

Israel bombs Syria; U.S. signals approval

BY JEFF MACKLER

No serious observer of Middle Eastern politics believes that the Zionist, colonial, settler, and racist state of Israel makes a single move before consulting with its U.S. benefactors. Indeed, the Israeli army and state depend on the billions annually allocated by U.S. imperialism to maintain Israel as its chief imperial representative in the region. Israel is by far the largest recipient of U.S. military aid.

The May 2-3 and May 4-5 nighttime bombings of Syria's International Airport and military installations reportedly killed hundreds. Israeli officials declared that the strikes were aimed at preventing Syrian aid to the Lebanese Hezbollah forces, which defeated the Israeli intervention in Lebanon several years ago.

Following the first attack, President Obama readily sided with Israel, affirming in a press interview that he fully supported Israel's right to guard against the transfer of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah. But major media, including *The New York Times* (May 4), raised questions as to whether the objectives of the attack were to intervene into the conflict in Syria itself.

Indirect support to the Syrian bombing was signaled days earlier by statements from President Obama and U.S. Secretary of "Defense" Chuck Hagel, who threatened overt war against Syria if the U.S. could verify the Israeli charge that Syria had used deadly sarin gas against the rebel opposition. Obama sanctioned direct and lethal military aid when he stated last week that the use of poison gas by the Syrian government would be crossing the "red line" that provided sufficient justification for an overt U.S. intervention.

To date there has been no verification of the use of sarin gas. Traces of chlorine have been found in soil samples near a Syrian chlorine plant bombed by the rebel forces. But despite repeated accusations and innuendos, neither U.S. nor international agencies have been able to point to concrete evidence of the use of chemical weapons by Syria.

Even a May 5 Reuters report from Geneva implying that rebel forces have used sarin was not without qualification. The report stated: "UN human rights investigators have gathered testimony from casualties of Syria's civil war and medical staff indicating that rebel forces have used the nerve agent sarin, one of the lead investigators said



(Above) Obama with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

on Sunday.

"The United Nations independent commission of inquiry on Syria has not yet seen evidence of government forces having used chemical weapons, which are banned under international law, said commission member Carla Del Ponte. 'Our investigators have been in neighboring countries interviewing victims, doctors and field hospitals and, according to their report of last week which I have seen, there are strong, concrete suspicions but not yet incontrovertible proof of the use of sarin gas, from the way the victims were treated,' Del Ponte said in an interview with Swiss-Italian television.

"This was use on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities,' she added, speaking in Italian."

What is incontrovertible is that U.S. allies in the region—Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—have supplied hundreds of millions of dollars worth of lethal military aid to destabilize the Syrian regime. The U.S. also claims to have supplied some \$400 million in "non-lethal aid." The United States, which funds Israel's "Iron Dome" missile program, missiles used in the early May bombings, is the chief military force in the region.

In the case of Qatar, a nation without an army, the U.S.-established and priva-

tized Blackwater military installation is used daily as an operational base for the U.S. war in Afghanistan. It was central to the imperial conquest of Libya, with Blackwater-trained troops playing a key role in the "liberation" of Tripoli.

While there is little doubt that the U.S. seeks the removal of the Assad regime, there appear to be divisions among the U.S. ruling elite as to how this should be accomplished. The central issue in dispute is the nature of the government to be established, presumably after the Syrian regime is either compelled to negotiate a "settlement" that establishes a new government with Assad or after Assad's complete defeat.

This internal dispute among top U.S. decision makers is fueled by the fact that none of the rebel forces are seen as reliable U.S. allies, and almost all of them oppose the establishment of another colonial regime beholden to the U.S. or any other colonial power.

U.S. envoys to the region, from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the present Secretary, John Kerry, have met repeatedly with the Syrian National Council in efforts to forge unity between these disparate, warring, and mainly expatriate Syrian bourgeois elements, all with virtually no influence on the ground.

The inability of the United States to establish a credible government and

therefore achieve "regime change" with yet another puppet government has led it to funnel aid to the rebels from all quarters, including from Islamic fundamentalists that the U.S. publicly opposes. Meanwhile, Washington stands silent as this component of the Syrian opposition receives lethal aid from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

The U.S. Machiavellian strategy is first and foremost to weaken the Assad regime to maximize its opportunity to establish a new government amenable to U.S. economic, military, and regional "interests," the latter including deepening the isolation of Iran.

At the same time, as in the U.S. war against Libya, the U.S. seeks to isolate and weaken, if not destroy, the oppositional forces that began the two-year war with peaceful protests against the Assad dictatorship. Those forces were brutally repressed by the regime, thus fueling a broad and popular mass movement, organized by independent Local Coordinating Committees and rank-and-file Syrian soldiers who refused orders to attack civilian protesters.

Today, while it is far from clear what the relationship of forces is among the rebel opponents, who include Islamic

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April's Days of Action Against Drones

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Emily Sorensen / Pomerado News

April saw a coordinated series of protests against the Obama administration's steadily escalating drone-warfare campaign. The National Days of Action Against Drones was endorsed by a number of U.S. groups, including United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), No Drones Network, Code Pink, the American Friends Service Committee, and ANSWER. Thousands of people in U.S. cities from New York to Seattle to Honolulu participated in the protests, while other protest actions took place in Europe and in Pakistan and Yemen.



The latter two countries are frequent targets of CIA drone attacks. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 316 confirmed drone strikes have taken place in Pakistan since Obama was elected president in 2008, resulting in from 2541 to over 3500 deaths. During the same period, there have been 44 to 54 confirmed U.S. drone strikes in Yemen, with from 232 to 333 reported dead. A June 2011 report to Congress indicated that the great majority of people killed by drone strikes (as much as 98 percent!) were civilians.

Drones allow the military to easily cross borders and carry out attacks and extra-judicial assassinations without the necessity of training and mobilizing troops, risking U.S. casualties, or even declaring war. Their use has allowed the Obama White House to pretend to disengage from the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while vigorously stepping up its aggression in Africa, Southern Asia, and elsewhere.

The Pentagon has some 7500 drones in its arsenal, and the U.S. Air Force uses the mechanized "hunter-killers" to fly at least 40 round-the-clock patrols ev-

ery day. The U.S. has established drone-launching installations throughout the oil and mineral-rich region of Northern Africa—including in Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and most recently in Niger—and around the Indian Ocean and Southern Asia.

On April 29, several dozen protested in front of the U.S. embassy in Yemen. According to *The New York Times* (May 2), civilian deaths caused by the attacks have bred increasing local resentment: "The drone program is terrorizing our people," the embassy protesters wrote in an open letter to Obama. "One never knows where the next drone will strike or how many innocent victims will die."

On April 27-28, some 600 antiwar protesters marched and rallied outside the Lincolnshire air base in England. British drone flights in Afghanistan are controlled from the base. The protest took place as the British government admitted that the Royal Air Force has carried out over 2000 missions using "borrowed" U.S. armed drones. Also, British personnel

"embedded" with the U.S. Air Force employed drones in the recent wars in Libya and Iraq.

In the United States, rallies, picket lines, and vigils against drones continued throughout the month in over 50 cities and towns.

San Diego, which carries the dubious distinction of being the drone production capital of the world, saw a couple of hundred activists from throughout the Western region take part in four days of protests in early April outside the drone-manufacturing facilities of General Atomics and Northrop Grumman, as well as at other locations. The San Diego activities drew attention to the fact that drones are being used along the increasingly militarized U.S.-Mexico border, as well as for warfare abroad.

Several hundred, including a contingent of people from Africa who are temporarily resident in the U.S., rallied in Washington, D.C., on April 13 in an anti-drone action sponsored by ANSWER and endorsed by many other organizations, including the Council on American-

Islamic Relations (CAIR). On April 29, the Anti-war Committee of Chicago sponsored an anti-drone picket line outside the stockholders' meeting of the Boeing aircraft corporation, which was being held at the Field Museum.

The drone command base at Hancock Field, near Syracuse, N.Y., has been a focal point for many anti-war activists in the Northeast. On April 28 close to 300 marched, beat drums, and carried mock coffins; the sheriff's department arrested 31 protesters on spurious charges of loitering, disorderly conduct, and obstructing government administration.

On April 27, Philadelphia-area activists picketed the former Willow Grove airbase in Horsham, Pa., which has been designated as a drones command center due to open in October. The Philadelphia anti-war movement has vowed to organize monthly protests throughout the summer to put a stop to the new base. ■

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Venezuela confronts political turmoil after Maduro victory

By MARC ROME

In the April 14 Venezuelan presidential snap election, the late Hugo Chavez's chosen successor, Nicolas Maduro, edged out his right-wing opponent, Henrique Capriles. "Chavismo" will continue in power after Chavez, although with the weakest mandate since Chavez's defeat in the 2007 constitutional referendum.

Less than 300,000 votes separated the two candidates, with nearly 78% of the electorate casting a vote, a thin margin separating the polarized country. Maduro's victory was made official by an announcement of the Venezuelan electoral commission, which pointed to high standards of auditing and voting procedures that allow each voter to verify a vote by comparing the one displayed on a thumb-print-identifying, touch-screen computer against a paper receipt, which is dropped into a secure ballot box.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's Carter Center called the Oct. 5, 2012, election procedures, in which Chavez defeated Capriles by 11%, the "best in the world." Many international election agencies have called the April 14 election fair and accurate, but the Obama administration has announced that the U.S. is not ready to accept the vote.

Capriles and his MUD party (Mesa de Unidad Democrática) have formally contested the election results before the Venezuelan Supreme Court, after previously demanding an audit of 100% of the ballot boxes, which they subsequently rejected when the electoral commission would not also audit the voter registry. A May 2 article on the pro-Chavez Venezuelanalysis.com reported that "Capriles demanded a verification of all the signatures and fingerprints that voters place in the voter registry at the time of voting, but the CNE has said this would be impossible, as there are more than 15 million signatures and fingerprints that would have to be evaluated."

Since April 15, when Capriles called off a mass march of oppositionists in Caracas to protest the election results after Maduro announced that he would not allow the event to take place, efforts by the opposition to delegitimize the Maduro government and destabilize the country have continued nearly unabated in the wake of post-election mobilizations of rightists in pot-banging protests and fascist-type violence.

The pro-Chavez Venezuelan website *Apporea* reported that thugs shot dead several Maduro supporters and a state-oil (PDVSA) worker, attacked medical buildings staffed by Cuban doctors (leaving one dead), and even attempted to set ablaze the Chavista governor's building in Merida. Venezuelan state television announced the arrest of armed Colombian and Salvadoran paramilitaries in possession of Venezuelan army uniforms and claimed that they had plotted to destabilize the country. As many as nine people have been killed, and scores have been injured in post-election violence that has been aimed primarily at Maduro supporters.

A layer of opposition legislators have refused to recognize Maduro as the legitimately elected head of state, sharpening a state of political deadlock in the highly polarized country. On April 30, oppositionists unfurled a banner in the chambers that read "Coup in Parliament" to protest a decision of the head of the National Assembly that refused to allow lawmakers to intervene on the floor if they did not recognize Maduro as the lawfully elected president. Consequently, the National Assembly meeting erupted in a brawl between opposition and pro-Chavez legislators.

Further highlighting the political and social division of the country was the fact that two separate massive May Day rallies were held in Caracas, one led by Chavistas, the other by the opposition.

The opposition seems to have tacit political backing by the Obama administration. The U.S. president all but announced in an interview on Univision that the elections were fraudulent. According to the May 4 *Washington Post*, he said that "it's up to the people of Venezuela to choose their leaders in legitimate elections."

