

Arizona anti-immigrant law spurs nationwide protests

By **GEORGE SHRIVER**

TUCSON, Ariz.—A huge wave of protest has risen up against Arizona's new anti-immigrant law, SB (Senate Bill) 1070, which in effect legalizes racial profiling. A number of cities, among them San Francisco and Los Angeles, are considering calls for boycotting Arizona. In Chicago, immigrant-rights groups picketed a major baseball park, Wrigley Field, where the Arizona Diamondbacks ball team was playing. Reports are coming in of students and researchers withdrawing from the University of Arizona.

Many Mexican businesses that engage in cross-border commerce say they will no longer do business with or in Arizona. The Mexican government condemned the law, and other Latin American and Caribbean governments can be expected to do likewise.

As many as 20,000 protesters attended a May 1 rally in Tucson against SB 1070. A number of Chicanos and Chicanas carried signs defying the threat of racial profiling, proclaiming themselves "Brown and Proud." On the front of one woman's T-shirt was emblazoned, "I am Mexican and I'm perfect as I am."

Noted singer Linda Ronstadt, a Tucson native, told the rally that the Arizona state legislature has been hijacked by the extreme right wing. Some demonstrators carried signs likening Republican Governor Jan Brewer, who signed SB 1070 on April 23, to Hitler. One huge sign said, "What Next? The Final Solution?"

Many have drawn the parallel with events in the late 1980s, when an extreme rightist and racist who managed to become governor of Arizona canceled the Martin Luther King Day holiday. A nationwide boycott of Arizona at that time helped to reverse the governor's action, and we have been celebrating Martin Luther King Day every year in Arizona since then.

Our demand now must be to rescind and abolish this racist law. Some belated attempts to tone down the law and conceal its racist essence are too little and too late.

Obama backs Schumer "blueprint"

This Arizona law comes at a complex moment for the immigrant rights movement nationally. The Obama administration, on this issue as on others, is loyally seeking to carry out the agenda of the giant U.S. corporations and financial interests—which want to control workers and subject them to maximum exploitation.

These interests are seeking, for example, a "guest worker" program that denies any rights to migrant workers, especially the right to form a union, and gives all authority to the employer and the employer-dominated government.

The Democrats want to slyly channel the outrage against the Arizona law toward gaining support for the version of "comprehensive immigration reform" that Obama endorsed in a televised message to the 200,000 immigrant-rights supporters who rallied in Washington, D.C., on March 21—the Schumer "blueprint." That blueprint, with its "four pillars," was spelled out by Senator Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), together with Senator Lindsey Graham (D-S.C.), in a *Washington Post* article on the eve of March 21. (See Lisa Luinenberg's report in the April issue of *Socialist Action*.)

The correct type of response for the immigrant rights movement in this situation was forcefully presented by New York City's Immigrant Com-



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

(Above) Demonstrators at May 1 rally in New York City protest Arizona anti-immigrant law.

munities in Action (ICA) in a statement issued on April 27, with the following headline: "Arizona's Law Should Not Be a Call for Schumer's 'Comprehensive Immigration Reform' Blueprint."

The ICA statement quoted Sen. Schumer, who said: "We believe our blueprint is even stronger than the Arizona senators' proposal in stopping the flow of illegal immigrants because our plan both increases border security and prevents employers from hiring illegal immigrants." So Schumer simply claims to "out-Arizona" Arizona.

Obama was subtler but in essence said the same thing. Within days after Arizona Gov. Brewer's April 23 sign-

ing of the new police-state law, Obama was quoted as follows by the "Democracy Now" TV and radio news program (see www.democracynow.org): "Indeed our failure to act responsibly at the federal level will only open the door to irresponsibility by others. And that includes, for example, the recent efforts in Arizona, which threaten to undermine basic notions of fairness

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Environmental disaster in the Gulf

By **JOHN LESLIE**

The seas are the key to life on this planet. Many in the environmental movement have come to recognize that capitalism is killing the planet, but the killing just turned from slow strangulation to a gunshot.

On April 20, the *Deepwater Horizon*, a deep-sea oil-drilling rig 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana, exploded, killing 11 and injuring 27. Two days later it sank in 5000 feet of water.

Documents recently released to the media show that BP (formerly British Petroleum) baldly dismissed the possibilities of environmental damage when it applied for its license to drill. And the government regulators entrusted with review of the project likewise discounted any danger.

After the explosion, both corporate and government authorities again downplayed the potentiality of disaster.

According to initial estimates by BP, the well was leaking a mere 1000 gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. As we go to press, according to "experts" and government officials, the well might be leaking approximately 200,000 gallons of oil a day (1.4 million a week). But no one really knows the actual quantity of oil that is escaping.

The well pipe is five feet in diameter and spewing oil at roughly 70,000 PSI. The drilling rig was unable to contain the pressures in this oil reserve—billions of gallons of oil lying 30,000 feet deep in the earth's crust.

The blow-out preventer, a piece of equipment supposedly designed to shut down the flow of a well in case of an accident, failed to function. BP ignored any alternatives to this faulty technology, or a valve under the sea floor to turn off the oil flow in case of emergency. "The company took their chances in not having the [emergency] valve so

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(Left) Jose Soberon, Cuban consul general.

With a more local perspective, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty member Leslie Wood celebrated the noisy optimism and numerical strength of the No One Is Illegal march held earlier that day (with several hundred participants)—defiant in the face of the province's inhumane cut to welfare spending in the middle of a recession.

Finally, Socialist Action Federal Secretary Barry Weisleder drew all these threads together in a "State of the Revolution" address. The evening was rounded out by a line-up of performers, leaving the crowd infused with rebellion and hope. ■

May Day celebrated in Toronto

By CHRISTIAN WHITTALL

The Free Times Cafe was packed to the gills on the evening of Saturday, May 1, for Toronto's 24th Annual Socialist May Day Celebration. The lively, convivial atmosphere may have seemed in sharp contrast to the rather dire-sounding theme for this year: "Eco-Socialism or Extinction". But what was really on display was great hope and excitement for the first of these two alternatives.

Jorge Soberon, Cuba's consul general in Toronto spoke about challenges facing his country and its militant resolve in the face of them. He deflated the wishful thinking of Cuba's enemies that the revolution would die with Fidel, citing the vast resource represented by the country's young generation.

The Venezuela consul general in Toronto, Mirna Quero de Peña, sent a written statement that was read aloud by emcee Elizabeth Byce. De Peña emphasized that the environmental crisis we are facing is an economic rather than a technological one.

B.C. Holmes of the Toronto Haiti Action Committee talked about her visit to the subsequently earthquake-ravaged nation on the anniversary of its independence, Jan. 1 of this year. "Haiti needs solidarity, not charity," she insisted. Vice president of the Canadian Arab Federation Ali Mallah spoke next, also giving voice to revolutionary sentiments overseas, especially in the Middle East.

SA East Coast Conference

Socialist Action activists and friends convened in Philadelphia, April 17-18, for an educational conference on the important political issues of our times. About 65 people attended the weekend event. Topics ranged from the critical necessity of eco-socialism to a critique of academic writings on the "young Marx," from how to mobilize the antiwar movement to the role of art in revolution.

Participants discussed Cuba, Venezuela, and revolution in Latin America. They got a look at the real working-class politics of Pakistan. They discussed the role of the African American struggles in history and the challenges faced today. And, they witnessed the critical importance of work in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, Lynn Stuart, and the Cuban Five—along with undocumented immigrant workers and Muslim Americans.

There were 13 speakers, including muralist Mike Alewitz; historian Cliff Conner; Black activists Glenn Ford, Colia Clark, and Lenore J. Daniels; Pam Africa of the International Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Pakistani commentator Adaner Usmani; and Socialist Action Nat. Secretary Jeff Mackler. ■

Commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal

When Empires End

Recently, there was published an extraordinary article in the journal, *Foreign Affairs*. Penned by the conservative British historian, Niall Ferguson, of Harvard and Oxford Universities, he surveys the trends that spelled an end to half a score of great Empires. His basic thesis is that great and powerful empires can fall with amazing rapidity, often in the space of a lifetime—or even less.

Citing the works of historians and scholars, Ferguson notes the Roman, British, French, Ottoman, Ming, Qing, and Russian Empires (among others). Many lasted centuries and exercised almost global power.

How did they fall? Some fell from economic crisis, often spurred on by military adventures, as the French example. The French gave money and troops to the fledgling Americans trying to repel their British occupiers, France's historical enemy. Within two decades, they were virtually broke, and people were in the streets in rebellion against the nobility. In a few brief years, a revolution raged through France, and a king, Louis XVI, would lose his noble head.

Rome, the glory of Europe, fell to forces both internal and external. Within 50 years, its population fell by 75%. Vandals tore at its borders, as its former soldiers turned brigands. The East-West split, between Rome and Constantinople, weakened imperial unity. According to Ferguson, Rome's great fall took less than a decade.

Ferguson wasn't just giving a bland history lesson. His article pointed to the U.S. Empire—one of the wealthiest and strongest in history. His point? That Empires—even those which seem impregnable—can suffer from a convergence of ills, financial, military, environmental and otherwise, and crack like an egg.

That's history's lesson—no Empire lasts forever.

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Source: Ferguson, N., "Complexity and Collapse," *Foreign Affairs*, Mar/Apr. 2010, pp. 18-31.

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Over 30,000 attend Bolivia climate conference

Dado Galdieri / AP

Juan Karita / AP



By CLAY WADENA

The oppressed people of the Earth have stepped forward forcefully into the climate-change debate with new declarations emerging from the “The World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth,” held near Cochabamba, Bolivia, in late April. The statements, which were formed in various workshops, accurately placed the responsibility for the climate crisis where it belongs—with the capitalist system.

It was abundantly clear that the working masses of the world needed their own conference where their voice would be heard after the majority of the world’s countries were undemocratically excluded from participating in the creation of the “Copenhagen Accord,” the only document to emerge from the UN Climate Change Conference in Denmark in late 2009.

The Copenhagen Accord pledged to continue the policies of the Kyoto Accord of 1997, which relied on inadequate “market” mechanisms to achieve carbon reductions. Like Kyoto, the Copenhagen Accord is non-binding on participants.

The Cochabamba conference was called by President Evo Morales of Bolivia, a country that might very well lose the snowcaps on its mountains (a vital source of water for the Bolivian people) as a consequence of global warming. This would be one of a huge number of catastrophes that the world would face if the world’s temperature rise were permitted to exceed the 2 degrees Celsius that the Copenhagen Accord

called for as a goal.

Over 30,000 activists attended the four-day Bolivian event, including over 9000 people from outside Bolivia. Participants came from over 140 countries, and heads of state or officials represented 48 governments.

The presence of thousands of indigenous people from all over the Americas highlighted the perspective of this conference that human life has to achieve a balance with nature instead of allowing capitalists to exploit natural resources with only profits in mind. There were also many rank-and-file activists and peasant, student, and labor groups who mobilized for this important event.

The conference approved an Agreement of the People, which demands that industrially developed countries, which are primarily responsible for the carbon emissions leading to climate change, reduce their emissions by 50 percent by the year 2017, based on 1990 levels. The Agreement calls for an international Environmental Justice Tribunal, which could take action against countries and private entities that fail to comply with agreed upon standards.

The viewpoint that the capitalist system is primarily to blame for the world’s alarming ecological situation, including climate change, was prominently featured in the conference and its resolutions. President Morales said, “The main cause of the destruction of the planet Earth is capitalism.”

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela said, “Let’s not change the climate, let’s change the system! And con-

(Above) An indigenous man from Ecuador attends the conference on April 20.

