

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

**20 years since Wilberg mine blast:
company greed killed coal miners**

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DEC. 28, 2004

U.S. jets drop 1-ton bombs near Iraq-Syria border; strike Fallujah, Mosul

BY SAM MANUEL

Pursuing their goal of destroying organized military units of the deposed Saddam Hussein regime, U.S. warplanes dropped heavy bombs on Baathist positions along the Syrian border the second week of December. U.S. fighter jets also bombed pockets of resistance on the outskirts of Fallujah as part of ongoing operations to rid the city of Baathist groups. They conducted similar air raids in the northern city of Mosul, particularly its western section, populated largely by Sunni Arabs, among whom Hussein's Baathist Party had its strongest base.

At the same time, the Australian defense minister said his government will send a logistics team to Iraq to help train the Iraqi military, and the government of Japan extended the deployment of its troops in Iraq beyond December 14, when they were supposed to depart. The December 11-12 *International Herald Tribune* also reported that for several months German officers have been in the United Arab Emirates training Iraqi policemen. The paper said that Berlin and Paris are among six governments that continue to refuse to train Iraqi security forces inside Iraq.

Two Navy jets based on the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier dropped three 2,000-pound bombs on targets along the Syrian border, reported the December 10 *Virginia Pilot*. They were joined by three Marine warplanes from the carrier that dropped six 500-pound bombs.

Washington has accused the Syrian government of giving sanctuary to former officials of the Hussein regime and allowing

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U.S. spying bill expands police powers

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

The "intelligence reform" bill passed by the U.S. Congress December 8 is aimed at strengthening and centralizing the work of U.S. spy agencies. The legislation creates a Director of National Intelligence with the authority to set priorities over the CIA and 14 other government spy agencies, including several at the Department of Defense. It also increases the number of border patrol cops and customs agents, and institutionalizes sharing of information between federal, state, and local police forces, as well as private cops.

In addition to the measures covered in last week's *Militant* (see "Bipartisan deal reached on bill strengthening U.S. gov't spying"), the bill, also referred to as H.R. 10, includes a range of provisions aimed at increasing the power of the FBI and other political police agencies to carry out surveillance, takes steps toward the creation of a national identification card, and curtails the rights of those charged with "terrorism."

H.R. 10 was drafted on the basis of the conclusions of the bipartisan 9/11 commission hearings that were held earlier this year. Democrats, in particular, used the hearings to advance their charge that the Bush administration's "intelligence failures" undermined the government's ability to prevent the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

The House of Representatives approved

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Utah miners fight mass firings days before union election

UMWA: 'blatant retaliation' by bosses against union backers

BY RÓGER CALERO
AND KATHERINE BENNETT

PRICE, Utah—On the eve of a union representation election scheduled for December 17, coal miners at the Co-Op mine near Huntington, Utah, and their supporters are mobilizing to respond to the firing of 30 miners, and to make sure every supporter of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) makes it to the voting booth to cast a ballot in support of the union.

In the face of a looming victory for the UMWA in the election, bosses at C.W. Mining, which runs the Co-Op mine, moved December 9 to fire all but a handful of the Mexican-born workers for allegedly not having valid documentation showing eligibility to work in the United States.

"Here we are, less than a week away from a vote for union representation, and the mine operator has conveniently decided to fire a significant number of the miners who are eligible voters," said UMWA president Cecil Roberts in a statement the union released to the press December 10. He called the firings "blatant retaliation" by the Co-Op owners against the miners for their effort to win UMWA representation.

As part of the stepped-up campaign of intimidation against UMWA supporters, four of the 17 miners listed in a federal lawsuit filed in September by C.W. Mining and the International Association of United Workers Union (IAUWU), which workers say is run by the company, have been served with court papers.

The lawsuit charges the UMWA, its officers, and 17 current and former Co-Op miners, as well as organizations and individuals who have extended support to the Co-Op



Militant photos by Teri Moss

Above: UMWA Local 6363 members, retired from Hiawatha mine, at UMWA District 22 office in Price, Utah, voted December 15 to donate \$500 to Co-Op miners' union-organizing struggle. Local president Dean Young is leaning on briefcase. In foreground is *Sun Advocate* reporter Melanie Steele. That day the union received a sample ballot for December 17 representation election. Inset, from left: UMWA retiree Juan Gutiérrez, and Co-Op miners Jesús Leyva (holding ballot), Bill Estrada, José Contreras, Ricardo Chávez, Alyson Kennedy, and Jesús Galaviz.



miners' fight, with "unlawful labor practices" and "defamation" against the company and the IAUWU. The original list of

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Brazil: 8,000 march to demand land, protest murder of five militants by armed thugs of big landowners

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

Eight thousand landless rural workers and their supporters surrounded the central bank of Brazil in the country's capital, Brasilia, November 25 to demand

the government provide more funding for the distribution of land to those who are without. The Movement of Landless Workers (MST) and other peasant groups organized the march a few days after armed thugs in Minas Gerais state killed five MST members who were part of a land occupation there.

"In April and May there could be a big struggle in this country," João Pedro Stédile, an MST leader, told the Reuters news agency along the mile-long march through Brasilia.

Last spring thousands of peasants and rural workers, organized by the MST, carried out dozens of land occupations across Brazil. More than 10,000 families joined in the actions.

Landless workers in Brazil are trying to reverse one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world: 1 percent of the population of 175 million owns 40 percent of the land, and the poorest 40 percent of Brazilians own less than 1 percent.

In defense of their wealth

and power, big landowners have expanded their use of private militias to terrorize peasants and rural workers into submission.

In 2003, 63 of those who organized and joined land occupations were killed, according to Catholic Church investigations. In 2004, 73 have been killed in the struggle for land, the highest number since

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Reuters/Jamil Bitar

November 25 march in Brazil's capital organized by Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST).

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Long Island county tries to make local cops ‘la migra’

BY PAUL PEDERSON

NEW YORK—Elected officials in Long Island are pushing for power to deputize local cops as immigration agents. The proposal, initiated by Suffolk County Executive Steven Levy, is one of the latest moves in an ongoing campaign by bourgeois politicians and rightist groups in Long Island to criminalize the New York City suburb’s burgeoning population of immigrant workers from Latin America.

In late August, Levy announced that county police had begun a crackdown against “unlicensed” contractors, many of whom hire immigrant workers as day laborers for construction and maintenance work. After announcing that police in a “sting” operation had issued 80 tickets to contractors for not paying sales tax, failure to obtain a license, and other violations, Levy told an August 24 news conference, “We are here to enforce the laws, not just sales tax, not just unemployment or workers compensation insurance, but also federal immigration laws.”

To carry this out, in November Levy announced his plan to give local cops the power to check on workers’ immigration status and hand over those without proper documents to federal immigration agents for deportation. Under current law, local cops are prohibited from asking those they stop about their legal status.

Protests against these moves were organized by a number of immigrant rights organizations. Editorials in *Newsday* and the *New York Times*, two of the area’s main daily papers, came out against the proposal. Levy also faced opposition from the Police Benevolent Association (PBA) for its own reasons. PBA president Jeffrey Frayler said the law would “make illegal immigrants less likely to report crimes,” the *New York Times* reported.

Levy has since modified his plan to have it apply only to guards in the county’s jails, who, if Levy gets his way, will have the power to turn over immigrants who end up there to the federal immigration police. The *Times* reported that this could have affected 2,349 of the more than 23,000 people arrested in the county in 2003. Levy announced that he plans to meet December 14 with federal immigration officials about expanding “in-

formation sharing” and other cooperation between local and federal cop agencies.

In addition to this proposal, local politicians in the towns of Farmingdale and Brookhaven have taken steps to crack down on foreign-born workers by going after working-class housing complexes and homes under the guise of “housing code” violations. In Brookhaven, an “informal task force” has been set up to investigate complaints about homes supposedly crowded with day laborers.

In Farmingdale, two successive city mayors have been trying to get an apartment complex where many day laborers and other workers live—which former Farmingdale mayor Joseph Trudden admitted are “the only apartments in Farmingdale”—declared a “blighted” area and razed. The new mayor, George Graf, has vowed to complete the project. Graf claimed that the former mayor had allowed the town to be “overrun” by day laborers and promised to get them “off our streets.”

Graf also instituted fines for contractors who pick up day laborers along a street where they had often waited for work. Once a number of contractors started getting slapped with the town’s new \$100 fine, the mayor said, “the crowds [of laborers] have thinned.”

“From the news reports you could get the wrong impression that there’s a groundswell of anti-immigrant sentiment,” said Nadia Marin-Molina, executive director of the Workplace Project, in a December 10 phone interview. The Workplace Project is a Hempstead-based immigrant rights group that has been closely involved with the day laborers’ struggle “There is very broad sentiment against what Levy is doing.... He is casting all immigrants as criminals, not only undocumented immigrants.”

Marin-Molina described the tug-of-war



Rightist David Drew pickets near day laborers in Farmingville, Long Island, Jan. 7, 2004. County government is seeking to use local cops as immigration agents.

that has been going on between workers and the government for years, as the Latino population in Long Island doubled in the 1990s and has jumped by 20 percent in the last three years alone. She said that the fights of the last several years to counter the anti-immigrant campaign have brought together a broad network of groups, and workers have made some gains.

“But what Levy is doing does put boldness into those who would like to see the world that way,” Marin-Molina said. She described the recent case of day laborers protesting outside the home of a construction contractor who had underpaid them, being told by the contractor, “Steve Levy’s my friend, I’ll call him and get you deported.”

Levy recently spoke to a meeting of the Greater Farmingville Community Association, headed by Raymond Wysolmierski, a former spokesman of the rightist organization Sachem Quality of Life. These groups have regularly picketed corners where day laborers seek work, carrying signs that say “deport illegal immigrants” and other rightist messages.

“They who refuse to accept that this is

an invasion and occupation are in a state of denial,” Wysolmierski wrote in a column in the November 11 *Newsday*, referring to the increasing immigration. He called on the citizens of Farmingville “to bear the burden of restoring a divided nation to its former self.”

The ultrarightist campaign has included the firebombing of a Mexican family’s home in 2003 and the near fatal beating of two day laborers in 2000. Despite all this, day laborers have won greater rights over the past five years. They have established hiring halls in Freeport and Glen Cove, for example, giving the workers greater control over relations with employers and a safer means of getting work. A similar hiring hall is being set up in Hempstead, Marin-Molina said.

And, as they have been doing for a number of years, day laborers have been organizing to picket homes of employers to demand back pay and living wages, and are continuing efforts to get secure hiring areas established in a number of Long Island towns. A Day Laborers Union has also been established to fight for these demands.

U.S. credit card debts, home equity loans soar

BY SAM MANUEL

According figures released in early December by the Federal Reserve Board, personal debt from credit card purchases and car loans has mushroomed. Hit by soaring interest rates on credit cards, more and

more people from the working class and the middle classes are borrowing money against their homes to meet other needs. This has brought home equity—the percentage of the current market value of a house that has been paid off to the bank or finance company—to an all-time low.

Debt from credit cards and car loans in the United States stood at a record \$2.05 trillion in September, and has continued to rise since then. That’s an average of \$7,296 per U.S. resident. Four years ago, the figure was \$1.52 trillion.

This year’s annual Credit Card Survey, conducted by Myvesta, a nonprofit consumer organization, says the average credit card debt carried by individuals has risen 14.5 percent—an average of \$2,627 per person. “When people are pulling out the plastic to make everyday purchases such as hamburgers and groceries, it’s no surprise that the average amount of debt has gone up,” said Myvesta spokesman Jim Tehan.

Part of the ballooning in paper values that’s a sign of the accelerating capitalist

economic crisis, is the rise of home mortgages taken on by workers and the middle class—not so much to buy houses but to secure refinancing to go deeper into debt to meet other expenses. Over the Christmas holidays, for example, millions of people will use home equity loans to purchase gifts and for travel to visit family, according to the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*.

“The logic of borrowing at 3 percent to 7 percent on a home equity loan compared to 13 percent on a credit card is too powerful

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THE MILITANT

Oppose U.S. intervention in Venezuela

Since 1998, Washington has backed layers of Venezuela’s capitalists in their efforts to topple the country’s elected government. The ‘Militant’ explains why and regularly covers the struggles of working people there to defend their class interests and resist imperialist domination. Don’t miss a single issue!



Thousands march from working-class districts in Caracas April 13, 2002, to restore Chávez gov’t after U.S.-backed coup.

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Editor: ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

Business Manager: MICHAEL ITALIE

Washington Bureau Chief: SAM MANUEL

Editorial Staff: Róger Calero, Michael Italie, Martin Koppel, Sam Manuel, Doug Nelson, and Paul Pederson.

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U.S. gov't opposes Venezuela arms purchases

New facts point to U.S. backing of 2002 coup against elected gov't in Caracas

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

Washington has made plain its opposition to the Venezuelan government's plans to buy helicopters, rifles, and other weapons from Russia for its armed forces.

"Let me put it this way: we shoot down Migs,' a senior administration official said when asked whether the intended purchase concerned the U.S. government," the *Financial Times* reported on December 1.

Sean McCormack, the National Security Council spokesman at the White House, told the British daily that the comment meant this "is an issue that we monitor closely."

During a visit to Moscow at the end of November, Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez, announced that his government will soon take delivery of 40 helicopters from Russia and has agreed to buy 100,000 semi-automatic rifles. Chávez noted that these weapons are defensive. "Venezuela is not going to attack anyone," he told the press.

Reports in the big-business media have also speculated that Venezuela is planning to acquire 50 Mig-29 fighter jets, the most advanced model of the Russian plane. The Venezuelan government has so far made no such announcement.

In addition to belligerent statements by U.S. officials, Washington's closest ally in Latin America, the right-wing regime of Colombia's president Alvaro Uribe, has joined the chorus of alleged concerns about an "arms buildup" in neighboring Venezuela. Helicopters and rifles are no big deal, said Alfredo Rángel, whom the *Financial Times* described as a "defense analyst based in Bogotá," according to an article in the November 30 edition of the daily. "But the Mig-29s would be of major concern. Their acquisition would be seen as virtually a hostile act towards Colombia."

