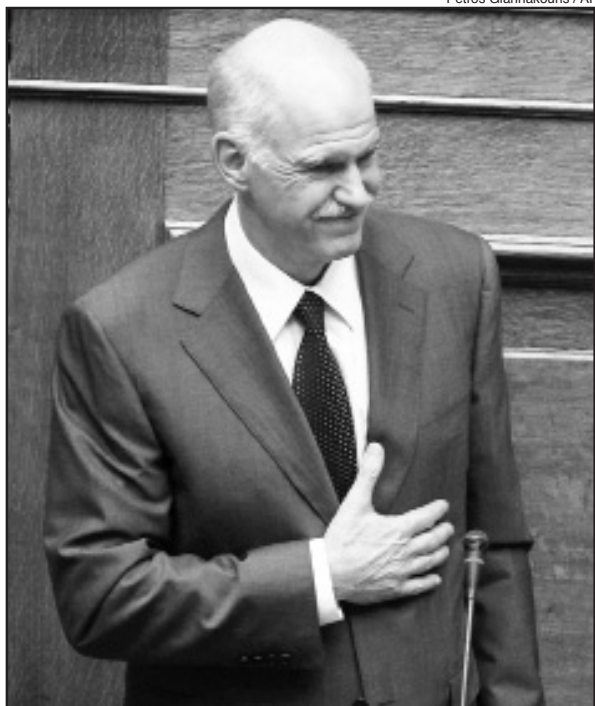
A few days later, the national holiday (Oct. 28) of the “No” (OHI) was marked by mass protests. Nationwide riots dominated the day. This was the last confirmation that the memorandum policies and those in government who carry them out, the troika—but also those other parliamentary groups who support them indirectly, especially from the ranks of New Democracy and the far-right LAOS—have lost all credibility, or are nearing that point.

In other words, the vast majority of the population has come to the conclusion that no compromise with the governments and the rulers is possible anymore, that what matters is to prevent the implementation of all measures prescribed from above. This may be possible by legal protests, occupations, and demonstrations, or by “illegal” resistance, such as the non-payment of the poll tax on real estate—i.e. through civil disobedience. ...

The main aim of the memorandum policies was not primarily “the reduction of debt” and so on. The main concern of the ruling classes, as several interviews by P. Thompson (IMF), C.-J. Juncker (ECOFIN), and others already showed in the past, is the implementation of the “reforms” in Greece. This means that the living standards of workers and the vast majority of the population have to be reduced by some 50 or 60%, on average, if not more. In fact, the downward spiral has no limits.

It seems that this policy is a strategic decision of the Eu-

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ropean and perhaps also of the North American capitalist classes. The basic idea obviously is to establish conditions under which “productive investments” are again efficient and profitable. This can be accomplished only by a decisive defeat of the working class and its complete subjugation. Only in this way can a realistic prospect be found for the global capitalist system to find an exit from the terrible crisis in which it is mired.

Situation of the Greek left

The new forms of mass struggle of the workers and oppressed, with square occupations in the summer, then other occupations, strikes, and forms of self-organization from September, directly influence all the forces of the left. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) leadership, which realized that it was increasingly being overtaken by the mass mobilization, tried to gain more strength by various reinforced sectarian actions of their union formation PAME (occupations of ministries, town halls, and schools; campaign for non-payment of poll tax). This is a slight shift in the “party line,” resulting in an attempt to provide leadership for the mass movement.

The appearance and the general political propaganda of the KKE are oriented to a more radical rhetoric “against capitalism,” but still never exceed bureaucratic routine. A deeper understanding of the economic and social reality does not exist. Even if it is true that the statements of the party generally correspond to an anti-capitalist and mechanistic Marxist framework, its sectarian tactics are tragically dangerous, as Oct. 20 abundantly demonstrated. They do not correspond to the need of the working class for a united front, which is today more necessary and more urgent than ever before.

The left-reformist alliance SYRIZA, which is dominated by the SYN, a reformist party with roots in euro-communism, tries to represent a credible alternative on the parliamentary left. The rapid fall of PASOK in the



(Left) Former Prime Minister Papandreou.

The vast majority of the population has come to the conclusion that no compromise with the government is possible.

polls raises the hope that this alliance may enjoy a new boom. The proposal of SYRIZA chairman Tsipras to aim for the installation of a government of the united left to promote the vital need of workers actually contradicts the immediate self-organization of the mass movement and the strengthening of unified militant mobilizations. It cannot be excluded that this orientation might weaken the emerging dynamics of the resistance movement against the memorandum policies, creating new parliamentary illusions.

Adamant in their “pro-European” orientation, the party leadership desperately tries to cling to the straw of eurobonds and the democratization of EU institutions. But all these nice things are solemnly rejected by the German government parties, also by the “opposition parties” of the social-democrats (SPD) and the Greens, and, of course, by their clients in banking and industry, as well as by the EU bureaucracy and the ECB. The radical youth of the party and the radical elements of SYRIZA, which have moved to the left due to the massive resistance

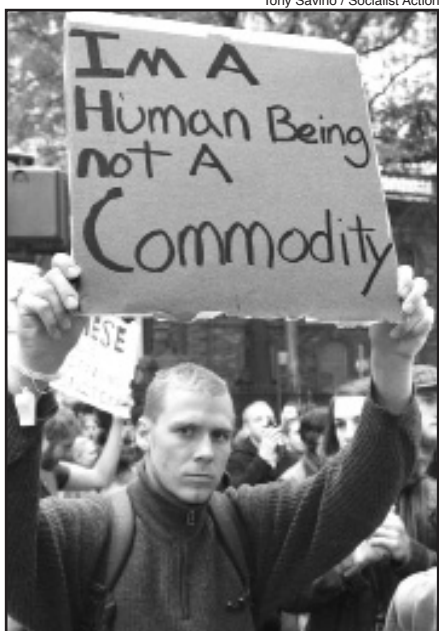
movement, clash increasingly with the boundaries set by the SYN leadership.

ANTARSYA undoubtedly gathers the most militant and politicized rank-and-file activists in the unions, youth, and students. It successfully held its first national congress in late October. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the formation of the alliance has up to now developed at a snail’s pace, mainly due to protracted factional struggles between its component organizations.

The “Political Theses” of ANTARSYA are certainly an excellent programmatic document. But it became clear in the discussion before and during the congress that a not insignificant minority of ANTARSYA tends to aim at a “unity of the Left” in the sense of a future government project. This would be a strategic concept based on a “popular front” policy in the framework of the existing system, specifically of the bourgeois state.

