

# THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Socialist candidates follow trail of labor struggles

— PAGE 5

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## Telephone strikers mobilize for a contract

86,000 workers fight for union rights, decent job conditions

BY JACOB PERASSO

NEW YORK—"C-W-A, C-W-A, C-W-A," chanted a sea of 8,000 red-shirted strikers bearing banners and signs in a militant and spirited mobilization here outside the national headquarters of Verizon Communications August 10.

"It was beautiful. We saw that whole sea of red, then the banners. When I saw those banners come down the street, that was when I knew how strong this union was," said Tyrone Noyte, a field technician on strike.

The show of force in New York has been backed up by hundreds of picket lines at Verizon facilities across 12 states and the District of Columbia. A total of 86,000 workers walked off the job August 6 after their contract expired and negotiations between the union and the bosses were not able to resolve the dispute. There are 72,000 workers represented by the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and 14,700 by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Verizon was formed when Bell Atlantic acquired GTE Wireless Communications. It is now the largest provider of local and wireless telephone service in the United States. The company has 260,000 employees and provides wireless service in 50 states and local service in 31 states. The wireless part of the company is for the most part not unionized.

The strike has received extensive coverage in the big-business newspapers where concern has been voiced over the effect the strike will have on the rest of the telephone industry, given the issues being posed in the conflict. Among them are the intensification of work, lengthening of the workweek, and unionization of the wireless division.



Some 8,000 phone workers turned out for a feisty strike rally in New York August 10

Megan Matos, a striking CWA dispatcher who has worked at Verizon for nine years, said that the wireless workers "should be able to join the union if they want." She also said that one of the main sticking points in

the strike right now is the company's desire for mandatory overtime, which was rejected by workers interviewed at the rally.

"The main issues are job security, health

Continued on Page 3

## Minnesota meat packers visit Teamster pickets

BY TOM FISHER

ST. PAUL, Minnesota—"How did you prepare for your strike?" asked Angelina Castro, who works at Dakota Premium Foods in nearby South St. Paul, to a group of Teamsters on strike against the Pepsi-Cola

bottling plant here.

She wanted to know about their strike "because we may have to prepare ourselves to do the same thing. What kinds of things did you have to do? How much money are you taking home? How did you look at

things when you started and how did you look at things now? How do you feel?"

Castro, who works in Dakota Premium's boning department, was one of seven workers from that meatpacking plant who visited the Teamsters picket line here August 12 to offer solidarity with their struggle and find out more about how each group of fighting workers can advance their struggles. Her question indicated the fact that a growing number of workers at Dakota, who recently voted in United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 789 and are now taking the next steps to establish the union, are thinking about the need for another strike against the company.

The packinghouse bosses have given every reason for workers to conclude that such action will be necessary. At a meeting called by the company August 10, a few hours before a well-publicized union meeting, company manager Steve Cortinas dismissed all the workers' complaints and ridiculed the strength of the union, according to workers who attended. "The union is planning a strike," Cortinas stated. "That won't accomplish anything."

The manager was quick to organize that meeting because a rumor had been going around the plant about the need for another strike.

"This came from an informal discussion among workers about how to deal with the

Continued on Page 3

## Ultrarightist Buchanan captures Reform Party

BY MAURICE WILLIAMS

In his August 12 acceptance speech for the Reform Party presidential nomination, ultrarightist politician Patrick Buchanan declared, "What are we fighting for? To save our country from being sold down the river into some godless New World Order.... That's what this Gideon's Army is fighting for."

Buchanan consolidated his grip over the party leading up to the Long Beach, California, national convention. There, he named Ezola Foster, an African American woman who is a member of the ultraright John Birch Society, as his vice-presidential running mate. She had served as a co-chair in Buchanan's 1996 presidential bid and in late April the ultrarightist candidate named her as a national co-chair of his current campaign.

"She has stood up for flag and family, God and country her whole life," said Buchanan. "And when I left [the Republican Party] to go to the Reform Party, she came with me," he added, citing her loyalty.

Two days before the national convention, which began August 10, the Reform Party held a closed-door national committee meeting. Buchanan's opponents, many of whom were supporters of Reform Party founder Ross Perot, backed John Hagelin for the party's presidential ticket. Hagelin, a physicist who was a two-time presidential candidate on the Natural Law Party ticket, asserted that he was the true Reform Party candidate.

Local cops were called when a shoving

Continued on Page 12

## Socialists hold Active Workers Conference

BY STEVE CLARK AND GREG MCCARTAN

OVERLIN, Ohio—"Something new has begun. The merger in action and leadership responsibility of a nucleus of communist workers with a fighting vanguard of workers and farmers we can see and touch—today!—a vanguard of what will become a class-struggle leadership of the working-class movement," said Socialist Workers Party national secretary Jack Barnes in a summary presentation at the Active Workers Conference here.

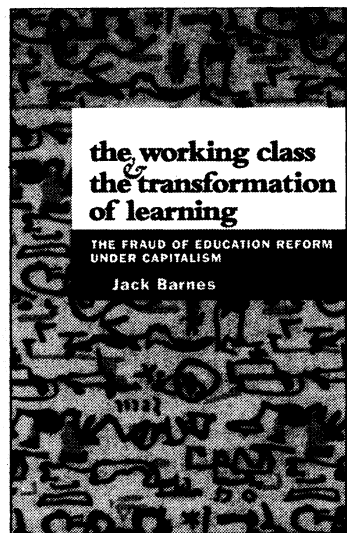
This shift in working-class politics, Barnes noted, was registered at the conference itself. The gathering, sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialists, was held July 27-30 on the Oberlin College campus.

The degree to which socialist workers and youth are an integral part of the upturn in strikes and struggles by working people in city and countryside was a palpable part of every conference session, class, and informal event.

In the course of these struggles, commu-

Continued on Page 6

NEW!  
FROM PATHFINDER



### The Working Class & the Transformation of Learning

The Fraud of Education Reform under Capitalism

By Jack Barnes

"Until society is reorganized so that education is a human activity from the time we are very young until the time we die, there will be no education worthy of working, creating humanity. That is the historic truth." \$3

Available from bookstores listed on page 12.

Debate over teaching evolution in schools heats up — page 4

# Louisiana fabrication workers win union

BY JACQUIE HENDERSON

AMELIA, Louisiana—"Respect" is what workers are seeking in organizing a union, said Recko Mills, a fitter at the J. Ray McDermott fabrication yard here.

After months of an intense opposition campaign by the company, workers at the McDermott yard, which builds huge offshore structures for the petroleum industry, voted 404-319 on August 10 to join International Union of Operating Engineers Local 406. The yard employs around 1,500 workers, many of whom work for contractors hired by McDermott.

Recko, who has worked at McDermott for more than nine years, is one of the hundreds of contract workers in the yard. He and other workers talked with *Militant* reporters as they left work August 11 and recounted incident after incident where McDermott showed their disregard for workers' basic human dignity. They cited common incidents of discrimination and favoritism.

## Bosses worry example will spread

The vote at McDermott comes at a time when several union-organizing efforts in this oil-rich region among refinery workers, mariners, and others are gaining ground.

The union victory took employers in the area by surprise and made them nervous. Prior to the vote, company spokespeople had expressed confidence that the union would be defeated.

Timothy Matte, mayor of nearby Morgan City, was quoted in the August 11 *Daily Review* as saying, regarding the union vote at McDermott, "We are certainly concerned.... We're a little unsure of what the impact will be because this entire area, the oil field, has not been subjected to union throughout its history."

State Senator Butch Gautreaux, a Democrat from Morgan City, said, "I was disappointed.... One of the marketing tools we have at our disposal for economic development is that until today we have not had significant penetration by unions."

St. Mary Chamber of Commerce President Emile Babin said the Council of Bayou Chambers has taken a stand opposing unionization of any major manufacturer in the area.

On August 2, the Operating Engineers union released a list of the "Top 10" reasons why workers wanted to unionize:

"No voice for the working person. Complaints of racial discrimination. Favoritism between bosses and their friends to the detriment of workers. Large pay and benefit differences between office personnel and hourly workers. Seniority and qualifications have no meaning. When work lessens, the worker suffers through pay cuts, reduced workweeks, unemployment, and furloughs. Wage increases are not given equally across the board. Retirees need better insurance coverage and benefits. Better sanitation facilities are needed. Termination of injured workers after six months."

The company organized a campaign of persuasion, intimidation, media propaganda, and community pressure. Quoted in the July 12 issue of the *Courier* of the nearby town of Houma, Gerald Ellender, president of a pro-boss outfit called "Concerned Citizens for the Community," declared, "We're going to assist and make all of our resources available to McDermott." Robert Alario, president of the Offshore Marine Service Association, also joined the antiunion campaign.

The company pressed hard for a no vote among the workers. They held meetings with workers on the alleged dangers of unionism, gave out antiunion material, and painted signs throughout the yard opposing unions. One of the signs read, "Our position: We are 100 percent against the International Union of Operating Engineers or any other union getting into our operation. We are convinced that having this union or any other union in Morgan City would not be in the best interest of our employees, our customers, or our company."

## Company unable to divide workers

"We won because everybody stuck together," said Ronald Wilson, 45, a welder. He said the company was not successful in its attempts to divide workers of different nationalities and colors in the yard.

The workforce at McDermott is about 40 percent Black, and 10 to 15 percent Vietnamese, according to union officials quoted in the local press. *Militant* reporters speaking with workers coming out the yard August 11 met Asian, Black, Latino, and white



Workers at McDermott fabrication yard in Amelia, Louisiana, celebrate union organizing success with jambalaya cookout, greeting day-shift workers after the vote. Bosses fear victory will boost organizing drives among refinery and other workers in the area.

workers who expressed their support for the union. A few expressed opposition and some others said they would "wait and see." Several workers who are Black or Asian, wearing union T-shirts, stopped to discuss with pride their efforts to organize the union.

After the August 10 vote, workers organized a jambalaya cookout and barbecue across the road from the company property to greet the day shift coming off work. Company security efforts to get them to leave failed, as more and more workers joined the celebration. While they had not yet heard the results of the vote, the support for the union was evident as workers honked in support of "Union Yes" signs, giving thumbs-up signs of support.

Many stopped to join the barbecue and talk about how they had brought the union in, reported Mills, who took part in the celebration.

Waiting there for the vote results, workers began a chant adapted from a popular rap song. "Who let the union in! Whoo! Whoo! Whoo! Whoo!" they chanted repeatedly.

The impact of the workers' victory at the McDermott yard is already being felt at the Litton Avondale Industries shipyard near New Orleans, the state's largest private industrial employer, where workers won recognition for their union last year after a long struggle and are still fighting for their first contract. Workers at that shipyard spoke to *Militant* reporters August 12 of their need for a union.

Several reported that as a result of the Avondale bosses' speedup, three workers were killed over the past three months when they fell from scaffolding that was improperly attached to the ship hull.

Ronald Dumas, a locked-out worker at Kaiser Aluminum's Gramercy, Louisiana, plant, greeted the news of the union victory at McDermott with enthusiasm. He had previously worked at both the Avondale and McDermott yards. "I worked there as a structural fitter," he said in an interview as he picketed at the Kaiser gate August 11. "But it was too unsafe. The company had us pulling everything ourselves, all over the

yard. We worked way up on scaffoldings that weren't secured. A lot of people got hurt. The company didn't care."

There are other signs of union organizing in the area. The Gulf Coast Mariners Association, an AFL-CIO affiliate formed more than a year ago, has organized activities highlighting the problems facing workers in the offshore oil and gas industry, including an informational picket in New Orleans at the 1999 International Workboat Show. Last April they organized a forum in Larose, Louisiana, that included mariners' union representatives from several countries. The forum highlighted the unsafe working conditions facing Louisiana mariners.

The union organizing centered in the South Louisiana oil patch is part of broader organizing efforts. On August 4, oil workers at Citgo's refinery in Corpus Christi, Texas, voted 236 to 14 in favor of joining the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical, and Energy Workers Union (PACE). Previously they only had a "Citgo employee federation."

Brandon Scott, an oil worker involved in a refinery organizing drive at a nearby refinery in Belle Chasse, saw the vote at McDermott as significant for his fight, "I tell my co-workers that now all eyes are on us, on our work to bring the union in."

Scott says he learned a lot about how workers can stand together and take on the companies from "seeing the example of the Kaiser picket line. Seeing, for almost two years, Black and white workers standing side by side against the company."

Scott now pickets in solidarity at the Kaiser plant. He is working on a public debate with the company on the question of union and has invited Kaiser union members to participate.

"From the Gulf in Texas, where they voted in the union at Citgo," said Scott, "across the Louisiana oil patch and up the Mississippi—from Monroe to Natchez—this is what is happening. We've got to push this on through."

Jacquie Henderson is a sewing machine operator in Houston.

## THE MILITANT

### Rightist Buchanan is a threat to labor

*Patrick Buchanan's takeover of the Reform Party is another step in the development of an incipient American fascist movement. From the very beginning, the 'Militant' has taken seriously and explained the character of Buchananism, its threat to working people, and how to fight it. Don't miss an issue.*



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# St. Paul meat packers visit Teamster strikers

Continued from front page

line speed, and one of his snitches ran up to tell him," explained Miguel Olvera, one of the pro-union workers. "But this shows the company is afraid of what we can do."

Workers at Dakota Premium first struck the company for seven hours June 1 to protest the line speed and to oppose the company's practice of forcing meat packers to continue working while they were injured, among other issues. They were able to win some concessions, and launched a campaign to win a union in the plant. Although the company fought the union-organizing drive with lies, firings, provocations, and other attacks, workers convinced each other of the need to be united and won a union representation vote on July 21 by a 112-71 margin.

The company has filed a challenge to the election with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

More than 200 meat packers work at the Dakota Premium slaughterhouse. The big majority are Spanish-speaking immigrants. Dakota Premium is owned by Rosen's Diversified Inc. The corporation's beef slaughtering operations make it one of the top 10 beef producers in the United States.

## Workers challenge company assertions

At the August 10 company meeting, Cortinas claimed that the July 21 union election was a fraud. He asserted that the line speed remained the same, at 95 heads of cattle per hour, although workers in the plant have calculated the speed to be above 115 per hour. "The work seems heavier because the cattle are bigger," he stated, a false allegation, according to workers on the line.

The plant manager also repeated his claim that two workers had been fired because their work permits were not in order, not because they were supporters of the union. "If a worker does not have his immigration papers in order, we have to send him home," Cortinas declared. But this assertion was belied by the fact that one of the workers was brought back the day after he was dismissed, due to pressure generated by the union in publicizing these cases in the

union's bilingual factory newsletter, *The Workers' Voice*.

The company's stance was quickly challenged, however. "The election was fair," stated Miguel Olvera, a worker in the boning department, who stood up and rebutted the manager at his own meeting. "I was a monitor and I saw everything that went on. I assure you that the election was fair. The union won a clear majority. We won the union!"

Another worker, Samuel Farley, who also works in the boning department, stated, "I back everything that Miguel Olvera just said. It was a fair election."

He then asked for translation of his remarks into Spanish, the language of the big majority of the workers. Cortinas offered to translate himself. Farley declined the offer.

Farley, one of the few workers in the plant who is Black and a leader of the union's in-plant leadership committee, has continued to face special discrimination and harassment from the bosses.

Even though Farley is now much faster than his trainer on the line, supervisors are constantly harassing him because of his support for the union. The company has a history of discrimination against Black workers, going back to the previous attempt to organize a union.

## Union meeting

The mood at the union meeting a few hours later was serious, according to workers who were there. This was the first general meeting since the July 21 victory in the union election. About half of the workers in the boning and packaging departments attended.

The main business was to discuss the need for a leadership structure of the union inside the plant. A proposal was put forward, discussed, and adopted for the election of shop stewards. Nominations were taken.

A proposal for a "Traveling Commission" was presented, discussed, and adopted. This



Packinghouse workers from Dakota Premium Foods in St. Paul, who are members of UFCW Local 789, exchange experiences with Teamsters picket (far right) at Pepsi-Cola bottling plant.

commission would be composed of union members who travel to other meatpacking plants in the area to link up with workers who face similar problems and arrange for mutual support.

A first effort will be to join up with workers at Long Prairie Packing, the sister plant of Dakota Premium, located 100 miles northwest of the Twin Cities.

Workers also discussed the importance of fighting against the attempt by Rosen's Diversified to overturn the democracy of the vote. The multimillion-dollar corporation filed a complaint with the NLRB challenging the validity of the election. The company claims the union offered \$10,000 to each worker and that it threatened workers with calling the immigration cops.

The union has answered these allegations as ridiculous and pointed to the record of the union informing workers of their rights,

including the rights of immigrants during the organizing drive. It explained that the corporation's only goal is to slow down the process of negotiations.

The NLRB has set a hearing for August 29 to determine the validity of the company's allegations.

## 'The union is us'

One worker, a leader of the union-organizing fight, addressed a remark to the president of UFCW Local 789, William Pearson. "You said you were going to get us a contract by October. Well, the clock is ticking," he said. According to workers who were present, Pearson replied calmly and clearly, saying, "The company shows no respect for the workers with this challenge, and we must continue with the important process of elections that is starting at this meeting today."

Miguel Olvera, another leader of the leadership committee, also addressed this question by saying, "The union is not these walls or offices. The union is in the plant. It is our own strength. A strong contract will be won with our efforts."

Other workers joined the discussion. José Mateo, another leader who works in the boning department, proposed at the meeting that workers organize a petition demanding the company respect the validity of the vote.

"They are telling me that my vote is not worth anything. We do not need another election. We already won. With a petition we can register the will of the majority again, and I want the NLRB to see it," he said in a tone of outrage.

A brief discussion took place after the union meeting on the importance of reaching out to the strikers at Pepsi. The unionists at the Pepsi Bottling Group plant have been out on strike since June 11 and are facing many of the same challenges as the workers at Dakota Premium. At both plants, the work is destructive to the body and the bosses have been unyielding in their position.

Workers at Pepsi, members of Teamsters Local 792, are demanding a wage increase above the 2.7 percent yearly raise offered by the company, and the possibility of early retirement after 30 years of employment. Strikers have been very active, mounting sizable pickets in the afternoons, organizing leafleting brigades to public events to get out the word about their boycott of Pepsi products, and deploying members to follow scab trucks to their delivery destinations to set up picket lines.

A number of Dakota Premium workers expressed interest in going to the Pepsi strike lines that Saturday. Seven workers participated in the event.

"The striking Teamsters were very impressed with our show of solidarity," stated Francisco Picado, a full-time union organizer for UFCW Local 789 who was part of the visit. "They ate it up. The meat packers in turn were very impressed with the strength of the fight against Pepsi. They were struck by the fact that only one union member has been crossing the picket line. They wanted to know how to prepare a strike like this."

Leonard Miller contributed to this article.

# Striking telephone workers mobilize

Continued from front page

benefit copayments, working conditions, and opening up the union to the wireless phone workers," said Dexter Martin, a technician at Verizon for more than two years. "Right now in customer service, if you have to go to the bathroom you have to raise your hand or put a cup up on top of your work area and wait for permission." Workers are striking over "respect for CWA workers across America," he said.

The issue of "job security" has come up because Verizon wants the power to transfer a certain percentage of workers from one area to another, including into the unorganized wireless division, or to fire those who refuse. Workers here say the company shouldn't be able to force anyone to move.