(Left) An indigenous woman from Peru waves a Bolivian flag as Evo Morales speaks to the conference.

sequently we will begin to save the planet. Capitalism is a destructive development model that is putting an end to life; it threatens to put a definitive end to the human species.” Later he added jokingly, “If the climate were a bank it would have been saved already.”

Cuban Vice-President Esteban Lazo Hernández said, “The struggle for the defense of life today must indisputably include the necessity of abolishing the capitalist system. ... It is intolerable that the total income of the 500 richest people in the world is superior to the income of the 416 million poorest people in the world.”

The next round of UN talks on climate change will be late this year in Cancun, Mexico, under the shadow of the undemocratically imposed Copenhagen Accord. The Cochabamba conference rallied forces against any possible acceptance of the Copenhagen Accord and also called for a “Global People’s Movement” to coordinate mass actions that struggle for a serious response to this crisis based on the best interests of human beings and their environment rather than profit. ■

Brazil mega-dam battle rages

By CHRISTINE FRANK

Despite growing domestic and international opposition, the Lula government of Brazil plans to go forth with the construction of the Belo Monte Dam on the Xingu River, a tributary of the Amazon that flows through the northeastern part of the country. The construction of the megadam will mean the flooding of an estimated 500 square kilometers of intact rainforest as well as the forcible displacement of tens of thousands of Indigenous and traditional peoples, who depend upon the riparian ecosystem for their survival.

Destruction of the rainforest will mean a loss of global carbon sink and source of oxygen as well as local habitat and home for wildlife and humans. When the vegetation is flooded, it will decompose under water in anoxic conditions and release vast amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

If allowed to go forward, the monstrosity—the third largest of its kind in the world—would divert nearly the entire flow of the Xingu, drying up its Volta Grande or “Big Bend” and its tributary, the Bacaja River, affecting two indigenous peoples’ reserves. It would also impact upstream fish stocks, a principal food source for native folk. Needless to say, no one consulted them about whether or not this ecological disaster should be built in violation of their customary rights to their ancestral lands.

Bent upon the further maldevelopment of the Brazilian economy, powerful economic interests are demanding the hydro-generated electricity to power the expansion of bauxite mines, aluminum smelters, and other industrial plants in the region—regardless of the environmental and human costs. Transnational metal and mining concerns that would profit from the project include Alcoa and Vale as well as energy giants GDF Suez, Electrobras, and Neoenergia. They plan to fund it with lines of credit from the Brazilian Development Bank, assisted generously with public pension funds.

At present, determined Kayapo Indians are planning to defend their homeland from the bulldozers and concrete mixers with bows and arrows. Clearly, they cannot win on their own. That is why it is important that climate-crisis activists, environmentalists, and supporters of native sovereignty bring international pressure to bear upon the Lula government to halt this engineering colossus before it destroys yet another swath of rainforest and the hydrology of the region. ■

... Gulf oil spill

(continued from page 1)

they could save money,” said Mike Papanonio, one of the lawyers representing Gulf shrimpers and fishermen, who have not been able to work because of the spill (*The New York Times*, May 3, 2010).

This is building to become one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history. The numbers of fish and other aquatic life killed may never be known. The damage to the economies of the Gulf States could range into the billions of dollars. And this is the “best case scenario.”

A large storm or hurricane could carry the oil sludge into Lake Pontchartrain, ruining the crab industry there—and even threaten the city of New Orleans with a catastrophe worse than Katrina. If the oil slick extends far enough south, the oil could be caught up in the Gulf Stream and carried up the Atlantic coast as far as North Carolina and Virginia. If it moves north, it could foul the coasts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Fishing and shrimping in the Gulf could be destroyed for years. The Port of New Orleans could be closed for a long period—with coffee, bananas and other products unable to be brought ashore.

All of this is taking place mere weeks after President Obama announced his support for increased off-shore drilling in U.S. waters. Clearly, oil wells in the oceans and waterways must be shut down and dismantled worldwide.

You can be sure that the administration

and Congress will try to find individuals (possibly even a few corporate execs) to blame for this disaster. We need an exhaustive investigation of the disaster, and a trial and jail time for the perpetrators. But the sources of the problem must also be exposed.

The naked lust for profits by petroleum capitalists are at the root of this disaster. The Mississippi delta has been fouled countless times by oil spills, and a large body of land has been lost to the sea partly due to canals built for oil pipelines. The oil and chemical refineries have made southern Louisiana one of the most polluted areas of the world.

BP bears responsibility for this latest crisis, but so do the capitalist politicians in both of the major parties who act as their accomplices by gutting attempts to regulate safety and protect workers and the environment.

A few years back the Greens were talking about a “corporate death penalty” that would entail breaking corporations up into smaller businesses. This isn’t enough. Nationalize the energy industry under workers’ control, and run the industry for the benefit of the people! Convert jobs in fossil fuel production to the production of safe, clean, renewable energy. We need a crash program to overcome dependence on fossil fuels by emphasizing mass transit and sustainable production for people’s needs instead of private profit.

The ultimate solution depends on taking political and economic power out of the hands of those who are ruled only by their drive for personal wealth. ■

Debt crisis in Greece, Wall Street corruption rock capitalist markets

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



By ANDREW POLLACK

Juan Sullivan / Getty Images



In recent weeks, the main flashpoint of the global economic downturn has been Greece, where strikes and demonstrations continue to challenge attempts by the continent's ruling classes to force workers to bear the burden of the country's deepening debt crisis. But in the U.S. all eyes were on charges filed by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) against Goldman Sachs.

There is a connection between the two stories—and not just because Goldman helped plunge Greece into crisis through the same kind of financial finagling which has put it on the hot seat in the U.S. In both cases, seemingly unique events mask underlying systemic causes.

On April 16, the SEC filed a civil suit against Goldman charging “fraudulent misconduct” for mortgage securities it sold in 2007. The firm got \$15 million from hedge fund operator John Paulson to market a package of securitized home loans he had put together in a collateralized debt obligation (CDO). Paulson then bought credit default swaps (CDS), which would rise in value when the loans behind the CDO went sour—that is, he bet against (went “short” on) the very package he had put together. The heart of the SEC’s case is that Goldman knew the loans were worthless yet sold them to clients with positive recommendations.

(The issuing and purchase of CDSs was a tactic widely used by many big banks themselves to hedge on their own account against mortgage-based securities during the housing bubble. And just as Goldman and its partners made money by betting homeowners would become homeless, so too it issued Credit Default Swaps in order to profit if manufacturing firms went bankrupt and workers lost their jobs, a prime example being trucking giant YRC Worldwide, which then used the threat of bankruptcy to get the Teamsters bureaucracy to force concessions on its 30,000 employees.)

Ratings agencies gave the Goldman CDO a triple-A rating. Yet by January 2008, 99% of the CDO’s loans had been downgraded. Paulson’s hedge fund, having bet on precisely this outcome, made about \$1 billion—the same amount lost by Goldman’s customers.

The CDS bought by Paulson was sold by insurance giant AIG, whose impending bankruptcy due to this and many other shady investments was one of several moments when the country’s entire financial edifice appeared to be crumbling. Paulson got his money thanks to one of the government’s many infusions of cash to save AIG as well as Goldman and other megabanks to whom AIG was on the hook.

As they did during the height of the mortgage securities crisis, this April many commentators blamed Goldman and co-conspirators for creating and then popping the housing bubble, ignoring the factors underlying the crisis of profitability that provided the basis for the speculative mania in the first place.

The media also speculated on the timing of the SEC announcement, suggesting that the SEC had waited until April to file charges in order to boost Obama’s efforts to get Senate approval for his financial regulation reforms.

This speculation is plausible even though Obama’s “reform”—like his just-passed health-care reform—is a mish-mash of tweaks to existing regulation and enforcement practices, a package so weak that Obama is asking the megabanks to endorse it (Goldman was quickly dropped from the list of solicited endorsees after the SEC’s action). But the banks, like health-care insurers before them, smell blood and are insisting on no “reform” in order to weaken even further the final bill.

There is no suggestion in the bill of banning any of the various types of investment tools (like CDSs and CDOs) that make profit not by producing goods or services, but by betting on other investments, or on swings in prices, or similar financial activities.

The same week that Goldman executives were being grilled in the Senate, two gatherings were held with the avowed aim of “solving” the country’s budget deficit problem by savaging Social Security, Medicare and other programs. These were the Peter G. Peterson Foundation’s “Fiscal Summit” and the first meeting of Obama’s recently constituted National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (see the March 2010 *Socialist Action* for more on these bodies).

So while Democrats in Congress and the White House give a legislative “tut, tut!” to the megabanks they so recently and richly rewarded with bailouts, the first steps are being taken for an even richer bailout of the ruling class by drastic cuts in workers’ old age and health benefits.

Crisis in Greece

Just such cuts are at the heart of the crisis in Greece, which in April threatened once again to bring down the economies of other second-tier eurozone countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy, which would inevitably be followed by crises in even the strongest ones.

Germany, the continent’s industrial powerhouse, is playing the central role in demanding that Greece get its fiscal house in order by draconian cuts to workers’ jobs, wages, and benefits.

Goldman Sachs played a role in helping Greece hide its deficits for a time, selling complex swaps in which it paid the Greek government for future revenue streams. The swap allowed the Greek government to

(Left) May 1 labor march in New York City.
(Below) April 27 San Francisco protest against Wells Fargo’s involvement in financial collapse.

avoid entering the borrowed money on its books as a loan, which would have raised its budget deficit above the eurozone limits.

But Goldman can no more be said to have caused Greece’s crisis than it and the other banks can be blamed for the crisis in the U.S. These banks took advantage of the ability to speculate, in the case of the United States through financing a housing bubble, in the case of Greece with shady deals involving public budgets (deals which have also brought some state and city budgets in the U.S. to the brink of insolvency). That ability only arose because of the glutting of global markets for goods and services, leaving trillions of dollars (or euros, yuan, etc.) with no productive investment outlets.

Now the fallout from the bursting of those speculative activities—which certainly took on a life of their own once they got started, and are further wrecking an already moribund global economic system—is rebounding from country to country.

An April 29 *Los Angeles Times* article titled “Greece’s fiscal woes threaten the U.S.” reported that “a widening financial crisis in Europe is threatening to put a damper on the economic recovery here and abroad just as the American economy is gathering steam.”

The article is a stark counterpoint to the plethora of stories this month claiming to see recovery under every bush in the U.S.: “It’ll take years of savage spending cuts, wage cuts and welfare-pension reform to eventually grow out of the [European] debt situation,” said an economist for Moody’s Economy.com, which shaved its forecast for economic growth in the European Union this year to less than 1%. That’s not good news for American businesses, which count on Europe as a major market but already have felt the winds of an economic slowdown.”

The euro’s slide thanks to the crisis has helped make U.S. exports more expensive in Europe. Yet projections of 3% growth in the United States, based on modest growth in the first quarter of this year, rested heavily on export growth.

Europe’s troubles, said *The Times*, probably contributed to the Federal Reserve’s decision to keep interest rates at historically low levels and to offer no timetable for raising them. What’s more, “despite a tentative increase in spending by consumers and signs of a stabilizing housing market,” said *The Times*, “a number of domestic factors, including barely visible job growth and still-depressed home values, warrant keeping rates unusually low. And now Europe has joined the list of risks.”

Labor, liberal response

In response to demands for austerity, unions in Greece have engaged in repeated general strikes. As we go to press, on May 5, reports are coming in that over 200,000 have marched in Athens at the apex of a gigantic general strike, and tens of thousands have marched in other cities, often battling police.

