

THE MILITANT

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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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UN okays U.S. military operations in Somalia

BY BEN JOYCE

The U.S. government has secured a resolution from the United Nations Security Council granting authority for military operations on Somali territory and in its airspace allegedly to go after pirates.

The move came as Islamist forces seized the Somali city of Merka, a major port 60 miles from the capital Mogadishu, threatening the imperialist-backed government there. The Islamist group Shabab, a bourgeois force that is backed by clan leaders in southern Somalia, took Merka without any struggle December 10.

United Nations Resolution 1851 authorizes several imperialist powers already patrolling the waters around the Horn of Africa to “take all necessary measures that are appropriate in Somalia” to suppress “acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea.” The resolution was passed unanimously.

The conflict between Islamist militias and the government in Mogadishu and the recent rise in piracy off

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Workers in Chicago celebrate sit-in victory

BY BETSY FARLEY
AND JORGE LERTORA

CHICAGO—“Workers are tired of being lied to and mistreated. They tried to throw us out of work with no money, no health insurance, and no job. And we said no,” said Armando Robles, president of United Electrical Workers Local 1110, speaking to a victory party here on December 15.

The unionists were celebrating the success of the six-day sit-in by more than 200 workers laid off at the Republic Windows and Doors plant the previous week. They were demanding 60 days’ pay and medical benefits following the closing of the plant on December 5. They won their demands December 10 in a \$1.75 million settlement that includes eight weeks’ pay, vacation pay, and a two-month extension of health insurance.

The gathering of several hundred workers and supporters was held at the Teamsters Local 705 auditorium. They were addressed by officials of the American Federation of State, County

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After 15-year struggle at N. Carolina plant Meat packers win union at Smithfield



AP (above)
Workers protest outside Smithfield plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, Nov. 17, 2006, against firing of immigrants for allegedly using false documents. Inset: June 26, 2008, pro-union rally in Tar Heel.

BY TIM MAILHOT
AND NED MEASEL

TAR HEEL, North Carolina, December 11—After a decade and a half of struggle and two previous elections, workers at the giant Smithfield Packing hog slaughter plant here scored a victory today. By a vote of 2,041 to 1,879 they voted to be represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union. The vote was held inside the plant over two days, with more than 80 percent of the workers casting ballots.

Many former and current workers said in interviews that the pace of work and lack of respect by bosses were the biggest issues. “They have 20 people on a line cutting meat, but only two packers. We can’t keep up,” said Alicia Rascoe, who has worked in the plant 10 months on the cut floor packing line.

René Hernández, 19, said he has worked four months pulling fat from 17,000 hogs a day together with three other workers. “They used to have

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U.S. officials: Afghan war ‘more complex’ than in Iraq

BY DOUG NELSON

Washington is increasing troops and other resources in Afghanistan, where top U.S. military officials say they are planning for a protracted war. Their fight against the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other forces based in Pakistan and Afghanistan, they say, has proved to be more complicated than Iraq, where U.S. imperialism has made progress toward establishing a stable allied regime.

Officials have announced one combat brigade—comprised of about 3,500 troops—will be sent to Afghanistan in January, with two more brigades likely to arrive by late spring.

While no specific commitments are made beyond January, David Petraeus, head of the U.S. Central Command, has said the U.S. military plans to increase its troop levels by some 20,000.

There are about 60,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan from 41 countries. Of these, about 31,000 are from the United States, two-thirds of which fight under NATO command, the rest under direct U.S. command.

U.S. commanders have stressed that the troop increase has little in common with last year’s 36,000-troop increase in Iraq, dubbed the “surge.”

“The increase in international forces that are needed here will be needed for a sustained basis for some period of time,

until we get to a point where the Afghan security forces have the lead,” Gen. David McKiernan, commander of international and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, told National Public Radio December 5. “So, it’s not a temporary surge sort of approach; it’s a more sustained security increase.”

In a *New York Times* op-ed piece published last month, former U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld described the differences between the conditions under which Washington carried out the surge in Iraq and what exists in Afghanistan today. In Iraq, Rumsfeld explained, the troop increase coincided with several other key factors that began to unfold in late 2006, none of which exist in Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda’s base of support in the Sunni areas began to disintegrate in late summer of 2006, Rumsfeld said. As forces there previously allied with al-Qaeda increasingly found themselves victims of the group’s murder, theft, and extortion, they decided it was in their interest to join the fight against it. The U.S. military has not forged similar alliances in the predominantly Pashtun areas along the Afghan-Pakistani border where the Taliban is based.

