

# Social catastrophe unfolds in South Asia after tsunami

## Imperialist domination, local capitalist regimes magnify toll

BY PAUL PEDERSON

Ten days after an undersea earthquake sent a series of huge waves across the Indian Ocean December 26, the United Nations reported that the official death toll in the region’s coastal communities had surpassed 150,000. Tens of thousands more are still missing, most of whom are presumed dead. Over half a million are seriously injured, and five million survivors throughout the region have been left homeless.

**Massive aid with no strings attached!  
Cancel foreign debt of countries struck!**

— editorial, p.10

“The death toll will grow exponentially on the western coast of Sumatra,” Jan Egeland, the supervisor of the United Nations relief effort, told the press January 4. Egeland was referring to the Indonesian island close to the epicenter of the massive earthquake, which registered 9.0 on the Richter scale and set the huge waves in motion. “We may be talking about tens of thousands [more],” Egeland said. “At this stage, it is beyond comprehension.”

As of January 5, the official toll in Indonesia stood at about 100,000. In Sri Lanka, the second-worst affected, the figure topped 30,000. India’s official toll stood at 11,000, although another 20,000 people may have died on the remote Indian islands of Andaman and Nicobar from which there is no accurate count yet. The confirmed deaths in



Getty Images/Prakash Singh

**People leave devastated village of Karmavadi, in Tamil Nadu, India, three days after tsunami struck. Official death toll in India from tsunami stands at 11,000; it tops 150,000 throughout the region. Thousands are still missing in India’s remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which were closer to the epicenter of the quake that set off the waves.**

Thailand stand at just over 5,000. Hundreds more died in Somalia, Myanmar, Maldives, and Malaysia.

“The underlying story of this tragedy is the overpowering, amoral mechanics of the earth’s surface,” the *New York Times* editorialized the day after the disaster struck. “They demonstrate, geologically speaking, how ephemeral our presence is.”

Geology indisputably played a role. The staggering loss of life produced by the tsunami’s wrath, though, was largely due to the absence of any warning system—including

in places such as India where the waves struck the shores four hours after the quake. Resources on hand—from communications, to roads, transportation, electrical grids, medical care, and food supplies—have also been scarce to respond to the disaster in its immediate aftermath. These are the products of the plunder of the region’s resources and labor over decades by the wealthy imperialist states—whose governments are now tripping over each other to paint themselves as generous benefactors—aided and abetted

**Continued on Page 6**

## Pentagon pours troops into Mosul, launches offensive in Iraqi city

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—In early January, the U.S. military increased its troop strength in Mosul by the thousands as part of a new offensive against Baathist forces in that northern Iraqi city. At the same time, U.S. occupation forces and Iraqi National Guard troops have captured hundreds of suspected Baathists in raids across the “Triangle of Death”—a string of towns south of Baghdad where the former Baathist party regime of Saddam Hussein had a strong base of support.

Meanwhile, Baathist forces have continued deadly attacks against U.S. forces and Iraqi troops, representatives of the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and election officials in a desperate attempt to halt elections scheduled for January 30. On January 5, for example, a suicide car bombing outside a police academy south of Baghdad during a graduation ceremony reportedly killed as many as 20 people, most of them policemen. Hours earlier, another car bomb killed two Iraqis in the country’s capital, according to news agencies. The day before, gunmen assassinated the governor of Baghdad province and detonated a fuel truck near an Iraqi Interior Ministry office in Baghdad, killing another 10 people.

Despite these killings, and a January 4 statement by the country’s most senior Sunni Arab official, Iraqi president Ghazi al-Yawar, that holding the vote as planned would be a “tough call,” the Allawi administration held firm on going ahead with the elections on January 30. The U.S.-backed

premier warned those calling for a postponement of the poll that any delay would “worsen the security situation,” according to Agence France-Presse.

An earlier audiotape message by al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden praised Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and said anyone who participates in the Iraqi elec-

**Iraqi Kurds push for autonomy**

— see p. 10

tions is an “infidel” and fair game for attack. Al-Zarqawi’s group has collaborated with Baathist forces and taken responsibility for numerous bombings of civilian and military targets in Iraq, as well as kidnappings and beheadings of hostages. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, bin Laden’s statement urged Muslims to attack anyone collaborating with the interim administration. “All polling stations and those in them will be targets for our brave soldiers,” it said. The embrace of al-Zarqawi by bin Laden is a further indication of the growing isolation of Baathists and their allies in Iraq, especially among Shiites, who comprise 60 percent of the population, and Kurds.

U.S. military spokesman Lt. Col. Paul Hastings, said two brigade-sized units would be deployed to Mosul to reinforce

**Continued on Page 10**

## Ukraine vote registers blow to Moscow

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

The victory of Viktor Yushchenko in the repeat Ukrainian presidential elections December 26 appears to have quelled the political crisis in the former Soviet republic for the time being. The outcome is a blow to Moscow and presents new openings for Washington and its imperialist allies in that part of the world. Outgoing president Leonid Kuchma has accepted the results, the challenges of the Moscow-backed Viktor Yanukovich have little chance of success, and the Russian government is not in a position to impose the acceptance of its favorite.

According to the Central Election Council (CEC), Yushchenko received 52 percent of the vote against 44 percent for Yanukovich—a margin of more than 2 million votes in this nation of 48 million. The results are a defeat for Russian president Vladimir Putin, who had campaigned for Yanukovich and opposed the idea of rerunning the elections after the second round of voting held November 21. While Putin has not officially recognized Yushchenko’s victory, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov signaled in comments to the German media that Moscow would bow to the inevitable. “We never said we weren’t prepared to work with the president elected by the Ukrainian people,” said Lavrov, according to Reuters.

“My government’s strategy will be European integration,” said Yushchenko,

**Continued on Page 7**

## Utah miners win support in fight for union

### Safety board cites Co-Op bosses for 10 violations

BY GUILLERMO ESQUIVEL

PRICE, Utah—The bosses at the Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah, fired nearly 30 foreign-born workers December 9—one week before a union representation election—for supposedly not having proper work documents. Since then, broad support for the coal miners’ fight to win representation by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) has not ceased. During the Christmas holidays, the miners received numerous letters of support and contributions amounting to more than \$7,000 to help about 20 miners who are still unemployed to pay rent, food, and utility bills.

For the handful of UMWA supporters who remained working at the Co-Op mine after December 9, harassment and firings by the bosses continued, workers report, leaving only one pro-UWMA miner on the job.

Meanwhile, the UMWA assisted the miners in filing unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) against the company for the mass firings. Workers also say an official with the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) told them the government agency cited the mine with 10 safety violations on December 28.

One letter of solidarity from the UMWA in Pennsylvania arrived here before the holidays with a \$300 check. “Each year we hold a haunted house in Indiana, Pennsylvania, to raise money for gifts for unemployed members’ children in Christmas,” the letter said, signed by two officers of UMWA District 2. “We hope this will make your Christmas brighter.”

Checks have also arrived from unions and individuals in Utah and other states, miners said.

Annie Fivecoat and her husband Bob, a UMWA retiree, help organize the Co-Op miners’ fund. “We are proud to be counted as supporters of the Co-Op miners,” Annie said in an interview. “It’s important for them to win their fight against the injustices from C.W. Mining. It’s very important for the miners to stand up for their human rights. It’s equally important for all of us to support the miners mentally, physically, morally, and monetarily. We urge all who can to give to their fund and we thank all those who have already stood up.”

Jesús Galaviz, one of the fired workers who worked at the mine for six years making \$6 an hour, said the contributions are vital. “While we look for work, the donations help

**Continued on Page 3**

## Also Inside:

Demand for uranium up, dormant U.S. mines reopen	2
U.S. military forces in Europe to be cut in half, moved east	3
U.S. textile bosses ramp up protectionist drive as quotas on textile imports from semicolonial world expire	4
More than four million Cubans mobilize in defense exercise	11



# Demand for uranium up, dormant mines reopen

BY DANIELLE LONDON

CRAIG, Colorado—After more than two decades of the uranium mines in the area around Naturita in western Colorado being shut down, three have reopened this year.

During an intensive period of nuclear bomb development following World War II, Washington established uranium mines in a number of locations on the Colorado Plateau, many on Indian reservation lands. The industry went bust in the 1980s.

The revival would have been unheard of just a few years ago, Stuart Sanderson of the Colorado Mining Association, told the *Denver Post*. “But with the price of natural gas going up, we’re seeing an increased demand for coal and uranium.”

What’s happening in western Colorado’s uranium belt is far from the boom that once dominated the area. But industry analysts predict that uranium prices will continue to climb, which will encourage more uranium production.

The 435 nuclear reactors in the world—including 104 in the United States—need 180 million pounds of uranium annually, according to the *Denver Post*. Global production has been half that.

The gap between supply and demand has pushed uranium and vanadium prices to their highest levels in more than 20 years, since the meltdown at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania and the explosion at the Chernobyl plant in Ukraine put the brakes on the construction of new nuclear power plants.

Uranium is currently selling for \$20.50 a pound. Its price was as low as \$7.50 a pound in 2001. Industry predictions have it climbing as high as \$25–\$35 before it levels off. And the steel-hardener vanadium that comes from the same ore has jumped from less than \$2 a pound to around \$10.

Those prices are behind the new stepped-up uranium mining in Canada, Australia, and Africa, as well as in one of the largest uranium reserves in the United States—an area that stretches from Grants, New Mexico, through the Paradox Valley in western Colorado and into Utah.

In the midst of the post–World War II boom, UMETCO Minerals built an entire company town, Uravan, Colorado. It was condemned in the 1980s by the state’s

department of public health and leveled because of radioactive contamination. All that’s left of the town today is a UMETCO building and holding ponds for the massive radioactive clean-up.

Thousands of uranium miners are sick or dying mostly from lung cancer and other lung ailments caused by exposure to radioactive dust.

Former miner Bill Chadd told the *Denver Post* that of 13 miners who worked on his crew in the 1970s, only two are alive.

Of the few former miners remaining in the area, most are older. The work is heavy and includes running handheld jack-leg drills. This is producing a labor shortage as the companies seek to increase production. Glen Williams, a spokesperson for the uranium producer Cottor Corp., told the *Post* that his company would open more mines if they could hire enough miners.



Radioactive uranium sludge contaminates creek bed in Uravan, Colorado. The company town built during the post–World War II uranium mining boom was condemned by the Colorado Department of Health and Safety in the 1980s.

## UN report backs U.S. nuclear ‘non-proliferation’ offensive

BY CINDY JAQUITH

A new United Nations report legitimizes the military actions of Washington carried out under the banner of combating “terrorism” and “weapons of mass destruction.” The report warns of a “cascade” of nuclear proliferation if the imperialist powers that dominate the UN Security Council don’t join forces to prevent semicolonial nations from developing nuclear technology widely used by imperialist countries both as a power source and to manufacture weapons.

Released in early December, the report to the Security Council was prepared by the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, whose 16 members were appointed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. While the report gives lip service to confronting the problems of world hunger, environmental destruction, and pandemics, the only recommendations receiving media attention are those related to alleged threats of “nuclear terrorism.”

The report raises the specter of a nuclear Armageddon as power-poor nations seek to use nuclear power to develop their countries. “The nuclear proliferation regime is at risk because of lack of compliance with existing commitments, a changing international security environment and radical advances

in technology,” the UN panel claims. “We are approaching a point at which the erosion of the nuclear regime could become irreversible, and result in a cascade of proliferation.”

It singles out—without naming them—Iran and north Korea, according to an article by Graham Allison in the *International Herald Tribune*. “If Iran goes nuclear,” Allison writes, “Egypt will follow, then Saudi Arabia (more likely buying than making) and possibly Syria. Contemplate the consequences of such a nuclear arms race for Israel’s security and the stability of energy supplies.” If north Korea obtains a nuclear bomb, he adds, “such developments will destabilize Northeast Asia and intensify the risk of one state pre-emptively attacking another. Even more dangerously, North Korea could sell nuclear weapons to eager buyers like Osama bin Laden.”

The UN report, according to articles in the *Financial Times* and *International Herald Tribune*, makes the following recommendations: “Collective action” against states alleged to threaten nuclear attack on nonnuclear countries; a moratorium on new countries developing uranium enrichment or reprocessing programs; UN “peacekeep-

ing” military missions in countries deemed “failed nations”; support for Washington’s Proliferation Security Initiative, which allows search and seizure, including boarding of ships on the high seas, for weapons allegedly destined for “states of proliferation concern.” As cover, the report also includes a proposal that the major nuclear powers proceed with programs to reduce their nuclear arsenals, as mandated by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. (The nations known to have nuclear weapons are the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan.) But this is just window dressing. The target of the report is the underdeveloped nations attempting to speed up their development with the use of nuclear power.

An article by David Hannay, a member of the panel preparing the report and former British ambassador to the European Union and the UN, stated, “The international community also needs to tackle the problem of state failure which has, on occasion, destabilized whole regions, provided a base for terrorism, and created the conditions for genocide. The international response to failed or failing states has generally been tardy and inadequate.”



Getty Images/Koichi Kamochida

Japanese “anti-terror” unit practices seizing a ship suspected of carrying “weapons of mass destruction” during Oct. 29, 2004, Proliferation Security exercise.

## THE MILITANT

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Freed Haitian priest Gerard Jean-Juste at Miami meeting, December 2004.

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# Latin America: imperialist retail giants help push peasants off land

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

The growing penetration by retail giants from the United States and other imperialist countries into food distribution in Latin America is increasing the number of peasants being forced out of farming and off their land. Supermarket chains such as Dutch food giant Ahold, the French Carrefour, and U.S.-based Wal-Mart have taken a big piece of the food retail markets in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Mexico, and to a lesser extent in less developed Latin American nations, like Guatemala.

Working farmers struggling to survive have to compete with often-subsidized goods from agribusiness in the European Union and the United States, as well as other Latin American countries. According to an article in the December 28 *New York Times*, for example, trucks at La Fragua's huge distribution center in Guatemala City regularly unload apples from Washington State, potatoes from Idaho, pineapples from Chile, and avocados from Mexico.

In addition, small farmers have to meet the costly specifications for food production the large supermarket chains demand.

