

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Israeli regime threatens further attacks on Syria

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Utah miners win support in fight against lockout

BY ANNE CARROLL

PRICE, Utah—As the lockout of 75 coal miners by the owners of the Co-op mine enters its fourth week, the workers' fight for a union remains firm and solidarity is building.

In one expression of this growing support, four members representing United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Local 9958, a retired miners local in East Carbon, Utah, came to the picket line on October 8 to bring the support of their local.

They brought \$110 collected at their local union meeting, and another \$83 was donated out of their pockets at the picket line. "We will try to get others to do what we did. Our word is our deed. We will be back—you can count on that," said Bobbi Fivecoat, a retired miner and member of Local 9958.

The next morning the retired workers began collecting food and cash donations at the local grocery store, the Miners Trading Post. Nick Degiulio, one of the members of UMWA 9958 who came to the picket line,



Militant/Above, Tanya Ross; Inset, Anne Carroll

Above, October 10 distribution of food donated by unions to locked-out coal miners and families. United Mine Workers members in region have responded to struggle for union recognition at Co-op mine in central Utah. Inset, miners set up picket line October 3.

said, "We went up to the store at 9:00 am and had a good response. Even the store owner contributed food. When I left there we had a sizable truckload of canned goods, potatoes, soups,

cooking oil, and Mexican food." Degiulio began working in the coal mines in the East Carbon and Sunnyside, Utah, area in 1940. They collected a truckload of food that they

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Supermarket workers in S. California walk off job

BY JAMES VINCENT

LOS ANGELES—Tens of thousands of workers at supermarkets in Southern California walked off the job October 11 after union negotiations with three major store chains were suspended in the face of the employers' intransigence.

"The contract the companies are pushing is not fair—the whole package stinks," said Albert Rodriguez, a produce worker at Ralphs. Workers there had been locked out when they reported for morning shift.

The United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW), which represents some 70,000 workers in southern California, struck the Vons supermarket chain. The other two chains, Albertsons and Ralphs, immediately closed their doors, saying they viewed a strike against Vons as a strike against all three.

The companies have been preparing for a strike for months, recruiting potential strikebreakers and training store managers to drive delivery trucks across picket lines. "When I came in to report to my 8:00 a.m. shift, I was told I was locked out," said Oscar García, 19, who has worked

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After hard-fought battles, 60,000 peasants get land titles in Venezuela

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

VEROES, Venezuela—"We will defend the agrarian law to the death," said Graciela Rojas with conviction. A peasant leader and member of Los Cañizos farm cooperative, in the state of Yaracuy in northwestern Venezuela, Rojas spoke to *Militant* reporters here October 2.

She was referring to the Law on Land and Agricultural Development, passed by the Venezuelan government in November 2001. This has been one of the most contentious measures decreed by the nationalist government of Hugo Chávez, one that has stoked the fury of big capitalists and landlords and increased Washington's hostility.

Taking advantage of provisions in the new agrarian reform legislation that allow expropriation of idle lands or large estates previously owned by capitalist landlords, peasants throughout the country have accelerated land takeovers this year, especially since the defeat of the two-month-long employer "strike" in early February. That was the second unsuccessful attempt by the Venezuelan bourgeoisie to oust Chávez. In April 2002, a U.S.-backed military coup failed because of massive mobilizations by workers and peasants.

As a result of hard-fought battles, nearly 60,000 peasant families who were



Militant/Argiris Malapanis

Peasants at Agua Negra in Yaracuy state, Venezuela, October 2, on new tractor purchased with credit from state agency. About 300 peasant families farm the land in cooperatives there, having waged battles over a six-year period to take it over from landowners. The peasants received land titles under the 2001 agrarian reform law.

landless have obtained titles to 4 million acres of fertile land since 2001, according to figures issued by Venezuela's National Land Institute (INTI). Most of these titles, encompassing 3.5 million acres, were

granted over the last year. Beginning this spring, thousands of peasants who are organized in cooperatives also began to receive credits, allowing them to purchase tractors and other equipment, as well as to expand and diversify production.

"Now with a good government we have water, electricity, credits, new housing, a new tractor, and a cooperative that's recognized by the state," said Rojas. "The big businessmen and landowners used to rule as they pleased. Now with Chávez they can't quite do that. They have tried to kick us off our land by hook or by crook, but they will fail because we shall defend it."

Los Cañizos has a reputation in this region as a symbol of determined struggles by the peasants, who comprise 13 percent of the country's population of more than 24

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Bush press conference targets Cuba

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—At an October 10 White House press conference, U.S. president George Bush announced his administration's plans to take several measures against revolutionary Cuba. These include stricter enforcement of curbs on travel to Cuba, aid to counterrevolutionary groups on the island, and the establishment of a presidential commission, co-chaired by Secretary of State Colin Powell, to draw up plans for a "free," that is, capitalist Cuba.

In a statement issued October 13, Cuba's foreign ministry condemned the announced measures, saying they were part of Washington's "40 years of economic and political war" aimed at "ending the example of dignity and social justice that the Cuban Revolution embodies." The travel ban, it

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'Militant' camera fund at \$1,200

Readers have sent in more than \$700 in contributions to help replace the *Militant's* stolen camera equipment. Thanks to a \$500 matching fund, the total is now \$1,200.

In September the *Militant's* brand-new Canon digital camera and three lenses were stolen at an event in New York being covered by a *Militant* reporter—a \$4,000 loss. A fund appeal was launched to help replace this

equipment. In response to political events in Venezuela, however, funds were borrowed in order to buy new equipment right away (see firsthand coverage in this and the last two issues).

Your contribution is needed now. Contributions, earmarked for the photo equipment fund, should be sent to the *Militant* at 152 W. 36th St. #401, New York, NY 10018.

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Cuban envoy speaks at launch of Maori literacy campaign

BY JANET ROTH

AUCKLAND, New Zealand—“The most important thing is that we are surviving, advancing, and we will not give up.” This is how Miguel Angel Ramírez began his talk about the Cuban Revolution at a September 21 meeting organized by the New Zealand Cuba Friendship Society.

Ramírez, based in Indonesia, is Cuba’s ambassador to New Zealand. The primary purpose of his visit was to take part in the launch of a literacy program run by Te Wananga o Aotearoa, a Maori-based university. The assistance of the Cuban government has been essential to the development of this program.

Rongo Wetera, the university’s chief executive officer, in introducing Ramírez to the 60 people present, said that a recent conference in Auckland on job training estimated that “280,000 employees are operating below the minimum level of literacy in the workforce. The Ministry of Education estimates the problem is twice that size.... Sixty to 70 percent of Maori and Pacific Islanders are operating below minimum literacy levels.”

Wetere paid tribute to the Cuban advisors who have left their families to come here for many months to help set up the program. Three of these Cubans were in the audience, together with Jaime Canfux Gutiérrez, director of the Adult Education Program of the Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute.

Ramírez described the 1961 literacy campaign in Cuba, in which some 100,000 young people went into the countryside to teach peasant families to read and write, as “our first milestone.” Pointing to other advances made since the 1959 revolution, he commented, “after 44 years we’ve been proven right. The most important resource in society is the human resource.”

“A radical revolution in education is under way today,” Ramírez said, comparable to 1961. This includes a campaign to ensure all schools have computers, televisions, and videos, “not only in cities but the most remote villages,” and to increase

the number of teachers to one or two for every 15 students. An additional test to enter universities has been brought in so students with lower academic results can be selected to continue their education.

The ambassador outlined the latest events in the ongoing campaign being waged by Washington to overthrow the Cuban Revolution.

He pointed in particular to how Cuba’s use of the death penalty a few months ago to counter a U.S.-fueled spate of plane and boat hijackings, and its jailing of 75 opponents of the revolution bankrolled by U.S. officials in Cuba to further their campaign of dislocation, had led to stepped-up slanders.

“A lot of people don’t like the death penalty—we won’t argue about this—but this is the law in my country and it has to be respected. We do it because we are under siege and need this law.

“They never mention the executions when [U.S. president George] Bush was governor of Texas, including of minors and the disabled, or those held at Guantánamo Base for over one year with some attempting suicide. We feel a hypocrisy from the United States and Europe when they talk about Cuba,” Ramírez said.

After briefly describing the case of the five Cuban revolutionaries imprisoned in the United States on frame-up charges as a result of their efforts to defend Cuba from attack by U.S.-based counterrevolutionary groups, Ramírez encouraged those present to join the campaign to win their freedom.

In reply to a question, Ramírez outlined some of the enormous gains made by Cuban women since the revolution, but added that more was needed. “It is still the culture of our society that women are in charge of the house. We have to break with this.”

Asked why the United States and not Cuba controls the Guantánamo Base, Ramírez explained the history of U.S. domination of Cuba and how the base had been “rented for eternity—a disguise for its takeover.” We won’t provide a provocation

Postal workers strike in Britain



Militant/Jim Spaul

Workers at the Mount Pleasant Post Office in central London on October 1. Dozens of postal workers picketed during a 24-hour strike called by the 25,000-strong Communication Workers Union (CWU). They are demanding a £4,000 annual increase in “London weighting”—additional pay to cover the higher cost of living in London. The CWU and the Unison union, which represents city workers, called a stoppage and march for October 16.

for them to attack us by trying to take the base back, he said. “We can only highlight that Guantánamo is our territory, but what happens there is the responsibility of the U.S.”

“We have mines around the Guantánamo Base,” Ramírez added. “Some countries would like us to sign the anti-mining treaty. How can we do this? Why get rid of the weapons of the poor countries and not nuclear weapons? What if the U.S. decided to invade Cuba from Guantánamo?”

A young man in the audience asserted that the majority of the news and cultural influences in New Zealand is from the United States and that this adversely affects youth growing up. He asked if Cuba was similarly affected.

Ramírez responded, “We can’t go back to the stone age. We’re against the imposition of the cultural values of the United States in every country but we don’t have the means to stop this.

“Our defense is to make our people more cultured, so they can differentiate for themselves what they see and read. The ‘Battle of Ideas’ is about people being able to judge, opening their eyes to alternatives.”

“We’re westerners,” Ramírez added. “We show 300 U.S. movies a year on TV.” Music played in Cuba encompasses all forms, whether traditional Cuban or hip hop. “It’s positive.”

Ramírez used the example of *Saving Private Ryan*, a film about U.S. soldiers in World War II. When it was shown in Cuba, it was accompanied by an explanation of some key events of that war, such as the siege of Stalingrad and the 20 million who died in the Soviet Union fighting against the invasion by imperialist Germany.

Jaime Canfux concluded the meeting by explaining more about the literacy program being set up in New Zealand. The program is based on students watching a video, then

practicing with a workbook, with a facilitator available to assist them.

“In Cuba this happened in a revolutionary context, where all the laws favored the project. In other countries we need to look for a different way to reach more people with less resources,” Canfux said.

Canfux named a number of countries where Cuba was helping to set up a similar program to teach reading and writing: Haiti, Nicaragua, Guinea-Bissau, Venezuela, and Mexico.

Some 540 students are currently involved in the pilot stage of the program in New Zealand.

Felicity Coggan contributed to this article.

‘La migra’ grabs 60 in Miami workplace raid

BY RÓGER CALERO

Some 60 workers were arrested October 3 in an immigration raid at a federal courthouse under construction in Miami.

Workers who witnessed the arrests said close to 100 uniformed cops from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other police agencies surrounded the fenced-off property, while another half a dozen agents watched from a nearby rooftop with binoculars and radios as they entered the construction site and began the arrests.

The immigrant workers were forced down on their knees to the ground with their wrists tied behind their backs.

“They came in with ample manpower. Believe me,” Gary Lott, an iron worker from Fort Lauderdale, said to the *Miami Herald*.

This is the second time in the last few months the immigration police have carried out a raid at this site.

THE MILITANT

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Defending abortion clinic in New York, 1999.

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Tel Aviv threatens further attacks on Syria

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Two days after Israeli jets bombed targets just 10 miles from the Syrian capital, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon emphasized that there might be further such Israeli attacks. Speaking on the 30th anniversary of Tel Aviv's war against Syria and Egypt—the last time that Israeli forces attacked Syrian territory—Sharon said, “Israel will not recoil from defending its citizens and will strike its enemies in every place and with any means.”

On the same day U.S. president George Bush reiterated his administration's backing for the action. “I have consistently said that Israel should defend himself,” he said. The White House, which condemns Syria as a backer of “terrorism,” has given approval to a package of anti-Syria sanctions that is now proceeding through Congress with bipartisan support.

The October 4 attack injured several people and destroyed buildings at Ain Sahab, described by people in nearby villages as a deserted camp. Israeli government spokespeople claimed that the site is used for training by the Palestinian organizations Islamic Jihad and Hamas—part of their constant theme that Syria, along with Iran, provides funds and safe harbor to several Palestinian organizations. In an October 10 statement, U.S. state department spokesman Adam Ereli backed this account, saying, “Our intelligence indicates that it was a camp in active use by terrorist organizations.”

Tel Aviv seized on the suicide bombing in Haifa the previous day to spread its war against the Palestinian people. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the bombing, in which 19 people were killed.

Speaking on October 7, Israeli vice prime minister Ehud Olmert said that the security cabinet had decided to bomb the camp almost two months ago after the suicide bombing of a bus killed 23 people, but had postponed the action.

Ranaan Gissin said that following that incident the government had decided that “there would be no limitations, not even geographic, to get the leadership or the infrastructure of the terrorist groups.” The Israeli armed forces have waged a campaign of “targeted killings”—Tel Aviv's euphemism for assassinations against Palestinian leaders.