According to the *Financial Times*, Venezuela's air force has about 20 U.S.-made F-16 jets, purchased years ago, most of which are today in disrepair.

Bogotá is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid outside the Middle East. The U.S. government has sent \$3.3 billion to the Colombian regime since the year 2000 under the Plan Colombia program initiated by the Clinton administration. The program was expanded by the Bush White House into the Andean Regional Initiative. Under the cover of fighting "narcoterrorism," Washington has used Plan Colombia to step up its military intervention in the region in an-

tipication of sharper resistance by workers and peasants to imperialist domination and the resulting economic depression gripping Latin America and the Caribbean.

U.S. involvement in 2002 coup

Washington's "concerns" over arms purchases from Russia by Caracas are at best hypocritical. In fact, it is the U.S. government that's the aggressor in Venezuela, having aided repeated attempts by sections of Venezuela's capitalist class to overthrow the country's democratically elected government. These include a military coup in April 2002, an employers' lockout in December of that year and January 2003, and a presidential recall referendum last August. All three attempts failed because of massive mobilizations by working people who divided the military and forced Chávez's return to power two days after the coup, quickly restarted production during the bosses' "strike," and ensured the resounding defeat of the recall vote.

Jeremy Bigwood, a freelance investigative reporter in Washington, recently uncovered, through the Freedom of Information Act, previously classified CIA documents that show Washington's full knowledge of the plans for a military coup in early 2002.

"Dissident military factions, including some disgruntled senior officers and a group of radical junior officers, are stepping up efforts to organize a coup against President Chavez, possibly as early as this month," says the secret CIA memo (which is posted on www.venezuelafoia.info). It is dated April 6, 2002—five days before the coup. The document indicates a plan by the pro-imperialist opposition forces to instigate unrest and blame it on the government to rationalize the coup. "To provoke military action, the plotters may try to exploit unrest stemming from opposition demonstrations slated for later this month or ongoing strikes at the state-owned oil company PDVSA."

This is what did happen. During an anti-government march on April 11, 2002, more than a dozen people died from gunshots fired by individuals who Venezuelan authorities say were organized by forces aligned with the Coordinadora Democrática opposition coalition. Army generals then used the bloodshed as the pretext to remove Chávez from power. The coup plotters swore in as president Pedro Carmona, a wealthy oil man and leader of Fedecámaras, the country's



Reuters/Howard Yanes

Venezuelan police examine wreckage of car destroyed by bomb blast November 19 in Caracas, killing Danilo Anderson, a state prosecutor. Anderson was carrying out investigation of April 2002 U.S.-backed military coup. Venezuelan government will ask for extradition from the United States of Johan Peña, a suspect in the bombing.

main business association. The new regime dissolved the National Assembly, dismissed the Supreme Court, and abolished the constitution. But it was short lived. Chávez returned to Miraflores, the presidential palace, within two days on the crest of huge popular mobilizations against the coup.

At the time, Bush administration officials denied prior knowledge of the plans for the coup, blamed the elected government for the crisis, repeated the lies of the generals who claimed Chávez had resigned, and initially recognized Carmona's regime. Hours after the coup, for example, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said "the Chávez government provoked the crisis" and "Chávez has resigned the presidency." Philip Reeker, a State Department spokesman, chimed in that "undemocratic actions committed or encouraged by the Chávez administration provoked yesterday's crisis."

Murder of Danilo Anderson

Tensions have continued between Washington and Caracas. According to a December 9 report by the Chinese news agency Xinhua, the Venezuelan government will ask

Washington to extradite Johan Peña to Venezuela. The country's Justice Minister Jesse Chacón said his government's intelligence indicates that Peña, a suspect in the recent murder of Venezuelan prosecutor Danilo Anderson, is now in the United States.

Anderson was killed November 19 from two blasts caused by bombs planted under his car. He was in charge of a government investigation of those who carried out the April 2002 coup. Cuba's National Information Agency said at the end of November that Venezuelan authorities had discovered an arms cache and explosives in Caracas that implicate individuals now residing in the United States in Anderson's murder.

Since it took office in 1998, the Chávez administration has angered many among Venezuela's wealthy ruling families and their allies in Washington by passing measures such as an agrarian reform law, bills strengthening state control of oil—the country's main source of income—and other natural resources, and legislation protecting small fishermen from super exploitation by large capitalist operations. Workers and farmers have frequently mobilized to implement these and other measures that are in their class interests, gaining self-confidence and higher expectations in the process. These mobilizations have caused the wealthy to fear that working people may push for even more radical steps that would threaten capitalist property relations.

The government's normalization of trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba has also drawn the ire of many Venezuelan capitalists and their backers in the United States. More than 15,000 volunteers from Cuba have been working in Venezuela for several years now. The majority of them are doctors who provide medical care through top-quality, free neighborhood clinics to millions who did not have access to health care before. Cuban volunteers have also aided Venezuela's massive literacy campaigns and agricultural and other programs. In addition, thousands of students from Venezuela have attended courses in Cuba on scholarships, and more than 7,000 Venezuelan patients have been treated in Cuba free of charge, based on agreements between the two countries.

Landless rural workers march for land in Brazil

Continued from front page

1996. That was the year of the Eldorado dos Carajas massacre, in which 19 rural workers were killed by the military police.

The Workers Party government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which took office in January 2003, has promised the "resettlement" of 400,000 landless peasant families during his four-year term.

The social-democratic regime hopes to achieve capitalist stability in this semicolonial nation through an increase in wealth for Brazilian manufacturers and agricultural exporters that will supposedly produce a trickle down of jobs and improved conditions for workers and farmers, thereby heading off a social explosion.

The president has tried to convince the rural population that land occupations are not needed to confront the big landowners, while demagogically identifying with the need for agrarian reform. "I do not imagine that in a country of this size, with the amount of land that it has, a violent occupation is necessary," he said in June 2003.

The MST, which supported da Silva in the October 2002 election, announced a moratorium on land takeovers on Jan. 1, 2003, to coincide with the inauguration of the new president. It called off the moratorium two months later because of the failure of the government to act on its promises. At the time, the MST demanded land for 1 million rural families by 2006 as a first step in addressing the gross disparity in ownership.

Nearly halfway through da Silva's term in office, the government has reportedly

provided land for 100,000 families.

The November 25 protest of 8,000 in Brasília was the largest demonstration of its kind ever held in the capital, organizers told Reuters.

Dozens of peasant organizations came together to protest the lack of government funding for resettlement onto unused land. The MST charged that Brazilian finance minister Antonio Palocci and other government officials had cut spending on social programs in order to meet demands by imperialist powers made through the International Monetary Fund to cut social services in order to continue having access to IMF loans. At \$440 billion, the Brazilian debt is the largest of any semicolonial nation.

At a December 10 meeting of government ministers, the president boasted that the cuts in government spending would make the country less vulnerable to international financial crises, Bloomberg News reported. Da Silva said these cuts would lead to advances for Brazilian workers and farmers. "We are all filled with the feeling that Brazil's time has come," he said. "This is the time for development, for economic growth with generation of jobs, for distribution of wealth and social inclusion."

Those seeking to make good on the government's promises to provide land have often suffered a violent fate. On November 20, about 15 hooded thugs fired on an MST settlement of 250 landless workers in the Jequitinhonha River valley, 500 miles northeast of Rio de Janeiro in the state of Minas Gerais. They left five dead, including a boy, and wounded 10.

The 80 families have been occupying

the site since May 2002. Police have arrested three men for the crime, and are investigating whether a local large landowner had ordered the attack, according to media reports. MST members responded by organizing the takeover of property of the landowner in Bahia state.

The deadly attack on peasants in Minas Gerais came a day after the Court of Justice in the state of Pará refused to order a new trial for dozens of military policemen for their role in the April 1996 massacre of 19 rural workers at an MST settlement in Eldorado dos Carajas County. The ruling came after years of appeals for justice in the case by the MST.

"Although the hearing upheld the convictions of the officers who commanded the operation," Amnesty International reported November 23, "it appears a further 128 policemen suspected of involvement in the massacre will never be tried for their part."

Further Reading

Land Reform and Farm Cooperatives in Cuba

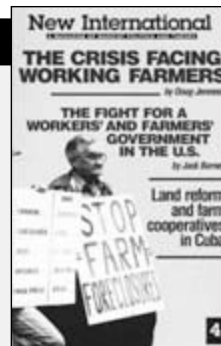
Two speeches by Fidel Castro in 'New International' no. 4

"The worker-peasant alliance is not a temporary, tactical pact but rather a strategic and enduring union between these two classes, a union whose final objective... is to carry the revolutionary process forward until every single one of us belongs to a society without classes, a society of producers, a society of workers with equal rights."

—from "The Agrarian Question and Relations with the Peasantry," theses adopted by the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba

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U.S. jets bomb Iraqi cities

Continued from front page
armed groups to cross its border into Iraq in order to attack U.S. forces and troops of the Iraqi interim government.

On December 11 a U.S. warplane dropped a half-ton bomb on a Baathist position in Mosul north of Baghdad after a U.S. patrol came under attack attempting to capture an arms cache. The U.S. military says that Baathist officers and leaders of Tawhid and Jihad, the group headed by Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, may have moved to Mosul after being routed in Fallujah in mid-November. Hundreds of bodies have turned up in the city, the apparent result of a campaign targeting Iraqis accused of collaborating with U.S. occupation forces.

Fallujah air strikes

The same weekend, U.S. warplanes bombed Baathist positions in Fallujah in ongoing operations against pockets of Baathist resistance. A reporter for al-Jazeera TV described the fighting as the “fiercest in two weeks.” Former officers in Hussein’s Republican Guard had used Fallujah as their base of operations against U.S. and Iraqi troops.

Fallujah is located in the Sunni Triangle in central Iraq, where most of the country’s Sunnis, who comprise about a third of Iraq’s population, live. The Hussein regime, based largely among Sunnis, used brutality and fear to rule. This party police state discriminated against Shiites, who comprise nearly 60 percent of Iraq’s population, and the Kurds in the north. Because of this record, there has been little outcry in Iraq against the U.S. assault on Fallujah, despite the city’s devastation and the uprooting of virtually all its residents. The U.S.-led occupation forces are now using this military victory to go after organized units of Hussein’s former army throughout the country.

Baathist units in Fallujah collaborated with other groups, like Tawhid and Jihad, that have claimed responsibility for numerous bombings of civilian and military targets in Iraq and kidnappings and beheadings of hostages. Thousands of U.S. troops launched a massive ground assault on the city November 7 that routed the Baathists and their supporters after one week of fighting.

Most of the city’s 250,000 residents had fled before the U.S. assault. When the displaced residents will be allowed to return remains an open question, reported the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Lt. Col. Michael Paulk, one of the Marine engineers assigned to rebuilding efforts, said that reconstruction would take months and that for parts of the city “we might as well take a bulldozer and start from ground zero.” Conditions that may be imposed on returning residents include wearing ID badges at all times, conscription of males into work brigades, and prohibition of cars because of their frequent use in bombings. The latest proposal would allow only heads of households to return to the city to inspect damage to their property in order to file claims for compensation.

Red Cross officials have now been al-

lowed again into areas of the city considered “safe.” The U.S. military had ordered the Iraqi Red Crescent to leave Fallujah earlier.

U.S. troops continue to take casualties in the area, including eight U.S. soldiers killed December 11–12 in Fallujah and elsewhere in Al-Anbar province, which includes the Sunni Triangle. “They hole themselves up in houses and wait to kill an American,” said Marine Lt. Rex McIntosh about the fighting in the outskirts of Fallujah. “We had very, very heavy contact against a group, you could call it a cell—which was bypassed in previous sweeping operations.”

According to the Pentagon, 1,019 U.S. soldiers have been killed in combat in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion of the country. Non-combat deaths bring the total U.S. toll to about 1,300. Nearly 10,000 U.S. troops have been wounded in the same period.

The occupation forces make no attempt to record Iraqi deaths. The British research group Iraq Body Count estimates that as many as 16,800 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the invasion. The group uses morgue and hospital records and press accounts to compile its figures. According to the Iraqi interior ministry, 850 Iraqi police have been killed since May 1.

Many U.S. troops have been killed by roadside bombs while traveling in vehicles with inadequate armor.

When a U.S. soldier asked U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld while he was visiting troops in a U.S. base in Kuwait recently why his truck lacked armor, Rumsfeld answered, “You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might



Devastated and deserted street in Fallujah after U.S. takeover in November. Most of city’s 250,000 residents fled before assault and have not been allowed to return.

wish to have at a later time.”

“Many are taking the exchange... as proof that the Bush administration has failed to give soldiers in Iraq the equipment they need to face combat,” said former Army Captain Phillip Carter in the December 13 *International Herald Tribune*. “Actually,” he continued, “the problem runs much deeper than the current administration: It stems from the Pentagon’s uneven effort over the last decade to turn a cold war military into a force able to meet today’s challenges.”

In the past truck and other transport vehicles operated in relative safety at the rear of operations as part of logistical sup-

port to the combat units on the front lines and did not require armor or .50-caliber machine guns. In Washington’s “war on terrorism,” U.S. troops must be equipped to fight under conditions where there is no front line, and thus no safe rear lines, Carter said. As part of what the Pentagon calls the “transformation” of the U.S. military, the Department of Defense is spending billions to purchase and develop light-weight and medium-weight armored vehicles that protect against small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. One of them is the Stryker medium-weight armored vehicle

Continued on Page 10

‘Homeland security’ chief nominee dumped after admitting he hired immigrant nanny, paid no taxes

BY PAUL PEDERSON

A week after the Bush administration nominated him to be director of the Department of Homeland Security, former New York City police commissioner Bernard Kerik withdrew his name from consideration December 10. Kerik said his employment of an undocumented immigrant as his domestic servant was the reason for abandoning the proposed post.

“I uncovered information that now leads me to question the immigration status of a person who had been in my employ as a housekeeper and nanny,” Kerik said. “It has also been brought to my attention that for a period of time during such employment required tax payments and related filings had not been made.”

In the Homeland Security post Kerik would have been head of the immigration police as Washington has continued to restrict the rights of undocumented immigrants. The latest restrictions came in the “intelligence reform” bill (see front page article). The enforcement arm of the massive immigration police structure of the Department of Homeland Security

reported in November that during fiscal year 2004 a record 157,281 immigrants were deported.

