

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

What's behind the skyrocketing fuel prices?
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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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Venezuela: hundreds of thousands rally to oppose recall

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

Hundreds of thousands marched in Caracas, Venezuela, on June 6 to oppose efforts by the proimperialist opposition to remove President Hugo Chávez. The protest took place three days after the announcement by the National Electoral Council that the U.S.-backed opposition forces had turned in enough signatures to hold a referendum on whether to recall the president.

Marchers, in their big majority working people, chanted, “*Ua, Ua, Chávez no se va!*” (Chávez isn’t leaving), expressing their confidence that they will defeat this latest move against the elected president.

A large banner directed at Washington read, “Bush, you’ve made a big mistake. Venezuela
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Colombian oil strikers push back assault by government

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

Despite vicious repression, the 5,500 members of Colombia’s union of oil industry workers, USO, waged a 37-day strike and stood up to the government’s use of “antiterrorist” measures against them, including the deployment of army troops to oil facilities and the firing of 248 union militants. After a hard-fought battle, the oil workers forced the right-wing government of President Alvaro Uribe to back away from its efforts to privatize Ecopetrol, the state-owned oil company.

On April 22, the USO launched the strike after a months-long campaign to prevent the state-run oil industry from being sold off to foreign capitalists. In June 2003 the Uribe government had announced plans to “restructure” the oil industry. It signed new and extended contracts with private companies for the exploration and production of oil fields on favorable terms for those firms. The oil workers recognized that privatization would likely mean reduced benefits and layoffs.

In face of the strikers’ determination and the support they won among other workers, the government signed an accord May 26 under which it will roll back the new contracts, and pledged to continue state control over the oil fields of central Colombia. The fired unionists, among them the union president, will retain their pension rights and can appeal their firings to an arbitration board.

Oil is a major source of foreign exchange for the government in Bogotá, accounting for one-quarter of the country’s exports even before the recent surge in prices. Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador are all among the top 15 suppliers of oil to the United States, and U.S. companies import more oil from those three than from the
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Utah miners: ‘On with fight for a real union!’

United Mine Workers union pledges backing ‘until we win’

BY JOEL BRITTON
AND PAT MILLER

HUNTINGTON, Utah—At a turning point in the strike by coal miners to win United Mine Workers of America union representation, 80 miners and supporters gathered in City Park next to the Huntington Town Hall for a cookout and rally June 5. It was a festive and serious event. Participants heard about the latest developments in the fight and plans to step up efforts to win solidarity, as workers at the Co-Op mine head toward a representation election.

Standing on a bench in front of a banner saying, “On with the fight for a real union” in English and Spanish, Bill Estrada, one of the strike leaders, explained the issues in this labor battle, read messages of support, and introduced other speakers.

“We are at a moment where our activity every day and your support really count,” said Estrada. He noted that after eight months on strike, having been illegally fired by the Co-Op bosses for union activity, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) has been informed by the National Labor Relations Board
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Militant Kenny Gunter (with bullhorn), a miner at nearby Deer Creek coal mine and member of UMWA Local 1769, told crowd at June 5 cookout and rally in Huntington, Utah, “You are in a tough fight, and you are doing a damn good job of standing up. We will continue to support the Co-Op miners and help get the UMWA in that mine.”

Socialist candidates in Miami, Tampa campaign for working-class alternative



Militant photos by Rachele Fruit Socialist Workers Party candidates Nicole Sarmiento for U.S. Senate in Florida (right) and Karl Butts (back to camera) for U.S. Congress in Tampa campaign at East Tampa flea market.

BY NORTON SANDLER

MIAMI— Campaigning outside a busy flea market in East Tampa, Florida, Nicole Sarmiento and several campaign supporters

spoke with working people going in and out of the market.

“I’m running for U.S. Senate in Florida as the Socialist Workers Party candidate,” said Sarmiento, 22, a student at the University of Miami. “Our campaign offers a fighting, working-class alternative to the Democrats and Republicans, which are the twin parties of imperialist war, exploitation, depression, and racism.”

Sarmiento said, “We call for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops from

Iraq, Afghanistan, Korea, Yugoslavia, and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.”

Workers stopped to learn more about the socialist campaign, drawn by the team of campaigners who were armed with leaflets,

U.S. court in San Francisco strikes down antichoice law

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

A federal judge in San Francisco issued a ruling June 1 that struck down an anti-abortion law passed by Congress with a bipartisan majority last November.

U.S. district Judge Phyllis Hamilton said the so-called Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act “poses an undue burden on a woman’s right to choose an abortion” by

limiting procedures allowable in the second trimester of a pregnancy. The ruling was based on one of three lawsuits challenging the legislation.

Supporters of a woman’s right to choose welcomed the decision. Dian Harrison, president of Planned Parenthood in the San Francisco area, described it as “a victory
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newspapers, books on working-class politics, and a bullhorn.

Sarmiento said, “We need jobs for all working people. These jobs can be created by cutting the workweek to 30 hours at 40 hours’ pay.” She added, “The Socialist Workers campaign also says: double the minimum wage.”

A young Honduran-born worker, Ricardo Mejía, joined other campaigners in passing out socialist literature. He had met the candidates the night before at the Militant Labor Forum in Tampa where Sarmiento and congressional candidate Omari Musa had spoken on the subject, “U.S. Hands Off Venezuela.”

Sarmiento spent three days in the Tampa area campaigning. She was joined by Karl Butts, a vegetable farmer in nearby Plant City and the Socialist Workers Party can-

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Jew-hatred, red-baiting: heart of claims of ‘neocon’ conspiracy

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Over the past year there has been a spate of articles by liberal and middle-class radical commentators, as well as by rightists, that attack the Bush administration by claiming that today U.S. foreign and military policy is being orchestrated by a small group of “neoconservatives” in the Defense Department. They often point to Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, former Pentagon advisor Richard Perle, and other high-ranking officials.

Some of these commentators go further, pointing to officials with Jewish names and implying or saying that a Jewish “neocon cabal” is involved.

All variations of these conspiracy theories are false and reactionary. They divert attention from the fact that the problem facing workers and farmers is capitalism, and that state power is in the hands of a class of billionaire families that exploits the labor power of working people. U.S. government officials—Democrats and Republicans alike—are simply servants of this ruling class and carry out policies in their interests.

For example the May 12 issue of *New Yorker* magazine ran an article by liberal journalist Seymour Hersh about the supposed “neocon takeover of the Pentagon,” which he blames for manipulating evidence “regarding Iraq’s possible possession of weapons of mass destruction and connection with Al Qaeda” as a justification for invading Iraq.

“They call themselves, self-mockingly, the Cabal—a small cluster of policy advisers and analysts now based in the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans,” Hersh wrote. He claims that in the past year “their operation, which was conceived by Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, has brought about a crucial change in direction in the American intelligence community” and that they “have helped to shape public opinion and American policy toward Iraq.”

Hersh’s “exposé” relied in part on information from a retired Air Force intelligence officer. The same officer was cited

as a source by Democratic senator Edward Kennedy in a March 5 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations. Based on information from this “intelligence source” Kennedy charged, “What happened was not merely a failure of intelligence but the result of manipulation and distortions of the intelligence and selective use of unreliable intelligence to justify a decision to go to war.”

Reactionary conspiracy theories

Hersh and Kennedy’s source is Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski. After her retirement from a Pentagon intelligence job, she gave an interview to *Executive Intelligence Review* a publication of the fascist outfit headed by Lyndon LaRouche and authored several internet articles in which she alleges a “neocon” conspiracy in the Bush administration seeking to “leverage the full might of the United States to build a greater Zion.”

Related conspiracy themes are being promoted both on the ultraright and among layers of left-liberals, Stalinists, and other middle-class radicals—from Patrick Buchanan and his magazine, *The American Conservative*, and the Buchananite web site antiwar.com, on the right, to the liberal magazine *The Nation* in the United States and the daily *Guardian* and weekly *New Statesman* in the United Kingdom, on the left.

This campaign finds a resonance among Jew haters and sectors of the wealthy ruling classes in the United States and Europe and of their officer corps whose positions and chances for advancement are threatened by the policies being led by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to transform the U.S. armed forces into a lighter, more mobile force to wage Washington’s wars around the world. It also finds an echo among remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy still interlacing the officer corps and “intelligence” agencies across Eastern Europe; insecure layers of the middle classes and better-off workers squeezed by the capitalist crisis; and Stalinist-influenced liberals and petty-bourgeois radicals worldwide.

The claim by Kwiatkowski, the fascist

LaRouchite outfit, and others that U.S. officials who are Jewish are involved in a conspiracy on behalf of Israel is a classic anti-Semitic smear. It is related to claims of a “cabal” promoted by Anglo-American capital—often involving the British crown and, since the October 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks.

One variant of the conspiracy articles that have appeared over the last year seeks to link a “Jewish neocon cabal,” at least in its historical origins, to Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky and those who trace their political continuity to the communist movement he fought to build. U.S. liberal writer Michael Lind, for example, in an article in the *New Statesman* in April 2003, asserts that U.S. foreign policy is dominated today by a layer of “neoconservatives” who are “products of the largely Jewish-American Trotskyist movement of the 1930s and 1940s which morphed into an anti-communist liberalism between the 1950s and 1970s and finally into a kind of militaristic and imperial right with no precedents in American culture or political history.”

Lind claims this alleged group is part of an “Israel lobby” in the U.S. government whose ideology is “Trotsky’s theory of the permanent revolution mingled with the far-right Likud strain of Zionism,” referring to the Israeli Likud party. His liberal diatribe was picked up in the pro-Buchanan web site antiwar.com.

Buchanan, in a March 24, 2003, article in *The American Conservative*, describes what he calls the first generation of “neocons” as “ex-liberals, socialists, and Trotskyites... who rafted over to the GOP at the end of conservatism’s long march to power with Ronald Reagan in 1980.”

Versions of this intermixed poison of Jew-hatred and Trotsky-baiting have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and numerous other publications and internet sites. They feature headlines such as: “Trotskycons?” “Bush-Trotsky Links: Let’s Count the Ways,” “Now It’s Trotsky’s Fault?” “Trotskyism to Anachronism: the Neoconservative Revolution,” and “Trotsky’s Ghost Wandering the White House.”

This kind of smear against Trotsky and the communist movement, including the Socialist Workers Party in the United States, is not new—from the opening days of the Bolshevik Revolution it has been used against communists by imperialist reaction,



U.S. fascist politician Lyndon LaRouche at May 11 news conference. “The ‘neo-conservatives,’ a group associated with Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and the group of neo-conservatives around them...are controlling the mind of the President,” LaRouche said in May 2003. Inset, LaRouche at “Cadre School” in photo from his website.

Social Democrats, and later the Stalinists. Such slanders and reactionary arguments will become more frequent as the capitalist crisis and conflicts between imperialist powers sharpen, heightening class tensions, political polarization, the politics of resentment, restrictions on rights, and the coarsening of bourgeois political discourse.

Smears about “Trotskycons” to the contrary, the fact is that no prominent figure among the so-called neoconservatives has ever been a member of the Socialist Workers Party. A few from the oldest generation—none of whom ever held government posts—were around the youth group of an organization led by Max Shachtman in the 1930s and 1940s. Shachtman and his supporters split from the Socialist Workers Party in 1940, breaking with Marxism. As they evolved, they dissolved their group into the Socialist Party in 1958, and accelerated their course by backing the Henry “Scoop” Jackson wing of the Democratic Party and filling the staffs of AFL-CIO unions.

It is also worth noting that in the current administration, the central architects of U.S. military policy, from the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to Washington’s policies toward Israel, are above all Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush. They are not Jewish, and are as conventional in their records as capitalist politicians as anyone could be.

Publishing schedule

This is a two-week issue of the ‘Militant’. The next issue, no. 25, dated July 5 will be mailed to readers June 23.

THE MILITANT

Oppose Jew-hatred

As the crisis of capitalism grows, Jews will again become a target of those who seek to divert working people from our real enemies, the billionaire capitalist rulers. Read the ‘Militant’ for articles and analysis on this life-and-death question for the working-class movement.

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Swastikas and ‘Jews Out’ in German were painted on graves at Jewish cemetery in France April 30.

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In face of U.S. ‘war on terror,’ Saudi gov’t closes int’l charities

BY PATRICK O’NEILL

Bowing to intense pressure from Washington, which is using its “war on terrorism” to increase its domination of the Middle East and its oil resources, the government of Saudi Arabia declared June 2 that it will close down all international charity organizations operating from its soil.

Speaking at a joint press conference in Washington, D.C., U.S. and Saudi officials claimed that one charity in particular, the Al Haramain group, has channeled tens of millions of dollars each year to so-called terrorist organizations.