CNN reported on October 7 that Gissin had told them that the government “is not ruling out another attack in Syria.” According to the report, Gissin “said that Syria is the ‘critical part’ of what he called an ‘axis of terror’ among Iran, Syria, and Palestinian militants.

“There could be more [air strikes], there could be not,” he said.

Gissin told CNN that “Iran is not a target,” but called for economic and political pressure on Tehran to force it to back off its alleged support for militants in Lebanon—a reference to Hezbollah. Gissin also said that Palestinian Authority President Yasir Arafat is “living on borrowed time.”

Reinforcing Tel Aviv's threat of further attacks, the head of Israel's northern command, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Gantz, said on October 7 that Lebanon and Syria's continued support for Hezbollah and other Pales-

tinian organizations would be met with retaliation. The day after the strike on Syria an Israeli soldier was killed in a brief, intense firefight with Hezbollah guerillas on the Israel-Lebanon border.

In response to the October 4 attack, Syria placed a motion before the United Nations Security Council condemning “the military aggression carried out by Israel against the sovereignty and territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.” The council did not vote on it. The representative of the United States—one of the five permanent members with veto power—said that he would veto the resolution.

Security Council representatives of the French and British governments condemned both the Israeli raid and Palestinian “terrorism.”

“Israel's action is unacceptable,” said London's ambassador, Emyr Jones Parry.

“Israel should not allow its justified anger at continuing terrorism to lead to actions that undermine both the peace process and we believe Israel's own interests.”

Moscow: need ‘balanced’ statement

Russian deputy foreign minister Yuri Fedotov said the Syrian motion needed to be “more balanced.... In particular, we think it should include a clause on the need to stop terrorist attacks in the region.”

The Arab League, which includes a number of governments in the Middle East, held an emergency session in Cairo. Its statement described the Israeli aggression as “a serious escalation.”

On October 8 the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee approved a proposal for a series of economic and diplomatic sanctions against Syria. White House spokesman Scott McClellan



Israeli soldier holds Palestinian man at gunpoint at checkpoint near Nablus, the West Bank, in September. Tel Aviv reinforced its clampdown on the occupied territories at the same time as its air force struck Syria.

announced the same day that the administration would drop its previous opposition to the package. “We have repeatedly said that Syria is on the wrong side of the war on terrorism and that Syria needs to stop harboring terrorists,” he said.

The new package includes a ban on the sale to Syria of so-called “dual-use technology” that could allegedly have military applications. The sanctions would also prohibit U.S. oil and other companies from operating in Syria; restrict Syria's U.S.-assigned diplomats and reduce or remove diplomatic contacts between the two countries; deny landing rights to Syrian airlines; and freeze Syrian assets in the United States.

The impact of the package will be lim-

Tokyo, Ankara to boost occupation of Iraq

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

Recent announcements by the Japanese and Turkish governments register progress in Washington's push to draw other governments into its occupation of Iraq.

According to Reuters, Japanese officials are hammering out a proposal to provide up to \$5 billion in funding to the U.S.-dominated occupation authority. At the same time, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has confirmed that Tokyo will place hundreds of troops at Washington's disposal, following a July 26 parliamentary vote giving the green light for Japanese forces to enter a combat zone for the first time since World War II.

The Turkish government announced in early October that it will deploy thousands of troops inside Iraq, under the command of U.S. officers.

The country's press reported that as many as 10,000 troops from the 28th Mechanized Infantry Brigade, which has been part of U.S.-led occupations in Kosova and Afghanistan, would be deployed as early as November.

According to the Turkish daily *Hurriyet*, officials in Ankara told U.S. representatives they wanted their troops deployed in northern

Iraq. U.S. officials, however, leery of having them near heavily Kurdish areas where their presence might spark protests, said they would instead be stationed in a region between Baghdad and the border of Jordan and Syria.

Members of Iraq's Governing Council, a body handpicked by Washington to put an Iraqi face on its occupation, voted to oppose the deployment of troops from “neighboring countries.”

Conflict with Kurdish forces

“We fear that those troops might side with one party of the Iraq people against the other,” said Council member Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, in a reference to Ankara's ongoing war against the Kurdish people, who have waged an historic struggle for national self-determination in a region that includes areas of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

Gen. Ilker Basbug, the Turkish army's deputy chief of staff, warned Kurdish leaders to keep their soldiers away from the Turkish forces as they cross the Turkish-Iraq border. “If the convoys are attacked, the necessary response will be given, he said. “The Turkish armed forces have the abilities and capacity to protect its convoys and itself.”

The Turkish government has already stationed thousands of troops on the Iraqi side of its southern border to seal it off from Kurdish refugees and guerrilla fighters. Unlike the soldiers to be deployed closer to Baghdad, these forces answer to Turkish commanders.

Opinion polls in Turkey indicate that a large majority of people there are opposed to the deployment. Eight months ago the Turkish parliament voted to deny the Pentagon the use of its territory for an armored force in the invasion of Iraq. Undeterred by the unexpected setback to its plans,

ited, reported the *Washington Post*, since Washington has already imposed heavy sanctions on the Middle Eastern country. Trade between the two countries clocks in at only \$300 million a year.

The proposal passed the House committee by 33 votes to two. A spokeswoman for the external relations commissioner of the European Union—a grouping dominated by major imperialist allies and rivals of Washington—reacted critically, saying, “We are in the process of negotiating an association agreement with Syria. The policy of isolating Syria is not the most productive.”

Washington has stepped up its pressure on both Syria and Iran to abandon weapons programs and halt funding and support to Palestinian organizations. Five months ago, on May 2, the day after Bush declared victory in the U.S.-British war on Iraq, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell called on the Syrian government to clamp down on several Palestinian organizations with offices in Damascus.

Although the government says these facilities have been closed, Washington and Tel Aviv assert that representatives of Islamic Jihad and other groups continue to function.

The Israeli strike against Syria coincided with army attacks in the occupied territories, as Israeli helicopters destroyed two houses in the Gaza Strip, and troops laid siege to Jenin on the West Bank. In the early morning hours of October 10, Israeli soldiers backed by helicopter gunships shot their way into the Rafah refugee camp, killing six Palestinians, including an eight-year-old boy and youths aged 15 and 17. Officers said they were searching for weapons-smuggling tunnels connecting Gaza with Egypt. A seventh Palestinian youth died in the afternoon.

In recent weeks Tel Aviv has reimposed a blanket ban on Palestinians from the territories entering Israel. Under the so-called “general closure,” 3.5 million Palestinians will be prevented for entering Israel. In addition, they are barred from traveling from one Palestinian town to another. The *New York Times* reported that government officials said “the army would maintain ‘a full encirclement on all of the Palestinian cities in the West Bank,’ while the Gaza Strip has been cut into four sections, with Palestinians unable to move from one to another.”

Washington pushed ahead with its war on Iraq, using Kuwait-based forces to overrun the country.

In late September, after a series of talks, U.S. treasury secretary John Snow gave approval to an \$8.5 billion loan package to the Turkish government on condition that it persevere with its austerity program and cooperate with Washington in Iraq.”

A week later, the BBC reported that “Turkey and the U.S. have agreed on an action plan to eradicate the Kurdish paramilitary group, the PKK,” or Kurdistan Workers Party. Based in the southeast part of Turkey, the PKK had fought a 15-year guerrilla war against the Turkish armed forces through the late 1990s.

The Turkish and Japanese troops will join an occupation force currently made up of 130,000 U.S. troops, some 11,000 British soldiers, and small deployments from 30 other countries totaling about 13,000 troops. Washington has also been trying to get the government of India to send forces. On October 5 U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell told CNN that the Indian government had “indicated they would not be in a position to provide troops. And I don't expect that position to change.” New Delhi has said that it would consider providing troops if the United Nations Security Council endorses such a step.

U.S. officials are pushing for the Security Council to adopt just such a resolution. Agence France-Presse reported on October 14 that the council representatives of the French, German, and Russian governments proposed “minor changes” while moving to accept the U.S. plan's “broad outline.” Berlin and Paris had opposed the “unilateral” character of Washington and London's decision to invade Iraq, counterposing to it military action carried out under UN auspices.

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By Gus Horowitz

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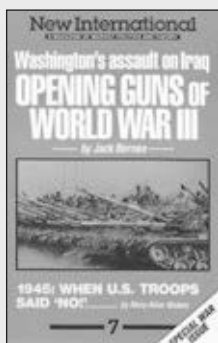
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Utah miners win support in union fight

Continued from front page

brought to the miners and their families October 11. Before the food distribution, a short program was held. Billy Preston, an officer Local 9958, told the gathering of about 80 Co-op miners and their families that “When we came up to your picket line we made a pledge that we would come back with food. We came back and we live up to our pledges.”

Also speaking was Jack Smith, 92, a 60-year member of the miners union who has been a UMWA organizer and UMWA District 22 officer. “With a union you can have your own safety committee,” he said. “There are laws that say you don’t have to work in imminent danger. You can force the company to implement these laws if you have a strong union. It does not matter where you come from, or how long you have been here. When you join our organization you are our brothers.”

When the members of UMWA 9958 visited the picket line, the Co-op miners on picket duty that day told these retirees about why they were fighting for a union.

Safety is a big issue, they said. One miner at Co-op, who like a few other workers there asked that his name not be published, explained that the Co-op bosses “sent five men into a mine with only one self-rescuer [an oxygen unit used for safety reasons] to recover mining equipment.” This is a mine that had caved in and as a result has only one escape way, workers reported, and this is where Co-op gets its water. “I had to go by myself in this mine to check the water supply,” the miner continued.

“I only get \$5 or \$10 for Christmas bonus,” another miner said. “If you report an accident, you are laid off for three days and your pay is cut.”

The retired miners described some of the many strikes and battles they had been involved in over the years to get the union organized in Carbon and Emery counties. Nick Degiulio said he had been in 15 or more strikes over the course of decades. Today out of eight coal mines in this area only one is UMWA-organized, said miners.

‘Lead the way for other mines’

“This will lead the way for the other mines,” said Preston. “In the other places the companies do everything they can to keep the union out. You have taken a stand. I’m proud of you guys. United we stand, divided we fall.”

Mel Stevenson, another UMWA retiree, described how they backed the workers at the East Carbon landfill to organize the United Mine Workers in 1999. “A bunch of us got together, 40 old-timers, and we went down there and set up pickets. The bosses said they would fire everybody if they went UMWA—but we won. And until you turn union, these old-timers will be here.”

On September 22 the miners at Co-op walked off their jobs, protesting the suspension of a worker and unsafe job conditions. The company, CW Mining, fired all the workers. The miners were involved in a union-organizing drive.

The next day the UMWA filed unfair labor practice charges against the company before the National Labor Relations Board, stating: “The regular hourly workforce (approximately 80 employees) were discriminated against in regard to hire and tenure of employment by being discharged for protected, concerted activity.” It added that the company “maintains an employer dominated ‘union.’” On October 3, the UMWA set up picket lines at the Co-op mine.

The *Sun Advocate*, the local paper in



Militant/Above, Tanya Ross; Right, Anne Carroll
Above, retired miner Jack Smith, seated, talks to miners and their supporters at October 10 distribution of food. “It does not matter where you are from,” he said, “when you join our organization you are brothers.” Right, volunteer divvies up sugar.

nearby Price, printed a lengthy letter on October 7 titled, “Company’s Version of Events,” signed by CW Mining’s personnel manager, Charles Reynolds. In the letter Reynolds charged that when a worker was suspended for supposedly falsifying “his safety/inspection checklist,” and “an employee became upset and called all employees off shift to protest. Some of the employees refused to participate in the protest and were threatened by the protesters.”

The company letter seeks to respond point by point to a fact sheet that the miners have distributed widely explaining the issues. The letter states, “Fact, There has been no abuse of any employee [by the bosses]. Fact...pay ranges from \$5.50 to \$20 per hour.”

The UMWA is preparing a response to

the bosses’ letter.

Solidarity with the miners has been growing. “Are you on strike? Is this a picket line?” a worker asked after he pulled his truck to the side of the road and walked up to the pickets. He was delivering acetylene tanks for welding to Co-op Mine. The miners explained their fight. “Well, I don’t cross picket lines,” he replied.

The trucker said he had read the company’s letter to the editor, and that he knew it was a lie as soon as he saw that Reynolds claimed that miners make up to \$20 an hour. “When I make deliveries I have talked to some of the miners there—I know about the low wages they make,” he said.

Miners’ spouses are cooking hot food and bringing it up to the picket line. The first day



‘Join the fight to bring down the final empire’

BY ARRIN HAWKINS
AND SUSAN LAMONT

NAPA, California—In the days before, during, and after California’s October 7 recall election, Young Socialists for Britton joined other campaigners for the Socialist Workers Party candidate for governor of California, Joel Britton, to take their message to workers and young people around the state. They presented the revolutionary working-class alternative to the twin employers’ parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

One campaign stop was a post-election return visit on October 9 to the Napa Valley, home to thousands of farm workers and their families.

“We formed last spring to educate ourselves on the power we have, and to learn more about our past,” explained Rosalinda Ibarra, 20, co-president of the Latina Club at Napa Valley College. “Most of us were born here, and we don’t know much about our own history and culture.”

The campaign meeting organized by the Latina Club drew nine members. Britton explained the impact the rise of the Chicano liberation movement in the early 1970s had on radicalizing youth. The collection of Pathfinder Press pamphlets and books on the Chicano movement brought by the socialists to the meeting was of great interest. *Chicanas Speak Out/Women: New Voice of La Raza*; *La Raza Unida Party in Texas*; *Chicano Liberation and Revolutionary Youth*, and *The Politics of Chicano*

Liberation were a few of the titles the young women pored over. The latter title continues to be available from Pathfinder.

The socialist candidate also described the current fight for a union by some 75 underground coal miners in Huntington, Utah.

