

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Bosses' profit drive responsible for fatal blast at Glasgow plastics plant

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Point Blank workers in Florida defeat boss attempt to up medical costs

BY SETH GALINSKY

OAKLAND PARK, Florida—Just weeks after workers at Point Blank Body Armor here approved their first contract following a two-year-long battle for recognition of the garment and textile workers' union, UNITE, unionists beat back a company attempt to jack up the cost of family medical insurance.

While the cost of individual medical coverage stayed the same, workers with the family plan were shocked to see on their paycheck the week after the contract took effect that their insurance costs had doubled. One worker's weekly insurance premium jumped from roughly \$70 to \$140, leaving her with take-home pay of just \$75.

Faced with workers' anger, the company began immediately backing down. Management gave everyone with family medical coverage a postal money order equivalent to the increased amount.

Workers continued to make their anger
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U.S. gov't to give police access to federal spy files

BY RÓGER CALERO

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft announced May 14 the creation of the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan, a system that will put the stamp of legality and legitimacy on the Justice Department and FBI sharing information with local and state police and other government cop agencies.

The computerized system will coordinate records gathered by the police and spy agencies involving 1.2 million cops and government agents at federal, state,
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Farmers demand reopening of settlement on anti-Black discrimination

BY JOHN HAWKINS

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Farmers who are Black and their supporters gathered here May 17 across from the E. Barrett Perryman federal courthouse. They announced the filing of a motion with the court for sweeping changes to a 1999 consent decree that was to have settled *Pigford v. Glickman*, a class action lawsuit through which
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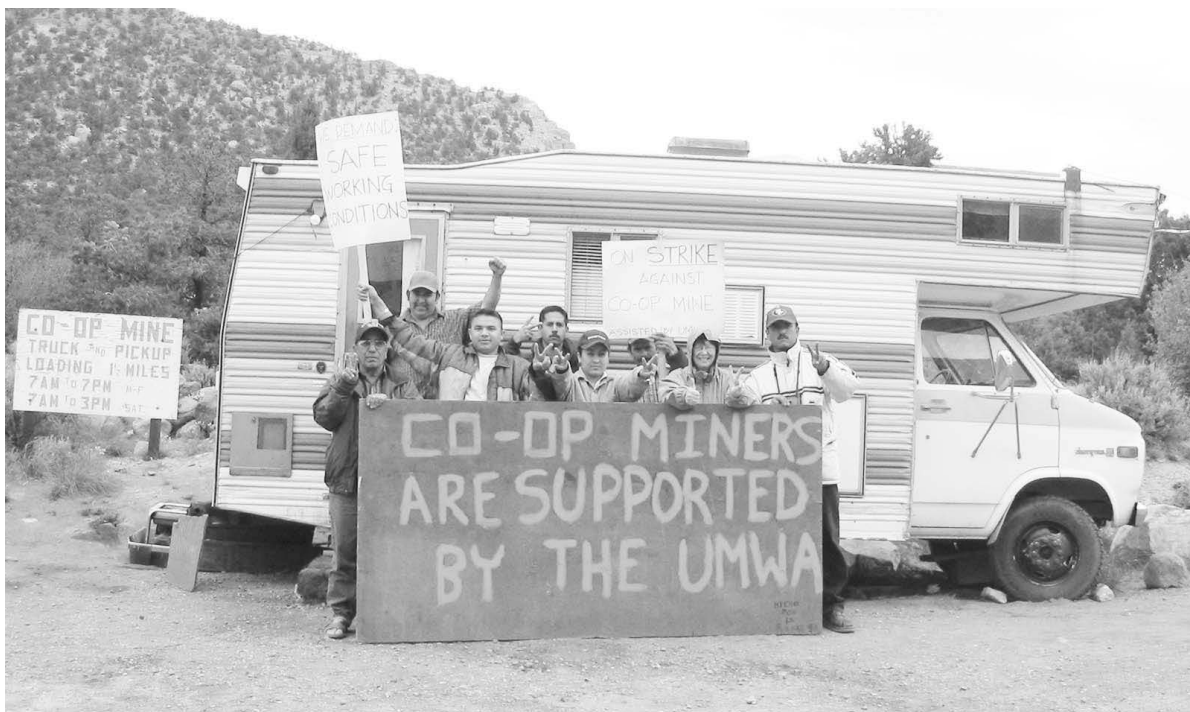
UMWA files for union vote at Co-Op mine in Utah

Labor support expands for striking coal miners

BY GUILLERMO ESQUIVEL

HUNTINGTON, Utah—“Eight months after being escorted by Sheriff's deputies off of mine property and allegedly fired in violation of U.S. Labor Law by members of the C.W. Mining Company, the locked out/striking Co-Op coal miners have filed a representation petition with the National Labor Relations Board Regional Office in Denver, Colorado,” reads a May 19 press release by Region IV of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

“For years, some of these miners have been forced to pay dues to a company dominated ‘union’ that most of them did not know about until it surfaced during the current labor dispute,” said Mike Dalpiaz, UMWA International Executive Board member from Price, Utah, who is quoted in the union's press release. The miners are taking advantage of a legally required open-window period in the so-called contract the Co-Op miners toiled under, Dalpiaz said, so



Militant/Guillermo Esquivel

Striking coal miners picket May 24 with new trailer near entrance of Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah. From left, Apolonio Acosta, Juan Carlos López, Umberto Miranda, Jesús Salazar, Ana María Sánchez, Jesús Galaviz, Alyson Kennedy, and Juan Salazar.

“a real union can file a representation petition in an attempt to challenge or supplant the one currently recognized by the NLRB.” The company “union” contract expires in August.

At the same time, labor support for the UMWA strike is expanding. This includes a recent \$1,700 donation from the National Union of Mineworkers in the United

Kingdom; the establishment of a “buck-a-week” club by Communications Workers of America Local 201 in Boston, so that its members can send regular contributions to the striking miners; and the expansion of a labor tour for Co-Op strikers in the Seattle area planned for June 9–10 and sponsored by the International Longshore and Warehouse
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Caracas book fair draws thousands, shows growing desire to broaden culture for toilers

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

CARACAS, Venezuela—“I think this fair is part of something very good happening in this country,” said Leonardo Gómez, 55, an office worker who was visiting the Pathfinder booth at the Caracas International Book Fair. “Millions of Venezuelans are studying and reading.”

“Those in the oligarchy don't like that,” Gómez added. “They prefer things the way they used to be. But for many people, advancing our education and culture is an opportunity that for a long time we had been excluded from.”

For 10 days, beginning May 14, tens of thousands of people thronged Los Caobos

Park in this capital city to browse through book stalls, listen to poetry readings, and enjoy puppet shows, videos, and other cultural performances.

While this was the 11th annual Caracas book fair, it was only the second year it was held at this city park. For years the book fair had been held in a closed space that was small and uninviting, many visitors to this year's fair told *Militant* reporters. It was oriented toward the literary and academic establishment. Last year the Venezuelan ministry of culture and the government of the Libertador municipality in Caracas decided to move the fair to an open location and take other steps to encourage broader

public participation. The park was spruced up. The 2003 fair drew tens of thousands and was a big success.

This year it was expanded from 77 to 127 booths. To help make books more affordable, government ministries gave their employees vouchers worth 10,000 bolívares each (about \$5) to use for book purchases at the fair.

The book fair was marked by the political ferment and sharpening class struggle that have dominated Venezuela for the past five years: rising struggles by workers and farmers for land, jobs, housing, and decent
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U.S. general running prisons in Iraq suspended, removed from command

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The U.S. Army suspended indefinitely on May 24 Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski and removed her from command of the 800th Military Police Brigade. Karpinski was in charge of 16 U.S.-run prisons in Iraq, including the one at Abu Ghraib near Baghdad, now notorious for systematic abuse and humiliation of prisoners by U.S. military police and intelligence officers.

Karpinski was relieved of her duties until investigations into the abuse are completed, said Lt. Col. Pamela Hart, an Army spokeswoman.

A day later, the *Washington Post* and other big-business media reported that the top commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, is being recalled from his post this summer. He is likely to be replaced by Army vice chief of staff Gen. George Casey. It is not clear what will happen to Sanchez who was earlier being considered for a promotion to head the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, which directs military operations in Latin America. According to the *Post*, Lt. Gen. Bantz Craddock, the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Donald
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Uruguay senate rejects bill decriminalizing abortion

Congress in Chile legalizes divorce, ‘morning-after’ pill

BY ROMINA GREEN

CLEVELAND—On May 4, Uruguay’s senate rejected in a 17-13 vote a bill to decriminalize abortion, which President Jorge Batlle of the Colorado Party had announced he would veto if passed. The country’s House of Representatives had approved the measure in early 2003.

The Law for Reproductive Health would have made it legal for women to obtain an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. The bill also included provisions for sex education in the schools and free distribution of contraceptives, and required hospitals to perform the procedure free of charge.

Existing legislation allows abortion only in cases of rape or when a women’s life is in danger. The National Coalition in Defense of Reproductive Health, a group in Uruguay supporting a women’s right to choose abortion, said polls showed that 63 percent of the population supported the pro-choice legislation.

The only countries in Latin America and the Caribbean where abortion is legal are Cuba, Guyana, and Puerto Rico.

A sign of the growing support for the right to choose was a public statement issued by the Medical Union of Uruguay backing the Law for Reproductive Health. The group had opposed the decriminalization of abortion for decades. Its statement said that one in three maternal deaths between 1997 and 2001 were due to complications from abortions performed illegally and pointed out that working-class women are the most affected.

Statistics show that 52,000 births take place each year in Uruguay, a country of 3.3 million people. Between 30,000 and 50,000 pregnancies are terminated.

A few hundred backers of the abortion rights bill rallied outside the senate to show support for the legislation. They held signs saying, “My Choice,” “Catholic Women for the Right to Choose,” and “Contraceptives! So we don’t have to abort; Legalize abortion! So we won’t die.”

Six members of the U.S. House of Representatives who are against a woman’s

right to choose had faxed letters urging Uruguay’s senators not to “make the same costly mistake,” referring to the decriminalization of abortion in the United States in 1973. Rep. Chris Smith, Republican from New Jersey, said, “Lawmakers have a duty to talk to each other on human rights.”

Uruguayan senator Reynaldo Gargano, a sponsor of the abortion rights bill, called the action “an act of gross meddling.” Supporters of abortion rights said they are planning to push for a similar law next year.

Chilean Congress approves divorce

Three days after the vote in the Uruguayan senate, Chilean president Ricardo Lagos signed into law a bill legalizing divorce in Chile—one of the few countries in the world where divorce had been banned by law. The previous law allowed a costly church annulment of marriage. Reflecting the growing involvement of women in the labor market, and thus their increasing independence from spouses for survival, many married couples would separate and live with their companions. This trend is reflected in the fact that 40 percent of children in Chile today are born from unmarried parents. The new law goes into effect in November.

At the same time, with much criticism from the Catholic Church, the Chilean Congress also voted to legalize the “morning-after” pill or Plan B. The Catholic Church organized a rally of several hundred in front of the presidential palace to oppose the bill. About two dozen college students, mostly women, organized a counter protest to back the bill.

In response to criticism from the Vatican, Chilean presidential spokesperson Francisco Vidal said May 4 that “while respecting the Church, consideration should be given that we must govern for the 15 million Chileans.”

The government has distributed 35,000 doses of the pill. Debate is now taking place across the country on whether the government will allow mayors opposing the pill to stop its distribution. At the same time, support for decriminalizing abortion is also growing. Several politicians have

announced they are preparing such a bill.

While Lagos’s Socialist Party government tries to portray itself as a defender of women’s rights, its effort to gut the Maternity Law is an attack on the rights of working-class women. It has put forward proposals that would eliminate maternity leave from work and limit women’s ability to receive emergency leave to only the care of sick children under the age of one. The current legislation permits women to arrive late to work and leave a half hour early if no childcare is provided for by the company, and the boss has to pay transportation. These provisions would be eliminated if the Lagos government gets its way.

CUT, the national trade union federation, has come out against amending this law and has included this in its list of demands for a general strike planned for July 29.

In a telephone interview, Patricia Coñomán, president of the garment workers union Contextil, said the government is trying to force women “to work up to the ninth month of pregnancy and practically deny any leave after birth. They also want to end the present law that forces the employer to give women a half hour paid leave in the morning and afternoon to pick-up children from school.”

Abortion battle rages in Argentina

In Argentina large rallies have taken place over the last year to back a bill decriminalizing abortion.

During a recent trip by Argentine officials to the Vatican, the pope approved of the deal signed by the Peronist government of Néstor Kirchner with the International Monetary Fund on the country’s foreign debt, but expressed his stern opposition to any steps to legalize abortion. Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa, who was part of the delegation, said in an interview with *Página 12*, “I repeated the words of President Néstor Kirchner’s wife, that our country is not one that practices abortion.”

Supporters of abortion rights, however, are pointing out that such statements are false. A growing number of women obtain



Protester at May 4 rally for abortion rights in Montevideo, Uruguay. T-shirt says, “Sex when I choose, a child when I decide.”

abortions, they say, and keeping it illegal simply results in the death of more women. In an interview with Buenos Aires daily *El Clarín*, Miriam Sonatti of the Movement of Women of the Left, said, “In Buenos Aires province a women dies every 13 days because of an illegal abortion.... These are statistics due to poverty. In Argentina there are one million pregnancies a year and about 600,000 births—which means that about 40 percent of pregnancies are aborted. In the last seven years, the number of women admitted to public hospitals due to complications from abortions has increased more than 47 percent.”

In response to the growing pressure from mass mobilizations for women’s rights, some government officials have adopted a pro-choice stance. New Supreme Court Justice Carmen Argibay stated she supports legalizing abortion, as has Argentina’s minister of health over the last year.

The struggles for abortion rights in Argentina reflect a rising self-confidence among women, as a result of their increasing integration into the workforce. The Assembly for the Right to Abortion in Argentina has called another march in Buenos Aires on May 28 to press for the right to choose and is organizing workshops on the issue.