Workers are also striking against the company's attempt to subcontract work to outside companies. Verizon would like to outsource a wide range of jobs, from installation and repair to customer service.

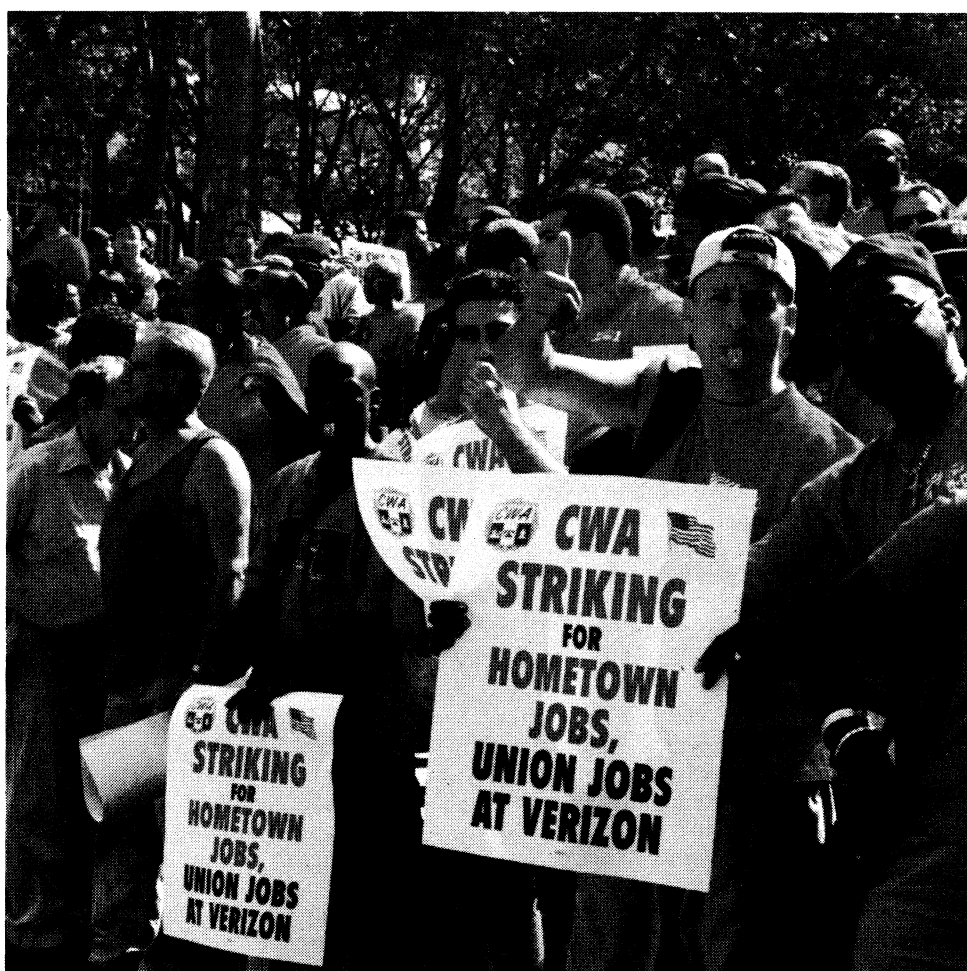
## Violence baiting

Verizon is continuing its campaign of violence baiting against the strike, aided by the major dailies in the city. The *New York Times* reported as fact that "acts of vandalism have taken thousands of phone lines out of service," without substantiating the claim. Striking union member Martin said, "There are thousands of lines down and Verizon is trying to blame it on us. Thousands of lines go down all the time, especially in the rain. The union did not tell anyone to go out and do anything like that."

"They weren't ready for the rains," he said. Rains knock out phone lines, especially in low lying flood areas.

CWA member Noyte said Verizon bosses "mood was, 'Oh there's not going to be a strike.' But we surprised them."

After the first week of the walkout the company has reportedly agreed to measures that would make it easier for workers in the wireless division to join the union. According to press reports and discussions on the picket line, Verizon agreed that if a majority of workers within the former Bell Atlan-



August 10 rally in New York. Phone strikers surprised bosses with militant picket lines.

tic territory sign cards to join the union the company would allow a "card check" rather than a union representation election to determine union recognition. This concession was reported on August 11, a day after the 8,000-strong rally.

As we go to press, no agreement has been reached on any of the other major issues, including subcontracting, mandatory overtime, benefit copayments, job security, and working conditions.

"We've been talking about this strike

since 1998," explained Martin, when they staged a two-day strike over similar issues. "We knew we'd strike if they didn't come with what we wanted," he added.

Martin explained that although the workers didn't expect the strike to go this long, they had all saved money and began preparing for a possible showdown. He said strikers will start receiving unemployment benefits September 29, that they are receiving strike benefits, and a strike relief fund has been set up to allow strikers to pay some bills.

# The battle over teaching evolution heats up

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

The battle over the teaching of evolution or creationism in the public schools was at the center of a nationally profiled local election for state Board of Education seats in Kansas. In the August 1 vote, two incumbent candidates in the Republican primaries who in August 1999 had voted to remove evolution as an explanation for the origin of species from the state's science curriculum were defeated. Another Republican candidate who supported the curriculum was also defeated.

As a result, after the November elections the new board will have a majority committed to overturning the antievolution policies currently in place.

The Kansas Board of Education's decision in a 6-4 vote last year did not formally ban the teaching of evolution, although it left the option of what to teach in the hands of local school boards by removing evolution from state tests that evaluate students' performance. But by effectively removing from school curriculum the teaching of evolution as the sole explanation for the origin of species, the board gave freer rein to promoting antiscientific doctrines of creationism in the public schools. The board also removed from the curriculum the big bang theory of the origin of the universe, which guides modern astronomy and physics.

Creationism is the myth—repackaged in the framework of "scientific" teaching—that a supernatural being created humans and other species. Evolution, based on scientific investigation of fossils, anatomy, and genetic evidence, shows how species come into being and evolve over long periods of time through a process of natural selection.

The campaign against the teaching of evolution in the schools has heated up in recent years. It is one front in the "culture war" spearheaded by rightist forces, which scapegoat sections of the population, foster irrational ideas, and mobilize emotional energy around the "decadence" of society in order to promote reactionary "solutions" to the social crisis caused by the capitalist system. Promoting obscurantism is used to undermine hard-won democratic rights such as the separation of church and state and to attack the scientific materialist understanding of the world that working people need to be able to change it.

Antievolution forces have sought to make inroads in a number of other states besides Kansas. Last October state officials in Kentucky eliminated the word "evolution" from the school curriculum. In Alabama and Oklahoma, authorities ordered that textbooks carry a disclaimer about the certainty of evolution.

Officials in New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and other states considered, but defeated, proposals by opponents of evolution. Last fall the New Mexico government barred creationism in the schools and endorsed the teaching of evolution in the science curriculum.

The rightist advocates of creationism in the schools have been emboldened by the reactionary policies of Democratic and Republican politicians, such as attacks on a woman's right to abortion, efforts to search youth with metal detectors and cops in the schools, attempts to censor freedom of

speech, and other assaults on the rights of working people.

Thomas DeLay, a prominent Republican congressman, argued last year that the shootings in high schools in Colorado and Georgia were linked to the "culture of abortion and the teaching of evolution."

Major capitalist politicians have bent to the rightist assault on science. "A year ago, when the Kansas school board removed evolution from the state's science standards, the nation's leading politicians barely responded," reported the *Washington Post* in an August 4 editorial. "John McCain and Elizabeth Dole declared that such judgments were a matter for the states; George W. Bush announced he was positively in favor of teaching creationism alongside evolution.... Al Gore, in other contexts a vigorous advocate of science education, initially refused to criticize Kansas and then did so reluctantly."

## Latest round in assault on science

Until the late 1960s, several states forbade the teaching of evolution at all. In a 1925 trial in Tennessee, John Scopes, a young high school biology teacher, was convicted of violating that state's law against teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. While his conviction was later overturned on a technicality, the trial had a big impact on the nation's public school system. Throughout the 1930s references to "Darwin" or "evolution" were not to be found in most biology textbooks.

In 1968 the Supreme Court ruled that banning the teaching of evolution is unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds—a victory resulting from the democratic gains of the civil rights movement.

In a second offensive in the late 1970s, the governments of Arkansas and Louisiana required that if evolution was taught, "equal time" must be granted to teaching the creation story, dubbed "creation science." Those pushing this antiscientific approach falsely argued that state and local school boards should play down the importance of evolution by presenting it, along with creationism, as unproven explanations. A Supreme Court ruling in 1987 rejected those laws.

The latest tactic, used in Kansas, is to simply delete, but not formally ban, evolution from school tests and allow instruction in the biblical "alternative" as a choice for local school boards.

Ultrarightist politician Patrick Buchanan, who has long railed against the teaching of evolution in the schools, has sometimes couched his reactionary position as a question to be decided "democratically" on the local level. Asked in a "Meet the Press" television interview last October whether creationism or evolution should be taught in the schools, he replied, "That should be decided at the local level by the school itself. I would prefer that children have voluntarily the right to be taught the Bible in public school or the Torah or anything as long as it's voluntary.... Let it be decided there by majority rule."

Forcing creationism into the curriculum on an equal footing with evolution makes a mockery out of scientific education. As Stephen Jay Gould, a leading defender of Darwinian evolution, put it, teaching biology without evolution is "like teaching English but making grammar optional."

The materialist explanation of the evolution of biological species was first outlined by Charles Darwin in 1859 in a book entitled "On the Origin of Species." At the time Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, founding leaders of the modern communist workers movement, hailed Darwin's discovery. In a letter to Engels, Marx wrote, "This is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view" of the development of human history.

Engels, too, noted the revolutionary character of Darwin's study, which views nature in both materialist and dialectical, dynamic terms. He pointed out that Darwin opened the way for a new view of nature where "all rigidity was dissolved, all fixity dissipated.... the whole of nature [was] shown as moving in eternal flux."

The battle today over the teaching of evolution is one expression of how, in times of mounting social crisis, the capitalist rulers seek to blunt rising class consciousness by promoting religious and other antiscientific notions. These false ideas fetishize existing class relations and obfuscate an understanding of the development of human society

and the modern class struggle.

Today, the attack on Darwinian evolution is moving from the fringes on the right wing into the pages of established bourgeois magazines through some of its "supporters," who give evolution a teleological explanation—that is, the idea this process has an ultimate goal.

## Attack on evolution by 'supporters'

Robert Wright, for example, has published a book entitled *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, which argues that there is a purpose and directionality to the evolution of life. An article based on two chapters of his book appeared in the December 13 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, entitled "The accidental creationist: Why Stephen Jay Gould is bad for evolution."

In his attack on Gould's materialist viewpoint, Wright argues that the evolution of advanced life was likely from the start. "The fates of particular species may depend on the luck of the draw," he writes. "But the properties they embody were in the cards—at least in the sense that the deck was stacked heavily in their favor."

Such unscientific arguments, like other forms of mystification, are ultimately aimed at convincing working people that we are the objects, not the subjects, of history; that there must be a plan, a creator, to whose goals we should submit rather than through our actions being capable of taking control of our destiny. The fight for a scientific understanding of the world is vital for workers and farmers to have the tools necessary to transform it through a social revolution.

# Chicago food workers end strike



Militant/Betsey Stone

Members of Laborers Local 681 picket Appetizers and Inc. during strike. Contract approved in July 26 vote included concessions, but workers say that striking and taking a stand for their rights strengthened them in ongoing struggle with the company.

BY ELIZABETH STONE AND ARRIN HAWKINS

CHICAGO—Members of Laborers International Union Local 681 voted overwhelmingly to return to work July 26 after more than two weeks on strike against Appetizers and Inc.

As workers lined up across from the plant to vote, none of those interviewed by the *Militant* spoke favorably of the contract offer. Nonetheless, some workers said they were glad they took a stand. "It's better to fight for something than not to fight at all," Ana Serrano remarked.

On a major issue of the strike—extending the workweek to Saturdays and Sundays—the new contract states that although workers hired before July 2000 will not work weekends, new hires will be forced to work these days. The company will use this setup to divide newly hired workers from those with more seniority.

Quality control workers and mechanics can be assigned to do Saturday and Sunday work, but for no more than 30 days and at a \$1.50 per hour pay increase.

Line workers, the majority of whom make close to minimum wage, got a small raise averaging about 13 cents an hour. Workers with more than five years seniority succeeded in keeping seniority pay, which the company wanted to take away. But no such pay will be offered to workers hired after the signing of the new contract as they gain seniority.

Why did workers vote to return? Despite the strong picket lines throughout the almost three-week strike, the company brought in temporary workers. Strikers were worried that this would become permanent and they would lose their jobs and the union.

Despite the inadequate contract terms, many workers are returning more proud and

confident than before the strike. Ana Serrano, a worker on second shift, spoke of the "strong women" who kept the picket lines large and militant.

On the afternoon of July 31, the day they went back, first-shift workers gathered outside Appetizers as those on second shift walked in. Maria Soberanis, a line worker, explained that workers are continuing to fight inside the plant. Another line worker noted that there is tighter security inside the plant, with two additional security guards walking around the line. Other workers explained that when they returned to work, they found they had been assigned to another job, some at lower pay.

Nino Resto, a shop steward on the afternoon shift, reported that 20 positions were "stripped" or permanently replaced by newly hired workers. Most workers were unhappy with this, and four quit. The union has taken this grievance to the National Labor Relations Board.

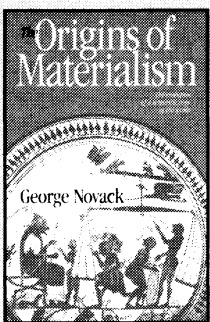
On their first day back, temporary workers continued to be bused in and out of the plant. Resto stated that temporary workers have been a mainstay of Appetizer's workforce since before the strike, something that made it easier to use them as scabs. The company has started a petition campaign to decertify the union.

Many workers explained that the fight will continue inside the plant. Nino Resto stated, "We're strong in there still. We became like a family out there on the picket line. When the rain came, who came with the umbrella to keep you dry? After three weeks, you know who you can count on. You know exactly who has got your back covered."

Arrin Hawkins is a member of the Chicago chapter of the Young Socialists.

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# Trowe follows the trail of labor struggles in Louisiana, Mississippi

BY JACQUIE HENDERSON

HOUSTON—Socialist Workers vice-presidential candidate Margaret Trowe joined workers organizing and defending unions in Louisiana and Mississippi, and Texas during a four-day visit in mid-August. The following notes were taken while traveling with the working-class candidate at factory gates, picket lines, and meetings in that region.

**AMELIA, Louisiana, August 11.** Margaret Trowe and socialist campaign supporters went to the J. Ray McDermott fabrication yard, which makes giant platforms for offshore oil rigs. We had learned, on our way to another campaign stop, that workers here had voted in a union yesterday. We turned south from our planned route and headed through the bayous to this small town near Morgan City, on the Gulf Coast.

Trowe and David Ferguson, Socialist Workers congressional candidate from Houston, introduced themselves to a worker near the yard. Trowe explained that they wanted to talk with workers about their union victory the day before. The worker, a fitter, introduced himself as part of the organizing effort.

The candidates spent some time talking with the fitter, who described some of his experiences in the fight for dignity and safe working conditions at McDermott. Trowe outlined what her campaign stands for and showed her campaign paper, the *Militant*. The unionist said, "Well, you're for the working person. I'm for you. I'll help any way I can."

Hundreds of workers began driving out of the yard while others went in to work. Over the course of an hour, close to 100 workers stopped to talk to the socialist candidates and took campaign brochures to read. A small number returned the literature after hearing that the campaign is pro-union.

"James Harris and I support your union drive. What you have done here is very important for other workers too," Trowe told workers.

"Packinghouse workers at Dakota Premium Foods in Minnesota will be happy to know you are organizing the way they are," said Trowe, citing one of several current

union-organizing battles. Sixteen people purchased the *Militant* and five signed up to support the campaign.

**AVONDALE, Louisiana, August 12.** "Where have you been?" a shipyard worker asked when socialist workers met him as he got out of his car to go to work early Saturday morning. "You haven't been here in a while," he said, buying a copy of the *Militant*.

Last year the union finally won the right to sign up members at this shipyard, the state's largest employer. The workers signed up for the union but the company has yet to agree to a contract. "Is this about the union?" asked two workers pulling up to talk to Trowe. They told of three deaths at the yard caused by company negligence. They were glad to hear about the Socialist Workers campaign and took copies of *Perspectiva Mundial*.

"Thank you for coming. Please come back more often," another shipyard worker said.

With the help of a second team, the campaigners met close to 100 workers, who took socialist campaign literature including 14 papers and one Pathfinder book.

**NATCHEZ, Mississippi.** On the way to meet with workers locked out by Titan Tire, we noticed a new growth industry along the highway—prisons.

Besides the large number of long-established prisons in the area, we saw half a dozen new, sprawling, windowless cement constructions surrounded by barbed wire and security guards.

In Natchez we got a warm welcome at the Steelworkers union hall. The walls are covered with pictures of visits the strikers have made in solidarity with other unionists and in rallies to strengthen their own fight. Strikers pointed out Trowe in several pictures.

We stayed for hours, meeting many of the union fighters who came and went during the course of that Saturday afternoon. Workers handed each other copies of the campaign flyer on presidential candidate James Harris and Trowe, and asked Trowe questions. The vice-presidential candidate asked questions in return and expressed her views on what to do about the situation we are confronting as working people.

One topic of discussion back and forth was whether cops are workers, whether there are bad ones and good ones. In Detroit, one striker said, the cops went easier on their demonstration because they were unionists too.

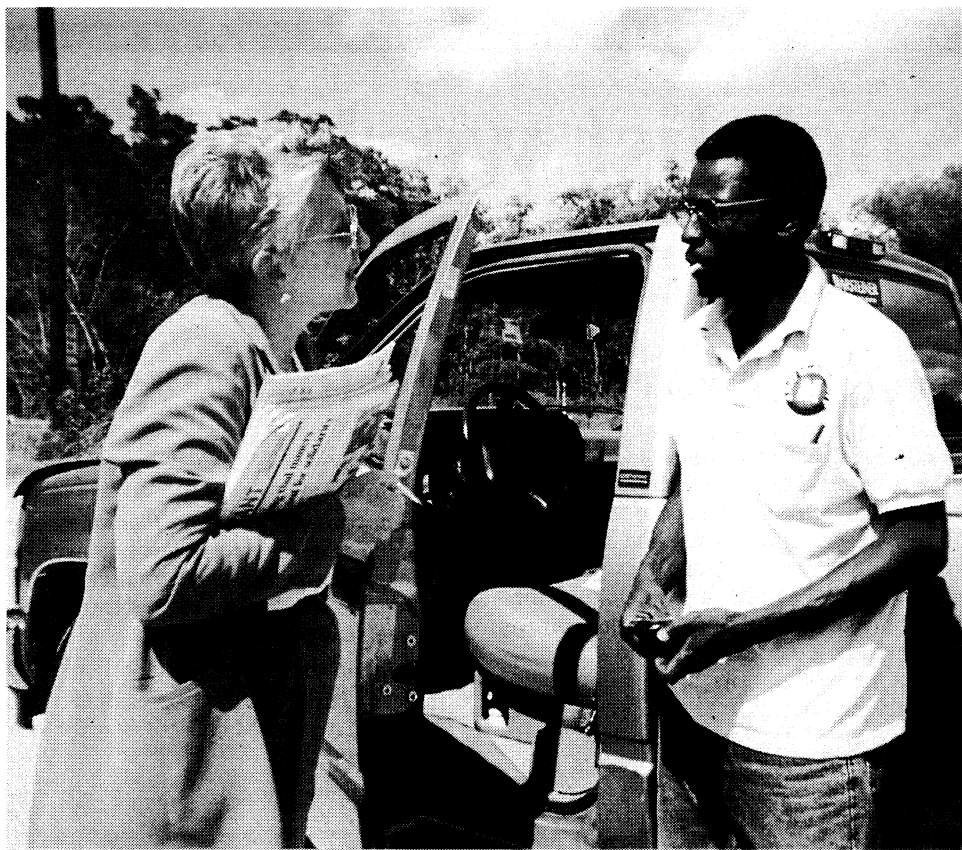
"In my opinion a police union is not a union," Trowe said. "They aren't part of the working class. Their job is to serve and protect Titan Tire and the other capitalists. Not to serve and protect us, working people." Strikers had experiences to back up that fact.