The debate about the withdrawal from the euro zone and the EU as part of a strategy of transitional demands, as well as the deletion of the so-called “non-acceptable part of the debt,” needs to be carried through on a much broader basis. But most important is that in the very near future ANTARSYA must begin functioning with its local units and national leadership as a factor in the political life of the country. This process of building the alliance appears today to be absolutely necessary as a political response of the Greek working class to the capitalist crisis. ■

A longer version of this article can be found at www.socialistaction.org.



By CHRISTINE MARIE

On Nov. 17, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the city of Chicago once again refused to guarantee permits for legal, peaceful protests at the overlapping NATO and G8 summits occurring from May 15 to May 22, 2012. Pat Hunt, a central leader of the Coalition Against NATO/G8 War & Poverty Agenda, explained to the media that CANG8 was demanding that the city publicly commit to providing permits

NATO & G8 to meet in Chicago — Support the right to protest!

that allow demonstrators to assemble within sight and sound of McCormick Place, the location of most of the summit proceedings, and that Chicago Police Superintendent McCarthy refrain from making further threats of mass arrests of protesters.

Accompanying Hunt were representatives from the National Lawyers Guild, SEIU Local 73, and the American Friends Service Committee. Despite this show of community support, officials from the permit division of the Transportation Department and the point person in the Police Department for the summits, Commander Debra Kirby, refused to put the city on record in support of the right to protest NATO/G8 policies in May.

The Nov. 17 meeting preceded by only days a denial by the Cook County government, and its private partner MB Realty, of CANG8’s appeal for a permit to assemble in Daley Plaza. According to MB, there will be “no permits” granted for Daley Plaza, one of the few adequately sized public spaces downtown, during the NATO/G8 summits. The United

National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), a founding group of CANG8, first applied for a permit for Daley Plaza last June.

The permit denials coincided with revelations about the role of the national government and big business in determining the kind of police response that local governments are mounting against the Occupy movement and plan to mount at the NATO/G8 summits.

World Business Chicago, the business group assigned to “host” the summits, has been given \$1 million in taxpayer funds but meets in secret, a fact that CANG8 activists will be using to challenge the undemocratic moves of the Chicago city administration.

Prominent in press coverage in Chicago about policing strategies has been William Bratton, former police chief of New York City and Los Angeles and now with the huge international corporate security firm, Kroll. Recently, Bratton suggested that the \$55 million that Homeland Security has already granted to Chicago in advance of the summit might not be enough.

The sudden prominence of Bratton’s company, Kroll, coincides with the news that an entity with ties to Homeland Security called the Police Executive Research Forum helped to coordinate by national conference call the late November nationwide assault on Occupy encampments around the country.

According to Shawn Gaynor of the San Francisco *Bay Guardian*, the Police Executive Research Forum is an international non-governmental organization with ties to both law enforcement and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Press statements by Bratton, PERF, and Chicago Police Superintendent McCarthy seem to be part of a national campaign to drown any discussion of the right to assemble and protest the wars and austerity drives of the global elite with tales about the violence that protesters plan to wreak upon the city of Chicago. Chicago TV news of the summits are already featuring images purportedly found on anarchist websites that call for protesters to take to the streets and asserting that they are calling for violence.

A host of governmental and private forces dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo are lining up to use the NATO/G8 summits to dampen the ma-

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(Left) Nov. 21 anti-fracking rally at statehouse in Trenton, N.J., after vote by officials was cancelled.

'Natural gas' fracking halted in Delaware River watershed

By WAYNE DELUCA

On Nov. 18, the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) suddenly delayed a planned Nov. 21 vote on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the Delaware River watershed. The commission includes representatives from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the Army Corps of Engineers. The regulation package before the DRBC would allow over 300 new wells in the basin, which affects drinking water for over 15 million people between the four states. In the lead-up to the scheduled vote there was a massive public outpouring of concern over water quality, and when it became clear that Delaware would oppose drilling, it was canceled altogether.

However, a protest originally planned for the Trenton meeting, initiated largely by forces in Philadelphia and New York, was not cancelled. It drew close to 800 activists, mostly upbeat and viewing the meeting's cancellation as a victory, while recognizing that the movement must continue to build mass action. The protest, drawing inspiration from Occupy movements around the country, was built by a broad array of environmental organizations.

Fracking is a process of extracting natural gas—methane—from shale rock miles below ground. Wells are drilled, and a high-pressure mixture of water and propellant chemicals are used to break through shale rock and force the gas out and upward. The Marcellus Shale beneath New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia contains an estimated 262 trillion cubic feet of methane. Fracking in Pennsylvania outside of the Delaware watershed is already in progress and linked

to contamination of water supplies in rural counties.

The primary pollutant of fracking is the methane gas itself. The recovery rate stands around 92%, and while much of the remainder is flared off, substantial amounts can pollute water supplies or escape into the atmosphere—where they act as a greenhouse gas. Other materials enter the water supply when drilling penetrates aquifers or the porous cement casing on wells leaks. Bromine has been the most common material, but at the depths fracking goes to, numerous toxic and radioactive chemicals can be dredged up by a drilling bore. The toxic stew produced by fracking, euphemistically called water, cannot be safely disposed of in residential water plants and must be sequestered.

While the DRBC has put off its vote pending a safety study, the possibility of fracking in the Delaware watershed still exists. Pennsylvania, led by governor "Toxic Tom" Corbett, wants to allow drilling in the Delaware watershed, regardless of the millions who rely on it for clean water. The threat is still real, since Corbett and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie favor drilling. With the Army Corps of Engineers as the swing vote, it is possible that the DRBC will out vote the governors of New York and Delaware and allow drilling in the watershed.

The long-term impact of fracking remains unknown. New evidence has suggested that fracking deep beneath the earth can increase the incidence of earthquakes, even hundreds of miles away from the drilling site. In turn, the increased earthquakes undermine the already unreliable methods used by gas companies to keep toxic effects of fracking out of the water supply.

Recent reports have revealed that gas-drilling corporations have taken a particular interest in military veterans with counter-insurgency experience. They have worked on applying "psy-ops"—psychological warfare—against the communities affected by drilling. The very same methods that are used to "manage" the local population in oil-rich countries of the Middle East are being used in the United States to enforce the will of gas-drilling corporations. One presenter at an industry conference even directly called the resistance to fracking an "insurgency."

As awareness has grown of the impact of fracking methods, local resistance has sprung up. The documentary film "Gasland" proved a provocative call to action, showing rural towns devastated by the impact of fracking runoff and water contaminated by methane so badly that it was flammable. The character of this opposition is slowly turning from lobbying to mass action, rallying communities to oppose pollution of their clean water supplies. The fact that the DRBC could not even meet demonstrates clearly that this is beginning to have a real impact.

