

U.S. Congress: smaller paychecks for workers



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By USMAN KHAN YUSUFZAI

New Year's Day has come and gone; the impending "fiscal cliff" disaster that so occupied the fears of politicians and businessmen throughout the country has, at the 11th hour, been averted by heroic deal-making by Republican and Democratic legislators. They made some "tough decisions" in the face of the (manufactured) crisis that was facing the country. And they passed a bill that managed to both not solve any of the debt problems that led to the mess in the first place (in fact, the deal will increase the budget deficit) and to set the stage for further assaults on social programs and working people in general in the very near future.

The deal, known as the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, is obviously focused mostly on the tax revenue side of the budget equation. It has a number of provisions, of which the most important are:

Permanency of the Bush Tax Cuts: The income tax cuts signed into law by President Bush in 2001 were one of the three major factors (the other two being

the recession and the expansion of health-care costs) leading to the explosion of U.S. public debt that caused this entire mess in the first place. The bill made these tax cuts permanent for everyone except those earning over \$400,000 a year, or only about 1% of taxpayers.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that, as a result, the budget deficit will increase by \$4 trillion over the next 10 years, relative to the case where all of the Bush tax cuts had expired this year, as originally scheduled. That shortfall means—you guessed it—another fight down the line over which social programs should be cut (and those cuts will be deep). The estate tax was also raised to its Clinton-era levels.

The Expiration of the Payroll Tax Cut: A payroll-tax holiday was enacted in 2010 as part of a fiscal stimulus program to assist recovery from the recession, dropping the rate to 4.2% from 6.2%. That means that anybody earning a paycheck will, despite the rhetoric about "not raising taxes on middle-class families," see an increase of an average of a thousand dollars on their tax bill this year. And, since the pay-

roll tax is a flat tax capped at \$106,800, the increase disproportionately affects those workers earning the least; someone earning \$500,000,000 a year pays the same amount of payroll tax, \$2,274, as someone earning \$150,000. And, of course, a two percent tax increase will hurt a family living on \$30,000 a year a lot more than one earning \$150,000.

Taken along with the Bush tax cuts being made permanent, we can begin to see an outline of the beneficiaries of tax policy in the United States. What we have is a major tax increase on all working people, while those earning higher incomes see no increase in their income tax, and a slight increase in payroll tax (which does not rise proportionally to income because of the cap).

There is, of course, a minor bone thrown in, in the form of a marginal tax increase on small numbers of the very rich, but this does nothing to impact the debt or improve the lives of working people. And although the payroll tax funds Social Security, there is

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Walmart actions spread in U.S. & Canada

By EVAN ENGERING

Following the success of the numerous strikes and job actions for American Walmart workers, the struggle to win respect for non-unionized workers is spreading across the continent. A week after the Black Friday (Nov. 23) walkout, hundreds of workers from fast-food restaurants across New York City staged a cross-workplace strike for better wages.

While these strikes and job actions were years in the making for labour organizers, new workers' associations are now being forged in Canada. The United For Respect campaign began in November, aiming to give Canadian employees of retail chains such as Sobeys, Price Choppers, and IGA a voice in their workplace. It started in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

I went to Winnipeg to join other young activists from across Canada to help launch the project. We took part in the initial work of talking to employees, and giving them information about how to organize themselves. We went to stores, gathered contact information, and talked to the workers there about the problems they face. We knocked on doors, trying to reach out to as many workers as possible.

We even took time out of our busy schedules to attend a rally at the Manitoba Legislature against the Israeli assault on Gaza, which was happening then. Despite resistance from managers, we were successful in holding the first general meeting for the Organization United for Respect (OUR) project, where we reached out to workers and community allies.

With the first members signed-up, the task now is to build strength in numbers in these work places, while



Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

continuing to dialog with new members, until a critical mass is attained. At this point, the workers will have the knowledge and experience to develop demands against the corporate bosses, and carry out job actions.

These new workers' associations show a new direction for the labour movement. For the first time in nearly a century, we are seeing masses of non-unionized workers walking off the job and striking for better conditions. United Food and Commercial Workers, the force behind the original OUR organizing drive, realized that previously it had hit a brick wall.

Faced with harsh anti-union tactics from Walmart and other employers, the union leadership decided that instead of giving up and accepting the anti-worker encroachment, it was time to think outside of the box.

The result is a new way forward, based on learned tactics from the past. The precedent now being set opens the door for a wider variety of methods to use. Most importantly, it enables the participation of all workers, no matter how repressive their employers are towards organization.

What we are witnessing could be the start of a new chapter in labour history. Now that the established law and courts-based method of worker organization is no longer seen as the only way to do things, there can be a return to the grassroots, militant spirit that gave birth to the workers' movement.

If more unions and labour activists seize upon this and apply these methods, we could begin to witness a labour renaissance. Like a sapling growing out of the smouldering ashes of the destructive forces of neo-liberalism, the fight for equality, justice, and respect in the workplace may be reborn. ■

On Dec. 18, a protest took place at the Port of Newark, N.J., when a ship transporting Walmart T-shirts from Bangladesh was to dock there (see photo above). Some 60 protesters gathered at about 8 a.m. to draw attention to Walmart's procurement of T-shirts from sweatshops that violate basic safety codes in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

The horrific fire at the Tazreen apparel factory in Bangladesh, which killed 112 workers in November, was making clothes for Walmart, according to leaked documents (*The New York Times*, Dec. 5, 2012). A Walmart director of "ethical sourcing" said in minutes leaked to *The Times* that correcting glaring fire and electrical safety issues at 4500 factories was not "financially feasible for the brands to make such investments." Walmart is the biggest company in the world. — **MARTY GOODMAN**

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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By LISA LUINENBURG

The *Los Angeles Times* recently reported that President Obama is planning a major push for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in early 2013. Early reports state that the proposed bill would likely include provisions for increased border militarization, more employer sanctions (which could include increased use of programs like E-verify), and special work visas for employers seeking to hire immigrant workers (Bracero-like guest worker visas). The push to pass a new immigration reform bill could come as soon as late January or early February, with a media blitz being planned for the month of January.

A new immigration policy is desperately needed. Far from being “broken,” as many claim, the U.S. immigration system has been designed to maintain a structure of super-exploitation of undocumented workers, who maintain our economic system by working the most difficult jobs for poverty wages. These workers have basically no rights, and are kept so fearful of deportation that they seldom report workplace abuses or lost wages, or organize themselves to fight for their rights or join unions.

The increasing use of programs like E-verify, which checks the immigration status of people applying for certain jobs, has forced more immigrants to work under the table, increasing the potential for employer abuses and driving down wages for all workers. At the same time, thousands of immigrant workers have been fired from their jobs after I-9 audits have revealed their immigration status, punishing workers for breaches of the law committed by employers.

Furthermore, increasing militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border has led to more deaths when immigrants attempt to cross the border, and the widespread use of federal programs like Secure Communities (a biometric database used to check the immigration status of people booked into jail) has led to record numbers of deportations and an increase in racial-profiling abuses committed by police. In fact, Obama has once again beaten his own record, deporting 409,849 immigrants in 2012, about 10,000 more than in the previous year.

This system has caused untold suffering for the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States. It has ripped apart families and communities, and perpetuated a social and economic structure based on xenophobia and the criminalization of workers and human beings. It has denied millions of immigrants their basic rights, as well as access to services and a stable place in society. It has created a second-class status, with undocumented immigrants as “less-thans” in all senses of the words.

And yet it is clear that the Comprehensive Immigration Reform proposals that are likely to come out of the White House will not be aimed at ameliorating the terrible situation that millions of undocumented immigrants face every day, but rather at perpetuating and legalizing this system of super-exploitation.

The White House website (www.whitehouse.gov) has already laid out a framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, which includes: (1) continuing and augmenting the militarization of the borders; (2) the use of more employer sanctions and employment verification programs like E-verify; (3) increasing the use of guest worker programs that tie immigrant visas to employers; (4) and stringent requirements that undocumented immigrants to undergo criminal background checks, pay fines and taxes, and learn English before applying for citizenship.

If we look back at the two Comprehensive Immigration Reform proposals that were introduced in 2009-2010, we can get a pretty clear idea of what proposals might look like in 2013. The CIR ASAP Act, introduced by Representative Carlos Gutierrez (D-IL), although making a few small positive changes to the U.S. immigration system, contained proposals for increased border militarization and the mandated use of E-Verify by all employers, and continued the system of the criminalization and deportation of undocumented workers. It also contained provisions for agricultural guest worker visas and visas for undocumented youth contingent on military service or expensive college courses.

The “pathway to citizenship” it laid out, far from the immediate legalization being demanded by the immigrant community, was an arduous process that would have taken over six years. The REPAIR act, introduced by Senators Reid, Menendez, Leahy, Feinstein, and

What sort of ‘reform’ does Obama have in mind for immigrants?



(Left) Protester in Mexico City against Arizona anti-immigrant measures in 2010.

immigrant rights organizations and an initial high level of interest in the immigrant community, so far only about 350,000 out of a potential 1.7 million qualified youth have applied and qualified for the status.

In the end, the Deferred Action policy offered little guarantee for undocumented youth and was widely recognized as a ploy to gain Latino votes during the November presidential elections. In fact, over 70% of Latinos and Asians voted for Obama in the November elections, hoping that he would provide some way for the millions of undocumented immigrants living in the United States to become legalized. Unfortunately, with the immigrant rights movement at low ebb, many people saw few other options for change except through the electoral system.

It already seems that major unions will once again wholeheartedly back Obama’s attempt at immigration reform this time around. Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO, recently issued a statement on immigration reform, thanking “the resounding number of Latino voters ... who turned out in huge numbers for President Obama.” He emphasized that immigration reform must provide a “roadmap to citizenship for all workers,” and provide protections for day laborers and other exploited workers while upholding “immigration laws that protect, not oppress us.”

Despite the vague language, it seems likely that the AFL-CIO and other major unions will get behind whatever Comprehensive Immigration Reform proposal comes out of the White House, even though it contains provisions for border security measures, E-verify, and guest worker visas. This was the strategy they took in 2010.

Despite all the rhetoric that is already beginning to swirl around Comprehensive Immigration Reform, undocumented immigrants deserve much more than what is currently being offered to them: an arduous path to citizenship while the government continues to deport people it labels “criminals” and to lock down the borders, while giving a boon to employers.

A truly just immigration system would include an immediate legalization for all undocumented immigrants, an end to the criminalization of immigrant workers and the use of guest worker programs, an end to the militarization of all borders and all raids and deportations, an end to enforcement programs like E-Verify and Secure Communities, an end to NAFTA and other economic policies that force people to migrate, and equal rights (both human rights and worker rights) for all immigrants, regardless of their status.

Undocumented immigrants have strength in numbers, and they have shown how they can use that strength when their rights are threatened, pouring into the streets in the thousands in response to reactionary legislation like the Sensenbrenner bill and SB 1070. With Comprehensive Immigration Reform once again on the horizon, now is the time to utilize that strength once again.

Now is the time for foreign-born workers to join forces with U.S. born workers; for immigrant families to join forces with African American and white families; for Immigrant Rights organizations to join forces with faith-based and labor organizations to push for something better than what we are being offered by the powers that be. We are the 99% and we can achieve a better kind of “immigration reform,” one that serves to uphold the rights of all undocumented immigrants.

Now is the time to add our voices to the debate in preparation for the Comprehensive Immigration Reform push that will soon be coming from the White House and the likely reactionary pushback from the Republicans. If we want true legalization for all to become a reality, now is the time to start organizing in immigrant and allied communities across the country! ¡Adelante compañer@s!