"They wanted consistent supply without ups and downs," Mario Chinchilla, a tomato farmer in Palencia, Guatemala, told the *Times*. "We didn't have the capacity to do it." For a time, the farm cooperative Chinchilla heads managed to sell vegetables to the Stop and Shop supermarket chain, owned by Ahold. Chinchilla's cooperative, which once had more than 300 members, is now down to eight farmers. Ahold requires farmers to use drip irrigation, expensive pesticides, and modern greenhouses for growing produce, but small farmers don't have the resources to meet such requirements which are increasingly being demanded.

Dairy farmers throughout Latin America face similar rigid requirements to sell their milk to food retail chains. According to the Inter Press Service news agency, "Tens of thousands of small dairy farmers cannot afford the investments in equipment they need to be able to sell to the supermarkets. The chains require mechanical milking

equipment, cooling tanks and ultra-high temperature treatments, demands that can close small farmers out of the supply chain."

Farmers who do manage to sell their goods to the supermarkets often wait two or more months to get paid for their produce, according to the International Policy Research Institute.

Supermarket chains, often owned by companies from imperialist countries, control 10 to 15 percent of fruit and vegetable sales in Guatemala. But in Argentina, their slice has grown to as much as 30 percent, while in Brazil it's up to half the total market.

Through the "free trade" offensive by Washington and its imperialist allies in the past two decades, finance capital has stepped up investments in Latin America and other semicolonial countries. Latin American governments have abolished price subsidies on food, slashed tariffs on imported goods from imperialist nations, sold off state-owned companies, and targeted workers' wages and unions—all in the name of attracting foreign investment. Millions of peasants have been forced off the land as a result.

Although the capitalist economic depression that has engulfed most of Latin America and the Caribbean has affected many professionals and other middle-class layers, working people in the city and countryside—the large majority—have been the hardest hit and their living and working conditions are deteriorating. The number of people living below official poverty lines has grown from 200 million in 1990 to 224 million last year—or 44 percent of Latin America's 512 million people. In rural areas, 60 percent live under officially defined poverty.

In Guatemala, 75 percent of the population lives below the government-defined poverty line, and 50 percent of Guatemalans are employed in agriculture. With the downward slide of world prices for coffee, sugar, spices, and other agricultural goods, many small farmers have lost their livelihoods and been forced to migrate elsewhere for work. According to the *Times*, José Luis Pérez Escobar, who belonged to the same cooperative as Chinchilla, migrated to the

United States after his potato crop failed last year and couldn't make enough money to pay off debts and keep his land.

In response to these conditions, peasants have intensified struggles for land and government aid for development throughout Latin America in the past decade. In Brazil, for example, 8,000 landless rural workers and others marched in the country's capital, Brasilia, in November to demand more government funding for land distribution.

The *Washington Post* reported in September that 2,000 police officers were sent to evict peasants occupying a cattle ranch near Champerico, Guatemala, and were met by a demonstration of 3,000 peasants, some armed with AK-47 rifles.

The fight for land has also been a major feature of developments in Venezuela, where peasants, encouraged by a new agrarian reform law passed by the government of President Hugo Chávez in 2001, have waged fierce battles against big landowners. Largely through



Reuters/Daniel Le Clair

**Thousands of Guatemalan peasants protest against the government of President Oscar Berger last April in Guatemala City during the 28th Regional Conference of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.**

such struggles, more than 75,000 landless peasant families in Venezuela had obtained titles to some 5 million acres of land as of the spring of 2004.

## Co-Op miners get support

**Continued from front page** keep all of us together," said Galaviz, who has a family of five.

The Voice@Work Campaign of the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., sent out a pre-holiday appeal to 30,000 union activists across the country asking for support for the

Co-Op miners. "Once again, with the recent firings, the company is trying to frustrate the will of the workers and break their union, by leaving them without an income for the second time in two years," the appeal said. "These miners live paycheck to paycheck, many only paid between \$5.50 and \$8.00 an hour (the average U.S. miner makes \$18 an hour, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics) and receive no health benefits while performing one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States. Having a union would allow them to negotiate for safer working conditions, a livable wage, and affordable health care. Make the difference for these miners by helping them continue to fight. Make a donation now by clicking on: <https://secure.ga3.org/08/helptheminers>." Through this link individuals and organizations can make immediate financial contributions by credit card to the miners. The AFL-CIO told the miners that an additional \$7,000 was raised through this appeal over the holidays.

As part of the Christmas spirit, Ricardo Silva, an activist from Salt Lake City, made the two-hour trip in his pickup truck to donate toys and 30 turkeys to the miners at the UMWA District 22 union hall in Price on December 23. Silva returned on January 3 with bags of clothes for miners' children that he collected from friends and other supporters of the miners' struggle in Salt Lake.

The unemployed miners said they are looking for other mining jobs in the area while they push for reinstatement at the Co-Op mine through the NLRB.

C.W. Mining, which operates the Co-Op mine owned by the Kingston family, fired 75 miners on Sept. 22, 2003, after miners demanded safe working conditions, protested harassment of co-workers and the firing of a colleague, and began the effort to win UMWA representation. The miners turned the lockout into a strike and set up picket lines for nearly 10 months, winning broad support in the labor movement in the West and beyond. The NLRB ruled July 1 that the miners were fired illegally and the company was forced to offer unconditional reinstatement to all the strikers, many of whom returned to work July 12. Since returning to work, miners said they faced a war by the company against UMWA supporters, which included selective firings of union backers and many attempts to intimidate

**Continued on Page 5**

## CIA maintained secret prison at Guantánamo

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

The CIA has maintained a secret detention facility within the Defense Department's prison camp at the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, report several media sources. The naval base has been maintained against the will of the Cuban people for more than 40 years. The CIA facility, a prison within a prison, held a number of prisoners U.S. troops captured during Washington's wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq two years later. The CIA held the inmates under strict secrecy, not

disclosing their identities or accounting for them in military records.

According to the *Washington Post*, the CIA used a group of hidden buildings enclosed within the Defense Department's Camp Echo complex to interrogate and detain the "most valuable al-Qaeda captives," alleged to have information on the group's "logistics, financing and regional operations." These "ghost" detainees were held under separate rules from other prisoners at the Guantánamo base. "Under a presidential directive and authorities

approved by administration lawyers, the CIA is allowed to capture and hold certain classes of suspects without accounting for them in any public way and without revealing the rules for their treatment," the *Post* reported.

A *New York Times* article in May said that these secret rules "have provided a legal basis for the use of harsh interrogation techniques." Similar to the CIA facilities at Camp Echo, other secret CIA detention centers were set up on the Bagram air base in Afghanistan and in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. The CIA claims that the facility at Camp Echo is no longer in use.

The majority of those detained at the Guantánamo prison camp have been in the custody of the U.S. Defense Department. Many of those captured during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan were labeled "enemy combatants" by the U.S. government to justify denying them legal rights, including those accorded to prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. More than 550 prisoners are still detained there. Some have been held for several years without charges, legal counsel, or due process.

Under Supreme Court rulings earlier this year, these detainees have the right to challenge their imprisonment in U.S. federal courts. Several dozen inmates have filed habeas corpus petitions with the U.S. Justice Department to have their cases heard. In response to the high court rulings, the Pentagon set up military tribunals comprised of U.S. military officers and denied the prisoners legal counsel, claiming the trials were administrative proceedings.

Meanwhile, abuse of the detainees continues. A recent FBI memo details practices by U.S. interrogators in Guantánamo that are tantamount to torture, reported the *Guardian*. The memo described detainees being strangled, beaten and burned.

## U.S. troops to be cut in Europe

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

The U.S. government is proceeding apace to cut in half the number of troops it has stationed in Europe, Marine Gen. James Jones told the U.S. *Army Times* in late December. Jones, who commands U.S. and NATO forces in Europe, said he is waiting for approval from Washington for this redeployment, which is expected to come later this year.

The number of U.S. soldiers stationed in Europe will be reduced from 110,000 to 50,000. In Germany, forces will be substantially cut down from the current level of 76,000 with the return to the United States of the Army's First Armored Division and First Infantry Division currently located at bases there. Jones said U.S. forces will remain in Ramstein and Grafenwoehr, Germany, as well as Aviano and Naples, Italy.

At the same time, Washington plans to shift its remaining forces in Europe eastward, closer to the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. "Troops will train at former Soviet bases in Eastern Europe," said an article in the January 3 *Army Times*. These include bases in Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, which are new members of

NATO. The repositioning will allow the U.S. rulers to more effectively deploy forces to "Georgia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus region and to strategic sites along the West African coast," the *Army Times* said.

These steps are part of the U.S. military's "transformation," aimed at reorganizing Washington's armed forces into smaller and more mobile and lethal units poised for rapid deployment for the U.S. rulers to defend their wealth and domination. There will be a step-up in the use of such units as well as port visits along the coast of West Africa "as soon as the Navy and the Marine Corps can generate the types of deployments they did in the past" and when "not all the Marines are either in Iraq or waiting to go to Iraq," Jones said.

"We're charting Africa right now," the U.S. general added, "so that when the time comes, and we get more assets, we can do things on a bigger scale."

The reduction in U.S. forces in Germany will be carried out in coordination with the U.S. Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is expected to give Congress a list of proposed base closings before the end of 2005.

# Florida sugar workers okay concession pact after four-day strike

BY ALEX ALVARADO  
AND ERIC SIMPSON

SOUTH BAY, Florida—After a four-day strike, members of International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 2152 ratified a three-year contract January 1 at Florida Crystals’s Okeelanta plant here. Workers voted 584-42 in favor of the agreement. The strike was the local’s first since 1972 at this modern, farm-to-refinery sugar production operation. The plant also generates its own steam and electrical power by burning sugarcane bagasse.

The contract includes major concessions from both seasonal and year-round workers. It terminates about 150 union tractor-trailer operators and replaces them with contract workers. The company also won the elimination of overtime pay for farm employees, which the union had gained in the 1970s. Health insurance for seasonal workers will no longer be part of the union plan, union officials report, and co-payments and other health-care costs are 25 percent higher across the board.

“There has been an injustice done to all the workers,” striker Augustine Batista, 49, told the *Militant*. Batista is a truck driver who has worked for Okeelanta for four seasons and will lose his job at the end of this one. “We were out there fighting for everyone and we ended up losing just about

everything. I voted no. I didn’t accept it.”

Many workers said they felt they had no alternative but to accept the contract in order to save the union. “A lot of workers are heartbroken,” said Javier Almazan, the president of Local 2152, in a phone interview after the vote. “But in ratifying the contract, every union member who was on strike will go back to work.”

Tractor-trailer operators whose jobs are being outsourced will work only through the end of the harvest season in February or March, said Almazan. Tractor-trailer trucks are used to transport sugarcane from the fields to the mill.

Like the harvester and other farm equipment operators and laborers in the fields, where the harvest is completely mechanized, these workers will no longer receive premium pay for overtime work, unlike the mill and refinery workers. According to company spokespeople, farm workers are “exempt” from overtime pay under state and federal laws. The union had forced Florida Crystals to pay farm workers a premium for work over 50 hours, as part of winning union representation for field workers after a strike in 1972. This was an exception in the industry.

## Bosses left Cuba after revolution

Florida Crystals is part of the sugar



Sugar workers who struck Okeelanta Sugar Corp., owned by Florida Crystals, picket in December near South Bay, Florida. They approved takeback contract January 1.

empire of the Fanjul family. Its property encompasses 180,000 acres of plantation land in south Florida, three sugar mills, one rice mill, a distribution center, and extensive holdings in the Dominican Republic. The Fanjuls were one of the wealthiest of the capitalist families that dominated the sugar industry in Cuba before 1959. Its property was nationalized after workers and farmers overthrew the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship at the time and established a revolutionary government. The Fanjuls’ extensive art collection—now estimated to be worth \$20 million to \$60 million—was nationalized as well. Along with one of

their mansions, it became Cuba’s National Museum of Decorative Arts.

Many workers on the picket line said the Fanjuls used their political influence to get police to limit picketing and control news coverage—keeping news of the strike out of the local Spanish-language press, and distorting coverage to the company’s advantage against the union.

At first strikers crowded onto the shoulder of Route 27 with signs defending the union, but police forced them behind barriers away from the highway.

Under heavy police protection, the company brought several busloads of scabs into the plant past hundreds of chanting strikers from day one of the walkout, workers report.

Almazan told the press that 600 of the 900 union members had signed up for picket duty. But some stayed on the job, along with crews organized by labor contractors. Despite the company’s use of scabs, local union vice president Mike Myers estimated that sugar production was cut to one-third of capacity.

Strikers set up four giant grills to cook food for the hundreds on the picket line. “I don’t know how long we’re going to be on the line, but we’ve got to show the company we’re sticking together,” said Enrique Cibrán, 43, a heavy equipment operator who has worked at the mill for 17 years.

## Solidarity from other unions

Solidarity came from sister IAM Local 57 at U.S. Sugar in Clewiston and Pahokee and from UNITE-HERE Local 25-70 at the Point Blank Body Armor garment plant in Oakland Park.

A delegation of garment workers from Point Blank was led by local president Umberto de la Cruz, who spoke to the pickets through a bull horn, summarizing the lessons he had drawn from six months of picket duty fighting for union representation at Point Blank. “You have got to remain united,” he told the strikers.

The visiting unionists were given ribs and introduced to all the pickets, including Burley Adams, a union veteran who helped lead the fight to extend union organization to the farm workers about 32 years ago.

“I stood in this corner in 1972 for the same reason I’m standing on this corner today,” Adams told reporters. He said the workers now faced losing “what took us so long to get.”

The bosses’ last offer was worse than their initial proposal. “There are some things that are non-negotiable,” a company spokesperson told the press. The company withdrew its offer of an early retirement plan, strikers report, and took off the table severance packages to the fired truck drivers, who are seasonal workers, some with decades of seniority. About half of the 700 strikers were seasonal, working only during the five-month sugarcane harvest.

Local 57 faces a similar challenge in its contract negotiations with U.S. Sugar, which has announced the closing of the Bryant mill in Pahokee, Florida, and the elimination of more than 300 union jobs. Production will be concentrated in Clewiston, where the mill and refinery will be expanded and modernized.

Local 57 members struck U.S. Sugar for six days in 1998, holding the line against company demands for cuts in their guaranteed work week.