These developments across Latin America are a further confirmation of the worldwide trend towards the growing social and political weight of women in struggles for the transformation of humanity.



April 13 rally outside Uruguay’s parliament backs bill that would have decriminalized abortion and provided sex education and free distribution of contraceptives.

THE MILITANT

Abortion: A Woman’s Right to Choose!

As protests from Argentina to the U.S. show, women are gaining a growing political and social weight in struggles to transform society. The ‘Militant’ brings you the news on these actions and explains why the fight for women’s emancipation is in the interests of the working class. Don’t miss a single issue!



April 25 pro-choice march in Washington

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U.S. general removed

Continued from front page

Rumsfeld, is now the leading contender for the Southern Command post.

These moves are aimed at cleaning up Washington's image in Iraq in face of widespread outrage in the Middle East and worldwide over the abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

An angry Karpinski, reported the *Post*, said, "I suspect that they want to make the statement that all the officers who have been involved in Abu Ghraib have been suspended." She said she intends to fight the suspension.

Sanchez has been tarnished by accusations that he had knowledge of the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and was present during some of the "interrogations." The attorney for Staff Sgt. Ivan Frederick, one of six military police officers facing court-martial for abuse of prisoners, said at an April hearing that the company commander of the military police unit assigned to the prison would corroborate the accusations against Sanchez in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

Washington is acting to ensure that the uproar from the abuse of prisoners does not get in the way of accomplishing its objectives in Iraq: stabilizing its domination of the country and dealing further blows to its imperialist competitors in the process—especially Paris and Berlin. The Pentagon is taking these steps as the U.S. rulers are pressing for NATO to take a greater role in the occupation of Iraq, leading up to the NATO summit in Istanbul in June. The German government has already expressed publicly its strong reservations about allowing the Atlantic imperialist military alliance to play such a role in Iraq. "We will make no secret of these doubts in Istanbul," German chancellor Gerhard Schröder recently told the press in Berlin.

In a May 24 national broadcast U.S. president George Bush said the Abu Ghraib prison "became a symbol of disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonored our country and disregarded our values." He added that his government would fund the construction of a "modern maximum security prison" to which prisoners at Abu Ghraib will be relocated. "Then with the approval of the Iraqi government, we will demolish the Abu Ghraib Prison as a fitting symbol of Iraq's new beginning," Bush said.

Throughout the speech Bush described the recent offensives by U.S. occupying forces against cities in central Iraq—including Fallujah, Najaf, and Karbala—as "measured actions." The U.S. forces, he said, "could have used overwhelming force," but decided that "massive strikes against the enemy would alienate the local population and increase support for the insurgency."

In addition to the suspension of Karpinski and the impending replacement of Sanchez, U.S. Army specialist Jeremy Sivits, a member of the 372nd Military Police Company, was sentenced to one year in prison May 19 for his role in the abuse and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The verdict came out of the first of a number of court-martials by the U.S. military aimed at assuaging anger at the systematic mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners, by trying to convince people that those responsible will be punished.

Top officials of the Bush administration have taken advantage of recent trips to Germany and the Middle East to underscore this point. In an interview with German public broadcaster ARD, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said, "We do no good" to equate what happened at Abu Ghraib to how this "would have been handled in a dictatorship. I simply don't accept that America has lost moral authority."

At a May 16 press conference with Jordan's foreign minister, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell offered further apologies for the abuse at Abu Ghraib and promised that those responsible will be held accountable and punished. "The president offered an apology on behalf of the nation," he said. "I will reinforce that apology."

U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld made an unannounced visit to Abu Ghraib. Rumsfeld denied that the trip was intended to diffuse the outcry over mis-

treatment of Iraqi prisoners. "If anybody thinks that I am [in Iraq] to throw water on a fire they're wrong," he said. "More bad things will come out," Rumsfeld said, adding that "time will settle over this, and we'll be able to make an assessment."

The one-year sentence handed to Sivits was the maximum that could be imposed under a special deal in which he agreed to testify against six other soldiers from the 372nd Military Police Company.

Three of them were arraigned on a variety of charges but declined to enter a plea, according the *Washington Post*. The three, Spec. Charles Graner Jr., Staff Sgt. Ivan Frederick and Sgt. Javal Davis, face a pre-trial hearing set for June 21. Three others, Lynndie England, and Specs. Sabrina Harman and Megan Ambuhl have been charged with participating in the abuse of the prisoners but have not been referred to a court-martial.

So far no officers have been charged for what took place at the prison. Seven commissioned and noncommissioned officers have received reprimands. All of the military cops charged and numerous soldiers who were stationed at the prison have said that they were encouraged by their superiors and military intelligence officers to abuse prisoners in order to "soften them up" for interrogation.

Sivits's testimony showed that guards felt at ease inviting anyone in the prison to get a piece of the action. Sivits, a mechanic attached to the military police unit, said that on the night of Nov. 8, 2003, he was relaxing in a common area when Frederick casually asked if he would like to take one of the prisoners to another section of the prison.

He recounted that when he arrived with his prisoner he saw England and Davis



In one of the recently released photos from Abu Ghraib prison, a U.S. military cop cocks his fist to strike a bound and hooded Iraqi prisoner held in a headlock.

stomping on the hands and feet of bound prisoners. Frederick struck one prisoner so hard in the chest, he said, that an inhaler was needed to help the prisoner breathe. And Graner complained that his wrist hurt after punching a prisoner in the head and knocking him unconscious, according to Sivits's testimony. Sivits claimed that he had "had enough" and left the area when the prisoners were forced to masturbate. Sivits said that as he left Frederick yelled to him, "You didn't see anything." Sivits told his story only as part of the plea bargain.

As more details of the abuse are becoming public, liberal critics of the White House are using the revelations as a political football to score points against the Bush administration as part of their efforts

to capture the White House in November. Towards this end, Democratic Party politicians are falsifying the historic record on Washington's conduct toward prisoners of war and inmates at home.

One recent example illustrating this point is a report by *New Yorker* writer Seymour Hersh, posted in the May 15 online edition of the weekly magazine. Hersh alleged that Rumsfeld was among the top U.S. government and military officials who ordered that interrogation guidelines be put in place that resulted in the abuse at Abu Ghraib.

The only sources for this allegation that Hersh cited, however, were "several past and present American intelligence officials," all referred to anonymously. Hersh

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Iraqi Kurds push for more autonomy

Demand is used by occupying authorities to push for federated Iraq

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

As U.S. occupation forces continue to deal blows to insurgents largely in central Iraq—including Najaf and Fallujah—the country's northern and southern regions have, for the most part, remained relatively stable. This is especially true for the largely Kurdish region in the north.

This reality has a lot to do with the fact that Iraq remains a deeply fractured country rather than a unified nation. The lines of division were bequeathed by the British colonizers some 80 years ago. They have been reinforced by the imperialist powers that have dominated Iraq ever since and by the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, which used brutal repression against both the Kurdish nationality in the north and the Shiite majority in the south.

An article in the May 19 *Wall Street Journal*, headlined "Kurds' Success Makes it Harder To Unify All Iraq," pointed to some of the complications this situation poses for Washington's prospects of stabilizing its occupation.

The north and northeast region of Iraq—bordering Syria, Turkey, and Iran—is widely described as Iraqi Kurdistan. Politically dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which have announced plans to form a unified government, the region is the "one part of the country that's living up to the Bush administration's vision of postwar Iraq," claimed the big-business daily.

Numbering 5 million, the Iraqi Kurds are part of the 25-million strong oppressed Kurdish nationality straddling Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

KDP and PUK leaders have directly collaborated with Washington's military forces from the period following the 1990–91 Gulf War up to the present. During the 1990s, the U.S. and British air forces established a "no-fly" zone in the north, which largely shielded the region from Baghdad's armed forces. Kurdish businessmen took advantage of the situation, establishing a relatively stable and—by Iraqi standards—prosperous enclave, pocketing both oil revenues and international "aid."

During last year's U.S.-led invasion, Kurdish militiamen fought alongside U.S. Special Forces against the Hussein regime.

The *Journal* stated that while Kurdish

leaders are firmly pro-occupation, they have also said they will continue to support a unified Iraq only if their region is granted autonomy from the central government.

The U.S.-run occupation regime is utilizing the situation to push toward a federated Iraq. "U.S. officials say that once tensions recede" in the central regions, the *Journal* said, and a "central government is established, it will be workable to integrate the north as an autonomous region."

Nechirwan Barzani, the prime minister of the western half of Iraqi Kurdistan, said that "independence isn't a realistic approach."



However, he added, that "doesn't mean we should never have it. A Kurd has never felt like an Iraqi."

"History, geography, politics have made us part of the country. Instead of erasing history, we've said, 'Let's try to make this work,'" said Barham Saleh, prime minister of eastern Iraqi Kurdistan. But "if Iraq turns into an Islamic state, or an [Arab] nationalist state we'll have no way to accept such a country."

In response, rival political leaders from the south and central regions of the country have threatened to revise the interim constitution dictated by U.S. officials and adopted by the U.S.-installed Iraqi Governing Council, with the aim of taking out supposed guarantees of Kurdish autonomy.

For their part, members of the Kurdish parliament have voted to ignore a section of the interim constitution that they say limits women's rights.

In spite of the statements by Kurdish leaders, "popular sentiment for full independence appears to be rising," noted the *Journal*. Half the population of the region—about 1.75 million Kurds—"have

signed a petition demanding a referendum on Kurdish independence," it reported.

Referring to the borders imposed on the region by the British colonialists, well-known poet Sherko Bekas said, "We were forced to merge with Iraq 83 years ago. Now we want to be free in our own land, like other nations."

"We don't have enough printing presses. There's a huge growth in Kurdish culture," publisher Badran Habib told the reporters. His company plans to print 150 Kurdish-language books this year, and is preparing a comprehensive dictionary of the Kurdish language.

For years, under the Baathist regime in Baghdad and earlier governments, the Kurds were forbidden to use their language in schools and public places. Kurds forced an end to the ban in 1970, but use of the language was still officially discouraged for another couple of decades.

Of particular worry to the U.S. occupiers and Iraqi politicians, said the *Journal*, is the push by the Kurdish parties to expand their sphere of influence southwest into Mosul and oil-rich Kirkuk. Both cities have large Kurdish communities. In some cases, Kurds who claim property owned by their families before their expulsion from the areas by the Hussein regime have come into conflict with other residents, including Turkomans, Assyrian Christians, and Arabs.

Last December, said the paper, a Kurdish demonstration chanting, "Kirkuk, Kirkuk, the heart of Kurdistan," was answered a week later by Arab and Turkoman marchers shouting, "Kirkuk, Kirkuk, an Iraqi city." At least five people were killed in the latter protests.

Meanwhile, to the north, the Turkish ruling class, an enemy of the Kurdish struggle inside its own borders and across the region, is watching these developments with concern.

Ankara's aggressive pursuit of its interests in the region brought it closer to a clash with Washington last year, when it moved troops southward to its border with Iraq as the U.S. and British forces began their assault on Iraq. In response, U.S. president George Bush warned the Turkish government to stay out of Iraq. The exchange posed the possibility of a clash between Washington and Ankara, both members of NATO.

Telephone workers walk out at SBC in 13 U.S. states

BY BEN WHITMORE

HOUSTON—About 100,000 members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) in 13 states struck SBC Communications over a contract dispute centering on rising health-care costs for workers. The union said it expected the walkout to last four days, from May 21 to May 24.

Picket lines at the Dacoma Street SBC offices here were spirited and upbeat May 21–22. The unionists made clear their opposition to company demands to boost what workers must pay for health care and the bosses' ongoing drive to outsource work to nonunion contractors. Many workers driving by honked to show their support, including an especially enthusiastic response from many FedEx truck drivers.

"It's outrageous they want us to pay so much for co-payments and deductibles," said Leatha Spencer, 43, a member of CWA Local 622, who has worked for the company for 24 years. "They're boosting everything—co-pays for doctors, prescriptions, emergency room visits. I'm out here

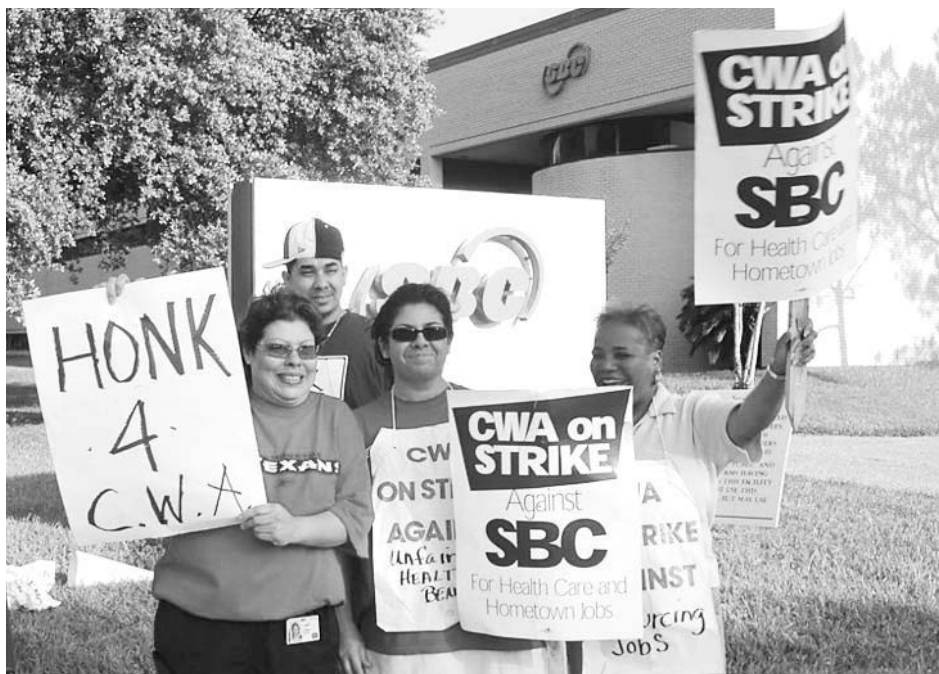
because I believe in our union."