Kerik was clearly recommended for the post by former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Before his career in bourgeois politics took off, Kerik worked alternately as a military cop, a bodyguard for the Saudi royalty, a prison guard, a narcotics cop, and as a rent-a-cop for the wealthy. He was tapped by Giuliani, while working as his bodyguard, to take an administrative position in the city’s jail system. In 1997 the Republican mayor named Kerik commissioner of the Corrections Department.

In August 2000, he was chosen to be the top cop in New York after his predecessor Howard Safir had presided over a string of brutal police killings that had sparked mass demonstrations in New York. Since that time Kerik has worked closely both in private and public positions with Giuliani and has been a key piece of the pro-cop, “tough-guy” image that the ex-mayor has sought to cultivate. In the process he has made millions by using his connections to

cut inside deals with companies. This has included investing in Taser stun guns that he sold to cop agencies. He also bought smokes from tobacco companies and then turned around and sold them at an inflated price to inmates while he was New York City’s top prison warden.

Giuliani felt compelled to apologize to the president for not checking Kerik’s record more carefully prior to pushing him into the national spotlight, embarrassing the administration for nominating someone who clearly violated the very immigration laws he would have been appointed to enforce. “I feel very bad,” Giuliani told the press in a December 12 interview. “I realize that one of the reasons they did it was because of my confidence in Bernie over the years,” he added, referring to the nomination of Kerik by the Bush administration.

Kerik is not the first nominee to lose their post over hiring workers without documents. It was the source of a scandal around the 1993 nomination by William Clinton of Zoë Baird to the post of attorney general, as well as one other Clinton nominee that year and a Bush nominee in 2001.

Baird, a wealthy corporate lawyer, had hired a Peruvian couple as household “help” for 1990-92. She had informed Clinton of this when the nomination was posed, but the Democratic administration at first approached it as a technical matter.

In the Senate hearings, Baird claimed she was acting “more as a mother than as a woman that would be sitting here before you to be attorney general.” But as the *Militant* pointed out at the time Baird was just acting as “one more greedy boss” by “paying the standard rock-bottom wages for domestic ‘help,’ and also by not paying Social Security taxes.... It was clearly of no concern to Baird that the workers she employed would have no right to Social Security in their old age.”

While all the new immigration restrictions of the last decade have made it easier for bosses like Baird and Kerik to continue these practices, under the spotlight of publicity such credentials are an embarrassment for the wealthy.

What weighed most for the ruling class in Kerik’s case was that he had been nominated for the top spot of Homeland Security, an agency that has become central in Washington’s “war on terrorism” at home and abroad since 9/11.

Spy bill takes step toward national identity card

Continued from front page

the bill December 7 in a 336-75 vote. Of those who voted against the legislation, 67 were Republicans and 8 were Democrats. The Senate passed the bill the next day by an 89-2 vote. U.S. president George Bush has promised to sign the bill into law soon.

The new legislation “includes a series of little-noticed measures that would broaden the government’s power to conduct terrorism investigations, including provisions to loosen standards for FBI surveillance warrants and allow the Justice Department to more easily detain suspects without bail,” said an article in the December 10 *Washington Post*.

The FBI and other police agencies gain new authority under the bill to wiretap and eavesdrop on individuals it labels “terrorists.” These agencies may now obtain secret surveillance and search warrants without having to show a judge a link between what the big-business media call a “lone wolf,” an individual suspected of wrongdoing, and a foreign government

or “terrorist” organization.

Even without these changes, judges readily comply with cop agencies’ requests for such surveillance. The Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act established a secret court in 1978 to enable the FBI to obtain approval for spying without having to go to a regular court. Of the more than 10,000 requests made to it for wiretaps, this secret court has never turned down a single one.

Opponents of H.R. 10 in Congress—such as Rep. James Sensenbrenner, a Republican who heads the House Judiciary Committee—had cited its sponsors’ decision to drop U.S. citizenship as a requirement for a driver’s license as their reason to vote against the bill. Senators Joseph Lieberman from Connecticut and Susan Collins from Maine, the bipartisan team that ushered the bill through Congress, however, boasted of the “standardized driver’s licenses” that feature in H.R. 10. The new standard set in place lays the groundwork for meeting Sensenbrenner’s demands, and at the same time is a step to-

ward a national identification card, which would give police and other government agencies greater access to personal information, representing further inroads to the right to privacy.

Under the banner of the “war on terrorism,” the new legislation would also increase criminal penalties for those convicted of “smuggling” or “harboring” undocumented workers, and increase the powers of the government to deny bail to “suspects in major terrorism” cases, the *Post* reported.

One secret spy program in H.R. 10 drew criticism from a number of Democratic senators, who charged it was, “very, very wasteful” and would pose a danger to “national security.” The Associated Press interviewed a number of “intelligence experts” who all agreed that the program was likely a spy satellite system, possibly equipped with the military firepower “to destroy potential attackers.” Sen. Jay Rockefeller from West Virginia said Congress has approved the program for the last two years.

Many U.S. coal miners welcome the ‘Militant’

BY PAT MILLER

PRICE, Utah—Coal miners throughout the western United States, and in other parts of the country, are snapping up the *Militant* at portals to follow the latest developments in the fight for a union at the Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah, and other struggles. Special teams of socialist workers and young socialists traveled December 4–12 in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah to talk to coal miners and introduce them to the *Militant*. Similar teams are also being fielded in the eastern coalfields around Birmingham, Alabama, and southern Illinois.

“We need these mines unionized,” said one miner picking up the paper at the BHP Billiton underground mine near Farmington, New Mexico, as he bought a copy of the *Militant*. He explained his local had helped the Co-Op miners and was glad to get the latest information about the fight. He thanked the *Militant* sales people for being at the mine with the paper.

A Navajo surface miner also working at that mine circled around after passing the team holding up papers by the side of the road. He was already a subscriber to the paper, but wanted to talk to the team members. He said he had been reading the paper, and following the news about the Co-Op fight as well as other articles. “We have issues with the management in this mine, too,” he added. He described fights the union has been waging over safety. He gave socialists the names of two other miners who he thought would want to get the paper and urged them to “put a sign on your car so the miners can see what this is all about.”

The BHP underground mine is one of several operations in the western United States that have high concentrations of H₂S gas. Very little is known about the long-term health effects of working in concentrations of the gas, and miners at BHP through their union, the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 953, wage a constant fight not only for proper evacuation from areas with high H₂S levels, but for the company and the Mine Safety and Health Administration to evaluate the long-term impact of very low levels of the gas. “We don’t want to end up like the uranium miners, 20 years down

the road,” explained one miner.

At the BHP surface mine outside Farmington, *Militant* sales people also got a good response. A sign prominently taped to the back of our car read, “Miners fight for Safety, Read the *Militant*.” Most miners passing by stopped their cars and talked to the socialist workers and 31 bought the paper. Two miners who already subscribe to the *Militant* stopped to say they are getting it in the mail and like the paper very much.

Commenting on the coverage of the mine explosion in China, one miner said, “What’s happening there is a tragedy, we need to go over there and work with them to make this stop, we can help.”

All-in-all two teams at the BHP Farmington mine portals and at the McKinley mine outside Window Rock, Arizona, sold 85 papers to mostly Navajo miners.

Driving through the Navajo nation, it was striking to see the number of homes that didn’t have electricity, the sheer number of unpaved roads, and the not uncommon sight of outhouses.

A team of socialist workers is also concentrating its efforts in Carbon and Emery counties in Utah, the heart of underground mining in the western United States. Here there is keen interest in the fight of the Co-Op miners, and many working people rely on the *Militant* to keep up to date with developments in the union-organizing struggle.

At the Deer Creek mine, which is organized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), just a couple miles down the road from the Co-Op mine, socialists sold two copies of the *Militant* at a small shift change. One of the miners expressing his solidarity with the efforts of the socialist workers to get out the word on the Co-Op fight gave \$5 for a paper.

At the GenWal mine, a nonunion operation also only a few miles from Co-Op, 13 miners bought copies of the *Militant* and one bought a copy of *Perspectiva Mundial*. Some of the miners stopped to say they were already subscribers and were glad to see the paper being sold there. One coal haul truck driver bought a paper and stopped again on his return run. “I liked what I read in the paper,” he said. “I only make \$26 a



Militant/Dean Peoples

Selling *Militant* December 11 outside GenWal mine near Huntington, Utah. Owned by Andalex Resources, this is a nonunion mine a few miles from the Co-Op mine, where miners are carrying out a UMWA-organizing drive.

run driving this truck. It is not even enough to feed my family. So we have to work incredible hours.” He said he was leaving his truck-driving job the next week to work at an underground mine.

Nine miners bought the *Militant* at the Westridge mine in East Carbon, another nonunion operation. A prominent sign reading, “Support the Co-Op Miners, U.S. Out of Iraq: Read the *Militant*” caught miners attention. “I’ve been following what is going on at Co-Op,” said one miner. “I’ll check this paper out.”

A sign of a nervous mine management about workers interest in the union was the company safety director coming out to talk to the sales team. “They’re saying up at the mine office there’s a picket line down here, so I came to check it out,” he said.

In door-to-door sales in the Price area, seven subscriptions to the *Militant* were sold and 21 single copies. Two widows of miners who bought the paper also gave \$5 each to the *Militant* salespeople as donations to be given to the Co-Op miners’ families.

In the eastern United States the *Militant* is also getting a good response at mine portals. “We just had the best portal sale we’ve had in years at the Unknown mine,” reported Susan LaMont from Birmingham. “Twelve

miners bought the *Militant*, and two bought *Perspectiva Mundial*.

“Many of the miners who stopped and bought the paper said they were aware of the fight at the Co-Op mine and several proudly told us that their local had contributed funds and extended solidarity to the Utah miners.”

She added, “One important aspect of the sale was that we finally broke through with several of the Mexican workers who have been working in the mine for the past six to eight months. They are employed by a subcontractor, not allowed to use the bathhouse, and generally kept isolated by the company. We know from several miners there has been some running discussion in the local about how to approach these miners. While it is an attack on union organization at the mine to have nonunion subcontractors employed to shovel belt, these are fellow miners who belong in the union.

“We have been trying to find ways to talk to these workers in the mine, and not having much luck. So the portal sale was great—three or four carloads of these new miners stopped. They were surprised to meet people who spoke Spanish and had political literature at the portal. One worker bought a current *PM*, and we gave last month’s *PM* to another worker who was very interested but had no money.

“One car had a license plate from Texas, another from North Carolina, so these are workers who have already been around the country a bit. Next time we will have a sign in Spanish, too.”

Another team of socialist workers from Des Moines, Iowa, Chicago, and Detroit sold the *Militant* to miners at coalfields in southern Illinois. One miner who bought a subscription to the paper there encouraged socialists with the same message heard at many portals recently: “Keep up the good work.”

SWP mayoral candidate on L.A. ballot

BY FRANK FORRESTAL

LOS ANGELES—The city clerk’s office certified December 8 that Wendy Lyons, the Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Los Angeles, met the requirements to appear on the ballot. Lyons is a kill floor worker at the Farmer John meatpacking company and a member of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 770.

After submitting 915 signatures on December 2 to the city authorities, Lyons was informed that the socialist campaign was 41 short of the 500 signatures required to get on the ballot.

In response, supporters of the SWP campaign talked to friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members to get the needed signatures within 48 hours.

Many workers at the Farmer John meatpacking plant where Lyons works were happy to hear the news. Some made victory signs when they heard Lyons was on the ballot. “It’s good one of us is running,” said one co-worker.

The Socialist Workers campaign is the only working-class alternative to the capitalist candidates running in this race. Ten other candidates will appear on the ballot. Democratic mayor James Hahn, the incumbent, is running for reelection. The vote will take place March 8, 2005.

The SWP campaign calls for mobilizing union power to fight the employers’ attacks on wages, benefits, and working conditions, and for workers to organize unions to defend themselves. Lyons is also campaigning for building a labor party, based on the unions, that defends the interests of workers and farmers. Lyons is campaigning against Washington’s war in Iraq, calling for an immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops from there, and is a defender of the Cuban Revolution.

“This week,” Lyons said in a Decem-

ber 10 interview, “I will be campaigning in support of the Teamsters drivers who are fighting for their first contract at 99 Cents Only Stores and who are preparing a strike.” The 65 drivers voted to join the union earlier this year. The drivers are paid minimum wage with no benefits.

Campaigners plan to go wherever there is working-class resistance—from picket

lines, to fights against police brutality, to social protests in opposition to cuts in healthcare. The socialists are campaigning at plant gates and in working-class communities. A key part of the campaign is speaking to students on campuses.

For further information contact laswp@sbcglobal.net or call (323) 233-9372.

Over the top, more to go on Militant Fighting Fund!

BY SAM MANUEL

As this issue goes to press, the *Militant* has received \$36,177 for the Militant Fighting Fund, surpassing the \$30,000 goal before the December 15 deadline. A third of that amount was collected in the last week of the six-week fund drive.

Pledges also increased substantially last week. They now stand at \$42,537. Every cent is needed. Partisans of the socialist newsweekly should make every effort to collect all outstanding pledges. Because this issue goes to press the day the fund ends, it is not possible to receive all funds on time and report them here. All donations received as of next Wednesday, December 22, will be counted in the final tally.

The fund was launched October 31 to help the socialist newsweekly defend itself against a harassment lawsuit filed against it by the Kingstons, the owners of the Co-Op mine in Utah (see front-page article on this struggle). The *Militant*, its editor, web administrator, and 20 of its reporters who have covered the Co-Op miners’ fight to unionize are among the nearly 100 defendants cited in the suit on allegations of “unlawful labor practices” and “defamation” against the company. Other defendants include the United Mine Workers of America, 17 current and former Co-Op miners, and the two main dailies in Utah—the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret Morning News*.