# U.S. textile bosses ramp up protectionist drive as caps on imports from colonial world expire

BY ANNE PARKER

ATLANTA—On January 1, a system of quotas that restricted the exports of garments and textiles from semicolonial nations to the United States and Europe expired under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. Under that system, known as the Multifibre Arrangement (MFA), quotas were assigned country-by-country limiting

imports from 2005 through 2008. “The Bush administration has already ordered new limits on Chinese shipments of four categories of clothing, and has threatened new limits on a wide range of additional categories,” reported the December 13 *New York Times*.

According to the National Coalition of Textile Organizations (NCTO), a business group, the crisis in the U.S. textile industry has been precipitated by China. The NCTO asserts that in clothing categories where quotas were removed in 2002, China’s market share went from 9 percent to 72 percent as of last June. “Because of these trade practices, the U.S. textile industry has been forced to close 300 textile plants, including more than 50 textile plants during the last year and a half,” the NCTO states. It demagogically argues that 650,000 more U.S. jobs are at stake—a figure roughly equal to the total number of U.S. textile jobs.

“Where will our Armed Forces go?” the NCTO asks. “Will our soldiers have to wait for Chinese textile producers to agree to meet our military’s specifications not just for quantity but for quality?”

Textile bosses in the United States are using some of the same patriotic, prowar arguments—aimed at convincing workers that bosses and their employees have common interests to defend “our company” or “our country”—to get workers to go along with ramped up production, lower wages, and deteriorating working conditions. The bosses try to convince us that we compete with workers in underdeveloped countries in order to deflect any resistance to the employers’ antilabor offensive at home.

Crying crocodile tears, the textile industry owners sometimes also pose as the benefactor of the semicolonial world. “If they won’t necessarily listen to the concerns of the domestic producers, maybe they’ll listen to the concerns of the Third World,” said Augustine Tantillo, executive director of the American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition.

U.S. textile and apparel bosses, joined by their Turkish counterparts, led an effort to appeal to the WTO to postpone the lifting of the MFA and to take action against their rivals in China. Ninety-six trade groups from 54 countries signed on to this call, known as the Istanbul Declaration. “The developing world sees China as a predator stalking them like prey,” stated Ziya Sukun, executive director of the ITKIB Association USA, a Turkish textile and

apparel business group.

Reflecting the contending capitalist interests, the U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel—representing retailers such as J.C. Penney—immediately filed suit seeking an injunction blocking the Commerce Department from considering the U.S. textile bosses’ petition. “If U.S. retailers can’t get sufficient supplies of merchandise from China, they’ll simply turn to other foreign manufacturers, not U.S. manufacturers,” said Erik Autor, of the National Retail Federation. An editorial in the December 12 *New York Times* commended the retailers’ association for “fighting back” against “the whiny [textile] manufacturers’ requests to impose new limits on China.”

In the face of new and threatened quotas and demands by the Bush administration that Beijing take steps to limit its exports, the Commerce Ministry of China announced in December that it would voluntarily impose some tariffs on its \$100 billion garment and textile exports this year. At the same time, Chinese officials protested efforts by U.S. manufacturers to limit free trade. China has a relatively modern and massive textile and apparel industry—with 30,000 factories exporting goods and 35,000 to 40,000 geared to the domestic market. Production is also integrated—from raw materials like cotton, to spinning and weaving of fabric, down to the last button on an article of clothing. Its main advantage, though, is its massive, cheap labor supply.

Recognizing opportunities to make a profit in China, some U.S. manufacturers have announced plans for joint ventures in that country. One example is the International Textile Group-China Ting venture. U.S. capitalist Wilbur Ross formed ITG by merging Burlington Industries—at one time the world’s largest textile company with 80,000 employees and 149 plants—and Cone Mills, a denim maker. Ross bought both of these companies after they declared bankruptcy.

Many in the big-business media have hailed the fact that employers worldwide will use the dropping of MFA quotas to push for further cuts in wages and working conditions. “It’s a new world order now, where Thailand and Turkey will compete furiously to reduce costs and eliminate unnecessary red tape, all so they can be the ones awarded the contract to run up your next pair of jeans,” said an editorial in the *New York Times*. “Let’s pull up the anchor;

Continued on Page 5

## AS I SEE IT

the volume of jeans, underwear, towels, fabric, yarn and other products companies could export from countries such as Bangladesh, China, India, Mexico, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Turkey.

Under existing WTO rules, though, Washington has indicated it intends to continue restricting garment and textile imports from many of these countries—especially China.

The 1974 arrangement protected the profits of U.S.-based companies and businesses in other imperialist countries against competitors in the semicolonial world. According to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, these quotas cost semicolonial nations \$40 billion annually in lost exports.

Leading up to the January deadline, trade conflicts mounted over the \$400 billion world trade in garment and textiles. The loudest voice demanding new protectionist measures was the most powerful imperialist power in the world—Washington.

In addition to any new quotas, the U.S. rulers already wield the club of duties to protect the profits of U.S. manufacturers from competition from imports. Bangladesh, for example, which exports \$1.7 billion in apparel to the United States, faces an average of 16 percent, or \$300 million a year, in duties. U.S. duties for garments and textiles range from 16 percent to 33 percent.

Charging that they will be devastated by competition from Chinese manufacturers, a coalition of U.S. textile trade associations and the UNITE trade union appealed to U.S. president George Bush to cap several categories of garment imports from China at 7.5 percent above the value of shipments over the last year. As a condition of China’s admission into the WTO in 2001, Washington won “threat-based safeguard provisions,” allowing the U.S. government to limit the growth of Chinese clothing and textile



# Board cites Co-Op mine

**Continued from Page 3**  
and divide them.

Region 27 of the NLRB in Denver ruled November 18 that Kingston family members and relatives and supervisory personnel would not be allowed to vote in the union representation election.

The company appealed the decision 12 days later and the NLRB subsequently allowed more than 100 Kingston family members and relatives, whom the bosses claim are legitimate employees, to vote in the election. Their ballots were separated and sealed, however, pending a final decision from the NLRB.

On December 17, 40 mostly Mexican-born miners and the Kingston family members voted in the union representation election conducted by the NLRB. The ballot included as choices the UMWA, the so-called International Association of United Workers Union (IAUWU), which workers say is a company-run outfit, or neither. Results have not been announced because most of the ballots have been challenged.

A week earlier, on December 9, mine manager Charles Reynolds called nearly 30 miners into his office one at a time to inform them that was their last day of work. C.W. Mining claimed they lacked proper documentation in order to justify the mass firings. The miners say their documents remain the same from their hiring date. Mexican miners have worked at Co-Op since the 1970s, but only now—a week prior to a union election—did the company question their work documents, workers and union officers point out.

On December 28, maintenance supervi-

sor Cyril Jackson went underground to pull miner Bill Estrada from the job. Estrada said the company claimed his alleged failure to do his job had resulted in a safety violation citation from the Mine Safety and Health Administration. This was one of 10 violations MSHA cited the company with that day, workers were told by an official with the agency. Estrada was given two “occurrences” by Jackson. These are disciplinary points, which the company said brought Estrada to a total of eight, the number at which the company supposedly may terminate employees. “This is retaliation against me because I and other miners have reported violations to MSHA and because I’m pro-UMWA,” Estrada said.

The company has also dismissed three other Mexican miners for alleged lack of proper work documentation since the mass firing on December 9. These latest firings leave only one UMWA supporter working at Co-Op, who is also under threat of termination, workers say. The company is now attempting to run the mine almost entirely with relatives of the Kingston family.

Miners visited the local MSHA offices in Castle Dale and Price to obtain information on their rights. One miner said an inspector informed them that MSHA has revoked the training papers for José Ortega, who was the safety trainer at Co-Op. Numerous Co-Op miners testified against Ortega in October 2003 for improper training and charging excessive payments for the courses—up to \$350 for the 32-hour MSHA-required new miner safety class that he typically taught in six hours out of his house. Ortega and his father, both of whom the pro-UMWA min-



Militant/Amy Huston

**Co-Op miners (from left) Ricardo Chávez, José Contreras, Jesús Salazar, and Guillermo Servando unload donated Christmas presents and turkeys at UMWA hall in Price, Utah, December 23. Ricardo Silva (right), a supporter of the union-organizing effort from Salt Lake City, brought the supplies to the miners.**

ers say are staunch opponents of the union, remain working at the mine.

The Co-Op miners’ struggle has continued to receive attention in the media here. The *Sun Advocate*, the local daily in Price, featured the fight in its year-end issue. “Co-Op mine strike draws national attention to workers, local mine operations,” reads the headline of one of the two lead articles for the 2004 top stories section of the paper in its December 30 edition.

“The work stoppage not only gained statewide coverage by the television stations and in newspapers across Utah, but national attention was brought to the situation primarily through the efforts of the United Mine Workers of America,” the

article said. “The UMWA had attempted to organize the mine workers when the stoppage began.”

The article also pointed out that in September the Co-Op owners and the IAUWU filed a civil lawsuit in federal court in Utah against the UMWA, 17 Co-Op miners, a number of labor unions and other organizations that have backed the union-organizing struggle, as well as many newspapers that reported on the labor struggle. The dozens of defendants were cited with “unfair labor practices” and “defamation” against the Kingston-owned company and the IAUWU.

Subsequently, the plaintiffs amended their legal complaint, dropping a number of the original defendants, in an effort to split those supporting the miners. Those no longer cited include all entities related to the Catholic Church, the local newspapers in Carbon and Emery counties, and a number of individual activists who have supported the miners over the last 15 months.

“The two local papers, the *Sun Advocate* and the Emery County Progress, were also named in the suit,” said the December 30 *Sun Advocate* article. “But the next week a mine official contacted the publisher of both papers and told him that the two local papers were added to the suit by mistake and their names were being withdrawn from it.”

The citation of the two local papers, however, was not done in passing in the original suit. The first company complaint named not only the newspapers and their publisher but also reporters of the papers and cited quotations from articles they had published on the miners’ struggle to back up the Kingstons’ allegation of “defamation.” These quotations remain and were even expanded in the amended complaint,

**Continued on Page 9**

## Minnesota meat packers fight firing of unionist

**BY JOHN PINES**

ST. PAUL, Minnesota—Twenty members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 789 and union representatives met here December 14 to organize a fight against the firing of Miguel Olvera, a union steward. Olvera has been a leader of the struggle through which workers at the Dakota Premium Foods (DPF) slaughterhouse won a union representation election in 2000 and their first contract a year later.

“The local is working vigorously in defense of Miguel Olvera’s job. We are sparing no expense, nor time and energy to fight with every means we have to win Olvera’s job and all the lost pay and benefits caused by this unjust firing,” said Don Seaquist, president of UFCW Local 789.

The firing occurred shortly after the company issued disciplinary warnings to dozens of union members in an effort to force workers to work harder and faster, cleaning more meat off bones than previously. This initial campaign, which took place last summer, was countered by Local 789 with a petition demanding the company halt the practice of calling workers into the office and reprimanding them for “dirty bones.” After more than 90 workers signed the petition, the bosses halted the warnings.

Unionists at the December 14 meeting decided to get the truth out about the company’s strategy of victimizing union leaders in the plant in an effort to weaken the entire union. Workers also decided to circulate a petition among union members in the plant to get support for the demand that Olvera be reinstated.

Two days later, an in-plant union newsletter, the *Workers Voice*, was distributed in the boning department with a statement by Olvera explaining the facts surrounding his firing. “Brothers and sisters from work I would like to extend an invitation to you to stand united and fight together and to defend our rights because today it was me and tomorrow it could be any of you,” Olvera says in the statement.

The leaflet explained that the fight to get Olvera’s job back has big stakes for the whole union and working conditions in the plant. It also announced that Local 789 is filing a grievance on behalf of Olvera and an unfair labor practice charge against the company for illegally targeting union activists for firings and other disciplinary measures.

“This is a clear attack on the union and on all of us workers at Dakota,” the *Workers Voice* said. “Miguel [Olvera] and Salvador Sosa have been singled out because they are active in defending workers from the company. This includes those who are not being paid at the wage that they should earn by

union contract. They are also active in signing up new members for the union. We feel the company wants to weaken the union so it can force the workers to do more production with the same number of workers and that this is part of a strategy of the company to attack the most active union workers.”

Since the union meeting, UFCW members at DPF’s boning department have collected over 75 signatures demanding Olvera be returned to his job. Workers said they plan to present the petition to the plant’s general manager.

The bosses walked Olvera out of the factory December 9, unionists said, claiming he was not doing his job up to company standards. Olvera has many years of boning experience and nine years of seniority in the plant. Until a few months ago, the company had never disciplined him for anything.

Olvera helped lead his co-workers to join the UFCW and take an active part in union affairs. His activities included helping lead a ground-breaking sit-down strike and union organizing drive in June 2000 in the South St. Paul slaughterhouse.

Rosen Diversified Inc.—which owns both Dakota Premium Foods and Long Prairie Packing in Long Prairie, Minnesota—has been stepping up attacks on Local 789. The local organizes both of these meatpacking plants and other facilities.

Other union militants have been disciplined for their work and face possible suspension and firing too. The company has also offered Quality Control (QC) positions to two UFCW shop stewards who were very active in organizing workers at Dakota into union fights against the company. The QC positions are privileged. Because of their semi-supervisory functions, workers in these positions are not in the union. One of the stewards has accepted the offer.

The most recent attack at Dakota came against union member Jacob Perasso. According to the company, Perasso was accused of trying to force a co-worker to take a union flier against his will. The Dakota bosses organized an intimidating “investigation” into the accusation and suspended him for “not cooperating,” Perasso said, when he sought to see a copy of the zero-tolerance policy that the company claimed it used to launch the investigation before answering questions. Perasso and his union steward were also denied the possibility of consulting with union officers at the time.

During the “investigation,” the bosses told Perasso and shop steward Montoya Guerrero that distributing union fliers without company permission is a violation of the union contract, the unionists said. Local 789 has filed a grievance against

the suspension and has produced another edition of the *Workers Voice*. “The bosses at Dakota claimed recently that it violates union contract to distribute union fliers in the factory if we don’t have permission from the company bosses,” the new issue of the union newsletter says. “This is completely false and we will continue to read and distribute what we want.”

It continues, “Company bosses argue that they are not making enough profits. But the owners of Rosen have grown wealthy from our labor. Instead of using that wealth to ensure the well-being of the employees and their families, they want to force us to solve their profit crisis by further wearing down our hands, backs, and bodies by working harder and faster. The Rosen owners, and their salaried bosses, don’t face losing their homes nor their ability to feed their families as we do when our bodies wear out and we cannot do our jobs any longer.”