Recent U.S. meddling in Latin American and Caribbean politics, including funding and helping to coordinate coups, have been well documented: Venezuela in 2002, Haiti in 2004, Honduras in 2009, and Paraguay in 2012. An April 10 article in *The Nation* by Natalia Viana details the extent to which the Obama administra-



(Above) Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

tion, through USAID, among other official government agencies, funded the principal coup-makers in Paraguay and garnered international support.

During the Venezuelan presidential campaign, Maduro accused the opposition of coordinating electricity blackouts during campaign visits to various states throughout the country. The levers of the electricity grid are in the hands of the state and secured by the military and have been since nationalization in 2007 merged 10 state-owned power companies into one. If Maduro's accusations are true, they speak to both the power of the opposition and the tenuous control that the Chavista forces have over the country's key industries.

Speaking ceremoniously to a mass crowd of supporters from the balcony of the presidential Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Maduro vowed carry on Chavez's political program, his Plan de la Patria, to build "21st century socialism."

Yet, for one who refers to himself as "Chavez's son," Maduro has seemingly inherited little of the political verve that his predecessor developed through his radical past as a coup plotter and coup breaker, which allowed Chavez to politically balance between the major opposing class forces for 14 years. The poor received a hefty slice of the national oil surplus under Chavez through government programs—although billionaire speculators also gained.

Nevertheless, the reconfigured oil-royalty rates became anathema to corporations like ExxonMobil, which folded in 2008, having been accustomed to unfettered profits for decades. Chevron, France's Total, British Petroleum, Norway's Statoil, and other foreign companies continue to exploit the oil reserves of Venezuela; Chevron obliged previous loan requests of billions of dollars from Chavez, according to a March 5 article in *Forbes*.

Chavismo loses political ground

In the snap election, Maduro lost roughly 700,000 votes while Capriles gained the same number. This may be owed to the fact that even Capriles, like Maduro, vowed to maintain the popular social programs in food, education, and health care.

Moreover, between the last presidential elections in 2006 and those of 2012, according to the Fourth International website, *International Viewpoint*, "Chavez gained 752,976 votes while the opposition gained 2,175,984, or more than three times as much. In the popular districts of Caracas (Petare, 23 de Enero, La Vega, and so on) the Chavista vote fell by 6 to 9%."

The economic outlook for Venezuela can only add to the uncertainty of the masses. According to Bloomberg, "Venezuela's dollar-denominated bonds fell the most in almost 15 years yesterday as traders anticipated political instability will undermine the economy. Inflation accelerated to 25 percent in March, the fastest official rate in the region [decreasing the buying power of the Bolivar, which is a strain on poor and working Venezuelans—MR]. The central bank's scarcity index, which measures

the amount of goods that are out of stock in the market, rose to a record high of 20.4 percent in January."

Workers' control

The website of the International Marxist Tendency reported: "Significantly, the opposition has won in the key state of Bolivar, where the main state-owned basic industries are situated and where there is an extremely critical mood amongst the Bolivarian rank and file against the governor Rangel and the bureaucracy in general because of their role in fighting against workers' control."

The struggle for workers' control began in earnest after the December 2002 to February 2003 oil industry strike organized by pro-imperialist anti-Chavez political forces inside the country and the state-controlled trade union. Workers restarted and kept in operation key energy and oil installations crippled by the strike and saved the country from near economic collapse. Since then, the state has made some concessions, allowing varying degrees of workers' control.

Where this relationship is exercised in practice, it often involves a tense cooperative relationship between the state and workers, with the state maintaining majority control. The National Guard has in the past been called out to fire on workers' protests.

Meanwhile, the radical, independent trade union, the UNT, formed through rank-and-file initiative inspired by the defeat of the bourgeois oil strike, and once boasting over a million members, struggles to maintain its influence. This is in the face of another trade union, the CBST, having grown in part by absorbing layers of former UNT members but also due to the fact that it is the only union recognized by the official state party, the PSUV.

Maduro will continue to be tested in the coming weeks by the instability wrought by the country's political polarization, a lack of confidence by foreign economic powers, electoral gains by the opposition, and discontent among radicalized sections of the working class. These conditions may work to the advantage of the right, which has maintained favorable relationships with imperialist powers, including the United States.

Washington colluded most infamously in the April 11, 2002, coup attempt, when Chavez narrowly escaped with his life, saved only by a massive mobilization of workers and the poor.

Unlike his predecessor, who enjoyed a more favorable margin of victory last October, Maduro's room for maneuver is much more narrow and sharpens the difficult and dangerous contradictions of trying to straddle opposing class forces—balancing between the interests of the workers and poor on the one side, and the industrialists, wealthy landowners, and imperialism on the other.

Only a mass revolutionary movement of working people and the dispossessed can take the definitive steps needed to defend their economic and social rights against the onslaught of corporate capitalism. ■

Strategizing on how to defend women's reproductive rights

By CHRISTINE MARIE

On April 25, Black women lawmakers, including Representative Barbara Watson, walked out of a Florida state legislative session to protest the introduction of an anti-abortion bill that would prohibit pregnancy terminations based on "race." The bill, introduced by white Republican lawmaker Charles Van Zant, is typical of a spate of reactionary laws introduced in an effort to associate the anti-abortion cause with the civil rights and human rights movements.

Such laws specifically prohibit "race-selective" or "sex-selective" abortions and propagandistically assert that Black women—the slogan mounted on some of the campaign's racist billboards is "the most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb"—are the main threat to children of color. The Asian and South Asian communities, the latter already demonized by imperialist war propaganda and Islamophobia, are similarly targeted as the site of the slaughter of girl children.

This racialization of the efforts to further restrict reproductive rights of women in the U.S., as well as related international campaigns, were key themes of the 27th Annual Conference for Student and Community Activists, sponsored by the Hampshire College-based organization Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP). The April 12-14 conference, entitled "From Abortion Rights to Social Justice: Building the Movement for Reproductive Freedom," was attended by around 1000 people, the large majority of whom were under 25 years of age.

The current attacks on abortion, maternal health, and the economic means to raise healthy children were analyzed by presenters on plenary panels and in nearly 80 workshops, many of which placed these current assaults in the overall national and global contexts created by the ruling elites' austerity drives, imperialist wars, and systematic repression against working people and people of color.

African American, Latina, and South Asian women led the discussion in workshops about the way that the ruling-class efforts to restrict abortion have been cynically packaged as opposition to a holocaust for children of color. The green light for the state legislation based on this phony concern for the potential offspring of racialized communities was the introduction of PRENDA, the Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass Prenatal Non-Discrimination Act, last year in the U.S. House.

A flyer distributed to all attendees and signed by



Steering Committee members of the National Coalition for Immigrant Women's Rights (NCIWR) explained that PRENDA and related bills broadcast the ideological message that women of color are "backward" and incapable of responsible decision-making about whether or not to bear a child. Abortion providers who fail to racially profile and "correctly" read the minds of women supposedly prone to "genocidal" decisions about their reproduction would face fines and jail time.

Attendees also learned more about the stunning number of women who have been subjected to murder charges and jail for failing to successfully carry a pregnancy to term. The most dramatic case so far is that of Indiana resident Bei Bei Shuai, who after being abandoned while pregnant, suffered depression and attempted suicide. When she survived and her newborn did not, she was charged with murder and held in a county jail for over a year.

The increasing criminalization and jailing of women whose fetuses do not become children has been dubbed "The New Jane Crow" by author Lynne M.

Paltrow, who contends that the restriction of reproductive rights in an age of mass incarceration should be expected to lead to horrors that will put the socially conservative 1950s to shame. This increasing regulation of the lives of poor women is being coupled with the introduction of legislation around the country that

would require anyone applying to receive the stingy temporary relief still available to poor women after the Clinton Welfare Reform to submit to drug testing.

The New Orleans-based Women's Health & Justice Initiative distributed a fact sheet on this campaign in which they explained that this kind of federal assistance to the poor in 2011 represented 0.7% of the federal budget, although that fact is conveniently hidden in the new elite propaganda about the need to quit supporting drug addiction with tax dollars.

The international side to this assault on the reproductive rights of poor women of color was addressed by a number of speakers, including Beverly Hartmann. Hartmann is the director of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College, as well as the author of "Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control."

Melinda and Bill Gates, who advocate population control to curb carbon emissions, have partnered on a \$4.3 billion initiative to provide doses of the dangerous contraceptive Depo-Provera to 120 million poor women in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The long-acting drug, known to cause osteoporosis and to somehow speed HIV transmission, is preferred by those who want to slow population growth without a meaningful investment in all-around women's health because it is injected under the skin without the need of doctors.

The Gates Foundation, Hartmann says, blames population growth for the burden of diseases, environmental degradation, poverty, and conflict. "It as if the fertility of poor women causes these problems, and not the exploitative policies and practices of the rich and powerful," she has written.

Debate about what strategy will be effective in the effort to build a mass movement to confront these ills was not an organized element of the conference. Nonetheless, such discussion did go on at literature tables, in the corridors, and in small group sessions.

Socialist Action displayed books and pamphlets and signed up 50 young women for a socialist feminist reading group. SA also helped to put together a workshop called "Toward a Mass Movement for Reproductive Justice: Organizing Working Women in a Period of Austerity" and featuring worker rights organizer Kazi Fouzia of Desis Rising Up and Moving, UE National Executive Board member Marie Lausch, UAW steward Stephanie Molden, and SEIU Lavender Caucus member Ann Montague.

Montague spoke of the experience of helping to organize an Oregon pay equity strike that proved to her that mass action in the streets, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, was the key to any success. She cited one of the leaders of her international union, who referred to his experience in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to conclude: "You cannot lobby your way to social change." To achieve real and lasting change, we must build a strong mass movement of women and their male allies. ■

Demand compassionate release for Lynne Stewart!

By JEFF MACKLER

Civil rights attorney Lynne Stewart, who spent over 30 years defending the poor and oppressed, is confined to a prison cell at the Federal Medical Center, Carswell at Fort Worth, Texas. She has served three years of a 10-year sentence on frame-up charges concerning help she gave to her client, the blind cleric Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. Lynne's family and friends have been pleading with federal authorities to grant her "compassionate release" in order to gain proper medical care for her stage-four cancer.

The author, Jeff Mackler, is West Coast Coordinator of the Lynne Stewart Defense Committee.

Federal probation officers in New York visited members of Lynne Stewart's family on May 3 to ascertain whether they could provide adequate Brooklyn, N.Y., facilities for Lynne to live and be cared for.

While we must use extreme caution in predicting an immediate and positive outcome from this fact, we can state that



government procedures with regard to granting the compassionate release that tens of thousands around the world have demanded include recommendations or administrative procedures from the Bureau of Prisons to the presiding judge in Lynne's case.

This is Federal District Court Judge John Koeltl, who, it appears, has the authority to direct federal probation officers to investigate whether a suitable facility

for Lynne's care would be available if Lynne were to be transferred to her desired medical facility—in this case, the world-renowned Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

Lynne e-mailed me on May 2 to state that her second chemotherapy treatment was only partially successful in reducing her metastasized breast cancer in the area of her lymph nodes and sternum. But the cancerous spots on her lungs remain unchanged. Now more than ever, first-rate medical care is critical to save Lynne's life and continue her battle for freedom.