The company is proposing "to increase health-care co-payments from \$20 to \$60," said CWA member Blanca Lancaster. "I am a mother with four kids. Do you know what that will cost me to take them to the doctor? I can't take this."

San Antonio-based SBC is the country's second-largest local phone provider, serving 13 states: Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wisconsin. Workers on strike include operators, linesmen, engineers, clerical workers, installers, and service representatives. This is the first walkout by the CWA against SBC since 1983, when unionists struck for three weeks.

The union called the strike after negotiating with SBC for nearly three months without reaching an agreement. The current contract expired April 4.

"The company demanded an increase in insurance co-pays and prescriptions and they wanted to end or scale back certain in-



Militant/Ben Whitmore

Communications Workers of America members picket Houston SBC offices May 21.

surance benefits for retirees," stated Jackie Vallair at the picket line here. "They also offered 2 percent lump sum payments for two of the years of the contract. The union demanded the 2 percent be rolled into our base pay. This is going on while the president of SBC made nearly \$20 million last year alone."

"The company made \$8.5 billion in profits last year alone," added Yolanda Reed. "Now they want to cut our benefits

and then cut our jobs. The company offered a five-year contract with only three years of job security. We said no!"

A particular thorn in the side of many of the workers is that the company is also demanding that retirees now start paying for their monthly health insurance premiums, which up until now had been covered by the company. "It's the retirees who fought for and won the benefits we now have," stated Shantay Bradley, 27, who has worked for SBC for four years. "It's unfair to take this away after the sacrifices they've made."

Another big issue in dispute is outsourcing of work by the company and its refusal to allow union members access to better paying high-tech jobs at SBC.

A May 19 news release issued by the union said that "CWA members have lost 29,000 jobs at SBC over the past three years." Many of these jobs are now being done by lower paid nonunion workers through subcontractors, noted several workers on the picket line. A fact sheet distributed by the CWA calls for "making sure all new jobs are union jobs; bringing under contract the work currently being done by management; [and] bringing back work that has been contracted out."

Eva Marron, a union shop steward who has worked for the company for 33 years, stated, "We want access to those jobs. If we don't have this we won't have a union."

In California, where SBC employs more than 17,000 people in the Bay Area alone, thousands of unionists picketed the SBC offices May 21. This included two busloads of members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) who came to express their solidarity. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "About 100 union members chanted, blew whistles and held signs outside SBC's 10-story office on Webster Street in downtown Oakland. Some CWA workers erected mobile pickets, following managers as they repaired phone lines around the region."

Leslie Easley, who has worked for SBC in California for eight years, told *Militant* reporters that the company "is asking for too much. They're not meeting us halfway. It's important to take a stand now or in the future we could lose everything." He added, "There have been scabs going in but the retirees aren't taking the jobs they're offering."

Jacquie Henderson and Tom Leonard in Houston, and Chessie Molano and Laura Anderson in San Francisco, contributed to this article.

UMWA files for election at Co-Op mine

Continued from front page

Union (ILWU).

Striking miners say the company union is called the "International Association of United Workers Union" (IAUWU). It never represented any of the workers when the company victimized them, the strikers say. The IAUWU officers are all bosses and relatives of the owners of the mine, the Kingston family. This multimillionaire clan, which has businesses in six western states, is notorious for superexploitation of its employees.

The Co-Op strikers aim to be represented by a real union, the UMWA, through which they can fight to improve working conditions, receive better pay and benefits, and win respect and dignity on the job. Co-Op miners say they were getting paid between \$5.25 and \$7 an hour, when average wages for underground miners across the United States are about \$15 an hour. They were forced to labor under unsafe conditions, resulting in injuries and deaths on the job.

Nearly all the 75 striking miners who were fired to the person Sept. 22, 2003, by the company have signed the petition.

Strikebreakers sign for UMWA

Another sign of the strength of their cause, even after nearly eight months on strike, is that a number of workers who have crossed the picket line have signed the petition as well, said Gonzalo Salazar, a leader of the strike.

"We decided to put our anger aside and do something that will benefit all the workers," Salazar said. "We explained to the scabs why we need a real union. Some signed but others didn't because they were afraid of the

threats by the company. Some scabs have told us the company says it would fire any worker if they vote for the UMWA and that Co-Op would rather shut the mine down than recognize the UMWA."

Salazar and other strikers said they visited strikebreakers at their homes to ask them to sign the petition. "We visited some scabs two or three times before they signed," Salazar said. "Now the scabs also told us that the company is organizing meetings at the bathhouse promising raises of one and two dollars if they side with the company union. The mine bosses must be afraid."

UMWA International Representative Larry Huestis added, "This petition is a legal step under the NLRB for the miners to elect a union that will represent them and have a better place to work and have a better future for them and their families."

Huestis is one of several UMWA representatives who have assisted the striking miners throughout the strike.

The labor dispute has drawn widespread attention and support from across a broad segment of the U.S. labor movement and others.

On May 20, several Co-Op strikers updated UMWA Local 1769 at the Deer Creek mine in Utah on their struggle. "We spoke before four different union meetings of Local 1769," said Bill Estrada, one of the Co-Op strikers who spoke in front of the Deer Creek local. "They have supported us all along with financial donations and food shipments. They decided they will help with the expenses of a cookout on June 5 at our picket line." The Deer Creek mine is located just two miles from the Co-Op mine and is the only active UMWA-organized mine in

the state of Utah.

"The June 5 cookout is being organized for us by the workers at the East Carbon landfill who are also members of the UMWA," said Estrada. "The goal of the cookout is to boost support for the strike among miners here and bring in much needed funds for the strike."

UMWA Local 6363 made up of union retirees also hosted one of the strikers at their recent meeting in Price for an update on the labor struggle.

Financial help from British miners

Meanwhile, the Co-Op strikers received a check for \$1,773.20 from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the Yorkshire area of England.

A letter by the NUM to the Co-Op strikers, dated May 13, states, "Many thanks for your letter dated 21 April 2004 together with press cuttings in respect of your ongoing dispute." The Co-Op miners had mailed news articles and a thank-you letter to the NUM for their support. The letter also sent the NUM greetings on the 20th anniversary of its 1984–85 strike, which was celebrated across many coal towns in the United Kingdom. "The National Union of Mineworkers sends its full support and fraternal greetings to all your members," the NUM letter concluded.

Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 201 from Boston has also decided to back the Co-Op miners with donations. Their first check of \$178 to the miners is part of a "buck-a-week club" by Local 201, which organizes workers at the General Electric plant in the Boston area. Two striking miners had traveled to Boston in March and addressed Local 201 members, as well as other unions and organizations in Massachusetts.

The UMWA District 22 offices in Price also recently received another donation from United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 342 in New York City. The local organizes meat packers at the Hunts Point market in the Bronx, New York, and elsewhere in the city as well as thousands of grocery workers.

Another example of solidarity is a letter of support in Spanish, English, and Swedish that meatpacking workers in Gothenburg, Sweden, sent to the miners.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union in the Seattle area is organizing a labor tour for the striking miners in the Pacific Northwest in early June. Two Co-Op miners are planning to go. Strikers reported that the tour is being expanded to include other unions.

To get more information on the Co-Op strike or to make a donation write to: UMWA District 22, 525 East 100 South, Price, Utah 84501. Earmark checks to the "Co-Op Miners Fund."

N.Y. hospital workers union tops reopen contract, give up wage raise

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

NEW YORK—The union representing 71,500 hospital workers here has given back to the employers 1 percent of a wage raise due workers in the final year of their contract with the League of Voluntary Hospitals and Homes. Service Employees International Union Local 1199 took the initiative to open the contract a year ahead of its expiration and to sign a new one May 7. The union leadership offered cuts to the employers amounting to \$200 million in exchange for promises of continued medical benefits and "job security" for those hired prior to Jan. 1, 2000.

The new four-year contract was the result of "our initiative to transfer one percent of this year's annual raise to the National Benefits Fund," union president Dennis Rivera and secretary-treasurer George Gresham wrote in a letter to the members. The union

officials said they offered the concession to the bosses because of high unemployment, the "serious deficit" in the state government's budget, and a White House that is "unfriendly to working families."

The union has also provided a \$260 million windfall to the hospital owners by letting them use a new formula for basing their contributions to the workers' pension fund, according to the *New York Times*.

Leading up to the initiative by the 1199 officials, several hospitals had said they were losing money and they would close. Private hospitals in the city had also reportedly fallen \$125 million behind on payments to pension and health funds for employees.

"I've never heard of any other employee group willing to reduce its salary like this to help out on health-care costs," said Bruce McIver, president of the bosses association.

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Workers skimp on medicine as bosses up ‘co-payments’

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

As bosses force their employees to pay a higher portion for prescription drugs covered by company health insurance plans, workers are finding it necessary to cut back on needed medication, a new report by the American Medical Association says.

While the study documents changes between the years 1997 and 2000, evidence shows there has been a huge rise in co-payments workers have to make for such drugs in the last three years. From 2000 to 2003, the average co-payment for a preferred prescription drug rose 46 percent to \$19, while the average for a nonpreferred drug climbed 71 percent to \$29, according to a 2003 survey of employers by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

In their drive to reverse declining profit rates, companies across the United States are forcing working people to choose between paying for medicine and covering the rising costs of rent, food, and other necessities.

“Pharmacy Benefits and the Use of Drugs by the Chronically Ill” was published in the May 19 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA). The facts presented in this report show that as a result of the employers’ drive to incrementally gut health-care plans workers are trying to get by on as little as half of their prescribed medication. The report states that in addition to raising co-payments, companies have adopted policies for “cost sharing” that include requiring use of generic drugs and mail-order services.

Health-care concessions demanded by the bosses have been central to recent union contract fights. Company demands to double workers’ monthly health benefit payment is one reason why 100,000 members of the Communications Workers of America walked off the job in 13 states May 21 against SBC Communications (see article on page 4). Health coverage was also a key issue in 138-day grocery workers’ strike in southern California earlier this year.

The report, prepared by researchers at Rand Corporation, charts the projected impact of a doubling of co-payment charges for privately insured workers among 30 employers, using information from the years 1997 to 2000. The study shows that workers reduced their purchase of eight categories of prescription medicine by more than 25 percent.

The use of anti-inflammatory drugs and antihistamines dropped by 45 percent, meaning that workers actually were able to obtain only about seven months’ worth of the medicine that was prescribed for an entire year.

Some one-third less than the prescribed amount of antihyperlipidemics, antiulcerants, and antiasthmatics were purchased by workers than their doctors’ had recommended, because the bosses jacked

up co-payments. About 25 percent of the recommended dosage was not obtained by workers suffering from hypertension, depression, and diabetes.

“Patients with diagnosed high blood pressure reduced use of other drugs by 27 percent when co-payments doubled,” the report says. “These estimates imply that a doubling of co-payments would reduce days [of medical treatment] supplied by more than 1 month” annually for patients with high blood pressure.

For diabetics the picture is as bleak as those using drugs for short-term illnesses. Diabetics purchased 25 percent less drugs than those doctors prescribed to treat their illness in all cases, as a result of the rise of co-payments.

“Our findings raise concern that co-payment increases could lead to adverse health consequences,” said the authors of the study, in an understatement. The figures show that when workers are charged more for health care, they are unable to afford the necessary medicine and so risk more serious health problems later on. As a result, the report states, there is an “increased use of emergency department visits and hospital days for the sentinel conditions of diabetes, asthma, and gastric acid disorder.”

While raising some concerns about the impact of rising co-payments on workers’ health, the Rand researchers approve of measures that penalize working people who opt for brand name drugs to fill pre-



Retired worker Eddie Bostec joins June 25, 2003, rally in Washington demanding a guaranteed prescription drug benefit under Medicare.

scriptions.

On average workers in the United States pay 27 percent of the premium for health coverage, according to Paul Fronstin of the Employee Benefit Research Institute in Washington, D.C. Demands by employers like SBC for pushing higher premiums on workers will grow even more insistent, Fronstin told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “We haven’t begun to see what’s possible in terms of cost sharing.”

In fact, health-care premium charges for workers are rising faster than companies’ costs. A study of 864 California companies showed that between 2000 and 2003 employer costs rose 42 percent for providing family coverage, while payments demanded of their employees’ grew by 70 percent. Gary Claxton of the Kaiser Family Foundation summarized the bosses’ strategy: “It’s

hard to ask employees to take a wage cut, so if you want to (cut costs), health care is a way to do it.”

The Rand Corp. study targeted those who are privately insured. Meanwhile, some 70 million people in the United States had no insurance at some point in 2002, and nearly 45 million had no insurance throughout the entire year.

Reflecting the conditions under which undocumented immigrants have to live and work, Latinos had the lowest rate of health insurance of any group in 2002. Only 40 percent of Latinos had health insurance for the entire year, compared to 80 percent of whites and 65 percent of Blacks, according Center for Economic Policy Research. Just over half of young adults, between 18 and 24 years old, had medical coverage year-round.

Local cops to get more access to federal spy files

Continued from front page
and local levels.

The program is the latest step taken by Washington to expand domestic spying and attacks on political rights carried out by the government in the name of “fighting terrorism.”

U.S. president George Bush and other government officials first proposed the plan in 2002. It has received its most forceful boost from Democrats, however, who have used the hearings of the 9-11 Congressional commission to argue that because of “intelligence failures” the Bush administration was unable to prevent the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The alleged failures include not sharing records across the board between various spy agencies and the police.

“No single agency or government alone can win the war on terrorism,” said Ashcroft at the May 14 news conference in Washington, D.C.

Related steps include the government’s demand for airlines to turn over passenger records, a national registration system for immigrants entering the country, and steps towards the implementation of a national identification card. They are all aimed at greater government control of information and access to it for all cop agencies spying at home and abroad.