“This is an example of how things are changing in the attitudes of working people today—the growing hunger for solidarity,” Britton said, “and the resistance we can expect will develop on a bigger scale as the crisis of capitalism deepens.”

“I thought Joel’s presentation on the miners and the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride was especially interesting,” said Ibarra after the meeting. “We had never heard of these things.”

The previous week, on October 1, a Socialist Workers Party campaign team at San Francisco State College bumped into a rally of 200 students in front of the Cesar Chavez Student Union. Organized by the Black Student Union, the action protested racist harassment directed against three Black women students, who were the targets of a watermelon and piece of paper with the word “nigger” placed in front of their dorm room. Several protesters bought copies of the socialist campaign paper, the *Militant*.

On October 4, socialist campaigners went to Oakland to speak with workers and youth there about the recent acquittal of three cops—part of a gang within the police department known as the “Riders”—charged with beatings, kidnappings, and falsifying police records.

A demonstration of 200 was held in front of Oakland City Hall the day after the October 1 verdict.

Teams also campaigned at Los Angeles Community College and among supermarket workers at strike authorization meetings in Los Angeles.

On October 7, Gov. Gray Davis was recalled from office by a 55 percent

they made huge pots of *posole*, a Mexican soup of hominy, pork, and dried chili served with cabbage, cilantro, and limes. Early one morning a wife of a retired miner brought a box full of egg sandwiches she had made. The pickets are organized in 6-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

According to these workers, several meetings of miners and UMWA organizers took place during the week of October 5–11 to discuss the importance of sustaining strong picket lines and continuing to reach out for support. This month’s bills are coming in and economic pressures are bearing down on workers. Unemployment insurance has been denied them by the state of Utah because the Co-op bosses said they had “quit” their jobs, miners said, and that this will be appealed by the union.

Right now there is about \$3,500 in the funds that have been set up for the miners. Thanks to the work of the delegation of Co-op miners who attended the recent UMWA convention, donations are also beginning to come in from UMWA locals around the country. But more is needed, miners say. These contributions are used for miners’ expenses such as food, rent, utilities, and doctors’ bills during the lockout.

Domingo Olivas, a miner at Co-op, said in an interview that, “My family doesn’t need help right now—we’re okay for now. But there are some families who are suffering. They need to let us know if they need help. We should find out which families are in the most need and help them first.”

On October 6 the UMWA issued a national press release putting the full support of the union behind the miners at Co-op. Cecil Roberts, international president of the UMWA, told the union convention September 30 that “We stand with these workers in solidarity as they fight for justice and dignity. We call on all American workers to support their struggle because we believe ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’”

Rosario León, the wife of a worker who works at another mine, has been contacting local food banks and agencies that help with rent and utilities, as well as Catholic churches in Utah, and as a result contributions are coming in. Donations can be sent to UMWA, 525 East, 100 South, Price, UT 84501; checks should be earmarked, “Co-op Miners.”

margin. Republican candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected governor of California, with 49 percent of the vote. Proposition 54 was defeated. Socialist Workers Party candidate Joel Britton received 655 votes.

On the Friday evening following the elections, Militant Labor Forums were held in Los Angeles and San Francisco to discuss the outcome of the recall vote and the revolutionary working-class perspective that the Socialist Workers Party candidates put forward. The featured speakers were Joel Britton in Los Angeles and Dennis Richter, a member of the Socialist Workers Party’s National Committee, in San Francisco.

“If you are a young person facing your future, you don’t have to accept a life of choosing one rotten compromise after another,” said Richter. “What our party offers you is being part of building a communist, working-class leadership that can forge a revolutionary movement capable of taking on the ruling capitalists and bringing our class to power by establishing a workers and farmers government.

“This is the life to be part of, the fight to bring down the final empire, U.S. imperialism, which until it is overthrown will remain the biggest threat to humanity.”

Richter was joined on the platform by Arrin Hawkins, a Young Socialist for Britton. She reviewed the accomplishments of the socialist campaign and invited others to join in continuing to campaign for the socialist perspective.

Deborah Liatos, Socialist Workers candidate for mayor of San Francisco, urged those present to be part of the socialist mayoral campaign in the November elections.

A collection at the meetings in San Francisco and Los Angeles raised \$405 to send three of the full-time volunteers to Utah and Colorado to take the socialist perspective to miners and other workers in the Western coalfields.

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston

The Legacy and Lessons of the Russian Revolution. Speaker: Ellen Brickley. 7:00 p.m., Fri. Oct. 24.

The “War on Terrorism” and the Assault on Workers’ Rights. Drop the Charges against Tony Van De Meer and Stop the Deportation of Amer Jubran. Sat. Nov. 1. Dinner at 6:00 p.m., program at 7:00 p.m.

Both events at 12 Bennington St., 2nd Floor, East Boston. Tel. (617) 569-9169.

— CALENDAR —

WASHINGTON, D.C.

March for an End to the Occupation of Iraq; Money for Jobs, Education and Health Care; Fight Back against the Patriot Act. Sat., Oct. 25. Sponsored by Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.) and United for Peace and Justice.

Sales campaigners reach to union fights

BY PATRICK O’NEILL

As the international drive to increase the readership of the *Militant*, *Perspectiva Mundial*, and revolutionary books enters its third week, subscription campaigners in Los Angeles are working to get these publications into the hands of striking and locked-out supermarket workers and working people who support them.

Frank Forrestral reported October 12 that sales teams had gotten out to three strike-vote meetings that led up to the October 11 walkout at the Vons chain. “One woman was drawn to the *Militant’s* coverage of the Utah coal miners’ fight to organize a union,” Forrestral said. “She took out a \$10 introductory subscription, and told us that her father had worked in a Pennsylvania coal mine.”

Workers there also bought more than 40 copies of the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial*, and two Pathfinder pamphlets: the *Communist Manifesto* and *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning* by Jack Barnes.

Turning to these kinds of political open-

ings has helped *Militant* supporters in Los Angeles keep up the momentum in the eight-week drive to sell 950 *Militant* subscriptions, 400 subscriptions to *Perspectiva Mundial*, and 500 Pathfinder books with subscriptions.

At the end of week two, campaigners had sold 217 *Militant* subscriptions, or 23 percent of the goal—just behind where we should be. Sales of *Perspectiva Mundial* subscriptions are at 35 percent. Book sales are lagging, however, as the chart shows.

In a note accompanying the addresses of ten new subscribers, Jacob Perasso in Omaha pointed out the interest that the coverage of the fight in Utah has sparked among those looking to resist the attacks of the employers and their government.

“A team sold three *Militant* subscriptions in a working-class district this past week,” he said. “A meatpacking worker who said he was glad to hear about the union-organizing victories at a couple of plants here that have been reported in the *Militant*.”

Perasso also reported that “a worker at the Swift plant here bought a subscription to *PM* from a co-worker.” Workers at Swift are working under a United Food and Commercial Workers contract after scoring a victory in an organizing drive last year.



Militant/Frank Forrestral

Young Socialists for Britton campaign at Los Angeles Community College for Socialist Workers Party gubernatorial candidate in California, Joel Britton.

Jim Spaul said that he and another socialist worker had paid a visit to picketing rail workers in London. “When we showed workers the *Militant*,” Spaul said, “one said to another, ‘That’s the paper you lost yesterday.’ The guy bought another copy, pleased to be able to replace the one that had gone walkabout.”

Ruth Robinett reported from New York that students at an English class at the Borough of Manhattan Community College bought several copies of the *Militant* and a number of Pathfinder titles after hearing a brief presentation by Paul Pederson, a Socialist Workers Party candidate for New York City Council. A student had arranged the invitation with his teacher.

Among the titles sold were *The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning*, *Capitalism’s World Disorder* by Jack Barnes, and *Che Guevara Talks to Young*

People. Pederson reported that one student asked about the former government of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath Party.

“What is Ba’athism?” she said, as she selected a couple of pamphlets. “Isn’t it true that Saddam Hussein was good for the people of Iraq?” Pederson described the anti-working-class character of the regime, whose reactionary policies gave Washington and London an opening to carry out their invasion and occupation of the country.

Campaigners are urged to send in reports and photos of their sales efforts for this column. Reports on book sales need to be sent each week, along with details of subscriptions. A running total of sales in your area in all categories is also a help to volunteers who compile the sales figures. The deadline for such information is Monday at 8:00 a.m. in New York.

SWP fund goal is within reach

BY ANGEL LARISCY

“A check for \$60 is on its way to New York today toward our goal of \$1,100,” wrote Tanya Ross from Utah on October 13. “It includes a \$50 contribution from a coal miner who reads the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial*, and supports the fight by workers at the Co-op mine.” Up until two months ago, she said, he was working at the mine, where the bosses have locked out 75 workers to try to undercut their battle for a union.

With less than one week remaining in the effort to raise \$80,000 for the Socialist Workers Party-Building Fund, socialist workers in cities around the country report they have mailed in or are collecting the final payments in the fund-raising campaign. With \$14,500 remaining to be turned in, many local fund organizers say they expect to go over their goal.

Public Party-Building Fund meetings in recent weeks have shown the interest among workers and others in discussing working-class politics and the possibilities of building a communist party today. Reporting from Miami, Omari Musa said that Margaret Trowe, a guest speaker from Boston, spoke for the Socialist Workers Party together with Young Socialist Nicole Sarmiento on “The Worldwide Capitalist Crisis, Working-Class Resistance, and the Revolutionary Party.” A garment worker involved in a fight to organize a union in his plant and a couple of veterans of the class struggle in Venezuela attended.

In response to a question on whether Washington had sunk into a quagmire in Iraq, Trowe said, “No. The Vietnamese organized a movement that for decades waged a revolutionary struggle for national liberation. That is not the situation in Iraq. Washington is occupying Iraq and what it is experiencing is simply the result of the occupation—including scattered attacks by remnants of the reactionary Saddam Hussein regime—not an uprising of the Iraqi people.”

Sarmiento spoke about her campaigning with the Young Socialists for Britton in the California elections, and what she learned in explaining the Socialist Workers Party program to other young people and workers.

Laura Garza spoke in New York City on October 5 on “The Working Class and the Fight for Women’s Rights.” A college student and a unionist who received a flyer about the meeting at the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride rally in Queens the previous day attended and gave a contribution to the fund.

Michael Italie reports that new contributions at the meeting push the total pledges in New York over the \$10,000 goal.

Fund supporters in Washington, D.C., organized a meeting for SWP leader James Harris on “The Reality of the World Capitalist Crisis Today” at the new local Pathfinder Bookstore.

Militant/Perspectiva Mundial Fall Subscription Drive September 27–November 23: Week 2 of 8							
Country	Militant Goal	Sold	%	PM Goal	Sold	Book Goal	Sold
SWEDEN							
Stockholm	8	3	38%	3	1	5	3
Gothenburg	10	3	30%	2	2	5	3
SWEDEN Total	18	6	33%	5	3	10	6
NEW ZEALAND							
Auckland	15	6	40%	1	0	5	0
Christchurch	12	3	25%	1	0	6	3
N.Z. total	27	9	33%	2	0	11	3
UNITED STATES							
Omaha	18	11	61%	38	11	15	3
Houston	25	10	40%	10	3	20	10
Newark	55	21	38%	20	10	25	18
New York	75	27	36%	35	22	40	2
Seattle	25	8	32%	6	0	10	0
Los Angeles	60	18	30%	30	8	35	0
Twin Cities	45	11	24%	35	3	15	0
Boston	35	8	23%	25	21	25	11
San Francisco	50	11	22%	20	1	40	2
Des Moines	25	5	20%	12	7	15	2
Detroit	25	5	20%	8	3	15	2
Utah	10	2	20%	10	5	8	1
Chicago	40	8	20%	25	7	25	1
Western Col.	15	3	20%	10	3		0
Washington	25	5	20%	12	4	12	2
Pittsburgh	25	5	20%	2	3	12	0
Atlanta	40	8	20%	17	9	25	6
Philadelphia	30	5	17%	7	4	7	4
NE Pennsylvania	20	3	15%	8	0	10	0
Tucson	7	1	14%	2	0		0
Cleveland	15	2	13%	5	2	10	1
Birmingham	18	2	11%	3	0	5	8
Tampa	20	2	10%	8	1	10	1
Miami	42	2	5%	12	3	21	0
U.S. total	745	183	25%	360	130	400	74
CANADA							
Montreal	12	3	25%	6	1	15	2
Toronto	25	5	20%	5	1	15	1
Vancouver	30	3	10%	5	2	15	2
CANADA total	67	11	16%	16	4	45	3
UNITED KINGDOM							
London	25	7	28%	5	2	10	6
Cent. Scotland	8	1	13%	0	0	4	1
UK total	33	5	15%	5	2	14	5
AUSTRALIA	30	3	10%	5	1	15	3
ICELAND	15	0	0%	1	0	10	0
Int'l totals	935	217	23%	394	140	505	94
Goal/Should be	950	238	25%	400	100	500	125
IN THE UNIONS							
	Militant Goal			PM Goal		Book Goal	
AUSTRALIA							
AMIEU	4	0	0%			1	0
CANADA							
UFCW	10	0	0%	2	0	8	0
UNITE	3	1	33%	4	0	4	0
Total	13	1	8%	6	0	12	0
ICELAND							
Efling							
NEW ZEALAND							
MWU	2	0	0%	0		1	
NDU	2	1	50%	0		1	
Total	4	1	25%	0		2	
UNITED STATES							
UMWA	13	4	31%	3	1	6	0
UNITE	25	4	16%	22	5	12	1
UFCW	50	6	12%	75	15	30	2

AMIEU—Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union; Efling—Union of unskilled workers; LIVS—Food Workers Union; MUA—Maritime Union of Australia; MWU—Meat Workers Union; NDU—National Distribution Union; UFCW—United Food and Commercial Workers; UMWA—United Mine Workers of America.