## U.S. textile bosses push protectionism

**Continued from Page 4**

it’s time for those ships to sail.”

Others in big business, like those represented by the NCTO, continue to complain about “unfair competition” from textile and apparel production in semicolonial countries.

This demagoguery notwithstanding, finance capital from the United States and the rest of the imperialist world robs enormous amounts of wealth from these countries for the coffers of imperialist banks and other financial institutions. This extortion is guaranteed not primarily by “unfair” terms of trade imposed from the outside onto the world market. It is guaranteed primarily by the differential value of labor power and the gap in the productivity of labor between the imperialist countries, on the one hand, and those exploited by imperialism, on the other.

Wages and other labor costs for textile and clothing bosses, for example, average \$.70 an hour in India, \$.92 in China, \$1.20 in Thailand, and \$1.70 in Mexico, according to business studies. These countries face the problems of underdevelopment—including lack of electricity, roads, ports, and communications systems—which make it impossible for them to compete on an equal footing.

Imperialism warps the economic structures of the semicolonial world. The “comparative advantage” of oppressed nations in the world capitalist market is largely restricted to producing and exporting agricultural goods and raw materials, as well as in recent

decades serving as an “export platform” for light manufactures or other industrial goods—like garment and textiles—often made in imperialist-owned factories. Even with regard to these goods, countries in the semicolonial world get slapped down every time they try to horn in on markets sought by the titans of agriculture and industry in North America, Europe, and Japan.

Countries where apparel and textile predominate have been and will continue to be vulnerable to protectionist measures. These include Bangladesh, where garments account for 77 percent of total exports—of which 94 percent goes to markets until now governed by MFA quotas; Sri Lanka, where 71 percent of export revenues are from textile; and Pakistan, where 45 percent of manufacturing jobs are in textiles.

Worldwide employment in the textile and garment industries is estimated at tens of millions of workers. As the world capitalist economic crisis deepens, textile and garment bosses are competing ferociously to increase their cut of the surplus value produced by these workers. Textile and garment workers all over the world face the common problems of lay-offs, speedup, longer working hours, stepped-up attacks on our working conditions, and lack of medical care and pensions. Workers face a common enemy, too: the textile and clothing bosses and the capitalist governments that represent their interests in every country where we live.

*Anne Parker is a textile worker in Atlanta.*



# Social disaster in S. Asia

Continued from front page

by the local capitalist regimes.

A week after the disaster, much of the media coverage had shifted to the millions of dollars in aid that has been pledged for recovery from the catastrophe. But a wide disparity exists between the amount of help that has been promised and what is actually given, and of that, what is turned over to the UN aid agency and what ends up in the hands of those who are in dire need. Aid is channeled through UN officials—whose recent record of thievery over the Iraqi “oil for food” program speaks volumes of what one may expect this time—and the imperialist governments and bureaucracies they represent. It then goes into the hands of the local capitalist regimes, before any of it reaches the intended destination.

### No early-warning system

“The waves are totally predictable,” Dr. Tad Murty, an expert on the region’s tsunamis affiliated with the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, told the *New York Times*. “We have travel-time charts covering all of the Indian Ocean. From where this earthquake happened to hit, the travel time for waves to hit the tip of India was four hours. That’s enough time for a warning.”

Stations that gauge wave and earthquake activity across the Pacific Ocean are capable of alerting potential targets of the giant waves in minutes. In fact, the scientists monitoring earthquake activity in the Pacific predicted within 15 minutes of the December 26 earthquake in the Indian Ocean that a substantial risk of a tsunami existed. Since no such early warning system exists in the Indian Ocean countries, there was no network in place to warn those who were potentially at risk. Thousands of lives could have been saved had such a system been established, especially in mainland India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, which were hit by the waves more than an hour after the quake shook the ocean.

Governments along the shores of the Indian Ocean are now calling for such a system to be put in place. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the level of development of the countries included in the network.

Even with such a network in the Pacific, for example, 2,000 people were killed when a tsunami struck the Pacific Islands of Papua New Guinea in 1998. Without substantial modern infrastructure, nations in the semicolonial world have far less of a chance of getting an adequate warning to their population than the industrially developed Pacific-rim nations of Japan and the United States.

In Indonesia, the World Bank reports, 47 percent of households are not connected to the electricity grid and 6,000 villages lack electrification altogether. In Sri Lanka, according to the 1998 UN Human Development report, 56 percent of the population in 1994 did not have access to electricity. Some 75 percent of the country’s population lives in the countryside.

Indonesia’s hardest-hit Aceh province on the island of Sumatra, near the epicenter of the massive undersea earthquake, is one of the poorest in the country. The province’s poverty is not due to a lack of resources. Rich in oil and natural gas, Aceh has long been a target of imperialist oil barons like ExxonMobil, which operates a large natural gas plant there. This wealth, though, is siphoned into the accounts of wealthy capitalists and government bureaucrats in Indonesia, the foreign oil monopolies, and imperialist banks and other such financial institutions (see also article on page 7).

According to the World Bank, in Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital, there are a little over 160 hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants. In Aceh, the figure is less than 50. Almost half of the children in this province are malnourished. About 22 percent of Indonesia’s population has no access to safe water.

This extreme underdevelopment meant that millions had few tools at their disposal to shield themselves from this disaster or, in its aftermath, to minimize additional loss of life and the spreading of disease and begin the recovery. Most of the southern coast of Indonesia, for example, has not been reached by relief efforts as this issue goes to press.

“From their position off Banda Aceh, the province’s capital, the [USS] Abraham

Lincoln’s helicopters can fly only as far as the leveled city of Meulaboh, along Aceh’s west coast,” reported the January 5 *New York Times*. “The fate of villagers to the south remains unknown.”

“We have a logistical nightmare,” the UN’s Jan Egeland told NBC TV’s Today show. “I would say that tens of thousands of people have received no relief.” Egeland said more trucks, aircraft, base camps, fuel, water treatment plants, and generators are needed.

### Strategic spy base hit

According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, only one-quarter of residents of Car Nicobar Island, once home to 30,000 people, have survived the tsunami. The waves hit from all sides and penetrated more than four miles onto the island in some places. But the estimated 20,000 dead do not yet appear as part of the overall figure, as the Indian government has kept the islands off-limits to outside assistance.

Car Nicobar is part of the Andaman and Nicobar island chain, an Indian territory that is home to 350,000 people. In addition to a large population of Indian settlers and an indigenous people who live largely in the forests, the islands are also home to Indian military spy bases. This is the rationalization New Delhi has used to bar foreign aid groups from the islands, even though it claims its listening posts have been destroyed too. Little has been made public about the extent of the devastation.

“India has used the islands, located 600 miles from the mainland, as a listening post for east Asia, mainly China, for many years,” said the *Monitor*.

“When the Chinese set up a signals intelligence facility by leasing an island from Myanmar, to monitor Indian missile tests in the northeast of the country, Indian intelligence came onto the scene with three state-of-the-art ESS, or electronic surveillance stations, provided to them by the Americans, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands,” Subir Bhaumik, a military analyst, told the *Monitor*. “The United States gave us the hardware to intercept Chinese intelligence and it was put in place by 2002, but now all three bases in the islands of Kakana, Katchall, and Nancowrie are believed destroyed by the tsunami.”

In Port Blair, the capital of Car Nicobar, starving survivors kidnapped the island’s top civilian official and police chief January 2 to protest the inadequate relief operation, the *Guardian* reported. After a four-day trek through the jungle, a group of starving Punjabi settlers came upon the two government officials eating plates of fine curried meat, the paper reports.

“The assistant commissioner was eating biryani in his guesthouse,” one witness, Lilly Ommen, told the UK-based daily. “The men arrived and pointed out that they were starving. They also said there were people stuck in the forest with nothing, as well as many dead bodies.”

“I’m very angry,” Suresh, 22, a welder, told the *Guardian*. “We saw these people eating biryani. But we had nothing but rice soaked in salt water.” The officials were released after promising more aid.

“On the really remote islands, God knows what is happening,” aid worker Hoslo Jiwa, who toured Car Nicobar, told the *Guardian*. “They have only made aerial surveys and dropped packages.”

### Tourists and fishermen

Press reports and interviews on television news programs have given substantial space to stories about the foreign tourists who were vacationing in Thailand and other areas when the disaster struck.

Thais have complained of the unequal treatment meted out to local residents who were caught in the disaster and the tourists. More than half the population of 5,000 in the Thai fishing village of Baan Nam Khem, for example, was feared to have died in the tsunami.

“Thais have complained that towns like Baan Nam Khem have been ignored, while the international relief effort has focused on foreign tourists,” the BBC reported. “They say that foreigners were put up in an international school with beds and Internet connections, while Thais were left to sleep outside.”

Thailand received large teams from



Getty Images/Dimas Ardian

**Aid for earthquake and tsunami victims in Aceh piles up at the Polonia military airbase December 30, in Medan, Indonesia.**

countries whose nationals were caught in the maelstrom in Thailand’s resorts and hotels—a much swifter response than countries that lost tens of thousands more.

“Obviously we have to look after the foreigners,” Thaksin Shinawatra, the country’s prime minister, said in early January. Shinawatra promised that the priority now would shift to the Thai population.

### Imperialist plunder

Behind the facade of generosity and sympathy that imperialist governments and their institutions have built with the aid they’ve promised to victims of this calamity, Washington, Paris, London, Tokyo and other citadels of finance capital continue to plunder the resources of the countries in the region. Indonesia and Sri Lanka, to cite two examples, are both saddled with massive debts to imperialist creditors.

In Indonesia, almost \$7.5 billion dollars, or one-quarter of the country’s tax revenue, is slated for payment in the coming year on the interest and principal of the country’s nearly \$81 billion foreign debt. This is equal to all of the country’s planned spending on infrastructure projects and many times the amount pledged by wealthy nations in aid for the country’s reconstruction.

In Sri Lanka, the overall foreign debt last year accounted for more than 58 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product—a total of \$10.6 billion. It has continued to grow steadily over the past decade, increasing from \$8.6 billion in 1995.

German chancellor Gerhard Schröder has proposed that the Paris Club, a banking network of imperialist lenders based in the French capital that holds roughly half of Indonesia’s debt, temporarily suspend collection in face of the tsunami’s destruction.

The governments of the world’s wealthiest nations have pledged aid packages totaling over \$2 billion. Washington had initially offered a paltry \$15 million in aid and then upped that figure to \$350 million after an international outcry.

“The greatest source of America’s generosity is not our government: it’s the good heart of the American people,” U.S. president George Bush said, in announcing a government-backed drive January 3 to collect private contributions that will be headed by his father, ex-president George H. W. Bush, and his predecessor, William Clinton.

But press reports cautioned that the hundreds of millions in government offers are only pledges. The U.S. rulers and their counterparts in Europe and Japan are notorious for making grandiose promises for the cameras and then failing to deliver. Aid to victims of last year’s devastating earthquake in Bam, Iran, for example, fell far short of the amounts pledged, top UN officials reported.

As the U.N. oil-for-food scandal revealed, the money, once in the hands of United Nations administrators, does not often reach its promised destination. Billions in funds generated by sales of Iraqi oil disappeared in a web of relations between various capitalist interests, government representatives, and UN bureaucrats.

What aid actually does reach the affected country has to then go through the web of local capitalist interests and government bureaucracy. A good portion of it never reaches its destination, and is sold on the black market and elsewhere, enriching local capitalist gangs, government officials, and their lieutenants. According to the



**Ten days after the disaster, relief flights have only made it as far south as Meulaboh. Tens of thousands of people south of there have received no aid.**

*Washington Post*, only one-eighth of the 400,000 tons of food flown into Banda Aceh has been delivered to the victims. The *New York Times* reported that “complaints have already arisen about soldiers siphoning off supplies for their relatives and friends.” The Indonesian government’s disaster relief coordinator dismissed reports of hungry families in towns leveled by the giant waves. “I can guarantee you there is no starvation, except for me, because I didn’t have lunch today,” he told the press.

At the same time, Jakarta has seized on the opportunity to go after an independence movement that has been waging a struggle against Indonesian rule in Aceh since 1976. According to military spokesman Col. Ahmad Yani Basuki, one-third of the Indonesian military forces committed to the region in the wake of the disaster is conducting operations against the Free Aceh Movement guerrillas rather than aiding the relief effort.

### Contrast with Cuba

The response of Cuba’s revolutionary government to recent natural disasters is a sharp illustration of the potential that exists to minimize the loss of human life during such calamities and in their aftermath when workers and farmers run society and are mobilized to defend the interests of the vast majority rather than the profits of the wealthy few. The Cuban example stands in stark contrast to the chaos, scarcity, and corruption that have characterized the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami by imperialist regimes and the capitalist governments of the affected countries.

When Hurricane Charley swept through Havana in the early morning hours of August 13 last year with winds of up to 160 miles per hour, the population was prepared. A massive mobilization to evacuate thousands and to prepare the city for the superstorm minimized the loss of life. While four people died in Cuba as a result of that storm, 30 people died in nearby Florida later that day despite the superior resources and wealth of the United States.

A month later, Hurricane Ivan hit. In its sweep through the United States, Ivan and the storms it produced killed 50 people. Another 70 died in neighboring Caribbean countries. But in Cuba, no one lost their lives as 1.9 million people were evacuated from the areas in the storm’s immediate path and a mobilization of volunteers helped in the effort to rebuild the more than 20,000 destroyed homes and quickly restore power to affected areas.



# Indonesia: imperialism amplified toll of tsunami

BY PATRICK BROWN

AUCKLAND, New Zealand—The December 26 tsunami turned Aceh—the northernmost province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra—into a brown wasteland and a grave for tens of thousands of people. Some 100,000 are now living in temporary shelters and 1 million people are dependent on aid to survive.

Aceh was hit at point blank range, because it is less than 100 miles from the epicenter of the earthquake that launched the tsunami.

As devastating as the waves were, however, their impact is magnified many times in Indonesia and elsewhere by underdevelopment and rule by capitalist regimes, which are corrupt as all such governments are. Fifty-five years after winning independence, Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country, remains a semicolonial country dominated by the billionaire rulers of the United States, Australia, Japan, and other imperialist powers.