Adel Jubeir, the foreign affairs adviser to Crown Prince Abdullah, the effective head of the monarchical government, told the media that the group’s funds would be seized and dispensed by a new government-controlled commission.

The announcement followed by less than a week the May 29-30 attack in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, on a housing complex for foreign oil company employees by four men claiming affiliation to al-Qaeda. Twenty-two workers, taken hostage by the attackers, were killed during a siege by Saudi police and commandos and a subsequent firefight.

The June 3 *New York Times* noted that the closure of the Al Haramain Islamic Foundation had been “a major goal for both the Clinton and Bush administrations, but until Tuesday [June 1] the Saudi government had limited its actions to smaller steps.” U.S. Treasury officials have accused the foundation, which is chaired by the government’s minister of Islamic affairs, of “providing support for the al-Qaeda network and promoting militant Islamic doctrine worldwide.”

In January, Washington and the Saudi regime in Riyadh proposed to United Nations officials that they add the charity’s offices in Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Pakistan to their list of “terrorist” groups. Officials said June 2 that the list would be further expanded to include Al Haramain’s branches in Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and the Netherlands.

Two months ago Saudi religious authorities fired Al Haramain’s top official, Aqeel Abdulaziz Aqil, seized his assets, and barred him from traveling overseas. U.S. Treasury official Juan Zarate, speaking to the media after the announcement, claimed that “it was under the cloak of charity that Aqeel al-Aqil used the Al Haramain organization to benefit himself and al-Qaeda.”

Zarate predicted that a Saudi government investigation of Aqil will “come to fruition fairly soon.”

Joining Zarate at the media conference, Francis Townsend, who is designated the White House “deputy national security adviser for terrorism,” gave the Saudi government a pat on the back. “The Saudis have been frankly very aggressive” about cracking down on funding to “terrorist” groups, she said. “They have committed to financial transparency and auditing.”

Former National Security Council official Lee Wolosky, who recently co-directed a “terrorism financing” task force of the Council on Foreign Relations, was more critical of Saudi actions, the *Washington Post* reported. “Regulatory actions are nice and good and should be applauded, but they don’t go far enough,” he said. “What you really have to do is put people in jail. But it’s exactly that, going after the elites, that is something the Saudis have not done.”

Alongside these moves against alleged funding to opposition groups, the Saudi government has waged a more direct offensive against so-called terrorist organizations. Riyadh “has issued a list of 26 most-wanted militants,” reported the Associated Press. Of these, “18 remain on the list.”

Coming on top of a string of other bombings and clashes between Saudi police and opponents of the regime, the May 29-30 attack in Khobar was a setback to this campaign by the Saudi government. By June 7, Saudi forces still had not captured the three men at large in the attack.

A unit of the British “antiterrorist” SO13

police squad, originally formed to crack down on Irish republicans, has flown to Saudi Arabia to offer “assistance and support to the Saudi authorities,” in the words of a Scotland Yard spokesman.

On June 2, gunmen fired at two vehicles carrying U.S. military personnel near a National Guard compound in Riyadh, where a U.S. military unit is based.

Some 400 U.S. troops remain in Saudi Arabia, down from around 5,000 a year ago. At the time of the announced withdrawal, U.S. deputy secretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz told the media that opponents of the monarchy were winning new forces on the basis of their opposition to the imperialist military presence. “It’s been a huge recruiting device for al-Qaeda,” he argued in an interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine.

The spate of attacks on oil assets, and the pro-imperialist stance of important elements of the weak, monarchical regime, have provided Washington with new openings to reestablish its military presence in the oil-rich nation.

Hospital workers in Miami walk out to defend health coverage



Militant/Eric Simpson

MIAMI—Some 250 hospital workers, nurses, and their supporters held a spirited march and rally in Miami June 5 protesting Pan-American Hospital’s refusal to recognize their union—the Service Employees International Union—and to bargain for a contract. The marchers also demanded the reinstatement of nine workers who have been fired for their union activity. Hospital workers and nurses at Pan-American voted by a 9-1 margin earlier this year to be organized by the SEIU.

—NORTON SANDLER

Meat packers in Canada protest firing

BY ROSEMARY RAY

TORONTO—“Go home or stay on the job!” is how bosses at Lakeside Packers respond to injured workers requesting to see a doctor, said Deng Rehan in a phone interview. Rehan, a kill floor worker at Lakeside with three years in the plant, is among 70 workers who were fired by the company April 26 because they protested intolerable working conditions.

Some 2,500 workers are employed at Lakeside Packers in Brooks, Alberta, southeast of Calgary. Owned by U.S. food giant Tyson Foods, the company processes a million carcasses a year, which accounts for one in every three cows slaughtered in Canada. It is the largest beef slaughterhouse in the country.

In the April 27 phone interview, Rehan described how 170 workers met in the plant parking lot and elected representatives to organize a meeting with the company to raise their demands about “the treatment of injured workers, being able to leave the line to go to the bathroom, and the rights of women workers to return to their jobs after maternity leave.”

Rehan said the company had agreed to meet with the workers’ representatives because it said it had “an open door policy.” The bosses cancelled the meeting on the arranged day, however, and then issued disciplinary warnings against leaders of the protest.

Rehan said the bosses wanted them to sign disciplinary warnings that required them to not participate in any more protests. When leaders of the fight refused to sign the warnings they were fired. Then 70 workers walked off the job in solidarity with those who had been fired. An article in the Toronto daily *24 hours* reported that Tyson claimed they had fired the workers for refusing to work.

Manout Deng, a fired airknife worker from the kill floor, told the *Militant* that the fired workers have formed the Lakeside Workers’ Committee, which is seeking support to help get their jobs back.

On May 23 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a documentary on this fight that showed the fired workers holding a protest outside Lakeside Packers with banners demanding their reinstatement and chanting, “We need a union.” The workers also organized a march to the offices of Mayor Don Weisback, whom they asked to broker a settlement to the dispute. Rehan said a United Food and Commercial Workers union lawyer is currently seeking to overturn a government decision denying the workers unemployment insurance benefits.

Rehan said he thought bosses at Lakeside had only fired Sudanese-born work-



Oshan Nylguo, left, and Deng Rehan were fired April 26 by Lakeside Packers in Brooks, Alberta, for protesting abusive working conditions.

ers to make it look like this was “just a Sudanese thing,” but that in fact the abuse and mistreatment by the company are opposed by many of the workers in the plant, including “Canadians and those

of other nationalities.”

Rosemary Ray is a member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 175 at Maple Leaf Pork in Burlington, Ontario.

Florida socialist campaign

Continued from front page

date in the 11th C.D. in Tampa, and Omari Musa, a Miami garment worker who is the party’s candidate in the 17th C.D.

The socialist campaigners in Florida had a busy week in both Miami and Tampa. In addition to the flea market, they introduced their campaign to working people and youth at a transportation center, several political events, and a rally in support of hospital workers fighting for a union (see page 3 photobox on hospital workers’ fight).

In Tampa, Sarmiento and Musa participated in a conference at the University of South Florida on “The Civil Rights Movement in Florida.” Socialist campaigners had a literature table there and distributed campaign material.

In Miami, Lawrence Mikesch, a meat packer and Socialist Workers candidate for mayor of Miami-Dade County, and Seth Galinsky, a garment workers and socialist candidate in the 21st C.D., campaigned with a bullhorn May 30 outside the Government Center Metro rail stop. On June 3, Mikesch and Galinsky participated in a forum attended by more than 200 people on “Haiti, Human Rights, and the Coup.” That event was held at Florida International University’s North Campus. In the discussion that followed panel presentations by a

range of speakers, Mikesch called for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti, receiving a round of applause.

Galinsky campaigned on June 5 at a march and rally organized by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in support of workers fighting to win recognition at Pan-American Hospital. On January 26 the majority of the workers at the hospital voted for the union, two weeks after nurses there also voted to be represented by the SEIU. The hospital is challenging the validity of the election and has fired nine union activists, workers report. The protest of some 250 also attracted unionists from other area hospitals, members of the Laborers International Union, and others.

A sewing machine operator at the Point Blank Body Armor plant in Oakland Park, Galinsky detailed the experience that workers there have gone through the last two years to win their first union contract. He said the Socialist Workers Party campaign joins with the hospital workers and urges other working people to support their fight.

Mikesch joined SWP campaigners from several southern states in Mississippi on June 5, where the effort to get the Socialist Worker presidential ticket on the November ballot is under way.

Miners: ‘On with the fight for a real union’

Continued from front page
(NLRB) that it will authorize the striking miners to vote in order to be organized by the miners union.

“The NLRB says the miners at Co-Op were fired illegally and there will be an election where workers can decide to vote for a real union,” Mike Dalpiaz, a member of the UMWA International Executive Board from nearby Price, Utah, told the crowd. “Those are two important victories.”

Phony company ‘union’

With the assistance of the UMWA, the fired miners filed a petition for a representation election against the “International Association of United Workers Union (IAUWU),” an outfit run by the Kingston family, which owns the mine. The miners filed the petition during an “open window” period in the terms of the so-called contract under which the Co-Op miners worked.

Miners in the West see the potential for a victory at the Co-Op mine as a spur to other UMWA organizing efforts in mines they work at or know about.
Discussion about the Co-Op strike continues to bubble among miners in the region.

That “contract” expires August 10.
The IAUWU “is a false ‘union’ that has never supported us,” strike leader Jesús Salazar told the crowd. “The union officers are bosses who are responsible for setting production goals and disciplining and firing workers.”

Estrada said the strikers were informed by UMWA officials that the government labor board claims this so-called union is a legitimate representative of the workers. Strikers provided ample evidence it is actually run by the company.

On June 3, at the suggestion of UMWA officials following the labor board’s reported claim legitimizing the company union, the strikers suspended their picketing on the road leading to the mine. At the rally, Dalpiaz said picket lines sometimes have to be taken down and put back up, and that the NLRB position in favor of the Kingston outfit means the picket line has to come down for now.

The strikers are going to look for every opportunity to expose the company “union” and make clear to the Kingstons that the strike remains solid, Estrada said.

Many messages backing the striking miners testified to the strength of this fight. Lawrence Oliver, former president of UMWA Local 1332 in Window Rock, Arizona, and current director of Human Resources of the Navajo Nation, wrote, “You have shown them that you are stronger. We went through the same thing. Right now they are testing you. The first strike is hard, but it is well worth it.

“As labor finds out about your fight, the solidarity will grow. I know you can win,” he said. Miners in the West see the potential for a victory at the Co-Op mine as a spur to other UMWA organizing efforts in mines they work at or know about. Discussion about the Co-Op strike continues to bubble among miners in the region.



Co-Op strikers (from left) Nite Flores, Juan Salazar, and Bill Estrada (speaking) at cookout and rally.

Support from Deer Creek miners

Kenny Gunter, secretary-treasurer of UMWA Local 1769 at the nearby Deer Creek mine, told the crowd, “You are in a tough fight. There is no doubt about it. But you are standing up, and you are doing a damn good job of standing up. We will continue to support the Co-Op miners and help to get the UMWA in that mine.”

The Deer Creek miners local has raised substantial funds and food donations for the Co-Op strikers, and the local has been a source of encouragement to the strikers as they drive to and from work honking their horns or waving to the strikers. Deer Creek miners provided the refreshments for the cookout.

Estrada pointed to the indispensable help provided by UMWA organizers throughout the strike who come in from Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. “From Montana, too!” UMWA Region 4 director Bob Butero yelled out from where

he was barbequing hot dogs and hamburgers with the other union officials.
Dalpiaz reported on a recent meeting of



Above, UMWA organizer Roy Fernandez from Raton, New Mexico, draws a ticket for Co-Op miners’ raffle of union hats, shirts, and coffee cups. Inset, Bill Preston, president of UMWA retirees’ Local 9958 told the miners, “You are in a strong position through all you have accomplished with your strike.”

the UMWA International Executive Board in Charleston, West Virginia, where the Co-Op miners strike was discussed and the union’s central leadership body pledged to continue the UMWA’s efforts to win the strike.

At the start of the strike in September 2003, the very first carload of supporters who visited the picket line was a group of retired miners from UMWA Local 9958. Bill Preston, recording secretary of that local, spoke at the cookout. Pointing to the wages he worked for as a UMWA miner, as well as his health-care and pension benefits, he said, “In many ways, we miners organized by the UMWA have it made, but that wasn’t always the case. When my father was in the mines 70 years ago, you were told everything to do. You were told what kind of food and clothing to buy and where to buy it, and where to work, whether it was safe or not.

“The first contract was the hardest, but from there we got



Mike Dalpiaz (standing on right), UMWA International Executive Board member, assured those attending June 5 cookout and rally in Huntington, Utah, of the UMWA’s support to the Co-Op miners until victory.

to where we are today,” Preston added. He said the Co-Op miners are in a strong position through all they have accomplished with their strike.