Another hot topic was the 300 accidents caused by Firestone tires that have only just been recalled. Most of the workers are tire builders, and they had strong opinions on the ways the companies cut corners that endanger safety—both in the building of the tires and in the product itself. One worker, a tire inspector, highlighted one safety problem—that the company had cut back on inspections and virtually eliminated them.

Trowe added, "That is the nature of capitalism. It's the lawful workings of capitalism. Capitalists like the Titan bosses are driven to increase their rate of profit. They can do that only by driving down our working conditions and wages, by putting our lives at risk. That's why the treads come off the tires and why so many of us get hurt on the job. Workers want to make a product that is safe, but the company blocks our efforts for the sake of profit. This is an important union question."

We started to leave, but a few more workers wanted to ask Trowe some questions. One worker wanted more campaign brochures to take with him to church.

We left an hour later, heading back to Gramercy, Louisiana, where Trowe has been invited to the picket line of Steelworkers



Militant/Jacque Henderson

Socialist Workers Party vice-presidential candidate Margaret Trowe campaigns near McDermott fabrication yard in Louisiana. The day before, the workers had voted in a union. Workers told Trowe of several union-organizing drives in "oil patch" region.

locked out by Kaiser Aluminum.

**GRAMERCY, Louisiana.** At the picket shack outside the Kaiser Aluminum plant here, workers were keenly interested in what we had found along the road about labor struggles. We started out talking with a few workers and were soon joined by half a dozen more. Many added their own experiences, listing more union-organizing drives they knew of in the area.

Some have been thinking ahead to the expected end to the lockout, about how to strengthen the union's power in the plant once they have returned to work.

Some of us continued the discussion at a restaurant. Union fighters and socialist campaigners from Texas and Minnesota mixed it up with a locked-out Kaiser worker and two young workers fighting against racist discrimination and for unions. The discussion ranged from the nature of the capitalists' drive against our class to the necessary

drive by workers to defend ourselves.

"Why does racism exist? Is it in the interests of white workers?" "Do workers everywhere have the same interests?" "What about farmers?" "How do we win?" "What responsibility do workers in struggle have to other workers?" "What about workers in other countries?" "How do we win?" These were some of the questions discussed.

One worker described the capitalists as "vultures—they try to divide us up and pick, pick, pick at us. But they're not finding it such easy pickings anymore," he added. He picked up a copy of *The Changing Face of U.S. Politics: Working-Class Politics and the Trade Unions*, by Jack Barnes, to study.

Those of us from Houston promised to come back in a few days. Then we headed back to Texas to get a few hours sleep before an early-morning stop to meet workers going into Quietflex, a Houston company where Mexican-born workers are continuing to lead an effort to unionize the plant.

## Harris joins pickets in New England

BY MARTIN BOYERS

BOSTON—Socialist Workers presidential candidate James Harris toured New England August 6–9. He spent time discussing politics with workers, farmers, and youth involved in resistance to union busting, the farm crisis, and political reaction.

Harris joined a picket line of striking members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Communications Workers of America at Verizon's downtown headquarters here. Hundreds of telephone workers picketed several entrances of the building.

The next day, he visited the picket line at Revere Copper in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where 82 members of the United Auto Workers have been on strike since May 1. The discussions with strikers there ranged from the state of the union movement to the example that the Cuban revolution provides for working people.

Harris had dinner with two farm activists from the organization Rural Vermont. They discussed how working farmers are caught in the crunch between their growing production costs and the falling prices that capitalist processors pay farmers.

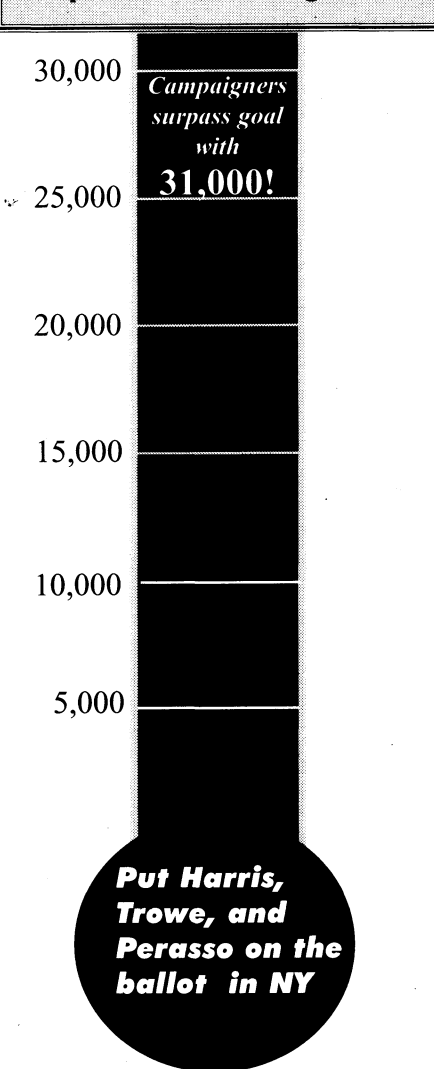
One of the farm activists described the growing international competition that farmers face for their products. Harris replied that farmers and workers have to look at the solutions to their problems on a world scale, based on working people from different countries closing ranks against their common class enemy. This means rejecting the bosses' trap of American nationalism, which pits working people from different countries against each other. They discussed the positive impact that immigration has on strengthening the fighting experience of the working class in the United States.

One of the farm activists told the socialist candidate about a organizing meeting taking place at that moment. It had been called by defenders of Vermont's "civil unions" law. Earlier this year, Vermont was the first state to pass a law allowing gay and

lesbian couples to establish a legal status. Opponents of gay rights have begun a campaign to repeal that law. The August 9 meeting to defend the law drew 80 people. Harris and the two farm activists joined the meeting in progress and pledged their support to the fight to end discrimination and harassment of gays.

Martin Boyers is a member of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees.

**Campaign to put Socialist Workers candidates on New York ballot**  
**Goal: 30,000 signatures by Aug. 21**  
**Requirement: 15,000 signatures**



**Campaigning to get Harris and Trowe on the ballot**

Colorado  
Minnesota  
New Jersey  
Washington State  
Florida  
Iowa  
Mississippi  
New York  
Utah  
Washington, D.C.  
Louisiana  
Rhode Island  
Tennessee  
Vermont  
Wisconsin

On ballot  
Petitioning completed  
Still petitioning

# Socialist workers, youth register growing integration in struggles of working people

## 'We are structuring the revolutionary party through mass work'

Continued from front page

nist workers and fellow fighters are discussing the program and strategy of the revolutionary workers movement—the lessons of worker and farmer resistance to exploitation and oppression earned in struggle over the past 150 years. Fighting workers and farmers are feeling a greater need to read and discuss the *Militant*, its Spanish-language monthly sister publication *Perspectiva Mundial*, the Marxist magazine *New Internationalist*, and books and pamphlets published by Pathfinder Press.

The effect of this work could be seen in the spirit, energy, political voice—and financial contributions—of those participating in the conference.

In attendance were some 450 people—members of the Socialist Workers Party and its sister communist organizations in other countries; Young Socialists members; organized supporters of the communist movement; and other workers, farmers, and youth interested in learning more about the struggles unfolding within the proletarian movement, as well as learning more about the YS and SWP. Seventy five were under the age of 30, and some 60 were 25 or younger. Workers and youth came from Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as from France, Greece, Italy, Korea, and Puerto Rico.

In response to the increased resistance by working people, participants in the Active Workers Conference came out of the gathering better prepared to increase the political striking power of the communist movement, and on a sounder footing to carry out campaigns over the rest of the summer and fall:

- an international effort to expand the sales of Pathfinder literature to workers and youth, focusing on the new pamphlet, *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning: the Fraud of Education Reform under Capitalism* and the book *Capitalism's World Disorder: Working-Class Politics at the Millennium*, both by

SWP national secretary Jack Barnes;

- a drive to win new subscribers to the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial* among fighting workers and farmers, as well as other working people and youth attracted to these struggles and repelled by the brutality of capitalist society;
- support for the Socialist Workers 2000 ticket of James Harris for president of the United States and Margaret Trowe for vice president; and
- a fund drive to raise \$125,000 by November 13 to finance the production and distribution of the *Militant* and *PM*.

Supporters of the communist movement who are organizing the Pathfinder Reprint Project—through which volunteers around the world are working to turn every Pathfinder title into digital files ready to be produced on the modern computer-to-plate equipment in the publisher's printshop—announced their plans for the coming year at the conference, as well. They aim to have fully half of Pathfinder's booklist in digital form by May Day 2001.

The party's supporters also announced an effort to raise the level of their monthly financial contributions to the party to a total of \$250,000 annually by December 31.

In a Friday afternoon presentation on the second day of the conference, SWP leader Jack Barnes outlined the central political ideas and strategic perspectives being reflected in the panels of active workers at the gathering. Barnes drew on concrete experiences of socialist workers over the last several months, and raised a number of issues that were discussed over the next day and half at a second panel, from the floor, at classes, and informally.

"Some day, if people hold tough," Barnes said, "an example emerges that not

"Once the company agreed to meet with the committee elected by those engaged in that sit-down strike, the workers had the union if they didn't stop fighting."

What is happening in South St. Paul can change the real perspectives in packinghouses throughout the Upper Midwest and beyond, Barnes said. In Omaha, Nebraska, where the UFCW has initiated an organizing drive, "all it takes is for workers inside one of the big packinghouses to decide, 'Let's do it like they did at Dakota!'" When something like that happens, then—after months of collecting signatures on union cards, and efforts by young people volunteering their services—the prospects for actually winning a union can begin to be transformed overnight."

### Capacity of workers

The evening before Barnes's talk, the conference had been opened by Roberta Niles, a member of the Young Socialists who works at another St. Paul meatpacking plant, and Norton Sandler from San Francisco, who is the organizer of the party's Trade Union Committee.

"The struggle at Dakota showed me what workers are capable of," Niles said, "and gave me a sense that this is the future of the working class."

"I also want my co-workers to be awakened to the possibilities of a socialist future"

through reading publications like the *Militant* and *PM* and getting involved in labor and other social struggles going on today, Niles remarked.

Sandler called attention to the words—the guidelines—on the large banners that had been painted by volunteers and hung behind the podium in the hall where the main conference sessions were held. The central banner read "¡Sí se puede!" the affirmation of confidence and strength—Yes, we can!—that has been taken as the battle cry by the Dakota workers and many other working people.

That banner was flanked by two others that read: "Following natural lines of resistance in the working class" and "Structure the revolutionary party through mass work." Those watchwords, Sandler said, described the course the SWP and YS had set out on at an Active Workers Conference held in July 1998 in Pittsburgh, where the socialists assessed their initial experiences in responding to the new resistance of working people to the offensive by the employers and their government.

The Pittsburgh gathering had been followed by a joint party-YS conference in Los Angeles in December 1998, held concurrent with a YS national convention. Participants there had discussed the perspectives summarized in a talk by Barnes on "A Sea Change in Working-Class Politics," which was subsequently edited for publication as the opening chapter of the book *Capitalism's World Disorder*.

Since those two gatherings, and an Active Workers Conference in Ohio a year earlier, Sandler said, the party has established branch organizing committees in six—usually small—towns and cities in the centers of the coal mining, textile and garment, auto, and meatpacking industries, and closer to farmers struggles.

Sandler reported that socialists will be establishing a new branch organizing committee in Tampa, Florida, in late August. It is an outgrowth of the Miami branch reaching out to farmers and industrial workers in central Florida and—together with party and YS units in Atlanta and Birmingham—reaching up to the triangle of northern Florida, southern Georgia, and western Ala-



Photo: Courtesy of UFCW Local 789

On eve of July 21 union vote at Dakota Premium Foods in St. Paul, Minnesota, workers rally in UFCW Local 789 union hall. "Fifty-one days between a sit-down strike and union victory in a major factory is, to put it mildly, unusual today," said SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes. It can have an impact throughout the Upper Midwest. "All it takes is for workers in one of the big packinghouses to decide, 'Let's do it like they did at Dakota!'"

only inspires but shocks—shocks—the thinking working-class world into a change, seemingly slight at first, in the focus of their creative work and even the very pattern of their daily lives.

### Packinghouse workers struggle

"The sit-down strike and rapid union victory at the Dakota Premium packinghouse is such an event. It shocked the officers of the local union. It shocked many working people throughout the Midwest. And it shocked our party and the Young Socialists," he said.

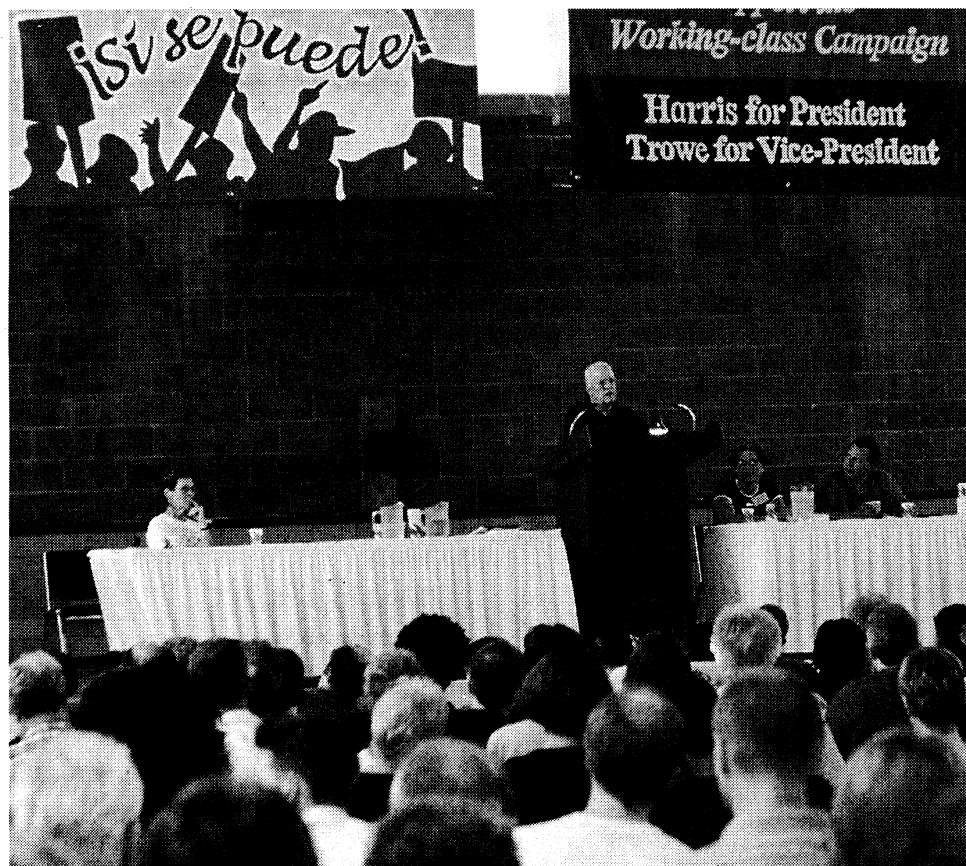
Workers at Dakota Premium Foods in South St. Paul, Minnesota, staged a seven-hour sit-down strike June 1, demanding the bosses address immediate concerns such as the brutal line speed, the company's practice of putting injured workers back on the job, and schemes to cut pay. By the end of that day, management agreed to meet with a delegation elected by the workers and granted concessions on line speed and other issues. On July 21 workers at Dakota Premium, organized by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 789, won a union representation election by a decisive 112-71 margin.

"Fifty-one days between a sit-down strike and union victory in a major factory is, to put it mildly, unusual today," Barnes said.

"The decisive moment was that morning when workers sat down in the cafeteria; when they would not work; when they would not be cowed, bought off, or divided," he added. "That's when the bosses broke and said, 'We will meet with you,'—and 'you' had become plural not singular; not just as an individual 'Dakota employee,' but with a delegation chosen by the workers themselves.

"A great moment in the American class struggle occurred that day, and the first steps across a bridge were taken," Barnes said.

"Once the workers came into the plant, punched the time clock, and then sat down in the cafeteria and refused to work, they were challenging the sanctity of private property. 'We refuse any longer to be treated like cattle, not human beings,' they said. 'We refuse any longer to be brutalized on the line.'



Militant/Carole Lesnick

"Fighting workers will always respond to those who help show the way in which the unions can be transformed into revolutionary instruments of struggle," Jack Barnes said. "There are no limits beforehand on how far this process can go."



bama.

In addition, Sandler said, substantial progress has been made in revitalizing the activity of socialist workers in the industrial unions in the United States, who work collectively together in plants, mines, and mills across the country. There has been growth and renewal of the party's work in the garment and textile industries organized by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE); the meatpacking industry, organized by the UFCW; and coal mines organized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

In addition, the conference marked a turning point in how socialists in the auto, rail, airport and aerospace, and steel industries are working to build local union fractions in their areas. Above all, this will accelerate the convergence of the course of these fractions with that of the party in UNITE, the UMWA, and the UFCW.

Coming out of the conference, socialists in the United Transportation Union (UTU), United Steelworkers of America (USWA), and International Association of Machinists (IAM) planned national meetings in August with the primary aim of reorganizing so they can work together in local units in the same plants or worksites. In many cases, this involves changing jobs or moving to new parts of the country where fights are taking place or are brewing.

At the conference session Saturday night, Ellen Berkeley, a worker in a UAW-organized auto parts plant in Detroit, explained how party members in the UAW had decided this spring to get out of situations where they were working in plants by themselves, and to get into workplaces with other party members. Working alone "made it impossible to have a feel for what was going on in the union and industry," she said.

At a national fraction meeting at the end of April, socialists in the UAW had voted to end all one-person job situations by June 15, a deadline that was met. Since then, Berkeley said, "we have a new fraction of

Although he had initially planned the trip with two other socialist workers, Wilson said that at the last minute neither could join the team. "But we had an obligation not only to the workers in Kemmerer but to two fellow fighters to go ahead with the trip," he said.