In a very literal sense, gas-drilling companies are at war with the population of the communities where they are trying to drill. No matter how much their practices are painted as creating jobs or bringing new income into their regions, fracking is a practice that compromises the long-term health and safety of communities for the gain of private corporations. Counter-insurgency methods are a tacit admission of this war, and it is more surprising that people have only begun to fight back.

A section of the ruling class in America has embraced natural gas as a panacea for a whole variety of problems. It is called "cleaner burning," technically true but deeply misleading. While burning methane releases less carbon dioxide than coal or oil, one particle escaping into the atmosphere has the greenhouse gas effect of a hundred carbon molecules. When this is taken into account, gas is actually dirtier than coal. It is supposed to improve the economies of the regions where it is drilled but it has shown no real benefits, while houses with methane-contaminated water lose their value rapidly. Buses are refitted to run on methane as if it were fundamentally different from oil.

In reality, natural gas is simply another fossil fuel, and relying on it can only deepen the acute ecological crisis that humanity faces. Climate change is an accelerating problem and is driving a series of related problems, from mass species extinction to severe weather and intense droughts. Methane can only be seen as a pollutant that furthers this. Far from a solution, it is another element of the problem; the only solution is a rapid and complete transition to renewable energy.

Just as the drilling corporations are at war with the communities where they accumulate their wealth, so the entire capitalist system is at war with the natural environment. Fracking is one of many battles in this war, a desperate attempt to wrench more profits out of the earth's crust. The fightback against fracking, likewise, is an important battle against the degradation of nature. It is critically important that this grows into truly mass action, and broaden from a particular fight against fracking to a more general movement for environmental and climate justice. ■

The future of the Occupy movement

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Barry Weisleder is federal secretary of Socialist Action (Canada), and Canada editor of Socialist Action newspaper.

TORONTO—On Nov. 23 police enforced an Ontario Superior Court order to Occupy Toronto to vacate St. James Park, a few blocks from Canada's corporate financial hub. Occupy camps around the world are also under siege. The challenge is clear:

Spread this movement from the parks and city squares to the sites of social production, distribution, and exchange. On Nov. 13, I spoke to a rally at Occupy Toronto on this theme:

I've been asked to describe how the work of Socialist Action relates to the Occupy movement, and how we can grow and develop our work together.

The first order of business is: congratulations! Congratulations to everyone who initiated the Occupy movement. From Tahrir Square in Cairo, to our sisters and brothers in Athens and in Wisconsin. From Wall Street to London to

Madrid to Toronto. What began with the Arab Spring, and spread like wildfire to over 1400 cities worldwide, cannot be extinguished. It is the voice of the voiceless. It is the cry of unemployed youth. It is the cry of dispossessed aboriginal peoples. It is a beacon of hope for the victims of ethnic cleansing, women's oppression, class exploitation and environmental plunder. No matter what the clowns at City Hall may do, Occupation is here to stay. Dismantle it in one place, and it will sprout again, like a sea of dandelions.

That's because Occupy expresses a seismic shift. It is the shift from ignorance and complacency, to awareness and action. It points not only to gross economic inequality and injustice. It points not only to the greed and malfeasance of the ruling 1 per cent. It points to the need to rid this planet of capitalism—the toxic system responsible for the social ills that ail humanity.

Have a look at our newspaper, *Socialist Action*, and see how we work to win support in the labour movement, and to defend Occupy against police repression. That's what we must do here: Defend

the Occupy movement. Defend it from bozo politicians, from police repression, from the commercial media that inflates the complaints of a few petty bourgeois restaurateurs into a social calamity—the only apparent solution for which is the suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We say: Hands off Occupy Toronto. It is the best thing that's happened to this park and to this city in a long time.

That brings us to a bigger challenge: How to extend the Occupy movement to the factories and offices, to the mines and mills, to the stores and schools, to workplaces, and to communities across this city and across this country. We can draw a lesson from Quebec, where this past week, over 200,000 students shut down schools and occupied the streets to oppose tuition increases and to demand free, quality, public post-secondary education. We can take encouragement from the Orange Wave (NDP surge) last spring that marginalized the discredited Liberal Party in its wake. We are inspired by environmental activists whose actions forced U.S. President Obama to delay construction of the Key-

stone XE pipeline.

These events underline a compelling truth: Occupy is a powerful symbol, a resilient rallying point. It has changed the channel. It has ignited a conversation of millions. But to win, to truly win human liberation and save civilization from the ravages of the profit system, we need to shut capitalism down. We need to re-boot production on a green, democratic basis, and build a cooperative commonwealth.

That's what we in SA mean by socialism, a democratic cooperative commonwealth, where production is wholly owned and controlled by working people, where the military is reduced to a rescue and disaster relief corps, where the 1% are expropriated, and where the state is transformed into the servant of the 99%. That's what socialism will look like.

What stands in our way? If it were just the 1 per cent, it would be easy to overcome, and it would have been done long ago. Standing in the way of economic democracy is a gigantic apparatus of minority rule. The cops, the courts, the bought-and-paid-for media, religious institutions, the managerial elite, and the capitalist political parties. How can

(continued on page 9)

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Flush from its part in NATO's bloody intervention in Libya to impose a pro-Western government there, Canada's Defence Minister Peter MacKay said Ottawa will not rule out military action in Syria. Speaking to the International Security Forum in Halifax on Nov. 20, MacKay postured as the defender of democratic forces suffering repression at the hands of the Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad.

But taken together with Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird's bellicose threat to take "necessary action" against Iran, amid media speculation about a possible preemptive Israeli-American strike at Iran's nuclear power facilities, MacKay's words help to form a different picture.

It is the picture of expanding imperial intervention—designed to blunt and re-shape uprisings across the Arab world. It is the image of Western powers seeking geo-political control over the world's foremost oil patch.

The business media call it "sabre-rattling." But such noises have led to bombing and military occupation. In 1999, CF-18s flew 684 combat sorties against Yugoslav forces, roughly 10 per cent of the NATO effort to make the Balkans safe for the restoration of private enterprise. More recently, in Libya, Ottawa flew 942 of

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

Canada eyes role in Syria conflict

NATO's 9600 strike missions, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties. Between those forays was the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, where over 900 Canadian soldiers continue to occupy, to kill, and to die.

Canada will keep warships in the Mediterranean Sea until the end of 2012, MacKay said. It deployed the frigate HMCS Vancouver as part of NATO's Libya intervention. After early 2012, HMCS Charlottetown will continue so-called "anti-terrorism" duties.

Certainly, former and present dictators, like Gadhafi and Assad, committed high crimes against workers and farmers, women and youths. Those dictators were in the good books of the Western powers when they imprisoned leftists and smashed unions, as are Washington and Ottawa's current allies who rule Saudi Arabia.