\$80,000 Party-Building Fund July 12–October 15: Week 13			
	Goal	Paid	%
Tampa	1,800	1,936	108%
Boston	2,800	2,785	99%
Detroit	2,500	2,350	94%
Des Moines	2,000	1,865	93%
Newark	3,500	3,230	92%
Seattle	6,000	5,530	92%
Birmingham	1,400	1,259	90%
Atlanta	6,800	6,045	89%
Cleveland	1,000	855	86%
Miami	1,800	1,535	85%
Twin Cities	5,100	4,350	85%
San Francisco	8,000	6,550	82%
Los Angeles	7,500	6,075	81%
Utah	1,100	890	81%
New York	10,000	8,049	80%
NE Pennsylvania	2,000	1,570	79%
Chicago	4,200	2,966	71%
Philadelphia	3,200	2,275	71%
Houston	3,500	2,455	70%
Omaha	1,300	830	64%
Western Colorado	2,700	1,609	60%
Pittsburgh	3,600	1,735	48%
Washington, D.C.	2,700	1,295	48%
Other		1,961	
Total	84,500	70,000	88%
Goal/Should be	80,000	77,037	96%

How Venezuela steelworkers helped defeat boss ‘strike’

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS
AND CAMILO CATALÁN

CIUDAD GUAYANA, Venezuela—When the big-business association Fedecámaras called a “strike” last December to oust the government of President Hugo Chávez, steelworkers at the SIDOR steel mill here played an important role in undermining the bosses’ efforts.

“I was among those who organized union members to take over company buses and head for Anaco,” said Jesús Fajardo, a member of SUTISS, the steelworkers union. He spoke to *Militant* reporters at the entrance of the huge steel works here the morning of September 29.

Fajardo and others said the union leadership organized the takeover of 20 company buses at the end of December when initial evidence showed that opposition forces had sabotaged gas pipelines in Anaco, a city several hours north of Ciudad Guayana in the state of Anzoátegui. Steel mills and other plants here use natural gas in the production process. Severing the main gas pipeline quickly brought production to a halt.

About 1,200 steelworkers were on the way to Anaco the day after the source of the problem became clear in early January, we were told. They were confronted by an armed demonstration of 3,000 blocking the road. “These rightist thugs included many of the local police, who had taken off their uniforms, and were organized by several mayors who are with the opposition in towns around Anaco,” said Luis Pinto, the financial secretary of the union, in a September 27 interview. “A good number of us were armed too, but we decided to back off at that point. The relationship of forces

was not in our favor.”

Pinto and others reported that SUTISS organizes its own defense guard. Training includes target practice. The union makes this publicly known.

The SUTISS contingent decided to back off in order to avoid an armed confrontation. They regrouped a few miles down the road and organized reinforcements. “We told the National Guard in Bolívar state that unless the Guard broke through, we would proceed even at the cost of bloodshed,” Pinto said. He reported that after getting Chávez’s go-ahead, the National Guard did deploy troops in front of the buses. They escorted the SUTISS contingent through the barricades and stood guard while the steelworkers repaired the damaged pipeline. The SIDOR steel works and other plants in the area were up and running by mid-January.

In interviews conducted on September 29 at the plant gate, inside the steel works, and in the union office, located on company property, many steelworkers said their biggest challenge now is resisting layoffs and other takebacks the bosses have imposed in the last five years.

Toll of employers’ assault on workers

SIDOR was state-owned until 1997. The government of President Rafael Caldera sold a majority stake in the company to Argentine, Brazilian, and other capitalists that year, just before Chávez was elected, we were told.

Since then, the workforce has been cut from 18,000 to 12,000, while production has slightly increased. Nearly half the workforce today is made up of temporary workers hired through subcontractors to do



Militant/Argiris Malapanis

Worker at SIDOR steel mill in Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela, cuts scrap metal to prepare it for furnace, September 29. He is a “red hat,” that is, a temporary worker.

maintenance and other jobs. The contract workers are not covered by the union contract. They make just above the minimum wage, about 200,000 bolivars (\$125) per month compared to the average monthly wage of 700,000 bolivars (\$438) for full-time SIDOR employees.

In the process, the workforce has become much younger and 20 percent female, compared to 10 years ago, when no women were working there. Some of the unionists said these represent new energizing forces for the union if organized and mobilized.

Meanwhile, however, the bosses have made headway in fostering divisions in the workforce by using the specter of the contract workers and the rising joblessness in Venezuela—now at an official rate of 18 percent nationally.

Without a struggle to bridge the gap between the temporary and the full-time workers, union power on the job—the strengthening of which won respect for this union leadership among the working class in the area—will progressively erode, as a couple of workers explained.

The bosses’ concession drive has taken a toll, particularly on job safety. “The main problem we face right now is safety,” said

Carlos Ramírez in an interview at the SIDOR entrance September 29. “Four workers have died from accidents on the job in the last few months, including one two weeks ago. Last week we carried out a slowdown of production for three days to protest and demand improvements.

“Those most adversely affected are the contract workers, who make less than half of union scale and who are less experienced. They are not unionized but we support them,” he said.

Several SUTISS members said they were organizing a workers’ assembly during the morning shift change at the SIDOR entrance September 30 to discuss how to fight the company, which has withheld benefits they are supposed to receive according to the union contract.

The large majority of workers interviewed attributed the deteriorating economic situation to the capitalists, not the Chávez government.

“I am not a Chavista,” said Ramírez. “But if they get rid of Chávez, we will lose. The opposition doesn’t propose any improvement for the workers. And they proved it during all those years they were in power.”

Venezuela miners, steelworkers struggles show radicalization of toilers

Forces on the left in new combinations; Workers Party of Venezuela holds first national assembly

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS
AND CAMILO CATALÁN

PUERTO ORDAZ, Venezuela—This city on the eastern bank of the Orinoco River, the state of Bolívar, is full of iron mines, coal processing plants, steel mills, and aluminum factories. The metropolitan area of Ciudad Guayana, which includes Puerto Ordaz and the city of San Félix across the river, has a population of about one million.

It is one of the most industrialized regions of Venezuela, with a somewhat higher level of unionization than other states. The working class here has a tradition of resistance to the employers’ attacks on wages and working conditions going back to the 1970s, and has actively opposed the bosses’ two-year long drive to overthrow the nationalist government of Hugo Chávez—an effort backed by Washington (see article on this page).

Militant reporters who visited this region of Venezuela for the first time September 26-29 got another glimpse of this reality from iron ore miners on strike against the giant Crystallex International Corp.

In an interview here September 27, Mildre Daza, who works in an iron ore mine operated by Crystallex, about 40 miles north of Puerto Ordaz, told us miners there have been on strike since June 2 against deteriorating safety conditions on the job and company attacks on wages and benefits.

Crystallex, a Canadian company, bought the concession to mine iron ore at Las Cristinas from the state-owned Venezuelan Company of Guayana. The contract, Daza told the *Militant*, stipulated that 25 of the miners who worked there before would be rehired, and that all 100 miners would receive at least the same pay as the 25 earned before—a minimum of 16,000 bolivars (\$10) per day—and benefits.

“But we haven’t received any benefits. We are paid half the promised rate, and safety conditions have deteriorated,” Daza said. That’s why the miners went on strike. In their efforts to reach out for solidarity they met

leaders of the steelworkers’ union, SUTISS, who have been the dominant force in the labor movement here for some time.

Struggles such as these by steelworkers, miners, and other workers in this region are part of the broader political radicalization of working people across the country. This process has accelerated in the last two years as working people in city and countryside have mobilized repeatedly to defeat efforts by the employers to topple the Chávez government, including the April 2002 military coup attempt and the bosses’ lockout last December-January. Through these struggles, working people have gained more self-confidence to fight for their interests. Their struggles have included factory occupations (see “Workers in Venezuela occupy plants” in last week’s issue) and land takeovers by thousands of peasants (see article on facing page).

These militant actions by working people have posed more sharply the need for a proletarian party with a revolutionary program and course of action that can lead the working class and its allies toward a successful struggle for power and the establishment of a workers and farmers government. No such party exists in Venezuela.

Leftist political groups that have functioned in the country’s labor movement for some time have been undergoing various permutations under these conditions.

This was the context for the “First National Assembly Toward Building the Workers Party,” (PT) held here September 27.

PT’s first assembly

About 200 people took part in the one-day conference, including a delegation from Crystallex. Most delegates came from Ciudad Guayana and other parts of Bolívar state, in eastern Venezuela.

The largest delegation was from SUTISS. It included more than a dozen union officers. Delegates also came from the unions of aluminum workers, at Orinoco Iron, several plants manufacturing charcoal briquettes,

construction workers, municipal and bank workers, and postal employees. Most were union officials, including from the top leadership of these unions. A number of rank-and-file unionists also took part. Less than two dozen people came from the Caracas federal district and the states of Carabobo, Falcón, Mérida, and Zulia. The composition of the gathering indicated that the new party is primarily based in this region.

In addition to their union membership, a number of delegates identified their political affiliations. Luis Miquilena from Falcón state, for example, a member of the executive committee of the PT-in-formation, said he is a long-time member of the Venezuelan Communist Party. SUTISS president Ramón Machuca said he came from a tendency in the union affiliated in the past with Causa R (Radical Cause). The majority of participants came out of this tendency.

Causa R was founded in the early 1970s out of a split in the Venezuelan CP. It had a middle-class, backward-looking, utopian perspective advocating small-scale manufacturing enterprises and self-sufficiency—first in Bolívar state and then nationwide. It opposed the large, export-oriented industrial development of raw materials such as iron, aluminum, and bauxite. Like other left-wing currents in Venezuela that functioned within the trade unions, Causa R built its main base in steel and other industries in and around Ciudad Guayana.

The assembly opened with presentations by Jesús Romero Anselmi, director of Venezuelan TV, a pro-Chávez station, and Carlos Escarrá, a lawyer and former member of the Supreme Court. Ramón Machuca presented the PT’s draft declaration of principles, which states that the PT “is born out of the need to organize Venezuelan workers into a political movement to profoundly transform society and the country, on the basis of doing away with injustice wherever it comes from.” The PT’s goal will be to “deepen the changes” taking place in the country since Chávez’s election, it says. The document

calls for ending Venezuela’s dependency on the production of oil and minerals and “diversifying the economy” along with fighting for improved social services.

Machuca said in his talk that the PT is needed to ensure that unionists can “fight for power.” His presentation and the plenary session discussion made it clear that the majority of delegates saw the “fight for power” as a question of elections.

Yhonny García, a member of the oil workers union Fedepetrol in Maracaibo, capital of Zulia state, said the PT must concretize what is meant by “deepening the changes under way since Chávez’s election.” This needs to be translated, he said, into demands to advance struggles by workers and peasants today, although no concrete demands were put forward in the course of the discussion. García was referring to fights by working people to implement new laws on agrarian reform, fishing, and strengthening state control of oil and mineral resources. The enactment of these laws in 2001 intensified the hostility toward Chávez of Washington and the Venezuelan bourgeoisie.

Mildre Daza invited delegates to join the solidarity actions of the striking iron ore miners at Crystallex.

In his summary Machuca said the gathering was a first step toward building the PT as a nationwide party, and indicated that he is open to running for governor of Bolívar state on the PT’s ticket in next year’s elections—adding, “hopefully with Chávez’s support.”

The one thing that was most clear from our visit to this region was that struggles like those of the workers at Crystallex and the SIDOR steel works will sharpen in the coming months as Washington and its Venezuelan collaborators continue to press their determination to oust the Chávez government and restore a relationship of forces more favorable to the bosses. The workers’ search for a political, class-struggle way forward will gain momentum in the process too.

Peasants take land

Continued from front page
million, according to a 1997 estimate.

“We started the fight to reclaim these lands from the landowners in 1987,” said Napoleón Tortolero, president of Los Cañizos co-op and a central leader of the struggle. “Peasants in the area formed land committees,” he stated, to press their demand for the right to till previously communal lands that the capitalist landowners had taken over by force. “The landowners responded with violence. After many years of struggle and repression, we took back 11,476 hectares [28,690 acres] in 1992.”

For another 10 years after that, however, the rich landowners in the area used the police to harass these peasants, who did not get title to their land until this year. Even as late as July 12 of last year, Eduardo Lapi, the governor of Yaracuy, who is with the pro-imperialist opposition that is trying to undermine the Chávez government, ordered police to fire on dozens of peasants who had tried to move onto lands turned over to them by INTi. A number of peasants were wounded in that incident.

Graciela Rojas gave more details of the 15-year-long virtual guerrilla war the peasants had waged. “We used to have meetings

ant was killed. The National Guard tried to cut off our access to water and to the rivers. But we continued to find ways to fool them and get around them.”

Credits for the first time, housing

This spring INTi granted the 35 families in Los Cañizos cooperative “agricultural certificates,” that is, titles to their land. “On August 21 we obtained credits for the first time,” said Víctor Torrelles, a veteran of the Mexican embassy occupation.

Torrelles, Tortolero, and other peasants proudly showed their newly acquired, Chinese-made tractor. “FONDAFA sold it to us at cost for 33 million bolivars (\$20,000), and we have five years to pay at very low, fixed interest,” Tortolero said. “And we have enough for seed and fertilizers.” The tractor was financed by the overall credit the cooperative got this summer, amounting to 77 million bolivars (\$48,000). FONDAFA is one of the rural banks created by the Chávez government that now provides such credits to agricultural producers.

