

# THE MILITANT

**INSIDE**  
Cosmopolitan 'meritocracy'  
and class stratification Part II  
— PAGE 6

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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## UN votes to tighten N. Korea sanctions

BY DOUG NELSON  
AND SAM MANUEL

The United Nations Security Council, led by Washington, unanimously voted to tighten sanctions against North Korea June 12 after Pyongyang conducted a second nuclear test in late May.

The resolution widens a 2006 UN ban on North Korean arms imports and exports and calls for inspecting and destroying "all banned cargo" to and from North Korea "on the high seas, at seaports and airports." At the insistence of Moscow and Beijing, the resolution states that if a ship's "flag country" refuses to be boarded at sea, it can send the vessel to any port it chooses and have the inspection carried out by local authorities.

While exempting "small arms and light weapons" from inspections, the Security Council demanded advance notice of all such shipments. It also calls for further financial sanctions against North Korea.

In an interview with the *Militant*, Sin Son Ho, ambassador to the United Nations for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), pointed out the hypocrisy of the Security Council in approving sanctions against North Korea, when the governments of the council's five permanent members—the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia—wield the largest nuclear ar-

Continued on page 5

## Elections highlight divisions in Iran's gov't

BY CINDY JAQUITH

June 16—After three days of protests by hundreds of thousands of people in Tehran and other cities, Iranian officials announced a recount of some disputed ballots in the June 12 presidential election, but also rejected demands to hold new elections.

Iran's Guardian Council, which is made up of 12 clerics and lawyers and supervises elections, may authorize a second count in areas where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory was questioned, state television quoted Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, the council's spokesman, as saying.

It was the latest sign of the deep fissures in the Iranian capitalist class, which divided sharply over the two main presidential candidates, Ahmadinejad and former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Less than a day after the polls had closed, the Interior Ministry reported the results of the election, giving Ahmadinejad 63 percent of the vote to 34 percent for Mousavi, a difference of some 10 million votes. Supreme Leader Sayyed Ali Khamenei, the most authoritative religious and political figure in Iran, declared June 14 that the elections were "a divine miracle" and a blow to Iran's enemies, according to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

In the final weeks of the election Mousavi held very large rallies in

Continued on page 2

## Actions demand: Free 5 Cubans in U.S. jails!

High Court refuses to hear frame-up case



Militant photos by Eric Simpson (left) and Tom Baumann (right)

June 16 picket lines in San Francisco, left, and New York, right, protest Supreme Court decision to not hear case of five framed-up Cuban revolutionaries locked up in U.S. prisons.

BY SETH GALINSKY

The U.S. Supreme Court on June 15 refused—without comment—to review the case of the Cuban Five. Supporters of the five Cuban revolutionaries responded to the decision by holding picket lines in several cities and are stepping up efforts to win the Five's freedom. They have been held unjustly in U.S. jails for more than a decade.

Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, and René González, known internationally as the Cuban Five, have been jailed since 1998. A federal court in Miami convicted the five in 2001 on frame-up charges ranging from "conspiracy to commit espionage" to failing to register as agents of a foreign government. Hernández was also

Continued on page 4

## Liberals remain silent after Letterman's antiwoman jokes

BY CINDY JAQUITH

Liberal politicians and columnists have been virtually silent on the reactionary barrage of "jokes" about Alaska governor Sarah Palin and her daughters featured on David Letterman's "Late Show."

Palin, who was the Republican candidate for vice president in 2008, visited New York recently and went to a Yankees baseball game with her 14-year-old daughter Willow. In Letterman's comedy routine June 8 he

said, "One awkward moment for Sarah Palin at the Yankee game during the seventh inning. Her daughter was knocked up by Alex Rodriguez." The next night he pursued this line, saying the hardest part of the New York trip was "keeping Eliot Spitzer away from her daughter."

Letterman also did a "Ten Top Highlights of Sarah Palin's Trip to New York." Highlight number two was: "Bought makeup at Bloomingdale's to update her 'slutty flight attendant' look."

Palin responded in an interview with Matt Lauer on the "Today Show"

Continued on page 4

## Tom Leonard: communist militant for nearly 6 decades



Militant/Jacquie Henderson

Tom Leonard speaking at Militant Labor Forum, February 21 in Houston. He introduced film *Black Soldiers Blues*, about fighting racism in World War II.

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Tom Leonard, a longtime leader of the Socialist Workers Party, died in Houston June 11. He was 84 years old. Meetings to celebrate Leonard's life are taking place in Houston on June 27 and in New York on July 11.

In 1943 as a young radicalizing

worker, Leonard joined the merchant marine. He then became a member of the National Maritime Union, participating in trade union resistance during and after World War II.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s he shipped to the Pacific, experiencing the impact of the anticolonial struggles in the region, including the victory of the 1949 Chinese revolution. He learned

Continued on page 5

**Celebrate the life and political contributions of Tom Leonard**

**Houston**

Sat., June 27. 2 p.m. *Bohemeo's coffee house*, 708 Telephone Road. Tel.: (713) 688-4919.

**New York**

Sat., July 11. Location and Time to be announced. Tel.: (212) 629-6649.

## California unionists fight 'no-match' letters, firings

BY NAOMI CRAINE  
AND ARLENE RUBINSTEIN

VERNON, California—Bosses at Overhill Farms gave workers here a May 31 deadline. "No papers—no work!" they ordered. But the workers aren't taking it without a fight.

"The fact of the matter is that the 'no-match' letters were a pretext to

Continued on page 2

### Also Inside:

- Protests in Peru fight for indigenous land rights 3
- Seattle high school students rally against rightists 3
- Oakland, California, cop to face murder trial 4
- Letterman's antiwoman comments (editorial) 5



# ‘No-match’ letters, firings

**Continued from front page**  
fire us. The company used it to get rid of people, higher paid workers with seniority and benefits,” said Isela Hernandez, one of the 254 workers who have been fired. “Now we are learning how to organize to defend our rights. We are demanding that the company give us our jobs back and that workers hired to replace us get full pay and benefits.”

Around 75 to 100 workers picketed the two Overhill Farms plants here in Vernon June 9. The company employs 1,000 workers, the majority of them women.

“We’ll be out here every Tuesday,” said Yolanda Ayon, who has worked 20 years in the plant. Most of the workers picketed in front of the plant, while others stood on the corners at the intersection, handing informational flyers to people in their cars. A few workers from inside the plant, including one part-time worker, joined the picket when they got off work. One of them, who asked that her name not be used for fear of reprisal, said the “part-time” workers are working six days a week, often more than eight hours a day, and the company doesn’t pay them overtime.

Upon passing the pickets many truck drivers and workers going to and from other factories honked their horns in support. About 44,000 people, most of them industrial workers, are employed within the 5.2 square miles of Vernon.

“These companies all look at each other, at what they’re doing. If one succeeds in something—like these firings—the others will try it,” said Bohemia Augustino, who worked at the plant for 18 years assembling food

plates until she was fired.

“We killed ourselves on the assembly line for many years, many of us have injuries from repetitive motion,” she said. “Now we’re worth nothing. We’re out on the streets. This is unjust, no one should be treated this way.”

About 75 of the fired workers rallied June 11 at a Panda Express restaurant in South Central Los Angeles appealing for support. Overhill Farms makes frozen packaged food products for companies like Panda, Safeway, Jenny Craig, American Airlines, and others. Once the workers formed a line and started chanting, fewer and fewer customers went inside. The workers were back again the next day.

The Overhill Farms plants are organized by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 770. “When we got the ‘no-match’ letters, our union didn’t do anything for us. That’s why we joined the General Brotherhood of



Violeta Vaquero

**Appealing for support, about 75 workers fired by Overhill Farms rally in front of Panda Express restaurant June 11. Overhill Farms fired the workers, claiming their Social Security numbers did not match Social Security department’s records.**

Workers International Union,” said Augustino.

“This is the largest mass firing of workers by a company due to alleged Social Security number discrepan-

cies,” said Nativio Lopez, of Hermanad Mexicana Latinoamericana. Lopez is also the president of the General Brotherhood of Workers International Union.