In Iraq, the U.S. military had killed the top leadership of al-Qaeda and the

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Ft. Dix ‘antiterror’ trial in N.J. marked by attacks on rights

BY NANCY ROSENSTOCK

CAMDEN, New Jersey—Closing arguments began here December 15 in the frame-up trial of five immigrants accused of plotting to attack the U.S. military base in Fort Dix, New Jersey.

The charges include conspiracy to murder military personnel and attempted murder. If convicted, the men could face life imprisonment. All five have pleaded not guilty.

The defendants, all in their 20s when arrested in May 2007, live in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Mohamad Shnewer, originally from Jordan, drove a taxi in Philadelphia. Three brothers—Eljvir Duka, Dritan Duka, and Shain Duka—are ethnic Albanians from the former Yugoslavia who ran a roofing business. Serdar Tatar is from Turkey and worked in a convenience store in Philadelphia.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Hammer argued for three and a half hours that the defendants were members of a conspiracy and that the government did not have to prove that the conspiracy

was successful, just that the defendants discussed targeting U.S. military personnel.

Rocco Cipparone, attorney for Shnewer, contended in his closing argument that there was no conspiracy, but simply the work of an FBI informant who molded the discussions and urged

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London court lets off cops in 2005 ‘antiterror’ killing

BY JONATHAN SILBERMAN

LONDON—Leading up to the December 12 verdict in the case of electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, shot in the head seven times by cops July 22, 2005, the coroner who presided over the case instructed the jury it could not return a finding that the police action was “unlawful.”

Michael Wright, a retired high court judge, also instructed the jury not to attach any criminal or civil fault to individual cops. The jury was left with two options: “open verdict” or upholding the killing as “lawful.”

By an 8–2 vote, jurors returned an “open verdict” December 12. The term means there was not enough evidence to decide the cause of death.

Wright condemned a silent protest by the de Menezes family, which sought to inform the jurors that they had the legal right to return an “unlawful killing” verdict. Three family members stood up in court displaying T-shirts bearing the message, “Your legal right to decide—unlawful killing verdict.” Wright said, “It’s quite wrong for anyone to seek to put pressure on a jury.”

De Menezes, a 27-year-old worker of Brazilian origin, was pinned down and shot at point-blank range by cops while he sat on a Tube (underground) train.

The police claimed he was suspected in bombings here two weeks earlier on trains and a bus that killed more than 50 people. The day before he was shot, there had been a failed bombing attempt.

At first, then Metropolitan Police

commissioner Ian Blair claimed that de Menezes was “directly linked” to the failed bombing attempt. Police also claimed that he had acted “suspiciously,” was wearing a “padded jacket,” and had vaulted the London Underground pay turnstiles. This soon turned out to be false. The police then changed their tune, stating that de Menezes was not a suspect and his death was a “tragedy.”

Contrary to arguments advanced by the police, the jury found that de Menezes was not acting suspiciously and was not moving toward a cop when the shooting began. Jurors also rejected the police story that they had shouted “armed police” before opening fire.

No individual cop has been prosecuted for the de Menezes killing. A trial was held last year in which the police were found guilty of endangering the public by breaching health and safety laws. They were fined £175,000 (US\$260,000). Cressida Dick, who led the police operation, was explicitly exonerated in the trial. She has since been promoted to deputy assistant commissioner.

In evidence to the inquest, one of the cops—identified as Owen—stated that Dick had given the instruction for a “hard stop” in relation to the pursuit of de Menezes. “A hard stop is an aggressive stop,” Owen clarified. “It’s not an official term but it is an aggressive stop.”

Anna Dunwoodie, who was at the time of the killing sitting two seats away from de Menezes, presented evidence at the inquest. Her testimony



Memorial near London Tube station where cops fatally shot Jean Charles de Menezes (right) in 2005. Police claims that he was tied to bombings proved false. Court, however, recently told jury it could not find cops guilty of a crime.

gave the lie to police claims that de Menezes was doing anything threatening or suspicious. She said she was “most frightened” by a man she later discovered to be the police surveillance officer on the train.