What made Torrelles most proud, however, was the new housing. Cooperative members built 20 new units this year, with materials provided by the state, to replace the old mud shacks that continue to predominate in the country’s rural areas. Another 20 are under construction. “This two-bedroom house costs us 5 million bolivars (\$3,150) and we have 20 years to pay it down,” Torrelles said, showing off one of the units. “It’s cheaper and better than anything we were able to build before.”

For the first time this year, all the 400 households in the township that includes Los Cañizos have running water and electricity, we were told. “We also have a new elementary school,” Tortolero said.

About 20 miles away from Los Cañizos, in the township of Agua Negra, César Ranjifo, president of another co-op there, told us that 300 peasant families, organized mostly in cooperatives, cultivate an area of 8,500 acres previously owned by the Atteques. These big landowners were “Batistianos,” Ranjifo said, Cuban capitalists who fled the Caribbean island after the overthrow of the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista there in 1959 and came to Venezuela. “Most of them are now fleeing once again—to Miami,” Ranjifo said with a laugh. In Agua Negra, peasants had also fought battles for more than half a decade, we were told, occupying these lands and finally getting titles and credits this year.

The struggle for land and the means to till it is intertwined with the fight against racism at Agua Negra, in a way these reporters did not see in other parts of the country. Most residents in that area are of African origin. “You have Blacks like myself running co-operatives, and people are not used to that in this country,” Ranjifo said.

Yauques claim 150,000 acres

Later that afternoon, on October 2, these reporters drove about three hours south to San Carlos, in Cojedes, one of the states with the highest production of grains.

During a *Militant* reporting trip there in July 2002, hundreds of peasant families who were landless had formed 50 cooperatives and signed up for credits from FONDAFA at a conference these reporters attended. Fourteen months later, however, neither the titles nor the credits have materialized, said Angel Sarmiento, a peasant who gave these reporters a tour of the area last year.

So far, meeting these peasants’ land needs depends on the resolution of a land claim by the indigenous family of the Yauques for some 150,000 acres of fertile land “stolen in the last 40 years by *latifundistas*,” as Sarmiento put it. Part of this land today is used for cattle grazing but much of it is idle. Big capitalist interests are involved here, including British landowners backed by London, we were told.



Militant/Argiris Malapanis

Peasants at Los Cañizos farm cooperative in Veroes, in the state of Yaracuy, Venezuela, talk about their fight for land. Left to right, Napoleón Tortolero, Víctor Torrelles, Graciela Rojas, and Isabela Salas. Right, in back, is Ali Hernández, a medical student from Valencia who accompanied *Militant* reporters.

“We are not fighting to reclaim the land for ourselves, but to turn it over to the hundreds of peasant families in the area who have formed cooperatives and are waiting for land,” said Jubir Yauque, in an interview at his house in a working-class neighborhood of San Carlos. Thugs organized by big landowners killed his father in 1968, he said, the only one from the Yauque nation that held legal papers to the land. No one ever faced charges for the crime. These documents later “disappeared” from the public registry, as the Yauques discovered when they initiated a struggle for access to a few hundred acres of this land in the 1970s. It wasn’t until after Chávez’s election in 1998 that the Yauques were able to get legal help and link up with peasant groups that helped them uncover evidence to back their claim.

It seems, however, that this land claim may take a long time to resolve. There hasn’t been the kind of struggle here that has marked the rural areas of Yaracuy.

Land titles go to peasants who fought

In most cases, peasants who have received land titles are those who have fought hard for land, sometimes for a decade or more. In an interview at the offices of the National Land Institute in Caracas October 3, Braulio Alvarez told us that nearly 4 million acres of land have been distributed to peasants since 2001, involving almost 59,000 families who had been landless. “The overwhelming majority have been decided by settling land disputes that come out of hard-fought peasant occupations,” he said. INTi, which is charged under the new agrarian reform law to settle all land disputes, aims to have distributed 5 million acres of land by the end of this year, providing titles to 75,000 families. Their goal is to turn over land to 300,000 landless peasant families across the country, Alvarez said.

Until two years ago, Alvarez pointed out in an interview in July 2002, about 1,000 big landowners controlled 85 percent of land under cultivation—a total of around 75 million acres. Some 350,000 hard-pressed

peasant families, who owned between 3 and 50 acres each, produced some 70 percent of vegetables and other major crops. The Chávez government declared the nationalization of another 75 million acres of idle but arable lands and promised to distribute them to peasants. “The land and its use has been nothing but a commodity,” Alvarez had pointed out, “not a social activity to produce enough food for the nation.” Nearly 85 percent of foodstuffs in Venezuela are imported from Canada, the United States, and other countries.

“With thousands of peasants getting land, this is now beginning to change,” he said on October 3. “For the first time we are beginning to make some progress toward food self-sufficiency. This year we had record production in corn, sorghum, and rice.”

The fight to implement the land ownership laws has been the bloodiest, Alvarez stated. He showed us a leaflet issued in September by the Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinating Committee, which names 58 peasant leaders murdered in the last two years by paramilitary squads organized by big landowners.

The battle is also being waged against state institutions. Last year, the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional two articles of the Law on Land and Agricultural Development, Alvarez noted. Articles 89 and 90 of that bill include provisions that facilitate giving titles to peasants who occupy land and till it over a few years, and that allow the government to forego any compensation for land expropriated from landowners who are proven to have claimed land by falsifying documents.

“The Supreme Court also suspended Article 211, which prohibits foreclosures on any property of peasant co-ops as long as the producers continue to work the land,” Alvarez said. Peasant organizations around the country, he stated, have started a petition drive to sign up most peasants in Venezuela and then present a demand to the National Assembly to reverse these actions by the Supreme Court.



Militant photos by Argiris Malapanis

Bottom, children play outside new housing at Los Cañizos farm cooperative October 2. Top, co-op member Víctor Torrelles shows old mud shack, of the kind still prevalent throughout rural areas, now being replaced by the new housing.

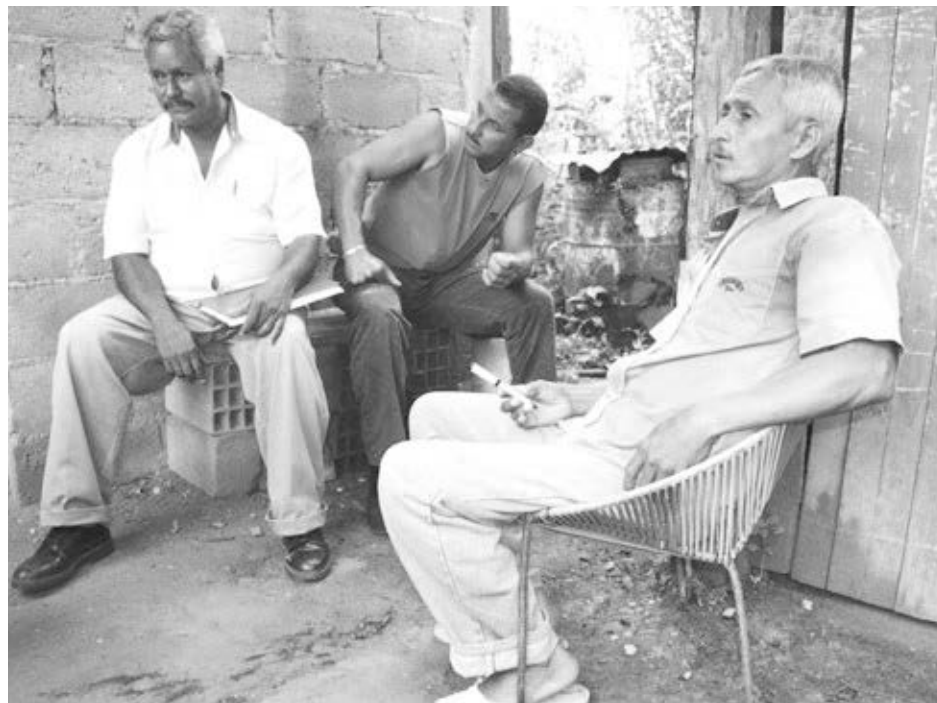
all the time to talk about our situation,” she said. “Braulio put an end to that, convincing us we had to stop just talking and take action to get land.” She was referring to Braulio Alvarez, a central leader of the peasant struggle in Yaracuy who is now the general secretary of the Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinating Committee and a member of INTi’s national board.

“So we occupied most of this area in 1987. The government sent the National Guard and they kicked us out by force. But in a few days we would go back and retake the land. Then they would come and evict us again. So it went for a while.

“In 1989 we decided to take more forceful action,” Rojas continued. “We took the cathedral in San Felipe and blocked highways in this region.”

That was the year of the *Caracazo*, a working-class rebellion in Venezuela’s capital and other cities in face of a steep rise in fuel prices and skyrocketing unemployment. The social-democratic government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez sent the army against masses of working people who had broken into supermarkets to get food and had begun marching toward rich neighborhoods. More than 3,000 were shot down in cold blood in Caracas alone. Despite the harsh repression by the capitalist regime, the Yaracuy peasants were not deterred.

“We also occupied the Mexican and Spanish embassies in Caracas, and other government offices, so that the people could hear about our problems in Yaracuy,” Rojas said. “Repression was fierce. On Jan. 3, 1991, the National Guard attacked us with force. We suffered many wounded and a young peas-



Militant/Argiris Malapanis

Left to right: Peasant leader Angel Sarmiento, Osvaldo Yauque, and Jubir Yauque in San Carlos, Cojedes state, at Jubir Yauque’s house. The Yauques, an indigenous family, have filed claim under agrarian reform law for title to 150,000 acres of land stolen from native people by capitalist landowners. They will turn it over to hundreds of landless peasant families in area who have formed 50 cooperatives to till land.

Fidel Castro: 'History will absolve me'

The following is an excerpt from "History will absolve me," Fidel Castro's reconstruction of the Oct. 16, 1953, courtroom speech he gave in defense of the attack on the Batista dictatorship's Moncada army garrison on July 26 of that year by a group of revolutionary cadres led by Castro. The speech, smuggled out of prison, became a basic programmatic statement of the July 26 Movement. A full text of the speech is contained as an appendix in *Fidel Castro's Political Strategy: From Moncada to Victory* by Marta

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Harnecker, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for October. The book traces the political course along which the July 26 Movement and the Rebel Army led workers and farmers to victory in the 1959 revolution. The book is copyright © 1987 by Pathfinder Press, reprinted by permission.

BY FIDEL CASTRO

The five revolutionary laws that would have been proclaimed immediately after the capture of the Moncada garrison and would have been broadcast to the nation by radio must be included in the indictment. It is possible that Colonel Chaviano may have deliberately destroyed these documents, but even if he has I remember them.

The first revolutionary law would have returned the power to the people and proclaimed the 1940 constitution the supreme law of the state until such time as the people should decide to modify or change it. And in order to effect its implementation and punish those who violated it—there being no electoral organization to carry this out—the revolutionary movement, as the circumstantial incarnation of this sovereignty, the only source of legitimate power, would have assumed all the faculties inherent therein, except that of modifying the constitution itself: in other words, it would have assumed the legislative, executive, and judicial powers.

This attitude could not be clearer nor more free of vacillation and sterile charlatanry. A government acclaimed by the mass of rebel people would be vested with every power, everything necessary in order to proceed with the effective implementation of popular will and real justice.

The second revolutionary law would give nonmortgageable and nontransferable ownership of the land to all tenant and subtenant farmers, lessees, sharecroppers, and squatters who hold parcels of five *caballerías* of land or less,¹ and the state would indemnify the former owners on the basis of the rental which they would have received for these parcels over a period of ten years.

The third revolutionary law would have granted workers and employees the right to share 30 percent of the profits of all large industrial, mercantile, and mining enterprises, including the sugar mills. The strictly agricultural enterprises would be exempt in consideration of other agrarian laws which would be put into effect.

The fourth revolutionary law would have granted all sugar planters the right to share 55 percent of the sugar production and a minimum quota of forty thousand arrobas for all small tenant farmers who have been established for three years or more.

The fifth revolutionary law would have ordered the confiscation of all holdings and ill-gotten gains of those who had committed fraud during previous regimes, as well as the holdings and ill-gotten gains of all their legates and heirs. To implement this, special courts with full powers would gain access to all records of all corporations registered or operating in this country, in order to investigate concealed funds of illegal origin and to request that foreign governments



Crowd celebrates Fidel Castro's release from prison in May 1955 as a result of a massive popular campaign demanding Batista dictatorship free political prisoners.

extradite persons and attach holdings rightfully belonging to the Cuban people. Half of the property recovered would be used to subsidize retirement funds for workers and the other half would be used for hospitals, asylums, and charitable organizations.

Furthermore, it was to be declared that the Cuban policy in the Americas would be one of close solidarity with the democratic peoples of this continent, and that all those politically persecuted by bloody tyrannies oppressing our sister nations would find generous asylum, brotherhood, and bread in the land of Martí²; not the persecution, hunger, and treason they find today. Cuba should be the bulwark of liberty and not a shameful link in the chain of despotism.

These laws would have been proclaimed immediately. As soon as the upheaval ended and prior to a detailed and far-reaching study, they would have been followed by another series of laws and fundamental measures, such as the agrarian reform, the integral educational reform, nationalization of the electric power trust and the telephone trust, refund to the people of the illegal excessive rates these companies have charged, and payment to the treasury of all taxes brazenly evaded in the past.

All these laws and others would be based on exact compliance with two essential articles of our constitution: one of them orders the outlawing of large estates,

indicating the maximum area of land any one person or entity may own for each type of agricultural enterprise, by adopting measures which would tend to revert the land to the Cubans. The other categorically orders the state to use all means at its disposal to provide employment for all those who lack it and to insure a decent livelihood to each manual or intellectual laborer. None of these laws can be called unconstitutional. The first popularly elected government would have to respect them, not only because of moral obligations to the nation, but because when people achieve something they have yearned for throughout generations, no force in the world is capable of taking it away again.