But imperialism is always on the prowl for more compliant regimes—ones that would be eager to dis-

mantle state enterprises and public services; ones that would happily sign "free trade" agreements with the vultures of Wall Street, Bay Street, and the City of London.

The task of deposing dictators is the task of the people suffering under them. The job of working people and progressive folks living in the rich countries is to stay the hand of foreign intervention, to disarm the war makers, and to demonstrate solidarity with those who fight for freedom and social justice. The famous advice of Karl Marx to the English working class on the Irish question bears repeating: No nation that oppresses another can itself be free.

It is a message that must be driven home in the unions and the labour-based New Democratic Party to avoid another debacle, as when NDP MPs voted in 2011 to support bombing Libya. The Syrian and Iranian test cases are coming soon. Canada, hands off! ■

Tory 'reforms' target refugees

By ERIC KUPKA

Refugees will increasingly be victimized by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's majority federal government, thanks to Bill C-4, the Conservatives' new immigration reform bill. The bill empowers the government to label certain refugees "designated foreign nationals" whenever it believes that it will be difficult to establish their identity, or that their arrival in Canada might be connected in some way to a criminal or terrorist enterprise.

This label carries a heavy burden: "Designated foreign nationals" must be imprisoned for at least one year upon arrival in Canada and, even if they succeed in obtaining refugee protection, they must wait at least five more years before applying for permanent residency.

The bill resurrects a previous immigration bill that the Conservatives drafted in 2010, as a panicky response to the arrival of two boatloads of Tamil civil war refugees from Sri Lanka. That bill, which was introduced when Harper still led a minority government, was never passed due to the opposition of all other parties.

Bill C-4 is condemned by leading human rights and immigration advocacy groups, including Amnesty International and the Canadian Council for Refugees. The Canadian Bar Association has called the reforms "a harsh and dramatic shift in policy" that violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and conflict with Canada's obligations under international refugee and human rights conventions.

Inside Parliament, the bill has been vigorously opposed by the labour-based Of-

ficial Opposition New Democratic Party. Toronto MP Olivia Chow highlighted the true human cost of the bill with the example of a Haitian mother and child fleeing poverty and devastation in their homeland without identification: they would both face a year of incarceration, followed by five years during which they could not bring other relatives to join them. Ms. Chow's inclusion of a child in her example was deliberate, since, as she explained, imprisonment has been shown to have particularly harsh psychological and emotional effects on children.

Another NDP MP, 22-year-old Mylène Freeman, summarized the basic unfairness of Canada's refugee system, which will only worsen with Harper's proposed reforms: "Canada does not jail children unless they are seeking asylum. We do

not jail people for years when they have never been charged with a crime, unless they are seeking asylum. We do not jail people without providing access to legal counsel, unless they are seeking asylum. We do not categorically bar prisoners from seeking bail, unless of course they are seeking asylum. We do not jail the traumatized victims of political conflict, abuse, and poverty, unless they are seeking asylum."

Socialists demand an immediate withdrawal of Bill C-4 and an end to Harper's attacks on the rights of refugees.

UPDATE: Harper's criminal justice reform bill, discussed in the September edition of *Socialist Action* (and which shares Bill C-4's emphasis on incarceration), has drawn condemnation from two more eminent voices in Canada—the former Chief Justice of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, Roy McMurtry, and the Canadian Bar Association. ■

Save the Canadian Wheat Board!

By TOM BAKER

On Oct. 18, Prime Minister Harper introduced legislation to dismantle the 68-year-old, farmer-controlled Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). With a Conservative majority in Parliament, it is expected the bill will become law before Christmas. Legislation to come into effect in August 2012 would allow a farmer to sell directly to grain-handling companies. With no "single desk selling," the farmers will have no collective capital base or access to grain handling facilities.

The CWB Act requires that farmers vote in favour before major changes can be made to the CWB. The government is ignoring that law and the 37,000 western grain farmers (62 per cent of the total) who voted in a mail-in plebiscite this summer to retain CWB control over the marketing of grain.

Allen Oberg, chair of the CWB's farmer-controlled board of directors, spoke at a Nov. 15 demonstration in Ottawa: "We are here because we cannot sit idly by while this government sacrifices farmers' interests to those of giant American grain corporations. We cannot

stand and watch farmers' democratic rights be steamrolled. This should be a farmer's decision—not one that is made in Ottawa."

CWB is spearheading a "Stop the Steam Roller" media campaign. Close to 30,000 Canadians sent letters to the federal government in just over a week demanding that CWB control be saved. Court challenges are underway. The labour-based New Democratic Party, the Official Opposition in Parliament, as well as the NDP provincial government of Manitoba, denounced the federal government's anti-democratic move.

Once the bill becomes law, grain handlers such as Viterra, Cargill, and the Winnipeg-based Richardson International Ltd will be allowed to immediately sign forward contracts with farmers for their 2012 grain harvests. Other transnationals, such as U.S.-based firms Bunge and Archer Daniels Midland, are expected to expand into Canada. Only the owners of the very largest farms will be able to negotiate effectively with the conglomerates, to the detriment of family farms and rural communities.

Canada is the world's top exporter of spring wheat,

and malting barley. This legislation will represent a major shift of power from western Canadian grain farmers to transnational agri-food conglomerates.

It is no surprise that major food processors, and their right-wing think-tank economists, see the CWB defeat as an opportunity to demand of the government that the historic rights of Canadian poultry, egg, and dairy farmers be dismantled or be fundamentally weakened. The "supply managed" sectors have legal authority to control import levels, plan production, and collectively bargain prices for their products. Free-trade advocates claim these farm protection measures must be dismantled for Canada to participate in multi-country trade deals such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks.

The CWB should be defended by all who believe in food sovereignty, collective bargaining and democratic process. Solidarity of all working people with western Canadian farmers is critical at this time.

Capitalist governments are attacking the historical, institutionalized gains of farmers and the working class as a solution to the rulers' economic crisis. Only a worker-farmer alliance can 'stop the steamroller' and fundamentally change society in the interest of the majority. ■

... Occupy's future

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we clear a path to majority rule? The same way we defend and spread the Occupy movement. We tell the truth, we build alliances, and we fight the forces that stand in the way of liberation.

But before the workers' and popular movements can go forward, we need to remove the obstacles within. I refer to the labour, NGO and NDP bureaucracies. Donations of food, tents and port-a-potties are good. But they are no substitute for organized resistance to labour concessions in the workplace. They are no substitute for a battle over the lack of democracy in many unions and the NDP.

Rather than walk away from the problem, we need to dig in and fight for so-

cialist policies and democracy from the bottom up.

That's what Socialist Action does. We build support for Occupy Toronto, and we organize a fighting opposition to labour misleaders who go along with cutbacks, with privatization, with layoffs in the public service (such as advocated by the Drummond commission at Queen's Park). We argue for a General Strike to stop the cuts.