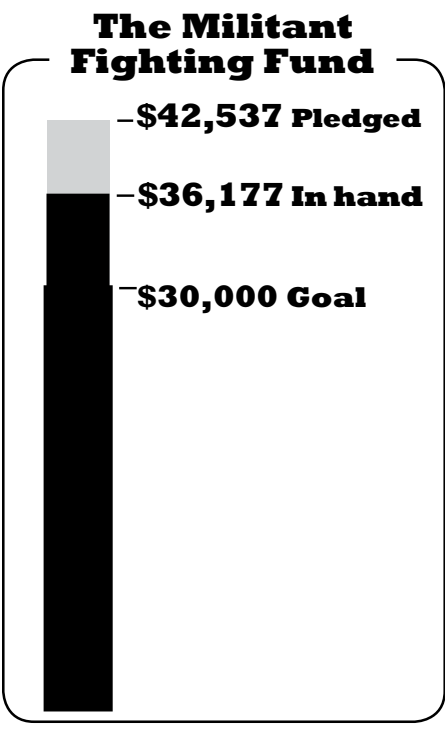
Contributions and pledges to the fund from participants in the December 10 Militant Labor Forum in New York City brought area pledges to just over \$10,000. That’s almost a third of what has been collected so far and \$1,000 over the local goal of \$9,000. The forum featured *Militant* staff writer Doug Nelson, who spoke about the place of the Co-Op miners’ unionization effort in the struggle to organize all of the western coalfields and broader efforts to mobilize union power to defend workers against the bosses’ antilabor offensive.

Militant editor Argiris Malapanis chaired the program and gave the fund pitch. Many of those present paid off their pledges or added to contributions they had already made, and a number pledged or donated for the first time another \$900.

Organizers of the Militant Labor Forum in Tampa followed up a mailing publicizing their fund-raiser with phone calls. They were able to double initial pledges of \$500 and have collected nearly \$1,100. Partisans of the *Militant* in Los Angeles raised their goal to \$3,500 and quickly exceeded that. They have already sent in more than \$3,800. And in New Zealand supporters of the *Militant* have raised \$1,050.

The fund will cover initial legal fees and costs for organizing a public defense campaign. Please send reports on the final fund-raising efforts by Monday, December 20,

so they can be used in the wrap-up column next week. Checks or money orders should be made out to the *Militant*, earmarked “Militant Fighting Fund,” and sent to: The Militant, 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, N.Y. 10018.



Company greed killed coal miners in Utah

20 years since Wilberg mine disaster; how Emery Mining Corp. tried to hide facts

The two articles below are reproduced from the Jan. 11, 1985, *Militant* on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Wilberg mine disaster that took place near Orangeville, Utah. The authors of the articles were both coal miners who participated in the union rescue and relief efforts. Cecelia Moriarity worked at the Wilberg mine where the fatal fire occurred. She was a member of United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Local 2176 and of the Lady Coal Miners of Utah. Moriarity ran for governor of Utah in the 1984 elections on the Socialist Workers Party ticket. Joe Geiser, a member of UMWA Local 1769, worked at the Deer Creek mine, which was located directly above the Wilberg mine. Both mines were owned by the Utah Power & Light Co. and were managed by the Emery Mining Corp.

BY JOE GEISER
AND CECELIA MORIARITY

PRICE, Utah—Nineteen members of UMWA Local 2176, and eight company executives and foremen, were killed by a fire that started Dec. 19, 1984, at the Wilberg mine outside Orangeville, Utah. The mine is located in the main coal-producing region in the southeastern part of the state.

The bodies of the 26 men and one woman remain inside the mine despite attempts to rescue them. On December 23 rescue teams were evacuated from the mine on the order of federal mine inspectors as explosive gases reached a dangerous level. On December 29 the mine portals were sealed in an effort to bring under control the fire that has raged since December 19.

World production record

The dead miners were all working in a section of the mine where a longwall, the most modern and mechanized machine for producing coal, was in use. The company was attempting to achieve a 24-hour world production record at the time of the fire.

Emery spokesman Robert Henrie refused to confirm that the company was pushing for a world record, but said that even if this were true, “It is totally unwarranted to suggest that an attempt for a record led to this tragedy.”

UMWA members, widows, and other community residents here are in general agreement with UMWA International Pres. Richard Trumka, who said, “When a coal operator becomes so concerned with setting short-term coal-production records, safety is made an afterthought and miners are needlessly killed.”

Few miners or other community residents here believe the company’s story that the fire was an unpredictable “accident.” They blame Emery Mining Corp. for recklessly endangering lives and disregarding safety in its drive to boost coal production and profits.

The union victims of this drive were the following: Bert Bennett, age 37; Ricci Camberlango, 26; Curtis Carter, 29; Robert Christensen, 32; Gordon Conover, 24; Randy Curry, 31; Owen Curtis, 31; Roger Ellis, 28; Brian Howard, 23; Gary Jennings, 33; Lee Johansen, 35; Joel Nevitt, 33; Kelly Riddle, 28; Lynn Robinson, 28; Ray Snow, 27; John Waldoch, 22; Lester Walls, Jr., 23; Nanette Wheeler, 33, the one woman killed; and John Wilsey, 31. The men leave more than 40 children, as well as widows, surviving them.

Emery Mining has tried to cover up its responsibility for the disaster, claiming the fire probably started as a result of a mechanical failure on the conveyor-belt system that brings coal out of the mine.

However, at a press conference December 28 at UMWA Local 2176 headquarters in Orangeville, eyewitness testimony was

presented by two union members who discovered the fire. Their story contradicts the company version.

What union members saw

Speaking at the press conference were UMWA members Alex Tidwell and Clinton Price. They are beltmen, whose job is to maintain the conveyor belt and keep the area clean of coal dust accumulation that could lead to a fire.

According to Tidwell and Price, the fire broke out near an electrical cable in the fresh-air tunnel leading to the longwall section, not on the conveyor belt.

In the Wilberg mine, the power system is equipped with safety circuits that should shut off power if cables are overloaded, damaged, or catch fire. But once the fire started, and the cable exploded, the power stayed on, the two unionists reported. They said the company “may have jumped the cable, a common practice.”

Wilberg miners are familiar with this practice, since the company regularly overloads the electrical system to increase production. Often a miner is assigned to repeatedly turn on the machinery every time the safety circuits shut it down because of overload.

The two men said the phone nearest the fire was not working so they were unable to immediately call for help. As the fire spread to the conveyor belt motor, an automatic foam system that should have been activated to put out the fire failed to work. “It just bubbled,” they said.

One of the miners finally found a working phone to call in an alarm. They also attempted to put out the fire but the flames quickly spread throughout the area, forcing them to leave.

Gov’t inspectors’ role

Just a week before the fire, the federal government’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) had inspected the Wilberg mine. Faulty equipment and other safety violations are supposed to be detected during such inspections.

Earlier last fall, MSHA inspectors had found caved-in coal and rock blocking an escape route. Instead of ordering Emery to clean up the cave-in, MSHA issued the company a variance, which is a permit to keep operating despite a safety violation. The union cannot appeal a variance.

Because the cave-in was never removed, there were only two — instead of the normal three — exits available to miners in the area. The fire broke out on one escape route and quickly burned through to a second exit, blocking both. The third escapeway was blocked by the cave-in. The miners on the longwall were thus trapped.

UMWA members had been discussing the cave-in prior to the fire. One person said the area was a potential “tomb” if anything ever happened requiring a quick escape.

Needless deaths

At a press conference December 24, the

UMWA District 22 president, Michael Dalpiaz, called the deaths of the 27 trapped in the mine “needless.” UMWA International Safety Director Joe Main, who also spoke, said, “these things don’t just happen. Usually when fires or explosions occur, safety rules have not been complied with or they have been altered.” He mentioned in particular the inadequate number of escape routes at Wilberg.

Such safety violations are only part of the assault on miners’ health and safety that has been carried out by the company in recent years. The Wilberg mine has had one of the highest accident rates in the country. Safety jobs have been eliminated through layoffs, and a speedup “bonus” plan has been introduced that further endangers the workers.

Emery’s lack of concern for miners’ health and safety was demonstrated last fall, when it refused to sign the national coal contract ratified by UMWA members. The company insisted on ending its payments into the 1950 UMWA Health and Retirement Fund. Miners at Emery’s Wilberg, Deer Creek, and Des-Bee-Dove mines went on strike for a month, finally forcing the company to accept a contract similar to the national agreement other companies had signed.

Company cover-up on safety

After the fire broke out at Wilberg December 19, the company tried to give the impression that emergency procedures at the mine were in good working order. It released statements implying that the trapped miners would be able to save themselves if they made use of safety measures provided by the company.

For example, Emery held out the hope that the miners could escape from the fire to a “logical safe retreat area” 1,500 feet from where they were working. Emery spokesman Henrie said that there were “emergency supplies, including oxygen tanks, throughout the mine and each miner can carry a self-rescue unit.”

But the “logical safe retreat area” he referred to is simply a small, empty space left



Sun Advocate/Larry Beckner
Fire in Wilberg mine outside Orangeville, Utah, killed 27 people. Company tried to cover up its responsibility for the disaster.

from digging tunnels. It was never designed for safety purposes.

The “oxygen tanks” in the mine are not for miners to use in breathing — they are used to run acetylene torches to cut metal.

The oxygen-supplying self-rescue units Henrie referred to are not generally carried by miners; they are too bulky and heavy. Instead these are stored at various points in the mine, as much as 1,000 feet away from work areas.

When rescue teams discovered the bodies of 25 of the victims, none were in the “logical safe retreat area.” A number of union members were found dead at the coal face where they had been working, indicating they never had a chance to try to escape. Another victim was found in the kitchen near the work area. Most of the bosses were found near some diesel trucks used to transport workers.

Many Wilberg miners report they have not participated in a fire drill for years, despite the fact that these are required periodically by law to make sure all workers know how to use the escape routes. Many say they have had no special fire-fighting or evacuation training beyond how to put on a self-rescue unit. It had become common practice at Wilberg for “safety meetings” to be no more than company personnel asking

Continued on next page

Wilberg mine was notorious for safety violations

BY JOE GEISER
AND CECELIA MORIARITY

PRICE, Utah—At a United Mine Workers of America press conference in Orangeville December 28 [1984], it was reported that in the last two years the Wilberg mine had received 264 separate citations for violations on safety. Many of these are directly related to preventing fires.

The Emery Mining Corp., which manages the Wilberg mine, received 87 citations for violating fire regulations and 29 for violating rock-dust regulations. (Rock dust is crushed limestone that must be spread throughout the mine to reduce the danger of coal dust igniting.)

In 1983 the company got 12 citations for coal-dust accumulation, three of which were termed “serious and substantial,” meaning they posed an immediate danger of injury or death. Emery was also cited for 24 violations on safety equipment.

In 1984 the company received 13 citations for coal-dust accumulation and 30 for faulty safety equipment. From Sept. 30 to Dec. 20, 1984, the company had been cited for “serious and substantial” violations four times.

The accident rate at Wilberg was 37.21 per 200,000 miner-hours of work in 1982. The national average that year was 12.21. In 1983, the Wilberg accident rate was 17.01, while the national average was 10.44. In 1984, the Wilberg rate was 11.48, and the national rate was 10.06.

The government’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) has said that the accident rate at Wilberg improved in the last two years, going by the officially reported rate. But since 1982 the mine has introduced a bonus plan that covers up what the real accident rate is.

The way the bonus plan works is this: based on how much coal is produced in the mine as a whole, every miner and boss gets

a bonus. However, the size of the bonus is reduced for every reported loss of work time due to injury. Thus the pressure is on to not report injuries. The true accident rate in the Wilberg mine in the last two years is unknown.

What is known is that through layoffs and job combinations, important tasks related to safety have taken a back seat to production and profit.

For example, one of the jobs the company has eliminated is the “hawkshack” job. This was a fulltime job for one miner on each shift, who was responsible for monitoring a fire-detection board and a minewide phone communications system. The phone dispatch has been moved to the warehouse and become an added job for the warehouseman, who is also responsible for other tasks. The fire monitoring system has been moved to the bathhouse and lamphouse, where miners with other jobs are also expected to watch for fires.

**Twenty Years Since
Wilberg Mine Disaster**
Sunday, December 19, 4 p.m.
Emery High School
975 N. Center Street, Castle Dale, Utah
Speakers include: Cecil Roberts, UMWA president; Jim Matheson, Congressman; and others
Sponsored by UMWA District 22
For more information call (435) 637-2037

33 miners, rescuers die in blast at China mine

BY DOUG NELSON

Thirty-three workers died December 9 in an explosion at the Daxian Sankeng mine in China's northern Shanxi province, outside the city of Yangyuan. The blast occurred less than two weeks after China's worst mining disaster in 44 years, when a similar explosion at the Chenjiashan mine in neighboring Shaanxi province killed 166 coal miners.

Seventy-one miners were working underground when the blast at the Daxian mine occurred. Of the 33 workers killed, 28 died from the initial explosion and five others perished attempting to rescue survivors trapped inside. Of the 43 survivors, 24 were hospitalized, with 18 of them suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning, doctors at the Yu county hospital told Xinhua news agency.

Meanwhile, on December 12 a coal mine flood in Guizhou province occurred while 80 miners were working underground. So far, 44 have been rescued. Workers continue to search for the remaining 36.

Throughout China, 5,286 deaths of miners have been reported in the first 11 months this year in explosions, floods, and other disasters. Methane gas explosions are a major cause of disasters, with more than 2,100 miners killed in 596 such blasts in 2003, according to statistics from China's State Administration of Work Safety.

"It's a problem of mine management and a lack of safety awareness," An Yuanjie, propaganda director for the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety, told the French Press Agency (AFP). "Over production exceeding mine capacity, especially in the small mines where there is already a lack of safety facilities, as well as inadequate investment in safety infrastructure, these are all the reasons that are causing these coal mine disasters," she said.

Joseph Main, the health and safety director for the United Mine Workers of America visited China in June. "The mines that are controlled by the state... through the national government structure—those mines are more capitalized, having better

equipment, better conditions, than many of the township mines, private small mines. And, many of those... lack the basic protections that are needed for mining, to make sure than miners are not killed," he said.

According to AFP, the Chinese government has said it has closed down 60,000 small mines in the last decade because they were considered unsafe and inefficient. But because of the soaring demand for coal, many of these mines are now reopening.