Durbin, and supported by President Obama, was also introduced in 2010. The REPAIR act contained similar provisions to the Gutierrez bill, but was heavy on enforcement and would have created a biometric ID card that would be issued to everyone in the United States. The “pathway to citizenship” laid out in this bill would have taken over eight years, during which time immigrants would have to live under an uncertain temporary status. Clearly, these bills were designed to perpetuate the current immigration system, which is based on the control and exploitation of undocumented workers.

Despite the fact that the Gutierrez and REPAIR proposals were widely touted by the Democratic Party and unions such as the SEIU and the AFL-CIO in 2010, they failed to make any headway in the halls of Congress. Much of the grassroots energy in the immigrant rights movement around legalization and Comprehensive Immigration Reform was co-opted by Reform Immigration for America (RIFA), a non-profit organization controlled by the Democratic Party.

Although RIFA organized a massive demonstration in Washington, D.C. of 200,000 people in March of 2010, the rally was dominated by the voices of Democratic Party officials. There was little room left in the debate for alternative points of view, despite efforts by groups like the Grassroots Immigrant Justice Network to attempt to circulate a proposal for legalization that was based on justice and fairness, and an immediate legalization for all undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

When the new Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation is introduced in 2013, Senior White House advisors are expected to turn to the same organizations and unions that helped them get record numbers of Latino voters to reelect President Obama in November.

In June of 2012, the Obama administration announced a new Deferred Action policy that provided a two-year protection from deportation, a work visa, and a driver’s license to certain undocumented youth. However, this policy did not offer any path to citizenship for young immigrants, and required them to pass rigorous background checks, pay fines, be enrolled in school or a GED program, and provide documentation of their time in the U.S. before they could apply for the new status. Despite gaining wide approval from many

Syrian rebels gain ground; U.S. threatens intervention

By ANDREW POLLACK

In the last month, all the factors fueling the Syrian civil war have taken on added weight and consequence. These include, on the one hand, massacres by the regime, positioning of imperialist powers for post-Assad influence, and financing by Gulf states of Islamist fighters from abroad; and impressive rebel military successes and continued mass mobilizations, on the other.

All these factors have increased the complexity of the situation and the perils that are involved. And while the war's unfolding has multiplied the obstacles in the way of a positive outcome, the steadfastness of the revolution against the Bashar al-Assad regime has never been greater.

Western governments and media have dramatically stepped up their propaganda campaign trying to justify intervention, pointing, for instance, to Assad's alleged use of Scud missiles in civilian areas and plans to use chemical weapons (though without proof). In mid-December, al-Jazeera and other news networks released a report and video of people from the rebel-held area of Homs who appeared to have inhaled some sort of poisonous gas during a government attack—but here too, proof is lacking.

At the same time, and also to justify their own intervention, the U.S. and its Western allies have stepped up their claims of alleged domination of the opposition by non-Syrian Islamist forces. The opposition, in contrast, says that the number and weight of such forces remain in a minority, and that imperialist propaganda on this point is a sign that the U.S. and friends are scared by the revolution's military advances, and are positioning themselves to intervene at the last moment to put in place a pliable regime once Assad falls.

Washington and other imperialist powers have recognized the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the new bourgeois opposition coalition, as the "legitimate" government of Syria, and they hope the Council will be the leading force in a post-Assad regime.

Meanwhile, that regime, whose military might is increasingly constricted by rebel forces who have scored numerous successes against ground troops,



Virginie Nguyen Hoang / AP

(Above) Children joined protest against the Assad government on Friday, Dec. 21, in Aleppo, Syria.

has relied increasingly on attacks by warplanes and artillery—including several times killing dozens or even hundreds of civilians waiting in long lines for bread. This phase too may be ending, as rebels have begun to capture some of the regime's air bases.

But the regime is still capable of mass slaughter. In fact, as we go to press, news comes of the deadliest day in the war, with Assad killing 399 on Dec. 29, of whom 220 were executed in a field in field in Deir Balbah, according to the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs). On Dec. 16, at least 25 Palestinian refugees were killed by the Assad regime in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, further embittering Palestinians resentful at being used for public relations purposes by the supposed "Resistance" leader Assad.

Still, the tide in the war has turned far enough against

Assad that officials of his main foreign backer, Russia, have stated publicly their doubts about his ability to remain in power. On Dec. 28, the Russian government issued a formal invitation to Moscow to the head of the National Coalition (the invitation was rejected, at least for now).

Among the Islamist forces arrayed against Assad is a supposed al-Qaeda affiliate, the al-Nusra Front. Estimates vary wildly over the size and significance of this group. Nonetheless, after Washington denounced it as a terrorist group, the huge weekly Friday rallies in Syria adopted the theme of support for the Front and denunciation of U.S. meddling. (Other recent Friday themes had included opposition to UN and U.S. intervention, with organizers declaring that after months of inaction, rhetoric from Washington against Assad could only be intended to position itself as a player in post-Assad Syria.) But the LCCs, while rejecting U.S. attempts to dictate participation and policy for the revolution, have denounced bombings and other actions by the Front and other forces that have taken civilian lives.

Syrian revolutionaries continue to point to ideological diversity within the Nusra Front and other supposedly Islamist forces, noting statements by various of their leaders and members calling for a tolerant, secular regime after Assad falls. They have also noted that access to arms and training, often not available in Free Syria Army units, continues to swell the ranks of such forces regardless of the personal beliefs of its recruits.

Meanwhile, the unbelievably brave mass unarmed demonstrations continue. For example, the LCCs reported that 291 demonstrations occurred around the country on Friday, Dec. 21. Among the themes chosen were demands that the FSA "commit to its duty to protect civilians," that the revolution continue until the ouster of the regime (and against settling for a UN-brokered "transition" leaving the bulk of the regime in place), solidarity with Palestinians in the Yarmouk camp, and maintenance of unity of all communities and religions against Assad.

In other encouraging news, in early December, a Dera'a branch of the Revolutionary Left Current was founded in Syria, comprising activists from a variety of Marxist and other left traditions. The RLC's newspaper also reported on the assumption of power since the ouster of Assad forces of an elected popular council in the city of Duma. That council, in a city of over half a million, has committees constructed on both geographic and technical bases. In addition, "a free forum of the city of Duma has been set up, which meets twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays for all questions concerning the city." ■

... U.S. Congress: Less for working people

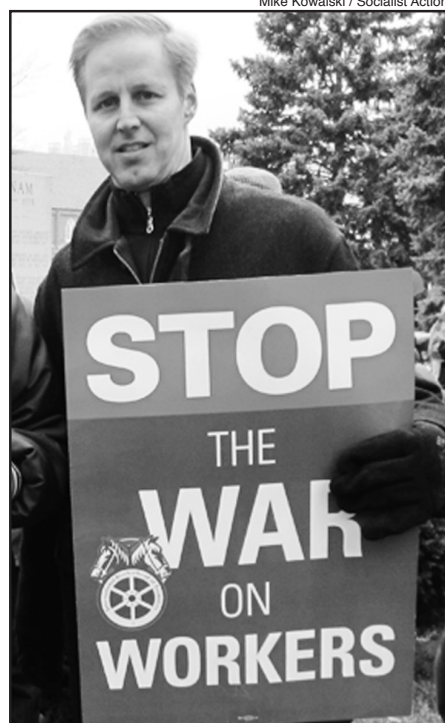
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no reason that a society as wealthy and productive as ours needs to squeeze the lives of its workers to fund their bare-bones survival in old age; in addition, with social programs being on the table for debt negotiation talks later this year, look for enterprising politicians to talk about raiding the Social Security fund to make up for the general deficit.

Annual Minimum Tax (AMT) and Tax Deduction Limits: The bill chained the AMT to inflation, effectively limiting it only to high wage earners, and created limits on tax deductions for individuals earning more than \$250,000 per year. Although these policies are designed primarily to affect the rich, the overall impact is likely to be minor.

Tax Extenders: "Tax extenders" are a bundle of various tax credits and subsidies that go entirely to corporate recipients, ranging from NASCAR to Goldman Sachs, ostensibly for research and development. But they include protection for a type of off-shore financing, tax credits for building "entertainment complexes," and other things that should be financed by the corporations themselves, like basic worker safety and maintenance, but are shunted off to the taxpayer. So, while the bill passes what amounts to a massive tax hike on the working class, it works hard to protect the Democrats' and the Republicans' primary constituency, the corporations, from, well, ... actually having to produce anything.

Extension of Unemployment Benefits, Earned Income Tax Credit, and



Mike Kowalski / Socialist Action

(Left) Dec. 10 protest in Lansing, Mich., against "right-to-work" law. Union tops, tied to the Democrats, were ineffectual in stopping the Michigan measure.

bill are the massive tax hike for working people and the fact that *the fiscal cliff has not been averted*. That is correct; the permanent changes to the Bush tax cuts, the permanent expiration of the Payroll Tax Holiday, the year-long extension of sweetheart corporate subsidies, were all done to push back the deadline for sequestration until *March 1*, by which time if a suitable solution to the debt "crisis" hasn't been found, the cuts to defense and non-defense discretionary spending *will proceed as normal*.

The bill did nothing to provide for a Fiscal Year 2013 budget (FY 2013 started in October 2012, so the government has been operating under a "continuing resolution," a stop-gap that continues the previous year's funding levels on an emergency basis). And finally, before sequestration is set to occur in March, we will hit the debt ceiling again near the end of February.

Upon the bill's passing, the usual suspects came out of the woodwork to defend it as the best compromise an embattled president could muster:

"[A]nd on the principle of the thing, you could say that Democrats held their ground on the essentials—no cuts in benefits—while Republicans have just voted for a tax increase for the first time in decades," says Paul Krugman of the deal, while Ezra Klein is busy, as usual, spinning the deal as another victory on

President Obama's inevitable road to progressive utopia. To be sure, there are some things that appear good in the bill, and some things that appear to be a reasonable compromise.

The real indicator, however, is the way that the fiscal cliff deal sets the stage for the upcoming fight on the debt ceiling. Revenues are a done deal; the changes in revenue structure are permanent, at least through the end of the year, and we will not hear much more about raising taxes (since we just did!). Despite being one of the major drivers of debt expansion, the Democrats will defend PPACA to the death, and the Republicans are certainly not going to fight for the one solution that will solve the problem of spiraling health costs,—i.e., nationalized health care—so we can expect that health care (aside from Medicare and Medicaid) will not be part of the discussion.

What's left? We have the tax increases; the only thing left to talk about is what to cut and how much—austerity, American-style. You can bet that Congress will be gunning for Social Security, Medicaid, education, and the whole sweep of social programs that help ordinary Americans; both sides have indicated a willingness to go after Social Security and Medicare, programs that were taboo to even talk about in the context of cuts (Obama's 2012 budget proposal already attempted to include a higher age eligibility for Medicare and reduced benefits).

So watch for February. It looks like, in order to solve the crisis of capitalist production, both the Republicans and Democrats are looking to throw working Americans to the wolves. ■

'Never again!' say Irish campaigners for abortion rights

By BETTY ANN McCAFFERTY

"Never again!" was the chant heard on the streets of Dublin on Dec. 1, as 20,000 people came out to denounce the Irish government's hand in the death of Savita Halappanavar and demand their right to free and legal abortions.