Since many FBI and other police records are based on allegations by informers, these steps will further legitimize, and elevate to the level of facts, rumors and innuendo by spies. One result will be the arrest and victimization of thousands on charges of “terrorism” with no evidence. The most recent example of this was the arrest in March

by the FBI and jailing for two weeks of Brandon Mayfield, a lawyer from Aloha, Oregon. The FBI alleged that his fingerprints matched prints on a plastic bag found near the scene of the recent train bombing in Madrid and argued for his detention as a “material witness” to the crime. On May 24, a federal judge in Portland, Oregon, threw out the case against Mayfield, who is a converted Muslim and is married to a woman from Egypt. The FBI said it had made an error in matching the fingerprints—claiming the mistake stemmed from the poor quality of a digital image of the print sent from Spain—and issued a formal apology to Mayfield.

Building on the bipartisan momentum provided by the ongoing congressional intelligence hearings on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate, said, “We must end the multiple watch lists.” In a statement posted

in his campaign website in response to the White House plan, Kerry pledged to create a Director of National Intelligence with “real control” of all national intelligence personnel and budgets, if he is elected.

Kerry has also extended his support to renewing and strengthening the USA Patriot Act, which Congress will vote on in the coming year.

The Patriot Act allows police to carry out arbitrary searches and seizures in private homes and businesses, expands the powers of police agencies to wiretap phones and personal e-mail, and authorizes police to jail immigrants without charges as “terrorist suspects,” among other provisions.

The “watch lists” Kerry referred to include the FBI’s Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS), and the immigration department IDENT fingerprinting databases, which the government is also working to merge.

A glimpse of ‘Swedish socialism’: unpaid labor is ‘practical education’

BY BJÖRN TIRSÉN

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—At the meatpacking plant where I work here, the bosses started early this year using a new method for increasing their profits: unpaid probation. Of course, they use a euphemism to

AS I SEE IT

describe it, calling it “practical education,” in order to confuse workers. Under this program, you work for four weeks without pay. At the end of the month, you may get a paid job, but you remain on probation.

While on unpaid probation, workers have to go the social welfare agency to plead for aid, which is not guaranteed. In practice, this means going to this office repeatedly to explain why you need financial assistance.

In Sweden, as in many other imperialist countries, the costs of rent, food, clothing, and transportation are rising for most working people.

One worker at the plant, a Palestinian who is my age, 22, was among the first to be subjected to this unpaid probation. This

worker, who asked that his name not be used, was convicted on a minor infraction about a year ago. The court, however, did not hand down the sentence until after he started his Swedish “practical education.” Things worked out well for the boss. It turns out that the Palestinian worker could finish his four weeks of unpaid labor *before* he started serving his seven months behind bars. The boss and the judge worked well together.

This new way of exploiting workers is a fine example of Swedish capitalism. It doesn’t exactly fit the image of “Swedish socialism” that the ruling Social Democracy and its associates around the world have tried to promote.

This young Palestinian was the first to suffer this indignity in the plant. Many more will experience the class reality of Sweden before working people start using their unions more effectively and transform them into revolutionary instruments of struggle to defend the interests of the entire working class.

Björn Tirsén works in a meatpacking plant in Stockholm and is a member of Livs, the food workers union.

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Why Attica prison exploded in 1971

Printed below are major excerpts from “Why Attica Exploded” by Mary-Alice Waters. The article was first published in the Oct. 1, 1971, *Militant* and then in the Pathfinder pamphlet *Attica: Why Prisoners Are Rebelling*, which is now out of print. Waters, then editor of the *Militant*, is now president of Pathfinder Press. The recent revelations of systematic humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq have shone a spotlight on the abuse of prisoners by their U.S. captors during wars of plunder, a practice that mirrors those in U.S. jails, generating interest in this question.

A guard assault on a prisoner provided the spark for the Attica revolt. On Sept. 9, 1971, about 1,500 prisoners took over four cellblocks and the adjoining yard at the Attica state prison in New York. They held about 40 guards and civilian workers hostage, elected an executive council, and presented several demands—including to be allowed to take more than one shower a week, that the bugs be washed off the lettuce they were fed, and that Muslims not be forced to eat pork. On September 13, on the order of then-governor Nelson Rockefeller, 1,000 state troopers, prison guards, and National Guardsmen descended on the unarmed inmates, firing indiscriminately. They murdered 33 prisoners and 10 hostages, and wounded more than 300. (For more details see “What was behind 1971 Attica prison revolt?” in last week’s *Militant*.)

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BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

Since the rebellion at Attica was brutally crushed on September 13, 1971, thousands of articles have been written about the prisons in this so-called free society. And volumes more will be written in the weeks and months to come, as countless politicians, journalists, and professors of sociology and criminology try to explain—often vainly—the roots of the “problems” with the “correctional system.”

The most reactionary and racist commentators simply attempt to justify the Attica massacre with the assertion that the men caged up there are criminals—i.e., guilty of acts defined as crimes by our “free” society. They are, therefore, not like “other people.” They are “uncivilized,” “antisocial,” and if they are treated like animals, it is because they are, after all, subhuman.

But millions of other Americans were struck by the elementary justice of the demands for which the Attica rebels were willing even to die. They were stunned by the brutal inhumanity of the murderous state officials. And they are trying to understand what happened at Attica.

One of the recurring topics in the post-Attica commentary on the prisons has been the “new mood” in the prisons, the emergence of a supposedly new kind of inmate. As Steven V. Roberts of the *New York Times* commented September 19, 1971: “A ‘movement’ paralleling those that have arisen in recent years among Blacks, students and women has now begun to emerge in the nation’s prisons.” Everyone is in agreement that while Attica and San Quentin are the visible tip of an iceberg, they are in no way unique. All over the country, Roberts comments, inmates “are making speeches, demanding meetings, and occasionally calling strikes.”

“They saw the welfare groups organize, the students, the Blacks organize for their rights.... There’s much more awareness that to organize is the way to go,” explained the obviously worried director of “corrections” in Michigan, Gus Harrison. The single most important reason, he added, is the general concern throughout society for more individual rights and self-determination.

Richard R. Korn, a former professor of criminology at the University of California (Berkeley), describing the particular oppressiveness of a maximum security prison and the way victims react to it, observed in the September 19 *New York Times* that “more and more (prisoners) are organizing politically and their political organizing is bringing them closer to the one objective prison administrators most dread: militant unity.” Roberts’s article commented that



Prisoners are forced to lie face down in mud near the bodies of fallen comrades following crushing of revolt. Others were stripped naked and lined up in the yard.

prisons are a kind of university for political education. “The ‘sacred texts’ of Black revolution—Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother*—are treasured like gold. In Auburn prison in New York, such books rent for a pack of cigarettes a night. In Jackson, inmates circulate typed manuscripts of those that are banned.”

In the year preceding the rebellion, Pathfinder Press received close to fifty literature orders from Attica prison alone, covering titles like Malcolm X’s *By Any Means Necessary*, James P. Cannon’s *Socialism on Trial*, Trotsky’s *Fascism: What It Is and How To Fight It*, *The Essential Works of Lenin*, Etheridge Knight’s *Black Voices from Prison*, and George Breitman’s *How a Minority Can Change Society*. There were six subscribers to the revolutionary socialist weekly *The Militant* in Attica at the time of the rebellion.

A number of aspects of this new political consciousness, militancy, and unity point towards the deeply revolutionary implications of what is happening in the prisons today. Many of the observers on the scene at Attica commented on the militant class solidarity of the rebels, on the unity in struggle among Black, Puerto Rican, and white rebels, and the apparent absence of racial conflict among them. *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker commented with obvious astonishment: “That prison yard was the first place I have ever seen where there was no racism.” But equally significant was the fact that it was unity under predominately Black leadership. The composition of the leadership reflected not only the prisons of this country, the reality of race and class oppression, but the depth of the Black radicalization as well.

Figures are not readily available on the race composition of the nearly 200,000 prisoners in state and federal institutions, but they are available for some prisons and some states. In New York City, for example, roughly 70 percent of the inmates are Black, 20 percent Puerto Rican, and 10 percent white. For New York State as a whole, 1970 statistics showed 52 percent Black, 13 percent Puerto Rican, and 35 percent white.

The reality of class justice in America

Such figures reflect the reality of class justice in America. If you are young and Black and are convicted of any petty crime, you may well get life. If you’re rich and white and own half of Venezuela, you can order the murder of forty-two people and receive the thanks of the president of the United States. To pick one small example, an Illinois banker, Irving Projansky, was recently sentenced to one year in prison after being convicted of a \$4-million stock fraud. George Jackson got life—and ultimately death—for a \$70 gas station holdup he never committed.

In the aftermath of Attica, Howard University law professor Herbert O. Reid told *New York Times* reporter C. Gerald Fraser, “Certainly for Blacks, that as far as any notion of prison and punishment being a stigma, we are losing that because of the number of Black prisoners. We’re beginning

to think that if you haven’t been (in prison) there’s something wrong with you. Going in is no big thing.” So the realization is growing, especially in the Black community, that prisoners are the real victims of this society. One must look outside the prisons for the criminals.

The prisons contain many of the most conscious, articulate, and courageous spokespersons of Black liberation, and they will unquestionably lead the struggle inside the prisons just as they have led it on the streets. It was precisely their rebellion against this racist, capitalist society which led to their imprisonment in the first place. As one Black ex-prisoner expressed it: “Blacks go to prison for messing with white society.”

The racist mentality of many of the guards was depicted in dozens of stories surrounding the Attica rebellion. Numerous observers noted that every single guard at Attica is white. Reporters detailed the treatment given news people, observers, relatives, and others who congregated in Attica during the rebellion. The Tipperary Bar across the street from the prison closed for the week when several Black members of the observer committee went in for a drink. Black and Puerto Rican observers were refused accommodations at motels. “A curfew, aimed at ‘outsiders and civil rights workers,’ according to the mayor (who is a prison guard), was enforced by civilians carrying hunting rifles who stationed themselves at the main intersections,” reported the September 15 *Washington Post*. The same article observed that “to many people in the town of Attica, the word ‘nigger’ was interchangeable with ‘inmate,’ and when the list of freed hostages was read outside the prison Monday morning, it was greeted with loud shouts of ‘white power’ from one of the waiting guards.

Perhaps the real mentality of those who ride herd on the prison inmates was revealed most gruesomely in the story of the post-massacre revelry. “On Monday night, after the prison rebellion had been put down, some of [the troopers] traded stories of their parts in it,” wrote *New York Times* reporter Francis X. Cline in the September 17 issue of that paper. “The talk in the barroom at the Holiday Inn in Batavia was heavy with memories of warlike darts and thrusts into embattled cellblocks, and through the rebels’ ‘tent city’ in the yard.

“The feeling of the troopers seemed then to be one of relief and relaxation, as glasses clinked over the songs of the bar’s entertainer, who at one point stared quietly at the drinkers and then sang: ‘The Green, Green Grass of Home,’ a song written by a convict about a Death Row inmate’s fantasy of dying.”

While some forty bodies lay in the morgues, and as many as 300 more human beings lay wounded in the cellblocks of Attica, the murderers ate, drank, and made merry. Against such a backdrop, the repeated assertions of the rebels that they were simply demanding their rights as human beings take on their full force. As Brother Richard (Richard Clark) put it during one of the long nights in the yard of Cellblock D, explaining that it was the guards and troopers outside

who had the bullets and the machine guns, and the inmates who were safeguarding the lives of the hostages: “We are the only civilized men here.”

The overwhelmingly Black, Puerto Rican, and Chicano population of the prisons; the all-pervading, institutionalized, and brutal racist mentality of the prison authorities; the growing political radicalization within the concrete walls—all these facts have been widely recognized and analyzed. Some observers have also predicted what is obviously on the order of the day—a growing battle for the extension of the civil and human rights of prisoners. While there have been prison revolts since prisons themselves came into existence, along with class society, it is unquestionable that the increasing numbers of politically aware inmates will spearhead a drive for political freedom within those walls. The American prison system can never be quite the same again following Soledad, San Quentin, and Attica.

But it is also true that there will almost certainly be more Atticas. Those who foresee more revolts and bloody reprisals are usually arguing for faster prison reform measures and fearing correctly—that they will not come rapidly enough. Such reforms are vitally necessary. Every improvement in the physical surroundings, every victory that gains a few more human and civil rights for society’s victims, will help make life just that much more bearable for them. But even the most humane prison is still a prison, and the reason there will be more Atticas is lodged in the very function of prisons in this capitalist society. Such revolts will recur so long as men and women are put behind bars for disobeying the inhuman laws of this society and struggling against its inequities—that is, as long as capitalism remains intact.

What does this society define as a crime? Almost all “crimes” are acts which violate the sacred right of private property upon which class society rests—the right of the few to control and benefit from wealth that belongs to all. “Crimes” are acts which break rules set up to guarantee the rights of a small handful, their right to condemn the masses of humanity to misery, exploitation, disease, starvation, and death—if it is profitable. The fact that the targets of “criminal” acts are most often the poor themselves only attests to the success of the rulers in setting the victims of class society to prey upon each other. Even murder, rape, and other “crimes of violence” can ultimately be traced, almost without exception, to the social inequities, and distortions of human potential and character that are rooted in capitalist society.

Prisons exist to terrorize

The prisons of this country exist for one reason—to try to terrorize people into accepting an inhuman, irrational social system based on maintaining the “rights” of the few over the majority. Once capitalism is eliminated, once it is replaced by a system which can provide abundantly for the needs of the many rather than the profits of a tiny handful, once we have eradicated all the distortions of human potential which flows from this inhuman system and the institutions that prop it up, there will be no need for prisons. The very social system that has created and defined crime will have been eliminated.

But only a revolutionary upheaval strong enough to take power out of the hands of the Rockefellers and Nixons and place it in the hands of the most oppressed and exploited—the workers, the prisoners, the Black and Brown communities, the women, the draftees—only such a fundamental reorganization of society can bring about the necessary changes. That is the “prison reform” we are ultimately working for. New York Deputy Commissioner of “Corrections” William Baker told reporters the day of the Attica massacre that prison riots, like proletarian revolutions, occur in a climate of rising expectations. He might have added with even greater insight that the prison revolts merely reflect the growing crisis of the capitalist system in its death agony.