When the three members of the new team met, they discussed their common goals. Wilson said his fellow miner—who considers the *Militant* "to be the only newspaper that told the truth" about an earlier UMWA strike by his own local—decided to help introduce the *Militant* to strikers they met. The team was a real success in what they learned about the strike, the coverage written for the *Militant* and *PM*, and contacts made for the ongoing struggle of miners in the West and throughout the country. In the process, five strikers bought *Militant* subscriptions, and numerous single issues were sold.

#### Working together with fighters

"Working together like this with fighters engaged in various battles is something we should start to expect," Wilson said. "It comes out of consistent, steady work with militants with whom we increasingly converge. The *Militant* becomes a natural part of what we and other workers are doing."

Also speaking on a conference panel was Samuel Farley, a worker who took part in the June 1 sit-down at Dakota Premium Foods and a leader of the organizing drive there. Farley said the struggle for the union and a contract at Dakota gave him "a real feel for the battalions of working people that will lead and be a part of the transformation of the unions. When you consider the composition of the workers—overwhelmingly immigrants—and the conditions they face on the job, you realize that what we did can and will be repeated elsewhere."

*The Workers' Voice*, produced by pro-union meat packers in the plant, has been an essential tool in answering each of the antiunion moves by the company, Farley said. The paper helped cut across divisions imposed by management between workers in different departments and from different backgrounds, and "explained what the union is and the need for our own organization."

"We have worked from the start to have a leadership from the various key production areas, such as the kill floor, the cut, and packaging," he said. Getting jobs at the center of production is crucial not only in meatpacking but in other industries, Farley said, since that is where the bosses are imposing speedup and conditions that propel workers to resist and in the process forge a leadership.

"We are also learning that solidarity is not just something you receive, but something you have to give in order to advance your struggle. We are now preparing for the eventuality of a strike to get a contract," he said.

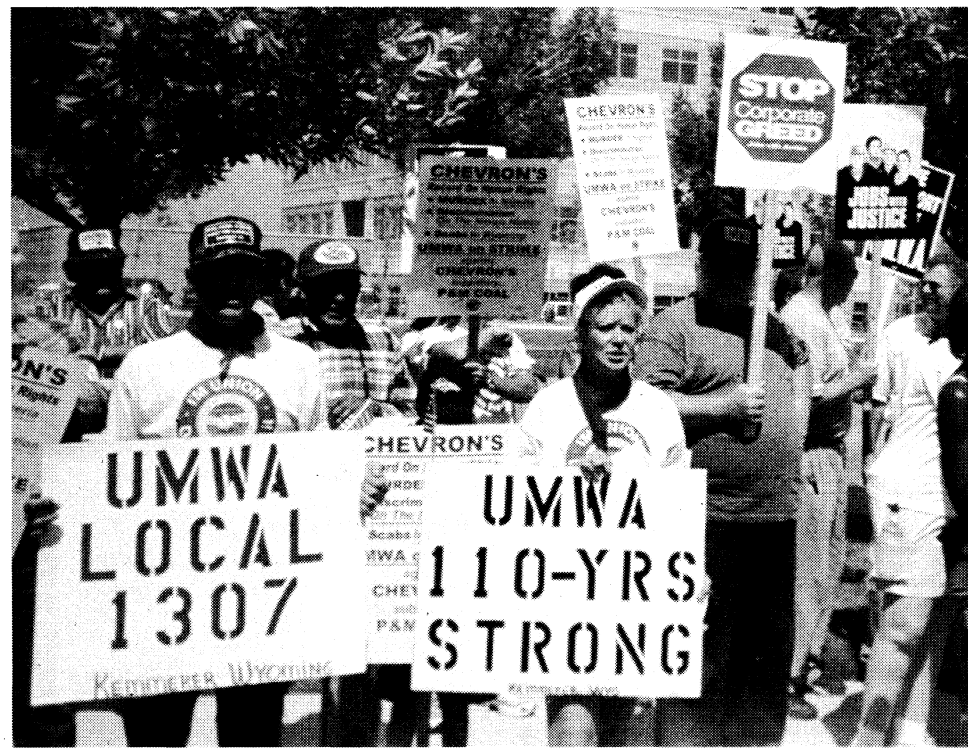
Amy Roberts, another leader in the organizing drive at Dakota Premium, spoke on the second conference panel during the day Saturday. She explained that "women have been stepping forward, distributing *The Workers' Voice*, and going to union meetings." In one case they forced the company to ask a supervisor, known for screaming at women workers, to resign after he tried to fire a worker.

Being part of the union battle, Roberts explained, helped her and others "to learn real discipline and gain experience doing mass work as part of a broader vanguard. If you vote to do something," she said, "your co-workers expect you to carry it out and want to know why if you didn't."

In working-class struggles such as these, said Barnes during his Friday afternoon presentation, the gauge of victory or defeat, of setbacks or advances, continues to be that used by Karl Marx some 150 years ago. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx wrote: "Now and again the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers."

The great product of working-class struggles "is the ever-greater union of working people and example of workers' struggles," Barnes said. "This includes developing a vanguard of our class that gains greater class confidence and a broader world view."

Within these struggles, "fighting workers will always respond to those who help show the way in which the unions can be transformed into revolutionary instruments of class struggle," Barnes said. "If we have not



Militant/Mark Friedman

Striking UMWA members and supporters rally July 26 in Denver at P&M's national headquarters. Miners in Wyoming and New Mexico beat back bosses' demands for 12-hour days. At conference, coal miner Danny Wilson described the solidarity work socialists had been organizing jointly with fellow miners for the P&M strikes.

fought for this, there is no possibility of finding a way to overthrow capitalism, a road toward the socialist revolution," Barnes said.

"The goal is not to turn the unions into a revolutionary party, not to turn the unions into a revolutionary army, or into some kind of 'pure' union in the imagination of some social reformer—no matter how 'red' or whatever. The goal is to turn the unions into effective, fighting, instruments of the working class that take the moral high ground, think socially, and act politically. Instruments that over time can organize the working class to be politically independent," he said.

"There are no limits beforehand on how far this process can go. It opens the opportunity to organize tens of millions of workers in the unions."

#### Speed, leverage, timeliness

Three words, Barnes said, summarize the challenge facing communist workers in face of this new situation in the labor movement: speed, leverage, and timeliness.

During a retreat in the labor movement such as the one that marked much of the 1990s, he said, "a small organization like ours learns that what we don't do or prepare on Tuesday can often be done on Wednesday or Thursday or even later without big negative consequences."

But this changes when working people begin depending more and more on what each other do in a common fight. Then the speed of response time becomes decisive. "The truth is," Barnes said, "that Danny had no choice but to make a quick decision to go ahead with the team to the Kemmerer

mine, since he had a commitment to a fellow miner, another fighting unionist, and other workers.

"Workers assumed we would be there. At that moment, there was no decision to make."

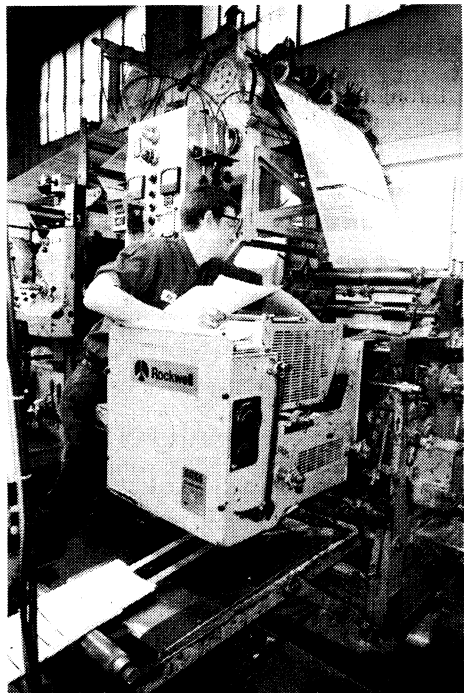
"What they did was a model. Because with the size and geographic spread of party units today, we cannot respond rapidly as fights break out and deepen unless we find other workers to join in and do it with us. And we will be better politically as we do so."

Communist workers also have to concentrate our striking power where our forces and our propaganda weapons have the greatest leverage in the class struggle, Barnes said, "where the fights and prospects for fights are the greatest. Where we are part of larger forces—a yeast, one of the levers within these forces."

When the developments in South St. Paul happened in June, for example, the Young Socialists set an example by putting aside a prior plan for summer activity and getting a substantial number of YS members into the Twin Cities and elsewhere in the Midwest to strengthen the energy of workers inside packing plants.

Party branches more than ever must carry out rounded political campaigns, Barnes said, reaching out as broadly as possible to working people and youth in their localities and regions. They must reach out to working people and youth deeply involved in the intense, minute-to-minute, and eventually—if left solely to their own logic—narrowing union and factory struggles.

Continued on Page 8



Militant/Susan Zárate

Ryan Lewis, chief web press operator in Pathfinder's printshop, at work. "Five Young Socialists are taking on major leadership responsibilities in the shop," YS leader Olympia Newton told conference.

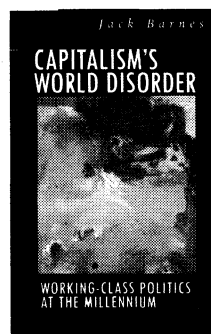
three in an auto parts plant in Detroit, which is a first step to put us on the road to rebuilding a national UAW fraction."

#### Linking up with fellow fighters

As the Active Workers Conference was taking place, UMWA coal miners in New Mexico and Wyoming were on strike against the Pittsburg and Midway Coal Co. (P&M), owned by Chevron. By holding firm and reaching out for labor solidarity, the workers at both mines beat back the energy giant's demand for 12-hour workdays and other concessions, winning contracts in early August.

As part of the first conference panel, Danny Wilson, a coal miner who works at a surface mine in the West, reported on solidarity work socialists had been organizing together with fellow miners for the P&M strikes. Wilson described how he joined with another coal miner who has been reading the *Militant*, as well as a union pipeline worker, to bring solidarity to striking miners in Kemmerer, Wyoming.

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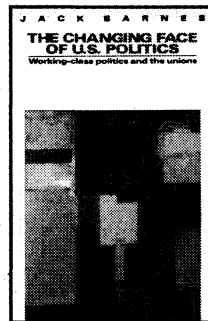
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Continued from page 7

At the same time, he said, the branches and branch organizing committees, union fractions, and cadres of the party now must also focus one-sided attention on particular plants, mines, and mills and often on particular workers districts in cities where they are located.

The importance of timeliness, Barnes said, is underlined by the way workers at Dakota Premium are using *The Workers' Voice* to respond point by point to the probes, attacks, and lies of management.

"Under these conditions, it's not only how quickly you counterpunch, but precisely when and how," Barnes said. "That's a question of political habits, and a concrete feel for the laws of the class struggle. That's where timeliness comes in."

#### Developing Young Socialists cadres

Following up on the comments by Sandler on the steps being taken to build functioning union fractions, Barnes pointed to the participation of a substantial number of Young Socialists in these efforts. This common fraction-building experience by party veterans and YS members occupies a uniquely important place in prospects for strengthening the Young Socialists, he said.

"A communist youth organization never grows rapidly except during a period of massive action," Barnes said, "usually social protest demonstrations of one kind or another—like the Black rights marches, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, and rise of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This is when the energies of broad layers of young people in the streets—high school and college students, as well as young workers and farmers—place their stamp on the class struggle, and an organization such as the Young Socialists can take off."

A precondition to building a truly communist youth organization, however, Barnes said, is that the Young Socialists develop a self-confident political cadre, educated in Marxism and experienced in proletarian

in union fractions—demonstrating the capacity to lead, in an undifferentiated way, comrades from generations older than themselves—who will be the political leaders of an expanding communist youth organization as well.

"That's been the record with every youth organization in the history of the communist movement," Barnes said. He pointed to the growing weight of YS members in organizing the leadership of production and training in the Pathfinder printshop as one of the places where this process is already most advanced in the communist movement today.

#### Working-class space

Barnes noted that among workers and within working-class organizations and communities, communist workers have virtually unlimited space to discuss political ideas, distribute socialist books and newspapers, and join together in common struggles. "For a Marxist," he said, "this is one of the most decisive tests that the resistance we're describing in the working class is real, not just what we want to see happen."

This reality can't be confused, however, with the notion that working people have expanding space on the rulers' own turf or that revolutionary-minded workers and farmers can act as if they have guaranteed rights in bourgeois society. "Working people have fought for rights over more than two centuries," Barnes said. "And millions of workers believe the bosses and government should honor what's contained in the Bill of Rights and press to make the rulers do so."

But if anything, the exploiters and their various repressive apparatuses are even more on the prod during a period of rising worker and farmer resistance. Class political polarization increases.

Especially in small towns, on college



Representatives of the Central Organization of Cuban Workers (from left) Manuel Montero and Olga Rosa Gómez, on a speaking tour of several U.S. cities, participated in conference panel with their interpreter, Edison Brown, and SWP leader Norton Sandler.

"They have diverted us from using to the fullest what the rulers *cannot* touch—working-class space," Barnes said. Recognizing and acting on the expanding opportunities among working people to discuss a socialist perspective, while avoiding ultraleft adventures that invite victimization by the state, is a crucial part of advancing the party's work, he said.

#### Cuba and the U.S. class struggle

At the opening session of the Active Workers Conference on Thursday evening, Mary-Alice Waters, SWP leader and editor of the Marxist magazine *New Internationalist*, gave a feature talk on Cuba and the U.S. class struggle. She began by highlighting two important working-class actions that had taken place the day before, on July 26.

In Colorado, 100 striking coal miners from New Mexico and Wyoming and their supporters had rallied outside the P&M headquarters near Denver.

That same day, more than 1 million people marched through the streets of Havana, Cuba, celebrating the anniversary of the 1953 assault on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago—the action that launched the revolutionary armed struggle that brought down the hated U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in January 1959.

The big-business press noted with concern that Havana that morning was awash in red-and-black flags—the flag of the July 26 Movement, which under the leadership of Fidel Castro led the workers and farmers to victory in Cuba. What worries the imperialist powers, Waters remarked, is what these colors show about the living revolutionary continuity still deeply rooted among Cuban working people, and the ongoing efforts by the leadership to win the new generations to a proletarian course.

The UMWA rally in Denver and the "March of the Fighting People" in Havana may seem vastly disproportionate given their respective sizes, Waters said, but they have something much more significant in common. They underscore the growing interconnections of the fight to strengthen the working-class resistance in the United States and the workers state in Cuba.

"They register the most important developments in the world class struggle today—the growing confidence of working people, both in Cuba and the United States," she said.

Waters noted that in recent weeks there have been maneuvers in Congress around several bills or amendments to bills that would modify the terms of the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba. The framework of the current debate around these proposals, she pointed out, remains how best to intensify the economic, political, and diplomatic war against Cuba and overturn the socialist revolution.

"The problem for the capitalist politicians on all sides of this debate," Waters said, "is that all of them insist that anything they consider *real trade concessions* must be accompanied by *real political concessions* by Cuba on its proletarian and internationalist revolutionary course. And that's exactly

what Cuban revolutionists refuse to do."

The irreplaceability of communists in the United States within the interconnected class-struggle developments here and in Cuba was registered in their response to the April 22 raid in Miami by federal immigration cops during which Cuban six-year-old Elián González was seized.

Focusing on the basic class questions involved, communist workers explained both why defense of Cuban sovereignty was at stake in demanding that Washington return the child to his homeland, and why the commando-style raid was a blow to the working class—a blow dealt by the U.S. rulers to reinforce the arbitrary and semimilitary powers of the hated *migra* and strengthen the prerogatives of the executive branch.

Waters also drew attention to several indications of the growing confidence among working people in Cuba as they emerge from the worst years of the retreat of the 1990s and begin to deepen their revolutionary course, as part of an international vanguard that converges with what is changing in the United States as well.

#### Garment and textile workers

Socialist workers and youth described a range of other experiences during the Friday and Saturday panels, and from the floor of the conference during the discussion period.

Alyson Kennedy, organizer of the steering committee of the UNITE national fraction, pointed to some of the shop floor and strike struggles going on among garment and textile workers today. These include the recent strike at Tartan Textiles near Miami and organizing efforts by industrial laundry workers in Chicago.

Some socialist garment and textile workers are in unorganized plants, Kennedy explained. "The union question comes to the fore more and more in these plants," she said. "As battles pick up, more and more workers will turn to the established unions. How we conduct ourselves will have an impact on whether there is a victory or defeat."

A big majority of the UNITE fraction members are now sewing machine operators, Kennedy noted, a key component of the industry at the center of production. The fraction and its leadership have been able to function on a nationwide basis and take up questions at the center of communist work in the union because there are several local fractions of two or more socialists working together in the same plant.

"This gives us the opportunity to collectively work together, respond to what is happening on the job, and carry out party campaigns among co-workers," she said. Building this kind of fraction in production jobs is "crucial before the bigger struggles break out. Co-workers will get to know us as trustworthy and serious people they can depend on."

Kennedy explained several experiences fraction members had learned from of how ultraleft functioning cuts across this approach. In one plant, the local fraction exaggerated how far a contract fight had deep-



Supporters of communist movement at one of several Pathfinder Reprint Project workshops on each stage of converting books to digital files. Their efforts are helping keep Pathfinder's arsenal of 350 books in print, ensuring lessons of working-class movement are accessible to fighters. From left, volunteers Marla Puziss, Jim Rogers, Nick Gruenberg, and Ruth Cheney, who also spoke at Saturday evening session.

politics. The progress of the YS today has to be gauged by its success in doing this, not in terms of immediate quantitative results in recruitment, he said.

"That's why the flexibility shown by young socialists in going to where working-class struggles are sharpest right now is indispensable not only to building stronger party-YS fractions in the industrial unions," Barnes emphasized. "These YS members, many of them at the same time young party members, are also building the kind of cadre that can take advantage of what will open when a wave of social protests begin in response to the brutality and inhumanity of the imperialist system and the prerogatives of the capitalist rulers."

What's more, Barnes added, it will be those YS cadres who have shouldered leadership responsibility in party branches and

campuses, or in front of factories or mines (when sharp union issues are posed, above all), working people can open themselves up to unnecessary victimization as a result of insufficient political preparation to sell papers, set up book tables, or carry out political activity. Willful ignorance of what we're walking into, smart-aleck mouthing off, or other traits of petty-bourgeois rather than proletarian functioning can rapidly result in a citation or summons by the police—and sometimes much worse consequences at the hands of cops, private company goons, or right-wingers in league with the bosses.

"Even though the cops may not win in court, or the citation may be dropped," Barnes said, "they've still diverted us from carrying out political activity. They succeed for a while in tying us up in red tape, draining our energy and resources," Barnes said.



ened and began acting as though the union officials were more of a problem than the boss. In another case, a fraction member became unnecessarily vulnerable by starting to distribute widely the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial* in a plant before getting to know other workers and the situation there.

"An ultraleft course can weaken our class in relation to the boss and damage a fight," Kennedy said. "When workers take their fire off the boss and put it on the union officials, it diverts the struggle and the longer-range possibilities to transform the union itself."

During the Saturday panel, Frank Forrester, a member of the UMWA in western Pennsylvania, described the conditions both union and nonunion miners face, and struggles in the mining regions against cutbacks in health care, pensions, safety in the mines, and control over the length of the workweek. Over the past year there has been a noticeable increase in the number of protests, meetings, rallies, and strike actions in the coalfields, signaling the emergence of a social movement resisting the consequences of the offensive by the coal operators and the government.