We oppose government contracts to build jet fighters and war ships, to construct pipelines for dirty oil, and to invest in nuclear energy. We demand a steeply progressive tax on big wealth, on inheritance, and on corporate profits—not just an end to recent corporate tax cuts, not just abolition of the HST, not just a Robin Hood tax, or a Tobin Tax. We demand public ownership of the com-

manding heights of the economy under workers' and community control.

We don't think that we, or any individual or small group can accomplish this alone. For that reason Socialist Action devotes most of our efforts to building coalitions, alliances, broad unity in action.

That is why we play a leading role in the NDP Socialist Caucus, a broad alliance of anti-capitalist party members who seek to win the 4.5 million NDP voters to a Workers' Agenda. That is why SA plays a leading role in the Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition, which is now fighting layoffs, and opposing OPSEU leaders' threat to quit the Ontario Federation of Labour.

That is why SA initiated the Oct. 15 Coalition of 11 organizations that marked the 10th anniversary of the imperialist

war and occupation of Afghanistan with a rally and march that concluded right here, in St. James Park.

We don't have all the answers. But we do know this: To win in the face of corporate state power requires a revolutionary perspective. It requires a conscious mass base in the working class. The revolutionary battle for hearts and minds takes place in the existing mass working-class organizations. That is where we are fighting to build solidarity, to build the Occupy movement, to spread it to unions, to the NDP, to work places and communities, and to put an end to the cancer of capitalist minority rule.

We are with you 100%. We invite you to work with us, to join SA and Youth for Socialist Action. Together we will win, much sooner than later." ■

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Into the Abyss," a documentary film, written and directed by Werner Herzog.

What strikes us first is Michael Perry's baby face: big brown eyes and an Alfalfa (from "Our Gang") haircut. He has a disarming smile that reveals big teeth that the rest of him hadn't yet grown into. On death row for eight years, he was 28 at the time the film was made. He neither looks his age nor like a cold-blooded killer. He will be dead in eight days—killed by the state of Texas.

Director Werner Herzog interviewed Michael Perry and his alleged accomplice Jason Burkett, in prison for the murder of three people. Burkett is serving a 40-year sentence and will be out in 2041. Herzog also talked to both the victims' and the alleged murderers' relatives and friends. He speaks in a calm, steady, and non-accusatory soft voice. You never see him, whereas Michael Moore appears in every frame in his documentaries.

In some respects, the documentary reminded me of a low-key TV news-magazine crime show. There are many long shots of sparsely inhabited towns, run-down shopping malls, and fenced off grass lands, overlaid with an ominous sound track.

With the inclusion of archival evidence photos, films, and interviews, Herzog appears able to piece together the chronology of the crimes. The police detective who had conducted the investigation took the filmmaker to the sites depicted in the crime-scene photos. But questions about the case still remain.

According to the prosecution, Perry and his buddy, Jason, wanted a car—a red Chevy Camaro with a white hard-top—but it belonged to a friend's, Adam Stotler's, mother. One random day, they went to Stotler's home in a gated community. He wasn't home, but his mother was. Perry and Jason allegedly killed

On death row in Texas



(Above) Michael Perry, executed in Huntsville, Texas, on July 1, 2010.

the mother as she was baking cookies (shots of drops of dough on a cookie sheet seemed to tell the story).

Stotler came home in a car driven by another friend. Jason and Perry got the keys to the Camaro and made off with it and the car the other guy was driving, then killed Adam and his friend. They allegedly dumped the mother's body, wrapped in blankets, in a lake; wounded the friend, who then ran into some heavy brush, where he died; and dumped Adam Stotler's body as well.

While on death row, Perry insisted that he was innocent. He maintained that records show he was in jail at the time of the murders, and that a cop fabricated his statements about the events. Unfortunately, the film fails to explore the lingering questions in Perry's case.

But even if he were guilty of murder, taking Perry's life solved nothing. Furthermore, it is a fact noted by the U.S. judiciary on all levels that the death penalty is not a deterrent, as some erroneously believe.

The film is not a statement about ending the death penalty. Yet the film's content and Herzog's interviews cause one to ask why this law is allowed to prevail.

the issue of who has the right to calculatedly take another person's life. "This is not Old Testament judgment," he said, "An eye for an eye," adding that Jesus would be against the death penalty.

The film ends on a note of hope for Jason Burkett, who married his attorney while in prison. In her interview with Herzog, she is evasive about exactly how she got pregnant, since conjugal visits are not allowed in Texas.

Perhaps the most noteworthy death sentence case is that of long-time death-row inmate and journalist Mumia Abu Jamal, who was framed for the murder of a Philadelphia cop in 1981 and sentenced a year later. On Oct. 11, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected yet another effort over a 30-year period by Philadelphia prosecutors to execute. The prosecution has about six months to decide whether or not to pursue a new sentencing hearing or drop the matter of execution and go for life imprisonment.

Any more time, effort, (wo)man power, and money, not to mention adding to the toll already taken on Jamal and others who have spent decades in a death-row cell deprived of human contact, could end with a federal and state repeal of this inhumane law. Two staunch anti-death penalty advocates, U.S. citizen Sonia Jacobs and Peter Pringle of Ireland, have recently been released from prison after spending half their lives in a death row cell—Sonia, on appeal, and Pringle totally exonerated. They have been touring both countries lecturing and touting their recently published books about their ordeal.

It is a fact that many innocent people are put to death in prisons in the 34 states where the death penalty is enforced. Recently, Gov. Kitzhaber of Oregon has said that he will now block all executions. We must demand that the other states, the U.S. military, and federal government now end the death penalty for good. ■

UAW members approve concession-filled contracts

By DAVID BERNT

In late October, members of the United Auto Workers at the Big Three voted to approve concession-filled contracts under heavy pressure from the Administrative Caucus that rules the UAW. All three contracts maintain the devastating two-tier status of new and recent hires, and contain no wage increases for "traditional" tier autoworkers, no cost-of-living increases, and many work-rule changes affecting skilled trades, subcontracting, and other provisions of the contract. The UAW leadership negotiated this weak agreement despite the fact that all of the Big Three have reported profits—and in the case of Ford, \$6 billion in 2010 profits.

The new contracts are the first negotiated after the auto industry bailouts at GM and Chrysler negotiated by the Obama administration, which arranged for the creation of two-tier wage scales and other substantial concessions. As part of that bailout the UAW gave up its right to strike at GM and Chrysler. Ford, which remained out of bankruptcy, also sought concessions from the UAW to "remain competitive," and the UAW bureaucrats happily agreed, only to see them rejected by the members.