China's rapidly growing energy consumption—70 percent of which is coal-generated—has resulted in a surge in the demand for coal. "Power demand in China in 2002 was just above 10 gigawatts and at the end of 2004 is expected to climb to 40," said Howard Schwab, an analyst at Driehaus Capital Management, according to a November 28 article in *CBS Market Watch*. Production methods and equipment are relatively backward in China's mines. A coal miner in China produces on average 320 tons a year—just 2 percent of the average production per coal miner in the United States and 8 percent of the same figure in South Africa. This usually means many more miners are employed in a given area when a disaster occurs.

In addition to mine disasters, Xinhua reports 5,000 people die in China each



Relatives visit injured miner December 10 at local hospital in Yangyuan City, Shanxi province, northern China, after methane gas explosion the day before at Daxian Sankeng mine nearby killed 28 coal miners and 5 rescue workers.

year from pneumoconiosis, a pulmonary disease caused by mine dust inhalation—commonly known as "black lung."

According to Wang Xianzheng, an official with the State Administration of Work Safety, about 600,000 miners currently suffer from pneumoconiosis. This figure is reportedly increasing by 70,000 miners each year.

Despite the severity of the problem today, injuries and deaths in the mines were even higher in the past. Officials report mine safety has improved recently as a result of increased inspections and stricter enforcement of safety regulations. In the first 11 months of this year, reported deaths from mine accidents dropped by 8 percent compared to the same period in 2003.

Co-Op miners fight mass firings in Utah

Continued from front page

defendants in the lawsuit reads like a who's who of those supporting the Co-Op miners fight for justice, and includes media outlets that have given some coverage to the miners' side of the story. In an effort to divide backers of the miners' struggle, the plaintiffs have dropped some defendants named in the original suit in a recently submitted amended complaint. Those who no longer appear on the list of defendants include: the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City and its bishop, George Niederauer; the two local newspapers in this coal mining region: the

Price *Sun Advocate* and the *Emery County Progress*; local Salt Lake City radio stations; the National Organization for Women; and individually named activists, particularly from the Salt Lake City area.

The UMW and its officers, the individual Co-Op miners, and the *Militant*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, and *Deseret Morning News* remain prominent targets of the suit. Most labor groups supporting the Co-Op miners also remain as defendants.

Firings of potential union supporters

On Thursday, December 9, Co-Op boss-

es took coal miners out of the mine an hour before the end of their shift. The workers were asked to report to the mine managers' office to discuss their work documents. As they individually walked into the office, workers were confronted by bosses with running tape recorders, said Juan Salazar, an underground miner. "We were told the deadline for providing new documentation was up, and since we had not complied with the company demand we were suspended for 'three days with intent to fire,' and were all sent home," Salazar said.

December 9 was the deadline set by the mine bosses for Co-Op miners to provide new "documentation" showing their eligibility to work in this country. Many of the miners have worked at Co-Op for several years, and in some cases for a decade or two. Miners denounced this move by the company to demand immigration documentation one week before the union election as a blatant attempt to intimidate the miners in hopes they won't vote for the UMW. The workers also said the move is a violation of an agreement brokered by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) last summer, prohibiting the company from using immigration threats to retaliate against miners who are working to establish UMW representation.

"C.W. Mining has allowed many of these so-called undocumented workers to labor in the Co-Op mine for years without questioning the status of their citizenship. It was only after these miners finally decided to fight to improve their livelihoods through legitimate union representation that the employer started playing hard ball, including threats, intimidation and now firings," said UMW president Cecil Roberts. "This is blatant employer retaliation against these miners, and the UMW stands ready to pursue unfair labor practice charges to ensure these workers receive a fair shake—and that justice prevails."

The day after the firings, 20 miners, including four who have never attended union-organized activities before, along with two UMW retirees and UMW organizers working with the Co-Op miners, met to map out a plan to make house visits to all 39 eligible voters approved by the NLRB. According to a November 18 NLRB ruling, these miners will be able to vote in the union representation election even if fired by the company before the vote.

Gathered around a table at the union headquarters here, the miners said they listed on a board the names of every miner eligible to vote, and discussed one-by-one where each stood in regard to their support for the UMW. Among those listed as

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Company greed killed Wilberg coal miners

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miners if they knew how to evacuate the mine in case of fire. The miners would then be asked to sign a statement that they had received escape training.

Rescue efforts by miners

In spite of all the obstacles created by the company, miners did everything they could to try to save their trapped co-workers, beginning the day the fire started. UMW members on the shift when the fire broke out, as well as those who arrived soon after for the midnight shift, volunteered to carry out whatever tasks were necessary to aid the specially trained rescue teams that were brought in. Some miners worked on fire-fighting and rescue units while others helped load materials or operate rock dusters to reduce coal dust. Many miners worked long stretches, sleeping at the mine or returning after short breaks.

UMW members worked with urgency in the hopes of saving the lives of those trapped underground, risking their own lives in the process. One miner who manned a fire hose described the underground blaze as having a roar "like a blast furnace." He worked on a team building walls, called stoppings, to try to cut off the air that fed the fire. The fire spread around the stoppings almost as soon as they had been built, he said.

Miners' morale remained high, until everyone learned that the rescue teams had located 25 bodies and that no hope remained for the other two.

At the same time, many miners were critical of the slow, disorganized manner in which the company carried out the rescue operation. Some miners suspect Emery may have wanted the fire to keep burning, in order to destroy evidence.

Community solidarity

People in the coal mining communities of

Carbon and Emery rallied to meet the needs of the fire-fighting and rescue teams. Local community organizations were flooded with offers of help. Calls also came from anxious friends and relatives from around the country trying to find out if loved ones were trapped in the fire and if they could do anything to help.

The British National Union of Mineworkers, which has been on strike for 10 months, called from London to express concern for the miners, their friends, and families. The Australian miners union also called.

While solidarity like this was pouring in from workers around the world, Emery Mining showed nothing but callous disregard for the victims and their families. The company's press conferences continually doled out deceptive, self-serving statements designed to make the company look good and raise false expectations. Before the mine had been sealed, the company wouldn't even tell widows whether it would pay for their husbands' funerals. Emery made a big show of paying for plane tickets for relatives flying into Utah, but refused to do anything to aid the families once they were here.

Union members organize relief efforts

It was the UMW and its supporters that took over the relief efforts for the families. UMW Local 2176 set up an information center in Orangeville with the help of the UMW district and volunteers. The Lady Coal Miners of Utah joined the efforts. This is a women miners' support team and the local chapter of the national Coal Employment Project, which helps women get and keep mining jobs.

Once the 25 bodies had been found, the UMW and Lady Coal Miners worked with the union families to help arrange the details of getting the miners' paychecks, removing their personal belongings from the mine,

making appointments for social security benefits, and finally, contacting the families to inform them that the mine had been sealed. The Lady Coal Miners helped staff the UMW district office, taking phone calls from widows and other relatives and getting out needed information.

Unionists arranged transportation from the airports in Grand Junction and Salt Lake City for relatives flying in. A local car dealer loaned new cars to the union to make the trips. Volunteers drove the families while they were in town and then back to the airport.

Volunteers also organized the preparation and delivery of food to the rescue and fire-fighting teams at the mine. The food was cooked by community residents or donated by local restaurants, fast food outlets, and convenience stores.

Several Wilberg miners who are women worked long hours at the mine making coffee and preparing lunches for the rescue teams underground. The company would not allow the women miners to participate in the underground teams.

'Natural disaster'?

On December 26, a memorial service for the 27 people killed in the fire was held in Castle Dale, Utah, sponsored by the Mormon church. It was attended by almost 2,000 people, including miners and bosses. Miners were urged by those on the platform to put the Wilberg disaster behind them. One of the featured speakers was Gordon Hinckley, a high official of the Mormon church who also sits on the board of Emery's parent company, Utah Power & Light. Hinckley called the mine fire an accident, comparing it to hurricanes, volcano eruptions, and earthquakes.

After the service was over, one miner said, "This was no accident. This was manmade."

Co-Op miners’ struggle for union

Continued from Page 7
“solid” supporters included miners who had crossed the line during the nearly 10-month-long strike at the Co-Op mine. The strike started in September 2003, after C.W. Mining locked out the 75 workers for demanding safe working conditions and protesting company victimization of UMWA supporters. Miners returned to work in July, after the NLRB ruled the workers had been fired illegally and ordered the company to make an unconditional offer to return to all the strikers.

Dividing into teams, supporters of the union said they visited other Co-Op miners in the Huntington and Price areas to talk about the anti-union firings by the company, and the importance of voting for the UMWA.

While preparing for these visits, Rosa Salazar, wife of Co-Op miner Juan Salazar, said this was one more act of injustice by the company. “They are trying to get the miners to obediently come back to work and keep their heads down,” she said. “Demanding new ‘documents’ does strike fear in some. Not most, but some.”

Co-Op miners Alyson Kennedy and Berthila León, Rosa Salazar, and another local miner sat around the kitchen table over coffee discussing what to do next. León said there were rumors that one or two miners were thinking about returning to Mexico, and that they should go talk to them about staying. “Right now it is important that we stick together,” said León.

León added that a couple of people who had crossed the line during the strike had not been fired and were not asked to provide new documentation. “The company feels sure they have those votes in the election, so they did not fire those workers,” said León. The UMWA supporters have prioritized visiting these miners.

“We face another Christmas without work,” said Salazar. Last Christmas the miners were on strike, having been on the picket lines for three months. Many of the Co-Op miners remember with gratitude the solidarity from the labor movement and others a year ago so that families of Co-Op miners could celebrate the holiday in spite of the hardship of being on strike.

As the company was firing most of its workforce, workers report management was encouraging the miners to come back and meet with IAUWU representatives to see if “things can’t be worked out.” While some workers prepared to formally file grievances through the IAUWU, none of the workers took the bosses’ bait to work out an individual deal with the company.

The bosses used the supposed discovery of new information, gathered through several grievance procedure hearings held in October, following the firing of Co-Op miner and UMWA supporter Celso Panduro, to launch this latest round of attacks on the largely Mexican-born workforce at the mine. Initially terminated for “refusal to work,” Panduro went through several days of tape-recorded hearings about his firing in the hostile environment of meetings alone up against management, IAUWU officials, and a so-called impartial mediator.

In the end, the company and its “union” agreed Panduro should not have been fired for disobeying a work order. But then the bosses and the IAUWU also agreed—because, during these stacked and intimidating hearings, they claim Panduro “admitted” to not having proper work papers—it was “unfortunate” but necessary he remain fired.

In the November 22 letter given individually to most foreign-born Co-Op miners, C.W. Mining manager Charles Reynolds blames an unnamed Co-Op miner for starting the firing campaign of the company. “In October, a C.W. Mining Co. employee admitted that the documentation he provided to the company when he was hired was invalid and that he was illegal. This same worker alleged that other current and former C.W. Mining Co. employees also provided invalid

documentation and are or were working here illegally.”

This is the pretext the company is using to fire nearly all foreign-born workers at the mine, a solid majority of whom, miners say, plan to vote for the UMWA.

“The company is using what it thinks is its strongest suit to discourage support for the miners and to intimidate those of us who are foreign-born from fighting for a union,” said Bill Estrada, a leader of the effort to win UMWA representation. “No one is going to be fooled by what the company is doing. It is a blatant attempt at intimidation and division.”

Union election, public campaign

A request by the UMWA to move the site of the election to a more neutral location was denied by the NLRB. Miners say that holding the election on company property gives the company more ways to try to intimidate workers from voting for the union. To help minimize potential intimidation by the bosses on the day of the vote, the miners are organizing to gather together and drive over to the polls. The miners are also asking supporters of their fight to be on hand on the day of the voting, which has been set for December 17.

Two Co-Op miners, Ricardo Chávez and Alyson Kennedy, met with supporters of their struggle in Salt Lake City December 13. They reported that Cory Hilton from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and several others at the meeting said they are planning to come to Huntington the day of the union election to show their support for the miners.

The struggle at Co-Op has received widespread media coverage in the area and is being closely watched by coal miners and other working people in Utah and throughout the western United States. Ten coal mines now operate in Utah. All have been hiring new employees because of the recent boom in demand for coal worldwide. Only two of these mines—Consolidation Coal’s Emery Mine and the Deer Creek Mine owned by Energy West—are organized by the UMWA.

Co-Op miners are asking their supporters to continue calling, writing, and faxing the NLRB and the Kingston mine owners protesting the illegal company moves to thwart the union organizing effort.

Ed Mayne, a Utah state senator, faxed such a letter to Co-Op manager Charles Reynolds on December 8, the day before the mass firings. “It has been brought to my



Militant/Teri Moss

Sample ballot NLRB provided to UMWA District 22 to be used in December 17 union representation vote at Co-Op mine.

attention that just days before a scheduled union election, you have terminated and are threatening mass firings of Co-Op miners,” the letter says. “These actions by C.W. Mining are a direct violation of the July 1, 2004 National Labor Relations Board settlement that prohibits discharge, harassment, and threats against workers for union activities. I strongly urge you to stop these illegal activities and allow the elections to go forward.”

A day earlier, Arturo Chavarria-Balleza, Mexico’s consul in Salt Lake City, sent a similar letter to Reynolds. “We have received copies of the November 22 letters that you sent to employees of your company,” the Mexican consul said. “These letters were sent to Mexican surname employees threatening to fire these workers.... After reviewing these letters with our legal staff we feel that you are violating these workers rights.... Your company will be subject to legal actions should you proceed. The Consulate of Mexico will be monitoring this situation and plan to lend our assistance to these workers.”

Letters to the labor board should be sent to NLRB Region 27 Director B. Allan Benson at 600 17th Street, 7th floor—North Tower, Denver, CO 80202-5433; Tel: (303) 844-3551; Fax: (303) 844-6249.

Letters to C.W. Mining can be faxed to Charles Reynolds at (435) 687-5724.

Copies of such letters and other messages of support and financial donations should be sent to the Co-Op miners at: UMWA District 22 at 525 East, 100 South, Price, UT 84501. Tel: (435) 637-2037; Fax: (435) 637-9456.

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No child left behind—“Many American youths participating in federally-funded abstinence-only programs have been taught that



Harry Ring

abortions can lead to sterility and suicide, that half the gay male teenagers in the United States have tested positive for the AIDS virus and that touching a person’s genitals ‘can result in pregnancy,’ a Congressional staff analysis has found.”—News item.