The government and its police forces have sought to use bombing incidents to try to legitimize increased

cop powers and other attacks on the rights of working people, including the shoot-to-kill policy and tightened border controls. The government is also seeking to extend police pre-charge detention powers to 42 days. The cops currently have the right to detain suspects for 28 days before charging them.

British ‘antiterrorist’ cops arrest Conservative Party spokesperson

BY PAUL DAVIES

LONDON—The arrest and nine-hour detention of Damian Green, an opposition Conservative Party spokesperson, for public statements has stirred widespread controversy.

“Antiterrorist” cops searched Green’s home and offices, seized his computer and papers, and froze his e-mail account. They searched his offices at Parliament. The government-appointed sergeant-at-arms, responsible for security when Parliament is sitting, failed to ask the cops for a warrant.

Cops arrested Green on suspicion of “aiding and abetting misconduct in public office” and “conspiring to commit misconduct in a public office,” charges that carry a maximum sentence of life in prison. He was released on bail.

Green was alleged to have made

public information leaked from the Home Office, including material about the government’s immigration policies that could politically embarrass the government. The Home Office is responsible for immigration, drug policy, “counterterrorism,” and police.

The arrest was condemned by Conservative leader David Cameron as “Stalinesque.” The *Sunday Times* said, “The hounding of . . . Green shames the government and the police.”

Opposition in the capitalist media to the raids and arrest has rested on defending “Parliamentary privilege,” not on the right to free speech. The *Daily Telegraph* ran an editorial titled, “The Commons must reclaim its sovereignty,” complaining that the “mystique [of Parliament] has been systematically undermined.”

THE MILITANT

Reporting on union fight at Smithfield

After more than a decade of struggle, meat packers at the Smithfield plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, have won a union. Follow their fight to win a contract and better working conditions in the ‘Militant.’



Smithfield workers in North Carolina join 2007 Martin Luther King Day march.

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Long Island cops cover up anti-immigrant attacks

BY CINDY JAQUITH

Cops in Suffolk County, New York, routinely cover up violent crimes committed against immigrants, according to reports now surfacing in the wake of the murder of Marcelo Lucero. Originally from Ecuador, Lucero was killed November 8 by a gang of youth in the town of Patchogue.

Seven youth have been arraigned on charges ranging from second-degree murder to gang assault and hate crimes in the lynching of Lucero. A presser in a dry cleaning shop, Lucero was jumped by the thugs late at night and stabbed to death.

From very early that morning, however, cops had received several reports by immigrants of attacks on them by thugs but the police took no action. Laundry worker Franklin Tigre told the Long Island daily *Newsday* that he was working alone around 4:00 a.m. when three youth demanded he let them into the laundry. When Tigre told them he couldn't, one of the youth said, "What? You only let Blacks and Latinos in?" A second racist then tossed a lighter into a pile of laundry but it didn't catch fire.

Tigre reported the incident to the cops. The police report, obtained by *Newsday*, said, "[Complainant] reports three white males throwing laundry. Subjects gone upon [police officer's] arrival." But Tigre says he could hear the youth down the street. The case was closed.

At 5:00 a.m. November 8, Marlon García saw two youth beating a Latino and yelled at them to stop. They fired a BB gun at him. García called police and filed a complaint. The officer's report, according to *Newsday*, said, "Canvassed area negative results," implying the suspects were nowhere to be found. But García actually pointed the two thugs out to the cops, he told *Newsday*.

At 11:30 that night, a gang of seven youth beat up Héctor Sierra, who was able to escape. Sierra told WPIX-TV he believes the youth were the same ones who killed Lucero.

A large rally in Patchogue November 14 of more than 2,000 condemned Lucero's murder. Since then, there have been smaller actions in New York City and in Hempstead, Long Island, demanding justice for Lucero.

On November 25 in Washington, D.C., several groups held a news conference to protest the murder. Attending were representatives of the National Council of La Raza, Asian-American Justice Center, Anti-Defamation League, National Urban League, NAACP, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

Some 50 people rallied December 2 outside the Suffolk County legislature. One of the speakers, Patrick Young, program director for the

Central American Refugee Center in Hempstead, called on the government to investigate the county police's claim that between 2004 and 2007 the number of "hate crimes" dropped from 15 to one.