Others came to show their support for the strikers. Many of the miners live in a trailer court near the middle of Huntington. One of their neighbors brought his whole family after seeing a flyer for the event. He wrote out a check to encourage the miners to keep up the fight. Two young Mormon missionaries who said they are winning support for the strike were also present.

Repeatedly throughout the long sunny afternoon, UMWA organizers drew raffle tickets for prizes provided by the union. A woman miner from Colorado won a union T-shirt commemorating the 1914 Ludlow



massacre. A Wal-Mart worker from Price won a UMWA hat. Another UMWA hat was won by a miner who retired from the nearby Wilberg mine and who had been working another shift on the day of the explosion in 1984 that killed more than two-dozen miners. Many of the strikers and their children won prizes.

Union solidarity tour

A message of support was received from John Castanho, secretary-treasurer of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 in the San Francisco Bay Area. “The struggles of labor and the Co-Op miners are also the struggle of the ILWU Local 10,” his message said. “You have fought a long hard battle and deserve nothing less than fair treatment and fair employment. Good luck in your struggle and your brothers and sisters of Local 10 are with you until victory.”

To applause, Estrada reminded the crowd of the solidarity visit on a cold day in February when Local 10’s 17-member drill team joined the strikers’ picket line and rally.

The cookout and rally was also a send-off for strike leaders Juan Salazar and

Alyson Kennedy, who will speak June 8–10 to five locals of the longshore union in Washington and Oregon.

Salazar said in an interview that the strikers see that tour as very important at this crucial moment in the strike. “We have always sought and received support from other unions. Now more than ever, we need it. The support gives us more energy. It helps us to keep going.

“We will explain that the company union is a fraud. Some of the miners who have crossed the picket line tell us the company makes promises of better wages and safety conditions, but there is no difference from when we worked there. And some of those workers are beginning to say that they’ve had enough.

“We are putting our plan in place. Day-to-day we will be organizing the activity of the striking miners. We can’t lose if we stick together. I for one am still looking forward to seeing the bosses cry when we win this strike.”

Representatives of two Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers (PACE) union locals representing oil, chemical, and other workers in the Salt Lake City area were also at the rally. They are actively involved in the effort to spread support for the Co-Op strike in the labor movement. A representative of the Catholic Church was warmly welcomed by the miners for its continuing support.

Ed Mayne, president of the Utah AFL-CIO, also sent a message to the Huntington event.

Strikers will be on hand when the NLRB convenes hearings in Price on who will be eligible to vote in the union election.

As part of the effort to meet other miners and unionists in the Western coalfields, the Co-Op miners have taken up the invitation by Region 4 director Bob Butero for a dozen strikers to participate in the June 27 commemoration of the Ludlow Massacre, in Ludlow, Colorado. These activities mark the brutal slaughter of 20 miners and family members who were part of a coal miners strike in 1914. The commemorative event attracts working people from throughout the West every year, and is a place where the Co-Op strikers will gain further support.

Róger Calero contributed to this article.

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What’s behind the soaring price of fuel?

BY PATRICK O’NEILL

Working people today are facing skyrocketing prices of gasoline and diesel fuel. By early June, gas prices had risen as high as \$2.50 a gallon in some parts of the United States, compared with an average of \$1.20 a gallon two years ago. Diesel prices are now averaging \$1.75 a gallon, a 32-cent increase in the past 12 months.

This price surge has provided a cascade of superprofits to the biggest oil companies. Taking advantage of an increased global demand for crude oil and its derivatives in the past few years, the oil giants have used their domination of the industry, from wellhead to gasoline station, to keep supplies tight and prices up. In particular, their long-term decision to keep the construction of U.S. refineries frozen has helped them ensure that supply lags behind demand.

The increased demand has been fueled by the recovery of the U.S. and Japanese economies from the 2001–02 recession, as well as increasing consumption by China and India.

The oil “majors,” as the biggest outfits are known, have also jacked up prices in response to the conflicts and upheaval in the Mideast, and to Washington’s offensive against the government of Venezuela, which, like Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern producers, is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

While U.S. companies buy more than half their imported oil from non-OPEC nations—part of Washington’s long-term strategy to weaken the oil cartel—their imports from OPEC producers rose by 31 percent in the past year. These facts highlight why the U.S. capitalist rulers place such a priority on using their military might to control the vast oil resources in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the rest of the Mideast.

Forced upward by these factors, crude oil prices reached a 20-year high at around \$40 a barrel in late May..

Profit bonanza

“Driven by soaring gasoline prices, ChevronTexaco Corp’s first-quarter earnings climbed 33 percent, continuing the oil giant’s recent run of gushing profits,” the Associated Press reported May 1. ChevronTexaco, the second-largest U.S. oil company, reported that the lion’s share of its profits came from oil refining and gasoline sales in the United States.

The number one U.S. oil firm, Exxon Mobil, reported its biggest first-quarter profit ever this year, while Royal-Dutch Shell—a combined Dutch and British firm that ranks third among the world’s oil and gas companies—reported a 9 percent increase in earnings for the first three months of this year.

Forbes columnist Daniel Ackerman reported May 28 that Exxon Mobil, ChevronTexaco, and British Petroleum “have seen their share prices rise by between 20 and 30 percent in one year.” By way of exception, Shell’s stock has dropped in the wake of revelations that it overstated oil reserves by about one-fifth in each of the last six years.

The sharp rise in gas and diesel prices, which has led to hikes in prices across the board, including increases in air fares, is putting growing pressure on the income of working people.

Protests by truck drivers

Truck drivers in California put a spotlight on this issue on April 30 with a series of work stoppages and other protests to back up their demand for compensation for rising diesel costs. In Oakland, drivers stayed out until they had forced most trucking companies to agree to a 20 percent increase in payouts.

As owner-operators the truckers bear the burden of maintenance and insurance as well as fuel costs. The protesters explained that they are paying over 30 cents more for a gallon of diesel than they did a year ago—an increase of 17 percent.

The jump in the gasoline prices is even greater. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average price of a gallon of regular gasoline at the fuel pump has risen

by 58 cents in the past year to \$2.06.

Like the independent truck drivers, working farmers are feeling the sharp rise in the diesel price as a body blow to their livelihood.

“The higher prices are already being felt here,” C.R. Martin, a farmer in central Florida, said in a June 3 phone interview. “I have to use a lot of fuel just to get to and from the fields.”

Martin, who grows sweet corn and beans, said that the fuel used in tractors has gone up by 2–3 cents a gallon just in the past month. At 70–80 cents a gallon, it’s cheaper and more polluting than the diesel used on the road. The Florida farmer said he also anticipates a rise in the cost of aerial spraying of pesticides and applying fertilizer.

Stanley Bevers, an economist with Texas Cooperative Extension, part of the Texas A&M University system, told AP that “farmers have experienced a 20 percent to 30 percent increase in the price of fertilizer” because of the rising price of natural gas, used in its manufacture.

Monopoly of oil industry

The rise in oil prices is not just a question of supply and demand. Oil consumption in the United States rose 16 percent between February 2003 and February 2004, yet prices have risen much more. Through their control of vast energy empires, the oil monopolies are in a powerful position to control supplies and thereby jack up prices.

Such monopolies are a classic feature of the imperialist stage of capitalist development. One hundred years ago the Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin noted that “the enormous growth of industry and the remarkably rapid concentration of production in ever-larger enterprises are one of the most characteristic features of capitalism.

“At a certain stage of its development,” Lenin wrote, “concentration itself, as it were, leads straight to monopoly, for a score or so of giant enterprises can easily arrive at an agreement....

“A very important feature of capitalism in its highest stage of development,” added Lenin, “is so-called combination of production, that is to say, the grouping in a single enterprise of different branches of industry.” Lenin’s description of the normal functioning of imperialism is just as true today as it was when he wrote it.

Since the years following World War II, when U.S. firms gained the upper hand over their British rivals, the oil industry has been dominated worldwide by a handful of giant companies with the power to restrict supplies and set prices. Combining efforts at one moment and engaging in cut-throat competition the next, they form an infinitely more powerful oil industry cartel than OPEC, a grouping of semicolonial countries that together produce about 40 percent of the world’s oil.

In an Aug. 23, 2003, report on the energy crisis, the California Legislature’s Select Committee on Gasoline Competition, Marketing, and Pricing noted that “seven oil companies control 96 percent of the gasoline sold in California. Additionally, oil companies are operating more retail outlets themselves and the number of retail outlets is dropping.”

Taking a nationwide view, a report by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) released last October observed that the oil industry “has become so concentrated in several parts of the country that competitive market forces are weak.... Because there are few firms in the market, prices hold above competitive levels for significant periods of time.

“The problem is not a conspiracy,” the CFA noted, “but the rational action of large companies with market power.”

The result is a profit bonanza. The report noted that “while profits were down in 2002, due to very low prices early in the year as a result of the severe economic downturn and travel slow-down following September 11, they were still just above the levels of the late 1990s.... *Fortune* reports return on equity of 25 percent in 2000, *Business Week* reports 22 percent. This is almost twice the historic average for the industry and about 50 percent more than other large corporations achieved.”



Tom Jones, owner of Tom’s Shell, in Madison, Wisconsin, altered his sign as gas prices kept rising. He has since changed the price of premium on the sign to “first-born.”

After a downturn in early 2002, by the end of the year “profits had increased dramatically,” said the CFA. With the sharp price increases of the following year, “the industry was seeing record profits once again.”

Freeze on construction of refineries

A key chokehold for the oil monopolies is the refining of crude oil in the United States. For the past three decades, oil company bosses have frozen the construction of refineries in the United States, putting a tourniquet on the flow of refined products.

“We haven’t built a new refinery in this country for three decades. Refineries historically haven’t made money,” Exxon Mobil chairman Lee Raymond told reporters in late May.

The oil barons claim that environmental protections, like the installation of scrubbers to neutralize harmful byproducts, make refinery construction too expensive from the point of view of their profit priorities.

Refinery capacity has actually declined by 10 percent over the last 20 years. While refining has been made more efficient, mergers of the big oil companies have cut the number of U.S. plants from 301 to 153, reported the May 28 *New York Times*. Those that remain are working at more than 90 percent of maximum capacity. Ten percent of refined gasoline is imported, mostly from Europe and Latin America.

One extra factor in the higher prices and profits is the increasing cost of finding new oil deposits. While Middle East reserves lie under the desert within relatively easy reach, newer finds are often located in deep waters requiring much heavier, more sophisticated, and expensive equipment. Other deposits need new pipelines to be tapped, or are locked in bitumen-rich sands, which have to be processed at enormous financial and environmental cost.

These are big questions for companies forced to constantly find new deposits or face extinction. One of the reasons that Shell’s prospects look gloomy right now, reported the BBC on March 18, is its failure to find “new oil and gas anything like as fast as” Exxon Mobil and BP, the other two international giants. In 2003 Shell had a “reserves replacement ratio” of only 98 percent, said the report—meaning that for every barrel it pumps, it discovers one more. BP’s ratio is almost double that.

All these companies use their enormous leverage to jack up prices of crude and refined products in a world marked both by growing demand for oil and by the increasing instability of the conflict-ridden imperialist system.

In a typical comment on the current oil market, *Business Week* ascribed the rising price of the Texas International grade

of crude oil to “a perfect storm of heavy demand from China and the U.S. and fears of Middle East violence disrupting supplies.”

Daily demand for crude will increase this year by almost 2 million barrels to 80.6 million, reports the International Energy Agency. “The world isn’t literally about to run out of oil,” stated a feature in the June *National Geographic* magazine. “But while demand, now 80 million barrels a day, continues to grow, production of conventional (easily extracted) oil will peak eventually, with production declining after that.” The article was titled, “The End of Cheap Oil.”

Growing demand for oil internationally is putting an upward pressure on the price of crude oil and adding to the volatility of international markets in oil and oil futures—essentially bets on the future price of this strategic commodity.

Adding to the pressures, the U.S. government is a big buyer on the oil markets right now, reported the May 28 *New York Times*. The U.S. strategic petroleum reserve, established in the 1970s to shield against wars and other potential disruptions in supply, “now holds about 660 million barrels, making it the world’s largest source of stockpiled petroleum,” it said. The article also noted reports “that China, which recently surpassed Japan as the second-largest importer of oil, is going ahead with plans to build its own petroleum reserve.”

These steps highlight the strategic place of oil in the modern world. Washington’s drive to control reserves to the detriment of its imperialist competitors is a powerful factor in its aggressive bipartisan foreign policy in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere.