Savita was a 31-year-old Indian woman working in Ireland, and she is one of the most recent victims of the global war on women. Savita, 17 weeks pregnant, was hospitalized in Galway when she was found to be miscarrying. Despite this, nurses repeatedly refused her requests for an abortion, on grounds that "it's a Catholic country." Seven days after being hospitalized, on Oct. 28, Savita died tragically of septicemia.

Why would a woman need to die from such a preventable disease in this day and age? The answer lies in a long history of anti-women legislation in Ireland. In 1983, a constitutional amendment banning abortion was passed by referendum. In 1992, a 14-year-old victim of rape was stopped by an Irish court from traveling to England for an abortion and became suicidal. On appeal, the Irish Supreme Court found that the young woman should be allowed to travel to England to seek an abortion because being suicidal was a threat to her life.

Despite this ruling, however, subsequent Irish governments have failed to create the legislation that backs up this right to an abortion when it could save a mother's life. The European Union Human Rights court has demanded that the Irish government create this clear legislation after a separate, but similar case. It has been this legal ambiguity that surrounds medical abortion that medical personnel have used to explain away negligence in Savita's case.

As important as this legislation is, what environ-



(Above) Pro-abortion rights protesters march in Dublin, Nov. 17. Some 20,000 marched on Dec. 1.

ment will it create for a woman seeking an abortion? Proof that she is suicidal? A decision by the paternalistic health service that her life is in danger? This stipulation of the need for a threat to a mother's life will create a further victimization of all women at the hands of the state.

Abortion rights in the United States are being whittled away in this same way. Stipulations that make abortion more acceptable to "pro-life" politicians delegitimize a women's right to make a choic-

es about her own body. Since this tragedy, the Irish pro-choice movement has made itself heard on the streets, demanding not just better legislation, but free and legal abortions for all.

We need to show solidarity with our Irish brothers and sisters, but also build a movement that will demand the same for women here. ■

Fracking destroys our health, the climate

By CARL SACK

Several protests took place in 2012 against hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a process that extracts natural gas from shale bedrock by injecting highly toxic chemicals thousands of feet underground. The fracking boom has killed livestock and contaminated drinking water supplies in several states. The movement to ban fracking continues to gain steam as more and more people stand up and defend their homes against the behemoth oil and gas industry.

In July, 5000 marched in Washington, D.C., under the banner "Stop the Frack Attack." In September, "Shale Gas Outrage" brought more than a thousand people into the streets of Philadelphia to protest a fracking industry conference. Marchers demanded an end to shale gas drilling and water withdrawals from the Susquehanna River. Hundreds of billions of gallons of water a year are injected into fracking wells and permanently contaminated with carcinogenic and possibly even radioactive substances.

Despite the protests, politicians of both major capitalist parties unreservedly support fracking, no doubt due to millions of dollars in campaign donations and favors meted out by the gas industry. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett received more than \$1.6 million from the industry, while Barack Obama received over \$700,000 from oil and gas companies for his presidential reelection campaign (Mitt Romney got \$4.8 million, according to the website OpenSecrets.org). It's no surprise, then, that in Obama's 2012 State of the Union Address, he promised to "take every possible action to safely develop [natural gas]," including continuing taxpayer contributions to the industry through government research grants. (Incidentally, according to *Rolling Stone Magazine*, robber baron Aubrey McClendon, who owns fracking giant Chesapeake Energy, gave \$26 million to buy off the Sierra Club and voted for Obama in 2008).

Contrary to the president's claim, "safe" fracking is impossible, at least under the capitalist drive for profit at any environ-



Drillers dispute 'Promised Land'

Movie-goers viewing Mat Damon's "The Promised Land," about a struggle over gas fracking in a rural Pennsylvania community, are now forced to endure a pro-fracking commercial before settling into their seats. The Marcellus Shale Coalition, an industry group, has funded a 16-second message advertising its website, which purports to give the real "facts." The drillers' ad is shown preceding Damon's film in about 75% of Pennsylvania theaters.

mental cost. Although profitable, the industry didn't take off until after 2005, in large part because the pollution it caused was illegal. But in what's known as the "Halliburton loophole"—named for the company that invented fracking, whose former CEO was U.S. vice president at the time—the Energy Policy Act of 2005 exempted fracking from most provisions of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and Superfund (toxic site cleanup) law.

It also allowed companies to claim that the chemicals they use in fracking fluid are "trade secrets" and therefore not subject to disclosure, throwing the public's right to know what's in their water supply out the window. In some states, doctors must sign confidentiality agreements—gag orders—before they are

told what might be poisoning their patients.

The Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania was the first geologic formation to gain the focus of gas companies using new deep-well directional drilling techniques that made fracking profitable starting in the late 1990s. Consequently, the state has the most wells and the most reported problems. The most widely cited example is the town of Dimrock, where 13 drinking water wells were contaminated with methane and a number of toxic chemicals, and one well exploded. Gas companies drilling in the Marcellus racked up 2072 regulatory violations from 592 wells between 2007 and 2010, most of which resulted in a slap on the wrist, if anything.

Pennsylvania cattle farmer Terry Greenwood spoke out at a forum in March 2011. He says Dominion Gas held a grandfathered lease on his farm, and started drilling without his permission in 2008, contaminating his well water. "We're still using a water fountain, drinking out of it, and now we're paying for it because [Dominion] discontinued it. They do what they want to because they're so big, and who you going to call? No one will listen to you," Greenwood said. Ten of his calves died and others were deformed from drinking out of his farm pond, which was contaminated by the drilling.

Many residents of areas with fracking have demonstrated that they can light their tap water on fire because of methane contamination, shown dramatically in filmmaker Josh Fox's excellent documentary "Gasland." Carcinogens such as benzene, toluene, and 2-butoxyethanol have been found in groundwater around fracking sites.

As with many polluting industries, fracking is more concentrated in poorer communities. Last year, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a bill that stripped local governments' rights to regulate fracking, but then passed a moratorium that only applies to the wealthiest parts of the state. The first law, Act 13, is currently before the state's Supreme Court.

Fracking proponents claim that natural gas is better for the climate than other

fossil fuels because it burns with lower carbon dioxide emissions. President Obama and even some big environmental groups have touted it as a "transition fuel" leading to renewable energy. But methane, the primary component of natural gas, is a greenhouse gas 20 times as powerful at trapping heat as carbon dioxide.

Fracking wells leak 4-8% of the methane they extract, according to a Cornell University study. Data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration show that after leveling off for 10 years, the amount of methane in the atmosphere began rising dramatically again in 2007, about the same time fracking took off in the U.S.

One would think that the danger to the climate would cause every precaution to be taken to ensure no waste. But in North Dakota, where the Bakken Shale holds both crude oil and natural gas, many derricks flare off the gas that comes up with the oil because it's more profitable than capturing it.

People are fighting back. Because of public outrage, 200 communities in 10 states now have local bans or moratoria on fracking. New York State was forced to extend a fracking moratorium enacted in 2010, after concerns were raised that New York City's drinking water supply could be contaminated. "Fracktivists" are fighting to prevent the moratorium from being lifted in 2013. In Wisconsin, which supplies much of the sand needed as a raw ingredient in fracking, communities are struggling against a boom in sand mining and processing, which pollutes the air with cancer-causing silica dust.

Fracking is murderous to the health of workers, the public, and the earth's climate, and should be banned now! We don't need more gas; we need a massive jobs program—controlled by working people—to transform our economy from one that runs on fossil fuels and profit-driven growth to one based on safe, renewable energy and energy conservation.

The transition we seek to halt the climate catastrophe isn't replacing one dirty fossil fuel with another. It's replacing an outdated economic system, which is killing the planet, with one based on fulfilling human needs! ■

REVOLUTIONARY CUBA

The meaning of the new economic reforms



(Left) Cuba's National Assembly votes to send solidarity greetings to ailing Venezuelan President Chavez, Dec. 13.

By JEFF MACKLER

Following is an edited version of the resolution on Cuba's new economic reforms, adopted by the 2012 National Convention of Socialist Action (U.S.). The original draft was prepared by the author.

The Dec. 1, 2010, announcement by the Cuban Federation of Labor that the jobs of some 500,000 workers would be terminated in the first quarter of 2011, and an additional 500,000 in the following two years, created quite a stir on the socialist left and in bourgeois circles, with some arguing that the decision represented a major step toward a market economy and perhaps the beginning of a process of capitalist restoration akin to the "Chinese model." The initially proposed terminations represented 19.4 percent of Cuba's workforce, 90 percent of whom were employed by the state.

The reforms indicate that the Cubans recognize the harsh reality of the economic distortions that have been wrought from their forced isolation from the world market due to the U.S.-imposed illegal embargo/blockade and related imperialist incursions. In a significant sense they are legalizing a reality—that hundreds of thousands of Cuban workers are already "employed" in tiny "business" ventures, trying to make ends meet, while they simultaneously receive subsistence wages from the state for their official job.

Some 178 areas where terminated workers can now operate as formally licensed small-scale business owners have been established. Prior to this the state regulated or prohibited all such employment. Regulation or not, legal or not, however, many of these small-scale businesses operated with impunity, sometimes via bribes to officials. The reforms largely aim at maintaining the impressive range of free or almost free social services that are absent in almost all other nations. They aim at reducing bureaucracy, corruption, and waste, however limited the means available.

The vision of the Cuban Communist Party, the real or effective government of Cuba, is far from turning workers into the streets to fend for themselves, as is the case in other countries subject to the present world capitalist recession/depression, in which unemployment and social cutbacks have reached the highest levels in decades. The capitalist restorationists in China much prefer turning the poorest sectors of society over to major multi-national corporations, half of which are U.S.-owned, or to Chinese capitalist corporations, where workers also labor for pennies and are denied virtually all social benefits.

Initial balance sheet after two years

According to figures released by the Cuban government on Dec. 27, 2012, the number of workers in private concerns rose 23 percent for the year, while em-

The vision of the Communist Party of Cuba is not to turn workers into the streets to fend for themselves, as is done in capitalist countries that are facing the recession.

ployment in the state sector dropped 5.7 percent. The government cut 228,000 public jobs in 2012, on top of 137,000 cuts in 2011.

Cuba, a country rich in agricultural resources, has imported up to 70 percent of its food needs. The reforms are aimed at achieving self-sufficiency under the most difficult of circumstances. Under the new laws anyone can solicit the government for 10 hectares of idle land, which can be held and farmed for personal profit for 10 years, with the opportunity for renewal. (One hectare is 2.47 acres.) The land remains the property of the state, and profits will be taxed, but contrary to the past, the new farmers can sell their produce directly to the hotel industries and private restaurants, almost all of which are operated out of the homes of Cuban families.

Over 1.2 million hectares had been distributed to more than 132,000 beneficiaries as of mid-2011, an average of nine hectares per person. Nevertheless, gains in production have been limited. Agricultural produce for the domestic market remained largely the same in 2010 and 2011, an indication of the still grave situation in Cuban agriculture. Bureaucratic abuse has been and remains widespread, including government and military personnel using state-owned trucks to steal or otherwise sequester food products from state or cooperative farms for sale on the black market.

We should emphasize that the openly discussed bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption that permeate Cuban society under conditions of perpetual shortages is qualitatively subordinate to, if not largely caused by, the blows struck against Cuba—the illegal imperialist embargo/blockade of the Cuban nation, and the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and the associated severe constriction of its markets and loss of hard currency and credits. To these we must add the imperialist-orchestrated fall in the price of sugar by 50 percent and the fossil-fuel-induced global warming that has raised the temperature of the Caribbean (and other oceans) and likely increased the number and frequencies of devastating hurricanes that cost billions of dollars in property damage and massive agricultural and livestock losses.