## Elections highlight divisions in Iran’s gov’t

**Continued from front page**  
Tehran and other cities and won broad support on campuses and in the urban middle class. Reports in the capitalist press have highlighted Mousavi’s promise to ease up on censorship and jailing of political dissidents, his call to negotiate with Washington, and the pro-women’s rights stance of his wife, Zahra Rahnavaard, as the key strengths and attraction to his campaign.

A sizable section of the country’s rulers saw him as the best candidate to reknit ties with Washington and end the economic and financial sanc-

tions on Iran. The Iranian rulers are also concerned about the instability that could result from such moves.

However, a survey conducted for the London-based Guardian in all 30 of Iran’s provinces prior to the election showed that among responders who said they supported Ahmadinejad, most also favored more democratic reforms, and better relations with the United States. Ahmadinejad campaigned on his record of providing some aid to peasants in the countryside and to low-income workers, his denunciations of wealthy politicians and clerics, and the advances of Iran’s nuclear program under his government. He also held very large rallies and had support among youth in the basij, the volunteer militia organization that operates under the command of the Revolutionary Guards.

Reporters from U.S., British, and French media carried virtually no election coverage from rural areas or the working-class areas of south Tehran where Ahmadinejad was likely to do well. Nor did they conduct many interviews with workers or peasants about their opinions on the race.

Mousavi supporters, many of them students, who had expected victory or at least a runoff with Ahmadinejad, began protest demonstrations in north Tehran, where more affluent Iranians live. Mousavi himself called on the Guardian Council, which certifies candidates and the elections, to annul the results and hold a new election.

Mohsen Rezaei, a longtime commander of the Guards and until recently an ally of Ahmadinejad, also contested the elections. He ran a distant third.

When riot police and paramilitary assaults on the demonstrators failed to deter them, Khamenei decided to meet with Mousavi. He announced June 15 that the Guardian Council should “carefully probe” the election results.

That same day, a march in Tehran  
**Continued on page 5**

## THE MILITANT

### Legalization for all immigrants now!

*The fight to legalize all immigrants and halt the raids, deportations, and discriminatory firings of immigrant workers is a life or death question for the unions. The ‘Militant’ covers these struggles. Don’t miss a single issue.*



Militant/Bernardino Flores

May 1 march in San Antonio, Texas, to defend immigrant rights.

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# Protests in Peru fight for indigenous land rights

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

In the face of sustained protests by indigenous people of Peru's Amazon region, on June 10 the government temporarily suspended some measures opening up large areas of Indian land to private "development" and exploitation by giant oil, gas, and mining companies.

Peru's president Alan García defends the decrees as necessary to bring foreign investment regulations in jungle areas into compliance with a U.S.-Peru free trade agreement, which went into effect February 1. According to protesters one of the decrees could allow the sale of lands used by indigenous peoples to oil, gas, mining, logging, and agricultural companies. Another ends the requirement that companies consult indigenous communities before doing any work on the land.

In response to a call for a general strike June 11, more than 20,000 unionists, students, and indigenous peoples rallied in cities and towns across the country, from the Andean highlands to the Amazon Basin lowlands, to back this fight.

Chanting "The jungle isn't for sale," some 10,000 protesters marched in Lima, the nation's capital. Police attempted to break up the action, firing tear gas on the crowd. Thousands also rallied in Iquitos, the largest Peruvian city in the Amazon, and in other cities and towns, including Puno, near the Bolivian border, and Arequipa on

the Pacific coast.

"We don't get anything from this huge exploitation, which also poisons us," Maeo Inti, a leader of the Aguaruna Indians, told the Associated Press. "We've never seen any development and my community lives in poverty."

On June 12 some 1,000 indigenous protesters from the town of Pichanaki began marching toward the mining city of La Oroya, and said they might march all the way to Lima.

A week earlier, more than 600 police assaulted 2,000 protesters who had set up a roadblock on a central highway near the northern Amazonian town of Bagua. Demonstrators fought back, capturing more than three dozen cops. More than 30 civilians, including three children, were killed in the clashes, according to indigenous groups, though with large numbers of people missing the figure may be much higher. Twenty-three cops also died during the clashes. According to Yehude Simon, the head of the Peruvian cabinet, 155 people were injured, about a third from bullet wounds.

In hopes of quelling the protests, Peru's Congress suspended two of the government's decrees for 90 days. But indigenous leaders rejected the move, demanding that all the decrees be repealed immediately.

"The government made the situation worse with its condescending depiction of us as gangs of savages in the forest,"

## Seattle high school students rally against rightists

BY EDWIN FRUIT

SEATTLE—Nearly 500 people, mostly students from Garfield High School, confronted seven rightists from the Westboro Baptist Church here June 15. The right-wingers were in Seattle to protest homosexuality, the election of Barack Obama as president, and local churches they claimed were spreading "lies." They targeted Garfield High School because it has a gay and lesbian organization.

The Westboro Baptist Church, located in Topeka, Kansas, is led by Fred Phelps. It is known for picketing funerals of GIs who have died in Iraq or Afghanistan, saying that these deaths are a result of the acceptance of homosexuality in the United States. In their picket lines here Phelps's followers carried signs saying, "God hates fags" and "God hates Obama."

The students chanted back, "Racist, sexist, antigay, Christian fascists go away!"

Hanna King, a 15-year-old sophomore at the school, organized the protest at Garfield. Interviewed by the *Seattle Times*, she said, "Speech that isn't rebutted gets to stand on its own." The paper noted she proposed the rally to give "support to anyone, from gays to Jews to African Americans, who might be angry or hurt by the signs."

At the rally King told the *Militant* that she was pleased to see so many students and others from the community present. "The turnout reflected the diversity of our student body and we did this with no violence or confrontation." Garfield students and some staff members marshaled the demonstration as well.

Roinerah Clewis, an African Amer-

ican student at Garfield, said, "If you never take a stand for what you believe in, you don't get what you want."

Willie Hodge, a member of the First AME Church, said that this demonstration was important to "stomp out hate."

On the previous day, some 150 mostly youthful demonstrators counterpicketed the Westboro Church rightists at the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Se-

## Pickers defend abortion rights in Chicago



Militant/Laura Anderson

CHICAGO—A picket line of 20 supporters of a woman's right to choose an abortion confronted members of the Pro-Life Action League here June 10. A group of about 25 from the antiabortion group held giant photos of fetuses.

Many people stopped or gave a thumbs up to the pro-choice protest organized by the Illinois Choice Action Team, affiliated with the National Abortion Rights Action League. Participants chanted, "Her body, her choice."

Rebecca Kupferberg, 22, said, "We need to be out here because 87 percent of U.S. counties don't have an abortion provider." Her sister Allison, added, "A threat to a woman's right to choose is a threat to her liberation."

—LAURA ANDERSON

Wagner Musoline Acho, 24, an Awajún Indian and indigenous leader, told the *New York Times*. "They think we can be tricked by a maneuver like suspending a couple of decrees for a few weeks and then reintroducing them, and they are wrong."

Protests have been taking place

since early April, with Indian activists blocking roads, waterways, and a state oil pipeline. President García declared a state of emergency May 9, suspending some constitutional rights in four provinces including Amazonas. He said the protesters are "ignorant" and "terrorists."

Oil and gas contracts could cover about 72 percent of Peru's rain forest, according to a study by Duke University in North Carolina. Among the biggest companies seeking oil exploration rights are U.S.-based ConocoPhillips, France's Perenco SA, and Spain's Repsol-YPF.

More than half the population of Peru is indigenous. While the regions where they live are rich in natural resources, at least 36 percent live in poverty, according to official government statistics.

## 25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



July 6, 1984

On June 22, 12,000 coal miners marched through the streets of Pontefract, Yorkshire, for the funeral of Joe Green, killed on picket duty by a truck delivering parts to a local power station. The striking miners are involved in a bloody war with the Conservative (Tory) government of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is striking against British government plans to close scores of mines and throw tens of thousands of miners permanently out of work.