Forrester said the mine where he works has been cited for 343 violations in the past year. Two workers have been permanently disabled and there have been four rock falls. The ventilation went down recently and workers were not notified for more than 30 minutes, creating a dangerous potential for buildup of explosive methane gas. These are the conditions miners are resisting.

The socialist coal miner explained that the party branch in Pittsburgh is stepping up its efforts to build both fractions of coal miners and of garment workers. Doing so will mean the socialist movement is much more in touch with political developments and actions by working people in the area. They are organizing regular portal sales at coal mines, including where Forrester and another socialist work. There is plenty of political space open to communist workers to act together with fellow fighters in struggle and to advance the knowledge and understanding of Marxism through distributing the *Militant*, *Pathfinder*, and *New Internationalist*, he noted.

Willie Evans, a leader of the USWA members on strike against Titan Tire in Natchez, Mississippi, explained the current stage of their nearly two-year fight against union-busting. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) recently ruled in favor of the union on its claims that the company has engaged in unfair labor practices, a ruling the company is appealing.

The unionists at Titan Tire are planning a rally September 13 to mark the second anniversary of the struggle and encouraged broad union participation in it. Panelists and other conference participants responded by pledging to be there and bring others with them.

John Stivers, a packinghouse worker and UFCW member from Toronto, explained a successful effort by co-workers to build solidarity with the struggle at Dakota Premium. Some 85 workers signed a message of support and turned it over to the union officials to send off to their brothers and sisters in Minnesota. Meat packers' struggles are occurring in many parts of Canada, other participants reported. Several were familiar with union-organizing efforts and workers' resistance to company assaults in Alberta; others are involved in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Lisa Potash, a sewing machine operator in a large plant in Chicago, described a union-organizing drive and strike for recognition by laundry workers there, reporting that 95 percent of the workers signed cards.

Siggi Herald, a Young Socialist in Iceland, described a recent strike by bus drivers that he said "helped the YS become a more proletarian organization. We saw a disciplined strike of workers and made contact with them. One strike leader spoke at a forum we organized."

Jack Ward, who has been a miner in southern Illinois, reported on a visit he made to the strikers in Wyoming against P&M. "There is a new organization there called Miners' Backbone," he said. "It is more than what we often think of as a women's auxiliary. They have organized picketing and other actions that have had an impact on the effectiveness and morale of the strike."



SWP leader Mary-Alice Waters (inset) spoke on intertwining of class struggle in Cuba and the U.S. Above, 1 million people march in Havana July 26 to celebrate 47th anniversary of assault on Moncada barracks, which launched the revolutionary struggle that overthrew U.S.-backed tyranny. This action and UMWA rally in Denver same day (see page 7 photo) "register the most important developments in the world class struggle today—the growing confidence of working people, in Cuba and the United States," said Waters.

Olympia Newton, a member of the Young Socialists National Executive Committee and a worker at Pathfinder's printshop in New York, participated in the second conference panel.

#### Young Socialists provide leadership

"Five Young Socialists are taking on major responsibilities in the shop and are leading across the several generations of socialist workers there to produce what the party needs and to maintain the kind of printing operation that makes it possible to continue these publishing efforts," she said.

As lead operator on the folder, Newton has trained three other workers to run the machine. Other YS members head up the web press crew, the probation committee responsible for the initial orientation and training of new workers, and the maintenance of the computer and phone systems in the Pathfinder Building.

"We are making progress both in building the shop as a factory and the YS as a proletarian youth organization," she said. "In the process we have taken more leadership responsibility in the YS and the party. We learn in the shop to take responsibility for

what we do. We learn we need discipline without compulsion, which is the basis for proletarian functioning in the Young Socialists and the party as well."

The Young Socialists organized a meeting for all YS-age youth at the conclusion of the conference to discuss these perspectives and map out plans for the summer and fall (see article in last issue).

Sherman Martin, from Los Angeles, spoke the final evening on how "members of the Young Socialists in high school and college have strengthened the YS. 'In Los Angeles we had four members who were students last year. We participated in events around the janitors' strike and actions to defend immigrant rights,'" he said.

Martin, who had just received his high school diploma, also addressed from his own experience one of the political challenges facing a good number of young socialists as they get deeply involved in political activity. He explained why he had decided to complete high school, "because graduating was a political task. We need a diploma to get jobs in order to be in the middle of struggles such as we have been discussing at the conference."

The petitioning drive to get Socialist Workers Party candidates in the 2000 elections on the ballot in New York, reported Paul Pederson, is part of defending political space within the working class and the legality of the party in the eyes of working people. Pederson, the organizer of the Brooklyn branch of the party and one of the party's candidates for U.S. Congress in New York, said the drive to collect 30,000 signatures was being carried out in record time.

This is partly due to reconquering the importance of winning ballot status, he said.

"The exploiters use the electoral arena to justify their rule, which makes it harder for them to simply deny a workers' party a place on the ballot, even if they erect all kinds of legal obstacles to make doing so difficult." Workers and farmers have no immutable rights under capitalism, he explained, and getting on the ballot undercuts the ability of the employers and their government to portray the party and its activities as illegal.

"The kind of response we are getting to the campaign is a good indication of the number of workers and youth we can meet over the coming months through the socialist campaign," Pederson said.

#### Danger of ultraleftism in unions

Seven classes at the conference were the scene of lively discussions. They were titled, "The working class and the transformation of learning," "Organizational principles of the SWP," "The danger of ultraleftism in the labor movement," "Death penalty: weapon of capitalist class rule," "Class struggle road to women's liberation," "Lessons from the battle at Crown Oil," and "The 1979 Iranian revolution and the class struggle in Iran today."

Joel Williams, a meat packer and leader of the SWP in Chicago, presented a class and spoke on a panel on the destructive logic of ultraleft currents in the labor movement.

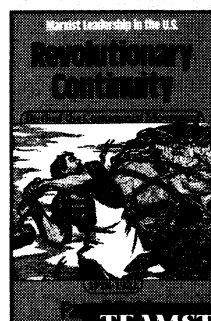
"If you start going after the union officials and not the bosses you're going to set back the struggle," Williams said. "Class-conscious workers are the enemy of any anti-bureaucracy effort. We lead other workers and unionists to take care of our own house as a byproduct of the struggle against the bosses."

Williams pointed to several examples in the UAW and mine workers unions where some veterans of struggles, in the name of fighting bureaucracy, have sought to turn workers away from the unions. This often comes after protracted struggles against an employer where the fight gets dissipated and frequently wrapped up in the red tape of the courts and National Labor Relations Board.

Communist workers must discuss these questions with fighters, Williams said. "We function on a pro-union, pro-workers-unity axis. We start with the fact that the members are the union. The union is ours, including the union hall and all its members, including the officers. That will be the road

Continued on page 10

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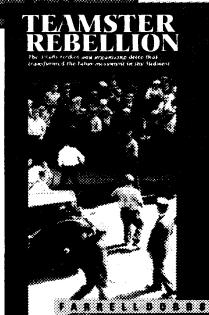


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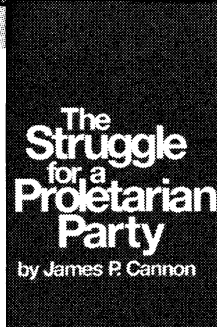
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# Continued from page 9

everywhere to transforming the unions into fighting instruments."

## Cuban union leaders participate

The interrelationship of the class struggle in the United States and Cuba was a political thread that ran throughout the conference. This was reinforced by the participation of two special guests to the conference, leaders of the Central Organization of Cuban Workers (CTC), Olga Rosa Gómez and Manuel Montero, on a speaking tour of the United States through mid-August.

Gómez is the general secretary of the Cultural Workers Union and a deputy in Cuba's National Assembly. Montero is the head of the CTC's international relations for North America. The unionists joined the conference during its first full day.

After listening to presentations at the Friday morning panel and having a chance to speak over breakfast with a number of conference participants, Gómez opened her remarks to the gathering by saying how much the CTC leaders appreciated the opportunity

invitation of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP).

"All farmers in the United States are at risk of being foreclosed," he said. "In Cuba we saw how the revolution makes it possible for farmers to have use of the land, rather than losing it to the bankers who hold the title over our heads."

"Many of us came back and started to discuss how can we make this revolution in our own country," Butts said. "We need it."

"With the revolution in Cuba," Montero responded, "farmers were not only able to use the land and earn a living, they eliminated the oppressive system and the army and rural police who would burn crops, burn homes, and murder peasants. With the revolution all these abuses were ended."

In his presentation later that afternoon, SWP leader Jack Barnes welcomed the CTC leaders, as well as Fernando García Bielsa, first secretary of the Cuban Interests Section to the United States in Washington, D.C., who spoke to conference participants at the evening session on Saturday.

"The most decisive convergence between

self-financing character of the project.

A special report was also given by Sara Gates, a party supporter from Seattle who organizes the monthly contributions of supporters across the country. They surpassed the goal set last year of \$200,000 in annual contributions, and launched a drive to increase the total to \$250,000 a year.

Participants bought \$7,648 worth of books, with many carrying bags and boxes full back home with them. The new Pathfinder pamphlet *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning* by Jack Barnes was purchased by 109 participants.

A total of 566 of the newly digitized books and pamphlets were purchased, with the highest sellers being *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* by James P. Cannon, founding leader of the SWP; *Teamster Politics and Teamster Rebellion* by Farrell Dobbs, leader of the Teamster organizing drives in the 1930s who became the SWP's national secretary; and *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution and In Defense of Marxism* by Leon Trotsky, a leader of the Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution. A total of 226 slightly damaged books were bought at bargain prices, grabbed up especially by young socialists at the gathering.

## Final day of conference

Three concurrent activities were organized on Sunday, the final day of the Active Workers Conference.

Socialists who are members of the steering committees of the party's national trade union fractions met to discuss further implementation of the course discussed at the conference.

The Young Socialists organized a meeting of all YS-age young people who attended the gathering to discuss their political perspectives and activity for the rest of the summer and fall.

And the steering committee of the Pathfinder Reprint Project held a series of workshops on each stage of the digital production line. Some 60 people attended, many of whom are new volunteers.

A few days after the conference, Joanne Murphy, a party supporter from Iowa, wrote a letter to Jack Barnes saying how much she had appreciated the gathering politically, including the proofreading workshop she had participated in.

In his reply to Murphy, Barnes pointed to a decisive aspect of the political contribution party supporters are making that is often not thought about. "In addition to meeting the goals of putting in digital form every book, pamphlet, and education bulletin produced by our movement," he said, "a much bigger accomplishment is being prepared."

"Together with the shop, they are helping put in place, for the first time in history," Barnes said, "an irreplaceable, web-based infrastructure of digital propaganda production, decentralized so that no matter what financial, security, or other conditions may confront the communist party in the decades ahead, the program and legacy of the modern revolutionary workers movement can be prepared outside any physical 'brick-and-mortar' apparatus and then printed on presses wherever they can be found and whenever they can be paid for."

"What the Bolsheviks would have given for that!"

"A hundred fighting people in the United States means a lot to the people of Cuba," said Fernando García Bielsa in his remarks to the Saturday evening session, referring to the Denver UMWA solidarity action mentioned by Mary-Alice Waters in her opening conference report. "It means a lot because they are doing it here—as José Martí said—inside the belly of the beast."

## Construction of socialism in Cuba

The first secretary of the Cuban Interests Section to the United States in Washington, D.C., brought greetings from the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Referring to the large celebrations in Cuba earlier in the week marking the 47th anniversary of the attack on the Moncada garrison, García said that those involved in the 1953 action "were mostly working-class people, humble people, trained through their own efforts."

The revolutionary government "created a new system of values and social justice," he said, "including that of internationalism." The Cuban people have faced unrelenting

threats and aggression by Washington in a "spirit of combat and struggle. We are going into a new stage of the revolution now, which is part of a tremendous struggle of ideas worldwide," he said. "The revolution is not going to change, and the people are not going to give up."

"Maybe they expect us to cry 'Uncle!'" García said. "But we are now ready not only to defend our independence, our homeland, and the accomplishments of the revolution, but to reinitiate, on more solid foundations, the construction of socialism in Cuba."

Written greetings were received from Puerto Rican independence leader Rafael Canel Miranda, who spent a quarter century in U.S. prisons for his actions opposing Washington's colonial rule. "What is happening in the meatpacking industry in the Midwest, in the miners' strikes in the West, in the protests against the criminal death penalty and against police violence—the developments in each of our countries affect us all," he wrote. "If we are able to liberate Puerto Rico from the bloody claws of Anglo imperialism—then we will all be stronger! Because a defeat for the enemy of all is a victory for each one of us."

The Movement of Landless Rural Workers in Brazil (MST) sent a message of solidarity "with the struggle of workers and farmers in the United States and the world against the neoliberal policies imposed on our peoples." The greetings described the ongoing mobilizations for land and union rights in Brazil and against recent murders of peasant activists and police attacks on protests.

In his presentation summarizing the conference, Barnes pointed out that "the 'productivity miracle,' the 'new economy,' the U.S. rulers boast of is not built on computer technology, as they claim. It's not something magic."

Their so-called productivity boom, Barnes explained, is built on what Washington's top banker, Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan, euphemistically refers to as "labor force flexibility."

In other words, Barnes said, "It is built on you and millions of others like you—on the life and limb of workers and farmers. It's built on speedup, on a longer and longer workweek, on more temporary workers, on



Militant/John Naubert

**Farm workers march August 6 in Washington State to demand legal residency for undocumented workers and wage increase for apple pickers. The capitalists "produce the gravediggers of their system," said Barnes, "creating a new U.S. working class by bringing into the factories and fields millions of workers from beyond the U.S. borders."**

nity to meet and hear from rank-and-file U.S. workers involved in struggles. She said she was struck by the number of young faces she had seen, as well.

"After hearing about how you develop your work and how many obstacles you face," Gómez said, she was "amazed at what workers in the United States have to do to get a union and then go on to get a contract." Washington and its supporters claim that workers in Cuba have no trade union freedom. Gómez said, a proposition she rejects from her own experience and that of other Cuban workers. But after hearing from conference participants, she remarked, "I don't know what kind of trade union freedom they are talking about right here."

The Cuban union leader described some of the steps working people have taken since the early 1990s to reverse the dramatic short-fall in production precipitated by the collapse of aid and favorable trade relations with the former Soviet Union. "We have been making extraordinary efforts to seek ways and alternatives to reverse the impact of this crisis on the daily lives of Cubans," she said, pointing to the progress made so far.

Gómez said the U.S. embargo against Cuba is "aimed at destroying the revolution, which is why it has been maintained and reinforced over the past decade." Montero pointed to the "workers parliaments" and other ways that working people in Cuba have brought their weight to bear in the "social, political, and economic life of the country."

## 'We need to make a revolution'

Karl Butts, a vegetable farmer from central Florida, was one of the speakers from the floor during the Friday morning panel. He described a trip to Cuba he took earlier this year with other fighting farmers at the

revolutionary-minded workers and farmers in Cuba and the United States," Barnes said, "is their shared conviction about what makes such a life worth living. It is the conviction among those fighting for a new world in each country that when we ask for solidarity, we will get it without conditions and with no strings attached, as each of us has in the past. We will collaborate as equals, as fellow fighters."

"That's the ultimate convergence between the 100 in Denver, the workers in South St. Paul, and the million in Havana waving the red and black."

"¡Unidos venceremos!" said Barnes in concluding his talk. Together we will win. "¡Cuba sí, yanqui no!"

The displays at the back of the meeting hall prepared by the Pathfinder Reprint Project volunteers and by the Young Socialists attracted great interest from participants, as did the Pathfinder book tables.

Since February 1998 the reprint project volunteers have been instrumental in getting 95 books converted to digital files and back in print, often in dramatically improved editions. "This conference has been all about why," said Ruth Cheney, a member of the project's steering committee based in San Francisco, to the session Saturday night.

Those 95 titles were on special display and sale, so fighters attending the conference could either expand their libraries or stock up on new printings with more readable type, and sometimes with new prefaces or other material.

Outlining the supporters' goal of making 50 percent of Pathfinder's titles digital by May 1, 2001, Cheney noted that in June of this year 125 individuals participated in the project, the highest of any month yet. The volunteers, she said, also plan to increase their monthly contributions, advancing the



Militant/Eric Simpson

**Florida farmer Karl Butts speaks during discussion at conference panel session. All farmers "are at risk of being foreclosed," he said. "We need a revolution."**

differential treatment, on driving down our wages and basic social protections."

At the same time, Barnes added, there has been an increase in cop brutality and state terror at every level. "The death penalty—whether the slow death on a plant floor or a quick one at the hands of the hated *la migra* along the U.S. border, whether inflicted by a cop on the streets or in a prison death chamber—goes hand in hand with the bosses' 'productivity miracle.'"

Just read the copies of *The Workers' Voice*  
Continued on page 14



# Socialists in Machinists union discuss steps to go where workers are engaged in struggle

BY BETSEY STONE  
AND JOEL WILLIAMS

CHICAGO—Airline and aerospace workers from six cities who are members of the Socialist Workers Party and are active in the International Association of Machinists met here August 12–13.

It was the most important discussion the party's "IAM fraction" has had in many years, focusing on a new vanguard being forged by workers fighting back against the employers' speed-up, praised in the daily press as a "productivity drive." Central to the discussion was the example being set for other unionists by workers in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW), and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).

The fraction meeting also voted to take on a campaign to sell the new Pathfinder pamphlet, *The Working-Class and the Transformation of Learning: The Fraud of Education Reform Under Capitalism* by Jack Barnes, the party's national secretary. Adopting a goal of selling 35 copies of the pamphlet by October 1, participants in the meeting hoped to encourage the party's other union fractions and branch units to also discuss and adopt goals. The pamphlet is available in English, Spanish, and French.

## Transforming fraction functioning

The meeting opened with a report by Betsey Stone, a United Airlines cleaner at Chicago's O'Hare airport. Stone emphasized the necessity for socialist workers in the IAM to restructure and transform the functioning of their local union fractions, so they can more effectively be part of developing labor struggles, and so their day-to-day activity converges with that of other vanguard workers in the mines and mining communities, meatpacking plants, and garment and textile factories.

Among the most far-reaching examples of the developing workers resistance, Stone said, is the seven-hour sit-down strike June 1 by packinghouse workers at Dakota Premium Foods in South St. Paul, Minnesota, who 51 days later voted to be represented by the UFCW and are now fighting for a contract. This battle is setting an example for labor in the Twin Cities and for packinghouse workers resisting speedup throughout the Upper Midwest.

Stone pointed to two recently concluded strikes of Western coal miners at Pittsburg and Midway (P&M) mines in New Mexico and Wyoming. These unionists successfully fought off a company attempt to impose a 12-hour day. In addition, the New Mexico miners beat back company efforts to force them to get medical treatment for them-

selves and their families at clinics on the impoverished Navajo reservation.

Stone also cited the current strike by 86,000 phone workers on the East Coast against Verizon, as well as a demonstration in New York City this spring at which workers from various unions joined together for a common rally, each carrying a giant inflatable rat representing the companies they are fighting.