Yet the reforms have produced no layers of capitalists that have any influence over the heights of the Cuban economy. A July 11, 2012, *Reuters* report affirmed that the largest private-sector operation in Havana since the new reforms, with about 130 employees, was "El Cabildo, a recently opened entertainment center that is pushing the limits of the communist country's still unfolding economic reforms."

Cuba's new economic guidelines limit the size of restaurants to 50 customer seats. El Cabildo (temporarily) got around this limitation by applying for three licenses and combining the space approved by the government. Within a month, the Cuban government, for reasons that are not entirely clear, closed down the El Cabildo operation. But if this experiment in "private enterprise" was, according to *Reuters*, the largest in Havana, it is not difficult to conclude that capitalism hasn't made much progress to date—to say the least!

The new regulations allow Cubans to buy and sell homes, with the restriction that no Cuban can own more than two, the first a regular residence, the second a "summer home." Before this, while Cubans did not formally "own" their homes, these were in all other respects their own. After the first

10 years, following the 1959 revolution when rent was limited to no more than 5-10 percent of one's income, Cubans lived in their homes rent free. Many or most still do. Today they can sell their homes for a profit, but hardly the kind that constitutes the foundation of a new class of entrepreneurs.

While the new plan decreed that 500,000 state jobs in one year—that is, by the end of 2011—would be eliminated, with the 500,000 given small plots of land or granted licenses to run small private businesses or cooperatives, the Cuban labor federation later announced that this date had been substantially revised. "The goal is to reach a 500,000 mark by April 2015," according to the federation. We should also note that since October 2010 there has been an increase of 230,000 jobs in the new sectors of the economy.

A July 16, 2012, *New York Times* article entitled, "Cuba Hits Wall in 2-Year Push to Expand the Private Sector" essentially confirms this data. Its opening sentence reads, "Nearly two years into the Cuban government's economic overhaul aimed at slashing public payrolls and bolstering private enterprise, the reforms have slowed so much that many Cuban entrepreneurs and intellectuals are questioning the aging leadership's ability—or will—to reshape one of the world's last Communist systems and shift nearly half of the island's output to private hands." Of course, *The Times* much prefers capitalist austerity and social dislocation. Its Havana reporters neglected to name the Cuban "intellectuals and entrepreneurs" who bemoan Cuba's failure to take the capitalist road at the expense of the Cuban people.

It appears that no one has been thrown into the streets in Cuba, not to mention the fact that laid-off workers are entitled to remain on government payrolls for several months, or longer, until they find employment. And further, we have seen no evidence that these barbers or street vendors or small restaurant owners, usually operating out of their own homes and family run, are combining with the small farmers to form a new capitalist class in Cuba!

Consultation with the people

In sharp contrast to the brutal and now completed capitalist restoration process in the USSR and China, orchestrated by the Stalinist bureaucracies that became the new capitalist class, and with billions, if not trillions of dollars in investments and technology from the world's great ruling-class families and their corporations in the U.S. and Europe, Cuba's modest and practical economic reforms aim at formally recognizing the reality that the Cuban people cannot construct the ideal or perfect socialist society in an isolated and beleaguered island nation.

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Ismael Francisco / AP

(continued from page 6)

The Cuban leadership's constant efforts to engage the people in collective work to resolve the most difficult of problems, in this case, its ongoing economic crisis heightened by the overall crisis of the world capitalist system, cannot be considered empty rhetoric.

A Sept. 20, 2009, article by Roger Burbach, a Cuba specialist and director of the Berkeley, Calif.-based Center for Studies of the Americas, described the process by which the new reforms were promulgated in an essay, "Cuba Undertakes Reforms in Midst of Economic Crisis." Burbach wrote, "Perhaps the most important early initiative of Raúl Castro was the call for a consulta (consultation) with and among the Cuban people. Barrio committees, factory workers, local party organizations, and others were encouraged to meet and register their thoughts and complaints. By August 2009, 5.1 million people out of a total Cuban population of 11.2 million had participated in the consultation. There were 3.3 million registered comments of which almost half were critical."

Burbach continued, "The most recurring criticism was of limited food production and the daily problems people faced in securing three meals a day for their families. Comments on corruption in government enterprises were also prevalent."

No doubt, "consultation" is not decision-making. But no government on earth engages its people in such a dialogue and consultation. Across the globe austerity measures are implemented with impunity. The views of the working masses are never considered—only the profits of ever failing corporations. In contrast, in Cuba the measures that are being implemented are aimed at improving the standard of living and the quality of life of all Cubans, at eliminating waste and corruption, at increasing efficiency while maintaining at great expense, almost every gain of the revolution.

Cuba spends 47 percent of its budget on health care and education. Few, if any nations can match this figure, although the extreme economic crisis has forced expenditure cutbacks in these areas amounting to 7.7 percent in 2011.

Similarly, according to the government newspaper *Granma*, an estimated 240,700 workplace cafeterias, that served lunch for free, have been closed down, with workers instead receiving 12 pesos daily to cover food costs. *Granma* reported that portions of the government-subsidized food previously provided to these cafeterias found their way to the black market—again, the inevitable and bitter truth in a beleaguered society plagued with constant shortages.

It is critical to add that the absence of institutionalized forms of workers' rule in Cuba—soviet or workers' council-type bodies with the power to decide and implement critical decisions—cannot be underestimated and weighs heavily on Cuba's ability to deflect the blows directed against it by imperialism.

Socialism means workers' rule—*majority rule*. In contrast to all previous class societies, in which a minority class of slave owners, kings and aristocrats, or



NY Times

Isolated Cuba has accomplished a small miracle in warding off the imperialist pressures that led the Stalinist regimes toward the restoration of capitalism.

capitalists have exercised real economic and political power, the socialist societies that revolutionaries struggle to bring into being are based on the institutionalized rule of the vast working-class majority.

Whatever measures have been taken against the well-recognized bureaucratic corruption are qualitatively less effective than workers themselves organizing and regulating society in their own interests.

While the CTC (Cuban Federation of Labor) originally announced the job terminations, the decision was undoubtedly made by the Cuban Communist Party and later approved by the National Assembly of Peoples Power, the formal but not actual governing body of Cuba. However much the Cuban Communist Party seeks out and encourages the input, consultation, and involvement of the trade unions, neighborhood organizations, and other substantial mass organizations, all critical decisions in Cuba are made by the Cuban CP.

Consultation and input are fundamentally distinct from the exercise of power by the working class itself. Workers' democracy, as we define it and as the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky lived it, was the cornerstone of the revolutionary state set up in 1917, where the workers' councils ruled, and not the Bolshevik Party, although the latter was the leading force in the original multi-party workers' government.

Socialist Action remains staunch supporters of the Cuban Revolution. We consider the present leadership to be "revolutionaries of action," a special term that has both positive and negative connotations—positive in the sense that the Castro team organized a social revolution that overthrew capitalism and established a workers' state that still remains a heroic example to oppressed people around the world.

The term has a negative connotation in that we have not considered the Cuban leadership to be proletarian

(Above) A self-employed street vendor sells clothes pins in Havana, Oct. 30.

(Left) National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón (l.) meets with Raul Castro, Dec. 13.

revolutionaries, that is, based on a consistent program for world socialist revolution and proletarian democracy at home.

At the same time, we reject any designation of Cuba as Stalinist—that is, a state in which the bureaucracy has become a crystallized parasitic and counterrevolutionary caste, whose interests are counterposed to those of the masses—which can only be maintained by resorting to mass repression and terror. While Cuba admittedly suffers from bureaucratic abuse, it is far from having reached the point where its important deficiencies cannot be remedied without recourse to the removal of the present leadership by the revolutionary action of the masses—that is, a political revolution.

Isolated and tiny Cuba has accomplished a small miracle in warding off the imperialist pressures that led the Stalinist regimes in the rest of the world to undermine and then obliterate the gains of the great Russian Revolution of 1917, and act as the key agents in the restoration of capitalism. Indeed, the "small miracle" becomes an unprecedented and heroic achievement when we factor in the 50-year embargo/blockade, the U.S.-backed invasion, innumerable acts of sabotage, bombings, the U.S. use of chemical and biological warfare, and material and financial aid to counterrevolutionary forces within Cuba.

When we add to this the effects of the sudden cessation of trade and aid from the former USSR and associated Eastern European states—some 75 percent of Cuba's trade—the mere existence of the Cuban workers' state represents a magnificent example in human dedication and achievement. We would be remiss in not including in these wonders the facts that Cuba leads the world in supplying doctors and teachers to poor nations, and that Cuba's level of free public education, "from the cradle to the grave," exceeds that of almost all nations on earth.

Cuba's renewed efforts at economic reform are aimed at preserving a beleaguered and proud revolution that has advanced the interests of the Cuban people and won the respect and admiration of revolutionary fighters around the world. ■

Idle No More!

TORONTO—The Idle No More movement, a campaign for indigenous rights, democracy, and environmental justice, spread like wildfire in December in response to Conservative federal government legislation.

An unprecedented wave of grassroots action is sweeping across First Nations communities. Over 100 rallies were organized locally, in particular by young people frustrated by the systemic inequality that persists across the country.

First Nations people also demonstrated on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Dec. 21, to protest Bill C-45, the Stephen Harper government omnibus budget bill which fuelled the growing movement. C-45 includes changes to the Indian Act affecting how reserve lands are managed, making them easier to "develop," and to be taken away from the First Nations' people. The bill also removes thousands of lakes and streams from the list of federally protected bodies of water, giving the tar sands industry a green light to destroy waterways used by First Nation people.

Atiwapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence (photo), who has been on a hunger strike since Dec. 11, resolved



to starve herself to death unless Prime Minister Stephen Harper met to discuss treaty rights, and the relationship of the Canadian state to indigenous peoples. The demands of aboriginal peoples for decent housing, for respect of treaties, for the resolution of outstanding land claims, against tar sands pipelines, to win economic development beneficial to their communities, and to establish self-government are entirely just.