Lynne has cautioned us all to not let up in this battle. "Like a tree that grows in Brooklyn," says Lynne in an allusion to the 1943 Betty Smith novel of a poor Irish-American family's struggle to establish roots and live a decent life in early 20th century Brooklyn, "I will not be content until my feet are firmly planted in my Brooklyn home."

It appears that the worldwide campaign for compassionate release for Lynne has

taken root. But this is not the time for speculation with regard to the exigencies of America's criminal "justice" system.

Lynne's life still hangs by a string. She survived the horrific ordeal of two chemotherapy treatments that nearly ended it and had to be confined to a hospital isolation ward when her white blood count fell to dangerously low levels. Her cancer has been in part and temporarily restrained, but not the malignant tumors that persist in her lungs.

Demand compassionate release for Lynne now! Sign the petition to do so in one of the following manners: Go to Lynne's website at LynneStewart.org and click on "Justice for Lynne Stewart." Or sign the petition on the change.org site.

Stay on the alert to attend a possible New York court hearing wherein Judge Koeltl may make a final determination on Lynne's demand for compassionate release.

Finally, send your generous donation payable to the Lynne Stewart Organization, and mail it to 1070 Dean Street, Brooklyn, NY 11216. ■

Women face a triple economic burden

By ANN MONTAGUE

The economic burdens on women are triple—working in undervalued jobs, domestic work, and cutbacks in social services used by women.

In the first place, women's work continues to be undervalued and underpaid. Women are half the labor force and continue to earn 76 cents on the dollar earned by men.

There remains strong deep-seated and pervasive discrimination that maintains a system of gender segregation. This means women are still marginalized in undervalued jobs because of discrimination in hiring as well as by male co-workers in skilled blue-collar jobs in industry and transportation. And now, many are forced into part-time, temporary, or seasonal work.

U.S. capitalism is increasing attacks on public-sector jobs, where women workers are in the majority—and in most cities they are women of color. Moreover, many jobs in the public sector are unionized. The jobs and benefits in this sector are major targets for austerity—with demands upon the workers that include lay-offs, furloughs, and increased workload.

In addition, women are being assaulted by the ideological attacks that seek to destroy every gain of the Second Wave of Feminism. Women are facing levels of sexism and inequality throughout society that have not been seen since the 1950s—not only attacks on abortion rights but even on the right to contraception. Not only do we see persistent acts of violence against women but the growth of an entire rape culture.

At the same time, the ruling class makes the ideological argument that social services are the responsibility of women within their extended family and not a responsibility of society as a whole. While many women perceive the Republicans as the generals of this war on women, they do not yet understand that the attack has been fostered by politicians from both ruling parties.

A big part of the capitalists' plan is to cut the growing costs of social services (as meager as they are) and to transfer the economic burden and responsibility for these services back onto the individual or family. In the home, women are expected to pick up what the ruling class wants to dump because it is a drag on their profit margin.

This is a major purpose of the ideological offensive against women's equality and independence. It reinforces the stereotypic roles of wife, mother, caretaker, and housekeeper. It is now more difficult, of course, to push women who are integrated into the workforce and more economically independent back into the home. But the ruling class has been bombarding women with manipulative propaganda about their individual "responsibility" for child care, elder care, education, and health care.

Naturally, as polls show that 57% of the country supports Marriage Equality for LGBT people, the ruling class must argue: "this is not what we had in mind when we talked of family values!"

When I was a case manager for Senior and Disability



Services, my job was to do holistic assessments of Medicaid clients to see if they qualified for In Home Care. I would sit down with a paper and pencil and talk about their personal care needs. If it looked like a home-care worker could come in and assist them (we would keep them out of the nursing home, and the state would save money), I would write up a plan.

Then in about 2002 we got laptops—which captured all the information and decided if they qualified. A couple of years later we were informed that we needed to inquire whether they had anyone (parents, children, church members, etc.) who could help them in their personal care. So this social service was being moved back onto the individual, their family, or acquaintances. As a consequence, the cases of elder abuse greatly increased, while home care workers became increasingly stressed.

This is the direction things are going in all social services. One of the largest and most popular federal programs is that of food stamps. (They changed the name to indicate that it would not cover all the food that people might need; it is now SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.) Now food stamp workers have to make sure everyone has the information about food banks or churches where they could go in the third week of the month, when their stamps

run out.

You can see this process also in medical care. In my home state of Oregon, even if people have no income or resources—which means they are categorically eligible for Medicaid—their names must go into a lottery, and the state officials only pull so many names a month. It can take years to receive benefits. The alternative is to ask a family member to pay the medical bills.

Due to unequal wages and employment discrimination, women are 30% more likely to be officially poor during our working lives, which means the bipartisan discussions of cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and pensions are devastating. These social benefits are already on the low end for women because of pay disparity and loss of pay for those years out of the workforce to have and raise children, or as caretakers for children, parents, and siblings.

A mass fightback is needed now more than ever. Unfortunately, the organized U.S. labor movement has done little to protect the rights of working people, with practically the only shining light being struggles by the Chicago Teachers Union and National Nurses United. One big reason that the unions have been ineffective is the kowtowing of the bureaucratic officialdom to the Democratic Party.

In the late 1980s my union decided to take on the issue of undervalued work and poverty wages in job classifications that were predominately women. They spent two years at the Oregon state legislature—testifying, lobbying, and negotiating with the Democratic governor. In the end, the governor announced that he would veto the pay equity legislation he received because it contained too many job classifications. But he welcomed us to return next session and try again!

At that point the union said, "Nope, don't think so—see you at the bargaining table." It was only then that the actual organizing of women workers began. We held statewide public hearings, rallies, worksite actions, and eventually a strike. And we won our upgrades.

This year the union is starting over again with a Living Wage Campaign. However, without the continuity of a rank-and-file women's movement and a left-wing rank-and-file organization, they will have to start from scratch.

A militant union movement is not possible without half of the working class. To win the war on women we are going to need to end the profit system that depends on our second-class status—and is determined to deny our basic needs.

To accomplish this will require a mass movement of working people that is led by those who understand the historic demands for reproductive freedom, child care, equality, and affirmative action. Women will need to be at the center of the fight, and we need to be at the point of production where profits are made. All working-class organizations must fight for gender equality and relief for women's triple economic burdens. ■

... Israel bombs Syria

(from page 1)

fundamentalists and Syrian workers and peasants, it remains a fact that none are considered reliable allies of U.S. imperialism.

The U.S. government is also restrained by the strong antiwar sentiment that has been expressed in repeated polls in the United States over the past two years. The most recent Pew Research poll indicates that 62 percent are opposed to any U.S. intervention in Syria. We must add to this the fact that the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the constant drone bombings of Pakistan, have earned it the deep hatred of the peoples of the Middle East and worldwide.

The "weapons of mass destruction" justification for the still ongoing war in Iraq, which has taken the lives of 1.5 million Iraqis, and the ongoing war in Afghanistan, which has caused the U.S. puppet Karzai regime to be discredited around the world, has convinced social justice activists everywhere that the U.S. imperial rulers fight for oil and military advantage and not for peace and justice.

More than ever, the U.S. and worldwide antiwar and social justice movement must demand: U.S. Hands Off Syria! Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now! Self-determination for the Syrian people! No to U.S. Sanctions! No U.S. Aid to Israel! U.S. Out of the Middle East Now! ■

Obama doubles down on Assata Shakur

By ANN MONTAGUE

On May 2, exactly 40 years after Assata Shakur (JoAnne Chesimard) was framed for the murder of a New Jersey state trooper, the Obama administration added her to the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List. The list was first formed in 2001.

Shakur was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. She was held in an all-male prison with male prison guards for her first two years. She gave birth to her daughter handcuffed to a hospital bed and escaped after six years—later being granted political asylum by Cuba. She has been living there ever since.

In 1987 Assata Shakur wrote, "Assata: An Autobiography," which is well worth reading.



It was also officially announced on May 1 that Cuba would remain on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism.

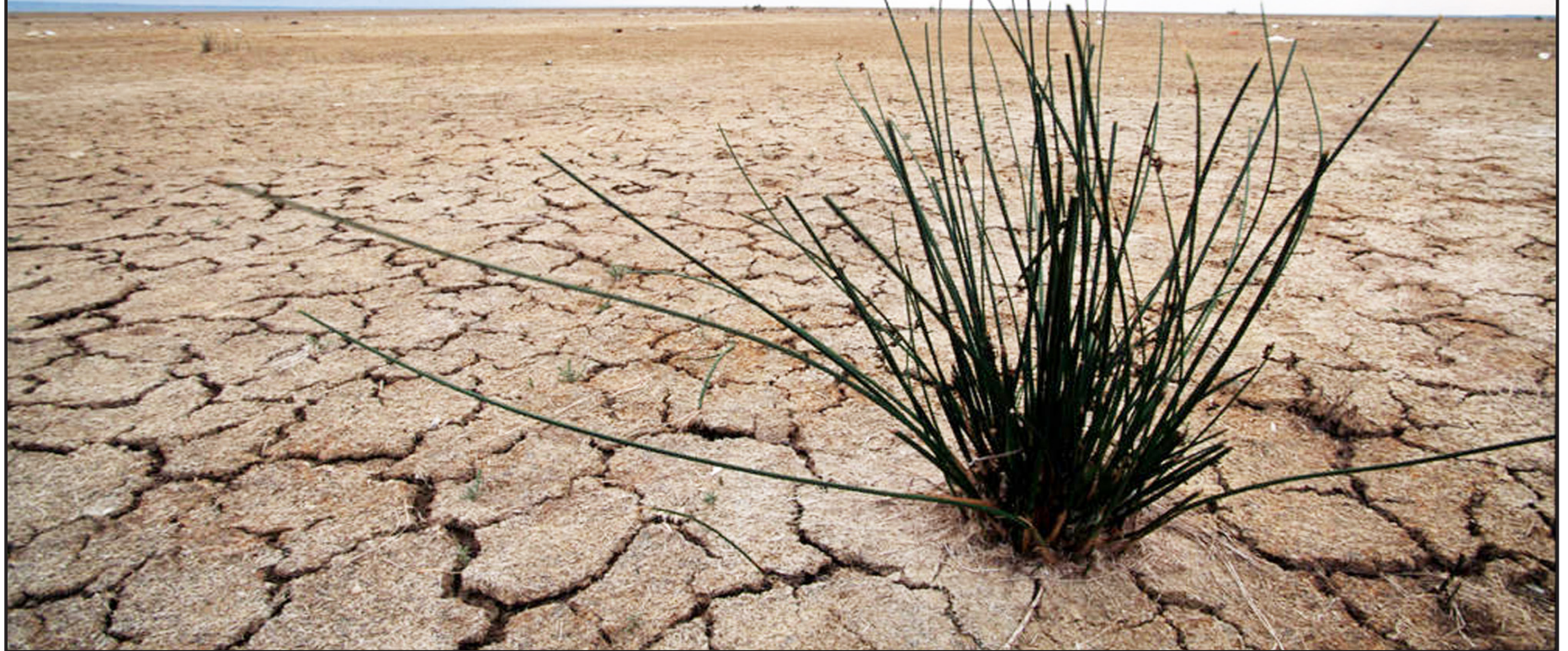
The organizations that have been working for decades to normalize relations with Cuba seemed shocked at these two developments. In the last couple of months they have been working furiously to get their supporters to sign petitions and letters to Obama showing support for removal of Cuba from the terrorism list. It sounded like they thought it really could happen.

Those illusions were finally dashed by the U.S. State Department's statement on May Day.