Shades of Inspector Clouseau—Last we heard, French cops

were frantically hunting for a plastic bomb unwittingly stowed on a plane departing from Paris. The explosive (no detonator) was planted in a passenger bag to test police sniffer dogs. One dog sniffed the bomb. Police fetched a second dog to further the test. Meanwhile, they lost sight of the bag. The minister of the interior blasted the episode as “reprehensible and scandalous.” The minister of police responded that he appreciated “the deep uselessness of the [interior minister’s] remarks.”

With an organic woof—San Diego’s Petco Park and the St. Louis Busch Stadium are planning to peddle “organic” beef franks in the coming baseball season. The prez of the outfit, which has a lock on chomps at stadiums, said this will be the first time folks will be able to taste organic food at a ball-

park. And, he might have added, fans with organic leather wallets will need only to remove \$4 for a hot dog.

Taking, not repaying, is their thing—The United Kingdom’s banks have 14 million accounts with transactions via the internet. Now, swindlers in growing numbers are accessing the accounts and lining their pockets. Initially, banks compensated people for their losses, but now, with the amounts ballooning, the response of the banks is “tough situation.” Some cops have advised people to stop using the on-line service.

Upsets the bosses?—A monument was stolen from the United Auto Workers local, AFL-CIO, at General Motors in Flint, Michigan. The stolen monument commemorates the historic 1936–37 sit-down

strike at the GM plant. The strikers wrested a ground-breaking contract from the company. The victory had a major impact, spurring the unionization of the auto industry.

P.S.—For a vivid account of the Flint sit-in, check out the Pathfinder book *Labor’s Giant Step*, by Art Preis. It also includes the role of the fighting women’s auxiliary that rallied invaluable support for the strike.

Capitalism, wherever there’s a \$—The University of California, Los Angeles, sponsored a panel titled “Homeland Security, Intelligence and Investment.” Speakers included professors, anti-terror officials, and members of the Los Angeles Sheriff’s and Police department. The program didn’t say who would lead the workshop on investment. The several police

panelists might qualify.

Not to worry, but...—“The federal agency that ensures the private pensions of 44 million workers said that its problems worsened this year, falling deeper in the red as it picked up the pensions of more failing companies.”—News item.

Lethal and prospering—Taser doing brisk business—Taser stun guns are being used by cops nationwide and in Canada—plus by U.S. troops in Iraq. Meanwhile, Amnesty International reports that the high-voltage stun guns have killed at least 74 people in the past four years. The gun is also being marketed to the public at a retail price of \$999. The Taser company says the guns are not sold to felons or those whose names appear on terrorist watch lists.

Workers at Case tractor plants in Midwest locked out

BY PATTIE THOMPSON

RACINE, Wisconsin—About 650 United Auto Workers (UAW) members here and at three other plants were locked out by Case New Holland Global (CNH) November 22. A spirited, well-staffed informational picket line at the Racine tractor plant elicited honks of support every few minutes from the busy day-after-Thanksgiving shopping traffic passing in front of the plant.

The company locked out the unionists after they had called off a 19-day strike against company concession demands.

UAW members at CNH manufacturing plants in Racine and Burlington, Iowa, a parts distribution center in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a design center in Burr Ridge, Illinois, had rejected the company’s “final” offer and authorized a strike one week after their six-year contract expired May 2. They worked without a new contract until the November 3 walkout.

“The main issues are health-care costs for active and future retirees, caps on post retirement health care, and lower wages for new hires,” said UAW Local 180 president John Valko in Racine. The company plans to raise health-care insurance premiums, deductibles, co-pays, and total payments. The union calculated workers’ costs would go up by \$4,000-7,000 annually. With the company proposing wage increases of only 3 percent in four of the six years of the contract, this means a significant pay cut.

Payments by retirees for health care would also jump because they would be calculated at 15 percent of the cost of whatever the plan charges the company.

At the Racine plant, 50 to 100 workers are eligible to retire now and more than 200

would be eligible by 2008, workers report. Caps on retirees health care refers to a limit on the amount the company will pay for health care for each retiree each year. The company contract offer spells out a limit of \$7,000 for those eligible for Medicare. CNH and its predecessors had already unilaterally cut off health-care payments at this level for hundreds of retirees, an attack which the UAW is opposing in court.

The company wants new hires to receive lower wages and fewer benefits than current workers. Those hired since 1998 would be reclassified as “new hires” and their pension contributions would be frozen. Those hired after 2004 would not receive a pension, but instead a 401(k) plan, which would tie workers’ pensions to the ups and downs of the stock market. Those hired after 1998 would never reach the pay rates of employees hired earlier.

After the lockout, the company mailed workers the “final terms and conditions” that they are unilaterally imposing in the plant. The list included, “greater use of supplemental employees,” (temporary workers hired seasonally) to up to 15 percent of the workforce with no defined benefits.

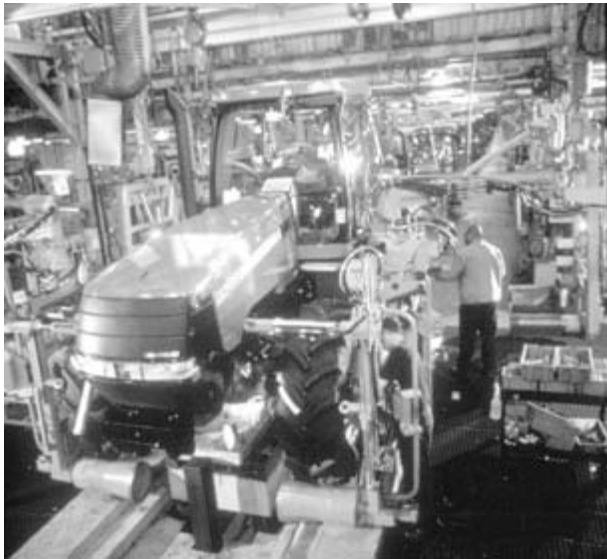
The company’s refusal to consider a union counterproposal on November 2 had sparked the walkout the next day. One week later, the company began transporting salaried employees and temporary replacement workers across the picket lines at the two manufacturing facilities in an attempt to start up production.

CNH then unilaterally declared talks were at an impasse on November 22, announced it would impose the same contract terms it had offered in May, and would hire

permanent replacement workers. In the face of this threat, the UAW called off the strike and instructed its members to report to work under the terms of the current contract. The company rejected the union’s offer, turning back both the second shift workers that night and the day shift the following day.

The UAW responded to the lockout by setting up informational picket lines and filing a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board. The union disputes the company claim that an impasse has been reached.

Support for the workers in the contract fight has come from individuals who stop by the picket to drop off money or donations of food. “Everyone is welcome to join the picket lines,” said local president John Valko. He pointed out that local unions in Wisconsin and Illinois have sent messages of support with donations and plans for food drives and adopt-a-family programs in solidarity with Local 180. He added that at this time last year, Local 180 supported meat packers on strike



Getty Images/Michael Abramson

Assembly line at Case tractor plant in Racine, Wisconsin, where workers are locked out.

against Tyson in Jefferson, Wisconsin. Strikers report that the picket lines are solid, and no local members have crossed the line.

CNH reports its 2004 third quarter sales for farm equipment is up 14 percent over last year, contributing significantly to the company’s overall revenue gains of 19 percent to \$2.97 billion.

— 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —



December 28, 1979

While Carter proclaims it a “principle” to give asylum to the mass-murderer ex-shah of Iran, Washington extends no such compassion to the thousands of Haitian refugees who arrive here every year seeking political asylum.

The Haitians are fleeing the bloody dictatorship of “President-for-life” Jean Claude Duvalier. Many are so desperate they take to the sea in small dangerously overcrowded boats.

The U.S. government, arguing that the Haitians are fleeing economic hardship “only,” tries to deport them.

The brutal treatment they face has been brought to light by testimony in a class-action lawsuit seeking to block the deportation of 4,000 Haitians. Hearings began here November 23.

The court heard testimony from a Haitian who had served five years in Duvalier’s secret police. He reported that standing orders from the dictator require the immediate arrest and imprisonment of any Haitian who is returned after unsuccessfully seeking political asylum.

A second witness who had worked in Haitian defense headquarters testified that he had seen an order for a group of returnees from the U.S. to be sent to Fort-Dimanche prison. The prisoners were later executed without a trial.

Dade County officials estimate that between 10,000 and 19,000 Haitian refugees live in the Miami area.



December 27, 1954

The decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations Dec. 10 to send Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld to Peking to negotiate for the release of 11 imprisoned American airmen and two civilians poses once again the question of recognizing the Mao government. Whether the Chinese charge that the prisoners were “spies” is true or false, the fact remains that the Mao regime, in trying and convicting them, acted as a sovereign government, and the UN in delegating Hammarskjöld to represent it at Peking recognized this reality in fact. The UN action constituted a diplomatic victory of first-rate importance for China.

Premier Chou En-Lai’s acceptance Dec. 17 of the proposal of the head of the United Nations to come to Peking thus opens a new stage in China’s formal standing as a world power, a stage clearly pointing toward its admission to the UN. For it would seem handier in negotiations—if only for practical reasons—to have a delegation from China at UN headquarters in New York rather than having to send a UN delegation to Peking.

The capitalist press, of course, is placing big emphasis on the problem of getting the airmen released. They insist on the fact that 11 of the men shot down over Chinese territory during the Korean conflict were in uniform and consequently couldn’t be “spies.” They would do better to explain why Truman sent U.S. forces to Korea without even consulting Congress.

Personal debts mushroom in U.S.

Continued from Page 2

to ignore,” said Kenneth Posner, a Morgan Stanley investment bank analyst, according to the December 13 *Business Week*.

The reason for this is that since 1995 home prices have risen much faster than inflation. This year, even with interest rates rising, the housing bubble has continued to inflate. Home prices rose 40 percent faster than the overall rate of inflation over the previous eight years. According to *Business Week*, outstanding home equity loans now stand at \$460 billion, having more than doubled in just three years. That’s more than four times the entire foreign debt of Argentina when it defaulted on \$100 billion in loans in December 2001.

At the same time, homeowners’ equity in their houses—that is, the portion of the current market value of a home that’s been paid off to the bank—was at an all-time low, having fallen to 55 percent of the market value of the home in mid-2004 from a high of 84 percent in 1945; the average over those six decades was 67 percent.

Myvesta’s Tehan warned that while home equity loans provide temporary relief “the equity will dry up and the debts will need to be paid off.”

Even a 10 percent drop in housing prices would wipe out well over a trillion dollars in assets corresponding to paper values of homes. There’s already a rise in bank foreclosures on families that can’t keep up with

the payments.

As of the end of 2003, household debt had risen to 83 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product from 70 percent in 1999. More than 13 percent of household income went toward paying interest and principal on those debts. Under the combined pressures of mortgage and other personal debt, 1.6 million individuals in the United States filed for bankruptcy in 2003, nearly twice the number a decade earlier.

After a spate of personal debt bankruptcy filings in the mid-to-late 1990s, banks issuing credit cards started a practice called universal default. If the bank found out you were late in paying your utility or phone bill you would be deemed a “credit risk” and your interest rate raised.

The credit card business is now the most lucrative sector of banking, according to a report done jointly by the *New York Times* and the Public Broadcasting Service. To offset competition from home equity lenders, credit card companies are raising interest rates and imposing wider ranging fees.

Fixed rates have been replaced by “variable rates” that can be changed at any time without prior notice to the card holder or any requirement to give a reason for the rate increase, *Business Week* reported. In the last eight years, the major credit card companies have increased the penalty for being even one hour late with a payment to an average of \$39, from the previous \$10 or less.

Defend a woman’s right to choose!

The Abortion Non-Discrimination Act (ANDAs), signed into law December 8 by President George Bush, will do exactly the opposite of what its name suggests. Like the so-called Partial Birth Abortion Ban passed in 2003 and the Unborn Victims of Violence Act passed earlier this year, it is misnamed on purpose to fool the majority that it is about equality. In fact, ANDA is a measure that further discriminates against women—especially working-class women, and particularly those living in the countryside—by placing further obstacles in their path when they seek to exercise their right to choose abortion.

The new law allows administrators of health institutions that receive federal funding to block doctors from providing abortion—or even informing women about the option!

States like California that have legislation in place mandating hospitals to provide abortion and information about the procedure would face losing federal funding, including the ability to accept Medicaid patients, for enforcing such laws.

In rural areas, where workers and farmers in a wide area of the country often depend on one or two health facilities, ANDA places more power in the hands of hospital administrators to determine whether women in entire regions have access to abortion. Already 87 percent of all counties in the United States have no health facilities or doctors that provide abortions. Nearly a quarter of all women who obtain abortion must travel more than 50 miles to get to the nearest provider.

A firm majority of the U.S. population, and an even larger majority among women, defend access to abortion and view it as a woman’s right to choose. In spite of all the obstacles measures like ANDA create, an estimated one in three women today have an abortion before the age of 45.

Given this reality, opponents of a woman’s right to choose know that they cannot carry out a frontal assault on *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 ruling that decriminalized abortion. Instead, using duplicitous rhetoric, bourgeois politicians—both Republicans and Democrats—are working to undermine this right by passing measures that whittle away at access to the procedure for the majority of women.

Some defenders of a woman’s right to choose have advanced the notion that such laws would not pass if the current Republican Party administration was not at the helm. But history belies that notion. The effort to erode access to abortion has continued unabated through Democratic and

Republican administrations and regardless of which party controls Congress or who sits on the Supreme Court.

The Hyde Amendment, the opening shot against abortion rights since *Roe v. Wade*, was signed into law in 1977 by Democratic president James Carter. It cut off access to funding from Medicaid for abortion, affecting millions of working-class women. Democrat William Clinton signed another measure in 1999 extending the Hyde Amendment to ban Medicare funding for abortions, cutting off 700,000 disabled women from access to abortion through the program.

At the start of the Clinton-Gore administration, 16 percent of U.S. counties had abortion providers. By the end of those eight years that figure was down to 14 percent. Today it is 13 percent. During the same period, the cost of paying for the procedure has continued to rise, averaging \$364 today. The overwhelming majority of abortions are paid for out-of-pocket.