The problem of the land, the problem of industrialization, the problem of housing, the problem of unemployment, the problem of education, and the problem of the people's health: these are the six problems we would take immediate steps to solve, along with restoration of civil liberties and political democracy.

¹ One caballería is equal to about 33 acres.

² José Martí—essayist, poet, and revolutionary leader—founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party and initiated the second Cuban war of independence in 1895; he was killed the same year. Martí is a national hero in Cuba.

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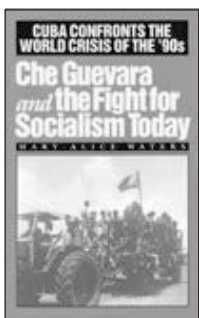
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Priorities—“Hospital labs ‘too busy’ to prolong lives of cancer victims.” —Headline, *Times* of London.



Harry Ring

Free-market blessing—About 16 percent of the world’s population live in impoverished, substan-

dard dwellings and areas. A UN report defines them as slums.

Plus other surprises to come—“Employees with families may be in for an unpleasant surprise this fall as they look over the annual health insurance packages. Many companies...are dramatically cutting benefits for spouses and children or are trying to get their families off their plans altogether.” —*Los Angeles Times*.

Pre-palsy—The *Times* also reported that jobless claims increased in August and that new

manufacturing orders dropped sharply. The paper saw the situation as indicating “a wobbly recovery.”

Like for instance—Immediately below the “wobbly” story was a report that Ford plants would be closed in Michigan and Ohio by year’s end with another to come in New Jersey in the first quarter of next year. This, Ford moguls said, was part of the recent contract with the United Auto Workers.

Get the thermals out—“Gas bills this year may top last year’s.”

— News headline.

A bright spot—The countryside editor of the *Times* of London reports that the Duke of Edinburgh is considering raising truffles on his royal estate. If there’s planting this fall, there will be a harvest in five years.

Not as if they’re officials—Illinois social workers who muster care for the mentally disabled thought they had been granted a 4 percent cost-of-living increase—the first in three years—but state officials, with apparent authority, sliced the

legislature’s vote down to 2 percent.

Essence of used car dealer—An Arlington, Texas, dealer says he lost several cars a year to folks who couldn’t meet the payments and took off. He’s developed a device that flashes and beeps when a payment is due, and shuts down the car if it seems necessary.

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Swedish union paper covers antideportation fight

The following article appeared in the October issue of *Mål & Medel*, the national monthly newspaper of the Food-workers union in Sweden, titled “The deportation from the U.S. that never happened.” The U.S. government dropped its efforts to deport Róger Calero in May of this year. The translation from Swedish is by the *Militant*.

BY MALIN KLINGZELL-BRULIN

The deportation of Róger Calero from the United States was stopped thanks to massive support from workers around the world. He is now touring to thank personally all those who helped him in his fight, like the workers at the Samfood plant in Årsta, Stockholm.

Calero was arrested by the U.S. immigration police in December 2002 as he was returning from a reporting trip to Mexico and Cuba for the publications *Perspectiva Mundial* and the *Militant*.

He was born in Nicaragua. U.S. authorities wanted to deport him on the basis of a suspended sentence he’d received in 1988, despite the fact that he had a “green card” and a work permit since 1990.

Calero decided to put up a fight. He understood that to be able to stay he had to win public support.

He had been a slaughterhouse worker and active in the union before. He was part of an organizing drive by workers at Dakota Premium Foods in South St. Paul, Minnesota, which succeeded in winning a contract. Now, he has contacted his former union, the UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers] and asked for support. And he got it.

A defense committee was formed and [UFCW Local 789 president] Bill Pearson signed up as co-chair. The local also contributed funds to a defense campaign to stop Calero’s deportation.

Petitioning

The *Militant* newspaper, the publication he works for, also wrote about his case. This resulted in workers around the world writing letters to U.S. authorities, demanding he not be deported. Petitions were also gathered around the world.

Thanks to the strong support that Calero received, the deportation was never carried out. In other words, he succeeded in the difficult task of winning against U.S. authorities, something considered almost impossible, especially after Sept. 11, 2001.

He is now traveling around the world to thank all the workers who supported his fight, and also to share his experiences—especially since he has discovered

that thousands of immigrants have come up against the same things as he did.

“It’s a very important question for the union movement to organize and defend immigrants’ right to live and work in this country. In the United States many immigrants have temporary employment and are treated as second-class citizens,” said Calero during his visit to Samfood in Årsta in mid-September.

Björn Tirsén and Anita Östling, two workers there who are regular readers of the *Militant*, were moved by the cruel fate of Calero and decided to begin petitioning on his behalf.

“More than half of the workers at Samfood signed,” said Tirsén.

Calero is now meeting those who supported his struggle at the meatpacking plant. He can tell them about its success thanks to the massive support he received.

He was also eager to share his experiences.

“A great deal of the support I got came from union militants, many with a background as immigrants,” he explained.

“I want to show you that it is possible to wage a fight if you are unjustly treated. Together we are strong,” he continued.

He also talked about his job as a butcher before he became a journalist. He is very familiar with the problems in slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants.

“When I was working we had problems with the line speed increasing all the time. We were injured but our bosses didn’t care. One day the workers sat down and refused to work until they slowed down the line. After that we started to organize [a union] and won a contract.”

He emphasized the importance of organizing to improve working conditions.

The struggle to improve conditions at his former workplace was very successful. And later the members of the local were there for him when he was threatened with deportation.

Many of the workers at Samfood stop and listen to Calero tell his story in the cafeteria. Most of the workers here are immigrants and can identify with him and his struggle. Many of them also signed the petition to stop his deportation.

“The union is our strength. To improve our conditions we must use it more,” he said, receiving approval from the workers that have gathered around him in the cafeteria.

The defense committee that was formed for Róger Calero has a web site, www.calerodefense.org, where you can read about his case and how he won his victory.



Militant/Sigurdur Haraldsson

Róger Calero (left) talks with high school students in Iceland September 15 during international speaking tour about his recent victory against the U.S. government attempt to deport him. In Sweden, he met with workers at the Samfood plant in Stockholm and thanked them for their support to the defense campaign on his behalf.

— 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —



October 27, 1978

NEW STANTON, Pa.—After a back-to-work blitz by United Auto Workers international officers and the local media, auto workers at Volkswagen’s first U.S. plant here decided on October 14 to end their six-day strike.

The strike was in response to contract proposals far below standards won by Big Three auto workers. The proposals called for the VW workers to wait three years before receiving equitable wages. The New Stanton workers would also be shortchanged on vacation time and layoff benefits, as well as subjected to forced overtime.

The overwhelming contract rejection [1,235 to 95] was a “real shocker,” admitted UAW President Douglas Fraser.

On October 5 the union and company had issued a joint press release congratulating themselves on “reaching a tentative settlement comparable to the U.S. automotive industry.”

“The Volkswagen strike is quite upsetting to us,” said a vice-president of Japan’s Nissan Motor Company.

VW had made every effort to find a docile work force in this steel and mining center. Forty thousand people were screened to fill 2,000 jobs.

“But in the process,” complained the *Wall Street Journal*, “Volkswagen hired many articulate workers steeped in traditions of unionism.... Moreover, the workers here show little regard for the union’s tradition of discipline when it comes to strikes.”

Before waiting for strike authorization from Detroit, the VW workers threw up mass picket lines, locking the plant up tight.

“No money, no bunny,” workers shouted on the picket lines in defiance of union officials, court orders, and company scare tactics.



October 26, 1953

CHICAGO—Jim Crow violence flared here again on the Southside as three Negro families moved into the Trumbull Park public project. Although the Chicago Housing Authority had the families accompanied by 13 police cars, hooligan elements, aware of the anti-Negro sentiments of the police, shouted invectives and hurled tomatoes and rocks at the families. Four demonstrators were finally arrested.

An extreme housing shortage faces the Chicago working class, the Negro people in particular. The influx of 20,000 Negroes a year from the South with no increase in dwelling units has intensified these conditions. In their desperate attempt to break from over-crowded ghettos and fire-traps, Chicago Negroes are moving into areas formerly all-white.

The Socialist Workers Party sees the situation as fraught with peril both for the Negro people and the unions. It asks that Chicago’s organized labor movement intervene in this situation.

The violence has already flowed over to an attack against Negro workers at Wisconsin Steel who do not even live in the neighborhood. They are being attacked as they leave the plant. The assaults are a forecast of the future of an organized anti-Negro hysteria by all those interests that benefit from the division of the working class.

Strung along Lake Michigan from 83rd to Gary, Indiana, are many steel plants—U.S. Steel, Carnegie, Inland, etc. In the residential area west of the lake, which includes Trumbull Park project, live many workers of these plants.

With contract negotiations coming up, the steel companies are making all efforts to weaken the union. It is no accident that management representatives are the ones most talkative about the Trumbull Park incidents, trying to stir up backward Jim Crow sentiments in the white workers.

From Pathfinder

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Meaning of California election

The election of Republican Party candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California in the October 7 recall election was a blow to the Democratic Party and a boost to the Republicans nationally. His electoral victory was aided by a Democratic governor tarnished by the energy crisis and the effects of the economic crisis. The Democratic candidate, Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, was part of the Gray Davis administration and was not seen as an alternative. Schwarzenegger played on the fact that the Davis administration had proposed increasing taxes to “balance the budget” and had tripled the vehicle registration fee.

Working people in California were not convinced by the arguments of union officials who went on a “No recall” drive to mobilize Democratic votes. They voted in large numbers for Schwarzenegger because of their hatred for Davis’s record in office. In this period of economic crisis, there is no ideological loyalty among working people to imperialist liberalism, which is what the Democratic Party stands for and what the trade union officialdom tries to tie workers to. The fact is that no significant layer of the population has loyalty to either big-business party in the United States.

Because Davis’s unpopularity was such a factor in the outcome, Schwarzenegger’s electoral victory doesn’t automatically translate into votes for President George Bush’s reelection in 2004. But the strength of the vote for the Republican candidate dealt a blow to the long-held assumption that certain states such as California are untouchable by one or the other major party, and that the Democrats have a lock on the votes of workers, Blacks, and Latinos.

Despite Davis’s very liberal record over the past two years, half of union households voted to oust him. Exit polls showed that among Latinos, only 52 percent voted for Bustamante while 40 percent voted for a Republican—31 percent for Schwarzenegger and 9 percent for Thomas McClintock. Even among voters who are Black, 23 percent voted Republican.

The election results were another sign of the slow shift to the right in bourgeois politics that goes back to the emergence of William Clinton and of the “centrist Democrats” as the dominant force in the Democratic Party, and which continued with the election of Bush as president. Democratic and Republican politicians above all keep workers and farmers within the bounds of capitalist politics by promoting patriotism. They foster the myth of “we Ameri-

cans,” that is, the false view that working people and the employers—our exploiters—have common interests.

Despite what some pro-Democratic forces say, Schwarzenegger is not an ultrarightist. He is not even a right-wing ideological Republican like McClintock. He is a Republican who took established positions in his party on the main issues he spoke out on, such as tax cuts. He voiced positions on several questions—support for a woman’s right to abortion, for gay unions, for medical marijuana, and for gun control—different from those held by Bush.

This crossover of Democratic voters is not unique—it was the “Reagan Democrats” who helped elect Ronald Reagan as California governor in 1966 and then as president in the 1980s. It’s worth remembering that as governor, Reagan signed a bill liberalizing abortion laws in California four years before the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion in 1973.

Schwarzenegger’s victory had nothing in common with the 1998 election of Jesse Ventura as Minnesota governor. Ventura demagogically attacked both the Democratic and Republican parties as being part of the “establishment.” He ran as an “independent” and won support by promoting himself as a strongman figure, supposedly standing above classes, who would sweep out the political stables and use an iron hand, even at the expense of bourgeois democracy. As it turned out, Ventura’s Bonapartist-type role was premature for U.S. politics today and hit a dead end.

Virtually all the other candidates ran within the capitalist framework, including Peter Camejo of the Green Party, which as usual acted as the left wing of the Democrats.

The only revolutionary working-class voice in these elections was that of the Socialist Workers Party candidate, Joel Britton. Socialist Workers campaigners approached all political questions from the standpoint of the interests of the working class, including the need for working people to chart a political course independent of all the capitalist parties.

Britton and the other socialist candidates said: young people and militant-minded workers don’t have to accept a life of choosing one rotten bourgeois politician or another. The SWP offers you the opportunity to be part of building a communist leadership that can forge a revolutionary movement of workers and farmers to take on the ruling capitalists and bring our class to power. This is the life to be part of—the fight to bring down U.S. imperialism, which will remain the biggest threat to humanity until it is overthrown. Join us!

Supermarket workers walk out

Continued from front page

at Ralphs for two months. “This is my first strike. The companies are trying to take away everything the union has fought for.”

Earlier in the week, UFCW members had voted by a 97 percent margin to reject the takeback demands of the three chains, which together operate about 900 stores from San Diego to Santa Barbara and control 60 percent of the grocery store market. Hundreds of workers left the strike authorization meetings with armfuls of picket signs. The UFCW contract with the three supermarket chains expired October 6. Strikers told the *Militant* that some Vons stores were forced

Bush press conference

Continued from front page

added, is also an attack on U.S. citizens’ “right to travel freely to our country.”