The government also announced that the monetary reward for Assata Shakur's capture has been increased from \$10,000 to \$2 million. This means that Assata's life is in increased danger from mercenary bounty hunters as well as from the administration of President Obama. ■

Combating climate change

The problems with James Hansen's fee and dividend proposal



By CHRISTINE FRANK

Since 2008, chief climatologist and activist James Hansen has been proposing fee and dividend as a means to curtail fossil fuel use and draw down carbon in order to prevent catastrophic climate change—a very real prospect that is looming ever closer. He has advocated the plan as an alternative to market-based carbon trading and offsets, which are nothing more than licenses to pollute, and phony accounting schemes that commodify Earth's carbon-storage capacity while traders and brokers profit from ecological disaster.

If you cook the books, you're only going to cook the planet because such projects have not reduced greenhouse gas emissions by one single jot. Since the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, which was based entirely on carbon trading, thanks to Al Gore's intervention on behalf of the Clinton administration, the situation has only gotten steadily worse, with none of the advanced nations making their emission-reduction goals. At Copenhagen in 2009, the worthless agreement was essentially scrapped altogether.

The mean global surface temperature of the planet has already risen 0.8 C since the Industrial Revolution. If it rises by 2 C, there will be a cascade of planetary tipping points that will speed Earth toward climate catastrophe. Scientists believe that one "climate domino" has already fallen and will begin toppling others. That would be the Arctic sea ice, which "flipped" into instability in 2007 and has been undergoing the permanent loss of its thick, multi-year ice ever since.

The next stage in the process is expected to be the Yedoma—the vast expanse of Siberian permafrost. Once it begins to thaw on a large scale, it will release enormous amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) as microbes break down organic matter in the thawing soils. This will lead to an amplifying feedback that will add to the blanket of gases that are warming the planet and in turn, melt more ice, adding to sea level rise.

The sediments of the seafloor on the Arctic continental shelf are already releasing huge plumes of CH₄ from thawing methane hydrates. Action should have been taken at once 25 years ago to reduce emissions from fossil fuel combustion, yet it's been business as usual ever since Hansen announced before Congress and the world in 1988 that the planet was warming.

Considerably modified, Hansen's fee and dividend idea has been incorporated into a bill in the U.S. Senate that was unveiled by Senators Boxer and Sanders prior to the successful Feb. 17 Forward on Climate demonstration of 50,000. The action was co-organized by Bill McKibben's 350, the Sierra Club, and the Hip Hop Caucus.

The plan is designed to eventually wean our society off of its fossil fuel addiction. It would impose a

Considerably modified, Hansen's idea has been incorporated into a bill in the U.S. Senate.

carbon fee on fossil fuel producers and cement makers upstream at the point of production or entry, and would be in the form of dollars per ton of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emitted from fuel extraction and use. The CO₂e would include other greenhouse gases such as methane, nitrous oxides, sulfur hexafluoride, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and nitrogen trifluoride. There is no mention of black carbon or soot, which has a huge warming effect when it lands on ice masses, greatly increasing the heat absorption factor.

Apparently, there would be no fee charged on products such as fertilizers or petrochemicals that use fossil fuels as raw materials or feedstocks to which value is added in the production process. Tariffs would be imposed on imports from countries that do not enact similar fee and dividend legislation. The non-regressive plan also requires an annual increase in the carbon fee, which would start out at \$15 per ton of CO₂ and rise \$10 per year or more if emission reductions are not proceeding at the desired pace. Combined with this would be a phase out of fossil fuel subsidies, including tax credits, over five years rather than an immediate and abrupt halt to the gravy train.

Then, 100% of the fee revenues would go to the general population on a per capita and monthly basis as a dividend with two half shares for each family with children under 18. The money would be directly deposited in each individual's bank account, with none going to the federal government for its tax-and-spend policies, thereby eliminating the influence of industry lobbyists. The idea is that the dividend would help ordinary people cope with the increase in transportation, heating, and electricity costs that the Energy Giants would pass along to consumers at every level.

It is thought that less well-off people, especially the poor, who are already low consumers of fossil fuels by virtue of their income status, would benefit the most and even have an incentive to conserve more while high-end consumers would receive a proportionately smaller dividend.

A decline in the use of hydrocarbons would logically follow. This assumption is based on the fact that the top one-fifth of the population has a carbon footprint that is three times that of the bottom one-fifth. At this rate, Hansen projects a 30% reduction in emissions in

10 years. The system is also supposed to spur innovation among entrepreneurs to develop more energy-efficient products and cleaner technologies. Oddly, there is no provision for any dividend funds being set aside for the development of renewable energy.

Continued fossil fuel use

The major problem with Hansen's proposal is that it assumes the continued use of fossil fuels, especially conventional oil and gas. He believes those reserves will gradually decline based on current estimates of "peak oil." Although he has warned that "it's game over for the climate" if we continue to use extreme forms of carbon-intensive energy such as tar sands bitumen, deepwater petroleum (especially from the Arctic), and shale oil and gas, he assumes that it's okay to use up the remaining conventional fossil carbon reservoirs. This means that we would not only still be generating massive amounts of greenhouse gases, but also perpetuating the destructive car/truck culture.

To prop up the wretched transportation system, he proposes a linear phase-in of polluting liquid biofuels of low-input and high-diversity as a substitute for petroleum-based gasoline—with no mention whatsoever of clean mass transit. This is entirely unacceptable.

Viewing coal combustion as the single greatest threat to civilization, Hansen calls for a moratorium on the construction of new coal-fired power plants, leading to their eventual phase-out, except in cases where carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) technologies can be employed. There is actually no such thing as "clean coal" by way of CCS, so we can forget about that. Plus, the possibility of catastrophic releases of carbon dioxide from deep geologic storage or its migration underground into water tables are all too real, making it a completely impractical alternative.

In 2008, when he originally presented his concept at a congressional briefing as a substitute for coal-fired electrical generation, Hansen called for a switch to natural gas, using up to 50% of the remaining conventional gas supplies. Coal-fired electrical generation has since fallen to 34% due to its replacement with natural gas. The drop in price of natural gas due to the "shale gale" has made this conversion possible. It is safe to assume that a significant portion of the shale gas being produced goes to electrical generation although no hard data seem to be available on that. Given the environmental devastation caused by hydrofracturing, switching from coal to gas has not been that beneficial overall. In fact, the fracking of natural gas emits more carbon than coal combustion because of all the accidental leaking and purposeful venting of methane!

Hansen also advocates the creation of a national, low-loss "smart" grid, while ignoring the benefits of locally-produced and distributed wind and solar power.

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er, which is actually more efficient since it doesn't have to travel through miles of transmission lines that create harmful electromagnetic fields.

Other aspects of his proposal include improved land-use practices such as reforestation that allow for the natural sequestration of carbon, which is all well and good. The capacity of our climate sinks is declining and needs to be reinforced. But he proposes the use of biochar by burning agricultural residues that would better serve as mulch or compost to return nutrients to the soil and enable better moisture retention in an organic system of food production. Plus, charcoal making is a filthy process and should be abolished.

The real stinker in his plan is the deployment of nuclear power plants using Integral Fast Reactor designs and thorium fuel. There are many problems with thorium (3-4 times more abundant than uranium) because it contains no fissile isotopes, which have to be added to achieve criticality. Therefore, either enriched uranium-235 or plutonium-239, made in dangerous breeder reactors, is required to kick-start the fission process.

Thorium does not solve the waste, safety, or cost problems of nuclear power. It is touted as a great green hope that "eats its own waste," but it is hardly that. Thorium's nuclear fuel cycle creates wastes at the front end with hazardous mine and mill tailings and at the tail end with long-lived decay products. Thorium-232 (1/2 life of 14 billion years), technetium-99 (1/2 life of 200,000 yrs.), iodine-129, cesium-135 & 137, and strontium-90 would all pose a danger now and in the future.

Thorium-232 has a very high radiotoxicity, with a bone-surface dose 200 times higher than that of uranium. Also, the process of breeding thorium up to uranium-235 emits lethal high-energy gamma radiation to which processing workers could be exposed. Experimental thorium reactors have had trouble with loss of coolant, concrete structural failure due to high heat, fracturing of the fuel, hot spots in reactor cores, and radiation releases into the atmosphere. Given the government and the nuclear power industry's performance record, should anyone trust them to launch a new generation of thorium reactors?

China to lead the way?

Because China is supposedly the world leader in non-carbon energy investments, it represents the shining hope to Hansen in being the first to implement his plan.

As factory to the world, the nation has become the largest carbon emitter by cranking out consumer goods, loaded with embodied carbon, for the West, which has been successful in exporting a huge portion of its greenhouse gas emissions as a result. If it wants to continue playing this role, China has no choice but to continue its reliance upon hydrocarbons. It is still very dependent upon coal, by installing one megawatt per week of coal-fired power.

Also, China will be using a lot of shale gas, for which it is now paying \$18/MBTU at the port of entry. Therefore, it has invested heavily in the Eagleford Shale Formation in Texas. There are currently 17 permit applications for new LNG ports in the U.S. that will enable increased export to Asia. So how exactly will China's leadership on fee and dividend manifest itself, considering its high-growth rate of 7%?

There are a number of things wrong with applying an exclusively financial solution to a problem of dangerous overuse and consumption. Hansen makes it clear that his plan will "allow the marketplace, not politicians, to make investment decisions." To our mind, the economic system is the entire cause of the problem.

In fact, one wonders if this is really about saving the planet for human habitation or more about money, since fee and dividend does not address the need for fundamental ecological and social change and ignores the enormous carbon footprint of the military as a blood-soaked procurement agent for oil ruthlessly taken from under the land of other people.

The question is: At what point in this process of charging fees and dispensing dividends would fossil-fuel use and consequent emissions actually decline?

It is logically expected that the Energy Giants, if they accept the imposition of the fees, would immediately pass on the cost to their customers when charging for coal, oil, natural gas, and electricity. But would the manufacturers of goods and providers of services, who are at the next step in this cascade, actually reduce the amount of fossil fuels they use in their productive processes, or simply pass on the increased cost of production to their consumers—who would pay for it in the end? Knowing how the Carbon Barons cheat, can they



(Above) September 2011 White House protest against XL Pipeline and Canadian tar-sands oil.

With Hansen's system we would be burning hydrocarbons into the indefinite future.

be counted upon to accurately report production figures? This raises the question of whether not the fees would be fairly and honestly paid and collected.

Myth of energy efficiency

A large component of Hansen's plan is conservation and energy efficiency. But would the increased discretionary income enable workers to afford energy-efficiency measures in their homes such as retrofitting appliances and lighting, heating, and cooling systems? Would it enable them to purchase expensive, resource-intensive, hybrid vehicles to replace the old gas-guzzling beaters they drive, and would it be good for the environment if they did?

The truth is the more energy that is saved, the more energy that is used over the long run. Nothing changes with attempts at energy efficiency under capitalism. This has been proven by the Jevons Paradox, which showed in the 19th century that improvements in the efficiency of the coal-fired steam engine only momentarily lowered the demand for coal before consumption shot up tenfold! That is because of the decline in the rate of profit and the need to sell ever more commodities.

Something similar occurs with fossil fuel production in efforts to lower carbon emissions at the well-head and refinery. The Kazzoom-Brookes Postulate has demonstrated that if carbon intensity is marginally decreased in the amount of carbon produced per barrel of oil, the savings are eventually wiped out by ramping up oil production. This would surely happen as more extreme forms of energy are exploited. The fee imposed on the Energy Giants would provide the incentive to do so, generating a vicious circle, especially since there are no means to stop them short of nationalizing their holdings, which is the only logical solution.