This steady chipping away at access to abortion goes hand-in-hand with the economic grind bearing down on working people. Costs of health care are increasing for working people, while the number of uninsured continues to rise. Real wages have been on a downward curve for nearly three decades. Social programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children have been eliminated and the rulers are preparing new attacks on Social Security. Meanwhile, the employers are pressing production line speed-up and stretching out the workday, workweek, work year, and work life of the vast majority who toil for a living. All this is aimed at shoring up the bosses’ declining profit rates.

The one million people who took part in the April 25 March for Women’s Lives in Washington, D.C., sent a clear message to the rulers: The right to choose will not be taken away without a fight. It is a precondition for women in the struggle to overcome their second-class status. But as long as society is run by a tiny minority of already super-wealthy families, any gain working people have made in struggle will be eroded. Only by taking power out of the hands of the capitalist exploiters and opening the road to building a society based on human solidarity—a socialist society—will working people be able to make these gains long-lasting. Along this road, defense of a woman’s right to choose and opposition to any measure that undermines it is a vital necessity.

U.S. ‘Abortion Non-Discrimination Act’ further undermines right to choose

BY MAURICE WILLIAMS

With scant media attention, U.S. president George Bush signed into law December 8 the Hyde-Weldon Amendment, which would cut off federal funds to states that enforce certain provisions of their own abortion rights laws. The new law, misnamed the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act (ANDAs), was tacked onto a \$338 billion spending bill that Congress approved November 22.

The measure denies a range of federal funding to any federal agency and state or local government that penalizes health-care institutions—such as hospitals, clinics, and insurance companies—for violating state laws that require them to give women full information about abortion and other reproductive services. This means that any physician, hospital, or health insurer can refuse to perform or pay for abortions. They can also refuse to tell pregnant women that the option exists.

States like California that mandate hospitals with no-abortion policies to offer that service to women would risk losing millions of dollars from the federal Medicaid program if they continue enforcing such a policy. Under ANDAs, health-care providers participating in Medicaid programs would no longer be compelled to provide abortion referral services, nor a full range of medical services to women. Health-care administrators who oppose abor-

tion could impose policies that restrict doctors, nurses, and other personnel employed in their facilities from informing patients about reproductive services like abortion. In rural areas with few hospitals and health-plan choices the measure could virtually end access to abortion in wider parts of the territory.

“This amendment’s name makes it sound like it protects women who are seeking abortions from discrimination,” said Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Instead the measure “intrudes on private, personal, medical decision-making” and allows “any health care provider or institution... to refuse to provide a much-needed health-care service.”

ANDAs is the latest government measure aimed at chipping away at a woman’s right to choose abortion. Opponents of the right to choose, unable to reverse the decriminalization of abortion that was codified in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling, have championed other piecemeal measures such as the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, signed into law by Bush earlier this year, which imposes additional penalties for killing an “unborn baby” on anyone convicted of killing a pregnant woman. The Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act was approved in Congress last year with broad bipartisan support, outlawing a procedure used in late-term abortions.

U.S. warplanes bomb Baathist forces in Iraq

Continued from Page 4

that can be deployed by airplane.

At a December 9 meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the German government joined those of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, and Spain in refusing to send officers into Iraq to train Iraqi cops and troops. “We will send no German soldiers to Iraq,” said Germany’s foreign minister Joschka Fischer. Since March, however, officers from the German federal investigation office have been training Iraqis in forensics and bomb investigation techniques at a police academy in the United Arab Emirates.

The December 11 *International Herald Tribune* reported that Washington has declined a similar year-long offer from Paris to train hundreds of Iraqi cops because Paris also insists that the training be done outside Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Australian government announced it will send a logistics team of 50 to Iraq, reported the December 14 issue of *The Age*. The paper said there are

400 Australian troops in Iraq and 500 more elsewhere in the Middle East.

Tokyo also decided to extend the presence of its 600 troops in Iraq for another year, according to the December 10 *Japan Today*. Prior to the mission in Iraq, Japanese troops had not been sent abroad since the end of World War II. The Japanese rulers are using the deployment in Iraq to strengthen their ability to use their military more effectively around the world.

As U.S. forces and their allies have continued to strike blows at Baathist opponents and their backers in Iraq, more political forces are getting on the bandwagon to participate in upcoming national elections scheduled for January 30. Two of Iraq’s largest Sunni-led political parties—including the Iraqi Islamic Party that led a campaign for six months to postpone the vote—have now registered to run candidates in the elections. This party quit the U.S.-backed interim government in protest over the assault on Fallujah and several of its leaders have been arrested since then on suspicion of supporting the Baathist-led attacks.

Why communists don’t call for a vote for British Labour Party

BY JONATHAN SILBERMAN

LONDON—“What happened to the character of the Labour Party?” asks Kristoffer Schultz in a letter to the editor published in last week’s issue. “What changes have occurred in the Labour Party” that underlie the position of the Communist League in the United Kingdom not calling for a vote for Labour in the next election in contrast to the general election of 1997?

The answer to the first question is that there has been no qualitative change in the Labour Party’s character for 90 years. That is true of all the social-democratic parties that mobilized support for the war efforts of “their own” bourgeoisies in World War I. Their record ever since has confirmed, and reconfirmed, their character as social imperialist parties. From that moment in August 1914 when the

REPLY TO A READER

social democracy betrayed the working class, the decisive task facing the workers’ vanguard has been to build communist parties in each country and a new revolutionary international.

The answer to the second question about what to do in a general election lies in the realm of tactics: how to advance the building of a communist party. And tactics change depending on the conditions of the day in the class struggle.

In the general election of 1997, the Communist League campaign centered on our own candidates who campaigned for a revolutionary working-class program and course of action, independent of the capitalist class. As an aid to advancing this program, the League joined with masses of workers who voted to dump the Conservative Party that had been running the government for 18 years—a period marked by the politics of the Reagan-Thatcher assaults on working people. We said to workers at the time, “You have great expectations that Labour will advance the interests of working people. We don’t agree. But let’s agree on the program we need, vote together as a class, and fight together for this program.”

As we said in this column in the November 30 *Militant*, millions of workers celebrated Labour’s electoral victory in 1997. “But hopes have been dashed. Today, workers engaged in resistance to the bosses attacks on wages and working conditions are not looking to Labour. Those voting Labour at the next general election will not be casting a ‘class vote.’”

A vote for Labour in 2005 will reflect quite a different dynamic than it did in the 1997 election. It will come in the context of eight years of the Labour government acting as the main instrument in the British ruling class’s march to war against working people at home and abroad. The coming general election will be more akin to what happened in Spain in March of this year. Then, two days after gigantic reactionary mobilizations against alleged “Basque assassins”—mobilizations of millions supported by the Socialist Party and Communist Party of Spain—the social democrats won the election. In no way could this possibly be described as “workers casting a class vote” against representatives of the boss class.

This gives a pointer to answering Kristoffer Schultz’s third question: is there any basic difference between Labour and what he calls “social democratic parties in Germany, Denmark or Sweden—parties also based on the unions”? The answer is no. All are social imperialist parties with years of experience in administering their respective imperialist states. While they continue to have organized relations with the trade unions and receive financial backing from the union bureaucracy, they less and less base themselves on or appeal to the mass of workers organized in the unions. Their composition and orientation is more and more in line with their bourgeois program and structure. You don’t find any Marxist currents developing in these parties today—as was the case with the British Labour Party in the past.

The biggest change since the 1990s, however, isn’t what’s happened to these parties per se. It’s the decline of Stalinism as a force within the workers movement, a consequence of the shattering of the Stalinist apparatuses in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was Stalinism that gave a second lease on life to the working-class credentials of these parties and their links to the unions, something that would have been buried decades ago if genuine revolutionary parties with substantial weight in the working class had developed. With the decline of Stalinism, the appearance of the Labour Party to vanguard workers has changed.

Today the Labour Party looks far more like the Democratic Party in the United States than the party of labor it pretended to be. That is why militant workers today seeking to organize unions and mobilize union power to defend the interests of workers and farmers don’t turn toward the Labour Party to generalize their struggles and get help in resisting the bosses’ offensive. Calling for a vote for these parties today would be an obstacle, not an aid, to winning vanguard workers to a communist program and course of action.

Telephone workers strike in Argentina

BY ROMINA GREEN

CLEVELAND—After a weeklong strike, 20,000 members of FOETRA, the telephone workers union in Argentina, ratified a new contract December 6, winning a 20 percent wage raise and a 500 peso (US\$160) bonus from Telefónica and Telecom, the two largest telephone companies in the country.

The strike was the largest labor action since the government of Peronist Néstor Kirchner took office 18 months ago.

On November 3, more than 5,000 telephone workers rallied in downtown Buenos Aires to push their demands, which included a 25 percent wage hike, better working conditions, and job security. Workers took over two buildings owned by Telefónica and Telecom November 30 and maintained the occupation until ratification of the union contract. Their action resulted in the disruption of some service. Long-distance calls to the Caribbean, for example, required operator assistance to go through.

“We feel exploited and manipulated,” Claudio Magdalena, 40, who has worked at Telefónica for 16 years, told Bloomberg News. “We have accidents and injuries from having to work on telephone poles

without proper equipment.” Magdalena said he struck mainly to get a decent raise in his monthly wage of 800 pesos (3 pesos=US\$1), which isn’t enough to make ends meet for him and his five children.

The strike was one of a number of labor actions for improved wages and working conditions as workers feel more confident to fight for their interests, as Argentina’s economy is in its first upturn since the financial collapse four years ago.

The country’s gross domestic product grew 8.7 percent in 2003 and is projected to grow 7 percent this year. In response to struggles by working people, the government recently decreed an across-the-board wage increase of 100 pesos per month for public and private workers, beginning in 2005.

Cristiano Ratazzi, president of Fiat Auto Argentina, expressed the opposition of many businessmen to this measure. “It is necessary to return to the normal system in how raises are negotiated between the workers and the company and not by decree,” he told the daily *Clarín*, arguing that the wage increase will force Fiat to raise car prices by 4 to 5 percent.

“The businessmen are never in agree-



Striking telephone workers rally in Buenos Aires December 1

ment with wage increases, and never accept the legitimacy of our claims,” responded Hugo Moyano, one of the three central leaders of the CGT labor federation.

Three hundred truck drivers struck December 4 in response to violations of their union contract by three companies that do street cleaning. “They are not paying the overtime rate and minimal safety measures are not being met,” said union leader Pablo Moyano. Workers have blocked streets and are demanding back pay.

On December 6, subway workers in Buenos Aires who are members of transporta-

tion workers union UTA went on strike to demand a 55 percent wage increase and the reinstatement of extra pay for night work, which was taken away 14 months ago. The company, Metrovías, has reportedly agreed to reinstate the night work bonus, but has not responded to the demand for a substantial pay raise. UTA has demanded that the wage increase come from the company’s profits and not from government subsidies. Roberto Pianelli, a member of UTA, told *Clarín* that the company currently receives 65 million pesos in subsidies while it pays 50 million pesos in wages.

Worldwide hunger increases amidst production boom

BY PAUL PEDERSON

Workers around the globe are producing more but earning less, while farmers are growing record amounts of food as the number of hungry people swells, United Nations agencies report in two recently published studies.

The annual UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) State of Food Insecurity 2004 report noted that despite steady increases in agricultural productivity the number of people going hungry worldwide has increased by 18 million since 2000 to a total today of 852 million.

“The world in aggregate is getting wealthier and producing more than enough food,” Hartwig de Haen, one of the authors of the FAO report, told the *New York Times*. “The problem is the access of people to jobs, to resources, to land and to money to buy food.”

Global stocks of grain have reached a record high, the UN agency noted, “a significant surplus is expected, for the first time since 1999/2000.” But under capitalism, grain production has no direct relationship to the amount of hunger in the world. In the language of finance capital “surplus” means the quantity of food above what can be sold at an acceptable profit.

In fact, massive dumping of U.S. and European agricultural goods on the world market has led to an increase in hunger. Washington and other imperialist governments give huge subsidies to agricultural monopolies that allow them to sell their produce at artificially low prices on the world market, wiping out farmers in semicolonial countries and enriching agribusiness in the imperialist centers. This is a contributing factor to the increase in long-term malnutrition. Those living in rural areas account for about 80 percent of the world’s 852 million chronically hungry. Half of these are subsistence farmers, according to the FAO report.

At the same time, imperialist bankers siphon off \$100 million dollars per day from the wealth produced by workers and farmers in the semicolonial world in the form of interest payments on foreign debt, Oxfam reported in a study released December 6.

Millions around the world are being drawn into the ranks of the working class. The worldwide proletariat has grown from around 2.4 billion to 2.8 billion in the past decade, according to a recent report from the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO). Over the same period, the number of workers living on less than \$2 a day has reached an all-time high of 1.4

billion worldwide, half of all wage workers. About 550 million of these toilers live on less than \$1 a day.

The ILO reports that over the same period there has been close to an 11 percent increase in labor productivity worldwide. In the decade between 1993 and 2003, labor productivity in the imperialist countries increased by nearly 15 percent.

In the United States and elsewhere, the drive to increase productivity has been fueled by increasing competition. The employers have turned to life- and limb-threatening increases in the speed of production; extension of the working day, week, month, and year; mechanization; and cutting wages, benefits, and social entitlements in order to shore up their declining profits.

In East Asia, with the economic boom in China as the main motor force, labor productivity has increased by 75 percent. In South Asia and Southeast Asia, the increase is 38 percent and 22 percent, respectively. The study shows a less than 2 percent increase in Latin America and the Middle East, while workers in sub-Saharan Africa have seen their labor productivity drop by a similar amount over the same period. Labor productivity in Eastern European countries has increased by one-fourth.