The names of the individuals who struggled and died at Attica and San Quentin and in the other prisons of America will go down in history alongside the names of men like Malcolm X as heroes of the masses in the coming American revolution.

How U.S. military massacred prisoners at Koje Island during Korean War

BY DOUG NELSON

The following is an article by James P. Cannon on the massacre of Korean prisoners by U.S. troops titled “The Battle of Koje Island.” It was first published in the June 16, 1952, *Militant*. It can also be found in *Notebook of An Agitator*, a book with Cannon’s writings from 1926 to 1954 published by Pathfinder Press.

Cannon was one of the founders of the Socialist Workers Party. He served as the party’s national secretary and then national chairman until his death in 1974.

The mistreatment of Korean prisoners by the U.S. military during the 1950–53 Korean War, and the massacre on Koje Island, in particular, are graphic examples illustrating that brutality against prisoners is inherent in the conduct of Washington’s armed forces in wars of plunder—an extension of similar widespread practices in the U.S. prison system. (For more information on similar examples during other imperialist assaults by Washington, and by other imperialist powers, see “Abuse of prison-

ers is feature of all imperialist wars” in last week’s *Militant*.)

at Compound 76 captured camp commander Brig. Gen. Francis Dodd. They tried him two days later for brutality against prisoners of war. Dodd signed a document admitting to the brutality by U.S. prison guards and promising to cease the “barbarous behavior, insults, torture... mass murders.” The prisoners released Dodd unharmed three days later, after they were promised there would be no further massacres. One month later the June 10 massacre took place.

The slaughter of Korean prisoners of war in U.S. prison camps was standard policy and occurred routinely during the Korean War. Despite suppression of news on the war at the time, the facts of the massacre at Koje Island were made public by a breach in military censorship. The story sparked worldwide outrage, and consequently, details of a number of similar incidents came to light.

According to *Korea, the War Before Vietnam* by Callum A. MacDonald, “American medical officers estimated that 50 percent of POWs in Pusan [a Korean area occupied



A column of dense smoke rises from one of the buildings in a Koje Island prison compound, as thousands of Korean prisoners surrender to UN guards.

ers is feature of all imperialist wars” in last week’s *Militant*.)

This information is necessary to refute the claims by U.S. government officials that the recent revelations of systematic abuse of Iraqi inmates in the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq is “un-American,” as U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld put it. It is also necessary to counter the hypocritical arguments of liberal critics of the Bush administration who try to portray the humiliation of Iraqi prisoners as an aberration of a Republican administration. In fact, during most of the wars led by the imperialist government of the United States of America over the last century, Democrats held the presidency and liberals ran the Department of Defense and the Pentagon.

This was the case during the Korean War, when Harry Truman, a Democrat, was president.

On June 10, 1952, some 6,000 U.S. troops—under the blue helmets of the United Nations—opened fire on a similar number of Korean prisoners of war held behind barbed wire in Compound 76 of the Koje Island prison in Korea. During the two-and-a-half-hour battle, the imperialist armed forces used tanks, machine guns, and flamethrowers against prisoners fighting with spears, clubs, and knives. At least 31 prisoners died and 136 were wounded. One U.S. soldier was killed and 14 wounded.

On April 10 of that year, the prisoners at this compound had rebelled against their brutal treatment. That revolt had also been put down in blood, with 28 prisoners and five prison guards killed. On May 7, the inmates

by U.S. troops] were suffering from malnutrition in January 1951.” MacDonald also said that “6,600 prisoners had died in UN captivity by December 1951.”

These are the conditions the prisoners at Koje Island were rebelling against.

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BY JAMES P. CANNON

The whole story of Koje Island is not yet known, but from the few scraps of information which have been blown out of the prisoners’ compounds, like hot rocks from a heaving volcano, the world is becoming uneasily aware of awful and fateful events transpiring there, with the premonition of more to come.

Through a breach in the military censorship the world is catching glimpses of a conflict of gigantic proportions in which ordinary men, as often before in history, play big parts because of the things they represent. In the great crises of history some men always rise above themselves and attain the stature of heroes. That happened in our own history—in 1776 and again in 1861. In the men who made these two revolutions young America saw the magnified image of itself.

The same thing appears to be happening now once again in a far-off land, and we are witness to it. The transcendent issues of our century are being dramatized on Koje Island in human terms, as in a heroic epic which has for its theme the death agony of an old social order and the birth pangs of a new



Korean prisoners of war at Compound 76 of Koje Island prison, following June 10, 1952, massacre. U.S. and other UN troops burned compound to the ground.

one. Colonial oppression and struggle for national independence; western supremacy and Asian self-assertion; war and revolution—these are the colossal issues involved in the confrontation of white and yellow men across a barbed-wire barricade.

Outwardly it would appear that the struggle is unequal, with the outcome foreordained. The American army, which never lost a war, goes into the battle of Koje Island with much better equipment than the “Ragged Continentals” of 1776, who defended their land and their homes with an odd assortment of old muskets and sticks and stones, and a more impetuous policy than the patient General Washington’s strategy of attack and retreat to wear out the enemy and keep his own army in being.

For the battle of Koje Island we needed a different kind of general and we found him. To the atta-boy applause of the editorial writers, who unfortunately can’t leave their desks to take part, General Boatner has proclaimed a crack-down and he has the stuff to make good with it. Press dispatches bristle with accounts of the formidable array of armament he has brought up for use against the prisoners of war who persist in waving their own banners within the compounds. There are daily reports of prisoners being killed and wounded since Boatner took charge and announced a “get tough” policy.

Things are moving to some kind of a show-down in this battle of Koje Island; and the American people, with the historic memory of Bunker Hill not yet entirely obliterated, would do well to ask for a little more information about what we are fighting for there. We have heard the explanations of the brass hats. The captured “gooks,” it seems, are “surly” and “fanatical.” They “don’t know who’s boss” and they have to be shown. The compounds have to be split up into smaller units so that the prisoners can be “screened” more effectively. The improvised banners, waved from sticks inside the compounds, must come down. These are our declared war aims at Koje.

The prisoners’ side of the story didn’t come through yet, although a UP dispatch of May 21 reports that they made a strenuous effort to tell correspondents what it is. “When the prisoners inside saw newsmen arrive they set up a clamor to be allowed to talk to them,” says the report. “One shouted in English: ‘Let us talk to these war correspondents!’ Authorities refused.” Could this incident, buried in a long dispatch, have been a correspondent’s indirect way of

telling the world that the whole truth is not coming out because he and his colleagues are not allowed to send it?

As the climax approaches, the papers are full of information about the battle plans of the forces outside the barbed wire. The *New York Times*, June 9, reports: “General Boatner has shaped up a full-scale offensive with all the troops under his command.... The plans call for battalions of infantrymen with fixed bayonets to crash through the barbed-wire barricades into the compounds, supported by several Patton tanks and under the protective range of machine guns.”

That ought to do it. Military doctrine says that, other things being equal, superior firepower prevails and decides. What chance, then, remains for the Koje prisoners who have no fire-power whatever? They have no chance at all—if other things are equal. But could it be that the prisoners keep their morale unshaken in the face of superior force because they think that the other things are not equal? That they have on their side some intangibles not comprehended by the military mind—some secret weapon more powerful than a bomb, some moral force generated by the things their banners represent and symbolize to them?

If that is the case, history tells us that such men will not be easy to conquer. History also tells us that men so inspired can lose a battle and still win the war. The most dangerous animal on earth is the man who has nothing to lose and is convinced that he has everything to gain. That’s the trouble with the ill-starred American adventure in Korea—it is up against men like that, who are convinced that their historic hour has come; that they have great allies; that hundreds of millions of their kindred are behind them because they are in the same fix.

Such a conviction can make all things possible. From such a conviction comes the fanatical courage of the Koje prisoners—you can even call it heroism and you won’t go wrong—to face all the military power of America unarmed and defiant. Yesterday they were nothing, with no rights that a white man was bound to respect. But a mighty revolution, coming up like thunder out of China and echoing throughout the entire Orient, has changed all that. Revolution has made new men out of them, lifted them to their feet and inspired them to sing and firmly believe: “We have been naught, we shall be all!”

That may be the secret weapon of the prisoners of Koje Island.

RECOMMENDED READING

Notebook of an Agitator

“The most dangerous animal on earth is the man who has nothing to lose and everything to gain...From such a conviction comes the fanatical courage of the Koje prisoners—you can even call it heroism and you won’t go wrong—to face all the military power of America unarmed and defiant.”—James P. Cannon on the 1952 Koje Island prison massacre in Korea. \$21.95



Capitalism’s World Disorder

“The U.S. rulers were dealt their first terrible defeat not in Vietnam but in Korea. They went into that war in 1950 to teach a lesson to the toilers not only of Korea, but to others anywhere in the world who challenged imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation...Instead, by 1953 the U.S. rulers and their allies—waging war, for the first but not the last time, under cover of a United Nations “peacekeeping” operation—had been defeated. They were fought to a draw by the Korean toilers and Chinese Red Army who came to their aid.”

—Jack Barnes in *Capitalism’s World Disorder*. \$23.95



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Roosevelt used troops against 1941 strikes

Below are excerpts from *Labor's Giant Step* by Art Preis, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for May. Written by a participant in the explosive labor struggles and political battles of the 1930s, it tells the story of how the industrial unions were built and how they became the vanguard of a mass social movement that began to transform U.S. society.

The excerpt below, entitled "Roosevelt—open strikebreaker," tells the story of how during two strikes in 1941 U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic "friend of labor," initiated his administration's direct strike-breaking program. The first was the 75-day strike by members of United Auto Workers Local 248 against the Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company plant in West Allis, Wisconsin. The second was at strike at the North American Aviation plant in Inglewood, California.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The author refers to several top union officials: United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Phillip Murray, and Amalgamated Clothing Workers president Sidney Hillman. Copyright © 1964 by Pathfinder Press, reprinted by permission.



BY ART PRIES

Now faced with opposition from the top CIO and UAW leaders as well as the strikers, the administration officials beat



United Auto Workers members confront cops June 10, 1941, on picket line at the North American Aviation plant in Inglewood, California. The police fired tear gas against the unionists before the arrival of federal troops sent by president Franklin Roosevelt.

a retreat and denied they had issued any ultimatum to the strikers. They then asserted that "the original strike vote had been obtained by fraudulent means." The March 30 *New York Times* reported, however, that "more than 5,000 UAW workers...voted today at a mass meeting to persist with their strike at the Allis-Chalmers Company plant, hooting down appeals of government officials...." There evidently was no fraud about the workers' desire to continue the strike.

Inspired by the Roosevelt administration's strikebreaking intervention, the local police on March 31 made a violent assault on the Allis-Chalmers picket line. For the first time in American labor history an armored car manned by police firing tear gas bombs through slits in the steel plates smashed through a picket line of 3,000 workers. Many were sickened and injured, but the line closed up and picketing went on.

In the meantime state militia had been sent to the scene. The workers, however, could not be driven back to work at bayonet point. After three days Governor Heil withdrew his troops and ordered the plant shut.

On April 7, after 75 days, the union voted

to end the strike when the company agreed to accept the terms the union would have settled for at the beginning. The agreement provided a "maintenance of membership" clause—a watered-down version of the union shop—which guaranteed the membership status as of the time of signing the contract.

Just two months later Roosevelt moved into the most open and violent phase of his anti-strike program. This was his use of federal troops to smash the picket lines of peaceful strikers at the North American Aviation plant in Inglewood, California.

Looking back, it seems incredible that the workers had not struck long before....

North American's minimum wage was 40 cents an hour, ten cents less than an unskilled laborer's relief wage on WPA. It was far below the subsistence standard of living computed by government agencies and lower than the average of all Southern California aircraft plants.

When the company finally agreed to open negotiations on April 16, the workers asked for a 75-cent hourly minimum and ten cents an hour more for all workers. In 1940, even before receiving huge government war orders, the company had made

a net profit of \$855 for every worker in its employ. But when the union made its wage demand, North American's President J.H. Kindleberger scoffed: "I don't have to pay any more to my workers because most of them are young kids who spend their money on a flivver and a gal."

After being stalled for five weeks with this kind of talk, the union membership on May 23 voted for strike. The issue then went to the National Defense Mediation Board. The workers stayed on the job 13 days past their strike deadline. When it became clear that the NDMB intended to stall indefinitely, the 12,000 North American workers struck on June 5.

The NDMB turned the case over to the White House. Roosevelt acted with dispatch. He ordered the workers to end their strike and announced he was sending U.S. troops to be on hand Monday morning, June 9, to open the plant in the interests of the "national emergency." Why he did not order the company to pay decent wages as a means of ending this "threat" to the "national emergency" the President did not say.

Roosevelt acted with confidence because he felt he had the backing of high CIO and UAW officials. In speaking of those who were at the President's side when he signed the order for the troops to smash the strike, Roosevelt's secretary Stephen Early, spoke of "Mr. Hillman and the others." Hillman—that was a name to conjure with. It was a "Labor" seal of approval.

After the strike was broken, at a meeting of 250 CIO executives in Washington on July 7, Lewis denounced Hillman as a "traitor" who was "standing at Roosevelt's elbow when he signed the order to send troops to stab labor in the back...."

On the very day the strike was called, the UAW international union officials dispatched Richard Frankenstein to the strike scene. That same night, without consulting the strike committee, he broadcast a denunciation of the strike over a national radio hookup....

[On June 9] the embittered workers massed at the plant. There to meet them was the first large contingent of what was to grow by nightfall into an army of 3,500 federal troops. Thus, the United States government waged its first military engagement of World War II on American soil against American workers resisting hunger wages.

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May

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

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OFFER GOOD UNTIL MAY 31

Those cheery economists— “[Job] gains in April were broad-based but half of what had been expected. Economists say there are



Harry Ring

reasons to be optimistic.”—News item.