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World War II: U.S. rulers' goal was plunder, not freedom

Big-business politicians in the United States and other imperialist countries have used the 60th anniversary of the U.S.-British imperialist assault on the Normandy beaches in northern France as an occasion to boost their patriotic campaign in support of their current war efforts in the Mideast in particular. The June 1944 assault was the beginning of a new front in the Anglo-American-led war against the German imperialist government. Berlin had already been dealt a major blow by the workers and farmers in the Soviet Union, who defeated the German invasion of that country in 1943.

In a June 2 speech at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S. president George Bush repeated the lie that in World War II Washington "saved the liberty of the world," and that in the subsequent Cold War the U.S. government pursued the same goals. Bush presented Washington's most recent assaults against Iraq and Afghanistan as a similar effort to "defend the peace through the forward march of freedom."

All these oft-repeated claims are lies. What was the real character of World War II and Washington's goals in it? Where did the interests of the world's workers and farmers lie? These questions are explained in the following excerpt from the article "Washington's Third Militarization Drive" by Mary-Alice Waters in issue no. 7 of the Marxist magazine *New Internationalist*. The excerpt is printed with permission of *New Internationalist*.

That piece is followed by an excerpt from an editorial in the Sept. 23, 1944, *Militant* that appeared just months after the U.S. landing in Normandy. Subheadings are by the *Militant*.



BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

Contrary to popular belief both then and now, World War II was not a war to stop fascism. It was much more complex than that; it was at least three wars in one, as the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] explained at the time.

It was an interimperialist war in which the defeat by Washington and its allies of Germany, Japan, and Italy did nothing to eliminate the economic and social roots of fascism nor the causes of imperialist oppression. Fascism, the most virulent form of maintaining imperialist rule, will again attempt to raise its head in any period of deep capitalist crisis and accelerating class polarization and combat.

It was a war to roll back the Russian revolution and reestablish capitalism in the Soviet Union. With enormous sacrifice the workers and peasants of the first and at that time only workers' state turned the tide against German imperialism's invading armies. They prevented the imperialist

powers from realizing this historic objective, which none of them have ever abandoned from October 1917 to this day.

It was a multifront war for national liberation in which the colonized and oppressed nations of the world took good advantage of the interimperialist conflict to advance their interests from India to China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Korea, the Mideast, Ireland, and Québec.

A fourth war also took shape as the imperialist bloodletting continued: the war carried out by resistance forces—many organized by the workers' movement—in the occupied countries of Europe. That was a war against the fascist dictatorships imposed by Hitler's National Socialist movement. It was also a war by the workers to create the most favorable possible conditions for the working classes in Europe to emerge victorious over their own bourgeoisies, whether fascist or democratic imperialist, as the conflict unfolded.

'We are going home'

After Japan's surrender in August 1945, the U.S. rulers, who came out on top of the pile in 1945, found themselves confronted with a disintegrating army. Workers and farmers in uniform, particularly those in the Pacific theater, demanded to be brought home immediately. They saw no reason to stay in uniform once the war they were fighting, the war against fascism, had been won.

The rulers in Washington, however, wanted to reap the harvest of victory over their rivals by taking control of Asia. In particular, they aimed at keeping China under imperialist control. As GIs throughout Asia started demonstrating by the thousands, the Democrats and Republicans in Washington howled, "But we are losing China!"

The GIs answered, "You may be losing China. We are going home!" They simply refused to continue under arms. Demobilization was accelerated and go home they did, by the millions. The U.S. armed forces had ceased to be an effective fighting force for imperialist interests.

That's how the postwar period began in the United States: with a GI going-home movement that no class on earth could have stopped, as well as a massive strike wave that brought nearly two million workers, many of them newly returned vets, onto the picket lines demanding an immediate end to the wartime wage controls.

New militarization drive

In response to the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II, the advance of the colonial revolution as the imperialist powers warred against each other, and the resulting shift in the international relationship of forces to the detriment of imperialism, Washington had to take steps to put back together a military force to use against struggles by workers and peasants around the world. With World War II barely over, the U.S. rulers needed a new militarization drive.

At the same time, the employers still had to housebreak the labor movement that had been born in the giant struggles of the rise of the CIO industrial union movement in the second half of the 1930s. They also had to try to prevent a massive movement for Black equality from arising on the basis of the civil rights militancy that had emerged during the war. The witch-hunt and anticommunist reaction of the end of the 1940s and the 1950s were aimed at accomplishing these goals.

The wartime conscription law was allowed to lapse in 1947, but the draft machinery was kept intact and the Selective Service Act was pushed through in 1948 as the new militarization drive began to roll. A "peacetime" draft was institutionalized for the first time in U.S. history. With the growing use of deferment loopholes by bourgeois and middle-class youth, the post-war army became even more working-class in composition. Military spending soared,



Top: Pres. Franklin Roosevelt (left) on battleship on eve of World War II. **Through the war** Washington came out on the top of the imperialist heap. **Bottom left,** U.S. "Flying Tiger" squadron based in China launched attacks on Japanese forces as part of U.S. imperialist designs on China. **After the war,** U.S. soldiers rejected Washington's efforts to keep them in Asia to crush anticolonial struggles in China and elsewhere. **Bottom right,** 20,000 GIs demand to be brought home in January 1946 protest in Manila, Philippines.

as Washington accelerated the nuclear arms race following the Soviet Union's development of an atomic bomb in 1949. When the U.S. rulers held a monopoly on atomic weapons, they used the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sacrificing the lives of more than 200,000 civilians in Japan. Their political aim in doing so was to demonstrate to the toilers of the world that Washington would not hesitate to unleash this weapon of mass horror to protect its empire.

The Korean war was launched in the midst of the witch-hunt at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s, but it was greeted in the United States with a marked decline in patriotic fervor compared with World War II. By no measure did it ever become a popular war. But there was little active opposition to the war aside from some socialist and pacifist organizations, which were rapidly declining in size and influence. (The social democrats at the time outspokenly supported the U.S. war against Korea.)

[During this period the Socialist Workers Party was] part of the defensive battles in the labor movement against steps by the employers and the government to use the militarization drive to undermine the power of the unions in the war industries. In particular, we fought the introduction of the system of "security clearances," aimed at victimizing union activists and other militant workers and weakening union protection and safety conditions. The party also continued to defend the right of workers on the picket lines to protect themselves against bosses' thugs, and especially the right of Blacks to defend themselves against racist violence and terror.



The following excerpt is taken from a Sept. 23, 1944, *Militant* editorial titled, "The Only Road to Emancipation for All Europe," which appeared three months after the U.S. landing on the Normandy beaches of France.

Earlier that year, the *Militant* had regained its second-class mailing rights, which the Postmaster General had revoked in March 1943 at the urging of Attorney General Francis Biddle to suppress views such as those expressed in this editorial. At a Jan. 21, 1943, hearing where the *Militant* editors confronted this attack, the attorney for the postal service, William O'Brien, asserted, "We are not concerned here with questions of truth or falsity. It does not make any difference if everything the *Militant* said is true." The fight to restore the *Militant's* mailing rights was part of the struggles by militant workers during World War II to defend their political rights in face of the employers' wartime offensive against labor.

The Fourth International, to which the editorial refers, was the name of the international communist movement to which the Socialist Workers Party belonged. It defended the revolutionary political course

that had been charted by V.I. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the early years of the Communist International, and continued to carry out this revolutionary course after the Comintern degenerated in the mid-1920s under the domination of a privileged bureaucracy headed by Joseph Stalin.



In September, 1938, one year before the outbreak of the second imperialist war, the founding conference of the Fourth International met in Europe and set forth a program of socialist emancipation for Europe and the world.

Today, after five years of war, capitalist Europe is disintegrating and falling into ruins. Amid the chaos of a dissolving social order the suffering masses are rising in revolt against their rulers and oppressors. In Italy, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, France, Denmark, and Poland the insurgent workers and peasants are displaying increasing determination to sweep away the rotted system which subjected them to the horrors of fascism and war. Tomorrow this movement will spread through Germany and the whole of Europe.

The Allied imperialists have appeared on the scene in the guise of "liberators." But while conducting war against their German imperialist rivals, they have already made it abundantly clear that they have another purpose in view—to prevent the masses from taking their fate into their own hands and finding a way out of the bloody morass along the only possible road, the road of socialist revolution.

Both in word and deed, Roosevelt and Churchill have shown that far from liberating Europe, they intend to subject its peoples to perpetual capitalist slavery. Germany is to be dismembered and the whole European continent Balkanized in order to assure the ascendancy of Anglo-American capital. As in Italy the peoples are to be saddled with police-military dictatorships subservient to the Allied conquerors.

Aiding and abetting these would-be enslavers of the European masses are the Stalinists, Social-Democrats, and the liberals—all of them defenders of the rotted capitalist order. The Stalinists are agents of the sinister Kremlin gang which, fearing for its own rule, has allied itself with the "democratic" imperialists and reactionary capitalist cliques of Europe in a plot to abort and destroy the coming revolution.

The only alternative to the reactionary plans of the imperialists and their European allies is the program of the socialist revolution. Only by the utter destruction of the outworn capitalist system can Europe go forward along a new road leading to lasting peace and security. The program of the Fourth International alone offers real hope to the tortured peoples of Europe and the world.

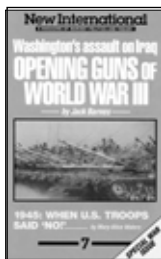
For Further Reading

New Internationalist no. 7

Opening Guns of World War III: Washington's Assault on Iraq

by Jack Barnes

Also includes "1945:
When U.S. troops
said 'No!'" by
Mary-Alice Waters
\$12



New Internationalist no. 11

U.S. Imperialism Has Lost the Cold War

by Jack Barnes

Also includes
"Socialism: A Viable
Option" by José
Ramón Balaguer
\$14



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Toll grows in Haitian, Dominican floods

Deforestation, product of imperialist domination, results in social disaster



National Geographic

1987 photo starkly shows deforestation in Haiti, left, contrasted with green forests on Dominican side of border. Because of imperialist distortion of Haiti's economy, working people in rural areas lack access to electricity or modern fuels, forcing them to rely on charcoal made from wood. Deforestation has turned heavy rains into devastating floods.

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

The number of dead or missing in the floods in Haiti and the Dominican Republic has reached 3,300, with tens of thousands more remaining homeless. Meanwhile, in a callous act that shows where their priorities lie, Washington and other imperialist powers have cut off the use of military helicopters for the delivery of emergency aid to the thousands in need, concentrating instead on securing their military control of Haiti. The Haitian government does not have helicopters of its own.

Aid workers in some cases have been reduced to loading up mules to deliver supplies of food, clothing, and other necessities to thousands of flood victims in the hardest-hit areas.

The consequences of this capitalist-bred catastrophe are being felt most deeply in Haiti, where three-quarters of the deaths have occurred.

Deforestation in Haiti—the result of decades of imperialist domination—is a major reason for the magnitude of the disaster for those living in the area, especially in the Haitian towns of Mapou and Fond Verrettes and the nearby village of Jimaní in the Dominican Republic.

Only 1 percent of Haiti's land has tree cover. In the neighboring Dominican Republic it is only 15 percent. With no tree roots to hold soil to the mountains, the rains that began in mid-May by May 24 rapidly became flood waters and brought with them waves of silt, gravel, and boulders that slammed into villages.

The disappearance of the woodland is the product of the lack of most forms of modern fuel in rural areas, which forces working people to cut wood for their own use or to sell it for charcoal—the only means of survival for many. This situation is compounded by the lack of electricity and inadequate roads, housing, and communications, as well as the virtual absence of medical facilities. The U.S. capitalists, who for decades have viewed Haiti as a source of cheap labor and natural resources, and the wealthy Haitian families who

rule that country, have never considered such facilities to be priorities.

The arrival of the wet season in June brings the potential for worsening the disaster for working people. Where the May rains did not devastate towns, they created dams above them from debris that can break open with a new burst of rainfall.

The Haitian villages of Bawa, St. Michel, Nan Galette, and Naroche are all in immediate danger.

“Our biggest concern right now is that these four villages are at risk of landslides, mudslides, and rockslides,” Bernard Bar-rat of the Red Cross told the BBC. As an indication of the minimal assistance Haitian

workers and peasants are receiving in the face of this imminent threat, he said, “We’ve distributed plastic sheeting for people to make temporary shelters in hilly areas.”

Among the first on the scene to aid the victims of this social catastrophe have been Cuban volunteer doctors. More than 500

Continued on Page 10

Court strikes down anti-abortion law

Continued from front page

for women's health and the right to medical privacy.” The president of the National Organization for Women in San Francisco, Deborah Glenn-Rodgers, also applauded the outcome of the case, as did attorneys for the city government, which had sued in defense of the abortion services in its health system.

The case goes back to the end of last year. Immediately after Bush signed into law the misleadingly named Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act on November 5, Planned Parenthood, a reproductive rights organization, helped initiate legal challenges to it in Nebraska, New York, and San Francisco.