— MILITANT LABOR FORUMS —

COLORADO

Craig
Forty-five years of the Cuban Revolution: An example for working people.
Sat., Jan. 1; 7:30 p.m. *11 W. Victory Way #205. Tel: (970) 824-6380.*

NEW JERSEY

Newark
U.S. imperialist intervention in the Americas and the class struggle in Mexico. Speaker: Andrés Pérez, SWP, and Michael Ortega, Young Socialists, recently returned from Guadalajara book fair. Sat., Dec. 18. Dinner 7 p.m.; program, 8 p.m. *168 Bloomfield Ave. 2nd Floor. Donation: \$5 dinner/\$5 program. Tel: (973) 481-0077.*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Challenges facing the labor movement; support Utah miners’ fight for UMWA representation. Speaker: John Hawkins. Sat., Dec. 18, 7:30 p.m. *3717-B Georgia Ave. NW. Tel: (202) 722-1315.*

— LETTERS —

Militant Fighting Fund

Enclosed is my contribution to the Militant Fighting Fund. It’s always been hard for anyone to get me to part with my money. However, you’re getting a little bit now, for two reasons. First, I recognize the threat posed by the Kingstons’ harassment lawsuit. Second, I have found that the *Militant* is far and away the best labor paper and the best radical paper I’ve seen.

I’ve found myself disagreeing with the *Militant*’s line a few times, and more often than not I’ve ended up in agreement when all was said and done. It is clear that your paper can be persuasive because it is informed, on the one hand, by decades of communist theory; and on the other hand, by a clear, concrete awareness of the day to day class struggle.

Loren Meyer
Missoula, Montana

Misleading photo caption

As a member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 175 recently on strike against Quality Meat Packers, I want to draw to your attention a problem

with the caption identifying the photograph of the picket line that appeared in issue number 45. The article that accompanied the photo was headed “Toronto meat packers approve contract, end strike.” The caption on the photo correctly identifies the picket line scene on November 5. It includes another sentence, however, which reads: “They fought for higher wages, won small pay raise.”

This sentence, while not inaccurate, isolated from the details that are contained in the article, could be misread to suggest that the one-month strike wasn’t really worth it. This is far from the truth.

“It’s not worth it, go back to work” was the theme of the intense company campaign against the strike from day one. Company letters to the strikers stated that the bosses had no more money to offer than what was in the original offer, and that the strikers were risking their jobs since the company would lose customers. The implication was the company might have to close down. None of this was true. Three days after the return to work production is

already up to pre-strike levels.

The one-month strike was a deep-seated response to the low pay over the past six years since a 1999 wage and benefits rollback of 40 percent following a two-month strike, along with speed up of the line, increased injuries, and verbal abuse by foreman—all part of a sustained productivity drive by the bosses throughout the meat packing industry—that has generated resistance and union organizing drives from Lakeside Packers in Brooks, Alberta, to the midwestern United States.

The owners assumed they could simply walk over us once again. Over the past six years new hiring has resulted in a workforce from over 20 countries. The bosses thought this would be an obstacle to unity and the use of union power. They were wrong. The workers united and tried to use union power to win back some of what was taken. In the end our union was not strong enough to improve on the original offer. But we did prevent the bosses from imposing contract restrictions on washroom time, and sent them a sharp warning that we intend to be treated as

human beings. The new contract contains no new concessions. And we have learned valuable lessons for the day-to-day skirmishes on the line and the next contract fight in three years.

John Steele
Toronto, Ontario

Iraq war

In the article on the U.S. victory in Fallujah in the December 7 *Militant*, the focus is on the military triumph of U.S. imperialist troops. The article barely mentions the death and destruction wrought upon the working people of the city.

In addition to Baathist fighters, many civilians were killed and their homes destroyed. About 300,000 residents fled the U.S. invasion, according to the *Boston Globe*. They will be returning to destroyed houses and rubble-strewn streets.

In addition, the U.S. military has a plan, reports the *Globe*, to institute measures appropriate for a “police state.” Fallujans who wish to return will have to go to processing centers where a

database of their identities will be compiled through DNA testing and retina scans.

They will then receive identity badges they must wear at all times. Cars would be banned in the city.

Another proposal would require all men to work in military type battalions, where they would be assigned by the U.S. military.

This is the democracy promised by U.S. imperialism!

Marine Lt. Col. Leonard DiFrancisco was quoted by the *Globe* reporter as saying, “There’s something to be said for a firm hand.” I don’t think it would be redundant to conclude any article on Iraq with the demand “All U.S. troops out of Iraq now.”

Gary Cohen
Arlington, Massachusetts

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.

London presses for IRA disarmament

BY TONY HUNT

LONDON—The British imperialists will continue direct rule of Northern Ireland despite agreement by Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to most proposals in a “comprehensive agreement” for a political settlement put forward by London and Dublin. London maintains an occupation force of 11,000 in Northern Ireland—larger than its contingent in Iraq.

The major sticking point is the insistence by the British rulers that the IRA provide photographic evidence of dismantling all its weapons. The IRA has agreed to “decommissioning” its weapons but says that providing photographs of the process would be a public humiliation of the group.

The agreement would have led to the lifting of the suspension of the Northern Ireland assembly in phases up through February 2005 and the formation of a “power sharing” executive of Sinn Fein—the nationalist party that has led the struggle for an end to British rule—and the right-wing Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) led by Ian Paisley.

London suspended the Northern Ireland assembly in October 2002 alleging “intelligence gathering” by the IRA at government offices. In elections the following year, Sinn Fein overtook the Social Democratic and Labour Party as the main nationalist party in the north. At the same time, the DUP replaced the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)—historically the main prop of British rule—as the main pro-British party. The assembly has remained suspended.

Until a cease-fire in 1994, the IRA had waged a military campaign against British occupation. The backdrop was mass resistance by working people in nationalist areas, overwhelmingly Catholic, to their second-class status and to the repression by the British troops. London deployed troops in the British-run north in 1969. Within months their guns turned toward those fighting for civil rights in the Catholic ghettos. Encouraged by London’s move, rightist pro-British gangs continued their pogroms in Catholic areas.

In 1998, Irish republicans, pro-British Unionists, Dublin, and London signed the Good Friday Agreement, which registered the continued weakening of British rule over the six northern counties of Ireland. The accord included the establishment of an assembly in Northern Ireland elected by proportional representation; a north/south ministerial council, to be made up of representatives from the government of the Republic of Ireland and the assembly in the north; and a two-year time frame for the release of political prisoners. It did not set a time frame for the withdrawal of British troops.

London and pro-British Unionists have set as a pre-condition for implementation of the agreement that the IRA give up, or “decommission,” all its weapons. No such demands have ever been placed on the right-wing loyalist death squads that have attacked and murdered Catholics and with whom the British rulers have consistently collaborated. Moreover, London is not advancing proposals to end its military presence, which remains substantial despite reductions in the last decade. London’s stated goal is further cuts in the number of its troops there and “normal security arrangements.” The latter means a future garrison in Northern Ireland of some 5,000 troops—which would be about 5 percent of the current size of the British Army.

The IRA said in a December 9 statement that the organization had “decided to contribute... to a comprehensive agreement to resolve all outstanding issues, including those of concern within unionism” so that “Irish republicans and unionists can, as equals, pursue our respective political objectives peacefully.” In particular, the IRA said it had agreed to “completely and verifiably put all our arms beyond use... if possible by the end of December... We

agreed to the presence of two clergymen as observers during this process.” The group also said it agreed that “all IRA volunteers be given specific instructions not to engage in any activity which might thereby endanger that new agreement.”

With the backing of Dublin, however, London agreed on December 8 to Paisley’s demands for photographic evidence of the disarming process. The IRA responded that this would mean its actions would be “reduced to an act of humiliation.” Paisley had recently said that the IRA had to be forced to “repent” and “wear sack cloth and ashes.”

In addition to providing for the gradual lifting of the suspension of the assembly in Northern Ireland, the proposed comprehensive agreement would end Westminster’s power to suspend the assembly. It would also transfer formal control of the Police Service of Northern Ireland—known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)—from Westminster to a new “community board.” Sinn Fein would be asked to nominate members to this board, having discussed the issue at a special party conference. London’s goal is to entice more nationalists to join the Northern Ireland police. Meanwhile, only after the IRA disarmed would the DUP be asked to urge loyalist groups to do the same. No mention was made in the proposed settlement about the removal of British troops.

At a December 8 press conference, Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams said the proposed comprehensive agreement is “a good deal which reflects accurately the fun-

Iceland teachers end strike after back-to-work order

BY ÓLÖF ANDRA PROPPÉ
AND ÖGMUNDUR JÓNSSON

REYKJAVÍK, Iceland—Teachers in public schools attended by students from 6 to 16 years of age voted December 6 to approve a contract by a vote of 2,313 to 1,643. They had ended their two-month walkout in mid-November, after parliament declared their strike illegal and ordered the teachers back to work. Parliament threatened to refer the dispute to arbitration if an agreement wasn’t reached. The main issue in the conflict was the teachers’ demand for higher wages.

The teachers’ contract expired at the end of March. In June, they voted 3,992 to 333 to go on strike if an agreement was not reached by September 20. That day all teachers in public schools, attended by 45,000 students, walked out.

On October 29 the state mediator put forward a contract proposal and the union negotiating committee called off the strike until the results of the vote came in. Teachers voted the offer down by a 4,293-276 margin, and the strike resumed.

Gunnhildur Ólafsdóttir, who works at Hagaskóli school in Reykjavík, pointed to the unity of the teachers seen in the outcome of that vote, and the broad solidarity they had received. “There was much more support in the community than 10 years ago,” she told the *Militant*, referring to a six-week strike in 1995.

On October 20 some 3,000 teachers marched down the main shopping street in Reykjavík and held an outdoor meeting. Teachers came from around the country for the spirited action. A contingent from the Students Association at the Iceland University of Education (Kennaraháskólinn) also participated. Two days later, strikers protested in the town of Akureyri as the minister of education, Thorgerdur Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, was on a visit there.

On November 13, a bill declaring the strike illegal was rushed through parliament. Introducing it the previous day, Prime Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson of the Progressive Party said that by not solving the dispute the municipalities and the teachers were basically “referring the

Refugees in Canada protest deportations



Human Rights Action Committee

MONTREAL—Despite sub-freezing temperatures and freezing rain, some 18 people, in their majority Punjabi-speaking refugees from India, held a campout and rotating hunger strike December 7–10 in front of the downtown office of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada. The main purpose of the action, organized to coincide with International Human Rights Day, was to expose the unjust practices of the IRB and to protest the potential deportation of hundreds of refugee claimants in the coming months. Sanjiv Kumar, president of the Human Rights Action Committee, explained that IRB commissioners “reject 80 percent of refugee claims on flimsy grounds. They don’t read the supporting documents we send them.... They are biased and incompetent.” In a symbolic gesture, refugees and their supporters set fire to documents and refused to attend scheduled hearings.

—SYLVIE CHARBIN

damentals of the Good Friday Agreement, including its power-sharing, all-Ireland and equality provisions.... All of the issues of substance have been resolved.” The “only obstacle,” Adams said, was the “DUP’s unrealizable demand for the humiliation of Irish republicans.”

Illustrating the importance Washington places on trying to resolve national questions on terms favorable to imperialism, U.S. president George Bush telephoned Adams and Paisley in late November expressing his support for the “comprehensive agreement.”

case to the government.” He added, “It is important that the wage policy of the state and municipalities doesn’t start a wage-price spiral that would lead to increased inflation and a decrease in buying power.” His comments played on the myth commonly used by the rulers to whip up anti-union sentiment, claiming wage increases cause price hikes.

The opposition parties did not protest procedural changes to speed up the passing of the bill, in sharp contrast to the factionalism that has marked parliamentary debates on other issues in the past year. While all opposition parties voted against the bill, Össur Skarphéðinsson, chairman of the Social Democratic Alliance, said, “I understand fully that this knot had to be solved by some means.” The back-to-work measure passed parliament 28 to 21, with 14 members of parliament absent.

Teachers protested in front of parliament November 12 as the bill was being presented. Many held or wore signs with footprints to symbolize the government trampling on their rights. Protests continued the next morning, as the bill was being passed. The first school day, Monday, November 15, about 85 percent of teachers didn’t show up for work. School authorities called on parents to stand for the teachers the next day. Half the teachers returned to work on Tuesday and the remainder were on the job the next day. With the strike over and arbitration looming, on November 17 union officials signed a contract that is largely based on the mediator’s earlier proposal.

Siggeður Ólöf Sigurdardóttir, a teacher at Hjallaskóli in the town of Kópavogur, described the first days back on the job after parliament declared the walkout illegal. “The worst part was on Tuesday, when half the teachers showed up and some stood in for those who were still at home,” Sigurdardóttir said. “It was very bad for unity.”

Press reports from around the country have indicated that a number of teachers are resigning in protest. In the town of Fáskrúðsfjörður all 16 teachers have turned in resignation notices.

The new contract includes an immediate pay increase of 5.5 percent, annual pay raises of 2.25 percent to 3 percent over the life of the four-year contract, and lump sum payments of 130,000 kronur (\$2,060) now and 75,000 kronur (\$1,200) next July. An additional pay increase of 9 percent in August 2005 will cover a reduction of the hated “wage pot,” the monthly amount available to each principal to award selective raises to teachers at the principal’s discretion.

The number of classes per week will be reduced from 28 to 27 in August of next year and to 26 in 2007. Finnþógi Sigurdsson, chairman of the Association of Teachers in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools, and a member of the negotiating committee, told *Fréttabladid*, the most widely circulated daily here, that although the majority of teachers accepted the contract, they were not at all happy, and many had done it to avoid arbitration.

Teachers had demanded an immediate pay raise of 13.5 percent to be followed by annual increases of up to 3 percent.

After the contract had been reached, Independence Party MP Einar Oddur Kristjánsson angered teachers when he said the contract gave them way too much. The agreement was a “break of pattern that could easily sink this society, could destroy overnight the real wage increase that has been created here for a decade and a half, make wage earners in Iceland poor, and put them in disarray,” he said. Kristjánsson is the former chairman of the employers’ organization, and one of the main architects of the “national reconciliation” of 1990—an agreement between the state, employers, and unions, with the latter agreeing to a near wage freeze for three years.

Morgunbladid, one of the main bourgeois dailies here, is among the big-business media that have used the strike to popularize calls for the privatization of the public school system. “Teachers would be in a much stronger position vis-à-vis independent schools in competition than with the current centralized apparatus of the municipalities, which effectively ensures that all teachers go hungry,” the paper said.