Washington prohibits most residents from traveling to Cuba. To tighten enforcement of these restrictions, Bush said he had instructed the Department of Homeland Security to “increase inspections of travelers and shipments to and from Cuba.” He said those who travel to Cuba via third countries or on private vessels will be “targeted.”

Bush claimed these measures would help curb what he called the growing “illicit sex trade” resulting from increased tourism in Cuba. Without offering facts for his allegations, he accused the Cuban government of “cruel exploitation of innocent women and children.”

In March the administration announced it would no longer issue “people-to-people” licenses to groups sponsoring educational trips to Cuba. The Treasury Department has increasingly enforced travel curbs with the threat of fines ranging from \$2,000 to \$7,500. The number of cases opened against individuals traveling to Cuba “illegally” rose sharply, from 165 in 1996 to 1,155 in the first half of 2001.

Bush also told the press Washington would increase the number of individuals allowed to emigrate from Cuba to the United States annually. And he said Powell and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Melquiades Martinez would head a “commission for the assistance to a free Cuba” that is to draw up plans in anticipation of assisting a post-revolutionary government in Cuba.

Lastly, Bush announced plans to step up Washington’s propaganda war against the Cuba through increased radio and television broadcasts, use of the internet, and distribution of shortwave radios.

to close their doors immediately after the strike began.

“I’m 100 percent for the union,” said John Sandford, interviewed at the October 8 strike vote meeting at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. “They want to cut our pay, eliminate some overtime, take away holidays, make us pay through the nose on medical—in short, they want to phase out the union.” Like other new hires, Sandford, who works at a Vons in Inglewood, makes close to minimum wage. His primary concern is losing his health benefits.

The employers offer no wage increase until October 2005, permanent two-tier wages and benefits, drastic cuts in health and pension benefits, and union-weakening changes in work rules. The contract includes language that would allow outsourcing to nonunion companies.

The union says the owners are trying to foist \$1 billion a year in medical-care costs onto the backs of the union members, including roughly \$1,300 a year per worker in monthly premiums, plus higher deductibles and co-payments.

On October 10 the supermarket chains took out a full-page ad in the *Los Angeles Times* claiming that a full-time food clerk can earn “as much as \$17.90 per hour on regular work days, \$26.85 per hour on Sundays and \$53.70 per hour when they work on contractually paid holidays.” The ad doesn’t mention the fact that about 70 percent work part-time, and that baggers make \$7.40 an hour.

According to the *Times*, profits have dropped at both Kroger and Safeway. Albertsons’s profits are up, but are “largely driven by closing stores and exiting unprofitable markets.” Competition from retailers such as Wal-Mart is fueling the profit crisis at the supermarket chains. Prices for much of their produce and packaged food are 10 to 20 percent below what the national chains charge. They are also nonunion. Wal-Mart says it plans to open 40 Supercenters in California in the coming years.

In a July newsletter, Safeway warned: “Each new [rival] store or an expanded food offering has the potential to take away grocery business from our stores, which means fewer hours and jobs for our employees. To ignore or further widen the cost gap with these competitors would be irresponsible.”

But many UFCW members reject these arguments. “These companies are making money. They just want to make more,” said Tibor Sziklay, who works at an Albertson’s in Huntington Beach

Grocery workers are appealing to store customers to honor their picket lines and to buy at other unionized food stores. One of their bilingual leaflets says: “Attention Shoppers! A major strike may soon disrupt your family shopping... Don’t Cross the Picket Line!”

Imperialism is not a ‘policy’

BY SAM MANUEL

What does the *Militant* mean by imperialism? In last week’s issue, we replied to this question from reader Ken Berg by drawing on V.I. Lenin’s pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin was the central leader of the Bolshevik party, which led workers and farmers to power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution.

Lenin answered the arguments of Karl Kautsky, who in his days as a revolutionary had been a leading theoretician of Marxism. As the imperialist powers moved toward World War I, Kautsky deserted Marxism and, using “revolutionary” arguments, became an apologist for the reformist positions of the leaders of the Second International who all lined up behind “their” respective imperialist governments in the war.

Lenin wrote that this was the result of Kautsky’s position that “imperialism must not be regarded as a ‘phase’ or stage of economy, but as a policy, a definite policy ‘preferred’ by finance capital.” But imperialism is not a policy. The sharpening trade competition between the major capitalist powers over markets, the debt strangling

REPLY TO A READER

the semicolonial nations, the deepening penetration and destruction of their markets by powerful imperialist cartels, and the accelerating drive by the strongest imperialist powers toward war to redivide the world’s resources in their favor—all these are inherent in capitalism. These features cannot be reformed; capitalist rule must be overturned and replaced by the rule of workers and farmers.

Lenin points out how middle-class radicals and pacifists could be eloquent, even strident in their condemnation of the devastating consequences of imperialist exploitation. They passionately implored the more “progressive” capitalists to consider a range of alternatives, from “antimonopoly” measures to “fair trade agreements” to “development schemes” and the use of military force only under the auspices of “world bodies” that were in fact dominated by the imperialist powers.

But, he pointed out, “as long as all this criticism shrank from recognizing the inseparable bond between imperialism and the trusts, and, therefore, between imperialism and the foundations of capitalism, while it shrank from joining the forces engendered by large-scale capitalism and its development—it remained a ‘pious wish.’”

He added, “The more rapidly trade and capitalism develop, the greater is the concentration of production and capital which *gives rise* to monopoly. And monopolies have *already* arisen—precisely *out of* free competition!”

These features of imperialism are true regardless of the regime in power. In the early 1900s, Lenin wrote, “A comparison of, say, the republican American bourgeoisie with the monarchist Japanese or German bourgeoisie shows that the most pronounced political distinction diminishes to an extreme degree in the epoch of imperialism.”

With this understanding, the first duty of class-conscious workers is to oppose the capitalist rulers of their own country. Lenin made fun of “anti-imperialists” such as “a Japanese [who] condemns the annexation of the Philippines by the Americans” but says nothing about the imperialist nature of Tokyo. Such condemnations of Washington “can be regarded as being sincere and politically honest only if he fights against the annexation of Korea by Japan, and urges freedom for Korea to secede from Japan.”

There are those today who decry “globalization” as a new phenomenon and imply that capitalist governments could take a more “humane” course. Lenin, however, explained how the drive by capital to penetrate every nook and cranny of the world is a feature of capitalism, not a policy option of governments. He describes how the imperialist powers are driven to export capital to the semicolonial countries and deepen their domination of their economies. As a result, “The old social relations become completely revolutionized, the age-long agrarian isolation of ‘nations without history’ is destroyed and they are drawn into the capitalist whirlpool.” In this way, “capitalism itself gradually provides the subjugated with the means and resources for their emancipation.”

In contrast to middle-class critics who argue that the development of industry and technology is intrinsically reactionary, Lenin states that imperialism is “capitalism in transition,” laying the material basis for a superior society, socialism. Industry and banks outgrow the bounds of purely private business enterprises and take on a social character. “When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organizes according to a plan” the supply and transportation of raw materials on a world scale; “when a single center directs all the consecutive stages of processing the material right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when these products are distributed according to a single plan among tens and hundreds of millions of consumers” as in the oil industry, Lenin writes, “then it becomes evident we have socialization of production.”

Class-conscious workers are not opposed to the globalization and centralization of industry and trade. The question is which class controls it. To end imperialist war and exploitation, working people must organize a revolutionary movement to take political power, expropriate the capitalist class, and reorganize the economy on the basis of the needs of the vast majority, at home and worldwide.

Ottawa backs off ‘terrorism’ accusations

BY ROSEMARY RAY

TORONTO—“We have done nothing wrong,” said Fahim Kayani. “They have no evidence to say we are terrorists.” The Pakistani immigrant, 28, was speaking at a rally on September 27, hours after his release from jail. Seventy people attended the event, organized by the Project Threadbare coalition in defense of Kayani and 20 other men arrested on accusations of “terrorist” activity in August and September. Rally organizers reported that 11 of the men had been freed on bail.

Kayani said that in his predawn arrest on August 14, the cops had smashed down his apartment door and dragged him from bed at gunpoint.

Referring to the “terrorism” allegations, Tariq Shah, the lawyer for nine of the men, told the media, “the whole thing is coming undone. They’re dropping the security concerns from all of the men.” The September 26 *Toronto Star* reported that a number still

face the threat of deportation under charges of immigration violations.

Along with 19 other men from Pakistan and one from India, Kayani was arrested and jailed under Project Thread, the so-called “terrorist dragnet.”

The predawn raids were carried out under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which gives the government the power to detain indefinitely any foreign national deemed a threat to “national security.” Immigration officials said the men had exhibited “a pattern of suspicious behavior,” including the fact that many were from Pakistan’s Punjab province, which the officials said was “noted for Sunni extremism,” and their practice of living in groups of four or five.

They also said the men were enrolled at the Ottawa Business College. At the September 27 rally, Tarek Fatah of the Muslim Canadian Congress said that the police had seized 400 files from the college, whose



Fahim Kayani speaks to Toronto media after his release from jail on September 27

director has admitted to selling phony diplomas and enrollment letters. He added, “Why is it that the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service investigated only those files at the business school belonging to

people who happened to be brown, Pakistani, and Muslim?”

To their now discredited list of accusations, officials added the claim that one of the arrested men, Muhammed Anwar Ur Rehman—a student pilot at the Durham Flight Center—had flown over the Pickering nuclear plant outside of Toronto. The route is regularly used in the training of students.

One week before Kayani’s release, 200 people attended a protest meeting organized by Project Threadbare at the University of Toronto. Muhammed Naeem, a 34-year old doctor from Pakistan who was one of the first of the men to be released from jail, said that the arresting cops had held a gun to his head. “Some of us were beaten in jail,” he said.

Amina Sherazee, a lawyer, told the meeting that “these assaults against the civil liberties of foreign nationals today are what will be done to Canadian citizens tomorrow if we don’t resist the racist policies of the Canadian government.”

Tyson workers rally in contract fight

BY MAURICE WILSON
AND ROLLANDE GIRARD

JEFFERSON, Wisconsin—The strike by meat packers at Tyson Foods is not only for unionists there, “but for all workers around the country,” said Mike Rice, president of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 538.

Rice was speaking at a September 28 rally of about 250 people to support the workers at Tyson, who have been on strike for more than seven months against the company’s take-back demands.

A feature of the rally was the participation of two busloads of unionists and immigrant rights activists from Minneapolis who were taking part in the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride.

“Welcome, folks,” Rice told them when they arrived amid cheers and applause. “This caravan is to tell the companies: ‘Quit exploiting the minorities.’”

“We are doing what you are doing—fighting for our rights,” Rafael Espinoza, one of the Freedom Riders, told the rally. “We are fighting for our right to a livable wage. It is not only for immigrant workers but for all workers. This nation is represented by different people, and Tyson represents the greedy people.”

The strikers and their supporters at the rally expressed determination to resist the employers’ demands for steep concessions. “One day longer, one day stronger!” they chanted.

The union has called a number of rallies here since the meat packers walked out February 28. They are standing up to the bosses’ drive to cut hourly rates for new-hires from \$11.09 to \$9.00 and freeze pay for others over a four-year period. The employers are also pressing to eliminate pensions for new-hires and freeze benefits for the rest; increase health-care premiums by as much as \$40 a week and eliminate medical supplements for retirees; cut sick leave and disability benefits by more than half; reduce vacations; eliminate two paid holidays for new hires; and end the “profit-sharing” program.

Truth Squads reach out for support

“We can’t do it by ourselves and we know that,” Rice told the demonstrators. He said that thanks to the teams of workers, known as Truth Squads, who have traveled to other cities to seek solidarity, “we have support from other unions around the country.”

Nancy Thrasher, one of the strikers, said in an interview that the previous week she had been on a Truth Squad trip to a meat-packing plant in Nebraska that had been purchased by Tyson Foods. “There are 3,000 workers at the IBP plant there, who are mostly Latino and nonunion,” she said. “We handed out informational flyers about our strike in Spanish. A lot of people told us they wanted a union there. They work under bad conditions. When people have accidents and are injured, they are sent back to work.”

The Tyson bosses, she said, want to “bring us down to their level instead of bringing them up to ours.”

Keith Griep, another Truth Squad veteran, said, “We had seven Truth Squads sent out last week with five people on each team.” He was on the team that went to the

nonunion IBP plant owned by Tyson in Garden City, Kansas. “There are about 3,000 workers at that beef plant. We lasted about one hour and passed out about 600–700 flyers before we were kicked off the location by company security.”

During the rally, Rice reported that Local 538’s Adopt-A-Family program had received contributions from UFCW locals across the country. He said several unions sent weekly donations, including the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, United Auto Workers, Teamsters, and UFCW locals in Seattle, New York, Montana, and Phoenix, Arizona.

Subs to Cuban journals can be bought online

BY MIKE TABER

Beginning this month, Pathfinder is offering subscriptions to three important Cuban periodicals through its web site, www.pathfinderpress.com. They are *Granma International*, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, and *Cuba Socialista*—publications that Pathfinder has made available through bookstores and by mail order for many years. Those interested in subscribing online can use the same virtual shopping cart available for buyers of Pathfinder’s books and pamphlets.

Granma International is the weekly international edition of *Granma*, the daily newspaper published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. Available in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, it regularly carries speeches by Cuban president Fidel Castro; other official government statements; news articles about developments in Cuba and world politics; and features on the economy, arts, and sports in Cuba. Annual subscriptions are \$40.

Pathfinder has been distributing *Granma International* since 1989. During that time, around 2,000 people from all over the world have purchased subscriptions. Many renew their subscriptions year after year.