But in the United States, the response to the financial scandals and the misery that has accompanied them has been tepid, with small, tame rallies organized by the AFL-CIO. The federation organized 200 small protests around the country in April “to publicly shame bankers.” The culmination of these actions was a march on Wall Street of about 2000—a pathetic turnout considering how layoffs have already affected New York City transit workers, teachers, construction workers, and others, with far more drastic cuts predicted for coming months, and similar cuts affecting workers throughout the country.

The weak turnout was matched by an equally weak program for the actions. The federation said, “Wall Street bankers should pay for the disastrous job loss this country has seen ... we’re asking for a modest financial transaction tax ... that would help generate \$100 billion to \$300 billion annually to pay for job creation.” The AFL-CIO claimed that such a tax would also diminish incentives to engage in fraudulent financial practices and issuing shady products.

The AFL-CIO also proposed new fees on banks to pay the cost of the bank bailout, a levy on Wall Street bonuses, and taxing hedge fund and private equity managers at ordinary income rates.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka told the New York crowd, “The message we bring is this: Wall Street, fix the mess you made.” Needless to say, not a word was said about nationalizing the banks (and meanwhile, many of the federation’s liberal friends in ac-

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... Protesters counter Arizona immigrant law

Ross D. Franklin / AP



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that we cherish as Americans, as well as the trust between police and their communities that is so crucial to keeping us safe. In fact, I've instructed members of my administration to closely monitor the situation and examine the civil rights and other implications of this legislation. But if we continue to fail to act at a federal level, we will continue to see misguided efforts opening up around the country."

In other words, act "responsibly" and adopt the Schumer proposal, or else expect more Arizona-type disasters. Nevertheless, with the standard capitalist politician's double-talking, maneuvering, and backtracking, Obama told reporters late on April 28 that he was taking the issue of immigration reform "off the table."

Apparently, Obama saw that on his left the grassroots opposition to any more repressive anti-immigrant laws, be they from Arizona or from Schumer, would make it hard for him to carry through his fake "immigration reform." But on his right, the racist extremists oppose any law that would grant legalization to the estimated 12 million undocumented workers in the United States, drawn here by and being successfully exploited by the U.S. capitalist economy.

Certainly the Schumer "blueprint" is just as bad, if not worse, in terms of police-state measures than the new Arizona law. For example, it calls for a biometric identity card for all workers. Both Hitler and Orwell's Big Brother would have loved something like that!

The New York City Immigrant Communities in Action statement nails the duplicity of Schumer and his supporters: "Proposals such as Schumer-Graham are tacitly in agreement with the xenophobic and racist sentiments that have led to hundreds of hate crimes against migrants and the passing of Arizona's SB 1070. We do not accept the 'pillars' put

(continued from page 4)

demia and the NGO world are calling for breaking up the banks, a middle-class fantasy).

Trumka, however, pleaded with the banks "to start paying back for the damage caused by their risky actions: Stop fighting Wall Street reform. Stop acting like what happened to our economy was some kind of accident. ... Take some responsibility for what you did. Call off the lobbyists. ... Stop speculating and start lending. Take responsibility for the clean-up of the mess you made. Pay your fair share of the cost of creating the jobs you destroyed."

A fine lecture, but one whose moral will certainly be lost on the billionaires. Instead of trying to shame the bankers, labor needs to demand access to their books to see where the money has gone. Such a demand would be part of a program demanding—not pleading—that the banks' assets be put to use creating jobs for ev-

erth by Senator Schumer. We call upon all immigrant rights organizations to denounce the proposal laid out by Schumer and Graham, and to continue the struggle for a comprehensive and humane immigration reform based on dignity and human rights."

Incidentally, South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham has withdrawn his former co-sponsorship of the Schumer proposal. Schumer, now with the support of a New Jersey senator and the Democrat majority leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, was reported ready to introduce his bill prior to May 1. But on April 29, Reid announced an "outline," not actual legislation. Obama immediately announced support for this "outline."

An AP news report published on April 30 stated: "The Democrats' draft proposal, obtained by The Associated Press on Tuesday, called for, among other things, meeting border security benchmarks before anyone in the country illegally can become a legal permanent U.S. resident. Obama praised the outline and said the next step is ironing out a bill. He said his administration will 'play an active role' trying to get bipartisan supporters."

The general situation on the eve of May 1 was well described by the ICA's April 27 statement: "Last week as Arizona became the focal point of the immigrant rights struggle, Senator Schumer clearly articulated the heart of his 'blueprint' for Comprehensive Immigration Reform—*more of the very same dangerous, anti-immigrant criminalization that was passed as SB 1070 in Arizona.*"

"Across the nation, the last month has turned into one of the most historic moments for the immigrant rights movement in the U.S. As the worst anti-immigrant law was signed in Arizona, millions across the country are gearing up to pour out into the streets again on May 1, to call for real immigration reform."

The principles necessary for a genuine discussion were laid out earlier this year in the Open Letter of the Grassroots Immigrant Justice Network. The Open Letter states, "... [W]e are proposing a different approach to discussing Comprehensive Immigration Reform. We need to generate a national debate based on immigration as a labor mobility and human rights issue, not as an issue of national security and enforcement."

"Immigrants have made vast contributions to the United States, and they

ery worker needing one, regardless of how much it costs. And the capstone of such a program would be the nationalization of the banks should they resist these demands.

At the height of the mortgage securities scandal, some liberal pundits called for nationalizing the banks—not for the benefit of workers, but as had previously been done in Western Europe, in order to save the system for its current rulers.

The only thing stopping labor from demanding nationalization on workers' behalf is a leadership that, in contrast to the fighting spirit displayed in Greece, is too frightened of its "partners" on Wall Street and in Washington to do more than plead.

But we can be sure that the next phase of the crisis—coming sooner than the media would have us believe—will usher in a new round of questioning among workers, and an openness to discussing more radical actions and solutions. ■



(Above) Phoenix protest, April 23.

(Left) Demonstrator at immigrant-rights rally in San Francisco, May 1.

MAY DAY RALLIES

At least 70 U.S. cities held events for immigrants' rights on May 1. Los Angeles saw 100,000 march, and around 30,000 rallied in Dallas.

Dave Bernt reports from Chicago: "This city had its largest immigrants-rights march in several years—about 20,000 people. The march was led by immigrant youth with t-shirts that declared, "Undocumented! Unafraid!" A lot of banners and signs focused on Arizona. Labor was highly visible."

About 20,000 marched in Tucson, Ariz., and over 4000 in Phoenix. Minneapolis saw two marches totaling 4000 people join together at the Convention Center, where the annual Republican Convention had just ended. San Francisco had a rally of 3000 people, with 4000 in Oakland. New York saw 5000 rally in Foley Square—with another, smaller rally in Union Square. ■

should be granted the right to live here legally and without fear. We should recognize migration as the global phenomenon it is and address the root economic causes of migration."

The Open Letter outlines seven basic points to guide the national debate around immigration reform. These include ending all economic policies that leave people in underdeveloped countries with no choice but to emigrate; providing a clear and easy legalization program for undocumented immigrants; eliminating guest-worker programs and increasing labor protections for all workers in the U.S.; stopping the raids and militarization of the border; and ending E-verify and other programs that lead to mass firings.

(Read more at www.grassrootsimmigrantjusticenetowork.blogspot.com).

The historical background

At Tucson's May 1 Gran Marcha and rally, the Coalición de Derechos Humanos distributed a flyer that explains that SB 1070 is the direct and intended result of border enforcement strategies that began when NAFTA went into effect, in 1994, under the Clinton administration.

"Building an unprecedented military-type enforcement infrastructure, these strategies have intentionally funneled most migrants through Arizona's southern border. By diverting more than half of all migrants, who had traditionally crossed through California and Texas, into a very conservative state, where the federal and local governments own most of the border land (thereby avoiding the community fightback that occurred along the border in Texas), the stage was set for the eventual passing of SB1070."

Over the past 15 years, one byproduct of this deliberate funneling of undocumented immigrants into the dangerous and inhospitable Arizona desert, has been

death by exposure to heat and thirst for at least an estimated 5000 immigrants, including many children.

The Derechos Humanos flyer explains that the increased number of crossings through Arizona "caused division and chaos in the border towns, allowed for the influx of hate groups and other anti-immigrant groups, opened the political space to racist and intolerant voices, with mainstream media feeding the climate of fear ... The Minutemen and other anti-immigrant groups proceeded to poison attitudes across the country, resulting in the spread of fear, racism, hate, ignorance, and anti-human policies that other states have replicated or are in the process of replicating."

Of course, the corporate-owned media and the twin capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans, either promoted the hate message from the Minutemen types or did nothing effective to counter it. Certainly these instruments of capitalism did not try to explain how their own policies had created the difficulties.

It's appropriate to conclude this article with the final paragraphs of the Derechos Humanos May 1 flyer: "SB 1070 is the most racist law in recent history, allowing for the legalization and institutionalization of racism, their version of 'ethnic cleansing'."

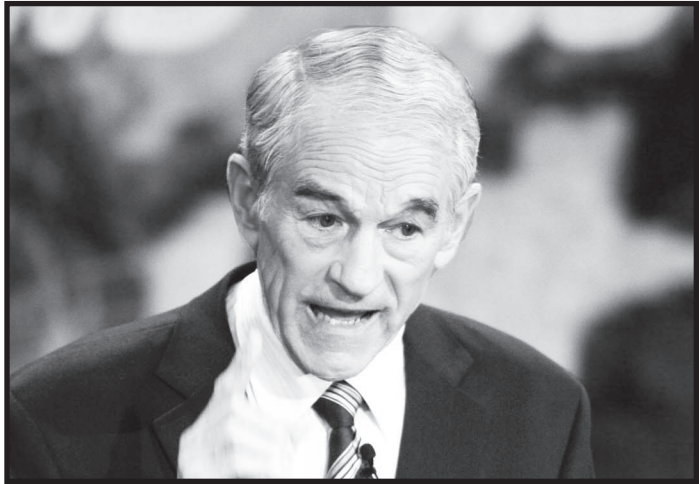
"We know that migration is not a law enforcement or national security issue, that we [the U.S. government and the parties of Big Business in the past] have encouraged migrants to come to this country to build it, that [U.S. government and corporate policies] have helped to destroy jobs in Mexico and elsewhere only to blame the very victims/survivors who migrate to work and provide for their families, that [as a result, these policies] have created and enriched smuggling organizations, [which then become an excuse for] the unprecedented buildup of policing and military-type enforcement along the border and in the interior of our country."

"With this law, the stage is set again for even more drastic calls for more 'security.' Our laws and policies have brought only *insecurity*—deaths, division, intolerance and ignorance, environmental destruction, and abuse of indigenous communities."

"We call for the repeal of SB 1070, an end to the enforcement strategies on the border and in our communities, and an end to criminalization of the immigrant. We call for a real dialogue based on truth, addressing the root causes of migration, and promoting justice for all."

"We call for a commitment of noncompliance with SB 1070, and ask for the commitment from all allies and people of conscience to boycott Arizona in every possible way. ¡Todos somos Arizona!" ■

Would a 'left-right' coalition revive the antiwar movement?



By CHRISTINE MARIE

In April, two well-known progressive figures, Code Pink leader Medea Benjamin and scholar of working-class cultural history Paul Buhle, went to press to champion a new "Left-Right Alliance Against War." Such an alliance was the topic of a Feb. 20 conference held, according to Buhle, "auspiciously, the day after the Conservative Political Action Conference, at which Representative Ron Paul stole the show with denunciations of war."