The miners have been confronted with tens of thousands of police, drafted from all over the country. It is suspected that soldiers are being deployed in police uniforms.

The NUM recognizes the big stakes in its fight against mine closures. Its answer to British government strike-breaking is to appeal for the maximum solidarity from the rest of the union movement.



July 6, 1959

Since the beginning of World War II in 1939 there has been an almost steady rise in prices. From the first, this rise has been blamed on the workers. Their struggle for higher wages to try to keep abreast of soaring living costs has been used as the whipping boy for the price gouging by the manufacturers, merchants and landlords. Whenever the steel workers, for instance, have managed to catch up a bit on rocketing living costs, the steel barons have used this as a pretext to hike their prices. For every additional dollar they have had to pay out in wages they have snatched three dollars more in price rises.

The monopolists have been telling us for decades that the rises in productivity and the improvements in mass production guarantee a decline in prices. Now we are informed that manufacturers have built-in guarantees of price increases regardless of improvements in productivity.



July 6, 1934

Another general strike of truck drivers under the leadership of the indomitable Local 574 looms in Minneapolis.

After the crushing defeat they suffered at the hands of organized labor in the first drivers' strike the bosses are now trying to recoup their losses in an effort to swindle the workers out of the wage increases which were taken for granted at the conclusion of the last strike.

The employers, violating the terms of the agreement, have refused to arbitrate the question of wages and working conditions with the representatives of the union. The open shop bosses have issued half page paid ads to the press, lying about the facts and charging the union with the responsibility for the impending strike.

But Local 574 will not be cheated out of the rightful gains they so victoriously won in the recent strike. They have accepted the challenge and hurled back the answer.

The answer is **FIGHT!**



# Silence on sexist ‘jokes’

Continued from front page

June 12. “My first thought was, ‘Hey, don’t disparage flight attendants. They work hard—we love them,’” she said.

Palin called the “joke” about her daughter “a degrading comment about a young woman.” To make jokes about “statutory rape,” she said, is “a sad commentary on where we are as a culture, as a society to chuckle and laugh through comments such as he made the other night.”

## Double standard

The Alaska governor pointed to the “double standard” followed by the media and Hollywood. “Remember in the campaign,” she noted, “Barack Obama said the family’s off limits. . . . Everybody adhered to that. . . . They haven’t done that on the other side of the ticket and it has continued to this day.”

Readers of most liberal newspapers were not even aware of the antiwom-an remarks by Letterman until many days afterward. The June 10 *New York Times* carried a story headlined, “Letterman Reaches a Deal with CBS to Extend ‘Late Show.’” It did not mention the Yankees game “jokes” of the show’s previous two nights. A one-paragraph note in the “Arts, Briefly” column in the June 11 *Times*—headlined “Letterman Leads Late-Night Ratings”—also ignored the “jokes,” which had been running for three nights now. Other media downplayed the story, too.

Finally, on June 13, the *Times* printed an Associated Press dispatch reporting the controversy and speculating that Palin’s response “may have inadvertently given Letterman a platform at a time when it is most valuable.”

Letterman responded on the air June 10 to the objections of the Palin family by provocatively retelling each “joke” again to gales of laughter and rounds of applause. He insisted he wasn’t talking about 14-year-old Willow but her 18-year-old sister Bristol, “the girl who actually—excuse me, but—was knocked up is now 18 years old.” He muttered that maybe the Yankee stadium routine was in bad taste, but not the “slutty flight attendant” line. “I kind of like that joke,” he said.

Letterman finally issued an apology for the joke June 15 but continued to say it was “misunderstood.”

## ‘Where is feminist outrage?’

FOX News host Greta Van Susteren replayed the Letterman shows and asked, “So where is the feminist outrage over this? We called *Ms.* magazine. They had no comment. We asked the National Organization for Women to send someone to appear on our show. They declined but then added

Letterman to its Web site’s ‘Media Hall of Shame.’”

A NOW statement criticizing Letterman was posted to the “Media Hall of Shame” June 11. It ended with an attack on conservatives who have protested the comedian’s remarks. “NOW hopes that all the conservatives who are fired up about sexism in the media lately will join us in calling out sexism when it is directed at women who *aren’t* professed conservatives,” it said.

One of the very few liberal voices in the media to denounce Letterman is Mika Brzezinski, one of the hosts of the “Morning Joe” talk show. “I wonder if it was the kid of Al Gore or Bill Clinton when he was president, or the Obamas, if that joke would ever be told,” she commented.

Neither Barack nor Michelle Obama has said a word about the Letterman show. Nor has Vice President Joseph Biden, or William or Hillary Clinton. No leading Republican Party figure has spoken out either.

Neither has any liberal capitalist figure or media commented on the anti-working-class character of Letterman’s jokes. At various times since Palin became a national figure, Letterman has quipped that “she looks like the flight attendant who won’t give you a second can of Pepsi. . . . Like the waitress at the coffee shop who draws a little smiley face on your check. Have a nice day. . . . She looks like the lady at the bakery who yells out, ‘44! 44! 45!’”

# Actions protest ruling on Cuban Five

Continued from front page

falsely accused of “conspiracy to commit murder.”

The five were monitoring counterrevolutionary Cuban American groups in Florida that have carried out violent attacks in Cuba with the complicity of the U.S. government.

“Based on the experience that we have had, I am not surprised by the Supreme Court decision,” Hernández said from prison in a statement released by Cuba’s National Assembly. “There are no longer any doubts that our case has been from the beginning

## Oakland, California, cop to face murder trial



Militant/Betsey Stone

OAKLAND, California—Wanda Johnson speaks to reporters outside the Alameda County Superior Court here. On June 4 Judge C. Don Clay ordered former transit cop Johannes Mehserle to face trial for murder in the killing of Johnson’s son Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old African American worker.

Mehserle shot Grant in the back at the Fruitvale transit stop here January 1. Mehserle’s attorney had argued that the cop meant to use a Taser on Grant. “There is no doubt in my mind that Mr. Mehserle intended to shoot Oscar Grant with a gun and not a Taser,” Judge Clay said after hearing seven days of testimony. “These young men did nothing to warrant the use of deadly force.” Clay was referring to Grant and four of his friends who were detained by transit cops, allegedly in response to a fight on the train.

While welcoming Clay’s decision, Johnson called on the transit agency to take action against other officers who were with Mehserle January 1. “Something needs to be done,” she said.

Mehserle will return for arraignment in Clay’s courtroom on June 18. He will be the first cop to face a murder trial for a line-of-duty killing in nearly 15 years, according to a *San Francisco Chronicle* report.

—JOEL BRITTON

Continued from front page

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“Based on the experience that we have had, I am not surprised by the Supreme Court decision,” Hernández said from prison in a statement released by Cuba’s National Assembly. “There are no longer any doubts that our case has been from the beginning

a political case.”

The case is increasingly seen as an example of how the U.S. government uses the police and courts to attack the rights of working people. The FBI secretly broke into the five’s homes, copied documents, and listened in on their conversations. Unable to find any evidence they were “spying,” Washington brought trumped-up conspiracy charges against them.

The five were placed in the hole—solitary confinement—for 17 months before and seven weeks after their trial. They all continue to speak out

from prison and to conduct themselves there as revolutionaries.

Attorneys for the five had filed the appeal with the Supreme Court on January 30. Twelve *amicus curiae*—friend-of-the-court—briefs were submitted to the court, backing the request that the case be reviewed.

Among those filing the briefs were the Mexican American Political Association, National Lawyers Guild, National Conference of Black Lawyers, Civil Rights Clinic at Howard University School of Law, and 10 No-

Continued on page 5

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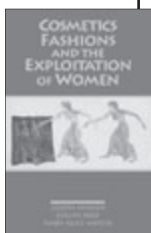
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## Cosmetics, Fashions, and the Exploitation of Women

by Joseph Hansen, Evelyn Reed, Mary-Alice Waters

How big business plays on women’s second-class status and social insecurities to market cosmetics and rake in profits. —\$15—

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# Letterman’s antiwoman comments

The silence of liberals on the antiwoman and anti-working-class tirade by comedian and “Late Show” host David Letterman is deafening. Letterman did routines about Sarah Palin’s 14-year-old daughter getting “knocked up” by Yankees star Alex Rodriguez and made fun of the “slutty flight attendant look” of the Alaska governor.