— SOCIALIST ACTION/ LIGUE POUR L'ACTION SOCIALISTE (CANADIAN STATE)

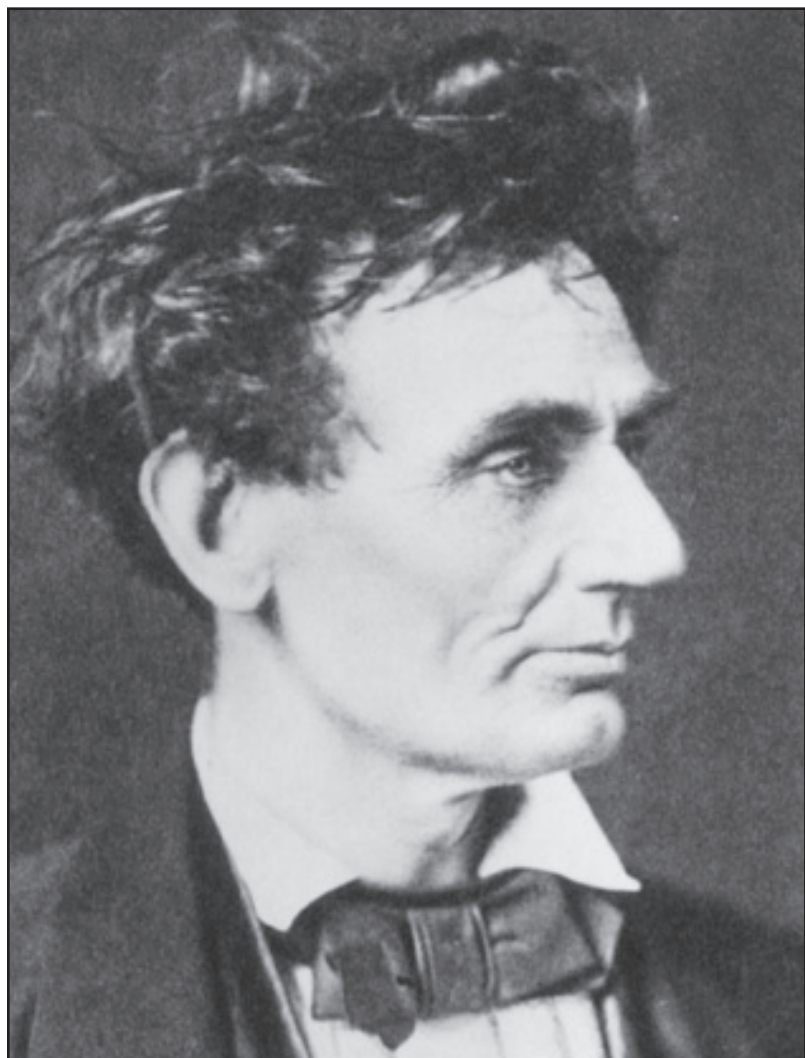
Year of the Dakota

MINNEAPOLIS—On Dec. 14, city council passed a resolution designating Dec. 26, 2012 to Dec. 26, 2013 as "The Year of the Dakota: Remembering, Honoring, and Truth-Telling." The St. Paul city council will do the same when they meet on Jan. 9.

The resolution acknowledges lingering issues that include land, genocide, suppression of American Indian spirituality and languages, concentration camps, forced marches, mass executions, and forcible removals."

The year 2012 was the 150th anniversary of the Dakota-U.S. War, and Dec. 26 marked the 150th anniversary of the mass hanging of 38 Dakota men, the largest mass hanging in U.S. history. These 38 were among the thousands rounded up at the end of the fighting (whether they participated in the fighting or not) and sentenced in military trials that often lasted only a few minutes. Lincoln, "the Great Emancipator" signed the order for this mass execution even as he was writing the Emancipation Proclamation. — KAREN REDNAGEL

LINCOLN



By DAVID RIEHLE

This is an abbreviated version of an article that can be viewed in its entirety at socialistaction.org.

Lincoln has been a giant, in the sense of historical memory, since the day he was murdered at Ford's Theater, and for some time before that. That's why movies are made about him. Spielberg's "Lincoln" was reportedly due to an epiphanic reading of "Team of Rivals" (2006), by Doris Kearns Goodwin, which is centered on Lincoln's relations with his cabinet members, and subtitled, "The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln." Eventually, the idea of constructing the film around the struggle to ratify the 13th Amendment to the Constitution emerged. Certainly, the approaching 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, made effective on Jan. 1, 1863 must have pointed in that direction.

Spielberg's, and Daniel Day-Lewis' depiction of Abraham Lincoln is probably as close as anyone will get to the living Lincoln in a long, long time, if ever. It's obvious that a multitude of Lincoln's personal and physical characteristics, as well as dialogue buried in memoirs, dairies, and reminiscences were teased out and entered into the characterization presented on screen. Lincoln has narrow shoulders, he walks bent over with his hands behind his back, he laughs at his own stories, he smiles easily, he puts his legs up on a nearby chair, he tells scatological stories (one).

It happens that the story Lincoln relates, involving a visit by Revolutionary hero Ethan Allen to England after the close of the war, is attested to as one he did tell. It's a funny story, but here is passed over without notice the conversion of a Revolutionary hero "to a harmless icon." Everybody has heard of the exploits of the Green Mountain Boys, but who knows that Ethan Allen was a vigorous disbeliever in Christianity, and in 1785 wrote and published "Reason, the Only Oracle of Man," described as an "unbridled attack against the Bible, established churches, and the powers of the priesthood." Lincoln, a life-long Freethinker and Deist, probably knew.

Still, even here, Lincoln is considerably cleaned up from what can be clearly deduced from the plethora of sources about him. Although Day-Lewis deliberately pitches his character's voice in an upper register tenor, and uses a mild form of Lincoln's upper South accent (he says "cheerman" instead of "chairman," and, occasionally, "ain't"), the most often stated impression of Lincoln's voice was that was not just "tenor," but "shrill, high pitched, raw."

IMAGES OF HISTORY

Spielberg's "Lincoln" spans January to April 1865. At its center is the struggle to get a 2/3 vote in the House of Representatives adopting the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, outlawing slavery forever. The Amendment had failed to pass the House when first introduced in April 1864, although it was approved by the Senate, and was moved for reconsideration in January 1865. To become effective, the amendment then had to be approved by 3/4 of the state legislatures. Under the circumstances prevailing at the time, it was clear that the major hurdle was winning in the House of Representatives, in a forum that had already rejected it. If successful, it was generally believed approval by the states would follow quickly, which it did, before the end of the year 1865.

Following a struggle over a fiercely contested piece of legislation, from introduction to eventual approval as the votes are counted one by one, provides a nice dramatic setting, organically building to an exuberant climax and emotional release of tension. In the film

"Amazing Grace" (2006), the parliamentary battle to pass a bill banning the British slave trade mounts to a similar crescendo, as William Wilberforce finally obtains enough votes to prevail.

Spielberg didn't direct "Amazing Grace," but he did direct "Amistad," another film concerned with a powerful event related to the enslavement of Africans in the 19th century—the capture of the slave ship La Amistad by its kidnapped passengers.

Both these films by Spielberg are magnificently staged and photographed, and powerfully acted. And in both of them, the final and decisive arenas of action depicted are the institutions of white people—John Quincy Adams' defense of the rebel African captive, Cinque, before the Supreme Court in 1841, and the vote in the House of Representatives on Jan. 31, 1865.

There are appearances by people of African descent in "Lincoln" (not many, almost cameos), but they are clearly inserted as surrogates for major pieces of history. Early in the film, Lincoln has a colloquy with two Black soldiers, who pause as Black and white troops are passing in formation by the White House on the way to war. One of the two is quite assertive, articulating some of the main grievances of the colored soldiers: Unequal pay with white troops—No Black officers. Lincoln is cordial but noncommittal.

The scene ends with the less assertive Black soldier reciting the Gettysburg address, and a white soldier joining in. Whether this strikes the viewer as ludicrous or moving, it is obviously an expository device to acknowledge, very briefly, the presence of Black troops and their grievances.

Later in the film, actually Jan. 29, 1865, three members of a Confederate delegation travel secretly north to meet with Lincoln to discuss possible terms of peace. One of them is Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the Confederacy, who Lincoln knew well when they both were in Congress in the 1840s. "Alec," he calls him. As the three commissioners step out of their curtained carriage, they see assembled, for the first time, a regiment of African American troops. Their stunned reactions are palpable—this is the new order.

When the day arrives for the vote in the House of Representatives, the film depicts a large contingent of African Americans entering and seating themselves in the gallery. There is a visible reaction by the (all white) Representatives on the floor, another brief expository moment. Also present together in the gallery are Elizabeth Keckley, Mary Lincoln's African American dress-



(Above) Daniel Day Lewis as "Lincoln."

maker, and Mrs. Lincoln.

At another point, Lincoln has a brief conversation on the White House steps with Keckley, the most extended appearance in the film by a person of African descent. He addresses her as "Mrs. Keckley." At that time in history (and later), a typical white person, especially one of Southern extraction, who wanted to address a mature African American woman with a modicum of decency would have probably called her "Auntie," or "Aunt Elizabeth." So the filmmakers seek to make a subtle point here. But Keckley, in her memoir, says Lincoln always addressed her as "Madame Elizabeth."

"My friend Douglass!"

Some historically informed viewers have asked themselves, "Where is Frederick Douglass?" Douglass visited Lincoln at least three times, including one visit that falls within the time span of the film. Seeking to attend the post-inaugural reception at the White House, Douglass was initially turned away by the doorkeepers because of his color. Someone got word to Lincoln that Douglass was present and he was admitted.

Douglass remembered Lincoln, who was "standing like a mountain pine high above the others, in his grand simplicity and home-like beauty." Lincoln demonstratively greeted him, "Here comes my friend Douglass!" Taking him by the hand, Lincoln said, "I am glad to see you. I saw you in the crowd today, listening to my inaugural address. How did you like it? ... You must stop a little, Douglass; there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours. I want to know what you think of it."

"Mr. Lincoln," Douglass said, "that was a sacred effort." Douglass was known for saying exactly what he thought. But the scene was left on the cutting room floor, or more accurately, never filmed.

The adoption of the 13th Amendment by the House codified the effective consensus of the rulers of the Union that the destruction of the slave system—the expropriation without compensation of the \$2 billion of invested capital embodied in the persons of four million human beings—was the necessary and only acceptable outcome of the war. In and of itself this was a revolutionary act. It was not negotiated, it was unequivocal and it was guaranteed by military force. It was, as been said, the Second American Revolution.

"A revolution," Frederick Engels said, "is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by the means of rifles, bayonet, and cannon." Or, as Lincoln said to a visiting delegation of preachers, "Friends, I agree with you in Providence, but I believe in the Providence of the most men, the largest purse, and the longest cannon."

And a revolution has its own logic. "A revolution," Peter Kropotkin wrote in his history of the French Revolution, "is a swift overthrow, in a few years, of institutions which have taken centuries to root in the soil, and seem so fixed and immovable that even the most ardent reformers hardly dare attack them in their writings. It is the fall, the crumbling away in a brief period, of all that up to that time composed the essence of social, religious, political and economic life in a nation."

The chief agent, director, and organizer of the passage of the Amendment by the House was Abraham

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Lincoln, utilizing every prerogative and advantage accruing to him as president. One of the contributions to authentic history that "Lincoln" does make is that it shows this. The depiction of this maneuvering, cajoling, bribing, and threatening is probably the most entertaining interlude in an otherwise pretty somber "Lincoln," with a cast of characters passing across the screen from weasely Copperhead Democrats, to surreptitious Dickensian henchmen and veteran political manipulators—notably the Secretary of State, William Seward.

Most striking, to me, at least, is the scene where Lincoln relentlessly demands action and more action of his knavish squadron as the vote is getting down to the wire, and, rising up to what seems like several inches above his actual 6'4" span, tells them, "I am president of the United States, clothed with great power. The abolition of slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate, for all coming time, not only of the millions now in bondage, but of unborn millions to come—a measure of such importance that those two votes must be procured. I leave it to you to determine how it shall be done; but remember that I am president of the United States, clothed with immense power, and I expect you to procure those votes" (emphasis in the film). This, at least, is what Massachusetts Congressman John B. Alley remembered he said, and Kushner's script follows Alley's account almost word for word.

The drama is intensified as the votes are counted on Jan. 31. It was known the Republicans, the majority of the House, would vote yes. But ratification required a 2/3 vote. The necessity was to bring over affirmative votes from the pro-slavery Democrats. Finally the Amendment is adopted—by five votes. There is wild cheering, and the artillery booms in Washington in celebration. This actually happened.