The Feb. 20 conference was called together by Kevin Zeese, known variously as the director of Voters for Peace, director of the Prosperity Agenda, and Executive Director of TrueVoteUS, in collaboration with George D. O'Neill, an aide to the 1992 Patrick Buchanan election campaign and a former chair of the Rockford Institute, a conservative "think tank" devoted to the restoration in the U.S. of the "values of Western Christian Civilization."

The goal for the event, popularized by Zeese in several articles beforehand, was the founding of a "patriotic antiwar movement" that could attract the support of business leaders and be a safe haven for military brass "who have become opposed to extreme militarism."

Participating also from the far right wing of politics were Doug Bandow, a former Reagan aide now with the Campaign for Liberty; Jesse Walker from the Libertarian *Reason* magazine; Daniel McCarthy from the Buchananite *American Conservative* magazine; Jeff Taylor from the traditionalist conservative *Front Porch Review*; a Naval Academy professor; staff from the Ron Paul campaign; and students from the Ron Paul-inspired Young Americans for Liberty.

Liberal editors and intellectuals who attended included Katrina van den Heuvel and William Greider from *The Nation*, as well as Sam Smith of the *Progressive Review*. Ralph Nader and Michael McPherson, the executive director of Vets for Peace, were in attendance too.

This coming together of "left" and right was inspired, according to the organizers, by the example of the American Anti-Imperialist League that opposed the occupation of the Philippines in the late 19th century and the America First Committee pulled together in 1940 to fight U.S. entry into World War II. Paul Buhle also claimed to be inspired by an unsuccessful attempt by the Madison SDS to work with "no foreign entanglements" conservatives near the end of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

Are Buhle and Benjamin, both well respected as activists, correct to champion the possibility of constructing an antiwar coalition led by right and left? Is this a clever way to reinvigorate a weak movement? Or is it a dead end for those who want to rebuild a massive movement in the streets to bring the troops home now? Is the America First Committee the model antiwar activists should be emulating today?

The America First Committee

The years leading up World War II were years of unprecedented union militancy and mobilization in the U.S. From the groundbreaking strikes of 1934, which included the Minneapolis Teamsters, the Toledo Auto-Lite, and the West Coast longshore strikes, to the United Autoworkers victory at Ford Motors in 1941, labor was on the move.

Revolutionary socialists who had helped lead the Minneapolis Teamsters strikes came out strongly in opposition to Roosevelt's plan to enter the war. They understood that the U.S. government's goal was to be in the best position to compete economically with



(Left) Texas Congressman Ron Paul.

... Or would it be a dead end for those who want to rebuild a mass movement in the streets to bring the troops home now?

their European corporate rivals and to exploit the postwar world, especially the colonial world, when the "peace" was declared. During the war, the Socialist Workers Party organized to aid fraternization among working-class soldiers of all nations, and they opposed the attempts of the government to prohibit strikes for better wages and working conditions and to brand actions by the labor movement as aiding the "enemy."

Their militant opposition to the war and wartime assaults on the rights of workers to defend their standard of living led the government to indict leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and the Minneapolis Teamsters under the Alien Registration, or Smith Act. Their sentencing took place on Dec. 9, 1941, at the same hour that Congress was formally declaring war. Their attempt to provide a pole of opposition to the war that was working class in its outlook was cut short by this attack and by their small numbers.

The bulk of the trade-union leadership remained patriotic and subservient to Roosevelt. Yet, the spirit that animated the Minneapolis Teamsters was heroically expressed in 1943, when the miners' union defied wartime government strikebreaking and became known by their confident slogan, "You can't dig coal with bayonets."

The failure of the government to suppress the militancy of the working class was reflected in a "bring us home now" movement at the end of the war. The direct link between the unionization of basic industry and the confidence of the troops to say "no" to imperialist intervention against the impending Chinese revolution was captured by an officer recorded trying to discipline his belligerent troops with the words, "This is not General Motors!"

The America First Committee was initiated with quite different goals than those motivating the antiwar demands of U.S. soldiers in the Far East. In 1940, a group of wealthy Americans—led by Robert D. Stuart Jr. (later the CEO of the Quaker Oats Company) with the backing of executives from Sears Roebuck, the Whiting Corporation, Hormel Meat Packing, Inland Steel, and Morton Salt—joined with the master of the National Grange, the head of the Chicago Theological Seminary, and a former editor of *The Nation* to form the committee. America First spokespeople ranged from Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas to the anti-Semitic and reactionary Charles Lindbergh.

The committee's founding statement, presented to the press by General Hugh S. Johnson, argued that the

U.S. must build an "impregnable defense for America" because no foreign power can successfully attack a "prepared" America. The immediate motivation for the formation of their committee was the decision of Congress to arm Great Britain, a nation many experienced directly as an unreliable competitor. "Aid short of war," they said, weakens national defense at home."

James P. Cannon, a Socialist Workers Party leader indicted with the Minneapolis Teamsters under the Smith Act, was of the view that the "isolationists" in elite circles merely held a tactical difference with those of their peers who were for sending U.S. armaments to Britain. Those opposed to early entry into the European war, Cannon warned at the time, believed that the U.S. should consolidate its political and economic hold over the Americas before intervening into the European colonies in the rest of the world.

Who is Ron Paul?

The "Left-Right Alliance" against the war has gained a hearing at all only because of the popularity of Texas Congressman and 2008 presidential candidate Ron Paul among veterans, students, and disappointed antiwar activists. Paul, who is an avowed right-libertarian in political outlook, has come out as a strong opponent of the U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. His advocacy of immediate withdrawal, in the context of the continued funding of the war by the Democratic majority in Congress, has given him tremendous credibility among those disgruntled with government policy and with the inability of the currently existing antiwar movement to force the war's end.

As conceived by Kevin Zeese, the "Left-Right Alliance" would be composed of the big liberal antiwar organizations, and the extra-electoral organizations of Ron Paul and his fellow far-right opponent of the wars, Patrick Buchanan. Paul and Buchanan, for Zeese, represent the Libertarian and Paleo-Conservative wings of the right, strains of conservatism that oppose the current U.S. military interventions as detrimental to the real security of the nation.

While many antiwar activists would shudder at the name of Patrick Buchanan, a figure usually characterized as neo-fascist in outlook, some have misunderstood Ron Paul's libertarian politics as somehow progressive.

What is Ron Paul's social program? Libertarians believe that the basis of human and individual freedom is private property. They strive to limit the scope of federal government, which they view as created to steal personal wealth. In Paul's view, the less government the better. His goal is to eliminate all of the federal social programs wrested from the U.S. ruling class by working people over the last century and a half. Such programs include not only welfare, Social Security, and Medicare but even public education.

In his book *The Revolution: A Manifesto*, Paul tells his readers that, if present trends continue, "by 2040

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America's Iraq: chaos and atrocities

By GERRY FOLEY

Iraq's disputed and inconclusive election continues to draw commentary in the U.S. press that the country's political crisis could "delay the withdrawal of American troops." But the journalists who make this ominous observation never ask what American troops are doing there, and why it should be their obligation to solve the country's political problems?

If the withdrawal of U.S. troops is conditional on political peace in the country, they could remain there indefinitely. What other countries have internal problems the U.S. bosses think could be solved by U.S. military occupation? Certainly, eight years of U.S.-led occupation of Iraq has not produced the results the American administrations that launched and sustained the occupation claimed that they were seeking.

Despite political and military defeats suffered by al-Qaeda and allied groups, civil war continues in Iraq. *The Huffington Post* reported April 25: "April has been the deadliest month in Iraq so far this year, with more than 263 civilians killed in war-related violence, according to an Associated Press count." The article claimed that this carnage was "dramatically lower" than in past years. But this body count is still staggering, even if it is less than the wholesale slaughter that prevailed in earlier years of the occupation.

An April 23 AP dispatch summarized the bombings over the last several months. On that date 69 people were killed by a blast aimed at Shiites. On Oct. 25, 155 people were killed in a blast aimed at government buildings. And so on.

Journalists who have taken the trouble to talk to Iraqis have found that generally they blame the Americans for the slaughter, although the bombings are clearly carried out by one faction of Iraqis aimed at other segments of the Iraqi population. The reason is that this



(Left) Iraqis carrying a photo of Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr mourn a bombing victim. He was one of 69 people killed April 23 in blasts aimed at Shiites.

terror did not exist before the U.S.-led invasion.

Moreover, Iraqis have experienced the ruthlessness of the foreign troops toward them. A dramatic example of this has been revealed recently by the on-line whistle-blowing service Wikileaks, which acquired a classified video of a U.S. air strike against civilians. Twelve passersby in an Iraqi street were mowed down by fire from an Apache helicopter. The incident gained the notice of the international press because two of the dead were Reuters journalists.

An on-line article dated April 6 by *Time*, hardly a left-wing or even liberal journal, gives a clear account of what the video, entitled "Collateral Murder" by Wikileaks, showed: "The crews of the two Apaches can be heard speaking about a handful of men, saying some are armed with AK-47s and one with a rocket-propelled-grenade launcher, although it's not clear from the video as released that such weapons are being carried. For alleged insurgents carrying weapons while a U.S. attack helicopter circles overhead, the men seem re-

Journalists who took the trouble to talk to Iraqis found that generally they blame the Americans for the slaughter.

markably nonchalant, strolling unhurriedly along a Baghdad street.

"After getting command approval to attack the armed group, an initial volley from an Apache's 30mm cannon blows some of them apart. An Apache crewman says, 'Ha, ha, ha—I hit 'em.' Another comment: 'Look at those dead bastards.' When a wounded man is seen crawling for cover, an Apache crew member hopes he reaches for a gun to justify shooting him again. 'All you got to do is pick up a weapon,' he says.

"Suddenly a van appears and Iraqis hop out to help the man. The helicopter crew seeks and receives permission to fire on the vehicle. In the ensuing barrage, two children inside the vehicle are apparently wounded, and their father, a

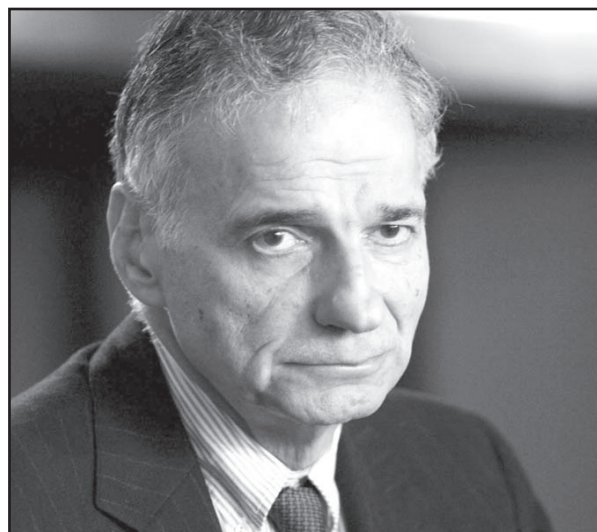
Good Samaritan who had stopped to take the wounded man to the hospital, is allegedly killed.

"When U.S. ground troops arrive later, they discover the youngsters. 'Well, it's their fault,' a member of the Apache crew says, 'for bringing kids into a battle.' Initially, the U.S. said the dead were all insurgents and had been killed in battle, but the video as released seems to offer no evidence of hostile intent by those on the ground."

Commenting on the video in the April 7 issue of the British *Guardian*, a journalist noted how much like a video game the incident was. It showed how the U.S. military has come to slaughter people from afar, as if in a video game. It gave substance to the slogan that has become current in Pakistan that "the Americans kill people like insects."