Class-conscious workers reject any demeaning of women or girls as sex objects regardless of the target or the source. Such “humor” is aimed at reinforcing stereotypes about women as weak and vulnerable and not equals in the workplace, the union, or society as a whole. Far from being “jokes” or even “jokes in bad taste,” as some liberal papers delicately described them, Letterman’s vile rants were a political attack on working women. He got away with it because Palin is a conservative Republican. Had he “joked” about a baseball player having sex with one of Michelle Obama’s daughters, or said the president’s wife looked like a “slut,” he would be out of a job right now. Instead, his ratings are going up among viewers within a certain social layer of the “sophisticated, urban, liberal elite” that votes Democratic.

It comes as no surprise that no one in the entire Obama administration, beginning with the president himself, has uttered a word against Letterman. Nor have the most prominent leaders of the National Organization for Women or other feminist organizations. By their silence they have allowed the conservative forces—who are every bit as antiwoman and anti-working-class—to pose as defenders of working women’s rights.

Such silence also emboldens those who seek to intimidate women and their supporters in the fight for women’s rights. After a rightist gunned down

Dr. George Tiller for providing abortion services for women, Obama issued a feeble two-sentence statement saying he was “shocked and outraged.”

Class-conscious workers also reject any social engineering by those self-appointed to tell working people when to have or not have children and how many children is “too many.”

In his “apology” for his remarks, Letterman escalated the attack, saying he wasn’t joking about Palin’s 14-year-old daughter Willow but her 18-year-old sister Bristol, who, he added, did get “knocked up.” Letterman’s statement reeked of the contempt many middle-class liberals have for teenagers—most often working class—who decide to bring a pregnancy to term, rather than have an abortion so they can better plan their “futures.” Who are the liberals to decide if Bristol Palin is ready to have a baby? Or to dictate how many children Sarah and Todd Palin or any other couple should have?

Letterman has complained on his show numerous times that Palin reminds him of a flight attendant, a woman behind the bakery counter, or a waitress—she reminds him of a worker. She brings out the contempt, and the fear, he and other liberals have for workers, especially for the prospect that working people might someday run the country.

In fact, Palin was a businesswoman before she became governor. Her policies are no more pro-working-class than those of the Democrats. But that is not the issue here. What is at issue is whether it is acceptable to whip up antiwoman prejudice under the guise of attacking an unpopular political opponent. On that question the working class takes the moral high ground and rejects both Letterman’s behavior and that of the liberals who apologize for him.

## Actions protest ruling on Cuban Five

Continued from page 4  
bel Prize winners.

The briefs take up three main aspects of the more than six-month-long trial in 2001: the refusal of the trial judge to grant a change in venue despite pervasive anti-Castro prejudice in Miami, the dismissal by government prosecutors of seven potential jurors who are Black, and the conviction of Hernández without any evidence of conspiracy to commit murder.

The National Lawyers Guild and the National Conference of Black Lawyers note in their brief that on the very first day of jury selection anti-Castro rightists held a press conference and packed the courtroom. Similar intimidation occurred throughout the trial. In August 2005, the three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the sentiment against the Cuban Revolution among many in Miami, “extensive publicity both before and during the trial,” and “improper” statements by the prosecutors combined to create a “perfect storm” that made a fair trial for the five impossible. The court ordered a new trial. Its decision however, was overturned a

year later by the full 12-judge court.

In refusing to review the case the Supreme Court “did what the Obama administration requested of it,” the Cuban National Assembly stated after the decision was announced. “We see manifested once more the arbitrariness of a corrupt and hypocritical system.”

“Now is the time to step up our actions and not leave one leaf unturned or one door unopened” in the fight to free the five, the assembly said.

Thirty people joined a picket line in front of the White House soon after the decision was announced, shouting “Justice delayed is justice denied! Free the Cuban Five now!”

The protesters demanded that President Barack Obama pardon the five. Other protests were held in San Francisco and New York City.

“As long as one person remains struggling outside, we will continue resisting until there is justice,” Hernández emphasized in his statement.

*Susan LaMont in Washington, D.C., contributed to this article.*

## Vote highlights divisions in Iran’s gov’t

Continued from page 2

addressed by Mousavi drew hundreds of thousands, despite the fact that it had no permit. It was peaceful, *ABC News* reported.

At the end, however, some individuals tried to set fire to a building of the basij. Members of the basij fired their weapons and at least seven people were killed, according to Iranian state radio.

That same night at Tehran University thugs burst into a dormitory and killed four students protesting the election results, eyewitnesses told Reuters. They appeared to be from the basij or were plainclothes cops. A sit-in of 800 students protested the attack June 16.

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani convened an investigation of the Tehran University deaths. “The Interior Ministry is responsible for this and should answer for it,” he said. Rezaei, who com-

manded the Guards until a decade ago, called on the government to treat protesters “peacefully” and “kindly.” Ahmadinejad, Larijani, and Rezaei, who have been described in the capitalist press as “hardliners” each rose up from the ranks of the Guards but have taken different stances in the elections. Mousavi supporters had called for another demonstration June 16. Ahmadinejad backers immediately called on their supporters to rally at the same spot an hour earlier. Mousavi issued a statement urging his supporters to stay away, calling the situation a “trap.”

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry announced the arrest of several prominent politicians, including Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who was Iran’s vice president under Mohammed Khatami.

*Sam Manuel contributed to this article.*

## North Korea

Continued from front page

senals in the world.

The U.S. government maintains some 5,700 active nuclear warheads, about 3,700 of which are ready for launch at a moment’s notice. Washington is the only government in the world that has ever used such destructive power outside a test. In August 1945 U.S. warplanes dropped a nuclear bomb on each of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands of people, mostly civilians.

By official count, Washington conducted 1,054 nuclear tests between 1945 and 1992. However, geophysicist Jim Lawson has documented 2,200 “known and putative” nuclear explosions conducted by Washington.

Moscow comes in second with 715 official tests and 969 explosions between 1949 and 1990. France, 210; the United Kingdom, 45; and China, 45.

Sin pointed out that “not once were any tests” by members of the UN Security Council brought before that body. The Security Council condemned North Korea for conducting just two tests.

“Our nuclear tests are for defense, for deterrence only, in face of U.S. threats and blackmail against our sovereignty,” said the North Korean ambassador.

Sin noted that even though the U.S. war on Korea lasted from 1950 to 1953, the war has never officially ended. In the course of the Korean War, U.S.-led forces dropped more than 428,000 bombs on Pyongyang alone—a city whose prewar population was only 400,000. It is estimated that 4 million of the 30 million people in Korea were killed in the war.

Washington and North Korea signed a cease-fire agreement in 1953, but Washington has refused proposals by the DPRK to sign a permanent peace agreement.

“We have requested on hundreds of occasions that the U.S. government replace the cease-fire with a peace agreement,” Sin said. “But Washington has rejected every proposal.”

As the council prepared to vote, South Korea sent hundreds more marines to its northern border. More than 600 were deployed to Yeonpyeong and Baekryeong islands June 12, according to Yonhap news agency.

## Tom Leonard

Continued from front page

firsthand about the assault against trade unions by U.S. forces occupying southern Korea at the outset of the 1950–53 Korean War.

Through his work in the maritime industry, Leonard met members of the SWP and joined the party in 1951.

Over the course of the next 58 years Leonard was actively involved in building the communist movement as a leader of the work of SWP branches and trade union fractions. He joined actions in defense of the Cuban Revolution, the massive working-class movement for civil rights, the protests of the women’s liberation movement, and—from 2006 on—in the protests of millions of workers, both immigrant and U.S.-born, for immediate legalization of all immigrants. He remained active to the end, building the Houston branch of the party.