Photos of the tsunami's aftermath dramatically show this underdevelopment. The tsunami faced little resistance from shacks, houses, and feebly constructed buildings in Banda Aceh, the capital—let alone from the ramshackle structures of many smaller towns and villages. Untold thousands of people were trapped in collapsed buildings or felled by swirling debris.

The few well-constructed buildings had a better chance of surviving the impact. Photos of Banda Aceh and Meulaboh township on Aceh's West Coast showed mosques standing in seas of mud where other structures had been smashed to the ground.

As they begin to clear the wreckage, working people and aid workers now have to contend with the region's poor road system and the fact that Aceh, a province of 5 million people, has only one small airport. Meanwhile, trained elephants are being used in the clean-up "because there [are] few trucks and other heavy equipment," reported the Associated Press.

The waves also destroyed the sparse health system. In Banda Aceh, only the hospital constructed for the tens of thousands of Indonesian troops stationed in the area remained standing. In the first days, surgeons there operated on the wounded using local anesthesia only and unsterilized instruments. Reporting on a visit to the hospital one week after the tsunami, Australian Associate Press reporter Rob Taylor wrote, "In a white tiled emergency room devoid of almost all equipment but stretchers, four people died in a matter of minutes."

## Capitalism, imperialist domination

All this is taking place in an oil- and gas-rich province whose natural wealth and human labor has for 30-plus years provided massive revenues for ExxonMobil in partnership with Pertamina, the state oil company. The government in Jakarta and its local political and military representatives—who act as agents for the imperialists while fattening their own pockets—have also taken a smaller, but handsome, share of the pickings over time.

Across Indonesia, the same investors from abroad and local capitalists have blocked national development. The industrialization that has occurred is tailored to meet the needs of imperialist investors. For them, Indonesia is a source of lucrative commodities from rubber to palm oil, petroleum, and gold. In addition, capitalists have taken advantage of Indonesia's 100-million strong labor force to make the country a low-wage export platform for light industrial products, including shoes made for a pittance and sold for exorbitant prices in stores from New York to Frankfurt to Auckland.

Among Indonesia's chief attractions for foreign capitalists are its minerals. U.S., Canadian, and Australian mining companies are hauling out gold, copper, and other minerals from Sumatra, West Papua, and other islands. Such products provided 19 percent of the country's export revenue in 1998.

U.S., Canadian, and European firms also exploit gas fields off West Papua and in the Maduras Strait, as well as in Aceh and elsewhere. The country also produces

palm oil and rubber on plantations, many of which date from the period of Dutch colonial rule.

## From colony to independence

The widespread group of islands that eventually became Indonesia was first cobbled together as part of the Dutch East Indies in the 19th century. After plundering the country's spices and other resources, as well as the labor power of its people, the Dutch colonial rulers were defeated in an independence struggle after World War II.

Fearing the militancy and combativity of the Indonesian workers and peasants who had gained self-confidence through the anti-colonial struggle, Washington, now the dominant imperialist power, took a hostile stance toward the new government of Sukarno, and backed a bloody military rebellion launched by General Suharto and other officers in 1965. Workers and peasants were left defenseless in face of the onslaught, instructed by the mass-supported Communist Party of Indonesia to place political trust in the bourgeois Sukarno government. Hundreds of thousands were killed.

Through three decades, imperialist governments from the United States to New Zealand gave support to Suharto's military-dominated regime, including its 1975 invasion and occupation of East Timor. In the 1980s and '90s, however, Suharto's iron grip began to loosen. In 1998 working people and youth poured into the streets to protest the government's imposition of austerity measures in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of the previous year. Backed by the imperialists, local ruling-class figures shoved Suharto aside.

Since then, working people have tried to use the political space they have won to advance their interests, while a succession of governments in Jakarta has tried to put a lid on the social ferment. The imperialist powers, meanwhile, have continued to interfere in the country's affairs.

Recently, Washington and its allies have had increasing success in working with the new government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the "war on terrorism," pressing it to pursue "Islamic" groups it accuses of bombings in Bali and elsewhere.

A key mechanism for transferring the wealth created by Indonesia's workers and peasants is the never-ending obligation to pay interest on the debt owed to foreign banks and imperialist institutions.

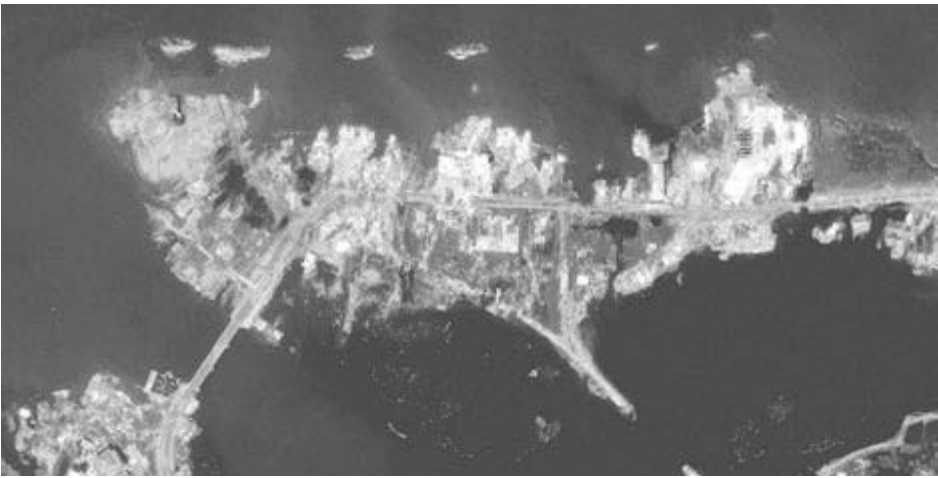
# Ukraine elections register blow to Moscow

## Continued from front page

according to Reuters, indicating that his administration would adopt a more pro-imperialist stance than that of the outgoing president. "We want to move westward," he said, "because Europe means higher standards—of democracy, social policy, and the functioning of the economy."

Washington took advantage of the economic crisis in Ukraine and the repressive policies of Kiev to present itself as the defender of "democracy" in the former Soviet republic. Under the guise of promoting "democratic" institutions, the U.S. government over the last two years has spent some \$58 million to aid opposition forces in Ukraine. In addition, the National Endowment for Democracy reportedly spent \$400,000 on "trade union education." The American Bar Association, for its part, spent another \$400,000 giving election law "training" to judges, including five who sit on Ukraine's Supreme Court whose rulings facilitated Yushchenko's victory. Imperialist powers in Europe kicked in millions for similar purposes as well.

Yanukovich's charges of violations of election laws were rejected by the CEC December 30. Although he had promised not to give up his position as prime minister, Yanukovich announced his resignation in a New Year's Eve address following the CEC decision and protests by Yushchenko supporters who have blocked Yanukovich from holding cabinet meetings. "I believe it is impossible to have any position in a state ruled by such officials," Yanukovich



Banda Aceh, Indonesia, before tsunami hit on December 26 (top), and after (below).

As in other semicolonial countries, Indonesia is forced to largely export raw materials and light industrial goods, usually at low prices, and import heavy industrial goods, technology, machine tools, and other manufactures, which are expensive. To make up the difference it has to borrow funds from the IMF and other imperialist institutions, which puts it in a perpetual state of debt slavery. Its foreign debt stands at \$136 billion. In 2002 the World Bank estimated that payments on this debt would take 44 percent of that year's national revenue.

Indonesia today bears other marks of its domination by imperialism. More than 40 percent of the population lives under the official poverty line—an official statistic that understates the real level of deprivation. Other aspects of underdevelopment can be illustrated by a comparison with Australia, the imperialist power closest to it geographically.

To cite one example, Indonesia produced 96 billion kilowatt hours of electricity in 2001. In the same year, almost double that amount—198 kWh—was produced in Australia, a country of around 20 million people, not even one-tenth Indonesia's population.

There is one phone line—on average—

for every 100 people in Indonesia, and one for every two in Australia. The figure is roughly the same for cell phones.

Indonesia has less than one-half the length of highways of Australia, and half the number of airports with paved runways—a major barrier to the delivery of food and other supplies to outlying regions.

The lack of roads and airfields is not the only obstacle to the transport of aid in Aceh, however. The province has been the scene of a series of military offensives under both Suharto and more recent regimes, as the rulers have moved to crush the pro-independence Free Aceh Movement (GAM), founded in 1976, and to suppress sentiments for independence or greater autonomy. AP reports that at least 13,000 people have been killed in Aceh in the last 30 years.

Following the December 26 catastrophe, GAM leaders declared a unilateral ceasefire. According to the British daily *Independent*, however, GAM spokespeople said in early January that the Indonesian military was sending in soldiers "under guise of the relief effort. Indonesian commanders confirmed that counter-insurgency measures were continuing but insisted that two-thirds of troops had been reassigned to coping with the aftermath of the disaster."

an official in the coal industry in the eastern region and Yushchenko in the state banking system. They each served terms as prime minister during the 10-year presidency of Kuchma, who directed the regime in Kiev toward closer collaboration with imperialist governments, while maintaining firm ties with Moscow.

The Russian government sought to prevent another regime in a former Soviet republic on its borders from turning away from its influence and toward Washington and other imperialist powers. Ukraine in particular had played a vital role in the Soviet economy, supplying much of the country's iron ore, coal, and heavy industry. The Black Sea port of Sevastopol remains home to Moscow's southern naval fleet. Under an accord with Kiev, the Russian military may station up to 25,000 troops at Sevastopol and its other bases on the Black Sea.

Meanwhile, on December 31 the government of Turkmenistan announced that it had cut off gas exports to Ukraine. "In what some interpreted was a hidden show of force by Moscow," reported Agence-France Presse, "Turkmenistan said it had cut off gas supplies to Ukraine to force Kiev to pay higher prices." A deal between the two governments was quickly reached, with the Ukrainian state-owned company Naftohaz agreeing to pay \$58 per 1,000 cubic meters, as opposed to the previous price of \$44. Ukraine receives 45 percent of its natural gas imports from the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan.



# How legless veteran fought 1950s witch-hunt

Below is an excerpt from *The Case of the Legless Veteran*, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for January. It describes a successful fight against the anti-communist witch hunt of the Joe McCarthy era in the United States. In the decade following World War II, the Socialist Workers Party, other working-class organizations, and individual artists, professors, and others were targeted and blacklisted as part of the government's "loyalty program." Due to his membership in the SWP, James Kutcher, a worker who lost both his legs in World War II, was fired

## BOOKS OF THE MONTH

in 1948 from his job at the Veterans Administration. In the book, Kutcher chronicles his eight-year battle through which he won back his job and pension benefits. The fight drew support from thousands of unionists and other supporters of democratic rights. Copyright © 1973 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BY JAMES KUTCHER

Newspaper publicity, press conferences, publication and distribution of literature, interviews over the radio—we



Press conference held September 1, 1948, in Newark, New Jersey, to announce formation of the Kutcher Civil Rights Defense Committee. Left to right: George Novack, James Kutcher, Carl Holderman, Rev. John I. Daniel.

looked for and grabbed every opportunity to reach the public ear with the facts. But the main part of such a job consists of leg work. You have to get out and around to people where they are; you can't just open up an office and wait for them to come to you. You can't go knocking on the doors of people's homes, either; you must concentrate your energies by going where people are in groups—that is, you must search out organizations and prevail upon them to listen to you.

It is not an easy job, especially where the element of alleged "disloyalty" enters, and sometimes you get ignored, or get put off with phony excuses, or get rebuffed altogether. Sometimes you know that if you can get before a certain organization and tell your story, the members will listen to you with attention and sympathy, but the officers or executive committee are afraid or hostile for one reason or another and they bar your way. And even when you succeed in getting the floor, it is still no picnic. Unless you are a trained speaker with leather lungs it is pretty tiring to make four or five speeches a night, as I often had to do.

The case was best known in my home town, and in the weeks following the first press conference I spent most of my time in and around Newark, taking my case to as many organizations as would

listen to me. Unless I am mistaken, the first local group, after the State CIO, to act on my case was my own chapter of the American Veterans Committee. They branded my discharge as "a cruel abuse of official power" and "a flagrant violation of civil rights." They opposed my prospective discharge, condemned the practice of blacklisting organizations without a hearing, and took a collection toward the expenses in the case. Since they knew all about me, after the newspaper publicity, it was not necessary for me to make a speech asking their endorsement.

A couple of weeks later, however, I did not have as good luck with the other ex-servicemen's organization I belonged to, the Disabled American Veterans. A motion was made by someone at a meeting of my chapter (composed of amputees) to support me in a mild sort of way. Then someone else suggested that the motion be made stronger. That got the majority of the meeting frightened, and a motion was passed to table the whole matter. Most of them worked for the Veterans Administration, and they did not want to jeopardize their jobs. I wasn't given the floor to tell my side of the story.

By coincidence, the first organization I spoke to on the case was the Newark Teachers Union, Local 481 of the Ameri-

can Federation of Teachers, AFL. All the time I was talking to them, I half wanted to say: "If things had gone differently, if I had done what I wanted to do, I would be sitting down there in one of the seats among you as a member of your local and your profession instead of standing up here defending myself against the charge of disloyalty." But I refrained. They unanimously passed a resolution to be sent to President Truman and the press, asking the VA not to turn me out of my job and the president "to grant Kutcher's request for a public hearing at which his party can defend itself against the subversive charges." Later, the New Jersey Federation of Teachers, AFL, took a similar stand.

Next I appeared before the Baptist Ministers' Conference of Newark and Vicinity, representing congregations of about 100,000 Negroes. They listened to me politely, questioned me closely and then endorsed my case vigorously. Through them I obtained access to a great many churches where I told my story to their congregations.

The Newark Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People applauded after I finished, took a collection for me and referred the question of endorsement to their executive board. At first I was afraid that this was a nice way of avoiding action, but that showed how inexperienced I was. The executive board turned it over to the branch's legal committee, which studied the whole question carefully and then brought in a resolution of whole-hearted support which was adopted by the executive board.

I appeared before a committee or group of officers of the Commission on Social Work, New Jersey Conference, Methodist Church. I couldn't tell from their expressions, questions, or comments whether or not they were sympathetic to what I was saying, although they were polite enough. They said we would be notified about their decision. Weeks went by, and we heard nothing from them. I thought the least they might have done was send me a letter stating they did not intend to act. Then George Novack told me on the phone one day that the New York office of our committee had received a resolution of endorsement from the Commission some time before. It was evidently the only address they had. I began to learn the virtue, and even the necessity, of patience.