The *Guardian* of April 27, covering an inquiry into Britain's involvement in the Iraq war, printed this vignette: "An officer of the regiment detaining Baha Mousa, a Basra hotel worker, when he was beaten to death said his soldiers held the view that 'all Iraqis were scum,' it was disclosed today."

So much for "Operation Iraqi Freedom," and so much for any illusions that the occupation helped the Iraqi people, or that its continuation is going to help them either. Of course, the U.S. authorities by their nature do not need a good excuse to intervene. They will invent one if necessary. The whole Iraq war experience demonstrates that abundantly. They will only withdraw their troops and cease their intervention in Iraq if masses of American people insistently and unequivocally demand it in the streets. ■



(Left) Ralph Nader, a long-time advocate of unity with the right wing for "common" objectives.

U.S. In fact, he voted for a bill requiring hospitals to turn in immigrants who sought medical help. He also opposes giving citizenship to children born in the U.S. of immigrant parents.

And while Paul is for withdrawing troops from the Middle East, he has voted in favor of deepening the militarization of the border with Mexico. Perhaps most ominously, Paul sponsored a bill making it illegal for the border patrol to interfere with the 7000 anti-immigrant vigilantes of the Minutemen Project, because their help has been "productive and good." He also votes to deny visas to students from any country that "supports terrorism" or inadequately fights terrorism, as defined by the U.S. government.

Paul is an obstetrician who calls abortion murder and sees *Roe v. Wade* as an assault on the Constitution. To be a consistent civil libertarian, Paul argues, one must defend the rights of the "unborn." *Roe v. Wade*, and many other federal civil liberties and civil rights rulings and legislation, are, according to Paul, attacks on states' rights.

Like many supporters of racial and gender discrimination before him, Paul uses a call for states' rights as a code word to obscure his opposition to LGBT rights, gay marriage, affirmative action, and nearly every other gain of the civil rights movements of our time. It should be no surprise that commentator Glen Ford of the *Black Agenda Report* has described the rise of Paul's Tea Party movement as "White Nationalism on the March."

What kind of unity is needed?

The history of the fight against U.S. intervention into Vietnam, along with the experience of the civil rights, women's liberation, and labor movements, shows that the kind of activity needed to move the U.S. corporate elite to accede to our demands, is mass independent action in the streets. The ruling-class parties gage the power of such a movement by its size and social composition. A movement that reaches deep into

the working class, the class who machines the weapons, transports them to the theater of operations, and then populates the armies is their biggest nightmare.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army, witness to the heroism of the Vietnamese and supported by a giant antiwar movement at home, eventually refused to fight Washington's war. Building a movement with this kind of intrinsic social power should be our goal.

To involve the great majority of the working people of the United States today, the antiwar movement must be a safe place for the most militant and combative components of the unions and of community struggles. It must seem relevant to those whose first waking thought is how to find a job or keep their house. It must be welcoming to the 200,000 LGBT activists who recently marched on DC.

A united front with the anti-interventionist far right, on the other hand, would require that our movement drop its demand for "Money for Jobs, Not War!" It would advertise mass actions by promoting a list of speakers that included the viciously anti-immigrant Paul and Buchanan at a time when the fightback against the racist Arizona law is among the most important working-class struggles in the U.S. It would feature Paul supporters who hail his effort to keep Arab and Muslim students out of the U.S. It would naturally draw in the openly racist Tea Party elements. Such a "united front" would make the antiwar movement uninhabitable by those most crucial to its success.

The unity that we need in the antiwar movement today is the kind of unity exemplified by the United National Antiwar Conference to be held in Albany, NY, on July 23, 2010 (see www.nationalpeaceconference.org). Here veterans, unionists, community activists, faith communities, Muslim Americans facing a new witch hunt, and civil libertarians fighting not only the Patriot Act but the Arizona law as well will join with international guests to find ways to revive mass action for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, mercenaries, and bases from the Middle East and South Asia. It is on this kind of basis that the new "broad" antiwar movement will be built. ■

(continued from page 6)
the entire federal budget will be consumed by Social Security and Medicare. Forty percent of our entire private sector output will need to go to just these two programs."

On a recent Chris Matthews TV interview, Paul explained that Social Security is immoral, because it forces responsible people to pay for those who were irresponsible enough not to save money for their retirement when they were young.

Even more extreme are Paul's views on race and gender equality. According to Paul, fighting for Black rights or women's rights is illogical, as the categories of oppressed nationality and gender are false constructs when it comes to thinking about liberty. The only basis on which he believes one can meaningfully struggle for freedom is as an individual property owner.

Paul has stated that the Civil Rights Act had terrible consequences for the United States and would not vote for such legislation today. He argues that the children of immigrant workers should be denied schooling and emergency room treatment, since too much "welfare" is drawing immigrant workers to the



Kirghiz revolt signals growing instability in ex-Soviet republics

By GERRY FOLEY

The April 7 uprising in Kirghizia (sometimes called Kyrgyzstan), the mass uprising that overthrew the corrupt tyrant Kurambek Bakiyev, himself the beneficiary of a mass uprising five years ago that overthrew his predecessor, Askar Akaev, was a new sign not just of continuing political ferment in that country but of growing instability in the former Soviet Central Asian republics. In the Russian-language *Neweurasia.net* of April 23, an article written under the pseudonym of Alfarabi compared the Kirghiz event with the Tadjik civil war, which started in 1992 and lasted for four years.

Tens of thousands of people died in the Tadjik civil war, and hundreds of thousands fled the country. The defeated opposition was mostly Islamic and included Uzbek Jihadis. Russian President Medvedev declared in the wake of the April 7 uprising that Kirghizia could become "another Afghanistan." The Russian press in recent days has focused on attacks by Kirghiz on ethnic Russians.

On April 25, *Izvestia* reported: "On Tuesday, Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev instructed Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov to take steps to insure the safety of Russian citizens in Kirghizia and reinforce the defense of Russian facilities. As the Kremlin press service reported, this decision was taken in response to acts of plunder and raiding in the country. The situation in Kirghizia remains tense. Pogromists killed five people in the town of Maevka [a settlement of Russians] and wounded 28."

The article went on to report that most of the violence involved attempts by Kirghiz to seize land in the suburbs of the country's capital, Bishkek, held by Russians and Meskhetian Turks. It claimed that the mayor of Bishkek was trying to negotiate with the "pogromists" but had been taken captive by them: "Today in the towns international self-defense units are being set up. They are breaking up stones and acquiring arms. ... To distinguish themselves from the pogromists, they are wearing red armbands. Today, the roads into Bishkek are packed. There are enormous traffic jams of vehicles carrying refugees. The situation is very threatening."

The article cited an appeal to the new government stressing the threat of an outburst of Kirghiz chauvinism and stressing the multinational makeup of the country. "In the meantime, the inhabitants of the Chu Valley, which has traditionally been settled by people of many nationalities, sent the following appeal to the provisional government: 'From the middle of the 19th century, Russians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis, Germans, Poles began settled in Kirghizia. The historical names speak for themselves: Maevka, Aleksandrovka, Petrovskoe: During the Great Fatherland War [World War II] Stalin transferred Chechens, Turks and Greeks to the Chu Valley. Many Chinese live here. ... Kirghizia has always been and will always remain a multinational state.'

It is possible that native Kirghiz view settlements of other nationalities as colonies implanted on the basis of their oppression. The Kirghiz were the victims of racist oppression both under tsarism and Stalinism. Settler colonies are a common tool of imperialist oppression and it is frequent in uprisings of the oppressed people that they turn against settlers. In fact, the Russian racist attitude toward the Kirghiz was reflected in the headline of the *Izvestia* article cited above: "Can the Kirghiz live without a khan?"

The April 7 revolution seems to have had no political leadership. In its April 23 web edition, Radio Liberty, the U.S. government's unofficial organ, noted: "Whatever might have been planned, on April 7, when several thousand protesters stormed the government house in Bishkek, there were no opposition leaders commanding their action. Nearly all of them had been arrested the previous night...."

"Inspired by the demonstrations in the provincial town of Talas one day earlier, the opposition had reportedly planned to conduct peaceful, nationwide demonstrations on April 7. They were going to demand that Bakiyev fulfill the promises he made in the last revolution almost exactly five years earlier: freedom of speech and media, economic stability, an end to nepotism and corruption, and releasing opposition activists from prison.

"But after hearing about the overnight arrests of opposition leaders, people became aggressive. Witnesses said police appeared to panic when there was no sign of leadership or supervision of the protesters. In several cases, demonstrators wrested the security forces' weapons away from them."

An article in the April 25 *Washington Post* confirmed this scenario: "The roundup decapitated the opposition on the eve of protests scheduled across the country but also provoked a backlash and left young crowds without elders who usually restrained them. 'We had always been accused of cowardice because we never let people storm government buildings,' said Omurbek Tekebayev, one of those arrested. 'But this time, all the opposition leaders were in jail, so there was no one in the streets to stop them.'"

Without a leadership representing the revolutionary masses, the new government seems to have been formed essentially of the old elites who had gone into opposition to the Bakiyev regime on the basis of individual grievances. The head of the provisional government, Roza Otunbayeva, is a veteran political figure already prominent in Soviet times.

An article dated April 8 on the Radio Liberty website described her early background as follows: "In 1986, she was appointed deputy chairwoman of the Kirghiz SSR Council of Ministers, and foreign minister. From 1989 to 1991, she worked at the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow, before returning to Kyrgyzstan in late 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union." She was the first foreign minister of independent Kyrgyzstan when the Soviet era regime was only slightly reconstructed. And in the 1990s she held top diplomatic posts, including that of ambassador to the U.S.

Despite implication in the various autocratic regimes that have ruled Kyrgyzstan, Otunbayeva has a better personal reputation than other veteran politicians. But some accounts cite doubts that she actually has a political base. And there is no indication so far that any other figure or grouping in the provisional government has any real authority.

The Eurasia-Net website reported on April 25: "While the provisional government can claim to wield the levers of power inside government offices, its authority clearly does not yet extend to the streets. Omurbek Tekebayev, leader of the Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party, appeared on state broadcaster LTR just after 8:30 p.m. and told viewers that the provisional government was in charge of enforcing a curfew in Bishkek. Throngs of citizens disregarded the curfew, however, as widespread looting continued into the night in Bishkek."

Among the Kirghiz, there is a tradition of grassroots democracy dating back to tribal days, the Kuraltai. Ac-

(Left) Anti-government demonstrators fill the streets of Bishkek, Kirghizia, on April 24.

ording to one report, such formations played a role in the buildup to the insurrection. But there is no concrete evidence about that in reliable sources. In the power vacuum that exists, if such bodies are genuinely representative or can serve as a forum for a political program in accordance with the aspirations of the masses, their influence should soon become apparent and undeniable to all serious journalists.

However, past experience, as in post-World I Germany and Austria, demonstrates that even soviets (democratic workers' councils) without the leadership of a revolutionary party are not likely to be able to lead a socialist transformation. And there is no visible sign yet of any revolutionary socialist political organization in Kirghizia.

There was a revolt against at least some of the privatizations of the Bakiyev regime, which were carried out in the spirit of the policy of restoring capitalism of the old Soviet bureaucracy and with the same or even worse corruption. There has been a report in the Russian-language Kirghiz *Komsomolskaya Pravda* dated April 23 that an official of the ousted regime will be tried for an "illegal privatization" of an electric plant.