Consumerism under commodity production

Under fee and dividend, people with a small carbon footprint—the vast majority—are expected to experience a net monetary gain. However, would the money go into savings for a more secure retirement or be spent to improve living conditions? If low-income working people had more money in their pocket to spend as they wish, would they actually cut back in hydrocarbon use?

Wouldn't they be inclined to spend it on more goods and services just to improve their basic quality of life, which would lead to greater per capita consumption and fossil fuel use regardless of the increase in cost? After all, it takes fossil fuels to produce everything we consume in this society—food, clothing, shelter, pharmaceuticals, transport, gadgetry, the toys that take up people's leisure time, and the energy to power them.

If well-heeled, big consumers receive a lesser dividend as a result of their profligacy, what's to stop them from simply biting the bullet and paying more for the goods and services they consume, especially since it would be difficult to give up the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. "Sin now, pay later" would be the norm for those who can afford it. Yes, the affluent may turn off the lights more often when leaving

a room and switch to a more energy-efficient vehicle, but they still might drive around the block just to pick up a carton of milk instead of walking!

Despite the planetary crisis we face, everyone would still be subjected to the same pressure to consume through the advertising barrage that artificially shapes false needs and desires in people. This is because capitalism requires the creation of markets for its commodities, which are designed to wear out, become obsolete, and require replacement.

With Hansen's system, we would still have an exchange economy that voraciously devours natural resources. Only a steady-state, zero-growth, use economy that recycles everything will allow us to satisfy basic human needs while leading a satisfying and fulfilling life in harmony with nature. The gross overconsumption of raw materials, which is rampant in the industrial North, no longer needs to exist. As the production of clean technologies increases, they can be exported to improve the quality of life for people in the global South without the maldevelopment that China and India have gone through.

A crash program to transform production

With Hansen's plan, we would be burning hydrocarbons into the indefinite future. There are differing views on how much we would need to leave in the ground to keep the climate from entering a stage of chaos. The International Energy Agency says two-thirds, while Bill McKibben advocates that three-fifths remain unused.

Both are unacceptable compromises. Even if we halted all emissions tomorrow, temperatures would still rise another 0.3 C. Consequently, more warming is in the pipeline due to the inertia of Earth's natural systems. Therefore, all greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced to zero from all sources as soon as possible to draw down carbon to a safe 300 to 325 ppm CO2 and cool down the planet. This is the only reasonable way to proceed. Thus, the solution is to leave all fossil fuels in the ground and wean our society completely off of them.

Rather than fiddling with financial schemes, getting a crash program of renewable energy up and running should be the top priority. This can be paid for by funds now given over to the war budget and implemented through the equivalent of a wartime mobilization similar to that of World War Two, when industry was completely retooled and rationing, recycling, and conservation were widely instituted. The implements of war can also be melted down and reused by hammering swords into plowshares.

Only a workers and farmers government would be capable of launching such a massive undertaking. The entire productive apparatus, placed under democratic workers' control, would have to be directed toward the retooling of industry for the green manufacture of wind turbines, photovoltaics, electric train locomotives and carriages, and other necessities. This would occur along side the conversion to organic farming, which doesn't need petrochemicals.

The enterprise would require the unleashing of tremendous human creativity as well as collective and cooperative action. Revolutionary eco-socialists prefer to fight for this because we do not believe that fee and dividend will bring down the Fossil Fuel Kingpins, whom Hansen considers guilty of crimes against nature and humanity. Only working people and the oppressed, struggling independently in the streets, have the power to do that. ■

Teachers, communities fight Chicago school closings

M. Spencer Green / AP



(Left) Chicago Teachers Union Pres. Karen Lewis speaks to press after strike vote in June 2012.

By DAVID BERTT

CHICAGO—Students, parents, and teachers from across the city are fighting back against what could be the largest school-closing plan in U.S. history. Mayor Rahm Emanuel's handpicked school board has proposed closing 54 public elementary schools, primarily in the heavily African American south and west sides of the city, affecting more than 30,000 students.

In the face of this unprecedented attack on public education a tidal wave of protest has erupted from the affected communities. Close to 10,000 people demonstrated in downtown Chicago at the end of March to protest the proposed school closings. Thousands of parents and students have packed community hearings on the closings throughout the city to send a message to the school board that their schools will not be closed without a struggle.

The Chicago Teachers Union, fresh off a massive strike last September, has continued its fight against Rahm Emanuel's attempt to privatize public education by leading the struggle against school closings.

Emanuel claims these schools are "underutilized" because of enrollment declines. While enrollment has

in fact declined in many of these areas, largely due to gentrification, activists note that the schools are not underutilized. The CPS board's underutilization statistics are based on a 30 student per classroom formula, hardly a reasonable size for an elementary school.

Despite his claim that all he cares about is improving the education of Chicago students, Rahm Emanuel and his appointed school board have ignored extensive research showing that smaller class sizes improve student performance and graduation rates. Recently, a CPS spokesperson was quoted as saying that class sizes don't matter, and that a high quality teacher "could take 40 kids in a class and succeed."

Additionally, the proliferation of charter schools has siphoned off students from the traditional neighborhood schools. Charters, which are non-union and unaccountable to local school councils, have been lauded by corporate "reformers" as the panacea for the social problems facing impoverished urban school children. Yet CPS's own statistics show charter schools do not outperform neighborhood schools.

The real intention of charter schools is to weaken the teachers' union and undermine community and parent influence on their children's education while

allowing enterprising and well-connected "education" organizations to profit from the spoils of privatizing.

A case in point is the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), the largest charter school operator in Chicago. UNO's director, Juan Rangel, is a big-time Chicago political power broker, a critical Latino vote mobilizer for the former Mayor Daley and later for Rahm Emanuel.

The Chicago *Sun Times* recently exposed Rangel's end in this political deal. On top of his own six-figure salary, the *Sun Times* revealed that Rangel siphoned millions of tax dollars to friends and family through construction and other contracts with the charter schools he controls.

CPS claims it is facing a \$1 billion budget shortfall necessitating the school closings. CTU and community and parent organizations have noted that the closings will result in nominal cost savings in the long term but will cost more money in capital costs in the short run. Activists have pointed out that hundreds of millions of dollars of property taxes are diverted from CPS to Tax Increment Finance funds, which are used by the mayor to dole out tax breaks and subsidies to developers and corporations.

Past beneficiaries of the funds include Boeing, Sears, and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. While the school board pleads poverty, it plans at the same time to open dozens of additional charter schools. It doesn't take a fifth-grade math class to understand the arithmetic of Rahm Emanuel's priorities.

While Rahm Emanuel and his political benefactors laugh all the way to the bank, 30,000 Chicago school children are paying the price. In addition to disruptions such as losing developed student-teacher relations is the fact that many elementary-school children will have to walk as much as 10 blocks through crime-ridden neighborhoods.

Community-teacher protests have already had success. The school board had initially planned to close 123 schools, but scaled down its plan and removed all high schools from the closing list. The Chicago Teachers Union and community organizations have vowed to continue the fight until all schools are taken off the closing list. CTU has called for parents to have their children report to closed schools on the first day of instruction in the fall—an act of mass civil disobedience in the spirit of the Occupy movement. ■

Film: *Baseball legend Jackie Robinson*

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"42," written and directed by Brian Helgeland, starring Chadwick Boseman, Harrison Ford, and Nicole Beharie.

"42" is a fictionalized film biography that covers the years 1945 to 1947 in the life of baseball legend Jackie Robinson, when he rose from the Kansas City Monarchs, a Negro League team, to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Chadwick Boseman, whom Helgeland cast as Robinson, bears an uncanny resemblance to the young athlete. Boseman studied archival news clips and read countless sports articles about Robinson. He spent endless hours playing baseball, capturing Robinson's unique style.

After a successful career with the Monarchs, Robinson was signed by Branch Rickey (portrayed by Harrison Ford), a Bible-quoting Methodist, to play on the Montreal Royals, the first Black on the team. Later, Rickey moved him up to the major leagues' Brooklyn Dodgers, which he owned.

Segregation and prejudice were rife at the time of Jackie Robinson's rise in major-league baseball, issues that are still present, despite decades-old laws and the election of a Black president. Rickey knew that signing Robinson would create controversy—which meant publicity as well as bucks.

At one point in the film, Robinson and his wife, Rachael (Nicole Beharie), want to fly from Daytona Beach, Fla., to Pasadena, Calif., where they live. In the airport to buy tickets, Rachael says: "That's the first time I've seen that," pointing to a "Whites Only" sign on the bathroom door.



Then they're told the flight is full as they see a white couple allowed on, so they end up taking Greyhound.

Though Robinson has experienced racism before, in the majors it is relentless. Jibes, jeers, racial slurs come not only from baseball fans and players on other teams—pitchers who bean him, infielders who purposely cleat him when he reaches the bag—but from some members of his own team, who openly express their hatred.

Robinson is neither weak nor submissive. He uses logic, tact, and smarts to assert himself when refused anything he feels he has a right to as a human being.

Alan Tudyk, from the TV series, "Firefly," plays Ben Chapman, the manager of the Philadelphia Phillies. When Robinson's up at bat, Chapman throws a continuous verbal barrage of racial epithets at him. Robinson seethes, but does not react until Chapman slings one so egregious that he heads for the dressing room, where out of sight he falls apart.

Robinson's presence on the field became polarizing not only in baseball but also in American society. The threat of

violence was palpable for him and his family; threatening letters were sent.

Sportswriter Wendell Smith (Andre Holland) covers his career in the Black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*. Smith travels with and suffers the same ignominies as Robinson. Smith is banned from the press box, where white reporters clack away on their typewriters, while Smith sits in the stands with his portable on his knees. Except for *Ebony*, established in 1945, print media was almost completely segregated; only a handful of African Americans were journalists at major white newspapers.

Jackie Robinson advocated openly for civil rights, often alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and became a leader in the NAACP. (King described Robinson as "a freedom rider before freedom rides.") As important a figure as Robinson was in the movement, however, he testified against actor Paul Robeson at the Committee for Un-American Activities, fearing that not complying would jeopardize his career.

He told the Committee, in part, "Every single Negro who is worth his salt is going to resent slurs and discrimination because of his race, and he's going to use every bit of intelligence he has to stop it. This has got absolutely nothing to do with what Communists may or may not do. Blacks were stirred up long before there was a CP and will be stirred up after un-

less Jim Crow has disappeared. I haven't any comment to make except that the statement [about Blacks refusing to fight the USSR]—if Mr. Robeson actually made it—sounds very silly to me. Negroes have too much invested in America to throw it away for a siren song sung in bass."

In a 1963 letter to Malcolm X, Robinson wrote, "America is not perfect by a long shot, but I happen to like it here and will do all I can to help make it the kind of place where my children and theirs can live in dignity." Yet he wrote in a 1972 biography published shortly before his death: "I cannot stand and sing the [national] anthem. I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a Black man in a white man's world."

So how far have we come since the 1940s? In 2009, Democrat Barack Obama became the first African American to run for president and win, yet he has done little to better the lives of Blacks. Today, the economic gap between Black people and whites is steadily widening. Blacks remain the last hired and the first fired. African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites.

Yes, Jackie Robinson became the first African American Major League baseball player, but the idea that he improved himself for the benefit of whites puts the burden of change on people of color rather than on the institutions that, historically, have made racism and discrimination law in white America.