In response, courts in all three states issued interim injunctions against the act. Judge Phyllis Hamilton's ruling, which followed a three-week trial in March and April, is the first final decision.

In her ruling Hamilton noted that “the term ‘partial-birth abortion’ is neither recognized in the medical literature nor used by physicians who routinely perform second-trimester abortions”—that is, operations from the fourth to sixth months of pregnancy.

Properly called intact “dilation and extraction,” the procedure at issue involves the removal of the intact fetus from the woman. Opponents of a woman's right to choose say that the fetus, which is incapable of independent existence, can briefly show signs of life and therefore is “partially born.”

Basing her ruling on the testimony of

doctors, Hamilton pointed out that the procedure is a variant of—and in some ways is safer than—the most common form of second-trimester abortion, in which the fetus is not kept intact in the process of removal.

Because such a fetus may still have a heartbeat or show other signs of life, and thus “may be considered a ‘living fetus,’” she said, the law could be used to ban other abortion procedures.

Hamilton said the act violates a 2000 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on a similar law passed by the Nebraska state government in 1999. The court faulted the law for failing to allow the procedure when the woman's life or health was in danger.

This was the basis on which Bush's predecessor, President William Clinton, vetoed two such bills barring this abortion procedure. If a provision was included to make an exception for when the mother's health was at risk, he would “happily sign the bill,” Clinton told sponsors of similar legislation in 1996.

Stephanie Cutter, a spokeswoman for presidential candidate John Kerry, said the Democratic senator supports restrictions on late-term abortions together with a “clear exception for life or health of women.”

On the other hand, she went on, “George Bush pushed through a different piece of legislation that failed to protect the health of women and that is what the court struck down today. When John Kerry is president he will appoint judges that are committed to upholding the Constitution, not pursuing

an ideological agenda.”

Kerry told Associated Press reporters in May that while he supports the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that decriminalized abortion, he would consider opponents of a woman's right to choose in appointing lower court judges.

The San Francisco ruling is the latest episode in the ongoing battle over the right to abortion. Since the 1973 Supreme Court ruling, both Democratic and Republican politicians have passed legislation chipping away at access to abortion in a way that affects working-class women the most.

Today only 21 of 50 states provide any public funding for the procedure, and only 13 percent of counties have doctors who perform abortions. These attacks on a woman's right to choose were a major reason for the turnout of hundreds of thousands of supporters of a woman's right to choose at an April 25 march on Washington.

In a related development, the Food and Drug Administration decided in early May against making the Plan B emergency contraceptive available over the counter. The “morning-after” pill reduces the risk of pregnancy when taken within 120 hours of unprotected intercourse. It is available only by prescription, in spite of the fact that the sooner it is taken, the better it works.

“This is anti-choice politics at its worst,” said Planned Parenthood's Dian Harrison May 6. Harrison pointed out that the FDA's own advisory committee had voted to allow Plan B's sale over the counter.

Materialism: a scientific view of the world

Below are excerpts from *The Origins of Materialism* by George Novack, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for June. The book explains the first giant steps taken by ancient scientists and scholars—particularly those in early Greek society—toward understanding the world and society in scientific terms.

The excerpts are taken from the chapter titled, "The Milesian Contributions to Materialism." The Milesian School was a current among fifth- and sixth-century Greek philosophers. They developed pioneering views that began to challenge prevailing beliefs in magic and mythology.

George Novack joined the communist

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

movement in 1933 and was a leader of the Socialist Workers Party until his death in 1992. Copyright © 1965 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.



BY GEORGE NOVACK

Our information about most Greek thinkers, and especially the earlier ones, is very scanty. The accounts of their lives, works and ideas are intermingled with legends. The extant texts are fragmentary, distorted, contradictory and, even with the most correct methods, lend themselves to divergent interpretations.

Nevertheless, the unanimous testimony

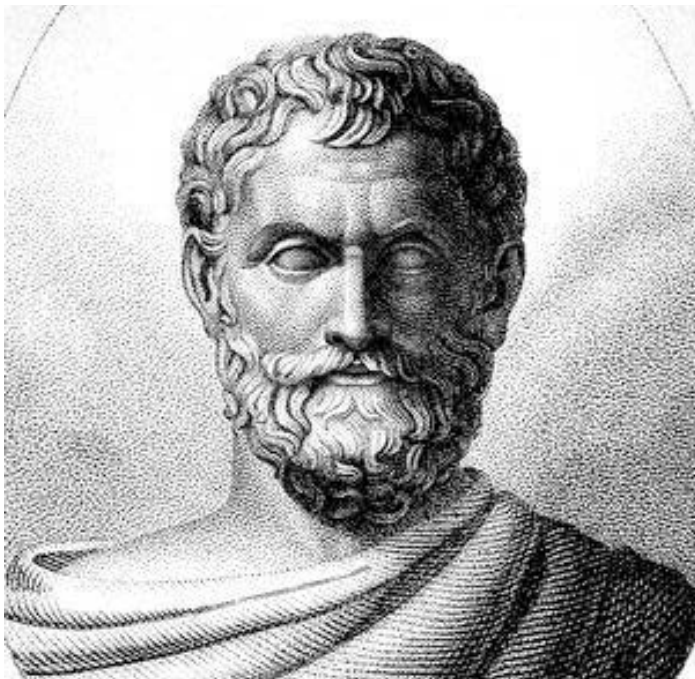
of antiquity is that the Milesians founded the first school of philosophy and placed it on a materialist basis. These two facts are organically connected. It is essential to understand why the birth of philosophy was likewise the beginning of the materialist view of the world. The position of the pioneer philosophers was determined by the nature of their opposition. The first form of philosophical thought necessarily had to be materialist in its content because it was implicitly directed against the dominant religious ideas and magical methods, constituted a critical opposition to them, and became the only solid alternative to them.

The method they introduced of explaining the formation of the world and its developments was the imperishable achievement of the Milesians. Instead of resorting to the gods as the creators and promoters of phenomena, they looked for the causes of things in the interconnections of events within nature and the interactions of natural elements alone.

Whereas the religious-minded spun narratives of what supposedly happened, the Milesian thinkers tried to single out from the welter of events around them in nature the decisive factors which brought things into being and made them what they are. This procedure of searching for the explanation of things in the recurrences of nature and the laws of their movement, instead of in the actions and impulses of divine powers, was scientific in principle and rational in method.

In addition to their method of investigation, the Milesians made other important contributions to the materialist treasury.

One concerned the concept of matter itself. The Milesians did not arrive at any general idea of matter; that was a later ideo-



Depiction of Thales, sixth-century Greek philosopher credited with helping to found the school of materialist thought.

logical development. But they initiated the train of speculation which culminated in the definition of the category of matter.

The Milesians were compelled to consider the problem of matter and its nature by the very starting point, momentum and direction of their thought. If the gods are rejected as the authors of events, then what in the world is the original source of all things? Aristotle, to whom we owe much of our information about their ideas, described the materialist conclusions of the Milesians in these words: "Most of the first philosophers thought the principle of all things was in the form of matter alone; for that out of which all things are and from which, as the first, they come into being, and into which, at the last, they pass away...this, they say is the element and the principle of things."

The lineage of Milesian thinkers was constituted by Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Hecataeus. Although their mode of reasoning was the same, these various members of the Milesian school gave somewhat different answers to the question of what the specific form of matter was, what "the element and the principle of things" was. Thales singled out water as the primary substance from which all else was derived

and to which it returns.

There are many conjectures why Thales took water as the primary stuff of nature, the essential reality of all other phenomena. Aristotle said that Thales saw the essential part played by water in nourishing life so that the hot element could come from it, since what is alive has heat. Water is also the essence of seeds. Aristotle also suggests that Thales might have been carrying forward the primacy that Greek and Egyptian mythology accorded water.

Later scholars have argued that Thales chose the moist element because of his special studies of climatic conditions. Water not only assumed such different forms as ice, liquid, and vapor but to the Greeks mist, wind, animal breath and life were all intermingled and identified. Whether meteorology, botany or biology, the phenomenon of evaporation, the germination of plants or the origin of life most inspired Thales, the reasons for his decision are not so important as the fact that he singled out a purely natural, physically observable element and used its properties and powers as the exclusive means of explaining reality.

Anaximander, his follower, took a step forward in developing the conception of matter. He objected to the notion of Thales that everything is essentially a form of water. He held that the primary substance could not be any specific element like water, or air, or fire. Aristotle sets forth his reasoning as follows: "They are in opposition one to another—air is cold, water moist and fire hot, and therefore, if anyone of them is infinite, the rest would have ceased to be by this time." That is, one of the elements would have swallowed up all the others.

Anaximander taught that there must be something more primitive than any of these elements from which these warring opposites had separated out, to which they are attached, and into which they pass away. He called this substratum the boundless, the non-limited, the infinite. This non-limited was material and therefore perceptible but out of reach. It was apparently meant to designate the original stock of matter from which everything is derived. Anaximander had put his finger on the general category of matter, and especially on the inexhaustible creativity of matter which manifests itself in numberless forms but cannot be fixed or exclusively identified with any one of its determinations.

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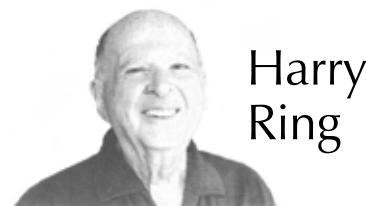
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OFFER GOOD UNTIL JUNE 30

Good—Despite protest by the cop “union,” a modest Chicago park (previously a parking lot) has been named Lucy Ell Par-



Harry Ring

sons Park. Lucy Parsons was the widow of Albert Parsons. He and three other anarchist comrades were executed in 1886 on a frame-up bombing charge. Lucy Parsons was in the forefront of their defense, and also played an important role in labor’s fight for an eight-hour day.

Hey, a cop boycott!—The Chicago reader who sent us the news on Lucy Parsons Park added her own update: “The park is in the heart of one of the city’s most notorious police districts. A couple of uniformed ‘gang crime’ specialists just got federal prison terms for drug trafficking. It’s fitting.”

Maybe inmate dinner menus—The Pentagon furnished a U.S. Senate committee with a copy of a report on the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners. Of the 6,000-page report, 2,000 pages were missing. The Pentagon and the senators agreed it was of no great consequence.

Seize the time—In Kuwait, the cabinet approved a bill to grant

women the right to vote and to run for parliament. *The Times* of London observed that women in Kuwait have been pressing for the vote for decades.

Cleaning the evidence room?—In Fairfield, Iowa, Cameron Cooksey, now an ex-cop and son of the police chief, pleaded guilty to lifting some \$1,500 from the station house evidence room. A judge put him on probation and sentenced him to 100 hours of community service.

They also think like cops—“Kent, Washington—A review panel said Kent school guards should stop using metal handcuffs to restrain unruly students. The panel also said the guards should stop carrying guns, batons and

pepper spray. The guards aren’t police officers. The review was ordered after the NAACP filed \$500 million in claims against the district on behalf of 15 Black students who say guards abused them.”—*USA Today*.

Tension? In a jail?—In the St. Joseph, Indiana, county jail, dress rules have been posted for women visiting inmates. Guards bar visitors deemed to be scantily clad. Said an official: “A lot of people have gotten away with inappropriate dress.... That’s not a good thing. It can cause tension.”

Why buy 1 when you can buy 2?—In Beverly Hills, USA, there’s a home originally the dwelling of early film idols Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.

Once a 16-acre estate, most of the land has been parceled off. Yours for \$27 million. But be patient. The initial asking price was more.

In England, Lord Hescott, a former Conservative whip in Parliament, is offering his Northamptonshire estate for \$91.5 million. The estate sits on 3,300 acres. His lordship says he’d rather sell it than open it to the public.

Brrr—“Scientists have discovered more than 100 species of bacteria living in the toxic sediment beneath underground tanks that have leaked radioactive waste at the Hanford nuclear reservation in Washington [state], home to some of the most contaminated soil in the world.”—*Los Angeles Times*.

Workers in Lebanon protest soaring fuel prices

BY GEORGES MEHRABIAN

ATHENS—Army troops in Lebanon opened fire on thousands of demonstrators in the mainly working-class Shiite neighborhood of Hay Al Selloum in southern Beirut on May 27. In the course of the military assault, six were killed, dozens wounded, and over 130 arrested.

Hundreds of angry protesters then broke into the building of the Ministry of Labor. They were eventually driven out by troops.

The initial protests were part of a general strike called by the General Labor Confederation (CGL) to oppose the spiraling price of gasoline. CGL president Ghassan Ghosn explained that prices in recent months had shot up 150 percent.

“We participated in the demonstration to express dissatisfaction with the government’s economic policies, not to clash with the security forces,” said Mohammad Miqdad, brother of one of the injured protesters.