During the discussion, participants noted other struggles by workers in their areas. Scott Breen, who works at a Boeing aerospace plant in Seattle, pointed to fights by meat packers, farm workers, and immigrant

other packinghouse workers around the country. "This includes forging ties with workers beginning to turn toward UFCW organizing efforts in nonunion plants in the Omaha, Nebraska, area," Stone emphasized.

## Being part of the fights

Joel Williams, a Chicago packinghouse worker and member of the SWP National Committee, attended the meeting on behalf of the party's trade union leadership.

The changing situation in the unions, Williams said, is increasing the likelihood that socialist workers will be involved in resistance in plants where they work. Build-



Militant/Scott Breen  
**Machinists march to Alaska Airlines offices in June 1999, protesting the firing of six workers. Socialist workers active in the union decided on steps to transform their functioning in order to participate more effectively in labor struggles unfolding today.**

carpenters in central and eastern Washington. John Studer, a worker at USAir in Philadelphia, described the ongoing unionization effort in that area by mushroom workers.

"The fights at Dakota Premium, in Western coal, and elsewhere are being fueled by the employers' unrelenting attacks on workers and our unions," Stone said.

"The United Mine Workers at P&M are both celebrating their victory and positioning themselves to help strengthen other fights coming up in Western coal," she said. Stone noted that contracts expire August 31 at the Kayenta and Black Mesa mines in Arizona, both owned by Peabody Coal.

To advance their battle for a contract, workers at Dakota Premium Foods will need to join with workers at the company's sister plant in Long Prairie, Minnesota, and with

ing labor solidarity—unions supporting each other, sending money, speakers, walking each others' picket lines—is part of doing so.

"But we will be taken off course," Williams said, "if we approach solidarity activity as a strategy. It is not an alternative to the strategic course of communist workers, which is to get jobs where fights are under way or where the assaults by the employers are creating conditions we know will lead to fights, sooner rather than later."

There is no lack of centrist, middle-class organizations that operate in and around the unions with a "labor solidarity" strategy, he said.

"We should be getting into skirmishes as they develop where we are, and looking for jobs where they've begun or are likely to develop," said Williams. "These skirmishes will lead us to the next steps in strengthening and transforming our unions, including reaching out for mutual solidarity to other fighters and to their struggles."

That is happening already at Dakota Premium Foods, Williams noted. He also pointed to the example of the P&M strikers who took their struggle to workers in the oil industry in California, Utah, and Colorado. That was a natural extension of their fight to win a contract from P&M, which is a subsidiary of the energy giant Chevron.

Williams emphasized that it's hard to break out of old habits on the job. If you have been somewhere a long time, and you haven't been involved in the developing resistance in your plant, then it's harder to start doing it now. "It's better to get a fresh start, to get into a new fraction somewhere else," he said.

John Studer also addressed this point. The struggle at Dakota Premium is not unique, he said. "Similar struggles can and will break out elsewhere. If this were not true, the fighters in St. Paul would be in trouble. This can happen where we are working."

In her opening report, Stone contrasted the situation today with the experience of socialist workers in the 686-day Eastern Airlines strike that ended in early 1991. "That strike was a giant effort where we worked with others to reach out for solidarity," she said. "Workers at other airlines regularly marched on the Eastern workers' picket lines, and Eastern workers in turn came to our rallies and picket lines."

"Eastern strikers had a goal—to prevent Frank Lorenzo, Eastern's notorious union-busting CEO, from creating a nonunion empire at airports around the country." It was a fight to last "one day longer" than Lorenzo—"and they did," said Stone. "That put all airline workers on a stronger footing to resist employer attacks."

"Since the early 1990s," Stone pointed out, "more years of attacks have gone by—attacks that have brutalized some layers of the working class more than others. The capitalists are fueling their economic boom on the backs of workers, who are being forced to work faster resulting in more injuries. We are working longer hours with fewer days off and less vacation time," she said, "and all the while our wages stagnate."

Having defeated Lorenzo's antiunion drive in 1991, the Eastern workers themselves had to take other jobs. That strike ended up marking the end of an upswing in labor fights that had begun in the latter 1980s. It was not the product of a sea change in working-class politics, such as we're now in the midst of.

Today, Stone said, more and more workers are open to finding an explanation of what is propelling the employers' speed-up offensive. This is generating interest in reading publications, such as the *Militant*, *Perspectiva Mundial*, and Pathfinder books and pamphlets, which clearly explain the roots of these attacks in the intensifying competition for profits at the heart of the dog-eat-dog capitalist system.

## Resistance in the airlines

As the meeting convened, newspaper headlines were filled with news of the cancellations of United Airlines flights due to the refusal of the company's pilots to work overtime and the refusal of its mechanics to violate safety rules. Amid a hue and cry from the airlines, United pilots are explaining that the source of the problem is the company's refusal to hire an adequate number of pilots to staff its flight schedule. Meeting participants noted that many United baggage handlers and aircraft cleaners are growing impatient with working under the expired IAM contract.

Among other important examples of resistance by airport workers noted at the meeting were the work stoppage of DineAir workers at the Oakland airport; the organizing drives at the San Francisco airport by workers at Ogden Aviation and by food service workers; and the successful union organizing drive by baggage screeners and terminal cleaners employed by Argenbright at the Los Angeles airport.

Participants in the meeting discussed the fact that socialists in the IAM have not thrown themselves into all these struggles in the same way. Some of the most significant actions—such as at DineAir in Oakland, where nonunion workers carried out a work stoppage—were never drawn to the attention of the *Militant* newspaper's editor, so regular coverage could be carried.

Participants in the meeting concluded that the retreat of the labor movement in the 1990s, under the blows of the employers' offensive, had had a deep impact on vanguard workers in the IAM, including those who are socialists. As time passed, they responded in less and less timely ways as the situation changed, as a new layer of workers—less affected by past union setbacks—began to resist the employers and reach out for allies. A new vanguard, largely drawn from fresh forces, is being forged and beginning to put its stamp on struggles. Other workers looking for a road forward seek to emulate these fights.

Most participants in the meeting were the only members of the Socialist Workers Party in their workplaces, both in the airlines and in aerospace.

They noted that working alone reinforces conservatizing—and, worse, depoliticizing—habits in their work that came out of the retreat of the early 1990s. Only by changing this situation, they decided, could the party's union fractions in the airlines or aerospace begin to converge with the militant spirit of the fractions socialist workers are building today in the UMWA, UFCW, and UNITE.

Those present at the meeting voted unanimously to

Continued on Page 14

## Pathfinder supporters in UK get sales campaign under way

BY TONY HUNT

LONDON—Promoters of Pathfinder in London and Manchester secured orders for nearly 100 books from visits to four bookshops in the opening days of a sales campaign here.

The goal of this effort is to increase sales of Pathfinder titles to commercial retail outlets and campus bookshops. Supporters of these books around the world are engaged in the same campaign.

The Pathfinder sales volunteers went to "High Street" shops, as they are referred to here, the main place in London where workers and young people buy their books. Sales included six copies of *Che Guevara Talks to Young People*, four of *Capitalism's World Disorder* by Jack Barnes, and five of *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*.

The buyer at a bookshop that serves Manchester University expressed interest in the newly published pamphlet *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning* by Barnes. This buyer wanted to take time to study the catalog before placing an order.

Teams of Pathfinder sales volunteers have begun to visit 15–20 major outlets in order to reverse a decline in sales over recent months and relaunch consistent sales work.

Further appointments have already been booked with several stores over the next week.

To prepare for this campaign, volunteers have organized refresher training sessions to ensure they meet Pathfinder's high professional standards as they carry out the work.

"We took advantage of the fact that so many titles were published or printed so far this year," said Pathfinder sales volunteer Paul Davies. He secured big orders from two major Central London stores that serve the University of London as well as working people in the area and tourists.

"The book buyers I saw were attracted by the quality of the new reprints," Davies noted. "It's another way of understanding the importance of Pathfinder's reprint program. I was also able to point out the difference in quality between Pathfinder's edition of *The Bolivian Diary*—with its glossary, maps, notes, and other explanatory material—and a recently published competing edition that is prominent in bookshops at the moment. Buyers were able to notice that the Pathfinder edition is much more useful, especially for those just learning about the subject."

# Buchanan captures the Reform Party

Continued from front page

and shouting match broke out. Buchanan's opponents, about one-quarter of the 120 delegates attending, stormed out and held their own national committee session, then a convention, two blocks away.

When they tried to explain their version of the meeting to reporters and camera crews, Buchananites drowned them out, chanting: "Go Pat go! Go Pat go!" When Buchanan's opponents shouted back, "Go, John, go!" Buchanan remarked, "You don't know this peasant army." One opponent, Jim Mangia, who was the party's national secretary, accused Buchanan's supporters of "brown shirt tactics" that included physical assaults.

On the first day of the convention, Hagelin's supporters announced they had filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission. Both groups claim the Reform Party mantle and are battling for \$12.6 million in federal campaign funds due to the Reform Party's presidential candidate. In addition, the party is listed as the Reform Party in half the states, and Hagelin allies vowed to contest Buchanan for the ballot slot.

Meanwhile, the right-wing candidate stepped up his demagogic appeals at the Long Beach convention, lacing his remarks with anticapitalist, national socialist rhetoric. "I began my campaign, 18 months ago, in a tiny steel town in West Virginia called Weirton," Buchanan said. "The workers of Weirton and their families were being betrayed by Bill Clinton and sacrificed to the gods of the Global economy." Buchanan, who blurs class issues and takes the fire off the bosses where workers are engaged in struggle, said, "I told those steel workers we would stand with them...working together, the Buchanan Brigades, the Reform Party, and the union folks of Weirton."

## 'A new, populist, conservative party'

Many bourgeois commentators and other media pundits treated the Reform Party convention as a sideshow. Noting the split in the organization and the tussle over millions in federal funds, they have written off the organization as "dying the usual death" of

capitalist third parties. "While still technically alive, the Reform movement is suffering the fate of every third party established in the United States since the Republican Party was founded in 1860," wrote *Los Angeles Times* reporter Cathleen Decker. Its "decline was predictable."

The opposite, however, is the case. "The Reform Party...is here to stay if we are on the ballot," said Buchanan on the August 6 "Fox News Sunday" television show. "This is the one reason I've joined it, to make it a permanent institution in America." That same day he said on "Face the Nation," another TV program, "We are building a new populist, conservative, traditionalist Reform Party."

In 1992 the Reform Party presidential candidate Ross Perot won 19 percent of the vote, appealing to economically insecure and discontented layers of the middle classes. He promised to bring economic security with an iron will and clean out waste and fraud in the government. After Perot declined to take the helm of the party this past year, his allies urged Buchanan to join them and seek the Reform Party nomination.

Perot's reactionary demagoguery paved the road for the incipient fascist politician, who unlike Perot is not primarily concerned with electoral success. Buchanan easily defeated Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura in a fight to control the national party, and dealt blows to rightist Lenora Fulani, a leader of the New York Reform Party, after a temporary alliance helped him secure his domination of the organization.

A third party with ballot status and federal funding has been captured by an ultrarightist. This marks a departure in U.S. politics. Buchanan, who has one foot in capitalist electoral politics and the other in forging a cadre that is preparing to fight in the streets against picket lines and mobilizations of working people, appeals to better off layers in the working class and to middle-class people who anticipate economic difficulties and social conflict down the road.

A political regroupment of ultrarightist forces has begun within the Reform Party, which now includes members of the John Birch Society and supporters of the *Spotlight* newspaper. Buchanan's campaign has previously attracted white supremacists, right-wing militia groups, and anti-Semitic elements. The overtly racist Council of Conservative Citizens, however, has distanced itself from Buchanan for picking a Black person as his running mate. "Buchanan

picks unqualified Black woman as running mate," the organization stated on its web site.

"If we lose them, then I say good-bye, I'm not interested in them," said Angela Buchanan, chief campaign strategist for the ultrarightist politician, referring to reactionary forces uneasy with Foster on the Reform Party national ticket.

## Chauvinist appeal to Blacks

By naming Foster as his running mate Buchanan aims to blunt accusations of racism against his campaign, while pitching his "America First" appeal. Her candidacy complements Buchanan's assault on affirmative action and immigrant rights as he attempts to foster divisions among working people.

"She'll be an ambassador to America for what this party is all about. This shows that we are a party that is open to everybody," said Buchanan. "It is Black Americans—and especially many of those in California—who are the ones who have to go through ferocious competition for jobs in factories and 7-11s and things from huge numbers of illegal aliens coming in."

Foster, no novice at reactionary demagoguery, served 33 years as a teacher and school administrator in the California school system. She has run for California state assembly twice, losing both times. Foster campaigned vigorously for California's Proposition 187, the 1994 ballot initiative that would have banned undocumented immigrants from receiving public services.

Echoing Buchanan's immigrant-bashing, she stated, "We are concerned about our American children and our American schools. We are concerned about our American workers." During a hearing of the Congressional Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, Foster called for putting the U.S. military "on the border of Mexico to insure domestic tranquillity."

A staunch advocate for cops, Foster defended the widely-known police assault on Rodney King. In a 1993 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, she asserted, "They were acting according to the training they received from the police department. They were acting in the line of duty."

Currently president of Americans for Family Values and past president of the California chapter of the John Birch Society, Foster stands firmly in defense of her reactionary positions. She went on a speakers tour for the John Birch Society in 1998. When asked about the opposition of Black

rights organizations to the Confederate battle flag being displayed prominently at government buildings, she remarked, "The Confederate flag...is to be honored as part of our history.... It's not a racial issue."

In his acceptance speech, Buchanan focused heavily on American nationalist themes, claiming the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund—institutions dominated by U.S. imperialism—violate U.S. sovereignty. His message tries to get workers thinking of themselves as "Americans" first, rather than part of an exploited international class with interests diametrically opposed to those of the capitalist class. "I will personally tell [UN secretary-general] Kofi Annan: Your UN lease has run out; you will be moving out of the United States, and if you are not gone by year's end, I will send you ten thousand Marines to help you pack your bags."

"When I become President all U.S. troops will come home from Kosovo, Kuwait, and Korea," Buchanan said, driving home his anti-worker, anti-immigrant speech, "and I will put them on the borders of Arizona, Texas, and California, and we will start putting America first."

## MILITANT LABOR FORUMS

### ILLINOIS

#### Chicago

**Report from the Western Coalfields.** Speaker: Lisa Potash, member of UNITE. Fri., Aug. 25, 7:00 p.m. 1212 N. Ashland, Suite 201. Donation: \$4. Tel: (773) 342-1780.

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

**Speak Out Against Police Brutality.** Speaker: Sam Manuel, activist in Coalition to Build the August 26 anti-police brutality march, also Socialist Workers candidate for D.C. delegate to the House, and member of the United Transportation Union. Sat., Aug. 19, 7:30 p.m. 3541 14th St. NW. Donation: \$5. Tel: (202) 722-6221.

### BRITAIN

#### London

**Why the 'Name and Shame' Campaign is an Attack on Democratic Rights.** Fri., Aug. 25, 7:00 p.m. 47, The Cut. Donation: £2. Tel: 020-7928-7993.

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## MARCH against police brutality August 26

Washington, D.C.  
12 Noon  
Lincoln Memorial

The march will commemorate the 37th anniversary of the 1963 civil rights march led by Martin Luther King.

For more information, call (877) 9-REDEEM

## CALENDAR

### NORTH CAROLINA

#### Charlotte

**Labor Day Parade.** Mon., Sept. 4. Assemble 9:30 a.m. at 6th and N. Tryon. March at 11 a.m. Rally, Noon to 5 p.m. at Independence Park at 7th and Independence. For more information, call (704) 483-3060.

### OHIO

#### Mansfield

**One Year of Solidarity.** Join the locked-out members of United Steelworkers of America Local 169 at a rally to mark: "One Year of Solidarity" standing up against AK Steel's corporate greed. Sat., Sept. 9, 12 Noon. Town Square of Mansfield. Speakers, food, and refreshments. For more information, call Local 169, (419) 522-9375.

### NEW ZEALAND

**Hear Margaret Trowe, Socialist Workers candidate for U.S. vice president:**  
**Auckland**

Sun., Aug. 27, 4:00 p.m. A supper and social to follow the meeting. La Gonda Arcade, 203 Karangahape Rd. For more information, call (9) 379-3075.

#### Christchurch

Fri., Sept. 1, 7:00 p.m. Gloucester Arcade, 129 Gloucester St. For more information, call (3) 365-6055.



**Salute to freedom**—"Washington—Her name is Freedom, but she was cast in bronze by slaves and



Harry Ring

hoisted atop the Capitol by slaves.... [who also helped erect] the Capitol itself. They were never paid and, until now, never recognized for their work."—News item.

**Virtue's reward**—According to Chuck Shepherd's internet column, "News of the Weird," Douglas Ivester pocketed a retirement package of \$20 million in February, after laying off 6,000 employees. And John McCoy left Bank One in March with a \$13 million retirement bundle after laying off 5,100 employees.

**'Waste not, want not'**—Chuck Shepherd says he also has a report that Sidney Kosann, former top dog at Shelby Yarn in Shelby, North Carolina, lives in a \$500,000 pad and was knocking down \$300,000 a year until the plant folded. Report-

edly, he was in line with 650 fired employees to collect unemployment insurance.

**What capitalist greed?**—"In the first of a series of oil industry reports likely to rekindle consumer charges of profiteering, Occidental Petroleum Corp. said its profits surged to a record high. Occidental...said the operating profit for its second quarter rose to \$343 million, compared with only \$4 million in the year-ago period."—News item.

**Tender, loving care**—"State [California] health inspectors are

accusing a state-run home for retarded adults of violations that include the overdose death of a 33-year-old man, the mysterious poisoning of a 40-year-old woman, and the staff's use of a stun gun on a young man. The state Department of Health Services has issued at least 15 citations since January against the Sonoma Development Center."—News item.

**KFC?**—In Orono, Maine, 20 postal workers and 20 employees at a neighboring business were evacuated after a postal worker had a bad reaction to a package oozing liquid. A bomb squad X ray showed it to

be thawing frozen chicken patties. The affected employee, they speculated, was allergic to the liquid.

**He means there might be money in it?**—With recent acquisitions, media mogul Ted Turner now owns 1.7 million acres of Western land—more than any other individual. Asserting his concern for the environment, Turner takes umbrage with rancher critics who say he's gobbling up the land simply for the prestige. Declares the nation's biggest landholder: "I've got close to \$500 million invested in this. That'd be a pretty expensive hobby."

## Lenin on ultraleftism in the trade unions

Printed below is an excerpt from *Revolutionary Continuity—Birth of the Communist Movement, 1918-1922* by Farrell Dobbs. The author was a leader of the 1934 Teamster strikes, the national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party from 1953 to 1972, and the party's candidate for U.S. president in 1948, 1952, 1956, 1960. This excerpt, dealing with the political leadership played by V.I. Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the early years of the world communist movement, following the October 1917 Russian Revolution, can be found on pages 172-176 of the book. Copyright © 1983 by Pathfinder Press, reprinted by permission. Subheadings are by the *Militant*.

BY FARRELL DOBBS

Along with guiding an intransigent fight against opportunism, the Russian leaders

### BOOK OF THE WEEK

also had to cope with problems of ultraleftism inside the communist movement. Whereas the struggle against opportunism necessitated a break with bureaucratic and careerist individuals corrupted by their relatively privileged social position, the Bolsheviks hoped that the disease of ultraleftism could be cured and its proponents saved for the revolutionary workers' movement.