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**Babies, not bombs**—Two years ago, a maternity ward was established on the Puerto Rican island



Harry Ring

of Vieques. Since then, some 150 children have been born there.

For decades, women had to travel to mainland Puerto Rico to

give birth. The new maternity service coincided with the surrender decision of the Pentagon to give up use of the island as a bomb-test range. For years, the people of Vieques had fought tenaciously to get them out.

**Twisted history**—*Navigator*, an AARP travel guide, offers tips on where, “the U.S. is feted, not hated.” As a prime choice, it plugs the island of Grenada. It cites that Grenada celebrates Thanksgiving “to mark the American overthrow of the socialist government in

1983.” This is twisted history.

A short-hand account: In 1979, a movement of workers and farmers led by Maurice Bishop toppled a hated government backed by Washington. With Bishop as prime minister. Grenada moved in a socialist direction. In 1983, counter-revolutionaries turned guns on the people and murdered Bishop. A week later, U.S. forces stormed the island and reinstalled a puppet regime. For a first-rate article by Steve Clark, check out Pathfinder’s *New International* no. 6.

**Sounds like capitalism**—“The fascination with customized cell phone ring tones is in the midst of a severe—and possibly offensive—evolution. Shotgun blasts. Rapid gunfire. Horrific screams. Bodily functions. Even sexual moans and groans.”—News item

**Like the wage system**—The Georgia state prison system is reducing the average number of calories allotted to women inmates. It will be a 20 percent calorie reduction and, it’s said, meets the standards set by nutritionists. Male pris-

oners will continue to get the same amount as before. Both women and men, we assume, will continue to get the same culinary slop.

**How about a slave galley?**—According to Scotland Yard, so many arrests are being made in London that they have an acute shortage of prison cell space. To ease the crunch, the Yard is considering buying a ship moored in the Thames river. They say it can hold 400 prisoners. Earlier, the chief prisons inspector attacked conditions on board the ship.

## Utility workers strike Jersey Central Power & Light

BY SARA LOBMAN

MORRISTOWN, New Jersey—The 1,300 workers at Jersey Central Power & Light Co. (JCP&L), New Jersey’s second-largest utility company, have been on strike since December 7. The workers are members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). They include meter readers, service workers, linemen, and collectors.

Workers on the picket line here in Morristown said that one of the main issues in the strike is the company demand to increase the number of unionists, especially retirees, who will have to pay for health insurance. JCP&L also wants changes in work rules that would force workers to be on-call for 24 hours at a stretch, several times a week. Workers would not get paid for this time unless they were called in, but would be subject to disciplinary action if they were unreachable or unavailable. The company has already tried to impose these work rules, issuing lengthy suspensions for noncompliance.

“Basically they want to take money from us and put it in their pockets,” Micah Al-mendinger, a meter reader said.

Keith Harris, also a meter reader, with two and a half years at the utility, noted that the company has little regard for safety. Less than a year ago, a lineman was electrocuted on the job due to poor equipment. Meter readers are expected to go out in all kinds of weather, yet their trucks are not equipped for snow.

“I don’t think a utility should make a profit at all,” Dave Hoppy, another meter reader, said. “This is not the 1800s. Utilities are a necessary thing for everyone.”

The previous contract expired in November. In September, the workers had rejected a proposal recommended by the union negotiating committee that included up to a 12 percent jump in health-care costs by 2006.

JCP&L is owned by FirstEnergy of Akron, Ohio. The company is on a similar offensive against workers in other states. In Shippingport, Pennsylvania, a contract for 360 members of the IBEW expired in February. When no agreement was reached, the bosses unilaterally implemented parts of their “last, best offer,” requiring workers to pay 5 percent of the company’s cost for health insurance. “It’s an out-and-out



Militant/Sara Lobman

**Workers in Morristown, New Jersey, December 14, on strike against Jersey Central Power and Light Co. Some 1,300 members of IBEW union walked out December 8.**

attempt to break the union,” David Raffa, the local president of the IBEW, told the Newark *Star Ledger*.

Members of the IBEW at Toledo Edi-

son in Ohio also turned down a contract offer because the company was insisting on increasing workers’ health-care contributions.

## Co-Op miners win support for union fight, bosses cited

Continued from Page 5

which dropped the two local newspapers as named defendants.

The UMWA, other labor organizations, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret Morning News*—Utah’s two main dailies, and the *Militant* remain defendants.

The new complaint is a sharper attack against the UMWA and others who have backed the fight. The amended Kingston legal brief now accuses the UMWA, through one of its “agents,” of misrepresenting the actions of the Co-Op bosses when they fired Bill Estrada on Sept. 22, 2003. The complaint claims that after his firing Estrada “falsely told the waiting workers they had also been fired,” thereby causing the walkout.

“The Kingstons are attempting to rewrite history and obscure what miners have been fighting for,” Estrada told the press. “The miners were responding not only to my firing but to two other disciplinary actions by the bosses against workers in the days preceding the firings. After I was fired, the

miners as a group were making their opinions known to the bosses that I should be put back on the job, and were refusing to back down. That’s when management called the cops, ordered all of the miners off the property, and locked us out.”

C.W. Mining lawyers also state their intention in the lawsuit to prove allegations of defamation against the UMWA and the *Militant* through discovery. No mention of using discovery is made in relation to the *Salt Lake Tribune* or *Deseret Morning News*, the other two papers still named in the suit. This process, which can be used if the court does not dismiss the case in its early stages, opens up defendants to massive legal expenses as the Co-Op bosses’ lawyers organize a fishing expedition by demanding correspondence, records, and deposition from defendants.

“This is a frivolous lawsuit,” UMWA Region 4 director Bob Butero said. “The union’s attorneys will represent the miners and we will try to get this dismissed.”

The fired Co-Op miners say funds

continue to be urgently needed. Almost all the fired workers live in trailer parks in Huntington. In the winter months heating bills can soar above \$200, as much or more than rent payments. Funds can be sent to: UMWA District 22, 525 East, 100 South, Price, Utah 84501. Checks should be made out to the Co-Op Miners Fund. Messages of support can also be faxed to the UMWA at (435) 637-9456. For more information call the UMWA at (435) 637-2037.

Miners are also urging their supporters to write, call, or fax the NLRB to protest the mass firings, demand reinstatement of the workers, and ask that the election be decided based on the November 18 NLRB ruling on who was eligible to vote. Letters to the NLRB should be sent to Region 27, Director B. Allan Benson at 600 17th St., 7th floor—North Tower, Denver, CO 80202-5433; Tel: (303) 844-3551; Fax: (303) 844-6249.

## — 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —



January 18, 1980

TEHRAN—More than two months after it began, the occupation of the U.S. Embassy here—renamed the “den of spies”—remains at the center of political developments in Iran.

The refusal of the students holding the embassy to compromise on their demand for the return of the shah, and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s support for their stand, have inspired new mass mobilizations by workers and peasants in recent weeks.

A powerful example of this was a demonstration held December 23 in Tehran by the Islamic Workers Shora to support the occupation of the embassy and oppose any compromise with imperialism.

The Islamic Workers Shora consists of representatives from shoras (committees) in 128 factories. The December 23 demonstration was called on only one day’s notice. Nevertheless, some fifty factory shoras took part. Tens of thousands of workers organized in contingents from each plant, turned out.

The banner at the head of the march read: “Unity, Martyrdom, Shora.”

Among the most popular slogans were: “America, America, you are our enemy,” “The trial of the spies must begin,” “The Imam [Khomeini] is not going to compromise,” and “Long live the people of Panama” (a reference to the protests against the shah there).



January 17, 1955

DETROIT, Jan.10—Attempts to bar minority parties from the ballot in Michigan will be renewed this week when the Republican-controlled State Legislature meets in Lansing; The Legislature’s Elections Committee, headed by State Senator Clyde Geerlings, has announced that it will introduce a bill to change requirements for minority parties so drastically that it will be virtually impossible for them to comply.

The drive against minority parties began in 1952 when the State Legislature passed, and Democratic Governor Williams signed, the notorious Trucks Law. One of the provisions of this witch-hunt measure gave the authorities the power to ban minority parties through the device of designating them as “subversive.”

The Socialist Workers Party was the first organization singled out for victimization after the Trucks Law went into effect. But the SWP went to the courts and was able to preserve its ballot rights thanks to widespread protests against the Trucks Law by the CIO, AFL and the nonpartisan Citizens Committee Against the Trucks Law.

The courts are still considering the constitutionality of the Trucks Law. But without waiting for a final court decision the Republican leaders have decided to try to bar the minority parties by changing the election laws.

## Malden mills workers sign contract

BY MAGGIE TROWE

LAWRENCE, Massachusetts—Textile workers here at Malden Mills Industries voted 301-136 to accept a three-year contract that includes a modest wage increase offset by steeply increased health insurance premiums.

Some 1,000 people work at the main mill here and a smaller facility in Hudson, New Hampshire, knitting polyester fabric. Seven hundred are production workers organized by UNITE HERE Local 311.

Several days earlier, local members had voted 231-198 to authorize a strike and reject what the company claimed was the initial offer, which included cutting the time laid off workers are covered by the company’s health insurance from three months to one month. In the offer that was adopted, the company restored the three-month coverage. In recent years a good portion of Malden Mills workers have been laid off for several months annually.

Union officials from the local and the

New England Joint Board recommended adoption of the first and second offers.

This was the first contract negotiated by the mill’s new ownership, led by GE Commercial Finance, the financial arm of General Electric. Former owner Aaron Feuerstein lost control of the company when Malden Mills filed for bankruptcy in 2001.

The three-year contract includes annual wage increases of 2 percent, 2 percent, and 3 percent. However, health insurance premiums for individuals will triple from \$6 to \$18 a week in the first year and then to \$25 and \$31 the following two years. Family coverage will quadruple in the first year from \$9 to \$35 to a week, followed by increases to \$40 and \$45 in the next two years.

In November, 190 workers at Duro Finishing in Fall River, Massachusetts, accepted a concessions contract, including increased health insurance payments, after a six-week strike pushed back the company’s initial proposed cuts.



# A social, not just natural, disaster in Asia

Massive aid with no strings attached! Cancel the foreign debt of all the countries struck by the Indian Ocean tsunami! Working people should campaign with these demands as relief efforts for the victims of this disaster unfold.

At the same time, the magnitude of the toll; the social catastrophe plaguing millions in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and elsewhere in the region in the tsunami’s aftermath; and the class character of the aid extended from abroad and its distribution locally speak volumes about the need for social revolution. No capitalist country—from top imperialist powers like Washington to those in the semicolonial world—has ever used existing technology and human ingenuity and resources to effectively minimize the toll from natural calamities.

The movement of tectonic plates on the ocean floor did cause the powerful quake that made the sea rage. It was a reminder that we live on the crust of a planet whose molten core makes its shell shift. We can’t do anything about that.

The extent of the toll, however, was man-made. Early warning systems for tsunamis have been developed and are in place off the coast of California and in the Sea of Japan in the Pacific. These systems are costly and none of the countries struck have the resources to build or buy them and make them functional, or effective. Tens of thousands perished in Sri Lanka and India, alone, which were hours away from the tsunami’s starting point. Lack of adequate communications, warning networks, and transportation rendered useless even the signals picked up in Hawaii and elsewhere that indicated a tsunami was developing 15 minutes after the earthquake’s eruption.

The underdevelopment of the countries affected, which accounts for this state of affairs, has everything to do with their domination by imperialism. The plunder of the natural resources and exploitation of labor of the semicolonial world by the barons of finance capital in Washington, Paris, London, Tokyo, and elsewhere has everything to do with lack of access for millions to modern forms of electricity, telephones, paved roads, sturdy housing (or housing at all, other than shacks), public sanitation, medical care, or adequate nutrition. The workings of capitalism, and imperialism, are behind the acuteness of the social catastrophe unfolding the last 10

# Free trade: either way workers go to wall

In his January 1848 “Speech on the Question of Free Trade,” Karl Marx warned working people and democrats not to be “deluded by the abstract word Freedom!” Whose freedom? he asked. “Not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but freedom of Capital to crush the worker.” Under capitalist social relations, Marx pointed out, whether free trade or protection happens to be current government policy, either way the worker “goes to the wall.” Since Marx prepared that speech for publication more than 150 years ago, the structure of world capitalism has changed significantly, with the rise of consolidation of the global imperialist order. What hasn’t changed, however, is the correctness of Marx’s concluding words: that in judging the trade policies of one or another capitalist government, the position of the workers movement should be determined by what “hastens the Social Revolution.”

The labor movement needs to start with the interests of the working class, which is an international class. There is no blueprint good for all times, all situations, and all places. With regards to products coming into the United States, our position on free trade is very simple: we’re for it. Revolutionists in any imperialist country take the same position with respect to “their own” governments. We’re unconditionally opposed to the rulers of the United States imposing protectionist barriers of any kind under any pretext on imported goods. And we’re opposed to Washington imposing an embargo on goods to Cuba, Korea, Iran—or any imperialist country either, for that matter!

The “free trade” demagoguery of finance capital needs to be exposed. The trade policy of the U.S. rulers, or those in any other imperialist country, is a *national policy*. It aims to advance the national interests of the exploit-

days on the coastal areas of South Asia.

The character of the aid extended and its distribution is the product of the class character of the states that offer it and those that receive it. Relief offered by the imperialist powers so far has been inadequate, if not stingy. None of these governments has taken the much needed step to immediately cancel the foreign debt of the countries affected, to cut the noose of debt slavery. And much of the aid promised, if the past record is any indication, is not likely to materialize.

Much of the relief distribution is in the hands of the United Nations—as much a “den of thieves” as its predecessor, to borrow the apt term for the League of Nations used by Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin. This is cause for discomfort, as recent revelations of the handling of the Iraqi “oil for food” program by UN officials shows.

Not all the aid that does reach the countries it is destined for will get to those in dire straits either. Reports have already surfaced of tons of relief supplies accumulating in warehouses, members of the local military pilfering donations, and of callousness among local government officials toward the millions in desperate need of aid to rebuild their lives. Corruption, rampant among all capitalist regimes, does show its ugly head at such moments, often with more crudeness in the semicolonial world where scarcity is rampant.