La Gaceta de Cuba is Cuba’s leading cultural and literary journal, published bi-monthly in Spanish by the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba. It features articles and interviews that from the cultural perspective regularly delve into some of the sharpest questions and challenges facing Cuba today, such as racial prejudice, women in the media, and controversies in the history of the revolution’s cultural policy. Pathfinder has distributed this magazine since 1995. Institutions that renew every year include libraries in the United States and the United Kingdom, and a number of Latin American studies departments at universities.

Individuals can subscribe to *La Gaceta de Cuba* for \$40 a year. There is a special student rate of \$28 and a library rate of \$75.

Cuba Socialista, the third publication, is the quarterly journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. Published in Spanish, it features theoretical and analytical articles that assess trends in world politics and international debates among left-wing forces on such themes as “globalization,” the Free Trade Area of the Americas, and the world economy.

Don Seaquist, president of UFCW Local 789 in St. Paul, Minnesota, which represents 8,000 workers, told demonstrators, “We’re not going away until you guys get a contract.” Workers at the Dakota Premium meatpacking plant in St. Paul, members of Local 789, waged a successful union-organizing battle there in recent years.

Another speaker, Joe Hayes, chief shop steward at the Tyson facility in Cherokee, Iowa, said the union’s contract there ends in March 2004. He said their stance toward the company is, “If you are offering us the same thing [as at the Jefferson plant], we will say the same thing as in Jefferson.”

Pathfinder has been distributing *Cuba Socialista* since 1998. Annual subscriptions are \$28 for individuals and \$40 for institutions.

Anyone will be able to go online and subscribe to these periodicals with just a few mouse clicks. Readers outside the United States will no longer have to deal with the inconvenience and expense of obtaining international money orders in U.S. dollars.

Pathfinderpress.com will also provide links to the web sites of *Granma International*, at www.granma.cu, and *Cuba Socialista*, whose new web site at www.cubasocialista.cubaweb.cu features English translations of many articles that have appeared in the print edition.

Subscriptions and individual copies of these publications will continue to be

UK rail workers strike for union

BY SHEILA HUGHES

LONDON—Rail workers on the express service between central London and Heathrow Airport struck for 24 hours October 3. Pickets that day said they planned to push their fight for union recognition with two further 24-hour strikes on October 10 and 12, and had set an indefinite overtime ban.

The rail service is operated by Heathrow Express (HEX), which employs some 230 workers and carries 14,000 passengers a day. HEX has refused to recognize the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), to which 104 workers belong. Company officials say that their staff association provides adequate “consultation” and representation.

Pickets at Paddington station here enthusiastically explained their fight to *Militant* reporters, but said they could not be named because of a company “gag” rule. “Individual ASLEF membership has grown,” said one picket. “Over the last two years union branch meetings have got bigger. Drivers, conductors, ticket office and station workers have joined the union and we expect an increase.”

Another worker said, “We don’t want consultation. We want an independent union to be recognized so that we can push for better pay and conditions.” The unionists explained that they are paid substantially less than workers at other train operators,

and there is no overtime pay and public holidays worked are paid at flat rate.

“The company deliberately hires staff from poorly paid and poorly unionized sectors, including many women,” said a picket. “But the fact that HEX employs every sex, race, and religion has not come between us; it has strengthened our sense of unity.”

In the ballot preparing the stoppage, 60 percent of ASLEF members voted for action, from a 73 percent turnout. Workers noted that the strike had had an impact: passenger numbers were down and managers were helping operate the trains. Company chairman Vernon Murphy was seen loading passenger suitcases onto rail cars, said strikers, and non-striking workers were given presentation baskets of chocolates.

One worker said, “For the service to rely on the managers is already a small victory.” Another said, “They treat the workers like idiots with no self respect or dignity. We want union recognition, decent pay, and reasonable hours—not fancy chocolates. Their actions make us more determined than ever.”

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Argentine marchers: ‘Legalize abortion!’

BY ROMINA GREEN

Thousands of women marched in major cities of Argentina on September 26 to demand the decriminalization of abortion. Some 8,000 people marched in Buenos Aires, the capital. Thousands more rallied in Mendoza, Córdoba, La Plata, Neuquén, San Salvador de Jujuy, and Rosario.

The mobilizations were organized as part of the annual commemoration of the Day for the Decriminalization of Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The call for the nationally coordinated actions in Argentina was issued a month earlier, at the 18th National Gathering of Women, held August 16–18 in the city of Rosario, which drew 9,000 women.

The Buenos Aires demonstration was sponsored by 140 organizations. These included women’s rights groups, as in past abortion rights actions. Among the sponsors, however, were also organizations of unemployed and retired workers that have been active in the past two years in the working-class protests against the effects of the economic crisis. Women have played a prominent role in these actions.

The demonstrators marched from the Congress to the government house at the Plaza de Mayo, where a delegation from the retired workers organization MIJD and women’s rights groups met with representatives of the presidential cabinet to turn in a petition with several demands. These included the decriminalization of abortion and free abortion services at public hospitals and clinics; free, unrestricted distribution of condoms and contraceptives; and mandatory sex education in public schools.

The march drew people from all walks of life, from professionals to working-class women and students. “I am for legalizing abortion because it’s the poor who die. I’ve seen many women die,” one demonstrator, a 90-year-old woman, told the Buenos Aires daily *Clarín*.

Carina Fernández, from the working-class neighborhood of Villa España, told another Buenos Aires daily, *Página 12*, “We are here not only because we are against the prohibition on abortion, but because in the clinics in our neighborhood they sell you the pills for two pesos. People are going hungry—you tell me how are they going to afford the pills?”

Fernández was with her neighbor Norma Romero, who has five children. Romero, 40, cannot take birth control pills for medical reasons. “I am a mother. It’s not that I’m in favor of abortion, but I am in favor of contraceptives,” she said.

As they marched to the Plaza de Mayo, the marchers chanted “Contraceptives so we won’t have an abortion, Legal abortion so we won’t die.”

Inés Miño, a kindergarten teacher, said, “The rich have plenty of ways to get access to abortion. But the poor don’t—they’ll go to a butcher, or take some kind of weed, or end up going to a quack doctor.”

Conference and march in Rosario

In a phone interview with the *Militant*, Zulema Palma from the organization Women of the West, based in Buenos Aires province, said the August conference in Rosario had been the largest since these gatherings began in 1986. “Those participating included feminists, *piqueteras*, employed workers, and others, and they put their stamp on the conference.” *Piqueteras* refers to unemployed workers who organize road blockades and other protests to demand jobs. Among those participating were workers who had been involved in the occupation of the Brukman garment plant in Buenos Aires, a focal point of labor resistance.

The conference included workshops on abortion, neighborhood organizations, unemployment, and domestic violence.

A few women opposed to abortion rights, who identified themselves as Catholics, attended the conference and argued in favor of the current laws barring abortion. One of these, Inés Italiani, argued in a workshop



Some 8,000 marched in Buenos Aires September 26 in nationwide mobilization for decriminalization of abortion. Banner reads, “Abortion: free and available now!”

that “women who have an abortion suffer terrible psychological effects.”

Another participant, Mariel Páez, answered the self-described Catholics saying, “I used to be a leader of Catholic Action, and I can say that many women who are practicing Catholics also have abortions. I’m tired of the hypocrisy—those who don’t want an abortion simply shouldn’t have one.”

On August 17 some 10,000 women—conference participants and others—marched through downtown Rosario. They wore green headscarves with the slogan, “For the right to choose—decriminalize abortion.”

A much smaller antiabortion group tried to counter the pro-choice mobilization, passing out scarves reading, “Against contraceptives.” They tried to provoke a physical confrontation with the women’s rights demonstrators, and the police intervened.

The conference delegates decided on a “national battle plan” of activities, including the September 26 day of actions.

In Argentina abortion is illegal and is punishable by time in prison. A court may allow abortion only in the case of rape and if a woman’s life is in danger.

Nonetheless, it is estimated that about

4 out of 10 pregnancies are terminated by abortion. According to health minister Gines González García, as many as 500,000 Argentine women have abortions every year.

The top cause of maternal death in Argentina—80 percent of such deaths—is complications from abortion. In the last five years hospital admissions from botched abortions have increased up to 148 percent in the province of San Luis and 143 percent in La Rioja.

Some 500 women die from such abortions every year in Argentina, and 16,000 women suffer serious permanent physical damage, the health minister reported.

Situation in Latin America

In Latin American and Caribbean countries, abortion is legal only in Cuba and Guyana. In Puerto Rico, abortion is legal because U.S. laws and court decisions are enforced in that U.S. colony. In other countries abortion is available only under very limited circumstances.

Complications from abortion account for 21 percent of maternal deaths in Latin America as a whole, and up to 50 percent of maternal mortality in some countries.

In two countries—Chile and El Salvador—abortion is illegal under any circumstances. Chile is the only Latin American nation where divorce is still illegal; Congress is now debating a bill that would make divorce legal under certain circumstances.

Workers demand union rights for all at Iceland dam construction project

BY ÓLÖF ANDRA PROPPÉ

REYKJAVÍK, Iceland—On October 10 the bosses at the Impregilo construction company agreed that all workers on the Kárahnjúkar Power Station project, whether native- or foreign-born, will be paid according to the company’s contract with the Icelandic unions.

The decision, reached in talks with representatives of the Icelandic Confederation of Labor (ASI), was a victory for the 600–700 workers on the huge project. They are fighting to increase wages across the board, ensure adequate facilities for all, and to end the company’s discriminatory practices of paying the immigrant workers substantially less.

Impregilo won the contract to build a dam and hydroelectric power station at Kárahnjúkar. The project will dam two major glacial rivers and create two water-storage reservoirs.

The power station will be run by the publicly owned National Power Company. It is designed to provide electrical power to an aluminum smelter in Reydarfjörður, on the east coast, to be run by the U.S. company Alcoa.

After being chosen, Impregilo contracted out parts of the job. Workers on the site have come from many countries, including Portugal, Rumania, Turkey, and Iceland. Some are working on the dam construction, while others are building the facilities for the workers. There are also cleaners, cooks, bus drivers, and others. Most of the bosses, foremen, and specialized dynamite personnel come from Italy.

Thorbjörn Gudmundsson, the executive officer of the Federation of Skilled Construction and Industrial Workers (Samidn), told the daily newspaper *DV*, “It’s not patriotism that draws people way up into the mountains, but the hope of good wages.... The wages offered there [at Kárahnjúkar] are lower than those paid at Vatnsfell [dam construction] two years ago.”

Workers discuss wages, conditions

On August 12 the Icelandic-born workers employed by Impregilo met to discuss wages and conditions in the camps. Native-

born workers had been told would work shifts and receive 30 percent more than for day work. But very few were actually on shifts and therefore got substantially lower wages than they expected. Icelandic-born workers stay on the project site for 28 days, working six days a week up to 12 hours. They then get seven days off.

According to Samidn’s newspaper, the conditions did not meet the Icelandic labor contract provisions for dam projects, which are more extensive and detailed than regular contracts.

At Kárahnjúkar two or three workers sleep in rooms made for one. According to the union paper, 200 workers use a dining hall that seats 47, without a place to take off overalls or to clean up. Sewage is not disposed of adequately and the sleeping barracks are not suited for cold and snow.

One issue that has drawn increasing attention is the low wages and abusive treatment of workers from other countries, most of whom are hired through job agencies abroad. Gudmundsson told the union paper that these workers are paid as little as 300 Icelandic kronur an hour (US\$3.85), and no one knows how much of their wages goes directly to the hiring agencies.

The pay scale for Icelandic-born dam construction ranges from 613 and 701 kronur an hour (between \$7.86 and \$8.99)—less than at previous dam projects.

On September 8 the unions called an on-site meeting attended by 150 workers, mostly Portuguese and Icelandic. The Portuguese workers said they wanted to be represented by the Icelandic unions and receive the same wages as their Icelandic co-workers. The unions demanded that Impregilo abide by the law and pay all workers according to Icelandic contracts.

In response to this pressure, the contractors published so-called labor contracts. On September 14 the Romanian-Turkish company Edersiter, contracted by Impregilo to build the employee camps in the Kárahnjúkar area, demanded that workers sign a contract stating that they earned around 265,000 kronur (\$3,397) a month.

Ten workers refused to sign because their wages were far below that amount.

One, a Romanian worker, was immediately fired. He says the bosses threatened him when he didn’t sign and warned him not to contact anyone from the Icelandic unions. The trade unions are now sponsoring him in Reykjavík, hoping to use his case to pressure the company.

Some of the Romanian workers signed the fake documents. The original contract includes a clause saying that if they don’t meet the requirements demanded of them, or if they cause “clashes,” they will have to cover the expenses of their own trip home as well as the cost of bringing in a replacement worker. This clause does not appear in the October 10 agreement.

Government ministers and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) backed the Italian contractor. Gudmundsson pointed out in the September 15 issue of *Frettabladid*, “When the company [Impregilo] starts disputing minimum wage, SA joins them in that fight and the issue becomes more far-reaching.... We are not going to negotiate with this Italian company about an understanding of minimum wage that will affect all other contracts in this country.”

On October 9, more than 100 workers from Portugal sat down in their work sheds and refused to begin working until they were given waterproof shoes and woolen socks. The bosses supplied some of the workers with the clothing and promised that more would come.

The next day, 50 stayed out, explaining that not all had received the promised footwear. The company fired four of them, saying they had been the ringleaders of the sit-down, and called in police from the nearby town of Egilsstaðir. Later that day it rehired the four workers.

The labor contract negotiated nationally by ASI is coming up in February.

Ólöf Andra Proppé is a member of the trade union Efling. Sigurlaug Gunnlaugsdóttir, a member of the trade union Hlíf, and Einar Már Thorgeirsson, a bulldozer operator at Kárahnjúkar and member of the trade union Vökull, contributed to this article.