Dozens also testified before the legislative session, including Omar Henriquez of the AFL-CIO Labor Council for Latin American Advancement.

A few opponents of immigrant rights also testified. On November 22 about a dozen rightists, including members of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, demonstrated outside the offices of *Newsday* to protest its coverage of the Lucero case. One carried a sign reading "Newsday Anti-American." Another's sign said "Newsday: What About Americans killed by illegal aliens?"

In another development, an Ecuadoran immigrant died December 12, five days after an assault by several men left him brain dead. Thirty-one-year-old José Sucuzhañay, a real estate agent, was clubbed repeatedly by thugs as he was walking back to his home. (See accompanying photo box.)

After rightist protests, Thai gov't forced out

BY RUTH GRAY

AUCKLAND, New Zealand—Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva was elected prime minister of Thailand December 15 after a court ruling forced the People's Power Party (PPP) government to resign following prolonged demonstrations by right-wing opponents of the PPP connected to the military and Thailand's royalty.

Abhisit is the third prime minister in four months. Parliament elected him, in a close vote, over the former national police chief, Pracha Promnok, who was put forward by the ousted PPP. Some supporters of the PPP defected and voted for Abhisit.

The Democrat Party has been out of power for eight years. It won 34 percent of the vote in last year's elections.

On December 2 the constitutional court found the PPP and two of its coalition partners guilty of vote-buying in the December 2007 elections. The court ordered the parties to disband and barred their leaders from political office for five years, including the prime minister, Somchai Wongsawat.

Following the ruling, PPP members of parliament who still retained their seats regrouped as the Puea Thai (For Thailand) party.

For the past few months the right-wing People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) has conducted a sustained campaign to oust the PPP government. It has mobilized thousands of middle-class Thais into the streets against the PPP government.

Most recently right-wing protesters occupied two airports in Thailand's capital, Bangkok, for a week, stranding 300,000 passengers trying to leave the country. The occupation ended December 3.

PAD proposes an electoral system where a majority of representatives in parliament are appointed and only 30 percent are elected. This is to curb the influence of rural voters, a majority of

300 protest thug killing of Ecuadoran in N.Y.



BROOKLYN, New York—More than 300 people protested in the Bushwick neighborhood here December 14 against the killing of José Sucuzhañay, an Ecuadoran immigrant. He was severely beaten with a baseball bat in the early morning hours of December 7 as he walked home with his brother Romel. The four attackers shouted anti-immigrant and antigay epithets at the brothers, who had been walking home arm-in-arm. The rally, march, and vigil at the beating site were organized by more than a dozen Latino, gay rights, neighborhood, and small business groups and the NAACP. Earlier in the week another brother, Diego, told the press, "Today my brother is the victim, but tomorrow it could be your brother, your mother, your father."

—NANCY BOYASKO

the population, who PAD leaders describe as "ignorant."

PAD leaders accuse the PPP of being a puppet of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin's government had won support among rural toilers through measures granting access to low-interest loans, cheaper health care, and some land redistribution. He was overthrown in a military coup in September 2006 and forced into exile.

After 15 months of military rule, new elections were held in December 2007 and Thaksin's party, renamed as the PPP, was reelected to government. Somchai, who is Thaksin's brother-in-law, eventually became prime minister.

PAD supporters, who wear yellow clothing as a symbol of their allegiance to Thailand's King Bhumibol

Adulyadej, had vowed to continue protesting until all Thaksin supporters were removed from government.

Pro-government forces calling themselves the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship have begun to mobilize in response to PAD. On November 30, 15,000 rallied in Bangkok. Many wore red T-shirts and headbands with the words "No Coup" emblazoned on them.

Several days later, hundreds picketed outside the court to oppose the electoral fraud case against the government. Protesters condemned the election of Abhisit as prime minister, calling it a "silent coup."

Seven people have been killed and hundreds have been injured in the political conflict over the last six months.