That agreement created the hated two-tier wage level, where new workers make half of traditional autoworkers toiling on the same assembly line. The second-tier workers also are not in any pension fund, instead receiving 401k plans. The UAW also allowed the Big Three to outsource non-assembly work. The concessions were sold to workers at the time as necessary since the Big Three were allegedly on the brink of going under. However, no such useful excuse exists now; all three automakers were profitable last year.

The new agreements would raise wages for second-tier workers from around \$14-\$15 an hour to \$19 an hour by the end of the contracts, but the second tier will continue to receive inferior health and retirement benefits, and no means to ever become first tier. First-tier workers will receive no wage increase, despite being on a wage freeze since 2004. Instead, they will receive contract-signing bonuses, ranging from \$1400 at Chrysler to \$6000 at Ford.

The concession train does not stop at economics, as the UAW gave up significant work-rule provisions of the contracts, especially affecting skilled trade workers. The contracts allow for this higher paid work to be

subject to reduced classifications, with more outsourcing to outside workers and (lower paid) assembly-line workers. This is why skilled trade workers at Chrysler voted down the contract, even though the UAW imposed it anyway based on a small majority vote among assembly-line workers.

These contracts are the first to not give retirees a pension increase. And buried in the GM contract is a side agreement that says if UAW members approve the contract they will give GM and the UAW leaders the permission to "amend" the pension plan in future negotiations. The UAW could negotiate massive cuts to GM pensions, or even its elimination, without a further vote from members.

UAW President Bob King and his henchmen put on an arm-twisting campaign to get the membership to approve these concessionary contracts. First was the usual job security promise; all three automakers "agreed" to increase jobs at U.S. factories. However, many UAW rank and filers point out that the UAW has been exchanging concessions for job security in nearly every contract for at least 30 years, only to watch their ranks drop dramatically. Since 2001 alone, the UAW has lost 50% of its membership.

Bob King next used the fear of bankruptcy at Ford to make those workers swallow the bitter concessions. At GM and Chrysler he reminded workers they had no right to strike, and a "no" vote would result in arbitration through which workers might even get a worse deal.

The UAW could have gone another route. Instead of preparing members for concessions, it could have organized them for battle against the Big Three, no-strike pledges be damned. The UAW could have used the growing outrage at the 1% reflected in the Occupy Wall Street movement as a means to build public support for a strike.

They could have pointed to the billions of dollars in profits made by the Big Three while second-tier workers survive on poverty level wages. Tens of thousands of auto workers striking against three multi-billion-dollar corporations could have become a symbol of the fight of the 99% against the 1%, and would have been supported enthusiastically by rank-and-file trade unionists, occupiers, and working people across the country. Instead, the UAW only organized a demoralizing defeat.

In order to build a stronger labor movement that can reach and organize the vast majority of workers who are

unorganized, the labor movement must first mobilize the ranks of the already organized to fight back against the bosses' offensive. Only through such actions can the labor movement grow and build unionization in the vast majority of workplaces.

Settling short on one of its most historically important contracts, the UAW leadership has taken a step back from fighting for the rights of not only its own membership but also the entire working class. How can the UAW organize the transplant automakers when they are taking massive concessions in the already organized auto plants? As autoworker Dave Dogonski in Detroit put it in an article in *Labor Notes*, "How can the union in one breath support things like Occupy Wall Street but at the same time let the corporations take windfall profits and not get us a raise?" ■

... Chicago protest

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majority public support for the right to assemble to protest economic injustice and war.

Ultimately, though, the strings for the NATO/G8 summits are being pulled from Washington, D.C. The White House and the State Department have already declared the Chicago summits a "National Special Security Event" and a joint committee headed by the Chicago Police Department and the Secret Service has been established. Obama, who has declared that he supports the right of political assembly and wants to leave the policing of the Occupy movement to local governments, is, of course, lying.

The fight to reclaim public space for protest of the crimes of the 1% against the 99% has been catapulted to the center of politics in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The antiwar and economic justice movement now has six months to mount the kind of nationally coordinated civil liberties campaign around the NATO/G8 protests that can deal a decisive blow to government efforts to permanently roll back our hard-won rights.

To get involved in this important fight, visit www.CANG8.org or e-mail cangate2012@gmail.com. ■

... Upsurge of the Egyptian masses

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cal prisoners, and against military rule.

Egyptians abroad and their supporters began holding actions in solidarity with these demands, and are now holding frequent actions in solidarity with the uprising. In New York several have already occurred, including a picket line on Last Chance Friday at Point Lookout Capital Partners in Manhattan (Point Lookout is the majority stock owner of Combined Systems Inc., maker of the tear gas being used to murderous effect in Egypt). The picket demanded an end to tear gas sales, an end to all U.S. military aid, an end to military tribunals and the freeing of political prisoners, and an end to military rule.

Nearly 12,000 Egyptian civilians have been tried by kangaroo military courts since the fall of Mubarak, the overwhelming majority convicted. Eighteen civilians have been executed after such trials, and minors sentenced to adult prisons in which torture is common. Women demonstrators have been subjected to sexual assault in the form of “virginity tests” by the army, and demonstrators of both genders subjected to electric shocks and other forms of cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment. The regime sponsoring such crimes has been rewarded by the U.S. government with promises of billions in loans, and continued military aid to the tune of \$1.3 billion a year.

The uprising marks the end of months in which revolutionaries’ propaganda about the intransigence of the military regime often fell on deaf ears. This is inevitable in a revolution, which has phases in which the masses give new powers a chance—but eventually realize that only institutions created by their own power can form the basis of a legitimate revolutionary government, one which they control and which meets their needs in practice and not just in words.

That consciousness reached the tipping point this fall as Egypt’s suffering masses saw that the new regime was doing nothing to mitigate the impact of the global economic crisis that had played a key role in sparking the January revolt (as it had in Tunisia and throughout the region). What’s more, as the military made more and more statements indicating elections would have no bearing on their continued control of the main levers of power, the notion that “the army and the people are one hand” began to lose its power.

As a result, as reported by Sameh Naguib, a member of one of the leading radical groups, the Revolutionary Socialists, “in Tahrir Square we have people coming up to us and saying, ‘We know you. You have opposed the military council from the start. We want to be with you.’”

Meanwhile, Obama still wants to be with Tantawi. Even the *Washington Post* had to chide Obama for being so transparently pro-SCAF. In an editorial titled, “As Egyptians protest anew, the Obama administration again enables the generals,” the *Post* said that “faced with the escalating violence in Cairo, the administration is repeating the mistake it made in January, when it hesitated to push for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak.

Rather than using its considerable leverage, the administration is deferring to the military council. White House spokesman Jay Carney weakly called Monday for “re-



(Above) Nov. 24 rally in Tahrir Square.

straint” from “all sides”; when asked whether the generals should specify the date for a presidential election, he replied, “I don’t want to dictate specifics to Egypt.”