The self-proclaimed "left" advocated policies marked by adaptation to syndicalist practices. Its views reflected several major weaknesses: inadequate knowledge of the historical experiences of the workers' movement; lack of experience in applying a Marxist program; sectarian excesses in trying to counter social reformism; no concept of the transitional method and program, or of necessary alliances; and efforts to bypass the initial stages through which the masses pass on their way to revolutionary consciousness.

Ultraleftism, the Russians patiently explained, could only isolate the vanguard, instead of deepening its integration as a leading component of the working class. The communists had to learn how to function among large numbers of workers just awakening to political life. Their aim should be to lead them forward and help them make a transition to revolutionary perspectives. To accomplish that, however, the workers themselves had to go through political experiences. These experiences would have to be shared by the members of the Communist Party, who would only then be in a position to help the workers analyze the lessons of their ongoing struggles. Only in that way could the treacherous role of reformists and centrists in the labor movement be systematically exposed for all to see and the way opened for development of revolutionary leaderships in the mass organizations of the proletariat.

Lenin took the initiative in spelling out the strategy and tactics required by communists in the revolutionary situation prevailing in Europe. His views were presented in "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder. This small book, published in June 1920, was distributed the following month to the delegates at the Comintern's second world congress. It dealt chiefly with the perspectives of ultraleft Communists in Ger-

many, Great Britain, and Holland.

"It is far more difficult—and far more precious—to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle *do not yet exist*," he wrote in the booklet, "to be able to champion the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation, and organization) in non-revolutionary bodies, and quite often in downright reactionary bodies, in a non-revolutionary situation, among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action.

"To be able to seek, find and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will *lead* the masses to real, decisive and finally revolutionary struggle—that is the main objective of communism in Western Europe and in America today."

The massive postwar influx of radicalizing workers into the trade unions, Lenin said, confirmed "that class-consciousness and the desire for organization are growing among the proletarian masses, among the rank and file, among the backward elements. Millions of workers in Great Britain, France and Germany are *for the first time* passing from a complete lack of organization to the elementary, lowest, simplest and...most easily comprehensible form of organization, namely, the trade unions."

In that volatile situation, the main aim of the reformist hacks who dominated the trade union officialdom in the capitalist countries was to preserve their bureaucratic control over the workers in order to perpetuate class-collaborationist policies. Their central objectives were to confine union demands to limited economic and social improvements within the capitalist system; to maintain a formally "neutral" attitude on political questions that amounted to support for ruling-class policy; and to ensure that trade-union action did not move toward challenging bourgeois political power.

The "leftists" were impervious to the growing opportunities for communists to take on these class-collaborationist perspectives in the unions and win workers to their views. They repudiated the established trade unions unconditionally, calling for new, revolutionary unions.

#### Working in the existing unions

Lenin quoted a pamphlet of the German "left-wing communists" on this question. "A Workers' Union, based on factory organizations, should be the rallying point for all revolutionary elements," the pamphlet said. "This should unite all workers who follow the slogan: 'Get out of the trade unions!' It is here that the militant proletariat musters its ranks for battle. Recognition of the class struggle, of the Soviet system and of the dictatorship should be sufficient for enrollment."

Such a course, which puts an ultimatum to the masses of workers, could only lead to disaster, Lenin said.

"This is so unpardonable a blunder," he wrote, "that it is tantamount to the greatest service Communists could render the bourgeoisie...."

"To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, the labour aristocrats."

"There can be no doubt," Lenin continued, "that the union bureaucrats of all nations 'are very grateful to those 'Left' revolutionaries who, like the German opposition 'on



Militant/Scott Breen

Steelworkers locked out by Kaiser Aluminum at rally in October 1999 in Spokane, Washington. Communist workers have sought to draw in fellow unionists in solidarity with these militants. Dobbs writes that communists participate in the unions as they exist to "cooperate directly with the workers in their struggles and experiences."

principle' (heaven preserve us from such 'principles'!), or like some of the revolutionaries in the American Industrial Workers of the World advocate quitting the reactionary trade unions and refusing to work in them."

To the contrary, Lenin explained, "The task devolving on Communists is to *convince* the backward elements, to work *among* them, and not to *fence themselves*

*off* from them with artificial and childishly 'Left' slogans."

To be effective, communist policy required that party cadres participate in the unions as they currently existed. Only in that way could they cooperate directly with the workers in their struggles and experiences, using that close relationship to guide them toward adoption of revolutionary perspectives.

## —25 AND 50 YEARS AGO—

35 CENTS  
**THE MILITANT**  
A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY/PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

September 5, 1975

FRESNO, Calif.—More than 2,000 delegates, members, and supporters gathered here for the second biannual convention of the United Farm Workers of America, August 15-17.

It was not a typical union convention. A festive, rally, atmosphere marked the proceedings. Farm workers and their supporters assembled here were enthusiastic about the big fight shaping up in the fields this fall. California's new law providing for farm union elections goes into effect August 28.

The convention came at the peak of a new upsurge in UFW activity, which began with a demonstration of 10,000 in Modesto, home of Gallo, the scab wine company. The UFW organized a "1,000-mile march" this summer from the Mexican border north through California's agricultural centers. Led by UFW Director César Chávez, the marchers have talked with field hands along the route, explaining the terms of the new law. In several key farm worker centers, the marchers have stopped to hold rallies, some of them quite large.

The convention drew many *campesino* families. There were also hundreds of young boycott activists, whose presence reflected an increase in the activity in support of the boycott of non-UFW products in the cities.

**THE MILITANT**  
PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE  
NEW YORK, N.Y. FIVE (5) CENTS

August 28, 1950

American imperialism is waging a barbaric war of utmost brutality against the whole Korean people. Wholesale atrocities are being committed upon civilians, without regard for age or sex. Little distinction is made between North and South Koreans—all are treated as actual or potential enemies. As for genuine combatants, most captured North Korean soldiers or guerrillas are murdered on the spot, many of them after frightful torture.

These facts about Truman's "police action" in Korea have emerged piecemeal up to now from bits and hints slipped into reports by American war correspondents. Now *Life* magazine in a report by John Osborne has pieced revealing bits together to give us a picture of how Korea is being "liberated." The U.S. is trying to win the war in Korea "by military means alone," Osborne explains. "This means not the usual, inevitable savagery of combat in the field but savagery in detail—the blotting out of villages where the enemy MAY be hiding; the shooting and shelling of refugees who MAY include North Koreans, or who MAY be screening an enemy march upon our positions, or who MAY be carrying broken-down rifles or ammunition clips."

# Socialist conference

Continued from page 10

on the web site of UFCW Local 789, Barnes said. “You’ll find out that Dakota Premium management before the June 1 sit-down went from moving 450 head of cattle through the plant in 10 hours to 700 head in less than eight hours. That’s the source of their great boom,” Barnes said.

“And this is true not just in meatpacking, but throughout other industries and across North America.

“As workers start resisting—as they push the line speed back from 700 head to 450—then we’ll begin seeing a ‘reverse productivity miracle,’” said the SWP leader. “Because ‘the miracle’ is built on the blows the employers have dealt to the working class and unions for more than a decade. And that’s what’s beginning to change.

“Their miracle needs you as silent martyrs. When the silence ends, the miracle evaporates.”

## Produce their own gravediggers

It is this reality, Barnes said, that underlines the recognition by class-conscious workers that what produces “class battles and revolutionary struggles in this country and worldwide is what the bourgeoisie and other propertied classes do in relation to the toilers. It’s the consequences of what Fidel Castro aptly calls the ‘dog-eat-dog’ heart of capitalism.

“It’s not how capitalism *doesn’t* work,” Barnes said, “but how capitalism does work—its ‘miracles,’ not its failures—that produce the horrors, the conditions of life and labor that lead working people to resist and rebel.”

The capitalist rulers truly “produce the gravediggers of their system,” he said. “They, not we, are creating a new U.S. working class by bringing into the factories and the fields millions of workers from beyond the U.S. borders, with their experiences and traditions of struggle from throughout the Americas and the world.”

This is what the capitalists are compelled to do by the laws of their own system, by intensifying interimperialist competition for markets and profits. And they always believe that in doing so they are solving their problems.

“But they miss the point, as the employing class has done throughout its history,” Barnes said. “What they do to working people breeds rebellion. The intensification of work, of line speed, the brutality, the unfairness; being treated as objects, as ‘factors of production,’ instead of thinking, fighting human beings—that’s what brings the resistance.

“It begins around *moral* questions,” Barnes said. “The fight at Dakota Premium, the strikes in the Western mines, the developing social movement in coal communities across the country are around moral questions. Read what person after person says in *The Workers’ Voice* and in the *Militant* coverage. ‘I cannot accept this any longer, not only for myself but for my co-workers. I now make my stand.’ That’s what the fights we’re seeing are over.

“The capitalists bring on the socialist revolution,” Barnes said. “It is the political organization of workers in massive numbers when the revolutionary situation arises that decides whether or not it will be victorious.”

## Bipartisan assault

Class-conscious workers must not be taken in by the election-year bombast of the Republican Party presidential candidates and members of Congress, Barnes said, who point to what he called “the almost comical limitations” of the Alaska-based antimissile defense system being proposed by the Democratic White House. Because behind the campaign rhetoric is the deadly serious reality that the Clinton administration has taken the first steps in two of the main strategic but unrealized goals of the so-called Reagan Revolution.

Clinton is making the initial move to put in place a missile defense system—another step toward a nuclear first-strike capacity for U.S. imperialism—aimed at the Chinese workers state in the first instance. In the 1980s, Reagan ultimately had to back away from anything more than ongoing research expenditures on such a “Star Wars-type” system.

Similarly, Clinton’s legislation to “end welfare as we know it” opened the assault on Social Security that Reagan himself considered too explosive politically to touch during his own eight years in office.

These and other moves by the Democratic administration—the aptly-named Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act is a prime example—have opened the door for deeper assaults on working people at home and abroad, no matter which of the two major capitalist parties occupies the White House or holds the majority in Congress.

Political polarization is growing as well, Barnes noted, pointing to the capture of the Reform Party by Patrick Buchanan.

Buchanan is leading a regroupment of rightist and ultrarightist forces around the Reform Party, Barnes said. This will aid Buchanan’s forces in keeping one foot in capitalist electoral politics—with ballot access and substantial government funding—while regrouping the cadres of an incipient fascist movement that will eventually take its ultrarightist politics and antilabor thuggery to the streets and strike pickets.

## Convergence of party, YS, supporters

In concluding his remarks, Barnes called attention to the photograph of workers from the cut floor at Dakota Premium Foods, wearing ¡Sí se puede! T-shirts, at the UFCW Local 789 union hall the night before their victory in the union representation vote.

“We should remember the origins of that photograph,” Barnes said. “It was organized by the workers, as an act

## EDITORIAL

# March on Washington August 26

The August 26 national march on Washington will bring together thousands who want to fight against the daily brutalization of working people by the police. Buses are filling up with reservations from Boston to Birmingham.

For workers and others involved in struggles for justice, this demonstration is an arena to link up with other fighters. They will meet others like themselves from around the country who face similar experiences with the endemic brutality of the cops and are seeking ways to combat it. The action will offer an opportunity to discuss and explain the cause of police violence and put the fight against it into the broader picture.

The function of the police in capitalist society is to protect the property rights and interests of the wealthy ruling class. The problem is not a question of “rogue cops.” The problem is cops *doing their job*. That job is to mete out punishment on the spot in order to keep working people in line—whether terrorizing Black youth on the street or arresting strikers on the picket line.

The slaughter of Amadou Diallo in a barrage of 41 bullets—just to take one example—was not an aberration. The cops are trained like rats in behavioral experiments. The New York cops who killed Diallo explained how they underwent training in the “funhouse,” an apartment building filled with gunmen and other false dangers to train them to react to noise and surprises. When asked whether the training included learning to distinguish between guns and harmless objects, one of the cops said: “The only objects they ever pulled on us were firearms. In every incident we were

killed.” Cops graduate from this training only when they learn the correct reaction to all such cases: shoot to kill.

The killing of Diallo was a result of the city government’s “quality of life” campaign. The rulers of this country seek to convince us to accept such cop violence in exchange for “lower crime rates.” More “anti-crime” measures mean more killings by police, more frame-ups, more incarcerations, and more executions both in the state death chamber and on the street, with workers who are Black or Latino a special target. All these are part of the normal functioning of the cops and the capitalist “justice” system, under Democrats and Republicans alike. Both Albert Gore and George W. Bush have a long record of enforcing that system.

Whenever cops commit violence against anyone, we should demand they be put behind bars—it’s the only way to push them back and win justice for those victimized by the gangsters with badges. It was mass protest actions that forced the New York authorities to jail the cops who tortured Haitian immigrant Abner Louima.

To end cop brutalization for good, it will require forging a mass revolutionary movement of working people that takes power out of the hands of the ruling capitalist minority that cops protect, and creating a government of workers and farmers. That is the perspective that supporters of the Socialist Workers candidates for president and vice president, James Harris and Margaret Trowe, are explaining as they campaign among working-class fighters and farmers. Join with them!

## Socialist workers in Machinists union meet

Continued from page 11

mously to reaffirm the course charted by the party in the late 1970s, and reaffirmed several times since, that fractions of socialist workers be made up of at least two individuals working together with the same co-workers in the same workplace.

Participants voted overwhelmingly to set a deadline to end all one-person fraction situations. This includes situations where two socialists work for the same employer, are members of the same large union local (or a different union), but work in different areas without common co-workers. The work to carry out these decisions is the responsibility of the leaderships of party units in towns and cities where socialists are working IAM jobs. Party branches will decide which unions their members will work in, as part of effectively participating in the resistance of other working people in their area.

This effort, several participants remarked, includes reinforcing the steps under way in their branches to build fractions in the UMWA, among UFCW packinghouse workers, and in UNITE. A number of longtime airline workers in the party have already taken steps to change jobs and help build these fractions.

## Lessons of previous experiences

Other meeting participants pointed to the situation a couple of years ago when the mechanics at Northwest Airlines voted to join the Airline Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA), an organization that sought to break mechanics away from other workers in the IAM. Socialist workers actively opposed this course prior to the vote. Afterwards they did not leave AMFA but instead became

part of the effort to bring together in action workers at Northwest—both those in the IAM and those in AMFA—to fight company attempts to impose concession contracts.

In the absence of a substantial organized struggle at Northwest, however, meeting participants decided that holding AMFA jobs—which are primarily mechanics positions—is no longer fraction policy.

It’s useful to take a fresh look at the experience of building the Teamsters union in Minneapolis and the Upper Midwest in the 1930s, commented John Studer of Philadelphia in the discussion. This history is found in the four-volume series by Farrell Dobbs available from Pathfinder Press (see ad on page 9).

“The struggle went from the coal yards, to trucking more broadly in Minneapolis, to the over-the-road drivers throughout the region. Key to advancing that struggle was reaching out for solidarity to the wives and families of the strikers, to working farmers, to the unemployed, and to other workers in all kinds of situations inspired to form unions and *use them*.

“The pages of the union’s paper, the *Northwest Organizer*, addressed the mounting imperialist war threats that culminated in World War II and other pressing social and political issues of the time. It was out of these experiences that a fighting union was forged and that recruitment to the revolutionary party developed,” Studer said.

In addition to the effort to sell copies of *The Working-Class and the Transformation of Learning*, participants in the meeting voted to wage a campaign, ending October 1, to sell to co-workers 12 subscriptions to the *Militant* newspaper and 4 subscriptions to the Spanish-language monthly *Perspectiva Mundial*.

of pride and to put fear into the bosses. They posted it on their union web site the day of the vote.

“Then the *Militant* ran the photo on its front page. And the Young Socialists decided to make it the centerpiece of their display at this conference, along with a picture from the UMWA strike against P&M out West.”

The party supporters organizing the Pathfinder Reprint Project also used the photograph of the Dakota Premium workers as a central opening feature of their conference display, Barnes pointed out. The text explained that the struggles depicted in that and other photos on the display “are the reason we do this work.” (Reprint project steering committee member Peggy Brundy later said the volunteers “had the display all ready to go before the vote and union victory at Dakota. We just added the picture in with the rest. It fit like a glove!”)

That photograph, Barnes said, “is sort of a ‘gut check.’ If you like that picture—if you see in it the kind of revolutionary party and youth organization we’re determined to build—then we’re on the same road, were together on the historic line of march of the working class.”

Barnes said that the communist movement had “never before had a gathering at which the purpose of the Young Socialists, the purpose of the party’s organized supporters, and the purpose of the party have converged in the powerful ways we’ve seen over the past few days.

“We are building the nucleus of a party that will be capable of leading the working class in a mighty revolution against the most violent ruling class that has ever existed on the face of this earth. Out of the vanguard of fighting workers and farmers we will forge the cadres, the

women and men, who will make up the most advanced political organization in the history of humanity, a communist party, capable of emulating what our comrades in Cuba did—make a socialist revolution—so that together with working people the world over we can end the degradation of capitalism once and for all.”

*Martin Koppel, Norton Sandler, and Brian Williams contributed to this article.*

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# 'The issue in our campaign is workers can change society'

Reprinted below is an article that appeared in the August 3 issue of the *Toronto Star* on the campaign of John Steele, Communist League candidate for mayor of Toronto. Steele is a meat packer and member of the United Food and Commercial Workers union. The article in the *Star*, the largest-circulation English-language daily in Canada, was headlined, "Nothing to gain but the mayoral chain."

BY JIM COYLE

John Steele is, at 59, a small man, soft-spoken, bespectacled. His short hair is wiry and flecked with gray. He wore, the night I met him, a sports jacket, blue shirt and tie. You might take him, at a glance, for a college professor.

Odds are few would peg him as a meat packer, fewer still guess that this most unlikely class warrior is the Communist candidate for mayor of Toronto.

As always, appearances can be deceiving. Which, as it happens, is more or less the message Steele wishes to send to those who believe that communism, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites, has been consigned to history's dustbin.

Oh, you might think so, he admits, if you follow only mainstream media. Steele finds he has to read *The Militant* to really know what's going on. And, as he sees it, working folk still have a world to win and nothing to lose but their chains.

"Communism is alive and well in Cuba, in small organizations like ours," he says.

"What is happening today is that the obstacles to the development of the communist movement are being removed by the development of capitalism itself as it heads more and more to another historical period of fascism and world war."

Which are probably not issues the current mayor was planning to discuss much in the campaign for the Nov. 13 vote. Though he will be relieved to know Steele does not hold him personally accountable.

"We're not saying [Mayor] Mel Lastman is the problem. The issue is what capitalism is doing to humanity and the need for working people to realize that we can actually change society."

"There are a lot of young people out there who do not like the values of this society, the dog-eat-dog ethic. I'm quite convinced we'll get a hearing."

It was as a young man himself that Steele, who's worked in textile plants, cleaned aircraft and ran once before for mayor, joined the Communist League.

"Many years ago I concluded that capitalism has no future for humanity. And one of the big influences on me was the Cuban revolution."

There, if perhaps not paradise, is a living example of human solidarity at work, he says. Elsewhere, most notably here, fewer workers are asked to produce ever more ever faster



Militant/José Lagman

John Steele, left, Communist League candidate for mayor of Toronto, talks with participant in protest against cop brutality and frame-up of advocates for the homeless.

for less pay and benefits in order to lower prices and increase profits for a minority.