"42" ends on a feel-good note as Robinson is celebrated wherever he goes, and kids—Black and white—imitate him on the sand lots. The film is designed to make everyone happy (except racist bigots): All is right with the world, and the sun is shining in America! But many would question whether this is the real picture of America today. ■

By BARRY WEISLEDER

MONTREAL—Despite the move to water down the reference to socialism in the Federal New Democratic Party Constitution, the word remains, as does the working-class nature of the party. Indeed, socialism is still both a very lively topic and an active movement within the NDP. The party leadership certainly pushed hard to limit debate and to re-shape the party in its own image. But socialists had a higher profile at the NDP convention in Montreal, April 12-14, than in recent years.

To be sure, the convention was a kind of love-in for NDP chief and Leader of the Official Opposition in Parliament, Tom Mulcair. The appetite for the perks of government office fueled a wave of opportunism and attracted an array of party boosters and young career-seekers.

It was the biggest-ever NDP federal convention. Over 2000 delegates registered. Typically, about 1200 were on the convention floor to vote on motions. Despite media hype about the inevitability of the NDP choosing to “moderate” its message, and the high cost of a delegate’s credential (up to \$400), it was surprising to see the extent of the support for the radical left.

Twenty-eight per cent of the delegates present for the election of NDP Treasurer voted for Socialist Caucus (SC) candidate John Orrett. Sixteen per cent voted to retain the constitution preamble, with its call for social ownership of the economy, with its insistence that “production and distribution of goods and services be directed to meeting social and individual needs” and “not to the making of profit.”

The Socialist Caucus received massive mainstream media coverage for its initiatives and policies. SC spokespersons were frequently interviewed by CBC, Global, CTV, CPAC, Sun Media, *Huffington Post*, *La Presse*, *Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*, *Rabble.ca* and others.

SC floor interventions, firstly to amend the convention agenda in favour of providing more time for policy debate, and later, to alter a resolution on “pipeline safety” to include opposition to any new pipeline construction, failed to get much traction. But another SC referral motion produced a high point for the left.

Etobicoke Centre youth delegate and Youth for Socialist Action chairperson Tyler MacKinnon argued for a party campaign to abolish all post-secondary tuition fees. He called for solidarity with movements demanding an end to fees and a halt to the police repression they faced in the streets of Quebec in 2012. Tyler’s motion carried, but only after a delegate demanded a “standing count,” which showed over 60 per cent in favour. While the referred (amended) resolution did not come back to the floor for approval, the vote registered a stinging rebuke of the party establishment.

Delegates and observers showed a keen interest in socialist ideas. They snapped up over 1100 copies of the glossy, full-colour SC magazine *Turn Left*, and donated over \$200 to support it. They spent another \$200 on individual copies of *Socialist Action* newspaper, as well as associated radical buttons and booklets.

A bright orange banner proved to be a lightning rod for protest against the pro-capitalist party tops. The Socialist Caucus displayed a wide cloth antiwar slogan on the concourse Saturday morning, and again at lunchtime. It galvanized opposition to the appearance of invited guest speaker Jeremy Bird, National Field Director for the U.S. Democratic Party, who headed President Barack Obama’s re-election bid in 2012.

The banner proclaimed, in English and French, “Stop Obama’s Drone Wars.” Scores of supporters, notably

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

NDP’s slide to the right sparks socialist opposition



Julius Arscott / Socialist Action

South Asian and visible minority delegates, defended it in the face of persistent efforts by officials to remove it. SC comrades and other delegates held their ground against threats of all kinds, including that security personnel and police would be asked to intervene. The three-hour standoff backfired on the party brass, who were seen as petty control freaks by the bemused national media.

It wasn’t the only example of undemocratic measures deployed by party controllers. They allowed no display booths on site, except for the social democratic Broadbent Institute, and a group of party authors promoting a book. Participants witnessed the stacking of the Persons With Disabilities Caucus, one of many equity-seeking group meetings, with non-disabled voters who arrived just moments prior to its election of reps to the federal party executive and council. Was this just to defeat an SC candidate?

A top party bureaucrat temporarily “lifted” this writer’s delegate credential for being one of dozens booing Jeremy Bird when the latter was introduced on stage. National Director Nathan Rotman reversed himself when MP Niki Ashton, who had addressed the SC forum on Friday evening, protested his punitive move, and after the mass media got hold of the issue. Rotman did not apologize for exceeding his authority, so more nonsense in this vein can be expected.

Most of the resolutions adopted at convention were strictly non-controversial. Indeed, many passed unanimously. These included: putting a halt to tax havens, promoting farm commodity supply management, reversing cuts to employment insurance, enshrining a pro-active

pay equity regime in law, and providing more predictable funding for VIA Rail.

SC resolutions (on pipelines, corporate trade deals, Iran, Palestine, public ownership of banks and industry, Quebec self-determination, etc.), some submitted by multiple district associations, were ranked so low they would not be debated. Even the issue re-prioritization panels on the Friday morning were stacked deep by pro-establishment delegates.

Tellingly, a resolution on the rights of sex workers, submitted by a Vancouver district body, made it to the floor, but was referred to federal council for more study by MP Libby Davies, ostensibly to avoid “a divisive debate,” a move that disgusted many progressive activists.

The Socialist Caucus held three public forums at the Convention Centre during meal breaks. The topics were “Quebec and

the NDP, and Why Quebec Students are in the streets again,” “The Fight to keep Socialism in the NDP Constitution,” and “Canadian Military intervention in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean—Where does the NDP stand?” The meetings attracted 30 to 70 delegates. Thirty-six people signed up to join the socialists at the convention. A similar number applied to join the leftist caucus via the internet.

With a general election expected in 2015, delegates gave Mulcair a 92 per cent approval vote. The 8 per cent who nonetheless voted for a leadership review can be considered the hardcore base of the SC, with support for the organized left reaching 20 to 30 per cent for certain initiatives and candidates. This is not inconsiderable, if projected across an NDP membership of 120,000 countrywide.

Overall, the NDP continues on its liberal policy course. Justin Trudeau, who was crowned Liberal Party Leader in Ottawa that same weekend, mocked the direction of the NDP towards his own Bay Street-backed party when he referred to it as a case of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.”

To be sure, the new pro-market preamble is a setback to labour and the left. But the NDP, which was never socialist, has not changed its stripes. It remains a labour-based reformist party to which millions of workers look—still the only game in town for independent working-class electoral/political action. And within that game, socialism is very much a player, looking for reinforcements from the social protest movements and from the leftist political sidelines. ■

Terror law returns

By RIC EKAPUK

Following the tragic events in Boston last month, the Stephen Harper Conservative government wasted no time regressing to the paranoid security-state mode of the early post 9/11 years. Within days of the bombings, it passed the Combatting Terrorism Act, which revives similar legislation in effect from late 2001 to 2007.

This means that residents of Canada will once again be vulnerable to highly controversial expanded police powers, including secret tribunals and “preventative” arrest. Authorities may now detain anyone “associated” with terrorism for up to three days, without being charged, and then place conditions on him/her for one year.

Someone who refuses to accept the conditions could face jail time. People also may be compelled to attend secret hearings and answer questions—again, without being charged with a crime, and at the risk of being jailed for up to a year if they refuse.

On the same day as the final House of Commons debate on the bill, with timing that was almost too perfect, the Royal Canadian Mounted

Police announced that it had arrested two men in connection with a plot to bomb a VIA rail train in Ontario. In the ensuing hysteria, with Public Safety Minister Vic Toews ominously warning that “terrorism continues to be a real threat to Canada,” the bill easily passed into law.

The third-place Liberal Party supported the Conservatives in voting for the bill, which was logical since it was the Liberals who passed its previous incarnation in 2001. However, the Official Opposition New Democratic Party stood firmly against the measure. The NDP Critic for Democratic and Parliamentary Reform, Toronto Danforth MP Craig Scott, summed it up quite succinctly: “The government is on record as wishing to permit conditions to be imposed on perfectly innocent people. Failure to comply can lead to 12 months imprisonment. Is that a regime we want in our country?”

Socialists demand the immediate repeal of the Combatting Terrorism Act, and call for a whole new approach to combatting terrorism, both foreign and home-grown, which would include an end to wars of aggression overseas, measures to end the economic and social marginalization of minority communities at home, and support for popular movements fighting oppressive regimes everywhere. ■

Rebel with a Cause

Peter Kormos, Niagara Regional Councillor, and for 23 years the NDP MPP for Welland, was an outstanding fighter for the working class, the poor, and the disenfranchised. He was a person of principle who openly identified as a socialist. He fearlessly stood up to corporate foes, and fought traitors to the cause, including inside his own party. He passed away on March 30 at age 60. The cause of death was not released.

Kormos was Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations in the NDP government elected in Ontario in September 1990. Kormos was dropped from cabinet on March 18, 1991. The stated reason was that he posed fully-clothed, wearing his trademark cowboy boots, on page 3 of a right-wing tabloid. The real reason was his criticism of NDP Premier Bob Rae for abandoning the party’s commitment to introduce public auto insurance.

For the remainder of Rae’s term in office, Kormos acted as an unofficial “left opposition” within the NDP caucus. Kormos also challenged the contracting-out of government services, the expansion of casino gambling and Sunday shopping, and the privatization of public highway 407.

He was a constant presence at picket lines far and wide, a legendary fundraiser for the party, and served as NDP House Leader in the Ontario Legislature from 2001-2011.

Peter Kormos will be sorely missed. Our sincere condolences go out to his family and to his vast legion of comrades and friends. — B.W.



(Left) Haitian workers carry scarce food supplies over the Dominican Republic border.

Barnard College Eco-socialist Conference — Labor worldwide must mobilize for the environment

By MARTY GOODMAN

The following presentation was given in the labor workshop at the April 20 conference at Barnard College in New York City sponsored by the Eco-Socialist Contingent.

The conference was endorsed by 29 organizations, including Socialist Action, and brought together 240 participants in lively debate and discussion concerning an effective strategy to combat climate change.

When Hurricane Sandy hit New York on Oct. 29, transit workers were busy securing the city's transit lifeline. Both the city and the Metropolitan Transit Authority were forced to acknowledge that the real story of the almost super-human, super-fast hurricane recovery of the nation's biggest transit system belongs to transit workers. After the wreckage, just as it did in the aftermath of 9-11, transit workers pitched-in. Local 100 members joined Occupy Sandy in delivering aid and supplies to the Rockaways.

What a powerful social force transit workers can be! Think back to December 2005 when transit workers brought the ruling class—the Wall Street crooks—to its knees with its heroic strike. We were white, black, Hispanic and immigrant. We shut the city down tight!

Public transit workers, with the rest of the working class, are a mighty force for change. Transit work is Green Jobs. Yet, the nation's 1% refuses to fund public transportation adequately. In Obama's so-called stimulus package, public transportation spending by states averaged a scandalous

1.7%, according to a sample study by the very mainstream "Smart Growth America." The study also noted that each dollar spent on public transportation was 75% more effective in putting people to work than highway projects.

Domination of the transportation discussion was sown years ago by the barons of the auto industry, in league with the petroleum industry, which demanded more roads for its gas hog autos. For decades, federal transportation aid has been about 80% for roads, with the rest for green public transportation. And even that meager aid is rigged to cheat transit workers of adequate pay.