On Last Chance Friday, the U.S. gave de facto backing to the SCAF, calling for elections to proceed on the following Monday—elections rigged by the military, in the middle of a mass uprising attacked with murderous force!

Similarly, the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that “a White House statement appeared to place the blame equally on both sides for violence that has killed at least 29 protesters since Saturday. White House spokesman Jay Carney said the U.S. was “deeply concerned” about the violence and “tragic loss of life” and called for “restraint on all sides, so that Egyptians can move forward together to forge a strong and united Egypt.”

That call for restraint on “all sides,” in the face of days of excessive use of force by police and soldiers, was met with incredulity in Cairo: “Should we stop dying? Is that how we should show restraint?” scoffed protester Salma Ahmed as heavy gunfire echoed through Tahrir Square.”

Meanwhile, the State Department, which has been channeling money to “pro-democracy” fronts to tempt and coopt the more naïve or corruptible middle-class elements in the opposition, opened a new front in the U.S. An NGO leader working with State concocted an effort to get Occupy Wall Street to send a delegation, costing tens of thousands of dollars, to “monitor” Egyptian elections. Egyptians here and abroad and their supporters argued that the time and money should be devoted instead to organizing solidarity and material aid for the struggle against military rule.

But ultimately, Washington’s schemes and funding of SCAF will come to naught. We can see this, as in January, in the humor that runs through the uprising. *The New*

York Times reported that “some activists joked that the anger was so widespread and deep among the protesters that their chants should be, ‘The people want the fall of the coming president.’”

Behind this seemingly paradoxical joke lies the clear long-range vision of those committed to completing revolutions. The fighters in Tahrir know the ruling class will try to foist on them one fraud after another in the hopes that they’ll be fooled or just get tired. But just as the May 1968 barricade fighters in Paris scrawled on the walls, “Be realistic: Demand the impossible,” so the shabab of Tahrir know that today it is possible, indeed essential, to hold out for a solution in the interests of the country’s masses, and there is no need to settle for what is “practical,” i.e. what the rulers are willing to grant.

Reports are beginning to arrive of junior officers defecting to the revolution. This is crucial, as one requirement for the success of the uprising will be the splitting of rank-and-file soldiers and junior officers away from their superiors’ dictates. The other key components will be the continued mobilization of millions, and growing workers’ strikes, hopefully coalescing in a general strike, which can be the coup de grace for Tantawi, as it was for Mubarak. And to ensure lasting gains, it is essential to construct a mass revolutionary socialist party, rooted in the working class, to lead the fight against capitalist rule.

One final key factor will be global solidarity. In the U.S., the labor and Occupy movements have repeatedly stressed the debt they owe to the Egyptian uprising. It is now time for those movements, as well as the antiwar movement, to pay that debt and organize massive solidarity and support for the Egyptian masses. ■

Democrats divert Wisconsin workers into recall campaign

By CARL SACK

MADISON—On Nov. 19, over 25,000 people rallied at the Wisconsin State Capitol to kick off the electoral drive to recall Gov. Scott Walker and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefish. Petitioners began collecting signatures on Nov. 15 for a special election in the spring of 2012. To hold the election, 540,000 valid signatures of “electors” (those not currently in prison or on parole who are state residents eligible to vote) are needed; 105,000 had been gathered as of Nov. 18.

A much smaller “Jobs Not Cuts” rally of 150 was held early in the day outside the offices of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the mouthpiece of the state’s big bourgeoisie, to protest Congressional spending cuts directed at working people.

Among the rally speakers, a U. Wisconsin-Madison student highlighted the plight of young workers facing “indentured servitude” to pay off college debts, and a Vietnam veteran told the crowd that spending on U.S. imperialist wars should be brought home along with all troops and contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan. At noon, the group marched

to the Capitol to join the Recall rally.

Unions mobilized their members to participate in the Recall rally, which was put together by One Wisconsin Now, a Democratic Party front group, and Wisconsin Wave, a project of the liberal Liberty Tree Foundation. The clear emphasis was on funneling the anger and resentment felt by working people into the electoral arena via the recall effort.

The statewide rebellion last spring against the notorious Act 10, the law that stripped public workers here of their right to collectively bargain with government institutions, made international headlines and helped inspire the ongoing Occupy Wall Street movement. The specter of over 100,000 people marching against the dictates of the ruling rich in a mid-sized, Midwestern city such as Madison had not been seen since the great labor upsurges of the early 20th century.

But the boisterous protest and occupation that shook the Capitol from February to April somewhat quieted after the ultimate passage of Act 10, and was also sabotaged by the state union brass discouraging their rank-and-file members from calling strikes to halt the law. On

the local level, the South Central Federation of Labor, the federation of AFL-CIO unions in southern Wisconsin, passed a resolution endorsing a general strike—an act which was never carried out.

Over the summer, a series of recall elections of state Senators took place, which resulted in the replacement of two Republicans with Democrats and the retention of the Republican majority. The amount of money spent on the campaigns blew away all previous records, and there was little mention of collective bargaining in campaign ads despite it being the issue that sparked them. The governor recall, if it happens, promises to look much the same. Fundraising has already started, for which there are no limits. This is the bourgeois elections’ “control valve” for popular anger at capitalism acting as intended.

Meanwhile, the Wall Street Occupations that have given wings to the resistance elsewhere have only materialized in a minor way here. Occupy Madison camps on an abandoned car dealership lot eight blocks from the Capitol. Roughly 20 people attend its General Assemblies, which are held three nights a week, and occupied in part with fend-

ing off ridiculous demands by the city’s Health Department. Participants have held a number of small but spirited protests at banks and other capitalist institutions, and have gotten voiced support from local unions.

Despite pockets of radical activism, the political energy in Wisconsin at present is clearly directed toward the recall. Workers are looking to take out their justified resentment on the present administration. But attacks on the working class have come equally from Republicans and Democrats, as demonstrated by cuts to welfare programs, Social Security, and Medicare promulgated by the Obama administration and Democratic-controlled state governments around the U.S.

It is no matter if one loyal servant of capital is recalled so long as he or she is replaced with another who is equally loyal to either major party. Socialist Action supports recalling *all* anti-worker politicians and bureaucrats belonging to any political party—in fact, recalling the entire *government* of, by, and for the bourgeoisie. We need to start by building a real Labor Party to run working-class candidates who will fight for us! ■

Egyptian masses say military regime must go

Khail Hamra / AP



Odd Andersen / AFP / Getty Images



By ANDREW POLLACK

The masses of Egypt in their millions have returned to the streets, determined to finish the revolution they began in January by ousting from power the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Every day since a police attack in Cairo's Tahrir Square on Saturday, Nov. 19, thousands of youths have braved murderous police sallies into the square, each time beating them back. Emboldened with their success in repelling the cops—who are backed by the country's ruling military—these same youth have mounted one offensive after another against the headquarters of the Interior Ministry, which oversees police affairs.