Increased electric rates were an immediate cause of the uprising. One of the first acts of the provisional government was to rescind them. The provisional government has also proclaimed that all of the media owned by the Bakiyev family will "become the property of the people." However, for the privatizations, even the most corrupt ones, to be reversed, the economy would have to be organized according to a socialist plan. Within the context of the restoration of capitalism in the entire former Soviet sphere, that would require a high level of consciousness and boldness. There is no indication that there is any such leadership, now in Kirghizia.

However, there has been very little analysis in the international press (or the Russian and Kirghiz press for that matter) of the internal dynamics of the Kirghiz revolution. The Russian press, as noted, has concentrated on threats to the Russian-speaking population. It has also made dark hints about an alliance between the Byelorussian strongman, Alexander Lukashenko, and Bakiyev, who has taken refuge in the Byelorussian capital of Minsk. *Izvestia* wrote that the Kirghiz tyrant had "landed under Lukashenko's warm wing."

Actually, the Byelorussian dictator proclaimed that he was personally guaranteeing Bakiyev's safety. It remains to be seen what interest the boss of a small country on Russia's western frontier has in protecting a fugitive Central Asian tyrant.

The English-language big press has concentrated on speculation about what the revolution means for American versus Russian interests in Central Asia, specifically the future of the American Manas military base, which serves as a conduit for jet fuel to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. One of the major reasons the Russian government and its subordinate media encouraged the opposition to Bakiyev was supposedly that he had reneged on an agreement to expel the Manas military base.

There can hardly be any doubt that the Russian government does not like seeing U.S. bases in its former territories. After all, it has done everything it could to prevent the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe and Ukraine. But it is hard to know how much of an irritant the Manas base is. The Russian government formally, and to some extent materially (overflight rights), supports the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

One of the major foreign-policy gambits of the Russian strongman, Vladimir Putin, has been to draw the West into an alliance against "radical Islam," to project the idea that it has an interest in supporting his war against the Chechens and other peoples of Islamic heritage in former Soviet territories, or at least not criticizing it. In fact, Putin rose to power on the basis of anti-Chechen chauvinism, and anti-Islamic drum beating continues to be one of the props of his regime.

An English-language organ, *The Times of Central Asia*, apparently a pro-U.S. publication, argued in the wake of the Kirghiz uprising that U.S. influence was secure in Kirghizia: "It is no secret that over the past 10 years, the United States has consistently tried to strengthen its presence in the post-Soviet Central Asian republics. Already, it has achieved a lot. The growing American influence in Kyrgyzstan is proven by the fact that U.S. dollars are used here alongside the national currency, the som, with most commercial deals made in dollars."

"The United States has greatly influenced not only Kyrgyzstan's economy but also the law enforcement agencies and the army. Since 1995, Kyrgyzstan's Defense Ministry has sent hundreds of servicemen to the United States for military training. There is perhaps not one colonel or general in the Kyrgyz army who has not been abroad via the NATO Partnership for Peace program.

"Over the past decade, U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, teachers, and business people have also been spread-

(continued on page 10)

By BARRY WEISLEDER

At the risk of being found in contempt of Parliament, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative minority government still refuses to release documents pertaining to the torture of detainees handed over by Canadian forces to Afghan authorities. If House of Commons Speaker Peter Milliken backs the parliamentary order, the Justice Department may take the issue to the Supreme Court, which will buy the Tories some time.

But time doesn't appear to be on their side. Despite assiduous, side-door efforts to re-open the debate and extend the 2011 date for removal of troops from the war of occupation, a series of scandals have conspired against Harper and company.

First, there are persistently surfacing torture allegations. Ahmadshah Malgari, 37, an Ottawa resident who volunteered to work for Canadian military intelligence in Afghanistan, made three claims before a Commons committee in mid-April:

1) In August 2007 a Canadian soldier illegally shot an unarmed Afghan in the head and, to cover this crime, troops panicked and arrested innocent people. (Chief of defense staff General Walter Natynczyk denied this.)

2) Military intelligence officers deliberately handed over "uncooperative" prisoners to Afghanistan's notorious National Directorate of Security, knowing they were likely to be tortured.

3) Canadian troops arrested far too many Afghans with no links to the insurgency. Malgarai interviewed such people, including a 90-year-old man who could barely walk. There has been no official denial of the

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

War crimes & scandals aplenty

latter two allegations.

Then there was the revelation that, among NATO allies, the Canadian army led the pack with 163 prisoner transfers, followed by Britain with 93, the Netherlands 10, and Denmark one. The U.S. has its own system for dealing with captives.

To deflect mild Western criticism of Afghan puppet-government corruption and brutality, Afghan President Hamid Karzai threatened to join the Taliban. His outburst cast a deeper pall over the imperialists' promise to bring democracy and civilization to the region as they ready for the anticipated summer offensive of national resistance fighters.

Ironically, the scandal over alleged influence peddling by ex-Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer, and the dubious behaviour of his wife, ex-Tory Cabinet member

Helena Guergis, might have seemed like a welcome distraction from the unpopular war in Asia and from the persisting woes of the so-called Great Recession. Except that it isn't. It highlights the government's toxic secrecy, duplicity, and arrogance, and it makes extension of the war a more problematic sell-job.

Not to be lost in the fog of scandal-wracked Ottawa are maneuvers to keep Canadian police and other security personnel in Afghanistan, backing the corrupt regime of drug lords, past the 2011 troop pull-out time—or to transfer troops to Congo or Haiti or elsewhere to secure corporate resource extraction interests. Vigilance by activists, alongside demands for full disclosure by Ottawa, are key at this turning point.

If only the antiwar movement would get back into the streets to seal the deal for peace now. ■

Harper sets a corporate table for Summits

The big issues on the agenda for the G8 and G20 Summits in Huntsville and Toronto in June include climate change, nuclear weapons, Afghanistan, and the state of the world economy. Poverty, hunger, and disease as a function of capitalist economic crisis and growing inequality will likely take a distant back seat to government deficit and debt reduction.

Just to make sure that the rich are not made to pay, even in the slightest way, for the crisis their system caused and their actions aggravated, the Conservative federal government in Ottawa is campaigning aggressively to block a proposal for a speculation tax and an excess-profits tax on financial institutions.

This is an old idea, first posited by the English economist John Maynard Keynes in 1936, and by American economist James Tobin in 1972. It is backed today by British P.M. Gordon Brown and the International Monetary Fund; even U.S. President Barack Obama is edging towards such a tax to pay for bank bailouts. These facts are clues that the FAT (Financial Activities Tax) will not go nearly far enough—and moreover, that it is designed to help stabilize the system of the fat cats rather than help

working people.

But it goes way too far for the likes of Canada's Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "No Canadian taxpayer money has to be put into our system," Flaherty told The Canadian Press on April 20. While Canadian banks were not hit as hard by the global meltdown in 2008, the country didn't escape unscathed. Quebec's giant Caisse de depot et placement, which manages the province's pension fund plan, was burned by its investments in risky securities, as were private holders of asset-backed commercial paper. The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan lost \$19.5 billion since the end of 2007.

And now deficits resulting from shrinking revenues, in large part caused by cuts to corporate taxes, are being cited by governments as a reason to slash services and jobs, freeze workers' wages, and further reduce corporation taxes. So, wouldn't a Tobin Tax go well now?

Socialists are not opposed. But we insist that to eradicate (not just alleviate) poverty, hunger, and disease, and to convert industry and homes to green energy technologies (to save our global habitat), it will be necessary to expropriate the banks and big business. Democratically elected councils of workers and consumers will know how to invest the fabulous wealth of such institutions in the interest of the majority, once and for all.

In the meantime, let's get ready to hit the streets and alternative venues for the Peoples' Summit and protest actions in Toronto during the week leading up to June 28.

— BARRY WEISLEDER

Children a G-8 'priority'?

While child and maternal health is supposed to be a top priority at the G8 Summit in June, host Prime Minister Stephen Harper will have a tough time reconciling his federal budget with his public relations spin.

Ottawa's budget freeze on foreign development aid after this year is in tune with Tory and business priorities to reduce the deficit, notwithstanding uninterrupted annual increases for the military.

Meanwhile, the tragic deaths of millions of children globally, from easily preventable diseases, proceeds at a staggering pace. Some 8.8 million children still die annually before they reach the age of five, according to World Vision Canada. That is 24,000 children per day. Seventeen per minute.

At the same time, 500,000 mothers die annually in

childbirth or from other pregnancy-related causes.

A \$10 bed net can protect a child from malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Access to nutritious foods can be provided at little cost. Diarrhea kills 1.5 million children annually. It is easily treated, as is malaria. Child blindness, too common in the underdeveloped world, can be prevented by just two vitamin A pills per year, at a cost of four cents.

Today the world spends \$49 billion (U.S.) on pet food every year. If half of that amount were added to current spending on maternal and child health, the child death rate could be cut nearly in half.

If the big business politicians who run the G8 and G20 were forced to tax the rich and abolish military spending, humanity would have taken a big step toward solving our major problems.

— B.W.

TD moves into Florida

While most of us have been trying to cope with the ongoing 'Great Recession', Canadian bankers have been busy with their own expansion plans. Showing that Canada's banks weathered the crash better than their American counterparts, TD Bank (formerly the Toronto-Dominion) bought three insolvent Florida banks to establish its retail presence in the U.S. southeast.

TD's purchase of Riverside National Bank of North Florida, First Federal Bank of North Florida, and AmericanFirst Bank is a low-risk venture since the U.S. Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. agreed to share 50 per cent of the loan losses up to specific thresholds at each bank, beyond which the FDIC would handle 80 per cent.

TD is getting 69 new branches in Florida, bringing its total there to 103. It already has a major presence in New England and New York, and owns 40 per cent of TD

Ameritrade, a discount brokerage based in the U.S. Midwest.

One elite's loss is another's gain. That's why we call it inter-imperialist rivalry, sometimes the stuff of wars. But this one is still well under control as high-finance operators make the average Jill and Jack pay the price in lost homes, jobs, and pensions.

Meanwhile, as bank profits in Canada soar, and corporate taxes decline, consumer debt is rising fast. In Canada, disposable income growth has been going down, and in the year ended last February, household debt went up more than three times faster than income growth. Canadians have seen their liabilities rising twice as fast as their assets over the past two years—despite the rebound in stock valuations and the recent surge in home prices.

"Canadian consumer fundamentals are weaker than they have been in almost 15 years," reported CIBC economist Benjamin Tal on April 1. When will the next bubble burst, and who will pay the price? — B.W.

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

Friday, May 21:

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

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

Saturday, May 22:

10 a.m. Marx versus Malthus

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

4 p.m. Women's Liberation Today

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

Sunday, May 23:

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

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

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

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Temple Hospital strikers defeat gag rule, union-busting demands

By JOHN LESLIE

PHILADELPHIA—On April 26, nurses and medical technicians at Temple University Hospital approved a new contract to end their militant 28-day strike. The strikers succeeded in defeating the most objectionable provisions sought by Temple—a “gag rule,” an open shop, staffing changes, and staggered expirations for the union contracts of the two bargaining units.

The provisions of the settlement include a 2% wage increase in July, followed by a 2.5% increase in 2011, and 3% in 2012. Workers will also receive tuition reimbursement for up to six credits for dependents. Cost of health care will increase; with members choosing among three plans, paying either 10%, 20% or 25% of the premium. The differential for working weekends will remain at \$5 per hour. Shift differential for night work will be 13% of base rate. The pension contribution by Temple will remain at 8.5% of salary.

On March 31, nurses and technicians at Temple University Hospital went on strike after working without a contract for six months. The 1500 Registered Nurses and professional staff, approximately 1000 of them RNs, are represented by the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP).