The stabilized economy— “Normally, 2 million teenagers swell the work force during the summer. But over the last three

years, with the economy in recession and then experiencing a tepid jobless recovery, that number has dropped substantially. And it is worse than after the recessions of the early '80s and early '90s.”—Associated Press.

Probably so—Folks living near the electric power company in Cheshire, Ohio, have taken court action to curb the blue mist of sulfuric acid streaming from the plant's smokestacks. The company responds that it meets current health and safety standards.

Is 'insatiable greed' adequate?—Pfizer, the giant medical outfit, will plead guilty to criminal charges of selling Neurontin,

an epilepsy medication, for other, unapproved, uses. It will pay a fine of \$430 million. Last year it racked up sales of Neurontin totaling \$2.7 billion.

Murder Inc.—“Abbott Laboratories Inc. was hit with a federal antitrust lawsuit by two California patients charging the company with illegally jacking up the price of a popular AIDS drug by 400 percent. The pharmaceutical company made a decision in December to raise the price of Norvir, a key component of many AIDS-fighting cocktails. Since then, doctors have urged a boycott and the nation's largest AIDS organization sued the company in protest.”—*Los Angeles Times*.

Tooling up for Iraq?—“South Carolina: Charleston—Attorneys failed to reach a mediated settlement of a federal lawsuit stemming from a drug raid at Stratford High School in Goose Creek. During the November 5 raid, police, some with guns drawn, ordered about 100 students to the floor.

“About a dozen were restrained while a police dog sniffed at their backpacks. No drugs were found and no arrests were made. Two groups of students sued and the cases were later combined.”—*USA Today*.

Wanna bet?—At that New York restaurant offering a \$1,000 omelet—including caviar, lobster, etc.—an inspired manager dared

customers to put it on their expense account. Big deal. For instance, a corporate honcho who bills his company for a gold shower curtain wouldn't think twice.

She wasn't 'holding a gun'?—“What began as an attempt to remove shrubs and appliances from a North Portland yard last year ended with police knocking down and pepper-spraying a blind, 71-year-old, woman, shocking her in the back with a stun gun, handcuffing her, and citing her for harassment and disobeying an order. This week, the city agreed to pay Eunice Crowder \$145,000 to settle her excessive-force lawsuit.”—*The Oregonian*.

Profit drive is reason for fatal Glasgow plant blast

BY CAROLINE BELLAMY

GLASGOW, Scotland—“That place was inherently dangerous, it was too old,” said Lenny McDonald to *Militant* reporters May 15. McDonald was speaking about the explosion that destroyed the ICL Tech/Stockline Plastics factory May 11, killing nine people and injuring 41, 17 seriously.

“Health and Safety weren't interested,” said McDonald, who is a shop steward at a Glasgow distribution depot. “Management are responsible for health and safety, but no company bosses get charged with manslaughter.”

The four-storey factory in Glasgow's Maryhill district collapsed “like a house of cards” in the massive blast, reported the *Herald* May 12. Eyewitness Jacqueline Collins told the *Militant*, “The floors and windows shook. We thought it was a bomb.” The factory “was a danger to them [the workers] and those around about,” she said.

Several workers were buried for hours. The last body was taken from the unstable structure after three days of searching by fire and rescue workers.

“These old factories are death traps,” said Thomas McCann, a retired engineering worker and shop steward. “I'm angry,” he said. “Why was this not investigated earlier?”

There was no trade union at the factory, which had a high staff turnover, according to media reports. The plastics manufacturer occupied a factory building from the Victorian era, located next to shops and surrounded by densely packed housing. About 60 people were believed to be working inside at the time of the explosion.

Most of those killed were working in the offices above the manufacturing area, where metal was coated in plastic using

highly volatile materials and electric and gas-fired industrial ovens. The dead included the managing director and finance director.

Survivors said the blast came from the ovens. Fire safety experts said that the company should have installed vents that would have allowed the force of a blast to escape the building instead of knocking down the walls.

A feature article in the May 16 *Sunday Herald* stated that a “catalogue of health and safety hazards lay at the heart of the working practices” of the company. Among other hazards, the factory air “was filled with dust from chemical powders” and “troughs of chemicals were kept next to ovens.” Some gaps in oven doors were “big enough for a hand to fit through,” reported the paper.

Jim Fletcher, a plastic coater for eight years in the factory, told the *Scotsman* newspaper that he had resigned in 1998 over concerns at the unsafe working conditions. Workers felt “trapped” in the confined factory space, he said. “A total of eight were on one floor. That is one of the reasons I left,” Fletcher said. ICL Tech/Stockline Plastics was investigated by the government Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in both 2000 and 2003 over conditions at the Maryhill plant.

Two other workers complained to the HSE and wrote to their Members of Parliament about unsafe handling of chemicals. The HSE deemed at the time conditions were safe. It has emerged that the government outfit warned the company in advance of its visits, and that the identity of a worker who complained was revealed.

An HSE spokesman told the BBC that the most recent complaint “bore no relation at all to what happened this week.”

Saying it was “not appropriate” to com-



Body is removed from the rubble May 12 after an explosion three days earlier destroyed the Stockline Plastics factory in Glasgow, killing nine.

ment on the cause of the disaster, First Minister in the Scottish Parliament Jack McConnell promised a “thorough” investigation into the blast, led by the Procurator Fiscal Service—a government-appointed lawyer who investigates sudden or suspicious deaths—and involving the police and HSE.

A worker who had been in the basement of the factory when it collapsed, still suffering from the after effects four days later, told the *Militant* that the police had told him he shouldn't talk publicly about the disaster.

Peter Clifford contributed to this article.

— 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —



June 8, 1979

Although Houston is the nation's oil refining capital, working people here are suffering from the same long lines and short hours that are occurring at gas stations across the country. And the same high prices. And the same politicians telling us to drive less and pay more because there just isn't enough gasoline to go around.

Many Houstonians, however, when they turned on their television sets May 24 for the evening news, got to hear a different explanation of the gasoline shortage.

“As an oil refinery worker, I know something firsthand about the energy hoax ... and the profits the oil companies are making,” said Debby Leonard, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Houston, at a well-attended news conference announcing her campaign.

“At the refinery where I work, the pipelines are full, crude storage tanks are overflowing, the docks are full of tankers and barges, and the company is renting storage tanks at other facilities. But the gasoline producing units at the refinery are operating at a reduced rate—a rate barely sufficient to keep them on stream.”

“The energy industry,” says Leonard, “should be taken out of the hands of private profiteers. In order for us to find out the real truth, the energy industry should be nationalized and placed under public ownership.”



June 7, 1954

At the behest of the brutal, profit-hungry United Fruit Company, the Eisenhower administration is stepping up to a screaming climax its campaign to incite outside invasion and internal counter-revolution against tiny Guatemala.

This impoverished Central American country of less than three million people has invoked the wrath of American imperialism by introducing mild agrarian reforms that have affected the property holdings of United Fruit, one of the ten largest holdings of American foreign investments and notorious exploiter of the “Banana Empire” in Central America.

Washington is attempting to incite Guatemala's neighboring countries, including Nicaragua and Honduras, to invade Guatemala. The U.S. has already signed military alliances with these countries and is sending them huge shipments of arms.

This campaign of U.S. intervention has been mounting ever since the land reform measures were enacted in 1952. The law provided for distribution among landless peasants of uncultivated estates of more than 667 acres. According to the United Fruit Co. officials, by May 1 of this year the Guatemala government had expropriated from the company a total of 392,945 acres. This left the United Fruit “only” 145,187 acres for banana production and “other operations.”

U.S. general removed in Iraq

Continued from page 3

also favorably quoted a statement by an unnamed military legal officer who supposedly said that the Bush administration's practices meant that “a fifty-year history of exemplary application of the Geneva Conventions had come to an end.” But this period covers the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other imperialist assaults during which torture and abuse of prisoners far worse than that so far uncovered in Iraq took place and is well documented. These wars were waged largely by Democratic Party administrations.

Another indication of the bipartisan support for Washington's war of plunder in Iraq was the reaction of Democratic congressmen after viewing photos of the abuse at Abu Ghraib that have not yet been made available to the public.

On May 14, the U.S. Congress held a closed-door screening for members of the Senate and House of Representatives of some 1,800 images and video clips depicting the widespread abuse at Abu Ghraib. Most politicians, Democrats and Republicans, told the press afterwards that the White House and Pentagon were correct in deciding not to release many of these materials to the public. The Associated

Press reported that several said they saw “images of corpses, military dogs snarling at cowering prisoners, women commanded to expose their breasts, and sex acts, including forced homosexual sex.”

Hewing to the White House line, Joseph Lieberman, a Democratic senator, said that the viewing “just deepens the conclusion that this was a cellblock that had gone wild.”

“People have seen enough—they have a good sense of what happened there,” said Sen. Frank Lautenberg, Democrat of New Jersey, to underscore his support for keeping the images secret.

John Kerry, the presumptive Democratic Party nominee for president, has been conspicuously quiet on the abuse at Abu Ghraib, noted a May 13 NBC report. It said that while “pictures documenting the abuse of prisoners in Iraq dominated television airwaves,” Kerry spent three days highlighting his “education initiatives.” Kerry voted for the resolution authorizing the war against Iraq and has criticized the Bush administration for not sending thousands more troops to “stabilize” the occupation of that country. He insists he will do a better job than Bush fighting Washington's “war on terror.”

EDITORIAL

War party on the prod in Iraq

With the suspension of Janis Karpinski, the top U.S. military cop in charge of prisons in Iraq run by the Anglo-American occupiers, and the recall of commanding general Ricardo Sanchez, Washington is taking steps to save face in Iraq as it confronts worldwide outrage at its systematic abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The U.S. rulers recognize that the revelations could become an obstacle to their objectives in Iraq. These wealthy families have run up against the growing view in public opinion worldwide that the torture and systematic humiliation of prisoners are unsupportable. So they are taking measures to make sure that the revulsion against the degradation of prisoners does not get much in their way.

What was the purpose of the invasion and occupation of Iraq? They were about which of the imperialist powers will control the strategic oil and mineral platform Iraq and Kuwait sit on. They were about redividing the world among the civilized hyenas—with Washington and London, on the one hand, and Paris and Berlin on the other, as the two main unstable polls of the rival blocs of finance capital.

Having dealt blows to their competitors in France and Germany with last year’s quick victory, the U.S. rulers are now pushing to stabilize the occupation and establish a major role in Iraq for NATO—the imperialist military alliance through which the U.S. government has remained the number one military power in Europe. This is one of their main goals leading up to the NATO summit in Istanbul in June. German imperialism’s “doubts” about this goal won’t prevent American imperialism from pushing ahead to advance its predatory interests. After all, Germany’s “socialist” chancellor has made it clear that Berlin is fully participating in the “global war on terrorism”—the rationalization all imperialist powers use to tell anyone who resists their domination: the Iraq treatment is around the corner.

Inside the United States, the liberal opposition to the Bush administration is an integral part of the war party. Democratic Party politicians are using the revelations around Abu Ghraib to score points against the president in order to “push Bush out” in November. What’s their alternative? John Kerry, who brags he would do better than Bush in fighting “terrorism” and pursuing the occupation of Iraq, with some UN blue helmets alongside the U.S. Army. Kerry and the Democrats are also helping to spearhead the bipartisan “homeland security” offensive: widening dragnets, intensified domestic spying, and rolling back of

the rights of the accused and convicted.

As part of this course, the imperialist liberals are falsifying history and trying to fool working people into believing that the abuse of Iraqi prisoners is an aberration of the Bush administration. They hide the truth about the massacres and torture of prisoners by the U.S. military and its allies during the UN-sanctioned Korean War, the Vietnam War, and many other imperialist assaults when Democrats were in the Oval Office and liberal military chiefs were in charge of Washington’s armed forces. How many ranking military officers were charged, convicted, or even suspended from their posts for those crimes under the Democrats’ watch? Virtually none.

As the crocodile tears of Democratic politicians are trickling over the horror of Abu Ghraib, the middle-class left is affixing its lips more and more firmly onto the nether parts of the liberal imperialists. The Communist Party USA and other “peace and justice groups” shout, “Rumsfeld must go!” and are becoming more energized for pushing working people onto the Kerry bandwagon—that is, into supporting democratic imperialism under an “antiwar” banner.

Rumsfeld and Bush do need to be pushed out—but not in order to push in the ghastly alternative of Kerry and Co. With either imperialist conservatism or imperialist liberalism in office, workers and the oppressed go to the wall.

While the war party in Washington remains on the offensive, Washington does face one undefeatable enemy: world capitalism’s inevitably deepening depression conditions and—over time, but just as inevitable—resistance to its effects among the toilers that will bring reinforcements, make possible the stripping away of illusions, and increase class solidarity and political consciousness as the consequences of the mounting catastrophe unfold.

The vanguard of this working-class resistance in the United States can be seen taking shape today in union-organizing struggles like those in Huntington, Utah; Oakland Park, Florida; and meatpacking houses in the Midwest.

As working people struggle for livable wages and job conditions, the right to till the soil, and the liberties needed to organize for these goals and win, more will see the commonality of their fights with the struggles of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and the need to join with them in demanding the unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. and other imperialist troops from their lands—the only way to end the abuse of prisoners by their imperial captors.

Farmers fight anti-Black discrimination

Continued from front page

the farmers demanded compensation for decades of racist discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

This consent decree was forced on the farmers by the administration of William Clinton and a number of liberal lawyers who worked with the USDA to diffuse rising struggles of African-American farmers in the 1990s.

The farmers are demanding that the case be reopened or the consent decree modified “to force, legally and judicially, the USDA to rid itself of wholesale racial discrimination, as admitted, against African American farmers.” The 1999 settlement did not provide “present and future relief from pattern and practice of discrimination”—that is, legal guarantees that individuals responsible for the government’s racist treatment of Black farmers would be removed and the institution changed.