It is no secret that mass transportation is identified in the minds of racists with Blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities; hence Obama's cowardly flight from these issues—not to mention Obama's failure to address the vast environmental racism endured by minorities in other sectors.

Obama's new budget projects a minuscule \$2 billion in research (not for actual production of alternate energy) over a 10-year period, to be funded by expanded oil drilling. Obama brags that under his watch drilling has expanded at a greater pace than ever—as the earth is being poisoned. Obama and the Democrats are no less the assassins of our planet than George Bush and the nuts of the Tea Party.

We must seize the moment to act against climate change. We must address mass unemployment and dread over climate change by demanding a federal Emergency Energy Reconversion Act tied to job creation in actually producing and installing alternate energy equipment that use wind, solar, and

water turbines. Obviously, the rulers will react with fury to such measures, yet they are only the necessary first step toward achieving climate justice and saving our planet.

When the U.S. entered the war in December 1941, auto production ceased and only war materiel was made. The GDP doubled in three years, bringing the U.S. out of depression. Back then industry was mobilized to produce the machines of death; this time it will be to produce the tools for life!

The workers movement and its allies are the most potent force for achieving these goals. The moribund United Auto Workers was virtually smashed by the new Obama administration when half-pay for new workers and pension cuts were rammed down their throats. But these workers can play a key role in the environmental movement. They can lead marches; a massive jobs march on Washington is certainly overdue (also to stop cuts to Medicare and Social Security!).

And while demanding the nationalization of Big Auto, not far down the road they could also take over the factories and demand green production jobs! That would certainly be a welcome return to the glory days of their union.

That renewed militancy goes for other workers, like my TWU, who face zero contracts at the hands of Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo and millions of others who face similar layoffs and cuts.

How to get there? One way to begin would be to convene massive rank-and-file union congresses to democratically discuss and implement a class-struggle strategy. That would require, in most cases, the construc-

tion of rank-and-file movements that could ultimately overthrow the labor bureaucrats who remain tied hand and foot to the Democratic Party. It would entail breaking with the Democrats and the formation of a new class-struggle Labor Party, one that that would fight without compromise in the interests of the workers.

Let's remember that this crisis is global. The planet faces massive environmental shifts in weather, coastal flooding, crop failure, and starvation—as well as capitalist war—as the corporate bloodsuckers attempt to extract every penny from the misery of workers and poor farmers around the world. The need for worker internationalism has never been greater!

In October, I traveled to Haiti and visited with sweatshop workers in Port au Prince organized by Batay Ouvriye (Workers Struggle). Haitian workers slave in international textile assembly plants for \$3.50 a day. As Haiti's U.S. puppet President Michael Martelly says, "Haiti is open for business!" Enforcing this hell on earth is a U.S.-led UN occupation that has killed without mercy and, as two scientific studies have proven, brought on a cholera epidemic by dumping human wastes into a much used river. The epidemic has killed more than 8000 Haitians.

In 2010, Obama cynically used the horrific earthquake to militarily re-occupy Haiti. Some of us protested right here in New York. One of the occupation's many crimes—this one approaching genocide—is that it has ignored the fact that cholera is easily treatable; clean, available water is what's needed as well as medical assistance, which only the Cubans have been consistent in providing.

On top of this, hurricane Sandy devastated Haiti once again, killing over 50. Despite the hoopla over international aid, 400,000 Haitians still live in flimsy post-quake shelters in Port au Prince.

In October, a new sweatshop park was opened in Haiti in the northern town of Caracol, with \$124 million in U.S. tax subsidy. Bill and Hillary Clinton and Hollywood celebs were on hand for the ceremony. What went unsaid was that 300 peasants lost their land in what is considered a fertile, ecologically fragile region. The nearby port at Fort Liberté is Haiti's only UN-designated ecologically "protected" area.

These horror stories are similar to others in the Third World. International links with worker and peasant organizations must be made, accompanied by active solidarity.

Building eco-socialist revolutionary parties worldwide is essential to our task. Revolutionary parties will encourage and develop mass movements of working people and the oppressed, as part of a transitional strategy toward socialist revolution. Struggle alone will save our planet. There is no hope under capitalism. Workers of the world, unite! ■

... Immigration

(continued from page 12)

Guest worker programs since the Bracero age have been little better in terms of worker abuse. So what's the incentive to change this time around? It all comes down to economics in the end.

The U.S. economy remains heavily dependent on the low-wage labor of a super-exploited class of workers—undocumented immigrants who have no rights and who are kept too afraid to fight back. The new immigration reform bill simply serves to legalize that system of economic exploitation, guaranteeing super-profits for agricultural, industrial, and meatpacking giants.

However, the bill does nothing to address the reasons that immigrants are forced to come to the U.S., including poverty and war (often created by U.S. interventions, or economic policies such as NAFTA). Undocumented immigrants who come into the U.S. after the new bill is implemented would be forced to live and work even farther outside of the more tightly-controlled wage system, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and repression and leaving them less recourse to fight back.

At the same time, the private prison industry would

also be guaranteed super-profits as immigrants continue to be detained and deported at ever-higher rates.

This entire infrastructure has received explicit union approval from the AFL-CIO and SEIU. Like the bill itself, these unions are pitting "good" immigrants against "bad" immigrants, as if some were more deserving of legalization than others. For example, the SEIU states on its website that it supports "earned legalization with a pathway to citizenship" so undocumented immigrants can "get right with the law."

Both of the big, bureaucratic unions also back border security, worker authorization, and the new guest-worker programs. Have they forgotten the thousands of immigrant workers who were fired in 1-9 audits? What about the military-style raids in Postville or at the Swift plants? Unfortunately, it appears that many big unions are so beholden to the Democratic Party that they are urging their rank-and-file members to support this immigration "reform."

But immigrants, indeed all workers, deserve better than this proposal we are being offered by those in power! Immigrants deserve legalization without chains—a legalization that allows them to reunite broken families, to live in their communities without fear, to work with dignity, to join unions and defend their rights.

Immigrants deserve a legalization that is not tied to militarization of the border, that doesn't force them to trade the deaths and detentions of their brothers and sisters for a chance at a green card. They deserve a legalization that doesn't force them to wait in line for decades, that doesn't force them to trade their labor so big corporations can make millions of dollars in profits while they struggle to send money to their families back home.

We all deserve to live in a world without borders—where we are free to move or stay as we wish, where we can be with our loved ones—no matter what their legal status or their sexual orientation, where we can work with dignity for a living wage.

This can only be achieved through the unity of the working class. We must not fall victim to the false ideas we are fed every day by corporate media—that undocumented workers are criminals, that they are here to steal "American" jobs, that some immigrants are somehow more deserving of citizenship than others or that they have to "earn" their status. We must remember that immigrant rights are workers' rights, that an injury to one is an injury to all.

The immigrant rights movement has the potential to push the government to give them something better, and the working class must join with them in solidarity to help achieve that goal. ■

Large turnout for West Coast socialist conference

By MARIE MANLEY

OAKLAND—Some 200 radical thinkers came to the historic Niebyl Proctor Marxist Library here on April 26-28 to attend the 2013 West Coast Educational Conference, hosted by the Bay Area branch of Socialist Action (SA).

The event was one of several SA educational conferences across the United States. Participants complimented the quality of presentations and the inclusivity seen throughout the conference, making it one of the most successful educational and party-building events the Bay Area branch has seen in over a decade.

With the theme “Socialism v. Capitalism,” the conference aimed to engage activists in a weekend of revolutionary strategizing in the face of an intensified assault on the working class. Participants represented a wide variety of workers’ struggles, including the labor, student, antiwar, immigrants’ rights, women’s rights, Black liberation, and LGBT movements.

Some SA members traveled from as far as Portland and Los Angeles to join in chairing conference sessions and leading workshops.

The opening session on Friday evening, entitled “Challenging Capitalism’s Inherent Evils,” began with heartfelt greetings



Marc Rome / Socialist Action

(Left) Marie Manley speaking at SA’s West Coast conference. To her right is *Black Agenda Report* editor Glen Ford.

from Jerralyn Blueford, mother of Alan Blueford and leader of the Justice for Alan Blueford Coalition. Special guest Glen Ford, executive editor of the *Black Agenda Report*, gave his first of two keynote speeches, asserting that the unending offensive against Black Americans should be met with nothing less than revolutionary acts.

Following his remarks were updates from the prison abolition and anti-Islamophobia movements, by Sky Keyes.

Co-chair of the SEIU Lavender Cau-

cus in Oregon Ann Montague closed the session, speaking on the way forward for women and LGBT people given this administration’s dismal reproductive rights and marriage equality records.

Spread over three sessions, Saturday’s workshops dealt with a range of topics, including the current global economic crises, the attack on public education, environmental disaster, police brutality, drone warfare, and U.S. imperialism.

The culminating moment came in the evening session, when student activist

and party member Daniel Vos received a roaring ovation after his impassioned plea for the Black community to return to its radical heritage. In an equally rousing speech, Glen Ford focused on AFRICOM and its role in the re-colonization of Africa. Featured speakers included professor of political economy Jack Rasmus; Bruce Pardoll, member of the SA National Education Committee; environmental activist NightSnow Vogt; Ann Weils of the National Lawyers Guild; Marc Rome of SA and the Lynne Stewart Defense Committee; and Youth for Socialist Action member Anthony Blackmon.

The final of five sessions, held on Sunday and presented by SA National Secretary, Jeff Mackler, was an in-depth workshop on Leninist organizing and the construction of a mass revolutionary party.

The event ended with an uplifting social gathering, where participants came together over food and beverages, lively political discussion, and to celebrate the conclusion of a successful conference.

More than a dozen signed up for upcoming activities and made purchases from Socialist Action’s table of revolutionary literature. ■

By DANIEL VOS

In 2013 the face of U.S. imperialism is Black

Below are major excerpts from Socialist Action member Daniel Vos’s presentation on April 27 at the SA West Coast Educational Conference.

In 2003, it was George Bush’s face we saw on TV in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq. The worldwide international protests that followed were some of the largest in history. In 2003, George Bush announced on TV that he was going to invade Iraq, while in 2013 Obama invaded Libya but didn’t even have to go on TV to lie to us.

Even George Bush had to get permission from the Democrats in the Congress before he could invade Iraq. But Obama asked no one.

And now Obama is overseeing the U.S. military’s takeover of Africa through AFRICOM (United States Africa Command), which is arming and training African militias that will protect U.S.

interests in Africa. And the first person that the U.S. military asked to run AFRICOM was William Ward, a Black man.

Obama bombs Yemen and Somalia without ever having declared war. He and the Democratic Party have given their full support to U.S. wars and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. ...

Obama’s only intention is to do the bidding of the capitalist class. If they decide they want to recolonize and seize the natural resources of Africa and the Middle East, then Obama is there for them to do that.

There is a myth that Obama is merely compromising with evil Republicans. From health care, to the massive budget cuts triggered after the phony debt crisis that the capitalist class created, we have seen Obama willing to propose measures identical to or even further to the right of Republicans.

I am only 21. I’ve never voted in a presidential election because by the time I was old enough, I could already see through the façade of American capitalist “democracy.”

Current research suggests that, at the current rate, Blacks will not close the income inequality gap with whites for another 500 years. This requires radical action, not weak liberal, reformist demands that the ruling class probably won’t even concede. I don’t have the patience to wait 500 years, and no one else should either.

I am often told that I’m not being realistic about the necessity or the plausibility of an international working-class revolution, that I am too radical to ever win. I am told that I need to be more pragmatic and less utopian.