Early life among the "Scrubs"

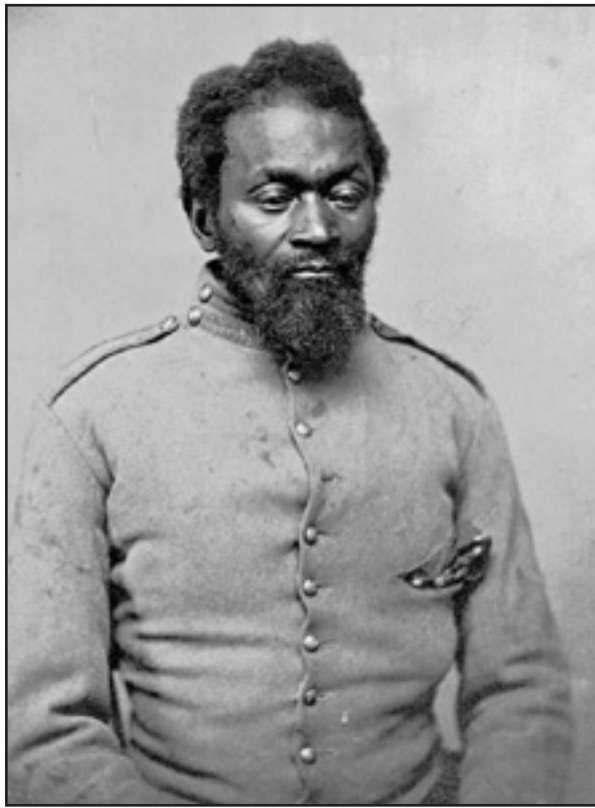
From his earliest youth, Lincoln was a fascinating and magnetic figure to those close to him. He was an organic natural leader of those around him. Lincoln was the wittiest, most entertaining, good-natured of them, a voracious reader with a total of three months formal education, and a person respected for his integrity and moral character.

When Lincoln volunteered for service in the Illinois militia during the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Blackhawk War of 1832, he was unanimously elected captain of his company. He was always physically the strongest; meeting him for the first time in the White House, William Russell, correspondent for the London Times, remembered a "sinewy, muscular yellow neck" and a head covered with a "thatch of wild republican hair." When Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy, viewed him on his deathbed across from Ford's Theater, he was struck by Lincoln's powerful arms, exposed as his clothing lay in disarray, and by the fact that Lincoln's body was too long for the bed.

Lincoln chopped his own firewood and did other manual labor up until he left Springfield for Washington in 1861 at age 52. His origins in extreme poverty, of course, have been told so often as to exist seemingly only as parody of 19th century sentimentalism. But only at a distance. "I belonged," Lincoln said, "to what they call down South the 'Scrubs;' people who do not own land and slaves are nobody down there." He once said there wasn't much to tell about his life, other than "the short and simple annals of the poor."

The movement of people from the Upper South across the Ohio River into free territory was more heterogeneous than usually depicted. Many of the "Scrubs," whatever their racial views, were deeply resentful of slavery. Others, obviously a small minority, but still significant, were slaveholders who moved north to manumit their slaves. A significant and active minority, a vanguard, were conscious abolitionists.

My great-great grandfather George W. Jones, a Scrub, was born in South Carolina in 1804, and emigrated north with his family from Kentucky about the same time the Lincolns did, proceeding in 1822 to the lead mines in present day southwest Wisconsin, part of the



vast lead-bearing region centered on Galena, Ill.

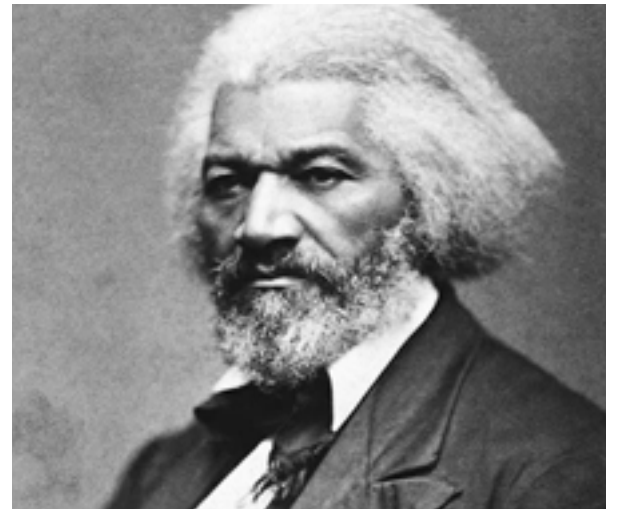
Like Lincoln, he enrolled in local militia during the Blackhawk War. When the Civil War began, he joined the Union Army at age 58, along with his son, who had been living in south Texas. I know what they fought for, at least. In a message to his descendants, written just before he died at age 97, he told them, "Remember the words of the immortal Lincoln, 'Labor is prior to Capital and deserving of the higher consideration.'"

Lincoln's election in 1860, apart from his personal abilities, which were considerable, expressed the rapid political emergence of the western region north of the Ohio River, and its determination to oppose the extension of slavery.

What the new region represented, Karl Marx observed, was "that a new power had arisen, the Northwest, [i.e., the new states that comprised the area of Northwest Ordinance of 1787, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan], whose population, having almost doubled between 1850 and 1860, was already pretty well equal to the white population of the slave states—a power that was not inclined either by tradition, temperament or mode of life to let itself be dragged from compromise to compromise in the manner of the old Northeastern states. The Union was still of value to the South only so far as it handed over Federal power to it as a means of carrying out a slave policy. If not, it was better to make the break now" (*Die Presse*, Oct 25, 1861, Marx and Engels Collected Works, vol. 17).

And Marx wrote, this time in the *New York Tribune* (Nov 7, 1861), [We] "know that the Southern slaveocracy commenced the war with the declaration that the continuance of slaveocracy was no longer compatible with the continuance of the Union. ... A fight for the continuance of the Union is a fight against the continuance of the slaveocracy—that in this contest the highest form of popular self-government till now realized is giving battle to the meanest and most shameless form of man's enslaving recorded in the annals of history."

Here Marx places the insurrection of the slaveocracy in a world-historic context, and here, I think, his thoughts are congruent with Lincoln's, and a key to a full understanding of the enormous voluntarist human sacrifice made for the Union, by both Black and white. Lincoln expressed it once like this, to his friend James Scovell, "Of the two great efforts to enslave the human race in body and mind [not "soul," note] the first met its grave 200 years ago under Cromwell at Marston Moor and the second at Gettysburg." For Lincoln, and for Marx, the Civil War was, in its defense of "the highest form of popular self-government till now realized," preserving the precious possibility of



(Above) Slavery abolitionist Frederick Douglass visited Lincoln but was left out of Spielberg's film.

(Left) Soldier from U.S. Colored Troops.

(Below) Nicholas Biddle, perhaps the first soldier wounded in the Civil War. On April 18, 1861, he was hit on the head by a brick thrown by a pro-Confederate mob as his volunteer unit marched through Baltimore. The next day, President Lincoln, reviewing the troops, asked Biddle about his wound.

its extension.

The 19th century was woven through with great struggles to overturn absolutism, clericalism, and suppression of the most elementary human rights. The impact of the American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century still reverberated among the masses, certainly in the United States. Foreign travelers passing through the U.S., especially in the first half of the 19th century, all noted that the common people were alive with the politics of democracy, vigilant and assertive of their rights as free citizens (limited to white men), and inspired by a concept of a worldwide revolution against tyranny, monarchy, and priestly superstition. Hundreds of thousands were immigrants and refugees from the revolutions of Europe.

"The war," Lincoln said, "cannot be successful unless all the parties in the country are represented in the army. If only Republicans are in the army, the war will be a failure, but if the Republicans, the Democrats, the Know-Nothings, and the Socialists are in the army, we shall be saved."

How did it come to Lincoln's attention that "the Socialists" were a political current substantial enough to be included here? Most likely, socialism had come to Lincoln's attention in association with German immigrants, who were massively present in Illinois. In the 1850s Lincoln actually purchased the building, type, presses and other equipment of a German newspaper in Springfield, holding it in reserve for a future campaign. Two hundred thousand natives of Germany fought in the Union Army, about equal to the number of colored troops. Some of the leading officers in the Union Army were Germans who were, or had been, members of the First International, like General Joseph Wedemeyer.

Why did a million white yeomen go off to war against the Confederacy? Whatever sympathy they had for their Black countrymen languishing under slavery was uneven and mixed, where it existed at all. But it is a certainty that the heroic and extended political agitation against slavery by a committed minority of Blacks and whites had created a vein of moral certainty that invested them with extraordinary courage, commitment, and self-sacrifice, and a sense of defending something tangible and of real value.

In all of Lincoln's speeches arguing that slavery should be restricted to its then present boundaries, which obviously carried with it the corollary that the settlement of new territories should be white, he says over and over again that slavery should be restricted because it is "wrong." "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." When he says this, and he says it throughout Illinois in 1858 to the broad masses who come to hear his debates with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln is greeted with cheering and applause by his auditors.

For the slave, who had no access to self-government in the most minimal form, and to self-determination only by running away, the Civil War, which divided the master classes, was an opportunity that was seized immediately. It was the autonomous movement of hundreds of thousands of African Americans away from slavery and toward freedom, what W.E.B. DuBois called the "general strike," which broke the stalemate in the war.

The mass enrollment of men of African descent into the Union army, beginning in 1863, gave this initial movement great temporal and moral power. It began to melt the glacier of racial hatred built up over 200 years. And the intervention of the most active component of the white population, notably in their massive

(continued on page 11)

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

All out for Jan. 26 in Toronto!

By ALEX GREENE

The conflict between public-sector workers and the government of Ontario continues to simmer. In December, elementary school teachers held rotating strikes across the province. Secondary school teachers withdrew many services, just short of a total strike.

Leaders of both groups promised a province-wide strike to protest the loss of collective bargaining and the right to strike in the education sector. Then Queen's Park imposed the terms and conditions set out in Bill 115 on Jan. 3. CUPE Ontario leaders, representing education support workers, had pledged to join such a protest, but made a separate deal with the province at the New Year.

Bowing to pressure, the government pledged to "rescind" Bill 115 by the end of January—with all the imposed and "ne-

gotiated" deals in place for the next two years. Thus, wages are frozen and sick leave is permanently cut in half. Teachers are barred from striking, but can legally continue to withhold voluntary services. In 1973 Ontario teachers won the right to strike by resigning en masse. But union officials seem unwilling now to go beyond challenging the law in court—a process expected to take four years.

The Ontario Public Service, in the midst of difficult bargaining, is battling a climate of concessions by the largest labour unions in the country. Observers compare today's attacks on labour to the dark days of Tory Premier Mike Harris. Activists are calling for "Days of Action" and general strikes similar to those conducted by the labour movement in the late 1990s.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union, representing 38,000 members of the OPS, has been in negotiations with

the employer for over two months. The parties did not reach an agreement by the deadline of Dec. 14. OPSEU proposed that negotiations continue into the new year.

OPS members are aware of the employer's demands. They include a wage freeze for two years (a loss of income of nearly 8% when inflation and annual increases are taken into account), salary changes that produce wages 3% lower at the beginning of the pay grid than current levels, and which will affect young workers dramatically, especially when combined with the freeze.

Workers also face serious attacks on sickness plans and benefits, as well as destruction of the frayed safety net for those made "surplus." If management has its way, termination payments will be eliminated for new hires and so will the "surplus factor 80," which enables "surplus" members a chance to retire if their combined years of service and age add up to 80. Other attacks include permitting the employer to keep members in contract positions for longer periods, and to make changes to current hiring practices that will fuel nepotism.