For the past decade and a half with the help of the Maritime Project Fund, Leonard prepared materials on his experiences and the systematic communist political work carried out by SWP fractions in the maritime industry in the 1940s and 1950s. Through the final years of his life he presented talks and classes in cities around the country on the party’s rich history in the U.S. class struggle and its lessons for today.

A fuller report on Leonard’s political contributions will appear in an upcoming issue of the *Militant*.

### Correction

Both the article on the funeral for Dr. George Tiller and the editorial in the June 22 issue of the *Militant* stated that rightist Scott Roeder, who is charged with shooting Tiller, had been found a day before the killing attempting to glue the locks shut at Tiller’s clinic in Wichita. The incident occurred at a clinic in Kansas City.



# The cosmopolitan ‘meritocracy’ and c

## Wages and living conditions of working people of all skin color

Last week the *Militant* ran the first part of a chapter from the forthcoming book *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power* by Jack Barnes, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party.

The chapter is based on reports presented by Barnes to an April 11–13, 2009, Socialist Workers Party leadership conference in New York and a Nov. 22, 2008, talk by him to a public meeting of some 375 participants held in Newark, New Jersey, sponsored by the SWP and Young Socialists. The second part of the chapter is printed below. The book will be released this fall. Copyright © 2009 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BY JACK BARNES

While the bourgeois-minded social layer Obama is part of has seen its income rise sharply since the 1960s, there has been an even starker deterioration over that same period in the living and working conditions of a growing majority of the proletariat of all skin colors.

The hypocritical and fraudulent character of Obama’s Fathers’ Day concerns last year about “the foundations of our families” getting “weaker”\* became even clearer a few weeks later, when he took part in a televised presidential forum in southern California at the Saddleback Church of Rev. Rick Warren. When Warren asked him about “the most significant position you held ten years ago that you no longer hold today,” Obama immediately pointed to his support today for the abolition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) by the Clinton administration and Congress in 1996. Obama said that he “was much more concerned ten years ago when President Clinton initially signed the bill that this could have disastrous results.” But today, in August 2008, he said, he was “absolutely convinced” that Clinton’s “welfare reform” had to remain “a centerpiece of any social policy.”

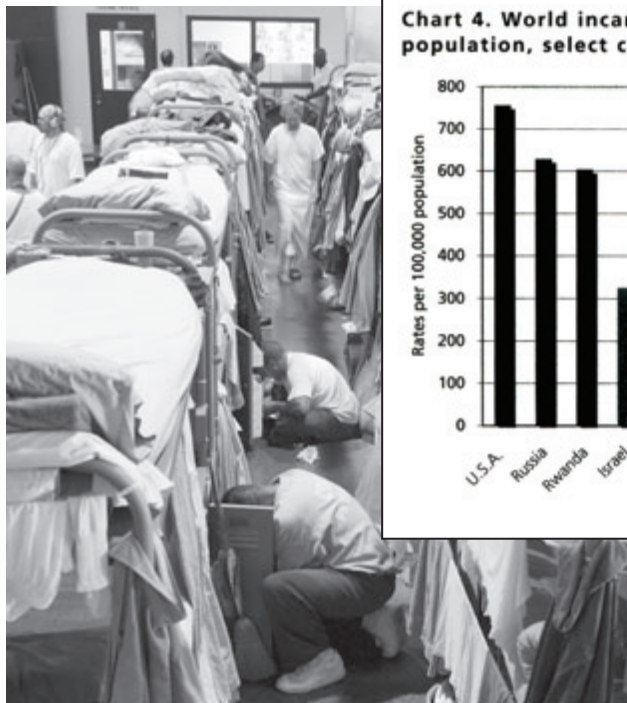
What have been the results of this liberal “centerpiece,” even prior to the long contraction in the rate of economic growth and working-class incomes—the depression—that began in 2007? Since the destruction of “welfare as we know it,” as Clinton callously described his target, the number of people receiving cash as-

sistance—now administered by state governments under AFDC’s successor, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—has dropped to a more than forty-year low. Far from having productive jobs at good wages, however, those pushed off AFDC who were lucky enough to find work of any kind—only about half by 2005, according to a recent study<sup>1</sup>—were forced into low-paying, nonunion jobs with little or no health, pension, or other benefits.

### CHAPTER FROM ‘MALCOLM X, BLACK LIBERATION, AND ROAD TO WORKERS POWER’

—Part II

By 2005 the 50 percent of former AFDC recipients who are Black and unemployed had fallen more than 30 percent *further* below the official federal government poverty line than they had been in 1999—and, once again, this was well before today’s deep capitalist downturn. What’s more, whereas cash payments to women eligible for AFDC increased during the 1974–75, 1981–82, and 1990–91 recessions, as of the end of 2008 cash benefits had been *reduced* in eight of the twelve states where unemployment had increased the most dur-



Getty Images/Justin Sullivan

**Overcrowded Mule Creek State Prison, Ione, California. With only 5 percent of world’s population, United States holds nearly 25 percent of all prisoners on earth—more than 2.2 million people—and has highest incarceration rate of any country (see chart above right).**

ing the opening months of the current crisis. The government’s official jobless rate for Black women over twenty years of age—which we know is way below the actual level of unemployment—has shot up from 7.8 percent to 10.5 percent just over the twelve months since early 2008.

1. See “Welfare Reform in the Mid-2000s: How African American and Hispanic Families in Three Cities Are Faring” by Andrew Cherlin et al, in Douglas Massey and Robert J. Sampson, *The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades*, special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (January 2009).

Whether it’s the gutting of AFDC, cuts in pension and health-care funding, the reduction of already woefully inadequate child-care and preschool programs, or assaults on other aspects of workers’ social wage, the blows rain down hardest on *women* in the working class, and heaviest of all on women workers of the Black or other oppressed nationalities. What’s more, it didn’t take the new Obama administration more than a week after the January 20 inauguration to signal that such assaults would continue. As a result of the adoption of the reactionary Hyde Amendment in 1976, abortion since that time remains the one medical procedure for which women enrolled in Medicaid—today some 12 percent of all women of reproductive age—are denied federal funding. Just days after taking office, Obama succeeded in killing a provision in the so-called congressional stimulus plan that would have expanded access to financial support for birth control to women not otherwise eligible for Medicaid.<sup>2</sup>

There *has been* a convergence since the 1960s in the economic and social conditions of working people of all skin colors and national backgrounds in the United States. But that’s not because times have gotten better for tens of millions of workers who are Black or Latino. The reason is that wages and living

standards *have declined* for a growing majority of the working class as a whole.

While the rate of births to unwed teenagers has risen sharply among both whites and African-Americans since the 1960s, for example, the gap be-

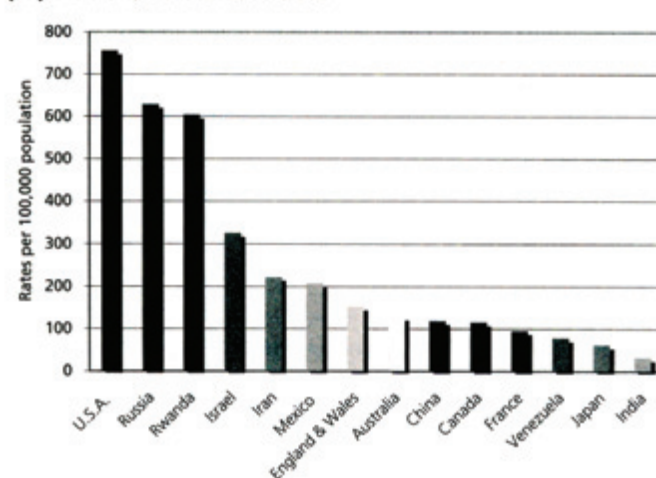
### “Cuts in social wage rain down hardest on working- class women, heaviest of all on Black women and other oppressed nationalities. . .”

tween young women who are Black and those who are white has dropped from a twelvefold difference to about two to one today.<sup>3</sup>

A comparable driving down of the conditions facing all working people, with African-Americans hit the hardest, is registered in the colossal increase in the size of the U.S. prison population over the past three decades. As of 2005 more than 700 U.S. residents out of every 100,000 were in prison or jail in this country. With only 5 percent of the world’s population, the United States holds nearly 25 percent of all prisoners on earth—more than 2.2 million people! The highest incarceration rate of any country in the world—yes, *any* country! And if you sum up all those behind bars, on parole, or on probation, the total comes to more than 7 million people—more than 3 percent of the adult U.S. population.