Cuba stands out as an exception to this horrendous reality in today’s world. Its record in preparations beforehand, massive evacuations during, and rapid reconstruction after last year’s hurricanes—and the resulting minimal toll, even in comparison to its wealthy Yankee neighbor to the north—is an example that cries for emulation. The reason? Workers and peasants in Cuba took state power and put the country’s destiny into the hands of the vast majority through a socialist revolution, forging a communist leadership that is not bought off or cowed. Cuban working people and their proletarian leadership joined the worldwide struggle to build a society based not on the profits of a tiny minority of super wealthy families but on the interests of the vast majority—a society that values human life and dignity equally for all. That makes all the difference in the world—including in a storm, flood, fire, earthquake, or tsunami.

ing class, including balancing the conflicting needs of capitalist sectors that are vulnerable to competition on the world market to quite different degrees. That’s what the previous textile and apparel quotas, or the new restrictions to clothing and textile imports from China and elsewhere Washington has put in place or is contemplating, are all about.

Under the banner of free trade, the U.S. government uses so-called antidumping clauses, “environmental” and “labor standards” restrictions, “human rights” demagoguery, and other measures to carry out brutal and aggressive trade wars not only against its imperialist competitors but with special ferocity against the semicolonial countries.

All the talk from the White House and Congress, and in the big-business press about the “complexities” and breakdowns of international negotiations to advance “free trade” is a self-serving smoke screen. The U.S. rulers need to do only one thing: declare that all goods coming into the United States are free of tariffs and nontariff barriers of any kind. That’s what revolutionists demand from Washington as well as the governments of Canada, France, Sweden, Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Japan, or any other imperialist country.

This is not what militant workers demand in most countries in the world today, however. Semicolonial countries, as well as those like Cuba or China where capitalism was overthrown in the past through popular revolutions, have a right to use trade barriers to protect their national sovereignty against decades of imperialist oppression and exploitation advanced through debt slavery and all the mechanisms through which finance capital dominates the world.

# U.S.-led forces launch offensive in Mosul

Continued from front page

8,000 troops already there in a new offensive against Baathist forces. Brigades are made up of 2,000-4,000 soldiers. On December 30, U.S. troops turned back an attempt by Baathists to overrun a U.S. combat outpost in Mosul, reported al-Jazeera. U.S. warplanes strafed and bombed the attackers, killing 25, according to the U.S. military.

Iraqi government officials have announced the capture of Abu Mawan, an alleged top leader of the Mosul-based Abu Talha, a group reportedly associated with al-Zarqawi.

U.S. and Iraqi troops also launched a new offensive in the Triangle of Death south of the capital. Nearly 300 suspected Baathists were captured, including Hatem al-Zawbal, according to press reports. Al-Jazeera said that al-Zawbal is believed to be the leader of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, another group that has taken responsibility

for kidnapping dozens of foreigners. The group’s name refers to Iraq’s fight against British colonial rule.

A third leader of the Baathist-backed armed groups was captured in fighting in Samarra, according to the *International Herald Tribune*. The *Tribune* said the man captured, Fadil Husain Ahmed al-Kurdi, is an Iraqi Kurd and was responsible for communications between al-Qaeda and Tahwid and Jihad, Zarqawi’s group, and for movement of their forces in and out of Iraq.

Under these conditions, while support among Shiites and Kurds for the upcoming elections has remained solid, the leader of Iraq’s largest Sunni-led party announced the group’s withdrawal from the upcoming vote, according to a December 27 report by al-Jazeera. Mohsen Abdul Hamid said the Iraqi Islamic Party was not calling for a boycott of the elections. Several leaders of the party were arrested by Iraqi police last November and were accused of supporting the Baathist attacks on the interim regime.

# Iraqi Kurds press for autonomy

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—Tensions between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurds have sharpened recently as Kurdish political leaders are pressing to resettle thousands of Kurds to the northern oil-rich city of Kirkuk and its surrounding area.

Another reason is the support by substantial numbers of Kurds for the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan, the term Kurds use for the northeastern section of the country. According to Al-Jazeera TV, on December 29 a delegation of the Kurdish Referendum Movement handed the chief United Nations official working on the organization of elections in Iraq a petition calling for a referendum on Kurdish independence. More than 1.7 million Kurds, almost half the Kurdish population in northern Iraq, signed the petition. The Kurds represent 20 percent of the country’s population of 25 million.

Efforts by Kurdish political parties to bolster limited autonomy from Baghdad that already exists on the ground, and the widespread support for Kurdish independence highlight the explosive threat the struggle for Kurdish self-determination represents to imperialism and bourgeois regimes in the region.

Thousands of Kurds were forcibly removed from Kirkuk and the surrounding area in the 1980s by the Saddam Hussein government. Their lands and homes were given to thousands of Sunni Arabs, many of whom were also forced to move to the area, in a Baathist “Arabization” program to strengthen the regime’s hold over the strategic region.

U.S. officials estimate that Kurdish resettlement efforts have so far forced 100,000 Arabs to leave. Some Kurdish leaders have proposed that the January 30 elections be postponed in the Kurdish areas until the resettlement of Kirkuk is complete.

Hamid Afandi, a prominent minister in the Kurdish regional government based in Erbil, northern Iraq, has suggested that Kurds take control of Kirkuk and get a larger share of its oil revenues. “We are ready to fight against all forces to control Kirkuk,” he told the *New York Times*. Afandi said that so far Washington has blocked such a move.

The Iraqi government has also expressed irritation at Kurdish officials signing deals with foreign companies to develop oil fields under Kurdish control. Baghdad has warned foreign companies against making such deals with anyone other than representatives of the central government.

Though the main political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan have repeatedly reassured Washington and Baghdad that they are for a “united, federated Iraq,” there is widespread support among Kurds for independence. This is what the petition recently turned over to UN officials reflected.

UN officials have balked. “We have all been working on the basis that you are going to have a unitary state, an Iraq that is united and at peace with itself and its neighbors,” UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said at a recent news conference.

Kurdish parties are also pressing to preserve a provision in the current Iraqi constitution that gives them broad veto powers over most laws passed by Baghdad. They have said that they will take part in the January 30 elections and the writing of a new Iraqi constitution on the condition that the veto provision is maintained. Iraq’s interim constitution, known as the Transitional Administrative Law, allows a two-thirds majority in any three provinces to block the ratification of a new constitution. Kurds constitute the large majority in three of Iraq’s northern provinces, enabling them to defeat attempts to weaken Kurdish autonomy.

Leaders of the largest Shiite-led parties, including Ali al-Sistani, the leading Shiite cleric, have said that the provision for Kurdish autonomy may no longer be in effect after the upcoming elections.

The U.S.-backed Iraqi interim government has little, if any, authority in the northern region of Iraq, according to an article in the December 31 *New York Times*. While it is nearly impossible to find an Iraqi flag displayed anywhere in the region, the Kurdish flag flies everywhere, including atop an Iraqi border guard compound.

In stark contrast to parts of Iraq dominated by Sunni Arabs, who made up the backbone of support for Baathist rule, the Kurdish provinces are in the midst of a construction boom. The 10-story Hotel Erbil in the provincial capital opened last October and its 167 rooms are often sold out, according to the *Times*.

Tight security is maintained throughout the region by a substantial police force and the 80,000-member Kurdish military comprised mostly of former pesh merga guerrillas. Thousands of these fighters were sent into Mosul last November when Iraqi police fled their posts in face of Baathist attacks. Though the Kurdish troops are officially incorporated into the Iraqi army, they functions largely independently of Baghdad.

Together with another 20 million Kurds living in a territory that covers parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Armenia, the Iraqi Kurds make up an oppressed nationality first subjugated by the Ottoman empire. Baghdad, Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus fear that any move toward independence, or even formal autonomy, by Iraqi Kurds could be a mortal threat to their states as it would inspire national struggles among their Kurdish populations.

The main Kurdish political parties in Iraq—the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—have hitched the future of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination to the wagon of U.S. imperialism. In exchange, Washington has tolerated a degree of autonomy for the Kurdish administration in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Kurds have every reason to be concerned about moves against the limited autonomy they have obtained. In the aftermath of the 1991 U.S.-led war against Iraq, the Kurdish people revolted against Baathist rule and held many villages and towns, including Kirkuk, for a week or more. At the time, Washington stood aside as the Hussein regime sent helicopter gunships and heavy armor to crush the Kurdish uprising.



# Four million Cubans join defense exercise

BY MATILDE ZIMMERMANN

HAVANA—“A United People. And With Tanks!” read the banner headline on the newspaper of the Union of Young Communists on Sunday, December 19. *Juventud Rebelde* was celebrating the successful completion of a full week of large-scale military exercises to test and sharpen Cuba’s preparedness for resisting a U.S. invasion.

The exercise, known as Bastión 2004, was launched December 13. It involved 100,000 people in the first five days of strategizing and simulated attacks and over 4 million Cubans in the final weekend of national mobilization. Bastión 2004 was the first nationwide military mobilization in this nation of 4 million in 18 years, and the first time in more than a decade that heavy tanks and MIG fighter planes have been brought out.

“For many years our principal objective has been to avoid war,” said Minister of the Armed Forces Raúl Castro when he initiated Bastión 2004 on December 13. “And we know that the only way to avoid an invasion is to make it clear that if it happens Cuba will be converted from one end to the other into an enormous wasps’ nest, which no aggressor can conquer, no matter how strong he is. In the end, the invader will have to retreat, bloody and defeated, because this would be a war of the entire people.”

“Better to spill rivers of sweat now than rivers of blood later,” became one of the slogans of the mobilization.

Active-duty members of the armed forces, reservists, and civilians organized into the Territorial Troop Militias were placed on alert status all over the country. They went into action with their weapons in response to announcements of bombing attacks, incidents of sabotage, or the landing of U.S. troops. Although the weapons were real, they fired blanks, in order not to waste precious ammunition.

Julio César Arteaga, a young first sergeant from Camagüey, told the press he had received six years of advanced weapons training. “What sets us apart from an invading army is our background and the values we have acquired,” he said. “There could be soldiers with a material and technical support system superior to ours, but they could never have our commitment to our revolution and our nation.”

Rafael Ramos Traba, an agricultural

worker and reservist, made a similar point. “We aren’t just prepared physically and militarily but also psychologically and above all ideologically, which makes us stronger and even invincible against an enemy that needs to draw the lesson that we shouldn’t be underestimated.”

According to Mercedes Valdés, a young soldier in her first year of anti-aircraft artillery training, “These days have helped me a lot in every way. First because I know I am being useful, and secondly because, even though it’s not an exam, for me Bastión 2004 is my first trial under fire.”

One difference between this year’s mobilization and the military alerts that took place in Cuba during the 1980s is that now there are many more young women who are officers in the army and more women of all ages leading the work of the Cuban Communist Party, Union of Young Communists, and Civil Defense Councils in different municipalities and provinces. This was clear in the television and press reports on Bastión 2004, as was the case during preparations to confront Hurricane Ivan three months ago.

Several million Cuban workers, peasants, students, and others are organized into the voluntary Territorial Troop Militias. Bruno Guerra, 53, who has been a member of the militias for more than 30 years, said, “When Playa Girón happened and the struggle against the counterrevolution in the Escambray mountains, I was just a boy. My Girón, my Escambray, my Sierra Maestra has been the Territorial Troop Militias, and that’s where my post is when it comes to defending the homeland.”

Guerra was referring to the 1961 mercenary invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, which was organized by Washington and crushed by Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces and popular militias within three days. The Sierra Maestra is a mountain range in eastern Cuba from which the Rebel Army and July 26 Movement led the revolution that overthrew the U.S.-backed dictatorship in Cuba on New Year’s Day in 1959. A counterrevolutionary campaign by U.S.-backed rightists was organized in the Escambray mountains in the 1960s and was defeated by the country’s armed forces and militias.

A key part of Cuba’s defense system is an elaborate system of tunnels for refuge and organizing resistance. These underground fortifications, in and near the city of Havana



Reuters/Randy Rodríguez

**Members of Cuba’s Territorial Troop Militia take part December 17 in civilian-military training exercise outside Havana. The drill, dubbed Bastion 2004, was the largest of its kind in 18 years. It took place December 10–19 throughout Cuba.**

and other urban areas, are maintained with ventilation, light, water, medical services and sometimes even classrooms. There are also field hospitals and refuges in natural caves in various parts of the island. The province of Holguín celebrated the early completion of its plan for expansion and fortification of the tunnel system with an act honoring the *tuneleros*, or tunnel-builders.

An important aspect of the training exercise was guaranteeing supplies of water, food, and medical care to the population and continuing industrial and agricultural production in the event of war. During Bastión 2004, every national industry drew up plans to protect or move machinery and supplies, and to continue production under conditions of extreme hardship.

One garment factory in Havana Province trained workers to continue producing with pedal machines if electricity was lost. “And if the factory is bombed,” said plant director Rosalina Lago Hernández, “we have workers chosen to continue working in their houses and in the people’s tunnels.”

A steel factory in Havana that normally produces medical equipment devised a plan to change over to weapons production. Bakers at the La Flor factory in Camagüey organized to produce bread without their electric mixing machines and ovens, kneading the dough by hand and baking it with wood-fired stoves. “This is my job if the enemy invades,” said young baker Kilbert Alvarez. “The Americans should realize

that children and fighters here can count on getting their pieces of bread, because even without electricity and in a war, La Flor won’t stop.”

Although Bastión 2004 was announced only a week before it began, military preparedness has long been part of the routine of life for millions of Cubans. Most workers and professionals do voluntary overnight guard duty every four to six weeks at their workplaces or in their communities. School children get target practice, starting in about seventh grade. The country also has an extremely efficient and well-organized civil-defense structure to deal with natural disasters such as hurricanes.

The last two days of Bastión 2004 were designated as Days of National Defense and involved the mobilization of a large part of the Cuban population and detailed plans for evacuation of the most vulnerable sectors.

On Sunday morning, about 8 a.m., a woman came down the street where I was staying in Havana, calling loudly for “evacuees” to gather on a nearby corner. Retirees and people who were sick or disabled assembled to receive evacuation instructions, following a short presentation about the danger that our neighborhood would be the target of bombing in an invasion, because of the proximity of government buildings, and tunnels and bridges across the Almendares River. The gathering point for children was at their schools. A few hours later I talked to a young mother who was taking her daughters—Anabel, 5, and Mabel, 3—to perform in a children’s chorus. She explained that when she arrived with the girls at the school early that morning, she was told that in the event of a real war, they would be taken first to nearby John Lennon Park and then in buses to a refuge in Matanzas province, and she was given a list of supplies to pack.