OPSEU has rightfully called this package "completely unacceptable." It launched a campaign to inform and mobilize its members to fight concessions and achieve a 'fair contract'. The union is planning a mass protest outside the Ontario Liberal leadership convention at Maple Leaf Gardens. It is to be held on

the morning of Jan. 26—possibly to block building entrances. The convention will select the next premier of the province. A general election is expected in April 2013. The OPSEU Rally for a Better Ontario, which will be busing union members from across Ontario to the site, may attract the participation of other unions.

However, it is occurring on the same day as the Ontario Federation of Labour mass demonstration. The OFL, which represents 54 unions and over 1 million workers, started organizing a Rally for Rights and Democracy months in advance. It is to begin at 1 p.m. at a park a few blocks east of the convention site.

While it is good to directly confront the governing Liberal Party, which propped (suspended) the Legislature and is steadfast in its austerity drive, the blatant dismissal of the OFL's initiative by OPSEU is sectarian and divisive. Labour needs to maximize unity and solidarity to defeat the bosses' austerity drive. Union bureaucrats should put their differences aside to defend the working class from the attack launched by the ruling class and its parties, which aim to make workers pay for the capitalist economic crisis. Broad and sustained mass actions are needed, not just token one-day strikes. The urgent task is to generate a fightback that includes collective planning and implementation of an unlimited general strike to force the Ontario Liberal regime to rescind Bill 115, or resign. ■

The hockey lock-out: Why it matters*

By BARRY WEISLEDER

What do NHL players have in common with workers at Caterpillar in London, and at U.S. Steel in Hamilton, Ontario, and at Rio Tinto in Alma, Quebec? They were all locked out by super-wealthy owners of highly profitable companies? Yes, National Hockey League athletes earn big incomes—for the few years they play. But they are the ones who generate fan interest and all the games' profits. No one buys a ticket to watch club owners do anything.

In the context of the global economic crisis, capitalists think they have the upper hand. Many are trying to get historic concessions in wages, benefit packages and job security from workers.

The current hockey lock-out, which threatens to scuttle the season, is the third in less than two decades—a deliberate trend. If the NHL bosses have their way now,



after seven straight years of record revenues (reaching \$3.3 billion last year), it won't lower ticket prices one penny. It won't recover the losses of the tens of thousands of workers and small businesses dependent on hockey to make a living. But it will do two things:

It will enable team owners to pad their profits inestimably; and it will encourage other capitalists to step

up their agenda of greater riches for them, and devastating cuts for the rest of us.

In the 95-year history of the NHL, players have had a union continuously for only 45 years. Before that, they were controlled like slaves. Many retired, and died, without any savings. In recent decades, the players got a bigger portion of their product. Now the owners want to turn back the clock. They demand a reduction of players' share of revenues. They insist on restricting the length of player contracts, weakening free agency, and putting an end to salary arbitration.

Unions cannot change everything, much less curtail how capitalism distorts the arts, culture, and sport. But when workers in any field get a bigger share of the pie they create, they thwart the employers' agenda and show the way forward. A victory for the players, and a defeat for NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and the greedy owners, will be a victory for working people and for everyone who loves the game. ■

* As we go to press, Jan. 6, the NHL and NHL Player's Association have reached a tentative agreement. The players made concessions but effectively resisted demands on pensions, salary caps, and salary arbitration.

Singing the Camaro blues

By BRUCE ALLEN

Vice-President of CAW Local 199, and V.P. Niagara Regional Labour Council (writing in a personal capacity)

General Motor's mid-December announcement that the next generation of its Camaro will be produced in Lansing, Mich., and not in Oshawa (30 minutes east of Toronto), is cause for serious reflection by Canadian autoworkers. GM is consolidating its rear-wheel-drive car production in one location, with the exception of the Corvette.

Such restructuring events are hardly new. Some 20 years ago GM did a similar thing in St. Catharines (an hour south of Toronto) by closing its large foundry operation, which employed 1800 workers, and consolidated its foundry operations in Defiance, Ohio. GM realizes such decisions yield big savings and simultaneously put the boot to the Canadian Auto Workers' union. The free trade agreements, which gutted the 1965 Auto Pact's domestic production requirements, facilitate unimpeded corporate restructuring and capital mobility.

Corporate restructuring is intrinsic to global capitalism. It defines the context for the Oshawa decision. And it reveals the theatrical nature of the CAW leadership's show of anger and indignation in response to it. GM similarly blindsided

the CAW by suddenly announcing the GM St. Catharines Foundry Division closure.

The similarities don't end there. That decision raised serious questions about the long-term viability of the GM St. Catharines operations. It set in motion their dramatic downsizing and continuing vulnerability. Likewise, ending Oshawa's Camaro production will mean the loss of nearly one third of current vehicle production and endanger the remaining operations by making them more costly. This underlies the CAW's demand that GM compensate for the lost Camaro production with new equivalent work.

But the CAW demand is problematic. GM has repeatedly said it has no plans for new investments in Canada. These statements, coupled with the Camaro decision, beg the question: is GM committed to sustaining its Oshawa operations? Even if GM changes its mind and allocates new work to Oshawa, experience strongly suggests that any new work will be more capital intensive and employ far fewer workers. Furthermore, we know that GM will exact a heavy price for new replacement work. Since the mid-1990s GM has successfully demanded substantial CAW contract concessions, particularly at the local level in return for new investment.

The longstanding practice of tying new investment to contract concessions has decimated the union's strength and gut-

ted decades of historic collective bargaining gains. The concessionary 2012 GM-CAW collective agreements heightened that regression—and weren't even tied to new investments.

In effect, the Camaro decision shows that the CAW leadership's endless contract concessions have hardly secured a future for GM workers here, and raise the specter of future concessions. Consequently, the immediate question facing GM workers in Canada is whether we will give more.

A bigger political question is posed by GM's use of the public funds it got in 2008 and 2009 to avoid bankruptcy, and by the prospect of the Canadian government's selling its GM stock at a huge loss, entirely at taxpayers' expense. (According to a Dec. 20 article in the *Toronto Star*, "GM to buy back stock from U.S.," the U.S. Treasury will be left "about \$21 billion short of recouping its investment.")

Isn't this a powerful reason for workers taking control of the means of production in order to meet human needs? ■

CUPW members ratify concessions

By ELIZABETH BYCE

Members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) voted in December to ratify a new collective agreement with Canada Post Corporation (CPC).

The tentative agreement generated opposition in many CUPW locals because it includes concessions that were rejected by members in 2011 prior to the strike and subsequent lockout. The deal puts in place two-tier wages and pensions for new hires, and rollbacks on other benefits.

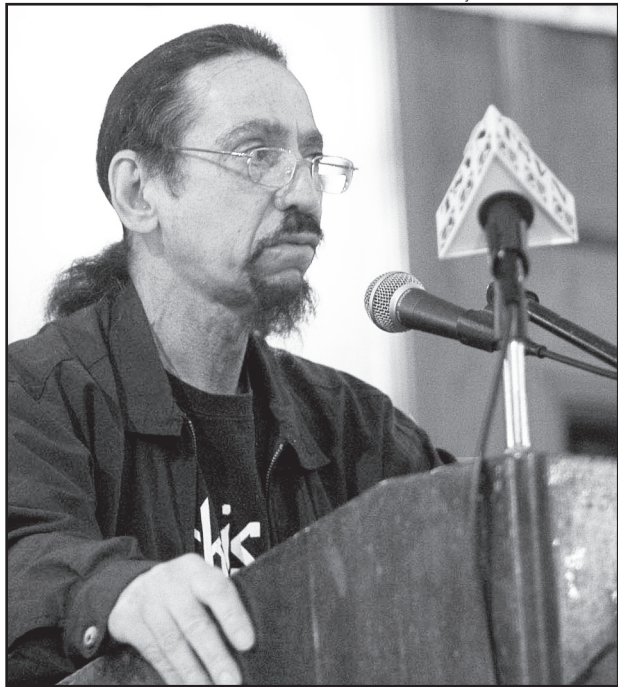
Given the high No vote, what im-

pact will the outcome have on members, and on the union's top leadership? In 2008 Deborah Bourque was defeated in her bid to be re-elected CUPW president, largely due to her support for a concessionary agreement with CPC. Denis Lemelin won the post, and retained it in 2011. Now that Lemelin has caved in, he will face over 600 potentially angry delegates at the 2014 convention.

For workers who used to count on CUPW for its militant resistance to the bosses' agenda, it should now be clear that a new fighting left wing is needed in virtually every union.

This won't happen by accident.

Only a cross-union, class-struggle workers' opposition can chart a new course to stop and reverse concessions.



By GLENN FORD

Below is the presentation given on Dec. 14 in New York City by Glenn Ford, executive editor of *Black Agenda Report* (www.BlackAgendaReport.com). Ford's speech was at a forum, "Post-presidential Election Analysis: Domestic & Global Impact — Will Things Fall Apart?"
Transcription and slight editing by Marty Goodman.

Usually when people talk about post-election assessments they want an account of who won what in the Senate and the House and various electoral contests. But I think that we need to start off this conversation by saying that Black folks didn't win anything.

President Obama won, and those who contributed to his billion-dollar campaign won. The people that he represents won. But we did not win anything, and we could not possibly have won anything because for the second time in a row Black folks collectively made no demands or even polite suggestions to President Obama about what they wanted. So we could not have won anything because they did not ask for anything. And certainly will not get anything.

My friend [lecturer in African American studies at Temple University] Dr. Tony Montiero likes to quote Malcolm on this kind of situation. Back in 1960, Black folks were basking in the glow of electing President Kennedy, but a year into Kennedy's term in the White House it was very clear he was avoiding doing anything substantive about civil rights. People were wondering what's up with that?

Malcolm had the answer. He said, "You put him first and he put you last." And that, in effect, is what we like to call the Black misleadership class. That's the predicament they've put us in for the second election cycle in a row. They've put Barack Obama first and they have put us last.

So when we discuss the failings of the Obama administrations, we can't do that without talking about the failures of the Black polity at this very unique and unexpected stage of a Black president. Clearly, they have caught us in our Achilles heel—a situation in which we have no defenses or offense. We certainly have no movement. So we really can't talk about winning anything until we have a movement capable of making demands.

In the Obama *delusional* state—we could call it that [since] from before 2008, for four years now, Black politics have been neutralized long enough that it is proper to ask, "What harm has been done to the historical Black political consensus?" Such a thing most assuredly did exist. You can discern its existence historically, not just by the actions of Black folks but by every opinion poll ever since Black people have been included in opinion polls (that was about 1960).

Post-election analysis by Glenn Ford: Obama and the Black community

Susan Walsh



(Above) Obama greets supporters in October 2010 at Bowie State University, Maryland.

But, every poll has shown the *unique* political character of Black America relative to the rest of the country. I mean *unique* in that it is not just a matter of degree; there appears to be a very different worldview among African Americans.

And I was reminded of this in February 2003 by a poll of the Zogby organization. Zogby asked a straightforward question. Everybody knew by February of 2003 that the U.S. was going to invade Iraq. That was no secret at all. Just like it's no secret that the U.S. is trying to break down the Syrian government; that's quite obvious. So, in the poll, they asked, "Would you support an invasion of Iraq if it would result in the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians?"