The largest increase has been among African-Americans. Some 577,000 Blacks were in prison or jail in 2005, a 58 percent increase just since 1990. Black men are eight times more likely

Chart 4. World incarceration rates per 100,000 population, select countries



2. Speaking at the May 17, 2009, commencement at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, Obama called for finding “common ground” with opponents of a woman’s right to abortion. Deciding to have this medical procedure, he said, is “a heart-wrenching decision for any woman,” with “both moral and spiritual dimensions.” Aiming his remarks at opponents of a woman’s right to choose abortion, the president said, “let us work together to reduce the number of women seeking abortion.”

Only two weeks later a fascist-minded militant, a hater of women’s rights, walked into the Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas, and murdered Dr. George Tiller. Tiller was the operator and physician at a clinic in Wichita that performed abortions, and one of only a handful of doctors in the United States who perform late-term abortions. Obama responded to the killing with nothing more than a two-sentence statement, saying, “However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion”—once again, abortion is not a woman’s right, but “a difficult issue”—“they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence.”

3. The same trend can be seen in the rising percentage of children born outside marriage. While the percentage of African-American children born to unwed mothers has increased from 24 percent in 1965 to 72 percent in 2007, the proportion shot up at a substantially faster rate from 6 percent to 28 percent for white children over that same period. The percentage of Latino children born to unwed mothers increased from 37 percent in 1990 to 51 percent in 2007.

## RECOMMEND

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# Class stratification of Black nationality

## ers are being driven down



Getty Images/David McNew

(Above) Barack Obama and Rick Warren at televised presidential forum August 2008 at Warren's Saddleback Church. When asked about most important political question on which he had changed his mind over the last decade, Obama pointed to abolition of Aid to Families With Dependent Children. (Left) President William Clinton signing bill abolishing AFDC in August 1996, part of course he callously described as "ending welfare as we know it." By 2005, 50 percent of former AFDC recipients who are Black and unemployed had fallen more than 30 percent further below official poverty line.

than white men to be behind bars—altogether some 14 percent of Black men in their twenties.

At the same time, in the years since 1980 there has been a threefold increase in the imprisonment rate of white men in their twenties. Three times greater. Nearly 2 percent of white males in this age group were in jail or prison at some point in 2004.

### Fettering working people with debt

Working people in the United States, especially those with the lowest incomes, are also being hit hard by the disastrous consequences of the rulers' drive over the past quarter century to float their rate of profit on a sea of debt, in which we are left to drown. With real wages slowly declining throughout this period, it became more and more difficult for workers to cover the cost of basic necessities without relying on credit. This has reached the point in recent years where growing numbers of us have little or nothing left at the end of the month to pay off interest and principal on loans. We simply can't pay the bills. We more and more do, in fact, "owe our souls to the company store."

How did this situation come about? Since the mid-1970s, as the capitalists

held back expenditures for the expansion of productive capacity and large-scale employment of labor, their representatives in the White House and Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike, together with the Federal Reserve Board, sought to counter the long-term pressure on the profit rate—which has slowly been trending down since the mid-1960s—through a massive expansion of credit. They did so both by increasing the amount of funds on loan, and, for the first time in history, by

### "Capitalists goaded and lured more and more working people into ever-deeper debt: credit cards, student loans, auto loans . . ."

spreading the use of credit deep into the working class, including those with the lowest incomes.<sup>4</sup>

Since the mid-1980s, Washington has not only flushed trillions of dollars into the banks but throughout the imperialist financial system has encouraged a degree of leverage that would make Las Vegas blush. The U.S. rulers have

intervened continually in world markets to keep interest rates at historically low levels.<sup>5</sup> In combination, these measures have kept banks in the United States awash with funds they needed to lend in order to boost their profit rates above those of competitors worldwide. The result has been a cascade of bank-driven "debt crises." Among the earliest targets of the banks were working farmers in the United States and the governments of oppressed nations across the Americas, Africa, and Asia—who were increasingly pushed toward default, and, in the case of farmers, into foreclosure and the loss of the land they tilled.

This simultaneous goading and luring of more and more layers of working people into ever-deeper indebtedness—credit card debt, student loans, auto "financing," mortgages and "home equity loans"—sharply accelerated through the 1990s and opening years of the twenty-first century. Total consumer debt, by government figures, has increased by nearly 400 percent since 1985. Credit card debt has nearly doubled over the last decade alone, and what the banks and other financial institutions call "delinquencies" have jumped by more than a third just since 2006, with nearly 12 percent of credit

card loans more than ninety days past due in early 2009. What's more, these high-interest pieces of plastic are *aggressively* pushed on working people: 5 billion solicitations were mailed in the United States in 2001 alone, roughly 50 for each household. And they aren't mailed to the bourgeoisie!

Student loan debt, which has become impossible to shake off, even through bankruptcy (it lasts beyond the grave), has more than doubled since 1995. In 2007 nearly two-thirds of college graduates left school shouldering debt—and on top of that, some 15 percent of parents of college graduates (according to 2004 figures) had also taken out loans. In 2007 the average debt load of graduating students who had borrowed to finance their schooling was more than \$22,000. Moreover, that average prettifies the situation of millions of students who graduate even more deeply in debt—some 10 percent owing more than \$33,000 in 2004—not to mention those who go on to medical or other postgraduate schools.

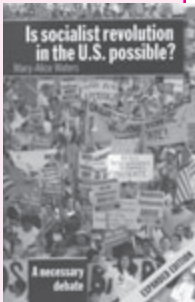
Meanwhile, college administrations—at state universities, as well as private ones—not only keep cranking up the cost of tuition, room, and board

**Continued on page 8**

## ED READING

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4. See "The Clintons' Antilabor Legacy: Roots of the 2008 World Financial Crisis" in *New Internationalist* no. 14, as well as *Capitalism's World Disorder* by Jack Barnes, "Capitalism's Long Hot Winter Has Begun" in *New Internationalist* no. 12 (2005), and "What the 1987 Stock Market Crash Foretold" in *New Internationalist* no. 10 (1994).
5. Keeping lending cheap in the United States has not been achieved, and could not have been, simply by the Federal Reserve board setting low interests rates on its own loans to U.S. banks, on banks' overnight loans to each other, etc. The U.S. rulers also actively intervened in world markets to keep interest rates low by holding down global gold prices (even as it denied doing so); promoted deals with the bourgeois Stalinist regime in Beijing to keep buying enormous quantities of U.S. Treasury bonds; and took advantage of U.S. imperialism's obscene degree of "seigniorage"—that is, its ability because the dollar is accepted as "the world's reserve currency" simply to *print* money to pay off U.S. debts to capitalists and governments the world over.



Getty Images/John Chiasson

Buffalo, New York, April 1992: Some of 1,500 supporters of women's right to abortion (right) who victoriously defended clinics during Operation Rescue's planned month-long "siege." After two weeks, anti-woman rightists were demoralized and defeated—a turning point in defense of women's rights. On May 17, 2009, Obama called for "common ground" with opponents of abortion rights to "reduce the number of women seeking abortion." Two weeks later a fascist-minded militant killed Dr. George Tiller, who operated a clinic in Wichita, Kansas.



# Cosmopolitan meritocracy

Continued from page 7

(a true “bubble”). More and more of them have also been found to be in bed—for a fee—with “student loan finance companies” raking in extortionate interest payments. This line of work has a name that college officials take umbrage at being called.