"And that," he says, in terms even [probusiness Canadian newspaper magnate] Conrad Black would appreciate, "is the bottom line."

Still, given times trumpeted as the very flowering of capitalism, given the popularity of the incumbent, some might regard Steele's mayoral campaign as quixotic in the extreme. Especially when you consider he has no entourage, no spin doctors, no swank office or limo, no campaign funds or organization to speak of.

Voters might find it refreshing, however, to know Steele also has no interest in talking about his religious views or fitness regimen, or in thrusting his family into the spot-

light. He will talk, he says, only about ideas.

"There are two Torontos, two different worlds. One is the Toronto that Mayor Lastman speaks and acts for, a small minority, the rich. The other Toronto is the vast majority of people like myself who face tremendous social and economic problems."

For now, Steele's campaign is run from Pathfinder Bookstore on Bloor St. W. On its shelves rest volumes chronicling struggles through the decades of working folk, the oppressed, dispossessed.

"The history of all hitherto existing society," *The Communist Manifesto* begins, "is the history of class struggles."

And to John Steele, so it remains.

"Why shouldn't somebody other than people in tuxedos run for mayor?"

## Cuban trade unionists speak in San Francisco

BY DEBORAH LIATOS

SAN FRANCISCO—In face of a world dominated by imperialist oppression and brutality, "the vast majority of Cubans want to change the world. They believe that it's possible to change the world and that this is possible only through the struggles of the workers and the people," said Leonel González, a leader of the Central Organization of Cuban Workers (CTC).

González and two other CTC leaders, on a U.S. speaking tour, described the accomplishments of Cuban workers in defending their revolution and contrasted it with the situation facing workers in the capitalist world, including some of the conditions they had already encountered themselves.

González, CTC secretary of international relations and a member of Cuba's National Assembly, was joined by Olga Rosa Gómez, general secretary of the National Union of Cultural Workers and also a National Assembly deputy, and Manuel Montero, director for the Americas in the CTC's international relations department.

The Cuban trade unionists spoke at an August 4 labor reception of 100 people, held at the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) hall here, and at a community event at the Mission Cultural Center for the Latino Arts the next day.

The national tour was organized by the U.S.-Cuba Labor Exchange. The local tour committee here was made up of several union officials including Walter Johnson, secretary-treasurer of the San Francisco Labor Council; Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers union; and Brian McWilliams, president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

González explained how Cuba had weathered the worst effects of the economic crisis in the early 1990s after suddenly being thrust into the capitalist market following the collapse of favorable trade relations with the Soviet Union. "In Cuba the economy shrank by 35 percent in one year. If the U.S. economy fell by 2 percent Wall Street might sink. Why did this not happen in Cuba? Because every measure we took was with the full participation of the people," he stated.

González was referring to measures taken to boost food production, get industry going again, and improve efficiency, including the development of tourism and other sources of hard currency to purchase needed

goods and supplies.

He added, "We instituted new laws that were discussed by the unions and the people. The farmers discussed what measures to take. The neighborhood organizations discussed it. Eight million people out of Cuba's population of 11 million discussed this. Then and only then did the National Assembly pass them. There were things to which workers said no and these were not carried out. For example, taxes on workers' wages were not approved."

González noted that the Cuban trade unionists had been invited to attend a West Coast meeting of AFL-CIO officials held in Las Vegas. "It was interesting to tell them what women have been able to accomplish in Cuba and have not accomplished in the United States, what we've won in infant

care, and the rights enjoyed by workers in Cuba," he said.

"I also spoke of what we saw in North Carolina, where immigrants have their visas and passports taken away. We went to other states where workers don't have the right to a union and can be fired or laid off at any time."

"When we see the opulence of Las Vegas and come back to San Francisco, where so many people don't have jobs; where workers get sprayed with pesticides as they work, where immigrant workers receive less than the minimum wage, pay a lot of money to be allowed to work, and are threatened with deportation—this is a society that doesn't convince us," said Gómez. "We have learned how difficult it is to organize a union in the United States, and then to collectively bar-

gain for a contract."

González remarked, "We are convinced that Cuba has been able to accomplish what we've accomplished through solidarity with the people." Socialism is necessary, he said. In confronting the effects of the world capitalist market, "we know the dangers, but we're confident that after 40 years, we've raised the level of education and culture, information and political culture of our people. Our people know about Mumia Abu-Jamal. They know about the importance of the struggle in [the Puerto Rican island of] Vieques. We are confident in taking on the challenges and not allowing ourselves to be defeated in our principles."

Deborah Liatos is a member of the United Food and Commercial Workers union.

## Chicago laundry workers win union recognition

BY LISA POTASH AND LISA-MARIE ROTTACH

CHICAGO—Workers have returned to their jobs after a six-week strike against Five Star Laundry, winning union recognition and a contract. Five Star is an industrial laundry used by some of the largest hotels in Chicago.

Prior to the strike 90 percent of the workers had signed cards to join the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). With the settlement of the strike, all 100 workers in the plant now have union recognition, joining nearly 2,000 other laundry workers in the Chicago area who are also members of UNITE. They voted to ratify a three-year contract by a decisive margin.

Before the strike, workers started at \$6.50 an hour, with most topping off at \$7.25. The agreement includes two wage increases of 35 cents each in the first year of the contract, and approximately 5 percent the subsequent two years. The contract provides for an additional holiday, some paid sick-day coverage, improved health insurance, and a pension.

The contract also stipulates that Five Star must notify UNITE if the Immigration and Naturalization Service police has contacted the company, and that workers submitting new information to the company after obtaining legal residence papers cannot be fired.

Most workers interviewed by the *Militant* favored the new contract, saying it is a step forward. One young worker, wearing a UNITE T-shirt as she headed into the plant, said that getting in the union and a contract is a start that they can build on. She also reported that the boss has been writing up more of the workers since the strike ended, and that tensions on the laundry plant floor between the company and the workers are sharper now.

Two young workers, originally from Mexico, said the contract provided better

terms than what the workers had before winning a union.

One worker interviewed said she felt there was more "division" on the job now and that it would have been better to bring in the Production Workers Union, favored by the company during the strike.

Lisa Potash and Lisa-Marie Rottach are sewing machine operators and members of UNITE in Chicago. Potash is also the Socialist Workers candidate for U.S. Congress in the 5th District.

## LETTERS

### A paper that tells the truth

As a reader of the *Militant*, I want to congratulate you for the excellent work that you do. In my eyes, the *Militant* is essential to be able to understand the world today. I was reading *Le Soleil*, a daily in the region of Quebec, and I found an interesting article [about police spying on antimilitarist groups in Canada]. I think that you should talk about it somewhere in the *Militant*. It might give a better idea of the nature of the Canadian state to other readers accustomed to think that the Canadian state is all about peacekeeping and liberty.

Finally, I want to thank you for the coverage of the struggle in the Dakota Premium meatpacking plant and the articles covering

the Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom. It is really good to have a paper that pumps the truth into our brains.

Vive le Quebec Libre! [Long live free Quebec]

Vive l'indépendance du Quebec! [Long live Quebec independence]

Dmitris Fasfalis  
Sainte-Foy, Quebec

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people.

Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

## Behind the outcry over 'war diamonds'

Washington, London intervene in Sierra Leone, seek greater influence in Africa

BY T.J. FIGUEROA

PRETORIA, South Africa—In July, professing concern over wars in several African nations, the United Nations Security Council, at the behest of Washington and London, decreed a global ban on diamond exports from Sierra Leone. A similar measure had been taken in 1998 against so-called illegal diamonds from Angola.

The moves to stamp out trade in "conflict" gems were ostensibly aimed at the operations of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), antigovernment guerrilla organizations. Legislation is also being drafted in the U.S. Congress to require Customs to enforce a ban on stones from Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, and those from Sierra Leone that do not carry an official government certificate.

On August 9, the UN Security Council gave its nod to a plan by the Sierra Leonean government to establish a procedure to certify the origin of diamonds, clearing the way for the imperialist powers to allow the African nation to export its gems again—under the watchful eye of a UN-appointed "sanctions committee."

The De Beers diamond cartel, which controls two-thirds of the \$7 billion yearly trade in uncut diamonds and owns half the producing mines, has joined the chorus against what are sanctimoniously called "blood diamonds," claiming it will not buy such stones and urging that all diamonds sold worldwide be attached to certificates of origin.

A number of liberal groups, most prominently Global Witness in London, have helped shape this campaign against the trade in "illegally" mined gems, which they say fuels wars on the African continent.

A closer look, however, demonstrates that this hullabaloo is not about halting wars and other conflicts in Africa—many of which the U.S., British, and French governments are deeply involved in. It is about advancing imperialist interests on the continent—and protecting the De Beers diamond cartel.

### De Beers: pillar of apartheid rule

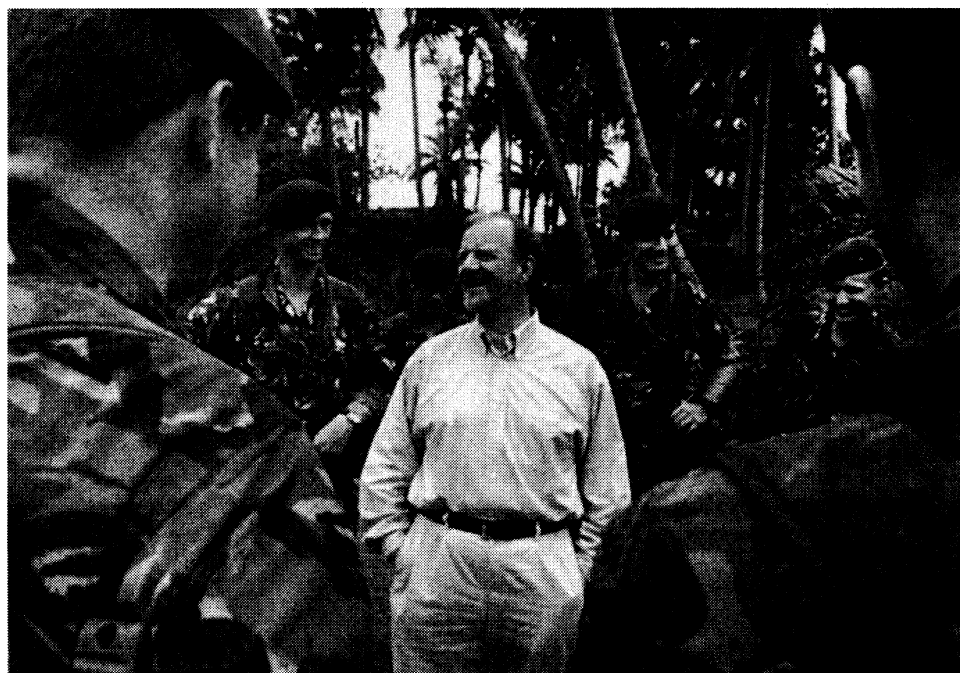
De Beers, based in South Africa and the United Kingdom, has dominated the world diamond trade for more than a century. Its ownership structures are closely bound up with those of the Anglo American Corp., the vast South African conglomerate, of which it owns about 40 percent.

Both companies raked in massive profits from the labor of superexploited Africans driven off their land and into the mines, starting at the end of the 19th century. Later this brutal system was codified under apartheid white-minority rule. Both companies were bastions of support for the racist regime.

Diamonds were discovered in 1867 near Kimberley, South Africa, which became the source of the De Beers empire. It was no coincidence that Kimberley was also the birthplace in 1876 of South Africa's notorious pass laws—and mass trials of Africans for violating them—as De Beers and other mining capitalists sought to brand labor in a black skin as rightless.

De Beers was founded by Cecil Rhodes, the infamous British colonizer. By the opening of the 20th century, De Beers controlled 90 percent of the international diamond trade. In response to falling prices during the depression of the 1930s, the company initiated a policy of buying up virtually all diamonds mined worldwide and bolstering its fortunes through monopoly pricing of the rock, which is mostly sold as a luxury jewelry item. De Beers today dominates the diamond trade not only through mining, but through its Diamond Trading Company, until recently called the Central Selling Organization, which controls most of world output.

Today, with much fanfare, the big-business press is proclaiming that De Beers is changing how it operates. "The South African mining group is surrendering its mo-



UK foreign secretary Robin Cook visits British troops in Sierra Leone in June

nopoly position by giving up its traditional role of 'buyer of last resort' of every stone on the market," the *Financial Times* stated in July. "The buyer-of-last-resort strategy worked brilliantly in times of high inflation when diamond prices were high and the value of the stockpile rose. But low inflation and the emergence of new players have taken a heavy toll on the group. De Beers spent billions of dollars accumulating a large stockpile of diamonds that were never sold."

De Beers has used its stockpile to absorb diamonds on the market that might lower the price of the stone. Its new strategy is to buy up more mines, particularly in Australia and Canada, and to become the "supplier of choice"—meaning that it will aim to continue dominating diamond sales through its brand. By promoting itself as a seller of "clean" diamonds, the cartel aims to reinforce its monopoly, not to end it.

"Having spent hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising this product, De Beers is deeply concerned about anything that could damage the image of diamonds as a symbol of love, beauty, and purity," the company said in U.S. Congressional testimony.

### Diamond cartel control slips in Africa

In recent years the cartel has lost control of diamonds produced in several African countries. It is the weakening of its grip that prompts De Beers to support quarantining diamonds it does not control. If the cartel is broken, the price of diamonds will nosedive.

Last year De Beers withdrew from Angola, which holds 10 percent of known diamond reserves. After Washington began to withdraw visible support from UNITA in the early 1990s, De Beers' business there became more of a liability, especially when it came to light that it was buying diamonds produced in UNITA-controlled areas to protect the market price. It was also losing control over more and more of Angolan production.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, site of 8 percent of known diamond reserves, control has also spun away from the cartel. In Sierra Leone, production from RUF-controlled areas eludes the De Beers buying operation. Last December the company closed its purchasing offices in West and Central Africa.

The company is also fighting to hold onto its monopoly rights to distribute diamonds produced in Russia, which holds 26 percent of known reserves.

"De Beers' strategy on conflict diamonds is motivated by more than just fears of a consumer boycott. Critics say the company has deftly turned the issue from a potential public relations disaster into a strategy to retain its market dominance," stated a *Financial Times* article. "They argue that if De Beers can position itself as a producer and distributor of 'clean diamonds,' it will keep a tight grip on the market without the expense of maintaining a stockpile."

Washington and London are building up "conflict diamonds" as an issue to bolster their ability to intervene—militarily and otherwise—in a range of African countries, from Sierra Leone to the Congo.

### U.S. and British intervention in Africa

The imperialist powers, posturing as defenders of peace, take full political advantage of the brutal conduct of forces such as the RUF of Sierra Leone and its ally, the regime of Liberian president Charles Taylor, to press their interests in the region. Those interests include having unfettered access to mineral resources and establishing stable, pliant regimes.

Earlier this year, British and other troops under the UN banner deepened their intervention in Sierra Leone when the imperialist-backed regime there made an effort to seize control of the diamond fields under RUF control.

On July 31, Washington's UN ambassador, Richard Holbrooke, compared the Liberian president, who has backed the RUF, to Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic, evoking the specter of the U.S. military intervention against Yugoslavia. "Taylor is Milosevic in Africa with diamonds," Holbrooke told the *New York Times*. "He is threatening to destabilize western Africa."

That same day, British diplomat Stephen Pattison told a UN hearing on "conflict gems" that, in return for diamonds, Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaore has sent

mercenaries to fight alongside RUF rebels in Sierra Leone against UN troops.

Virginia Republican congressman Frank Wolf, a sponsor of the measure before the House of Representatives on banning certain African diamonds from the United States, declared that "until the link between diamonds and war is severed, these African wars will not end."

The sermons about diamonds bankrolling "African wars" are a smoke screen for the imperialist scramble to loot and politically dominate hunks of the continent.

The reactionary UNITA outfit, for example, was long financed and organized by the U.S. government and the apartheid regime in South Africa. As the Angolan people won their independence from Portugal in 1975, UNITA launched a civil war—backed by Washington and Pretoria—to prevent the coming to power of a government led by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Successive attempts to overturn the MPLA government—including armed invasions by apartheid's troops—were smashed with the decisive assistance of Cuban internationalist troops, who fought alongside the Angolan army. Today, UNITA's uses have dwindled and Washington has withdrawn its most overt support.

In Sierra Leone, mining "legitimate" diamonds means mining under imperialist control. A colony of Britain until 1961, the country is rich in mineral resources, including diamonds and gold. Its major trading partners are Britain and the United States. In 1930, when diamonds were discovered, the British colonial government tried to seal off the region and made diamond mining illegal except for government-sponsored private monopolies and a few small licensing schemes, with the vast majority of the wealth leaving the country.

In the resource-rich Democratic Republic of Congo, fighting between rebel forces and the regime of Laurent Kabila is also unsettling the imperialist powers. For this reason the UN Security Council has voted to support a troop deployment in that country.

De Beers may sing the praises of "legitimacy", or even the "love, beauty and purity" of its diamonds today, but these were not its concerns as it mined in apartheid South Africa, apartheid-ruled Namibia, or colonial Angola, Congo, and Sierra Leone. Nor were Washington, London, Paris, and Brussels upset by these activities, which made huge fortunes in the imperialist capitals. But apartheid and colonial rule have been overturned in Africa—and a diamond cartel is not forever.

## U.S. military 'trainers' to Nigeria, Ghana

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

Increasing its military presence in West Africa, Washington has announced plans to send several hundred U.S. soldiers to Nigeria and Ghana to train "peacekeeping troops" to intervene in the war in Sierra Leone.

The soldiers will join an initial group of 40 U.S. troops stationed in Nigeria. They will train and equip three Nigerian battalions comprising 4,000 troops, which are part of a 13,000-strong occupation force in Sierra Leone under the United Nations aegis. They will also train soldiers from Ghana, and possibly Mali and Senegal.

The UN-sponsored force, together with British ground and naval troops, are backing the government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah against the Revolutionary United Front [RUF]. The British and U.S. rulers have their eyes on Sierra Leone's lucrative mineral wealth as well as the strategic position of the region.

Washington, seeking to establish itself as the dominant imperialist power on the African continent, has been cautious about direct military involvement in Sierra Leone, relying so far on British and Nigerian forces.

The Nigerian regime, the strongest West

African government, headed a regional intervention force that retook Freetown, Sierra Leone, in early 1999 and imposed a shaky cease-fire, but later withdrew. It was replaced by a weaker UN-led force that unraveled in May when RUF troops took hostage hundreds of UN soldiers, later freed by a UN "rescue mission."

In response, the Clinton administration offered \$20 million to beef up the UN occupation force, including the U.S. "trainers."

In early August the UN Security Council—dominated by Washington, London, and Paris—adopted a British resolution directing UN forces to act more aggressively in Sierra Leone.

Later in August the Security Council will vote on a U.S. resolution to set up a tribunal to try antigovernment forces accused of atrocities.

The new deployment of U.S. soldiers, presently stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, will represent Washington's biggest military commitment in Africa in nearly a decade. U.S. president Clinton plans to travel to Nigeria at the end of August, in an effort to bolster U.S. influence on the continent at the expense of its imperialist rivals in London and Paris.