About 70% of white males answered "yes." A little bit more than half of white women answered "yes." A little less than half of Hispanic Americans also favored an invasion under those circumstances. But only 7% of Black America said yes, that they would favor invading Iraq and killing thousands of civilians. Now that is not just a difference in degree of peace lovingness or war likeness. That is a different order of worldview, quite clearly. The 7% that favored an invasion under those circumstances have to be called highly marginal in terms of Black opinion.

So we're really looking at the constituency that as recently as 2003 when the sensible question was asked—I haven't heard them asking a sensible question since—that as recently 2003 was solidly antiwar.

What did that mean? Most of us didn't know any Iraqis. I venture to say most folks could not locate Iraq on the map. But they knew that it was not in Europe and they knew that the United States was up to no good and that the United States is always up to no good when it's dealing with non-Europeans. That is the product of our historical consensus on U.S. military adventures abroad.

So now let's transport ourselves to the present. We see the horrible and shameful spectacle of almost unanimously, certainly the Black misleadership class—those folks who pass for Black leadership—heartily, ferociously endorsing UN Ambassador Susan Rice, who is the most warlike Democrat that one could imagine. [Rice] has been central to U.S. policy in Africa, where

much of that expanding aggressiveness is taking place.

Yet we see 12 Black female congresspersons holding a press conference affirming what a dedicated public servant Susan Rice is. That included Barbara Lee, who's thought of as one of two of the most progressive members of Congress and was the only one to vote against the invasion of Afghanistan, and yet she is part of the circling of wagons around Susan Rice.*

So the question becomes, 'has something changed in Black America in these nine years?' I cannot believe that that is true. We cannot give up the ghost in terms of the inherent progressiveness and peace lovingness of Black America based upon reactions of the Black misleadership class and even general Black behavior under this very unique, unexpected situation of having a Black president and the delusional effects that it has. But it does mean that we have a lot of work to do.

I believe the veil for Black people around Barack Obama began to be lifted when the returns came in. From that moment on, even though he was basking in the glow of victory, he entered the status of lame duck.

I think that's why we see that Black misleadership class gathering itself in an ad hoc fashion last week in Washington for a four-hour closed-door meeting of all these self-appointed people and coming out with a ridiculous list of five items that somehow pretend to be demands. Clearly, they are responding to a bubbling up from the bottom that says, "Well, what are ya'll going to be asking for, what are you going to demand? Do we have anything to say?"

I think part of that is finally the realization among masses of Black folk that this first Black president is not going to be here forever. There has to be an assessment of what has been the experience. So just as the Black misleadership class feels that it necessary to fake it and front it and pretend that they have a nascent list of demands stewing for some later date, it is incumbent on the left, especially the Black left, to get serious about doing a real agenda.**

Now, even if we had a full house tonight, it would not be the time to start talking about what that agenda would be. The first thing one does before setting an agenda, is to do an assessment of what is the objective reality in which we're working. That's what *Black Agenda Report* attempts to do to make a contribution toward advancing the discussion. ■

* Rice was seen as a possible replacement for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. However, following attacks on her by right-wing critics over security issues at the U.S. embassy in Libya, she withdrew her name. Sen. John Kerry, who during his 2004 presidential run called for more U.S. troops to Iraq, has accepted Obama's nomination.

** During the forum discussion, Ford spoke of weak "virtual demands" made during a post-election meeting of the Black misleadership, as represented by the Rev. Al Sharpton, the NAACP, the Urban League, the National Council of Negro Women, and other Black organizations in the orbit of the Democratic Party. They, said Ford, "are the usual suspects and represent the class we are talking about." They create "a simulation of a demand in order to not make a demand."

LINCOLN

(continued from page 9)

enrollment in the Union army and then the overwhelming victory given to Lincoln and the Republican party in 1864, effected a unity of action that crushed the slave owners' rebellion.

"Lincoln" closes on a note of high emotion, in the background a tableau of the Capitol and Lincoln reading his second inaugural address (Mar 4, 1865), which is scrolled across the screen, if I remember rightly. Of course it ends with the famous "With malice towards none, with charity towards all," appropriated later by the apologists for white supremacy,

to support their thesis that if Lincoln had lived he would have restrained the abolition fanatics in Congress, and spared the South the indignity of having to pass through the trauma of Black Reconstruction.

I was wondering if this recitation would include the passage immediately preceding it: "Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if it is God's will that it continue, until all the wealth piled up by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.'" It did.

And the continuing relevance of Lincoln is, I think, that all the wealth has not been sunk, and every drop of blood drawn by the lash has not yet been paid. ■

Millions in Egypt protest new anti-democratic constitution



Nasser Nasser / AP

(Left) Dec. 17 protest in Cairo against President Morsi's policies, sponsored by liberal Wafd party.

Despite mumbled objections by Washington to some of Morsi's measures, he is still their man.

By ANDREW POLLACK

Following mass protests in November against President Mohammed Morsi's decree granting himself new dictatorial powers, millions returned to the streets to protest his announcement of a snap referendum to be held in mid-December for a draft constitution hastily written by an assembly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood after most secular and liberal forces had walked out. The regime met the renewed protests with violence, as Brotherhood-organized gangs murdered 10 protesters on Dec. 5.

The referendum eventually yielded a majority of 64% for the proposed constitution—but with a voter turnout of only 33%. And in the meantime, mass rallies against Morsi forced him to withdraw within less than 24 hours plans he had announced for raising taxes on a range of goods that are staples of working-class consumption. The plans were designed to appease the International Monetary Fund, which has been insisting on sterner austerity measures before turning over \$4.5 billion in promised loans.

Liberal opponents of the government and remnants of the Mubarak regime had united in a National Salvation Front to oppose the constitution, and called for a boycott of the referendum. More radical groups called for a “no” vote.

Opposition to the constitution included objections to the retention of privileges by the military, which, as under Mubarak, maintains a role in prosecuting civilians, has a voice in setting foreign and war-making policy, and retains its vast economic empire—an empire shrouded in secrecy. Other objections concerned limits on the rights of women, giving religious figures final say over legal rulings, and other antidemocratic clauses.

Despite a few mumbled objections by Washington and the mainstream media to some of Morsi's measures and parts of his proposed constitution, he's still their man. *The New York Times*, for instance, has run a series of articles in favor of political “stability” in order to ensure that economic “reforms” can be carried out in the face of continued mass worker and peasant discontent. In standard *Times* fashion, all such reforms are portrayed as inevitable—indeed, the only rational choice—and their opponents mocked as ignorant or unrealistic.

For instance, in an article profiling prominent liberal oppositionist Hamded Sabahi, the paper said: “A criti-

cal loan of more than \$4 billion from the IMF ... has been delayed until the political situation settles. The Egyptian pound is slipping against the dollar. And the most obvious step to improve the growth and fairness of the economy requires a government with credibility and political skill. Attempts at overhauling Egypt's vast subsidies to energy prices have in the past set off riots.”

Sabahi, said *The Times*, after opposing the constitution, “is preparing for his next battle: against Islamist leaders' plans for Western-style free-market reforms.”

“Mr. Sabahi insists the I.M.F. loan would be unnecessary if the country followed his radical prescriptions to turn away from Western economic orthodoxy. In addition to steeper annual taxes on the rich, Mr. Sabahi is calling for Egypt to meet its deficit with a one-time 20% tax on the wealth of anyone with more than about \$17 million, which he says is about 1% of Egyptians...”

“He is calling for a ban on all exports of raw materials, including the important commodities of natural gas and cotton, so they can be used for domestic production. He proposes to increase fees on businesses that use natural resources as well as on real estate and stock market transactions. And at the same time he wants to expand Egypt's already bloated public sector to create more jobs for the poor” [the “already bloated” phrase, of course, being a classic example of bourgeois journalism's “objectivity”].

Such measures are unrealistic and dangerous, claims *The Times*, and Egypt's poor need more faith in their leaders: “Economic overhaul now poses a critical test of Egypt's fragile democracy. Without enough trust in government, the changes to the systems of taxes or subsidies needed to reduce the deficit could easily stir new unrest in the streets, just as such moves have in the past.”

The New York Times joined other mainstream media in discovering in late December that the country's economy was on the verge of imploding due to shrinking foreign exchange reserves and fears of a devalued currency. The UN's IRIN news agency, in a story on growing poverty in Egypt, noted the rapidly growing difficulty of finding food on a daily basis, and the doubling of prices for many dietary staples. IRIN quotes a Cairo University economics professor linking the foreign currency reserves problem to malnutrition: “Our country imports most of its food. The problem is that our foreign currency reserves—necessary for

buying this food from other countries—are hitting rock bottom.’ Economists like Abdo say these reserves will allow the government to buy food for the people for three months only. Last week the government confirmed it would be importing 180,000 tons of wheat from the USA—being one of the world's biggest wheat importers is a big strain on reserves.”

What this and other articles on the same theme don't mention is that Egypt imports food because of decades of imperialist-dictated restructuring of the economy, especially on behalf of Western agribusiness. This has proceeded in tandem with Western banks' driving Egypt further and further into debt by forcing loans on the country to finance the imports that are required, thanks to this restructuring.

Meanwhile, Egypt's workers moved into action on their own against the proposed constitution and related antilabor policies. In her *Guardian* article “Egyptians are being held back by neoliberalism, not religion,” Rachel Shabi noted that “the proposed constitution reveals more of the Brotherhood's conservative economics. It has a clause that pegs wages to productivity. It stipulates that only ‘peaceful’ strikes (whatever that means) are allowed.

“Small wonder, then, that the factory-dense city of Mahalla declared itself an independent state, in protest at Morsi's anti-union laws. Since he came to power there has been a wave of strikes; not just factory stoppages but also health worker strikes and consumer protests at eroding public services.”

The UK's Middle East and North Africa Solidarity Network reported that the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions was supporting protests against the constitution: “In the video produced by activist film-makers collective Mosireen, Fatma Ramadan from EFTU's Strike Committee unpicks the propaganda. ‘This constitution is biased in favor of the rich against the poor’ she says, ‘it is in favor of the powerful against the powerless and the rulers against the ruled.’”

The Revolutionary Socialists in Port Said took their campaign for a “no” vote to dozens of factories employing tens of thousands. They pointed to parts of the constitution linking pay rates to production, not to prices; provisions allowing the courts to dissolve unions; and limits on the right to strike.

Meanwhile, in Tunisia, a parallel process is taking place of deepening worker insurgency against a post-dictator, pro-neoliberal regime. The Islamist ruling party Ennahda has failed to address unemployment or any of the other grievances that sparked the revolution two years ago. As in Egypt, the ruling party has responded to dissatisfaction with a pro-IMF austerity program by repression, including armed attacks on offices of the UGTT (Tunisian General Labor Union).

Protests were so fierce that the government was forced to make some minor concessions, but its renewed attacks on the UGTT led to a call for a general strike for Dec. 13. In the end the strike was called off, once again after minor concessions were promised, but also because of uncertainty among union members about the chance of a strike's success. Nevertheless, the continued willingness of workers to leave the job, and the tightening alliance with groups representing women, youth, students, and the unemployed, has sparked discussions in the labor movement about mass actions in mid-January should the government not keep its promises.

Hopefully, such actions will be part of an organized effort at regional labor unity. Further evidence of the potential for such unity can be seen in recent events in Palestine. In September there were rallies against the Paris Protocol, the pro-neoliberal economic components of the Oslo Accords. Then in mid-December, public workers struck for two days over withholding of salaries by the Palestinian Authority.

This proletarian anger comes amidst continued evictions, land theft, beatings, and murders of Palestinians by Israel—including in Gaza, where a “ceasefire” allegedly holds. ■