Mohamed Mahmoud Street, which connects Tahrir with the Ministry, has seen countless acts of heartrending self-sacrifice and inspiring courage by the shabab (youth). They consult with each other constantly, assessing when to advance and retreat, how many of the hundreds of thousands gathering in the nearby square to involve, or when to ask them to wait. Those in the front lines appeal to the lines behind them not to back up but instead to stand their ground to bolster the front's position.

Revolutionary journalist Mostafa Omar reported that "many young people unable to enter Mohamed Mahmoud to support those on the front-lines are wearing stickers distributed by a group of revolutionary socialists that read 'A Martyr is available here' to underscore their readiness to die for a chance to live in a democratic country not ruled by army generals."

An Egyptian American active in building solidarity protests in New York passed along twitters from her cousin on the front line: "We throw rocks and they shoot us with rubber bullets and tear gas bombs ... we are still standing and fighting ... a lot of ppl died of suffocation and real bullets ... injuries are like rain ... but nobody surrenders. If one of us falls, more ppl show up and come ... the spirit of the revolution is back and the pigs dont understand that shooting us wont let us back, but encourage us to go towards them."

Omar described uprising participants as "less middle class and more working class" than at the beginning of the year: "Most people who died at the hands of police are poor, young working-class people who have come from the shantytowns—young people who have no hope after years of neglect." This truth was captured in a quote in *The New York Times* from a 23-year-old protester taking a break from battle, who declared, "This is a revolution of the hungry!"

Sometimes the unquestioning self-sacrifice of these hungry shabab makes it impossible to find words to properly honor them. Omar reports that "one of those killed was helping a young woman who was breaking stones to throw at police. He said to her, 'I'm uneducated, I have no future. The police will kill me someday anyway. I will die here—you go. You are educated, you will help the movement.'"

Truly, the working class is uniquely giving and selfless, deserving of the fruits of victory, of a decent life—qualities that it has learned and earned through hard experi-

'A lot of ppl died of suffocation and real bullets ... but nobody surrenders ... the spirit of the revolution is back.'

— twitter message from Tahrir Square

ence, and by rejecting the lying lessons of its masters. The morals of those masters are seen in their encouragement of the heinous behavior of their army, whose soldiers have been seen dragging dead bodies and throwing them on piles as if they were bags of rubbish—after hitting them on the head with batons to make sure they're dead.

The uprising began after a police attack on Nov. 19 on a sit-in of no more than 100 people in Tahrir Square of those wounded in the Jan. 25 uprising who have been demanding compensation for their injuries. Police began beating the wounded, including shooting rubber bullets purposely at their faces, putting out several eyes. Thousands responded to this repression by coming to the square to reclaim it. By the next day, there were tens of thousands of people in Tahrir Square again, and they kicked the police out.

The numbers in Tahrir—and soon in every major city and town in the country—grew day after day and into the night throughout the week following the initial cop attack, culminating in a million-strong "Friday of the Last Chance" on Nov. 25. This followed a week in which at least three dozen were killed and several hundred severely wounded. The size and steadfastness of the mobilizations make it clear that this phase of the revolution can only end either in the SCAF stepping down, or in a massacre on a scale too massive to even contemplate—an alternative that the masses in the streets are only too well aware of and which fuels their determination.

On Last Chance Friday, SCAF appointed a former Mubarak flunky as prime minister—and revolutionary groups immediately organized a sit-in to block him from reaching the PM's office. Other youth groups began circulating forms for protesters to fill in to nominate their own choices for a transitional civilian council. The independent union federation called for a workers' feeder march, following up on its call for members to join the protests as soon as they had broken out the preceding weekend.

Ahdaf Soueif, prize-winning novelist and aunt of imprisoned blogger Alaa abd el Fatah (detained for criticizing military tribunals), wrote movingly in the *Guardian* of scenes she saw in Tahrir. She described activists following the advice of organizers to write their names on their arms so loved ones could be informed if they were killed, advice issued after some bodies of the murdered couldn't be identified.

Soueif reported that someone had written on a wall: "We are the Square: A Church, a Mosque and a Parliament."

The notion of Tahrir as a more genuine parliament (certainly more than the one to be convened by the military's rigged elections) is a recognition that ultimately only organs of mass power born from the squares of Egypt can bring real democracy to the country.

The tragedies mount, but they only further fuel protesters' steadfastness. One hero murdered by the security forces was young field doctor Rania Fouad, who entered a coma and died after an attack by tear gas canisters on her make-shift clinic in the Square. After her murder, said Soueif, "The people notched it up: the revolution had just become dearer—more impossible to abandon." On one day motorbikes brought to such clinics 50 cases in 10 minutes. On another day, the media reported 500 brought in during a two-hour span.

On Tuesday night, Field-Marshal Hussein Tantawi, head of SCAF, made a speech that stunned all observers with "its detachment and tardiness, its formal emptiness, its moral vacuity. And then the teargas started in earnest. People stood their ground because they knew the army wanted to claim that the speech had satisfied people so they'd left."

The Muslim Brotherhood, whose party was expected to garner the biggest vote totals in elections scheduled for Nov. 28, held a mass march of its own on Nov. 18 out of dissatisfaction with the military's threats to remain in power. But once the masses demanded an immediate end to military rule, many of them challenging the legitimacy of military-run elections, the Brotherhood reverted to form, and its middle-class leadership called on protesters to leave Tahrir.

In a typical but incredibly cynical move, on Last Chance Friday the Muslim Brotherhood distributed leaflets expressing its support for elections, and rather than join the monster rally in Tahrir, held its own small demonstration to protest the decision of Israeli authorities to demolish the gate to al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. But the masses of Egypt know that the Brotherhood, after decades of collaboration with dictatorial regimes (even when its own members faced repression), is no more capable of genuinely resisting Zionism than its military partners.

And in any case, increasing numbers of the younger, more working-class ranks of the Brotherhood are defying the leadership's advice and joining the fighting alongside their sisters and brothers against SCAF.

The most well known bourgeois liberal candidate for president, Mohamed El-Baradei, was said to be planning to join negotiations, maybe even to be willing to accept being chosen by SCAF as prime minister. In the end he boycotted the talks, obviously afraid of being denounced by the masses.

In the weeks before the uprising, pressure was building on the military. Workers had engaged in a wave of mass strikes in late September. Meanwhile, activists in the Campaign to End Military Trials of Civilians began holding rallies against such trials, for freedom for politi-

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