“Justice for Black farmers in this country, if it moves at all, moves at a snail’s pace,” said Thomas Burrell, president of Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, (BFAA) Inc. speaking to the press May 17. “We deserve more. The USDA has been a den of racism and bigotry.”

Calling the 1999 settlement fundamentally and legally flawed, Burrell stated, “At a March 2, 1999, hearing every individual who spoke representing Black farmers objected to it. The judge noted that there were no forward-looking provisions, no injunctive relief.... Every single employee of USDA found guilty of discrimination has either been retired, promoted, or remains on the job. The result has been to throw Black farmers back onto the lap of the very persons responsible for the discrimination against them in the first place.”

The number of Black farmers in the United States fell from 900,000 in 1920 to 26,000 in 1997. In 1992, Blacks owned 1 percent of the country’s farmland, down from 14 percent in 1920. Black farmers have faced systematic racist discrimination from the USDA in getting the credit and relief needed by all farmers to stay in business.

“African American farmers were and are more concerned about substantive change at USDA than they were and are concerned over dollars, as meager as they were,” states the legal brief filed in support of the motion. “The settlement... is neither just, adequate or fair.”

Leading up to the filing of the motion with the court to reopen the case, BFAA, Inc. organized meetings of farmers across the country. Hundreds attended each of these gatherings in Richmond, Virginia; Montgomery, Alabama; Chicago and elsewhere. At the meetings, farmers who are Black and their supporters have discussed how to continue the fight against the ongoing discrimination they face at the hands of county committees responsible for approving loans. Many have also described the economic difficulties they continue to face despite the settlement’s financial provisions.

Eddie Slaughter from Georgia told reporters, “If you can’t receive justice in this country, how am I supposed to feel about America? They froze \$11,000 so I couldn’t plant. I go to court, but I still can’t get justice.”

William Miller, another Georgia farmer, described his 23-year-long fight with USDA officials to keep his farm outside Marshallville. “I bought farm land in 1979 with loans from USDA and in 1981 they tried to tell me I was a poor risk,” he said. “In essence they tried to foreclose on me. How could I be doing poorly when I had more than 1,500 acres of land, three of the largest tractors you could get, and was planting all of it? I beat that back and still have 1,346 acres.

“They’ve been offsetting my social security money and other government payments against loans they say I still owe. We put some land under soil conservation and planted trees. They take all the money from that.

“Now they’re trying to take my peanut quota. I guess the USDA supervisor in Macon County figures he’ll starve me out if he can’t do anything else.”

When a U.S. district judge approved the consent decree on April 14, 1999, farmers were told that if they met minimal requirements for proving discrimination they would receive \$50,000 from the government. For the majority of farmers who have been victims of the USDA’s racist practices, this has proved to be a lie.

The vast majority opted to follow a provision called Track A, under which farmers who could meet a minimal burden of proof that they had faced racist discrimination would receive a lump sum payment of \$50,000. Of the 22,200 farmers who filed under that provision a little more than half, 13,500, actually received payment. Only 181 farmers opted to follow Track B, which imposed a greater burden of proof of racist discrimination, but allowed for greater compensation for the devastating effects of the USDA’s racist practices. Whether they opted for Track A or Track B, however, few farmers have seen any of the money coming to them.

On the other hand, the lawyers representing the farmers, the Consent Decree Monitor, and other administrators have grown fat off fees and salaries. In April the court extended the Monitor’s authority until March 2007, citing a backlog in processing claims.

More than \$20.5 million has been paid to lawyers representing the Pigford class to date, according to the farmers’ brief. While farmers have received roughly \$650 million in direct payments, the Monitor and other administrators under the decree have received close to \$120 million in salaries and expenses. That total, not including the plaintiff’s lawyers fees, could top 30 to 35 percent of the total monies paid to farmers by the end of the process, the brief states.

Janice Lynn contributed to this article.

Point Blank

Continued from front page

known. On two occasions dozens broke into union songs and boisterous chants as they waited in line to punch out after work. The singing could be heard all over the factory.

“This was their way of intimidating people and trying to divide the union,” UNITE member Umberto de la Cruz told *Militant* reporters.

At a company meeting held with those who have the family plan, company officials blamed UNITE for the increase. They said the union had agreed to the hike in the new contract.

Company representatives claimed they decided to hand out the postal money orders to alleviate workers’ hardship.

“We thought the cost of insurance was going to decrease,” said unionist Milagros Santos. “But the company jacked it up. Even if we were rich we couldn’t pay that much.” At the company’s two non-union plants just miles away, insurance costs for workers stayed the same. “This was a company tactic to wear us down,” Santos said. “They are going to try to crush the union one way or another.”

The attack on the medical insurance came in the context of attempts by the company to speed up production, impose stricter work rules, and undercut the union victory.

A number of workers called UNITE officials to discuss the situation. Then, they decided to put out paper badges in Haitian Creole, Spanish, and English that said, “Point Blank, stop playing with our medical insurance. The struggle continues. UNITE!” Scores of workers wore the badges into work May 19 or hung them from their sewing machines.

Two days later the company caved in. In a letter to employees with the family plan the company stated, “We are pleased to announce that the Company has agreed to continue to pay most of the cost of health insurance and change our collective bargaining agreement to reflect the prior practice.”

“What an excellent victory,” said de la Cruz. “I believe that it came about because of the action we took. Without it, they would have continued to take the money out.”

The same day UNITE south Florida manager Arcine Raspberry came inside the lunchroom on company property for what turned out to be a celebration of the union victories. She was handing out checks to union members. The first check of \$85 was compensation from Point Blank for calling in the cops to evacuate the factory for one day and lock out workers after a union protest in July 2002. The second check for \$280 was the bonus paid by Point Blank for signing the contract.

During the entire two-year fight for union recognition, UNITE officials were unable to enter the plant. On May 5, UNITE southern regional director Harris Raynor toured the plant. Almost everybody started cheering when he reached the factory floor.

While Point Blank managers continue to complain that many workers are not “cooperating” with the company attempt to boost productivity, workers are looking for ways to use union power to advance their interests.

One worker brought a copy of a May 20 article in the *Sun-Sentinel* into the factory. The article noted that Point Blank’s parent company DHB made a profit of \$6.4 million in the first quarter of this year, up from \$5 million for the same period last year and has a backlog of \$220 million in orders. Point Blank is a key supplier of bulletproof vests to the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. New hires are still paid only \$5.50 an hour and many workers make between \$6 and \$7 an hour.

“Now we have to fight harder than ever to keep united,” said de la Cruz. “The struggle is going to get harder. The company is going to keep trying to stick it to us.”

Seth Galinsky is a member of UNITE at Point Blank in Oakland Park.

Corrections

An article in the May 18 *Militant*, titled “UK miners mark 1984–85 strike,” incorrectly stated that 12,000 miners worked at the Thoresby coal mine in Nottingham at the time of the one-year national strike. The figure should have read 1,200.

In the May 25 issue, the article, “U.S. prison construction booms, abuse rampant,” contains the sentence, “Between 1980 and 2002 the number of those held in state or federal prisons increased from just over half a million to 2,033,000.” The latter figure in fact includes not only state and federal prisons, but also local and county jails. The total number of people in state and federal prisons alone in 2002 was more than 1.3 million, up from 320,000 in 1980.

The final scoreboard of the *Militant/Perspectiva Mundial* subscription drive, which was published in last week’s issue, reported the wrong figures for the final results of *Militant* distributors in Los Angeles. Those were 138 *Militant* subscriptions, or 102 percent of their goal, and 54 *PM* subscriptions. The correct total figures are also slightly higher—2,138 *Militant* subs and 538 *PM* subscriptions.

Caracas book fair

Continued from front page

health care; the response to them by the government headed by President Hugo Chávez; and efforts by capitalist forces—backed by Washington—to oust the elected government and roll back these struggles.

Major sections of the Venezuelan ruling class are up in arms over measures the government has taken that, to the extent they are carried out, infringe on the bosses’ prerogatives. Working people have used these laws to press their demands. They include new land reform legislation, stronger state control over Venezuela’s oil and other mineral resources, several programs to broaden access to education among working people, and an expanding number of free neighborhood clinics staffed by volunteers from Cuba who offer quality health care.

At a May 14 event that officially opened the book fair, attended by several hundred people, Freddy Bernal, mayor of the Libertador municipality of Caracas and a prominent supporter of the Chávez government, said the move to upgrade the fair was made over the complaints of opponents of the government who objected to spending funds on such a project. “Some argued, ‘People don’t read here—they don’t like to read,’” he said. “But how can they if they are not given a chance?”

Speakers at the inauguration highlighted the presence in the audience of dozens of working people taking part in special educational campaigns. Wearing distinctive red T-shirts, they were enrolled in Mission Robinson, a literacy drive; Mission Ribas, an adult education campaign aimed at helping those who dropped out of school gain a high school diploma; or Mission Sucre, a program offering university-level classes to those excluded by class-biased university admissions policies.

Minister of culture Aristóbulo Istúriz, the keynote speaker at the inauguration, noted that with the expansion of the educational programs some 12 million Venezuelans are going to school today—about half the country’s population. Referring to the literacy campaign, he said, “1.2 million more people can now read and write.” Istúriz said the government is increasing subsidies to help boost book production in Venezuela.

“The educational missions in our country are turning millions toward reading,” said Lourdes Fierro, president of the National Book Center (CENAL), which sponsored the Caracas International Book Fair.

This year’s fair was dedicated to “the indigenous peoples of the Americas.” Representatives from several native peoples in Venezuela, as well as from Guatemala, took part in cultural programs throughout the fair and hosted a large book exhibit.

Of the 127 book exhibits, most belonged to Venezuelan publishing houses and government institutions, with half a dozen representing publishers from other countries—Mexico, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Argentina, Spain, France, and the

United States. Among the wide array of literature, there was a sprinkling of titles on political topics, much of it focusing on the history of the South American independence struggles of the early 19th century—particularly on their principal leader, Simón Bolívar—and on current developments in Venezuela.

On the closing night of the fair a showing of the new video documentary *Puente Llaguno: claves de una masacre* (Llaguno Bridge: Clues to a Massacre) drew a crowd. Using live footage, the film exposes in gripping detail how the proimperialist opposition manipulated TV coverage to make it look like the Chávez government had used gunmen to fatally shoot opposition demonstrators in an April 11, 2002, incident—a fabrication these forces used that day as a justification to launch a short-lived coup against the elected government.

The book stand, exhibiting titles from several Cuban publishers, was a particular pole of attraction at the fair. Many visiting the booth expressed interest in learning more about Cuba and the Cuban Revolution. That interest has been heightened by the presence and volunteer labor for more than two years of thousands of doctors, teaching instructors, physical education teachers, and agricultural specialists from Cuba.

During the fair, the Cuba-Venezuela Solidarity Coordinating Committee sponsored a meeting at a nearby theater of more than 2,000 to protest U.S. imperialism’s threats against Cuba and Venezuela. It was addressed by Cuban minister of culture Abel Prieto. The guests of honor were a contingent of dozens of Cuban volunteer doctors who, as they filed into the theater wearing their white coats, received a standing ovation.

Pathfinder books meet thirst for politics

One of the publishers taking part in the Caracas book fair for the first time was Pathfinder Press. A constant stream of visitors came through the booth. Most had never seen Pathfinder’s array of books and pamphlets on revolutionary working-class politics. Many were also interested in discussing politics with members of the international team of socialist workers and young socialists from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada who staffed the booth.

By the end of the fair, these volunteers had sold nearly 540 Pathfinder books. The most popular title was the Spanish-language edition of *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning: The Fraud of Education Reform Under Capitalism* by Jack Barnes, with 48 copies purchased. Many were surprised by the description in that pamphlet of the brutal consequences of the U.S. employers’ productivity drive and of the working-class resistance to these conditions unfolding today.

Titles on the U.S. class struggle, questions of war and depression in the world today, and the Cuban Revolution were

to the Land. To assume that we thought of it as our property is completely fallacious.

We were tribal and held together by our blood and fictive kinship relationships, not by communal ideas of ownership.

We were neither communists, socialists nor capitalists—in fact there is really no term adequate to define what our relationship with the land was or our social organization (other than tribal) as it defies western conceptions.

The reason the bourgeois find communism repellent is not for any primal or visceral repudiation of some misty far-off and shameful communistic (tribal according to you) origin, but because it runs contrary to the instilled (and distorted) beliefs of individuality which capitalism needs in order to exist.

Meegwetch for your time.

*Nehi Katawasisiw
Pipihkisis Cree Nation*

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.



Militant/Marion Talbot

Young Socialist Nicole Sarmiento (left) shows *Perspectiva Mundial* to visitors to Pathfinder booth at May 14–23 Caracas book fair in Venezuela. Thousands visited the bookstalls and cultural events during the 10-day fair.

among the most sought after. Between 20 and 32 copies were sold of the *Che Talks to Young People*, the *Communist Manifesto*, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, *Malcolm X Speaks*, and *Cuba and the Coming American Revolution*.

Other popular titles were the issues of the Marxist magazine *Nueva Internacional* featuring “The Opening Guns of World War III,” “U.S. Imperialism Has Lost the Cold War,” and “Imperialism’s March toward Fascism and War,” as well as the book *Capitalism’s World Disorder*, also by Barnes. Eleven people purchased *Marianas in Combat: Teté Puebla and the Mariana Grajales Women’s Platoon* by Cuban Brig. Gen. Teté Puebla, seven bought *Teamster Rebellion* by Farrell Dobbs, and all five copies were sold of *The Changing Face of U.S. Politics* and *The History of American Trotskyism* (all in the Spanish-language translations).

“I’m very surprised to find revolutionary socialists from the United States,” said Ana María Zia, an English-language teacher who purchased *Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women*. This was one of the most common remarks.

Many visitors were especially surprised to hear about working-class struggles in the Miami area such as the successful union-organizing battle by garment workers at the Point Blank factory there (see front-page article). A typical question was, “Can you be a socialist in Miami, which is run by right-wing Cubans?”