Near the end of the weeklong exercise, Raúl Castro directed an operation of heavy-armored tanks and then addressed residents of a nearby working-class neighborhood of Havana. Bastión 2004, he said, “involved Cubans of all colors, a beautiful rainbow of people. But all speaking the same language, all with one goal, one ideal: our most powerful weapon is our unity.”

## U.S. gov’t lifts restrictions on publishing works from Cuba, Iran

BY RÓGER CALERO

The U.S. Department of Treasury announced December 15 its decision to lift restrictions barring U.S. publishers from publishing books and journals from Cuba, Iran, and Sudan—countries under economic sanctions imposed by Washington—and doing editorial work with authors and publishers from these countries, as long as they are not government representatives.

Until this decision, U.S. publishers were required to apply for a license for each such work they decided to print or face fines up to \$1 million and prison terms of up to 10 years. Under the new rules publishers can obtain a general license for these activities.

The new rules are effective immediately. Permitted activities under them include “all transactions necessary and ordinarily incident to the publishing and marketing of manuscripts, books, journals, and newspapers” in paper or electronic format, including the commissioning of new works, advance payments, augmenting of already published work with photographs or artwork, editing and publicity, and payment of royalties.

The previous restrictions had come under heavy criticism from major publishers, which complained the restrictions stifle the free exchange of information and ideas and culture with these countries. Four institutions—the literary group PEN American Center, the Association of American Publishers, the Association of American University Presses, and Arcade Publishing—filed a lawsuit in September 2004 against the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, the

agency in charge of enforcing U.S. economic sanctions.

Stuart Levy, under secretary for the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the Treasury Department, said in a statement that the old regulations were “interpreted by some as discouraging the publication of dissident speech from within these oppressive regimes.”

For four and a half decades, Cuba has been the target of an unceasing effort by Washington to overthrow the revolutionary government in Havana. An essential part

of this course has been an economic war aimed at crippling Cuba’s economy. The White House tightened travel restrictions for Cuban Americans visiting relatives on the island and sending cash remittances to family in Cuba last spring. The attempt to clamp down on publishing work was part of this pattern.

In the last decade, under the banner of fighting “terrorism,” the governments of Iran and Sudan were added to the list of those Washington is targeting with such sanctions.

## — LETTERS —

### Danish meat packers strike

On Monday, December 13 of last year, 1,800 meat packers struck the Danish meatpacking company Danish Crown. The workers in Hjørring, Esbjerg, Rødding, Skærbæk, and Blans og Odense didn’t accept the contract at the Tulip plant in Ringsted, owned by Danish Crown, where the local union had agreed to a 15 percent wage cut. The company had presented the workers with an ultimatum: either accept the wage cut or the plant will be shut down.

The next day, Tuesday, more plants were drawn into the protest and the number of strikers increased to 3,000. At 10:30 a.m. on Thursday the 300 workers at Ringsted decided to tear up the concession contract and joined the strike at 13 other meatpacking plants at Danish Crown. After a meeting between the union and the company a joint declaration was issued saying that the company accepts the cancellation of the

contract by the workers.

*Dag Tirsén  
Stockholm, Sweden*

### Puerto Rican prisoners

*Militant* readers may be interested in knowing that Andres Santiago and Nestor de Jesús Guishard, two of the protesters who were jailed for participating in actions in Vieques, on the date the U.S. Navy withdrew in May 2003, were freed from the federal prison in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, December 9–10. They will remain on probation for three years.

There are four others who remain imprisoned, though, including one who received a five-year sentence. Supporters of the struggle to free Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial rule are encouraged to write them.

*Laura Garza  
Boston, Massachusetts*

The four are:

*José Pérez Gonzalez* #21519-069 Atlanta USP PO Box 150160 Atlanta, GA 30315 (anticipated release: Jan. 2008)

*José Montañez Sanes* #26317-069 MDC Guaynabo P.O. Box 2147 San Juan, PR 00922-2147 (anticipated release: May 2005)

*José Vélez Acosta* #23883-069 Coleman USP P.O. Box 1033 Coleman, FL 33521 (anticipated release Jan. 2006)

*Jorge Cruz Hernández* #26318-069 Federal Prison Camp P.O. Box 725 Edgefield, SC 29824-0725 (anticipated release: June 2005)

**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.**



# Australia: Aborigines protest killing by cop

BY LINDA HARRIS

BRISBANE, Australia—"What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!" chanted more than 1,000 Aborigines and their supporters who marched here December 11 to protest the latest Black death in custody.

The protest coincided with the funeral of Cameron Doomadgee, who was killed November 19 while in police custody on Palm Island off the far north Queensland coast. Angry island residents burned down police buildings November 26 in outrage over a government report clearing the cops of responsibility in his death. (See also article in December 21 *Militant*.)

The Queensland state government, run by the Labor Party, declared an "emergency situation." In a show of force, up to 200 riot cops were flown onto the island from nearby Townsville, then from Cairns, and as far away as Brisbane, 700 miles to the south, according to media reports. Heavily armed cops swept the island and arrested 19 Aborigines. Lex Wotton, 37, who police allege was "the ring leader of the riot," was charged with assault and arson. Wotton was a close friend of Doomadgee. He was also charged with destroying a building during a riot, which carries up to a life sentence.

To cheers of supporters packing the Townsville District Court December 6, and against police opposition, all those arrested were released on bail. Onerous conditions were imposed on them, however, banning their return to Palm Island or attendance at Doomadgee's funeral.

Three days after their release, about 2,000 people marched through the streets of Townsville to protest Doomadgee's death in custody. They marched on the police station, where Lex Wotton was waiting on the sidewalk. Bail conditions prevented him from participating in the march. Murradoo Yanner, a cousin of Cameron Doomadgee and an activist for Black rights, spoke at the Townsville rally after the march. He said the actions of Wotton and others on Palm Island were a heroic act of resistance to "state-sponsored murder," according to the *Australian*.

Similar sentiments were voiced at the Brisbane rally. Bertie Button, Goolburri Regional council chairman, said that the Palm Island protesters were "not rioters. They are heroes. They are saying, 'Don't let us down: speak out. Remind the government that one death in custody is one too many.'"

The Brisbane demonstration drew Aborigines from different communities around the state. Speakers commented that this was the first time in many years the community had come together in such a show of unity.

Peter Savage, an elder from Rockhampton in North Queensland, said, "We want justice and truth. We will get action by getting out and telling people about what happened, how every time a Black man goes to jail we are fearful of what will happen."

Ray Jackson brought solidarity greetings from the Aboriginal community in Red-



Militant/Ron Poulsen

**December 11 march in Brisbane, Australia, to protest killing by cop of Cameron Doomadgee, an Aborigine.**

fern, Sydney, to the people of Palm Island. Jackson has been leading the campaign for justice for TJ Hickey, an Aboriginal youth whose death at the hands of police in Redfern last February sparked a street battle with the cops.

Jackson pointed out that media reports about Palm Island had all been sympathetic to the police, not the murdered Aboriginal man. He said Doomadgee's injuries could only have been brought about by massive force and there were witnesses to his bashing. "The more the police in this country are allowed to get away with killing our

people the more they're going to do it," he said.

Following the Brisbane rally, the crowd marched through city streets. Initially they remained silent in a show of respect for the Doomadgee family, but then chants rang out for "Justice!" and "Stop Black deaths in custody!"

*Militant* reporters met Murris (the local term for indigenous people) from across the state on the march. One of the first to arrive at the rally was 50-year-old Brian Brown, of the Mullingally people, who works in a Brisbane meatworks. "They tried to breed us out, they tried to shoot us, they tried to poison us, and we're still here," he told the *Militant*.

"No matter how you look at it, we still haven't got justice," his cousin, Gresham Brown added. "We'll be fighting till the day we die."

Another demonstrator, Margaret Friday, lived on Palm Island for 15 years and raised her children there. She had just taken part in the Townsville rally. She said that the enquiries into Black deaths in custody never get anywhere because "they just get police to investigate police."

*Militant* correspondents also spoke to Madeline McGrady from Toomelah, on the New South Wales-Queensland state border. She was campaigning to get out the truth about a November 17 racist attack on youths from the Toomelah Aboriginal mission. Alan Boland, 16, was dragged with a noose tied around his neck up a riverbank and then beaten, she said. He and other Aboriginal youths had been charged with stealing a motorbike. A protest is being organized outside their court hearing

January 16 in Goondiwindi.

Ray Jackson spoke at a public forum in Sydney, December 12. He explained how the exoneration of the police in the Hickey inquiry meant that "what happened on Palm Island was no great surprise." It also encouraged other racist attacks like the one in Goondiwindi and another in Toowoomba December 3, where racist "skinheads" invaded a home and attacked Aboriginal youths with fence palings.

Many of the protesters in Brisbane were also angry at a highly publicized move by the newly elected government of Prime Minister John Howard, forcing a remote Aboriginal community to agree to paternalistic hygiene standards to regain their much-needed petrol supply.

Described by the government as a "shared responsibility agreement," the Aboriginal community in Mulan, in the northern Kimberley region of Western Australia, has agreed to a government deal that ties the supply of new petrol bowsers (pumps) to a demand that Aboriginal parents ensure that children shower daily and wash their faces twice a day.

For the past 17 months, since their original bowser corroded away, people in Mulan have had to drive 30 miles for fuel. The need for fuel has nothing to do with hygiene. Like many Aboriginal communities in the outback, health conditions are way below those in the rest of Australia. Trachoma, a preventable eye disease, is widespread. This reflects the lack of health-care services as well as severely depressed social conditions in such communities.

Aboriginal lawyer Michael Mansell told the Sydney Morning Herald that imposing funding conditions on Black communities was unlawful and discriminatory.

"The health department in West Australia should be going out and educating about hygiene," Friday said at the Brisbane march. "Instead they are cutting services to Aboriginal people."

Ron Poulsen contributed to this article.

## Cuba: infant mortality rate down to record 5.8

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

Infant mortality in Cuba went down in 2004 to 5.8 per 1,000 live births, according to an article in the January 3 issue of the Cuban weekly *Granma Internacional*. This is the lowest rate ever recorded in Cuba and places the Caribbean nation second only to Canada in the western hemisphere regarding this important health indicator.

Significantly, the decline in infant mortality is relatively even throughout the country, with no major differences between urban and rural areas. This is a sign of the progress since the Cuban Revolution of 1959 that took affirmative action measures to even out differences between city and countryside and develop areas of the country where little or no access to medical treatment existed before. Eight of the fifteen provinces in Cuba had infant mortality rates below the national average with rates as low as 1.8 on the Isle of Youth. Havana, Guantánamo, and Santiago de Cuba—the most populous provinces—had the highest rates, although none surpassing 8.5.

The decline in infant mortality is a product of the cumulative gains of the revolution, one of which has been providing free, lifetime health care for all. In 1958, Cuba's official infant mortality rate was 39 per 1,000 live births, according to UNICEF statistics, and did not begin to drop significantly until 1971. Since then, it has steadily declined into the single digits.

One of the reasons for this achievement is the family doctor program, a primary, preventive care service, under which a doctor and nurse is placed in every neighborhood, workplace, childcare center, and school—both in rural areas and the cities. According to *Periódico 26*, a newspaper published in Cuba's Las Tunas province, "Ninety-nine percent of the island's popu-

lation is covered by this program, through 14,671 family doctors' offices."

One duty of these family doctors, or "army of white coats," as they are called in Cuba, is to visit pregnant women, infants, the sick, and the elderly in their homes for routine examinations. Every pregnant woman is scheduled for as many as 11 medical checkups during her term, which include regular blood and genetic testing and other lab tests. The doctor-patient ratio in Cuba is at one doctor for every 165 people. In 1956, there was barely one doctor for every 1,000 people and the most impoverished working-class neighborhoods and rural areas had little if any access to a health care services.

The Cuban government has made possible this kind of comprehensive health care because from the early days of the revolution, it has viewed medical care as a fundamental right guaranteed universally from cradle to grave.

By comparison, the U.S. infant mortality rate was 7 per 1,000 live births last year, according to UNICEF. The U.S. rate is higher among oppressed nationalities—13.6 for Blacks, 8.2 for Native Americans, and 7.8 for Puerto Ricans.

The highest infant mortality rates in the Caribbean and Latin America are in the Dominican Republic, 29; Nicaragua, 30; El Salvador, 32; Brazil, 33; Guatemala, 35; and Haiti, a staggering 76. These figures are national averages. The mortality rates are higher in rural areas and impoverished working-class communities in these countries, where access to health-care services is more limited or nonexistent.

As Cuba continues to lower its infant mortality rate, it has also made progress in AIDS prevention and treatment. Cuba currently has the lowest AIDS infection rate in the western

hemisphere. In a letter to the editor published in the January 2 *New York Times*, Sanford Kuvin, a medical doctor in Palm Beach, Florida, and chairman of the Sanford Kuvin Center for Infectious Diseases, wrote: "Cuba recognized early on that the most important factor in preventing HIV-AIDS was to treat it like every other infectious disease by carrying out universal routine HIV testing, confidential name reporting to public health officials and mandatory partner notification, with treatment to all those infected." In a final comment reflecting the cynicism toward the Cuban Revolution among many professionals in the United States, even those who recognize the gains of the revolution, Kuvin said: "Few things in Cuba are good these days, but the Cuban approach to controlling H.I.V.-AIDS is excellent."

Cuba has also continued to develop its biotechnology industry and is currently one of the largest exporters of medicine and pharmaceuticals to Latin America and other parts of the semicolonial world. In 1999, Cuban doctor Concepción Campa Huergo, president of the Finlay Institute, developed the world's first meningitis B vaccine, testing it by injecting herself and her children. A Cuban-developed vaccine that stimulates the immune system against lung cancer cells is now being tested by CancerVax, a California-based biotech company.

At the same time, Cuba is unsurpassed in selfless internationalist solidarity on the medical field. Tens of thousands of Cuban doctors and nurses are currently working in nations in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. More than 10,000 Cuban doctors are now working on a volunteer basis in Venezuela as part of the *Barrio Adentro* program, offering quality health care and free medications through neighborhood clinics across the country.

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