In preparation for the strike, the union mobilized members and community supporters, taking the fight to various places around the city. After the strike began, workers and supporters protested outside of a City Council meeting, outside the luxury condo of Temple President Ann Weaver Hart, and outside a dinner for Temple University bigwigs.

On the Temple University campus, student supporters, organized by the Student Labor Action Project (SLAP), held a “die-in” on a main walkway. Wearing t-shirts reading “my nurse was a scab,” the students “died” for several minutes during a class change while supporters leafleted passersby. Later, the students marched to the administration building to condemn the administration for its complicity in strike breaking.

Strikers received aid and statements of solidarity from the National Nurses Organizing Committee, the California Nurses Association, and from local unions. A statement of support from filmmaker Michael Moore was



John Leslie / Socialist Action

read to picketers outside the hospital, which stated: “It is an embarrassment that an otherwise fine institution of higher learning would treat its own nurses and other health professionals with such contempt. Exactly what lesson is Temple teaching to its students when they attack the nurses at their own hospital? That we should beat up on the very people who have dedicated their lives to helping us when we get sick?”

Temple used the services of a union-busting outfit, Healthsource Global Staffing Inc., to hire scabs, offering them up to \$10,000 a week. Reportedly, replacements were working 12-20 hour days and up to several days a week.

The dangers of using overworked and unqualified scab labor was illustrated on April 18 when a critical-care patient walked out of the hospital twice to ask picketers for assistance. This patient had to unhook herself from monitors and walk past scab nurses to get to the picket line. There were also reports, by family members of patients, of unsanitary and unsafe practices by replacement nurses; such as incorrect medicine dosages and touching patients without gloves.

The issues in this strike were more than just wages. Temple management had demanded an end to tuition reimbursement for the children of nurses and techni-

cians. Traditionally, the children of Temple hospital have gone to Temple University for free or received \$7000 a year to attend another institution. On March 9 2009, Temple unilaterally ended the tuition reimbursement program. In January 2010, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board ruled that Temple had acted in bad faith and ordered the payment of all money owed to employees.

Temple also demanded that the agency shop fee paid by non-members be discontinued, effectively making the hospital an open shop. This proposal was a knife aimed right at the heart of the union. Another contentious issue was a proposed “gag rule” that would forbid union members or staff from publicly criticizing Temple. This would have made union advocacy for patient safety illegal under the contract.

Management also insisted on its right to dictate staffing levels and assignments at will, sometimes with nurses being switched from patient to patient in mid-shift. PASNAP repeatedly pointed out that the hospital is understaffed and that patient safety is their number one concern.

The staffing situation at Temple Main was exacerbated when the Temple system closed the Northeastern Hospital, laying off hundreds and leaving a vulnerable community without an Emergency Room. After the closing of Northeastern, the number of patients coming to Temple Main increased by more than 10% without any additional staff being added to the payrolls there.

PASNAP’s motivated and mobilized membership, its effective community relations, and its disciplined and high spirited picket lines contrasted with the lack of preparation for the SEPTA transit strike that took place in Philadelphia last winter. The Transport Workers Union gave practically no advance warning or explanation to workers or the public. The result was a lack of public support for the strike, especially since thousands of working-class commuters were stranded as buses and subways stopped service on the first day of the strike.

Temple strikers won a decisive victory over the hospital. Such a victory will be a shot in the arm for union organizing in health care generally and for the Philadelphia labor movement. Speaking at an April 24 union rally, Thomas Paine Cronin, former president of AFSCME DC 47, said: “This is not just your struggle, this is our struggle. Anybody who cares about decent health care, anybody who cares about education, free speech, decent work rules, and the right to join a union—this is their struggle.”

It is possible to win victories in unfavorable political and economic conditions. PASNAP based its strategy on a member-driven approach. They have shown what can be done when the business-union model is rejected. This is a victory that should inspire us all. ■



Vyacheslav Oseledko / AFP / Getty Images

(Left) Kirghiz opposition activist checks the body of a man killed during April 7 anti-government protest.

is not a rounded assessment. Russia provides 95 percent of the country’s oil, and would certainly not be averse to using it as a means of pressure. It did so in Ukraine to bring down a regime it considered anti-Russian. And as poor as Russia is, because of its oil income it has the means to suborn a country as small as Kyrgyzstan.

The real rival of the United States in the region, *The Times of Central Asia* argued, was China, because China has financial resources and “an ideology diametrically opposite” to the U.S. That was naive. The Chinese rulers may claim to be socialist but they have surrendered to the ideology of capitalism.

On the other hand, Central Asia is China’s natural hinterland, and it is reasonable to expect that, lacking the obstacle posed by the power of the old Soviet Union, it will eventually prevail there.

The Times of Central Asia opined that since the U.S. was now the world’s only superpower, it intended to dominate every region of the world. The U.S. capitalists are certainly greedy and ambitious, as their adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan prove, but nothing demonstrates the limits of their power as obviously as the events in Central Asia and Afghanistan, to say nothing of their failure to achieve any major benefits for themselves from the enormous costs of the Iraq operation.

Moreover, the U.S. capitalists had the bad luck that exactly when the government they had supported morally and materially was overthrown by a mass uprising, scandals emerged about corruption in the supply of the Manas base. Again, two huge American corporations gained the contracts without competition, apparently because of political influence.

The weekly *Nation*, which has been the leader in expos-

ing the corruption of the U.S. privatized wars, reported in an on-line article dated April 21: “Similarly, in nearby Kyrgyzstan, a staging ground for the Afghan war, Mina has another sole source contract, awarded without any announcement, to provide fuel to a huge and controversial base. The contract has been at the center of corruption and kickback allegations, and the companies have been accused of enriching the families of two successive heads of state, both of whom presided over kleptocratic and repressive regimes—an arrangement that fostered great resentment in the country.”

Both the revolution of 2005 and the latest one have exposed a vast network of corruption fueled by the money of shady but giant U.S. corporations. The overthrow of Akaev did not end this corruption, and there is no reason to think that its successor will either.

The only way the Kirghiz people can free themselves from robbers and brutes is to free themselves from the capitalist system as a whole. They have shown twice that they have the capacity to overthrow kleptocratic and tyrannical regimes, not necessarily any more kleptocratic and tyrannical than those of the other successor states of the old bureaucratized Soviet Union, including Russia—or, for that matter, China.

The April 7 Kirghiz revolution is undoubtedly an early bolt of lightning in a storm gathering over the entire former Sino-Soviet bloc, where the socialist aspirations of the peoples were betrayed by corrupt bureaucracies. And the Cuban example shows that when the ruling elites are discredited and the masses are frustrated and angry, a revolutionary leadership may emerge suddenly and carry through a socialist revolution. The historical need for socialist revolution cannot be forever denied, and it can break through unexpectedly. Given the dry tinder that exists throughout the former Stalinist states, a socialist revolution in Kirghizia could set some giant blazes and change the history of the world. ■

... Kirghizia

(continued from page 8)

ing the American influence in Kyrgyzstan.”

Of course, this means, although *The Times of Central Asia* did not point it out, that the U.S. was hand in glove with the overthrown regime and undoubtedly also has connections with the opposition elites. Reportedly, the presence of the Manas base is unpopular with the Kirghiz people but the new government has declared that it does not intend to consider the status of the base in the near future. A number of English-language journals have said that the U.S. made a mistake by backing Bakiyev, and the Russians profited by their error. But the coverage of the Kirghiz revolution in the Russian press does not indicate that the Russian authorities are very happy with it. The Putin regime is by no means allergic to corrupt and dictatorial regimes.

The Times of Central Asia argued that Russia does not have the financial means to woo Kirghizia. But that

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FILMS

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

WARNING TO CONSUMERS: Do not charge any of the products displayed in this film to your credit card.

"The Joneses," German writer/director Derrick Brote's first film, could be considered a social critique on America's endemic, debt-ridden, buying lust. It is a morality tale, a fable: be careful what you want, it could kill you, or hurt you, your family, friends and neighbors.

The film was made in 2008 during the U.S. recession that began in December 2007 and exacerbated by home-buying losses starting in 2006. In the first 10 months of 2008, employers trimmed payrolls by 1.2 million jobs. Regardless, the producers went ahead with "The Joneses." It has been speculated that the film's release date may have been delayed until the economy improved.

This beautifully made film is all about marketing—everything from alcohol-infused juice boxes to high-end Audi sports cars—instigated by a charismatic couple, Kate and Steve Jones, played by Demi Moore and David Duchovny and their perfect, comely teenage children, Jenn (Amber Heard) and Mick (Ben Hollingsworth). The Joneses move into a multi-storied, wood and stone mansion in an upscale suburb of Spokane, Wash. Acres of sloping lawns and a winding, tree-lined street separate them from their nearest neighbors—Larry (a perfectly cast Cary Cole in his best role) and Summer (a tousle-haired, blonde Glenna Headly).

To welcome their new neighbors, Larry and Summer bring them a gift—Summer's beauty products, which she sells at house parties (a hint of their financial status). They "ooooo" and "ahhh" over everything from the Joneses' furniture to Steve's brand of beer as the Joneses rave on, like salespeople. Which is what they are—they and their perfect kids. They work for a marketing company.

You begin to catch on when Kate sends Steve off to sleep in a separate bedroom, and when Jenn sneaks into his bed. Kate bursts in and tosses her out; Amber sneers, "G'night 'Dad'."

Kate is Steve's boss; he's a new hire, an ex-golf pro and car salesman. But he is too much into Kate and the good life; his sales suffer. Kate reads him the riot act, so Steve steps up and out-sells her. He touts the latest golf equipment to his pals, flat-panel TVs, the latest electronic devices, etc. The 'teens are no slouches

DROWNING IN DEBT



(Left) Amber Heard plays a shill for a marketing company in "The Joneses."

Chris Williams) into turning over his client list. The Joneses throw a lavish party where she and Steve extol the virtues of stuff discretely integrated into their home, to the envy of their guests, who include Billy and his clients. When the couple's fake children get into trouble, causing a potential scandal and compromising Kate, KC meets Steve secretly in her chauffeur-driven stretch limo and advises him to dump Kate and start with a new "family," and head up ICON, the outfit over which all her marketers drool at the chance to crack.

But he's fallen in love with Kate; and grows a conscience. Tragedy befalls sad-sack Larry and fragile Summer, a result of over-extended credit and lapsed mortgage payments, the result of Larry's drive to "keep up with the Joneses."

The film starts out as a kick-in-the-gut to out-of-control consumerism, a revelation on how we are manipulated daily by hundreds of ads, junk mail, television, product placement (intentionally showing products in television programs or movies so they are linked with characters), and "word of mouth" marketing. Clever (read underhanded and sneaky) marketing is the means to get people to buy, using shills who act as unpaid (in the Joneses' case, paid) "brand agents" to push products on the naive.

In 2008 U.S. businesses spent \$1.5 billion on marketing, and the figure has grown to \$1.9 billion this year. Look at those "good people" at the bank who sold balloon mortgages to the poor in the mid-2000s. People buy tons of stuff they don't need (or even want) on credit.

This year, in April, jobless applications were at 456,000. Wholesale prices rose more than expected in March, and food prices surged the most in 26 years. By the end of 2010, economists predict 2.4 million borrowers could lose their homes, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. That would be an increase from 2.1 million foreclosures and short sales in 2009.

"Experts" contend in the mass media that the economy is improving. But as Larry and Summer find out, eventually somebody has to pay up, or (literally in Larry's case) drown in debt—a lesson most Americans learned in late 2008. "The Joneses," which could have been a Michael Moore-type of unveiling, is weakened by a love-story ending. ■

either. Mick shills hi-end video games and monitors to his friends; Jenn—clothes, shoes, and cosmetics. Kate shows off her lush, velvet sweats to her female neighbors, but jogs alone. Their friendships are superficial.