Remember those TV commercials for auto loans only a year or so ago? “No job? No problem! Bad credit? No problem! Alimony payments? No problem!” Well, defaults on auto loans increased by 25 percent in 2008, and more and more working people are losing cars to the repo man each month. *Problem.*

The list could go on, and this doesn’t even include the massive debt incurred by small businesses, corporations, and the government. Over the past quarter century, total debt in the United States—private and public—has risen by more than \$45 trillion, while the U.S. gross domestic product has grown by less than \$11 trillion.

A large percentage of the federal government debt—a share that has spiked sharply since the White House and Congress launched their bloody assaults against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq earlier in this decade—goes to pay for Washington’s wars. This includes not only increasing annual outlays on military spending but mounting payments of interest and principal to the wealthiest bondholders on the national debt from past wars.

The propertied families of the United States have not had much success over the past sixty years in maintaining popular support for their wars to continue the domination, exploitation, and oppression of the world’s peoples. The wars against the people of Korea and Vietnam were unpopular. The rulers failed to win sustained patriotic backing for the Gulf War of 1990–91, the bombardment and intervention in Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s, or the more recent assaults on Iraq, Afghanistan (except immediately after 9/11), and now the border regions of Pakistan. In the absence of any broad outpouring of nationalistic fervor for such wars, the rulers face growing problems in rationalizing—under the banner of “patriotic sacrifice”—the inevitably inflationary consequences of massive military spending.

For example, in the 1960s as broad popular opposition to the Vietnam War increased, including among GIs at the

front, Democratic president Lyndon Johnson sought to throw a smokescreen over the inflationary toll that rising military expenditures were inevitably going to take on workers’ living standards. In order to do so, and to maintain the “Great Society” fiction of painlessly financing “guns” *and* “butter” at the same time, Johnson took a number of steps *to appear* to reduce the size of the federal budget. Among the biggest of the sleights of hand, the Democratic administration took the debt of the Federal National Mortgage Association—Fannie Mae—off the government balance sheet in 1968. Simply declared no longer a federal agency, Fannie Mae was dubbed “a government-sponsored enterprise” (GSE), owned and operated by private shareholders. Two years later, in 1970, a second such GSE was launched, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or Freddie Mac—also off the

## “Owning a house ties workers down, makes us less footloose, makes us less free, as Frederick Engels insisted . . .”

federal balance sheet.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, in turn, became among the capitalists’ favored institutions from the 1980s on to hobble working people with an even wider variety of credit shackles—house mortgages, and then “home equity loans.” This drive by the rulers to make us think and act like “homeowners” with a stake in the capitalist system accelerated to a dizzying degree in recent decades. In the process, Fannie’s and Freddie’s share of residential mortgage debt in the United States rocketed from 7 percent in 1980 to nearly 50 percent at the opening of the 2007 housing crisis; together they issued some 75 percent of so-called mortgaged-backed securities.<sup>6</sup>

Both the Clinton and the Bush administrations, for example, unrelentingly pushed workers to go into debt to buy houses and apartments, with a special eye to working people who are Black or Latino. Clinton mandated Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to step up their traffick-ing in what are today called “subprime” loans, targeting working people, particularly Blacks. Bush—who set a goal of expanding “minority home-ownership,”



Reuters

**Foreclosure sign in Antioch, California, November 2007. Banks, “home finance companies” and other mortgage-origination sharks lured many working people to manacle themselves with “low” or “no-down-payment” loans. Debtors eventually get crushed while creditors make out like bandits.**

especially by Mexican-Americans, by at least 5.5 million before 2010—told a gathering of commercial home builders in Ohio in 2004 that, “To build an ownership society, we’ll help even more Americans to buy homes. Some families are more than able to pay a mortgage but don’t have the savings to put money down.”

That same year, then Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan, in a February speech to the Credit Union National Association, gave a thumbs up to such high-risk loans. “[M]any homeowners might have saved tens of thousands of dollars had they held adjustable-rate mortgages rather than fixed rate mortgages during the past decade,” Greenspan said, adding that “American consumers might benefit if lenders provided greater mortgage product alternatives to the traditional fixed-rate mortgage.”

Banks, “home finance companies,” and other mortgage-origination sharks proved themselves more than happy to take advantage of the sales opportunity, while the big banks and financial intermediaries packaged the debt and confidently carried it on their books as leveraged “assets.” Over the past decade or so they’ve lured many working people to manacle ourselves and our families with “low-down-payment” (or even “no-down-payment”) loans, “adjustable rate” financing, and other forms of high-risk debt servitude. They’ve solicited and facilitated, in large numbers, what they cynically came to call “liars’ loans” (that is, the lender and the borrower exchange mutual lies and winks when filling out mortgage applications, with the debtors eventually getting crushed while the creditors make off like the bandits they are).

“We believe that low-income borrow-

6. The beginning of the surge in the percentage of working people, of whatever skin color, “owning” rather than renting the roofs over their heads came during the capitalist expansion following World War II. Living in terror of a return of prewar depression conditions and a resurgence of workers’ struggles, the rulers adopted the GI Bill—not only to help finance college enrollment for veterans who would otherwise be jobless, but to offer them mortgage subsidies to spur housing construction. More than 20 percent of all single-family houses built during the two decades following the war were financed in part by GI Bill loans. Since the 1950s, the percentage gap between whites and Blacks has slowly but steadily continued to narrow, with some 48 percent of Black households “owning” houses in 2008 and some 75 percent of white households.

ers”—a code word for workers—“are going to be our leading customers going into the 21st century,” an executive for Norwest Mortgage (now merged with Wells Fargo) cynically and baldly told the press in 1998.

During the Clinton administration, between 1993 and 1997 alone, there was a substantial jump in the number of Blacks taking on debt in order to buy—or, the biggest lie of all, to “invest”—in houses and apartments, and the pace quickened until the availability of credit seized up beginning in 2007. As a result, there has been a sharp increase in real estate foreclosures over the past few years, tripling just since 2006 to a rate of 1.8 percent of mortgages nationwide by the end of 2008. Workers—especially those with the smallest houses, built with the cheapest materials—have been the hardest hit, once again with working people who are Black or Latino sustaining disproportionately heavy blows.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration is doing nothing to assist working people in face of this expanding social crisis, other than proposing yet another plan “encouraging” banks to “voluntarily” renegotiate the terms of mortgages inevitably gone sour. The result will be that banks stretch out their income stream from interest and principal payments a year or so longer, before *then* foreclosing on these workers—who face soaring unemployment and declining real wages—and repossessing their houses.<sup>7</sup>

What broader political advantage do the U.S. rulers and the two dominant wings of the party of capital, the Democrats and Republicans, reap by supporting the bankers (their bosses) in encouraging and accelerating real estate “ownership” by workers? They understand that under capitalism, owning a house also has a conservatizing impact on working people and the oppressed. It fosters the illusion that we too are “property holders.”

As Greenspan candidly wrote in 2007 in defense of his earlier encouragement of “adjustable rate” loans: “I was aware that the loosening of mortgage credit terms for subprime borrowers increased financial risk, and that subsidized home

**Continued on page 9**

7. A May 2009 report by Fitch, a major Wall Street “ratings” agency, found, as a “conservative projection,” that within a year after “renegotiating” the principal and interests on their loans, between 65 percent and 75 percent of holders of subprime mortgages will once again have fallen behind sixty days or more on their payments.



**High school students at April 27, 1968, New York demonstration of 200,000 against Vietnam War. Propertied families in the United States have not had much success over past 60 years in maintaining popular support for their wars to continue domination, exploitation, and oppression of world’s peoples. In absence of broad outpouring of patriotic fervor, rulers face growing problems of rationalizing inevitable inflationary consequences of massive military spending on living standards of working people.**



# Cosmopolitan meritocracy

Continued from page 8

ownership initiatives distort market outcomes. But I believed then, as now, that the benefits of broadened home ownership are worth the risk [*for the rulers!*—JB]. Protection of property rights, so critical to a market economy, requires a critical mass of owners to sustain political support.”<sup>8</sup>

Owning a house ties workers down with onerous mortgage payments and endless expenditures of time and money for physical upkeep and repairs. It subverts our habits of class solidarity by elevating relations and problems we share in common with “fellow owners,” fellow “property-holding taxpayers,” over those with fellow workers.