“The strike took place all over Lebanon. It was the first time in 12 years that a strike had such participation—the banks, the schools, the universities,” said Bashar Abu Sayfan, a worker at one of the country’s TV stations, in an interview. “Only the media and the medical facilities were open. The strike lasted all day in West Beirut, but even in East Beirut there was participation. The major march was in Jounieh and 2,000 workers and minibus drivers participated. There were marches in the north as well. Every city except for Zahle was struck.”

Twelve years ago a wave of strikes forced the government of Prime Minister Omar Karami out of office. In the wake of those struggles the current government of Rafiq Hariri took office.

Abu Sayfan described the events that led to the army assault: “In Hay Al Selloum... there was a crowd approaching an M-113 [a tank without a cannon]. Some people in the crowd began climbing the tank. The soldiers used bayonets to stop them. Two were stabbed, one in the heart and the other in the chest. Then the shooting started by the army.

“During the day the radio and TV started appealing for the officials to intervene. They called government officials. Nobody was answering,” he said.

According to the *Daily Star*, a Beirut daily, “the following day thousands of mourners gathered to bury their dead chanting anti-government slogans.” The paper reports that the army withdrew its troops from the southern suburbs. Protests continued the next day in various parts of the city as well as in the Bekaa valley where many of the victims were from. The taxi and minibus drivers led these actions.

The General Labor Confederation has called on the strike to stop and for the demonstrations to remain peaceful.

Nabil Freij, a member of Prime Minister Hariri’s parliamentary bloc, sought to deflect blame from the government for the worsening conditions facing working people in Lebanon. “One thing is sure,” he is quoted as saying, “the speed at which the riots spread show that they were not innocent and that the matter is not the making of the General Labor Confederation, but rather of people who took advantage of the protest.”

The current strike occurs in the context of a deepening economic crisis that has been gripping the country. Lebanon, which is a country of 3.5 million, has a foreign debt of \$34 billion.



Mohammad Awada

Workers in Beirut, Lebanon, May 27 strike against skyrocketing cost of gasoline.

— 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —



June 22, 1979

Heads of state must have been green with envy over Pope John Paul’s nine-day visit to his native Poland.

Large numbers turned out for the touring pontiff. In his base city of Cracow a reported million people thronged to a papal mass.

Partisans of the church rejoiced. See, they argued, that’s how necessary to humanity religion is. More than thirty years after the revolution in Poland, the masses pour out for a pope. Christianity has a stronger appeal to working people than Marxism.

But what happened in Poland was no test of Christianity versus Marxism. It was a massive expression of revulsion by the Polish people against a police regime that oppresses them in every sphere of life.

The revolution that ended capitalism in Poland, while it created the potential for great economic and social advances for the masses, came into the world cruelly deformed. Privilege-hungry bureaucrats, backed by Stalin’s troops, blocked the workers from exercising political power. Determined to prevent the working class from running the economy democratically, these bureaucrats have mismanaged and distorted the planned economy. They hold back wages and let prices skyrocket. They suppress democratic rights. And when the workers resist they unleash club-swinging, trigger-happy cops.

That’s why the Poles are so deeply alienated, so hungry for any broader social vision, that they will turn out for a pope.

But the Catholic Church is no progressive alternative to the Stalinist bureaucrats.

The Polish masses will increasingly demand *working-class solutions* to their economic and social problems.

There’s not a prayer of a chance they will settle for wafers, holy water, and hypocritical papal rhetoric.



June 21, 1954

NEW YORK, June 15—An examiner’s decision has been issued denying the application of Carl Skoglund for discretionary relief from deportation to Sweden under the notorious McCarran Act. Although the 70-year old Minnesota labor leader has no political affiliation whatever, the examiner ruled that his admitted socialist views disqualify him from any consideration by the Attorney General; who has discretionary power to suspend the deportation proceedings.

Skoglund’s counsel, Stanley Lowell of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Alien Civil Rights Committee, immediately announced that the decision will be appealed. A vigorous effort will also be made to secure Skoglund’s release on bond from Ellis Island, where he has been detained since he was ordered there on May 20.

The government claims that Skoglund should be deported under the McCarren Act because he was a member of the Communist Party during the 1920’s, even though he was expelled from that party in 1928, and has been an outspoken opponent of Stalinism since that time. But Skoglund’s real “crime,” in the eyes of the government witch hunters, is his unblemished record of militant labor and socialist activity since he came to this country 43 years ago.

New Zealand: 1,000 march against anti-Asian racism

BY STUART NEEDHAM

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand—More than 1,000 people marched May 8 to respond to racist discrimination faced by people of Asian descent here. Recent and longer-term immigrants helped lead the action, which was built around the theme of “No to racism, yes to harmony.” National Distribution Union members carried a union banner saying, “No to Racism.”

“There is a growing trend against migrants in this city,” Hock Beng Lee told the rally that concluded the protest. “Sticks are thrown at them and they are told: ‘Gooks go home.’” Lee, who was born in Malaysia, was one of the organizers of the protest.

Another speaker, University of Canterbury international student adviser Jonie Chan, asked, “why do I have to accept abuse when I walk on the street under bright sunlight?”

The final speaker was Mark Solomon, a leader of Ngai Tahu, a major Maori tribe based in the South Island of New Zealand. “We have to stand up against [racism],” he said. “We can’t ignore it.” Earlier, march organizer Ghazala Anwar had pointed to the inspiring example provided by the recent marches for land rights by Maori.

In the lead-up to the protest, Christ-

church mayor Garry Moore issued an April 30 statement calling for its cancellation. Reversing his original endorsement, Moore described the planned action as “a recipe for disaster.

“How will this be perceived in Beijing or Kuala Lumpur [Malaysia] or Singapore?” said the mayor. “This will be seen as proving Christchurch is a racist city.” Christchurch, a city of 325,000 people, is the largest in the South Island and the hub of its lucrative tourism industry.

Moore also said the march could become a “powder keg,” given plans by the racist National Front to stage a counter-protest.

Rally organizers refused to call the march off or to water down its contents. Reaffirming the antiracist character of the action, Anwar told the May 5 *Press*, the city’s big-business daily, that “the banner is ‘no’ to racism and ‘yes’ to harmony. If we just came with a banner that said ‘yes to harmony’ it would be meaningless. Racism is the context.”

Some 20 members of the National Front—a group with a long history in the city—rallied behind the anti-racism march but were unable to disrupt it. After the rally the rightists were surrounded by marchers until they decided to leave.

For full cost-of-living protection

The skyrocketing rise in the price of gasoline and diesel fuel is hitting working people’s living standards particularly hard. The rise in oil prices is also having a broader impact on the economy, beginning with higher prices for fertilizer and pesticides that farmers need, other consumer goods, and air transportation.

In addition, working people today confront a huge jump in the price of milk and other dairy products. This is on top of increased rents for apartments, and rising costs for health care, public transportation, and other necessities. Inflation is not just a passing problem; we’ve only seen the beginning. As the worldwide economic crisis worsens, we can expect sudden inflationary surges that will devastate the living standards and any savings of workers and farmers.

Truck drivers in California who are owner-operators have carried out work stoppages to demand compensation for the rising price of diesel, which shipping companies have tried to shift onto their backs.

To protect our class from this scourge of capitalism, labor should campaign for federal legislation guaranteeing *automatic cost-of-living adjustments* for all wages, as well as pensions, health care, unemployment benefits, workers comp, and welfare payments. This must apply to all union contracts.

Capitalist politicians scapegoat semicolonial nations that are members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for rising oil costs. OPEC members, however, produce only 40 percent of the world’s oil. A handful of monopolies such as ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch/Shell, ChevronTexaco, and British Petroleum are the ones that control the refining and distribution of oil as well as the sale of gasoline and other petroleum products around the world.

The energy giants make decisions based on their profit prerogatives, such as their long-term freeze on building

refineries in the United States, which ensures that supplies will be tight when demand increases and therefore prices will soar. Today these companies are taking advantage of the instability accelerated by the imperialist war in Iraq, as well as Washington’s drive to remove the government of Venezuela, to justify hiking the price of oil. Prices are increasing more than the worldwide demand because the oil barons, through their monopoly, can simply jack up prices.

The labor movement needs to demand: *open the books of the energy monopolies* to inspection by elected committees of workers and farmers. Only such a step can expose to public view the contrived shortages, price-gouging, and the true financial situation of these corporations. The recent revelations of taped conversations of Enron energy traders, who boasted about how they ripped off working people by manipulating the electrical power market and hiking prices during the California energy crisis in 2000-2001, simply show how capitalists function on a normal basis.

The oil monopolies control a resource vital to society. But they are in the business of making money, not of providing energy. Their decisions, designed to enrich a few, have a disastrous impact on the lives of millions. The labor movement should demand the *nationalization of the energy industry*. That means that the industry must be taken out of private hands and be run as a public utility for the benefit of working people. This goes hand in hand with establishing *workers’ control of production*—control over the pace of work, job safety, and how the work is organized. Workers in oil refineries, power plants, and related industries can use their knowledge on the job to bring to light the bosses’ record of exploitation, swindles, and threats to safety and health. Workers can show that we can run the industry better and more safely than the bosses—in the interests of the vast majority.

Oil workers strike in Colombia

Continued from front page

entire Arab-Persian Gulf region. British Petroleum and California-based Occidental Petroleum already have major operations in Colombia, and would welcome the opportunity to carve up a privatized Ecopetrol.

Two days before the strike began, the government militarized Ecopetrol, sending troops into the refineries. Once the walkout began, Uribe declared the strike illegal, using the argument that the oil industry is an “essential service.” The government imposed legal sanctions against officials of the union and arrested 17 strike leaders.

Police announced that “antiterrorism” measures would be used against the union, and the union reported receiving a rising number of death threats. Unionists have been targeted by ultrarightist death squads, sometimes known as paramilitary groups, that act as an extension of the army.

The oil strike took place in the context of a U.S.-backed military offensive by the government against a guerrilla insurgency. Under the banner of the “war on terrorism,” police have often carried out mass arrests of unionists and other opponents of the government.

Washington has backed the Colombian military’s antiguerrilla operations and its broader efforts to terrorize working people. In 2000 the Clinton administration launched Plan Colombia, through which Washington has funneled more than \$2.5 billion in aid, mostly to the Colombian army. Colombia is now the third-largest recipient of U.S. military funding, after Israel and Egypt.

U.S. officials initially presented Plan Colombia as an effort to combat “drug trafficking,” and now is calling it an offensive against “narcoterrorists.” The U.S. ruling families have vast economic interests in Colombia and the broader region. They are also concerned about the continuing social upheaval in a continent where struggles by workers and peasants have brought down governments in Ecuador, Bolivia, and other countries.

The Colombian army has carried out military assaults to protect U.S. oil giant Occidental Petroleum. The *Los Angeles Times* reported May 16 that “U.S.-trained Colombian troops, backed by U.S. intelligence and private contractors, unleashed the offensive to stop rebel attacks on a pipeline” that the company depends on to transport its product. The use of such “private contractors” has become better known since a number of them were killed in the course of their role in the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

After one month, the strike at Ecopetrol spread to BP’s oil refining center in Barrancabermeja. There the union called a walkout after right-wing death squads killed at least 11 people and abducted 40 others, Reuters reported May 21.

On May 8 some 10,000 striking oil workers and their supporters marched in Bucaramanga, 200 miles north of the capital, the Colombian daily *La República* reported. The protest received broad union backing. “This demonstrates that the strike is not only for the workers at Ecopetrol, but for the all the Colombian people,” said USO president Gabriel Alvis.

Under the agreement signed with the government, those among the 248 fired workers with six years of seniority have the right to a full pension. Others can retire with a partial pension. Those who choose neither of these options can appeal for their jobs to a board that is supposed to rule on each case within six months. “All of the workers who were fired are going to the arbitration panel,” said the vice president of USO, who was joined by 173 of the other workers demanding their right to return to work.

The five-week walkout was the first strike called by the union at Ecopetrol since 1977.

As the oil strike ended, some 16,000 banana workers in Urabá province walked off the job, seeking wage increases and other contract improvements. The Uribe government has responded by sending an army contingent of 1,500 to Urabá to try to intimidate the strikers.

Toll grows in Haiti, Dominican floods

Continued from Page 7

Cuban medical volunteers are providing vital health-care services in Haiti, including in remote areas of the countryside where Haitian or U.S. doctors would refuse to work. Two Cuban doctors are staffing a clinic set up in Mapou, where the “lake” around the town still contains many bodies and dead animals. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency reported that a Haitian relief engineer “and four Cuban doctors managed to arrive to Fond Verrettes by land though the last five kilometers had to be on the dry river bed.”