The head of the corporation, KC, played with intense business mien by former super-model Lauren Hutton, ensure that the Joneses stock up on inventory. Her mentor is probably the British economist Paul Elkins, who wrote of consumerism: "The possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principle aspiration and the surest personal route to personal happiness, social status, and national success." The secret is in knowing who these people are: Just about everyone.

Kate lures a gay salon proprietor, Billy (a believable

... Afghanistan occupation

Mohammed Obaid Ormur / AP



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was then sent to military units and intelligence officials for possible lethal action in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the officials said.

"While it has been widely reported that the C.I.A. and the military are attacking operatives of Al Qaeda and others through unmanned, remote-controlled drone strikes, some American officials say they became troubled that Mr. Furlong seemed to be running an off-the-books spy operation. The officials say they are not sure who condoned and supervised his work."

"Off the books" is the name of the game for the murder-for-profit corporations.

And "off the books" obviously means uncontrolled. But the snake that the U.S. authorities released is striking them in the foot: "Officials say Mr. Furlong's operation seems to have been shut down, and he is now is the subject of a criminal investigation by the Defense Department for a number of possible offenses, including contract fraud."

The article continued: "Even in a region of the world known for intrigue, Mr. Furlong's story stands out. At times, his operation featured a mysterious American company run by retired Special Operations officers and an iconic C.I.A. figure who had a role in some of the agency's most famous episodes, including the

(Photo) Afghan forces secure area in Logar Province after hundreds of people set fire to trucks to protest civilian deaths due to NATO raids, April 25.

Iran-Contra affair.

"The allegations that he ran this network come as the American intelligence community confronts other instances in which private contractors may have been improperly used on delicate and questionable operations, including secret raids in Iraq and an assassinations program that was halted before it got off the ground."

The article quoted an unnamed American official to the effect that having free lancers running around war fronts trying to play James Bond was a bad idea. Now the U.S. authorities are obviously having their doubts about the mercenaries. The doubts are widening.

The *New York Times* published an article April 13 that asked the questions of how far the U.S. policy of assassinating terrorists could go and whether it was not only counterproductive but dangerous. The article was apparently prompted to some extent by the news that the U.S. had ordered the assassination of a U.S. citizen implicated with Islamists:

"But in this case the price we pay goes far beyond failure. If Harold Koh—the state department lawyer assigned the job of justifying Obama's strategy—carries

the day, America will be telling the world that it's O.K. to lob missiles into countries that haven't attacked you, as long as you think a terrorist may live there. Do we really want to send that message to, for example, Russia and China, both of which have terrorism problems? Or India or Pakistan?"

"And are we sure we want to say that, actually, due process of law isn't really guaranteed all American citizens so long as there's a war on terrorism—which, remember, is a war that may continue for eternity?"

Mainstream liberal publications like the *Huffington Post* have begun to refer to the Afghan war as "Obama's war." It is clearly casting a dark shadow over his administration. Of course, he has simply taken over the task of administering U.S. imperialism. But in the age of U.S. economic decline and political and social retrogression, these policies are becoming more and more costly and more and more threatening to the rulers of the system themselves. They are caught in their own coils.

Unfortunately, the American people are caught up with them and will pay the ultimate price. To get out of these traps, Americans have to mobilize directly in the streets to force the government and its gangster minions to withdraw immediately and completely from their entanglement in Afghanistan. ■

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Horizon darkens for U.S. occupation of Afghanistan

by GERRY FOLEY

The political justifications for the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan are unraveling rapidly. And its prospects are fading apace. The most eloquent demonstration of the bankruptcy of the occupation was the attack on a NATO convoy by an angry crowd reported in the April 26 issue of *The New York Times*. This was not an operation by the Taliban but an outburst of rage against the occupiers by local people.

"Twelve trucks, most of them carrying fuel to NATO base in eastern Afghanistan, were burned by an angry crowd early Sunday less than 30 miles from Kabul, according to local officials and NATO reports. The attack was thought to be in retribution for two raids by a joint Afghan-American force over the weekend, Afghan officials said."

The article went on to point out that the area of the assault had been the target of apparently successful NATO military operations against the Taliban. But the political backlash had left the occupation more embattled than before: "While insurgent activity had calmed there after a concerted effort by American troops and Afghan forces last year, it seems that the remaining insurgents are tapping into resentment among local people about continuing raids by American and Afghan troops, local officials said. These raids occasionally wound or kill civilians as well as insurgents."

This incident was another episode in the basic story of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, military success followed by political defeat. The story line was well established by *Newsweek's* "Oral History of the Taliban," which showed that after the Taliban was initially routed by U.S. firepower, it was rebuilt and resumed the offensive on the basis of popular anger against the occupiers and the slaughter of innocent people in ruthless and often misdirected air strikes and shootings. "People are fed up with these night raids and willful operations," said Mohammed Sharif, a teacher in Pul-i-Alam, the provincial capital, which is near the villages raided by the joint forces.

"They are raiding houses during the night, killing innocent people," he said. "Sometimes they kill opposition people as well, but usually they are harming ordinary and innocent people." Belatedly, the U.S. command has proclaimed its intentions to limit civilian casualties. But the atrocities have not stopped.

The New York Times reported April 12: "American troops raked a large passenger bus with gunfire near the southern city of Kandahar on Monday morning, killing as many as five civilians and wounding 18, Afghan authorities said." A survivor said that there was a U.S. military convoy in front of the bus and the bus was pulling over to let a convoy behind pass when U.S. soldiers opened fire. Of the 18 wounded some were in critical condition.

This atrocity also sparked a popular protest: "Hundreds of demonstrators gathered around a bus station on the western outskirts of Kandahar, shouting anti-American chants and blocking the road for an hour, according to people in the area."

On April 21, AP reported: "NATO backed away from its claim Wednesday that two 'known insurgents' were among four people killed this week when a military convoy opened fire on their vehicle in eastern Afghanistan. The shooting Monday night in Khost province sparked an outcry from the victims' family, who insisted that all four were civilians driving home from a volleyball game. The youngest boy was just 13, said Rahmatullah Mansour, whose two sons and two nephews were killed in the shooting."

It is clear now that the recent Marja offensive, which was supposed to be the trial of the "surge," failed to achieve its objective. The NATO forces pushed back the Taliban fighters all right. But they did not destroy the Taliban's effective control of the area.

The New York Times reported April 3: "The Marines took Marja, but the Taliban remain there. The approach helped turn the tide of insurgency in Iraq. But in Marja, where the Taliban seem to know everything—and most of the time it is impossible to even tell who they are—they have already found ways to thwart the strategy in many places, including killing or beating some who take the Marines' money, or pocketing it themselves."

The second stage of "the surge" is supposed to be the battle for Kandahar, the historic center of the Taliban and an area many times larger than Marja. The prospects there for the occupation forces look correspondingly dimmer. An article in the April 19 *Huffington Post* reported: "The Taliban commander [in Kandahar], who uses the pseudonym Mubeen, told the Associated Press that if military pressure on the insurgents be-



(Above) April 29 protest in eastern Afghanistan following a military raid that killed an Afghan politician's family member.

As liberal publications begin to refer to the Afghan War as 'Obama's War,' it is clearly casting a shadow over his administration.

comes too great 'we will just leave and come back after the foreign forces leave.'

"Despite nightly raids by NATO and Afghan troops, Mubeen said his movements have not been restricted. He was interviewed last week in the center of Kandahar, seated with his legs crossed on a cushion in a room. His only concession to security was to lock the door. He made no attempt to hide his face and said he felt comfortable because of widespread support among Kandahar's 500,000 residents, who like the Taliban are mostly Pashtuns, Afghanistan's biggest ethnic community.

"Because of the American attitude to the people, they are sympathetic to us,' Mubeen said. "Every day we are getting more support. We are not strangers. We are not foreigners. We are from the people."

The Pentagon itself is now openly expressing pessimism. On April 28, the McClatchy news service reported: "The Pentagon Wednesday issued a downbeat assessment of the situation in Afghanistan, saying that only one in four Afghans in strategically important areas currently back President Hamid Karzai's government even as the Taliban expand their insurgency and install shadow local governments."

The Pentagon's assessment of Karzai's support casts a light on his recent threat to join the Taliban. He knows he has little support in the country and is trying to make a deal with the Taliban before it is too late. Undoubtedly, he remembers the fate of the head of the former Soviet-backed government who was taken from an embassy and executed by the victorious Islamic resistance.

Karzai also claimed that the U.S. embassy was trying to oust him. It is probably true that the U.S. authorities would like to find a better replacement. The Afghan ruler is substantially discredited, and that weakens their whole vast operation to establish an authoritative government of their liking in the country. During the Vietnam war, the U.S. solved a similar problem by assassinating a ruler they considered incompetent.

On the other hand, the mercenary corporations the U.S. has been relying on to secure its occupation and the establishment of an effective client government are showing themselves to be no more competent and no less corrupt than Karzai. The DynCorp corporation has pocketed \$6 billion for six years of training the Afghan National Police and they have not even been capable of teaching them to shoot straight, much less steer clear of corruption.

In the 30 years of reaction since Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, the ruling neoliberals have

touted privatization as the magic formula for eliminating government inefficiency. They carried it to the point of largely privatizing the U.S. armed services. Thus, there are now far more private contractors operating in Afghanistan than there are members of the official U.S. armed forces. Now the mercenary outfits are being hit with a chain of scandals, and even the head of the U.S. command in Afghanistan, General McChrystal, has begun questioning their role.

AP reported April 16: "Gen. Stanley McChrystal, during a four-day visit to France, said the coalition in Afghanistan has become too dependent on private contractors in the effort to stabilize the country. 'I think we've gone too far,' McChrystal said at France's IHEDN military institute. 'I actually think we would be better to reduce the number of contractors involved...'

"McChrystal said the use of contractors was founded upon 'good intentions,' such as to limit military commitments or to save money for governments. 'I think it doesn't save money,' he said. 'We have created in ourselves a dependency on contractors that I think is greater than it ought to be.'"

Of course, it is unlikely that saving money is a good reason for using the contractors because they make very high salaries, many times the pay of soldiers. In fact, that is one reason the GIs hate them. The advantage of using mercenaries in reality is official deniability. Contractors killed are not counted among the casualties of war. But contractor deaths have been increasing rapidly in Afghanistan as their numbers have swelled.

ProPublica reported April 15: "Of the 289 civilians killed since the war began more than eight years ago, 100 have died in just the last six months. That's a reflection of both growing violence and the importance of the civilians flooding into the country along with troops in response to President Obama's decision to boost the American presence in Afghanistan."

Contractor deaths will undoubtedly increase more because the local people hate them more than the soldiers because of their uncontrolled cowboy behavior. Mercenaries are being used in particular in Pakistan as a way of getting around the Pakistani government's reluctance to allow U.S. military forces in the country. But their presence is becoming increasingly notorious.

The New York Times reported March 14: "Under the cover of a benign government information-gathering program, a Defense Department official set up a network of private contractors in Afghanistan and Pakistan to help track and kill suspected militants, according to military officials and businessmen in Afghanistan and the United States."

The article continued: "The official, Michael D. Furlong, hired contractors from private security companies that employed former C.I.A. and Special Forces operatives. The contractors, in turn, gathered intelligence on the whereabouts of suspected militants and the location of insurgent camps, and the information

(continued on page 11)