It makes us less footloose. It makes us less *free*, as Engels insisted—more tied to the land the “real estate” rests on. In his 1873 booklet *The Housing Question*, Engels explained that a title to real property (sentimentally called “home” ownership by its bourgeois proponents who, with consummate cynicism, add a maudlin touch to all their nomenclature) is “a fetter” for workers in capitalist society. “Give them their own houses, chain them once again to the soil, and break their power of resistance” during “a big strike or a general industrial crisis,” Engels wrote.<sup>9</sup>

We are already witnessing such modern-day steps backward toward greater bondage. As of March 2008, fewer people in the United States had moved over the past year than any time since 1962, when the population was 40 percent smaller!

## Social conquests of Black struggle

One of the most important conquests of the mass, proletarian-led struggle for Black rights in the 1950s and 1960s was the substantial *extension* of workers’ social wage that had been won as a by-product of working-class battles that built the industrial unions in the 1930s. As a direct result of the movement that brought down Jim Crow and the urban uprisings that turned the country and the confidence of the ruling class upside down, Medicare and Medicaid were won in 1965. And in 1972—thirty-five years after the original Social Security legislation—the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for the blind, disabled, and elderly was established.

The Social Security Act of 1935 had included small retirement supplements for many workers, federally mandated unemployment insurance and workers compensation, and aid for dependent children (paid to eligible mothers). It’s important to remember that this legislation had been crafted by the Roosevelt administration to serve the needs of capital by *limiting* concessions as much as possible. For example, not only were retirement benefits financed in part by a payroll tax on workers (a regressive, anti-working-class measure), but the minimal sums paid out were meant only as a minor supplement to whatever workers were able to put aside for old age (usually nothing) or get from their adult sons and daughters.

What’s more, since average life expect-

tancy in 1935 was below sixty-two, and just below sixty for men, the anticipated government payout on pension benefits beginning at age sixty-five would be small—in fact, in close to a majority of cases, nary a penny!

Social Security payments were not intended to defend and strengthen the working class. They returned to workers no more than a token of the wealth produced by our social labor. Social Security was aimed at bolstering the responsibility of the petty-bourgeois family for meeting the needs of the young, the elderly, the disabled, and the ill, including reinforcing the social norm that the place of working-class women with dependent children was in the home. (I say working-class women, because the bourgeois family has always hired or retained a phalanx of wet nurses, nannies, tutors, and even dog-walkers—in the latter case, the comical twenty-first century surrogate for the old bourgeois stable staff.)

Contrary to the self-interested claims of capitalist ideologues, there is no such thing as the “working-class family.” The family—the word derived from the Latin *familia*, meaning the totality of household slaves that are the property

## “Capitalist property relations are the root of much individual and ‘family’ misery today . . .”

of one man—has from its beginnings in the rise of class society been an institution of the ruling classes. Its primary function has always been to preserve the accumulated wealth and private property of the ruling class—whether cattle, slaves, and estates, or capital in land, mines, mills, and factories—and assure its orderly transfer from generation to generation.

Today’s counterpart of this institution among the propertyless working masses (also, and confusingly, known in everyday speech as a “family”) is descended from the petty-bourgeois family of the peasantry—a productive unit in which every man, woman, and child of all ages and generations labored for the father to provide the necessities of life. The survival of the individual members of this production unit depended on the mutual contributions of all.

With the rise of industrial capitalism, a hereditary proletariat was born through the forcible dispossession of the peasantry from the land. Each individual member of the previously productive peasant family—children and women first of all—was now forced to sell his or her labor power on the market to a capitalist employer, with all the brutality and suffering that produced. In the process, the petty-bourgeois family was ripped asunder. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1845, the young Frederick Engels, with great eloquence and compassion, described the horrendous consequences of this dispossession and proletarianization as it occurred there, and then across Western Europe.

The working class everywhere organized and fought to curb the degree of that exploitation, demanding a shorter workday, higher wages, and legislation to regulate factory conditions. Meanwhile, armies of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois reformers set out to reimpose on the toilers as individuals, and



Militant/Dan Styron

**Civil rights protest in Canton, Mississippi, 1966. Proletarian-based struggle for Black rights in the 1950s and 1960s throughout the United States won substantial extension of workers’ social wage, including Medicare and Medicaid, passed in 1965.**

on women first and foremost, the responsibility for reproducing and maintaining the working class, including those unable to sell their labor power.

The concrete complexities of this historical transition from precapitalist to capitalist property and social relations have differed from one part of the world to another. But the modern descendant of the petty-bourgeois family is today as universally recognizable to the factory worker in Shanghai as it is to his or her fellow worker in Manchester, Atlanta, Cairo, Johannesburg, or Mexico City.

All sanctimonious prattle by the capitalist rulers and their spokespersons about “defending the working-class family” serves only to obscure these social relations, which are the product of class society—to absolve the capitalist ruling families and their government institutions of *social* responsibility for food and clothing, education, health care, housing, transportation, and more. It is the banner under which responsibility for the care of children, the sick, the disabled, and the elderly is pressed on individual workers—that is, primarily on women.

It is these capitalist property relations that are the root of so much individual and “family” misery today. Only when they are uprooted through revolutionary action by the working classes ourselves, only when economic compulsion—the wages system, the “cash nexus”—ceases to be the foundation of all social interaction, will new human relations eventually emerge. While we cannot even begin to imagine what those relations will be, the one thing we *can* be sure of is that they will have little in common with the petty-bourgeois family of today, much less the propertied family of the capitalist class.<sup>10</sup>

Working people have a vital stake not only in defending the social wage we’ve fought for and won, but above all in building a mass social and political movement of the working class *to extend these conquests as universal rights*—not means-tested charity—for *all*. Through our labor, the working class, in this country and worldwide, produces more than enough wealth to

provide education, health care, housing, and retirement to every human being on earth, for a lifetime.

None of these questions are new ones for class-conscious workers. In the founding document of the modern revolutionary working-class movement, the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels recognized the “bourgeois claptrap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parent and child,”<sup>11</sup> for what it really is. It is the rationalization for rejecting government responsibility for the social needs of the working classes. It is the ideological excuse by the capitalist class for imposing those obligations on the individual families of workers. It is a pretext to keep women the second sex.

Every move toward a “family-centered” social policy, instead of an independent proletarian course to advance the historic interests of working people, including the right of every woman to reproductive freedom...

Every step by “talented” youth from the working class toward “a career” as a ladder up (and *out* of their class)...

Every move toward state-funded and “faith-based” charity (and Obama pledges to follow in Bush’s footsteps on the latter), instead of government-guaranteed education, health care, and pensions as *the universal social rights of the working class*...

Every move toward tightening the trap of mortgage debt slavery (that is, “home ownership”), as opposed to a revolutionary social movement of the toilers that demands nationalization of the land and the housing stock as we fight for pleasant, spacious, and affordable accommodations for all...

Every such move weakens the working class and labor movement, as it strengthens the hand of the rulers, who seek to blame sections of our class and other scapegoats for the accelerating ills of the world capitalist order.

Every such move strikes a blow to what working people, including Blacks, women, and the foreign-born, have fought for and conquered from the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction on—through the mass social movement that built the industrial unions, and the Black-led struggles of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s that drove a stake through the heart of Jim Crow and fundamentally transformed social relations in the United States.

8. Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 233.

9. Frederick Engels, “The Housing Question,” in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 23, p. 344.

10. For a further discussion of the emergence of the family in class society, see “Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women’s Liberation,” resolution adopted by the Socialist Workers Party national convention (August 1979), in *Communist Continuity and the Fight for Women’s Liberation*, Part I (Pathfinder, 1992).

11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Pathfinder, 1970, 1987, 2008), p. 53 [2009 printing].