But it is not utopian to think that we don’t have to pick between the lesser

of two evils. American democracy is a rotten game, with rules designed to not only see us lose but to see us play the game thinking we might win.

Black people fought hard for the right to vote, but they did so because they understood that voting could be a means to an end.

The end was not the democratic right to vote. The end has always been, and should continue to be, Black liberation, and that cannot really be voted on, because it cannot be attained under capitalism.

We stand in solidarity with the victims of U.S. imperialism because Black people in this country know what it is liked to bleed under the heel of U.S. imperialism. To think that we can end imperialism without completely overthrowing capitalism and instituting socialism is what is utopian. ■

DuBois’ critique of racism still applicable today

By ANTHONY MONTEIRO

Below are excerpts from the presentation by Dr. Anthony Monteiro at the Socialist Action East Coast Educational Conference, which took place in Philadelphia on March 23. Dr. Monteiro is a Distinguished Lecturer in African-American Studies at Temple University.

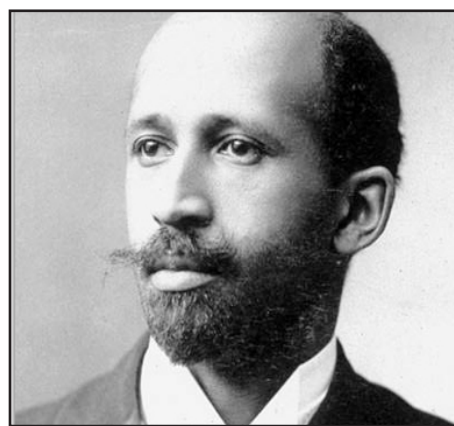
Obama represents the consolidation of the most counter-revolutionary forces in America. [He is hardly] a liberal reformist, or even a centrist; these are delusional concepts. It is interesting, however, that the front edge of counterrevolutionary ideology takes on what appears to be a not so vicious form. They say that we are in a “post-racial” America. That certainly doesn’t sound like what we usually associate with counter-revolution—unless we take seriously what the great W.E.B. Dubois said at the beginning of the 20th century.

DuBois said that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line. Everybody quotes that statement, but I feel that very few people really understand what he was saying. In 1903, he said that the problem of bourgeois democracy would be race. Well, 1903 was about 38 years after the end of the Civil War and chattel slavery, and

20-some years after the defeat of Reconstruction, the first attempt at “democracy” for the 4 million enslaved Africans. So, he says that liberal democracy would remain in a crisis unless the problem of race is solved.

He would evolve and develop that concept over time; in 1935 he gets to his magnum opus, “Black Reconstruction in America,” which is more a theory of American history than a study of events. One of his great observations in that work, which he shows in Chapter Two, is entitled “The White Worker,” where he does a brief history of the labor movement in the 19th century and says that its strategic weakness was its failure to take up the struggle against slavery—the race question. And he concludes that unless the labor movement and the left take as a strategic question that of race, neither labor nor democracy can move forward.

But then he makes another observation. He says that what we call slaves were really a proletariat. He says that after the Civil War and the end of chattel slavery, there was the possibility in several states—including states where there were Black majorities such as South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, and states where there was a decisive plurality like Georgia and Alabama—it was possible (this was in 1935) for the establishment



of the “dictatorship of the Black proletariat,” as a democratic mechanism for the fulfillment of democracy and the 14th & 15th Amendments to the Constitution. Now, he certainly understood that such a Black dictatorship would not remain at the bourgeois democratic level but would go on to a new social system.

But then he says that “a counterrevolution of property” occurred. And he argues that that counterrevolution was based on the breaking of the Black proletariat, and doing what Theodore Allen in his famous work, now re-issued and re-edited by Jeffrey B. Perry, “The Invention of the White Race,” describes as creating a psychological and ideological category to prevent the development of a class

consciousness across the color line.

Then he tells us that the slave-owning class, which was tiny in comparison to the population of the South, was sociologically, politically, and economically ruined by the Civil War. So where did the new ruling class come from? And here’s an extraordinary observation; I have not heard anyone else talk about this: It emerged from the *poor whites*.

He uses a word (if you are Catholic you might have heard it), *transubstantiation*: The transubstantiation of a part of the poor white population to become the ruling class of the South, who would then impose upon the entire South a reign of racial terror and counterrevolution previously unseen in American history.

Today the Obama presidency, contrary to popular perception, is nothing less than the consolidation of counterrevolutionary power in the United States as part of an attempt to globally reposition itself for war and the recolonization of Africa, in the first instance, and parts of Asia. We need not go into long discussion—just note the facts and events such as Libya in 2010 and 2011, and the brutal assassination of Muammar Gadhafi....

We are in a new stage of this counter-revolution. We have to think about the forms of struggle to defend the people, to prevent all-out world war, and to dismantle the institutions of domestic repression and control. ■

Immigration 'reform' proposal: More repression & red tape

By LISA LUINENBURG

Millions of undocumented immigrants and their families, friends, and allies waited with bated breath for the unveiling of the new proposal for Comprehensive Immigration Reform on Tuesday, April 16. Despite high hopes, the new bill includes many draconian provisions, such as more militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, new guest-worker programs and biometric employment verification, and a long, arduous, and expensive "pathway to citizenship."

One of the main sections of the bill includes a massive increase in the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and the criminalization of immigrants. The proposal earmarks \$4.5 billion to be spent on the use of new surveillance technologies developed by the Department of Defense, more Border Patrol agents, the use of drones to patrol the border, the installment of new double and triple-layer fences, and the deployment of the National Guard to support all this new infrastructure.

Other provisions include \$50 million dollars to allow Operation Streamline in Tucson, Ariz., to process 210 detainees per day for deportation (up from 70 per day), installing more checkpoints along the border, and granting Homeland Security officials access to all federally protected lands. But the worst part of all this is that militarization benchmarks and an expanded, mandatory E-Verify system must be implemented and met before the government grants legal status to *anyone*. This basically allows the government to delay the legalization process as long as they want.

Increasing the security and violence along the border would not stop immigrants from crossing; as in the past, it would only push people to cross at more dangerous points, leading to more deaths. It is estimated by the Immigration Policy Center that the number of migrants' bodies found along the border have increased from 14 per year in 1995 to over 160 per year in 2005—a direct result of increasing militarization.

Politically, the militarization strategy has a purpose too. It is a trade-off; the government gives the most conservative elements what they want, and they put their stamp of approval on the bill. In this way the government is also able to sway public opinion—they can make it appear that they are "cracking down" on immigration, without actually stopping the flow of undocumented labor that the economy depends on.

It's all part of a strategy known as "attrition through enforcement." The idea is to make life so unbearable for undocumented immigrants and their families that they're too afraid to take to the streets, to utilize their class power to fight back and demand their rights. This allows ideas like national security, cultural integrity, and criminalization—the backbone of the U.S. immigration system—to flourish.

And who profits from all this? Not surprisingly, it's the big military defense contractors. Even Charles Schumer, one of the main authors of the new reform bill, would get his cut. He has recently been criticized for taking over \$100,000 dollars in campaign contributions from GEO and the Corrections Corporation of America—two of the biggest private prison corporations who make millions of dollars in profits (\$296.9 million in combined profits in 2012) from housing immigrants awaiting deportation in sub-par detention centers.

Along with all of the border security measures, the new reform bill also makes the E-Verify employment verification system mandatory for all employers within five years. E-Verify is a database that allows employers to check the immigration status of workers when they apply for a job. Right now, its use is only required for certain companies with government contracts. But the new proposal would make the system nation-



Increasing security along the border would push people to cross at more dangerous points, leading to more deaths.

wide and would require *all workers*, citizens and non-citizens alike, to show biometric ID cards (cards that contain personal identifying information like photos or fingerprints) when applying for a job.

This is just the first step in government systems being put in place to track all people living within the United States. And because not all undocumented immigrants would qualify for the new status and many more would continue to cross into the United States, the expanded E-Verify system would force workers without papers into an even more precarious existence as they are driven farther underground—working for unscrupulous employers outside the system who have no problem abusing workers and paying super-low wages. Immigrants trapped in this situation would have almost no recourse when their rights are violated.

So what exactly would immigrants get when they *are* finally able to adjust their status? Instead of granting the fast, fair, and unconditional legalization that the immigrant community has demanded for so long, the new proposal sets up an arduous and expensive legalization process that will take over 13 years. In order to qualify for the new "Registered Provisional Immigrant" status, immigrants would have to prove that they've lived in the U.S. continuously since Dec. 31, 2011, and pay a \$500 fine, back taxes, and undefined "application fees." Immigrants who have been convicted of certain crimes or who are deemed a "threat" to national security will be disqualified.

The RPI status would last for six years, after which it could be renewed (along with another \$500 fee). After living in limbo for 10 years, immigrants with RPI status would be able to apply for a green card, but only

after paying another \$1000 fine, and demonstrating continuous physical presence, work history, and knowledge of civics and English. No one would receive a green card until all the existing backlogs are cleared (some people have been waiting decades for their family reunification visas) and after that, the process to apply for citizenship would take several more years. The fact that most immigrants would have to hire a lawyer to help them navigate all the paperwork would jack up the cost several thousands of dollars more, making the entire process a nightmare of paperwork, long lines, and punitive fees.

The new RPI status would essentially be a second-class status, uncertain at best. While immigrants who have it would be protected from deportation and allowed to work and to travel outside the U.S., they would be forced to live for years without the basic rights accorded to U.S. citizens. Immigrants with RPI status would be barred from accessing any government benefits like food stamps, WIC, or other assistance programs. And although spouses and parents of U.S. citizens, immigrants currently in the deportation process, and some immigrants who have already been deported would be allowed to apply, the bill makes no provision for the partners of LGBTQ people—an injustice already being decryd by the LGBTQ community.

While undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S. are navigating the new citizenship process, the government and big business have arranged a process for bringing in new immigrant workers under a system of legalized exploitation. Under the new system, certain types of family visas (for example, visas for siblings of U.S. citizens) would be eliminated, along with the Diversity Visa, under which many Africans have immigrated to the U.S.

In their place, the government would implement a new merit-based visa system, in which immigrants would be awarded "points" for their education level, type of employment, and length of time living in the United States. Those with the most points would "win" the visas—guaranteeing that visas would go to immigrants with high-level educations and well-paying jobs, while the poorest workers are once again left out in the cold. The government would also increase the number of H-1B visas, which go to highly skilled immigrants (such as doctors, scientists, corporate managers, and technology-based workers), to 40% of the total.

At the same time, the bill would create the "W-Visa," a new type of guest-worker visa for low-skilled immigrants who work in industries like meatpacking, textiles, or construction. A specially appointed committee would determine visa caps through complex economic formulas (guaranteeing, of course, that industries are supplied with the low-wage labor they need to keep prices low and profits high). Workers under the W-Visa could come to the U.S. for up to three years on work visas tied to a specific employer and a specific job. And although workers would be guaranteed certain rights under the law (for example, the right to change jobs, and protections from employer abuses), it is important to remember that *those very same rights were guaranteed under the original Bracero Program*.

The Bracero program, which imported immigrant workers to supply the agricultural system with low-wage labor in the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s, was notorious for terrible working conditions, super-low wages, exploitation, and abuse. And when the workers were no longer needed, the government deported over a million immigrants. The immigration reform proposal also includes the AgJOBS bill, which gives some undocumented agricultural workers a chance at citizenship, while creating two new types of agricultural guest worker visas.

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