In contrast to the response to the calamity by the Cuban medical personnel, on May 31 Washington ordered a halt to the use of its military helicopters for delivery of emergency supplies to areas cut off by the flooding. A U.S.-led force of 3,600 troops from the United States, France, and Canada, has been in Haiti to “restore order” for the government of Haitian prime minister Gérard Latortue.

Latortue was put in power as a result of a rightist rebellion in February. The elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was shanghaied by U.S. troops and taken by

plane to Africa. After spending several weeks in Jamaica, he is now living in South Africa.

On June 1 the first of a projected 8,000-strong United Nations military and police force formally took over control of the occupation from U.S. forces. It is likely that Washington will keep some kind of military force in Haiti in the future.

Like the departing U.S. forces, the UN troops and cops, headed by a Brazilian general, have put flood relief on the back burner.

“The UN peacekeeping mission doesn’t have helicopters right now, and it will take weeks for them to deploy some,” a representative of the UN food relief agency told the *New York Times* by way of explanation. The agency’s director in Haiti said, “We deeply deplore that the multinational force has other priorities.”

The *Times* reported June 1 that “the aid workers are talking about using mules to ferry aid to thousands of victims. Given the state of Haiti’s interim government, the agencies say they may have to rent bulldozers and rebuild ruined roads themselves.”

March in Venezuela

Continued from front page

is not for sale” (a play on words that also means “Venezuela does not sell out”).

In his speech to the large crowd, Chávez said he accepted the electoral council’s ruling and predicted a “popular victory” against the recall. In March the National Electoral Council had reported that only 1.8 million signatures submitted by the proimperialist opposition for the recall referendum were valid—far below the 2.4 million required. While dealt a blow, opposition forces launched a campaign to revalidate signatures. These were submitted May 29–30. The council reported that about 15,000 valid signatures above the required number had been turned in. The recall vote would probably take place in August.

The council’s announcement took place at a time of sharpening class confrontation. Major sections of the capitalist class in Venezuela, with Washington’s backing, have been seeking to remove the Chávez government. They failed in two earlier attempts—a short-lived military coup in April 2002 and a bosses’ lockout in December of that year. Both were defeated through large mobilizations of working people. The so-called referendum is a third attempt by these forces to oust the elected government. This polarization was registered in countermobilizations on the June 5–6 weekend. The day before the massive outpouring, tens of thousands of opposition supporters, mostly middle-class, held a demonstration to celebrate the electoral ruling.

In the May 29–30 revalidation process, those who signed against the president but whose signatures had irregularities were required to confirm or withdraw their signatures. Electoral Council official Jorge Rodríguez announced that the opposition managed to reconfirm 614,968 signatures—only about half of the number submitted. Adding these signatures to those already confirmed, he said, a total of 2,451,821 registered voters had signed the petition—about 15,700 more than the 20 percent of the electorate required.

Under the constitution adopted in 2000, the opposition will need to win more than 3,750,000 “yes” votes—the number of people who voted for Chávez in 2000—for the president to be dismissed.

Another 74,000 people reported to the election authorities that they had previously signed in favor of a recall but wanted to have their signatures removed.

Petition process marked by irregularities

Supporters of the Chávez government said the petition process was marked by numerous irregularities, with the names of minors, the dead, and nonexistent people appearing on the petitions.

Despite these irregularities, the council said enough valid signatures had been collected to open the way to the referendum.

In a nationally televised speech on June 3, Chávez described the referendum as a “victory for democracy and the Constitution.

Chávez said he was “happy that instead of coups, the opposition is planning a democratic referendum,” demonstrating that “Venezuela is a country with participatory democracy.”

U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said Chávez’s acceptance of the electoral council decision was “a very important step toward achieving a constitutional, democratic, peaceful and electoral solution to the current impasse.” A June 5 article in the *New York Times* noted that among the “array of obstacles” facing the opposition was the “solid block of popular support” for the president among working people, who support government projects “from free dental clinics to literacy classes to small-scale neighborhood improvement projects.”

The paper quoted a former bank worker, Angélica Gutiérrez, who said, “My mother is 75 years old and she’s in classes, learning how to read. You can’t imagine the number of people who are in favor of Chávez.”

What Wall Street and Venezuelan capitalists are most concerned about in Venezuela is the rising struggles of workers and farmers, who are using the available political space to press for land, jobs, expanded educational opportunities, improved health care, and other basic needs.

These big-business forces are opposed to legislation adopted by the government that, to the extent it is implemented, cuts into the prerogatives of finance capital. Such measures include an agrarian reform law, protections for working fishermen from overfishing by large commercial companies, the allocation of oil funds for cheap housing and other social programs, and a series of literacy and adult education programs that have involved tens of thousands of workers and farmers.

Chávez’s government has also drawn the ire of Washington and sections of the local bourgeoisie for developing closer political and economic ties with revolutionary Cuba, which has provided thousands of doctors and other volunteers. Many working people are skeptical of rhetoric by opposition capitalists that they will uphold “democracy,” given their record of attempted coups and destabilization. At a May 16 demonstration in Caracas, 100,000 people protested the threat of U.S.-backed military intervention, underscored by the recent arrest of more than 100 Colombian soldiers at a ranch near Caracas. The authorities said the soldiers were part of an opposition plot to launch attacks on the government.

Deported by Stockholm, 2 are tortured in Egypt

BY CATHARINA TIRSÉN

GOTHENBURG, Sweden—The deportation and mistreatment of two Egyptian citizens in December 2001 has sparked a debate here since revelations about their cases were broadcast on a recent television program called “Cold Facts.”

On Dec. 18, 2001, two men, Ahmed Agiza and Mohammad El Zari, were picked up by police and rushed to a plane to be sent back to Egypt against their will. The Swedish government claimed they were leaders of a “terrorist” organization. No reason or evidence for this claim was ever given to the men or their lawyers. The two had sought political asylum in Sweden.

Critics accused the Swedish government of violating agreements in the European Union and other international agreements signed by Stockholm, according to which no person is to be deported if they risk being subject to torture or execution. Swedish officials justified their actions by referring to an agreement with Cairo assuring that Agiza and El Zari would not suffer such a fate.

Initial reports that the men were being tortured came out a few weeks after their deportation, but Stockholm has dismissed them as untrue. In a report requested by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Swedish officials wrote on May 6, 2003, that they had received no information making them doubt that the men were treated according to the agreement with the government in Egypt.

The TV program reported that just hours after the government issued its summary decision to deport the two men, the SÄPO—Sweden’s CIA—arrested and expelled them. They were not allowed to contact their families or lawyers. Their attorneys were informed about the action by mail two days later, when the two men had already been deported.

On May 17 and 24, the weekly TV program “Cold Facts” presented eyewitnesses and documents indicating that the U.S. secret police had demanded a speedy deportation of the two men.

Hooded and handcuffed

One eyewitness interviewed on the TV program said he had seen the two arrested men being taken to the police station at Bromma airport in Stockholm by “six to eight Americans.” Handcuffed and shackled, they were forced to wear hoods and their clothes taken away and replaced by diapers and overalls. Guarded by two Swedish secret police, they were put in a

special harness in a plane leased by the U.S. government and flown to Egypt, reports Amnesty International.

In a May 18 interview, Hans Dahlgren, Swedish undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, tried to invoke the specter of a “terrorist” threat, saying, “We must not forget why these two persons were deported. They were considered to have leading positions in a notorious terrorist organization and there were suspicions they were preparing further terrorist attacks from Sweden.”

As more facts came out, however, Stockholm felt compelled to send former deputy prime minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén on a short visit to Egypt to “discuss the guarantees the Egyptian government had given,” as she put it.

In April Agiza was summarily tried by an Egyptian military court and sentenced to life on the charge of being a member of a “terrorist” organization. Swedish officials now say the military trial against Agiza was not fair. According to Dahlgren, however, the Swedish government is not to blame. “It is not Sweden that has treated prisoners this way,” he said. The verdict of the military trial cannot be appealed.

Agiza’s wife and four children are still living in Sweden, fearing they too will be deported.

El Zari was in prison for two years in Egypt. His lawyer, Kjell Jönsson, says he has evidence he was tortured. He has never been brought to trial. He was released but is under constant surveillance.

Four arrested for ‘assisting terrorism’

In another case, four men were arrested on April 19 in Stockholm and Malmö. Since then their detentions have been extended three times. From the beginning the authorities said only that they were accused of “terrorism” or “assisting terrorism.” After reports in the press that the accusations came from U.S. officials, who are targeting groups in Iraq that organize attacks against the U.S. forces there, the prosecutor made her accusations public. She accused the men of “murder and universally dangerous devastation, directed against the state of Iraq,” a formulation from a new law on “terrorist crimes.” The court agreed only to the charge of “assisting” such acts.

All four insist they are innocent. Their lawyers have been ordered not to disclose anything about the trial.

In order to keep the men in jail longer than the stipulated period of one or two weeks at a time, the prosecutor is consider-

Scotland: postal workers protest office closure with overtime ban, one-day strike



Militant/Caroline Bellamy

Postal workers in West Lothian, Scotland, picket postal outlet during May 22 one-day strike to protest the closure of Broxburn sorting office. This was the second such stoppage over the issue by members of the Communication Workers Union, who have also enforced an overtime ban since May 3. The 37 workers handed out leaflets to passers-by. “We have had very strong public support,” worker and union representative Joe Dunnigan told the *Militant*.

ing using a special law from 1952. The law is seldom used, and can only be applied in cases such as “terror threats,” hijackings, “universally dangerous devastation,” murder, or arson.

This is the second time a new “antiterrorist” law, which was adopted by the Swedish government last year, has been used. The first time a man was arrested here and charged for collaboration with al Qaeda. The court dismissed the charges the first time his detention was taken up. He was later convicted for illegal possession of a weapon. According to the main daily here, *Dagens Nyheter*, the political police came to the prison to interrogate him regarding “terrorism.” He refused to meet with them.

All this comes as the government seeks to expand the ability of the police to conduct wiretapping. “If the security police are to prevent crimes, they must be able to act before the crime is committed,” said Minister of Justice Thomas Bodström. Wiretapping, he assured, should be used

only when the police suspect serious crimes by “Neo-Nazis, terrorists, and organized crime.”

Bodström and the ministers of justice from the United Kingdom, France, and Ireland made a joint proposal at a European Union meeting in late April that all phone calls, text messages, and e-mail messages must be saved by phone companies and owners of servers for three years in order to “fight crime.”

Swedish police already regularly get access to telephone company records for about a year, although this is not stipulated in any law.

At the same time, voting in parliament on a new law that would limit the rights of those seeking asylum has been postponed to June 16. The measure would prohibit refugees in Sweden from submitting a renewed asylum application with new information once their first application has been turned down. On May 8 demonstrations against this law were held in four cities.

LETTERS

The prison system

I, like so many other people of conscience, am incredibly incensed regarding the recent reporting of the abuses that have been occurring in the prisons of Iraq.

The appointed administration of the United States sold this war to the masses as a war of “liberation” for the Iraqi people and “protection” for the American population against an “imminent threat” (Saddam Hussein). Some are still waiting for the justification, the proof, that set in motion a war that has devastated so many lives, both military and civilians. I hope that we all can see beyond arbitrary lines drawn in the dirt (borders) and realize that when the words “collateral damage” are uttered, we are talking about human beings.

Incensed as I am at the abuses suffered at the hands of our “ambassadors of liberation,” I am not at all surprised.

Prison abuse is not an anomaly. Prison abuse occurs regularly in the United States prison system.

When a prison sentence is levied on a defendant, it is a sentence to be confined for a specific amount of time. It does not include the regular physical abuse, the rapes, and the systematic dehumanization that occurs in the environment of terror our prisons have become.