They were interested in the descriptions given by Nicole Sarmiento and Omari Musa, who are Socialist Workers candidates in Florida for U.S. Senate and Congress, respectively, of how socialists there have joined in the labor resistance and openly campaign to present their socialist perspective to workers, youth, and working farmers.

Books of speeches by Malcolm X were a special draw. “For me it’s very important to know about Malcolm X and the struggles of Blacks in the United States,” said María Saintis, 19, a university student. She pointed to the need to combat racist discrimination in Venezuela.

Gregory Yáñez, 22, who is a member of an organization that does work among Afro-Venezuelans, said, “Before the April 11 [2002] coup, all government officials would say there was no racism here. Since April 11 some leaders have recognized publicly that there is racism.” Many workers who are Black took part in the popular mobilizations that defeated the coup and other attempts by the pro-imperialist opposition to overthrow the elected government.

Many who asked about the significance of the U.S. elections already knew that Democratic candidate John Kerry has argued for Washington to step up its offensive against the Venezuelan government. They appreciated an explanation of why the two-party system serves the interests of the U.S. employer class and not working people.

The impact of Cuba’s internationalist solidarity with Venezuela was noticeable in the discussions with people who came seeking books on the Cuban Revolution. Some, like Julio Salas, 24, a city employee, explained that he has benefited from the neighborhood clinics run by Cuban volunteer doctors, part of the program known as *Barrio Adentro* (Into the Neighborhood).

The big majority of visitors to the Path-

finder booth were supporters of the Chávez government. Opposition backers largely boycotted the fair. Some visitors, all from middle-class layers, expressed support for certain policies of the government but echoed arguments by the opposition such as, “The economy has gotten worse since Chávez became president.”

The growing confrontation between Venezuelan capitalists and Washington, on one hand, and Venezuelan working people, on the other, was a constant topic of discussion, especially given the recent arrests of Colombian soldiers in Caracas who were involved in a plot to attack the Venezuelan government. Pamela Conde, 18, a Central University of Venezuela (UCV) student who purchased *Che Guevara Talks to Young People*, was interested in an explanation of why U.S. imperialism is escalating its offensive against Venezuela.

Political ferment among youth

Most notable were the dozens of young people who came to the Pathfinder booth looking for books on a Marxist perspective. Many said they were not satisfied with any of the existing radical organizations and were searching for answers. Others belonged to a plethora of relatively new student-based organizations that identify themselves as Marxist, or to informal study groups. Virtually all of these revolutionary-minded youth supported the Chávez government. They were inspired by the rising struggles by Venezuelan workers and peasants, and sought a coherent perspective for how to uproot imperialist domination and capitalist oppression. “We need a revolutionary party,” was the comment by a few students from the UCV who purchased a number of books, including *Teamster Rebellion* and *Lenin’s Final Fight*.

One group of students invited two members of the Pathfinder team, Nicole Sarmiento and Carlos Cornejo, to give a forum at the school of anthropology in the UCV on “The Fight Against Imperialism Inside the United States and Around the World.” Sarmiento, the socialist senatorial candidate in Florida, is a member of the Young Socialists. Cornejo is a socialist worker in Canada. Nearly 30 students took part in the forum.

After the presentations, students peppered the speakers with questions: Is there much debate among ordinary Americans on the torture of Iraqi prisoners by the U.S. military? Why do you run in the elections? Are the unions bureaucratic? Is it possible to overthrow capitalism in the United States? What is the situation facing indigenous peoples in Canada? Did Bush steal the elections in 2000? Do you think there is a revolution in Venezuela? What kind of educational work do you do as communists in the United States? A number of students purchased books and pamphlets to get further answers to their questions, and several others visited the Pathfinder booth later in the week.

Another group of students invited Sarmiento and Cornejo to speak at the Bolivarian University. Several other groups of students invited the visiting socialists over for dinnertime or late-night discussions.

Pathfinder’s presence at the Caracas book fair was featured in several radio and television interviews. A number of people came over to the Pathfinder stand after hearing them.

— LETTERS —

Not primitive communism

In the excerpt, printed in the January 12, 2004, issue of the *Militant* under the headline “Genocide against the American Indians,” author George Novack says: “At the bottom of their censorship lies the bourgeois attitude toward the communal character of Indian life. The bourgeois mind finds communism in any form so contrary to its values, so abhorrent and abnormal, that it recoils from its manifestations and instinctively strives to bury recollections of their existence.”

I am Aboriginal and a member of the Pipihkisis Cree First Nation. I think it’s important that I respond to your article as it treats Aboriginal people in a pan-indianistic way and characterizes “our” social organization incorrectly, though for good reasons I am sure.

We Cree people did not consider the land as our property. We did not “own the land in common.” Although we were (and are still struggling to be) very communal, we did not consider that the land belonged to us and that therefore it was our property and the “products” of the land likewise. These “products” referred to are actually living beings, our Relatives, neither our property nor products. The Land itself is a living thing, everything is living and everything belongs

Israeli tanks, bulldozers invade Rafah

Troops kill 45 Palestinians, leave 1,400 homeless in assault on Gaza refugee camp

BY PAUL PEDERSON

At 8:30 a.m. on May 20, Wa'il Mansur's house in the Brazil neighborhood of the Rafah refugee camp became one of the more than 100 homes in the densely populated area in the southern part of the Gaza Strip to be destroyed by Israeli bulldozers. The assault was part of "Operation Rainbow," the Israeli government's largest military offensive in Gaza since Tel Aviv first occupied the territory in 1967. In an interview with Amira Hass, a reporter for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, Mansur described seeing the bulldozer drive up to the front of his home.

"I begged him [the bulldozer driver] to stop, to let us get out of the house," Mansur told *Haaretz*. "He blocked the entrance. Sitting behind the glass the driver never heard us.... We were just seconds away from being killed...children, the elderly, women, all of us with our backs to the wall with the bulldozer plowing toward us." The family made it to safety by climbing an iron ladder that led to a neighbor's home. "Just as we all got to the neighbor's house the bulldozer started to raze it as well," Mansur said. In addition to his home and all his belongings, Mansur's taxicab—his livelihood—was crushed by the bulldozer, *Haaretz* reported.

More than 100 Israeli tanks, helicopters, and armored bulldozers, and a large-scale deployment of Israeli troops descended from the north May 18 on the 121,000 residents of Rafah, who are penned in to the south by the Egyptian border, the west by the Mediterranean, and to the east by a heavily guarded concentration of Israeli settlements.

Mansur is one of an estimated 1,400 Rafah residents who lost their homes in the first three days of this assault. Israeli occupation forces have destroyed the homes of more than 12,600 Rafah residents—14 percent of the refugee population—in the last three and a half years, according to UN figures.

In the course of the operation, Israeli forces have conducted block-by-block raids with detachments of snipers firing from rooftop positions at Palestinians resisting the onslaught, and calling in targets for helicopter missile attacks. Two mosques, several dozen shops, and a zoo the residents built for the camp's children have also been heavily damaged or destroyed as tanks and bulldozers paved the way for the troops scouring through Rafah's neighborhoods.

In the first three days of the assault, the Israeli invasion forces killed 45 Palestinians, nine of them children, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR). Seven of the 19 killed on the first day of the operation were inside their homes, the center reported. No Israeli soldiers have been killed in the invasion, but 13 of Tel Aviv's troops were killed in three separate attacks in Gaza in the week leading up to "Operation Rainbow."

On May 19, Israeli soldiers fired tank shells and missiles from helicopter gunships into a demonstration of 3,000 unarmed Rafah residents who were bringing water, canned food, and medicine to the besieged residents of the Tel al-Sultan area of the camp. Images of the bodies of schoolchildren killed in that massacre being carried away from the scene filled the media. The death toll in that assault was at least 10, most of whom were under age 18.

Israeli army spokesman Brig. Gen. Shmuel Zakai said the crowd was fired on to protect Israeli invasion forces that were carrying out an assault nearby.

The Rafah offensive is part of a wave of assaults that Tel Aviv has launched in the past eight weeks aimed at dealing a crippling blow to the Palestinian struggle for national liberation. Over those two months, all border crossings into the Gaza Strip have remained closed and a curfew



Armored Israeli army bulldozers roll toward Rafah May 20. Right, soldier breaks into Palestinian home through hole blasted in wall.



has been imposed on many West Bank cities.

Tel Aviv launched major assaults in Rafah, Gaza City, and Beit Lahiya in the Gaza Strip in April and May, as well as daily raids, assassinations of Palestinian leaders, and arrests. Dozens of cadre and local and central leaders of organizations that have continued to stage armed resistance to the Israeli occupation have been killed or captured in raids over the past few months.

On May 20 Marwan Barghouti, a central leader of Yasir Arafat's Fatah organization and a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was convicted in an Israeli kangaroo court of murder in connection with attacks allegedly carried out by Fatah militants. Barghouti is accused by Tel Aviv of helping to organize the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a group organizing armed resistance against the Israeli occupation that is associated politically with Fatah. The deci-

sion gave "legal weight for the first time to the Israeli government position that Mr. Arafat has been orchestrating violence," wrote the May 20 *Wall Street Journal*.

With Washington's backing, Tel Aviv hopes to use this offensive to shift the relationship of forces more in its favor as it drives ahead on the so-called disengagement plan crafted by Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. The plan aims to shore up the Israeli government's claims to territory stolen from Palestinians on the West Bank, legitimize the land claims of the majority of Israeli settlers there who number over 200,000, and strengthen the security of the Israeli state by sealing off the majority of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories behind highly fortified borders. This "separation wall," drawn by Tel Aviv, cuts deep into Palestinian territory in the West Bank and is an obstacle to the creation of a territorially contiguous Palestinian state.

On March 14, U.S. president George Bush spoke in favor of Sharon's plan at a White House press conference alongside the Israeli prime minister. Since then Washington has continued to present Tel Aviv's moves as a "peace initiative."

One aspect of the plan is the removal of 7,500 Israeli settlers who have expropriated more than 20 percent of the land in the Gaza Strip. The settlers are guarded by a massive Israeli military cordon, which regularly meets resistance from the 1.3 million Palestinians living in Gaza.

On May 15, some 100,000 Israelis joined a march in Tel Aviv, organized by the opposition Labour Party, in favor of the disengagement plan. Sharon, who suffered a setback when his right-wing Likud Party voted the plan down in a May 2 nonbinding referendum, has said he is determined to implement some version of the plan with or without majority support in his party.

UN 'unification' plan defeated in Cyprus vote

BY BOBBIS MISAILIDES AND NATASHA TERLEXIS

ATHENS, Greece—The referendum on a United Nations plan to create a nominal federal government on the divided island of Cyprus went down to defeat April 24, as Greek Cypriots voted "no" by a three-to-one margin. The plan, which was advanced by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, required a majority vote in both the Greek- and Turkish-dominated sections of the country to succeed. Almost 65 percent of Turkish Cypriots, who form one-fifth of the island's population, voted in favor.

A spokesman for the European Commission, which is dominated by the continent's biggest imperialist powers, Paris and Berlin, said the EC "deeply regrets that the Greek Cypriot community did not approve the comprehensive settlement." Both Annan and the U.S. State Department likewise expressed disappointment.

The imperialist powers presented the plan as a step toward reunification as they pushed for a stabilization of the situation in Cyprus leading up to its membership in the European Union.

Cyprus was carved in two in 1974 following an attempt by the then-military government of Greece to annex the island for Greek imperialism. Seizing the moment, the rulers of Turkey invaded and occupied the northern area.

Annan's plan would have created a federal government with responsibility for external relations and monetary policy. The Turkish and Greek Cypriot areas would have remained under distinct administrations, with control over industry, commerce, and many other areas.

Under the blueprint, the 37,000 Turkish troops in northern Cyprus would have been reduced within two years from their present level to 6,000—equal to the number of Greek forces, with further reductions to follow.

The plan prescribed no reduction in London's military presence, centered on three military bases covering 99 square miles of the island's territory. The British government has retained this foothold since ending direct colonial rule over Cyprus in 1960. UN troops are also stationed there.

The vote in the north expressed the desire among Turkish Cypriots to overcome their economic isolation and backwardness compared to the south of their country, and to bring to an end their status as an occupied territory on a divided island. Many have hopes that EU membership will advance those ends.

While most northern politicians campaigned for the referendum, Rauf Denktaş, president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, opposed it, railing against Annan's proposal to give the Turkish Cypriot component of the state 29 percent of the land area—down from 39 percent today.

In the south the "no" camp included President Tassos Papadopoulos, officials of the Orthodox Church, and the Restorative Party of the Working People (AKEL). These forces concentrated on nationalist demands for greater concessions for the Greek-Cypriot region.

The majority "no" vote among Greek Cypriots was driven, among other things, by concerns over the Annan plan's approach to the question of the refugees created by the division of the country 30 years ago.

Rather than simply establishing the right of refugees to return to their previous homes if they so chose, the plan laid out detailed limits on resettlement.

In the Pyla village, located in the buffer zone between north and south, with a mixed Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot population and policed by UN soldiers, the majority rejected the UN plan.

"We have lived together for years and there have been no problems at all," said 62-year-old George Sotirou, a Greek Cypriot born in the village. "With a better plan and agreement between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots we will be fine. Unfortunately the UN hasn't offered us such a plan."

Cyprus became a formal member of the EU on May 1. On the eve of the accession, the EC voted to approve a 259 million euro aid package to the north. The imperialist powers at the EU's helm are eager to have access to Cyprus as a stable export platform to the Mideast. Athens is looking forward to using its proximity to the island to its advantage.

For their part, U.S. and British officials are using Cyprus's EU membership as leverage in their efforts to force Paris and Berlin to agree to admit Turkey, a U.S. ally. Meanwhile, the competing imperialist powers are still intent on forcing an Annan-type "solution" to the division of Cyprus.

"The only way to restore any chance of reunifying the island," stated the April 27 editorial of the *International Herald Tribune*, which is owned by the *New York Times*, "is for the EU and the United States to get tough—to lift the economic sanctions in the Turkish north and to limit aid to the Greek south."