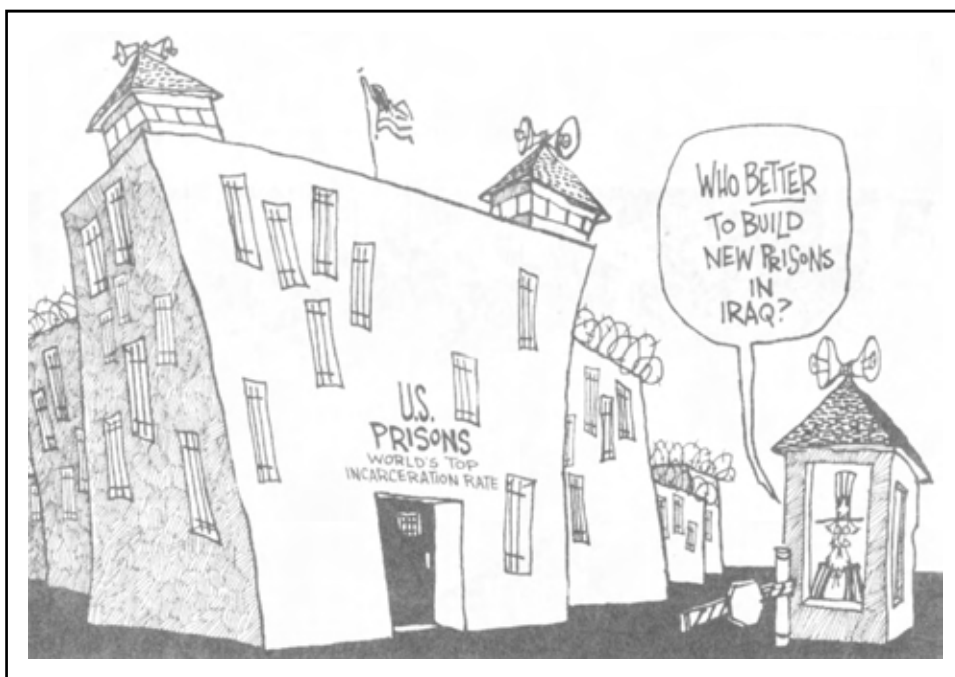
According to Human Rights

Watch, inmates are beaten by both inmates and guards, sexually assaulted by both inmates and guards; inmate on inmate physical and sexual violence is often allowed—facilitated even, by corrections officers. Is this how society “rehabilitates” people? The privatization of prisons should also be at issue—correction officers buying stock in the prison, their profits based on the warm bodies filling their corporate quarters. Would it not be in the best interest of a profiteer to keep an inmate for an indefinite period? How often are sentences extended based on profit principles? What does the corporatization of correctional facilities denote?

The United States has the highest imprisonment rate in the world. “The land of the free” cages over 2 million of her inhabitants.

California has built 23 prisons in the past 20 years, and one university. Something is terribly wrong with this picture.

M. D. Burns
Santa Barbara, California



Miners’ march

Some 200 miners and supporters joined a march and rally on May 22 organized by the South Wales National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Local people lined the main street in Pontyrid and clapped as the march went by.

Supporters of the *Militant* newspaper sold books and *Militants*. Two copies of *Cuba and the Coming American Revolution*, two *Communist Manifestos*,

a *Capitalism’s World Disorder*, and *Leon Trotsky on Britain* were part of the 16 books and pamphlets sold. Material about the Utah miner’s strike got a positive response, and some participants bought the *Militant* to find out more about the strike.

Two students, members of the National Union of Students in Wales, were surprised to see the photo of the March for Women’s Lives in Washington, April 25 on the front of the *Militant*. They told

J.H.
Oakland, California

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people.

Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

us they had been on the march representing the student pro-choice network of their union.

Rose Knight and Jim Spaul
Pontyrid, Wales

Labor and war

In your editorial May 18 you call on the “labor movement” to protest the brutal treatment of Iraqi prisoners. Then you say that “we should demand” U.S. troops out of Iraq now.

I have to ask, WHAT “labor movement” you refer to? Secondly, please describe your characterization of the current anti-war “movement” that might take up such a demand, both here in the U.S. and overseas.

Canada workers face employer assault

BY NANCY SEGUIN
AND JOHN STEELE

TORONTO—With the June 28 federal election campaign in full swing in Canada, polls continue to show deep dissatisfaction with the governing Liberal Party, and the possibility of the election of a minority government, either Liberal or Conservative.

In face of this crisis, Prime Minister Paul Martin has tried to frame his campaign around the question, “What kind of Canada do you want?” claiming the choice is between today’s Canada under the Liberal Party or “a country like the United States” under the Conservative Party. He and other bourgeois politicians want workers and farmers to identify themselves as “Canadians” embracing bosses and working people alike.

However, what isn’t being discussed by the capitalist politicians is the reality facing millions of workers and working farmers who have been confronting the brunt of the Canadian rulers’ intensifying austerity drive—a drive aimed at raising the sagging profit rates of the ruling rich in the context of the growing march of the world capitalism system toward economic depression and imperialist war.

Speaking at a May 29 public meeting here on this topic sponsored by the Militant Labor Forum, Michel Prairie, a leader of the Communist League in Canada, said, “There is no working-class voice in these elections. The truth is that in this class-divided society there is “we”—workers and farmers—and “them,” the handful of billionaire ruling capitalist families who own the mines, mills, factories, land, and the banks. *We* as working people have no common interests with *them*.”

Prairie said, “The Liberals, Conservative, the New Democratic Party [NDP], and the Bloc Quebecois are all acting in the interests of the rulers and have been part and parcel of the attacks against the social wage of working people and our unions.”

Living standards, unions under attack

An article in last week’s *Militant* explained that Washington’s blows against Canadian imperialism for its refusal to take part in the “coalition of the willing” in the war on Iraq is behind the crisis of the current government in Canada.

At home, as the bosses and their governments seek to make workers pay for their economic crisis, they have met resistance by workers and farmers. But as this drive steadily erodes the standard of living of working people, their first line of defense, the organized labor movement, has been weakened.

In May union officials in British Columbia agreed to a settlement that imposed a 15 percent wage cut on 43,000 health-care workers in the province and gave the provincial government power to fire 600 health-care workers over the next two years and to contract out their jobs. The workers had initially defied a strikebreaking law, winning the support of thousands of other workers. Since January 2002, some 6,000 hospital workers in British Columbia have lost their jobs as a result of contracting out by the government.

Over the past year, bosses have used the club of “bankruptcy” to go after workers and their unions. On January 29, Stelco, the biggest steel producer in Canada, gained court protection from creditors by declaring bankruptcy and has been demanding massive concessions from the United Steelworkers union that threaten the livelihood of thousands of Stelco pensioners and the jobs of those currently on the payroll. A May 1 rally of some 3,000 workers in Hamilton, Ontario, protested the company attack.

Thousands of unionized Air Canada workers are now being asked by union officials to accept more than \$1 billion (\$1 Can = \$0.73 U.S.) in wage and benefits concessions in order to “save” the airline, which is also under bankruptcy protection.

In mid-May, a provincial mediator im-



Unionists march on May Day in Montreal. Canadian bosses’ offensive, including mass layoffs, has steadily eroded the standard of living of workers and farmers.

posed a contract on 10,000 wood workers in British Columbia, members of the Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Canada. The contract allows the 61 employers on the West Coast to run their sawmills continuously with reduced overtime and travel pay. The contract also lets the bosses cut production costs by 10 percent over the next 18 months, which will result in thousands more layoffs.

The lives of working farmers across Canada are also being devastated by the capitalist economic crisis. Farmers’ cash income is at its lowest level in 25 years. Overall farm revenue fell to \$34 billion, a 5.8 percent slide from the \$36 billion reported in 2002. As a result, thousands of working farmers have been forced off the land. Since 1996, the number of farms in Canada has dropped by 11 percent to nearly 247,000. The number of people working on farms today is 313,000—down from half a million in 1976. This year the crisis was sharpened by the Canadian rulers’ trade war with Washington, which banned beef from Canada under the pretext of the threat of “mad cow” disease.

The overall impact of the bosses’ profit drive has pushed down wages dramatically for tens of thousands of workers. Today, one in four workers makes less than \$10 an hour. Long-term unemployment has increased with the closure of plants like Camco in Hamilton, and Levis in Stoney Creek, as well as layoffs at corporations like Bombardier in Montreal.

The organized labor movement, the main obstacle to the course of the rulers, has taken a battering under the onslaught of the bosses. While union membership has increased in absolute numbers by 350,000 to 4.2 million between 1997 and 2002, the proportion of workers organized in unions has dropped from a high of nearly 42 percent in 1984 to 32 percent in 2002.

The productivity drive of Canadian bosses against working people and their unions is fueled by the intensifying economic competition between Washington and Ottawa. For the bosses, productivity means forcing fewer workers to produce more in a shorter period of time, for less pay and benefits.

In this competition, in which workers in both Canada and the United States go to the wall, the bosses in the United States have done better than Canada’s rulers. For the 1997–2000 period, the average growth in the rate of productivity in the United States was 3.3 percent. In Canada it was 1.5 percent. Growth in labor productivity in Canada slumped in 2003 to 1.2 percent, less than half of what it was in 2002. Ten of the 20 industries in the manufacturing sector recorded a decline in productivity.

Fight for working-class unity in struggle

“The growing capitalist economic crisis has had a differentiated impact on different layers of workers,” said Prairie. For ex-

ample, the weight of the economic crisis has fallen disproportionately on workers who are Quebecois. The French-speaking Quebecois are an oppressed nationality within Canada.

Official unemployment in Quebec has grown steadily since 2000, reaching 9.1 percent, well above the national average of 7.6 percent. More than one-third of all working people receiving welfare in Canada lived in Quebec in 2003, while Quebecois only make up about one-quarter of the population.

Current polls show the Bloc Quebecois, a bourgeois nationalist party that supports Quebec sovereignty, would get a large majority of Quebec’s 75 seats. As a result, the Quebec national question has become an issue in the election campaign.

Conservative Party leaders are discussing the possibility that a minority Conservative government would make alliances on certain issues with the Bloc Quebecois.

Speaking at a rally in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Paul Martin attacked National Democratic Party federal leader Jack Layton for committing the NDP to repealing the Clarity Act if Quebec won its independence. The Clarity Act of 2000 asserts that Quebec would be able to achieve sovereignty only after negotiations with Ottawa, following a referendum in which the

House of Commons had concluded that the question and the answer were acceptable to Canada’s rulers.

Layton describes himself as a “flexible federalist” and is an opponent of Quebec independence. Campaigning in Quebec, he stated that the Clarity Act was no longer needed because “Canadians are ready to move beyond those divisive times of the past.”

“Our unions should support the struggle of the Quebecois against national oppression and for Quebec’s independence,” said Communist League leader Michel Prairie. “This is the road toward unity of working people in Quebec and in the rest of Canada against the government of our common class enemy in Ottawa.

“Other demands can also point our unions in the direction of promoting unity in struggle among working people,” said Prairie. He highlighted several:

“An immediate increase in the minimum wage, employment insurance, and social assistance to the average industrial wage of \$14 – \$15 an hour.

“Jobs for all by instituting a 30-hour workweek for all with no cut in pay, together with a massive program of public works to build and repair badly needed hospitals, schools, community centers, sports facilities, and basic infrastructure like roads and water purification systems.

“Government-enforced affirmative action programs to ensure that women, Blacks, Native people, and other oppressed layers of the working class have access to better-paying jobs, proper housing, and higher education.

“In face of rising gasoline and other prices, full and automatic cost-of-living protection for workers’ wages and social benefits.

“Opening the books of the energy monopolies, to be inspected by committees of workers and farmers, and nationalization of the energy industry under workers’ control, taking it out of the hands of capitalists.

“Canceling the foreign debt of semicolonial countries.”

By fighting for these kinds of demands, Prairie said, “working people can strengthen our unions. Through this struggle we can build a political party that can help lead a revolutionary fight by millions to replace capitalist political power with a workers and farmers government, as the first step in the fight for a socialist future here and abroad.”

New Jersey nurses strike for increase in staffing

BY ABBY TILSNER

PARAMUS, New Jersey—On June 2 some 425 members of Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE) Local 5091 struck the Bergen Regional Medical Center here. The local includes nurses, social workers, pharmacists, and other health-care workers. With a 1,185-bed capacity, Bergen Regional is the largest hospital in New Jersey.

In the months leading up to the walkout, the union carried out a campaign to win public support for the demand for lower nurse-to-patient ratios in order to provide higher quality care for patients. “Our Fight is Your Fight” union ads were placed on billboards, buses, and in area newspapers. The strikers are also calling for improvements in wages and retirement benefits.

The unionists are staffing lively picket lines 24 hours a day along the main road leading to the hospital and on both sides of the road that leads to its parking lot. The hospital has recruited about 100 scabs and is providing them with room and board in a local hotel.

HPAE members at five other New Jersey hospitals were also set to strike June 2 but reached contract agreements before

the deadline, winning pay raises of 8–10 percent over a two-year contract.

Workers at two of the hospitals, Englewood and Pascack Valley, won an important demand to have staffing ratios written into their contracts. This includes an agreement on the exact number of nurses required in different units. For example, the contract stipulates that there must be one nurse for every six patients on the day shift of a medical and surgical unit.

On the picket line at Bergen Regional, the strikers explained that the fight has been brewing for six years, since the hospital was sold by the county government to a private company. The company slashed the workforce by 42 percent, cut the number of holidays from 16 to 8, cut holiday overtime, and eliminated the pension entirely. The unionists also described the difficulty of doing their jobs without enough supplies such as pillows, towels, blankets, soap, and pajamas. The cafeteria closes at 4:30 p.m., leaving the afternoon and night shift workers without eating facilities that they can reach on their 30-minute lunch break.

The union reports that there has been a 40 percent reduction in the nurse staff since the hospital was privatized six years ago.