More unemployed workers excluded from jobless benefits

BY TOM FISKE

MINNEAPOLIS—Growing numbers of workers are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain unemployment benefits. Only 35 percent of workers the federal government officially counts as unemployed currently receive these benefits, down from 44 percent in 2001, the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* said December 6. Fifty years ago the figure was 55 percent.

Fewer than 15 percent of low-paid workers receive benefits, according to the Government Accountability Office. In Texas last year only 19 percent of unemployed workers received benefits.

Currently 10.3 million workers, or 6.7 percent, are unemployed according to U.S. Labor Department figures. This number greatly understates the actual figure. It does not include 1.9 million workers the government claims have not been searching for

jobs, nor 7.3 million involuntarily working part-time. Including them means that 12.5 percent of the workforce is unemployed or underemployed.

The state and federal governments set conditions for eligibility for benefits. Those who don't qualify include many part-time workers, those who quit or were fired, and workers who didn't earn enough money in a one-year "base period," which often excludes the most recent three to six months.

In addition, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies reports that 30 state governments may run out of funds to pay unemployment benefits. "Funds in two states, Indiana and Michigan, have already dried up, and both states are borrowing from the federal government to make payments to the unemployed," the *New York Times* said December 15.

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Defense of Cuban Five featured at int'l labor conference in Tijuana

BY ARLENE RUBINSTEIN

TIJUANA, Mexico—About 125 people heard Magali Llorca speak here on the fight to free five Cuban revolutionaries, including her son Fernando González, who have been unjustly imprisoned in the United States for a decade.

The December 5 program opened the Cuba/Venezuela/Mexico/North America 2008 Labor Conference. The three-day conference was sponsored by the U.S.-Cuba Labor Exchange along with other union and political organizations.

Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, René González, and Fernando González—known internationally as the Cuban Five—were arrested by FBI agents in south Florida in 1998 and sentenced to long prison terms on false charges ranging from “conspiracy to commit espionage” to, in the case of Hernández, “conspiracy to commit murder.” They had been in the United States keeping tabs on counterrevolutionary groups that have carried out violent attacks against Cuba.

“The five face an additional sentence, which is not written anywhere—the denial of family visits,” said Llorca.

While all five have been allowed some family visits, Olga Salanueva and Adriana Pérez, whose husbands are René González and Gerardo Hernández, respectively, have been repeatedly denied visas to visit their husbands, she said.

Silvia García, a staff person for Cuba’s National Assembly, noted that defense attorneys for the framed-up Cubans are preparing an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. She stressed the importance of the international defense campaign so the judges will “know the world is watching,” García said, adding that the court agrees to hear only a small percentage of the cases that come before it.

Supporters of the fight are working to get “friend of the court” briefs worldwide backing the appeal. “A lot of parliaments, human rights commissions, and other bodies around the

world have supported the case of the five,” García said, including the Mexican Senate.

Alicia Jrapko, representing the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five, noted that Andrew Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, sent a letter to President George Bush calling for relatives of the imprisoned Cubans to receive visas to visit.

A short video, *The Miami Five Ten Years On*, highlighted support for the defense campaign by trade unions in the United Kingdom.

Among those attending the program were about a dozen teachers and others from Mexicali, 120 miles east of Tijuana, who have been active in fighting cuts in social services. They said they plan to organize a local committee in defense of the five.

International panel

The following day’s program featured a panel of unionists from Cuba, Mexico, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, the Philippines, Haiti, and the United States. Their presentations highlighted the impact of the world economic contraction on working people in the Americas, as well as resistance to



Militant

December 5 panel in Tijuana, Mexico, on the Cuban Five. From left, Alicia Jrapko of International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five; Magali Llorca, mother of Fernando González, one of five jailed Cuban revolutionaries; Silvia García, staff person of Cuban National Assembly.

these conditions.

The speakers included Edgar Paez of the SINALTRAINAL food workers union in Colombia; Luis Humberto García of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union; Paul Loulou Chery, secretary general of the Confederation of Haitian Workers; Cristina Vasquez of the Western States Regional Joint Board of UNITE HERE; and Ernesto Freire Cazan, head of foreign relations for the Central Organization of Cuban Workers.

Freire pointed to the example of revolutionary Cuba’s internationalist solidarity with working people world-

wide. For example, he said, “Union members from Cuba are helping in Haiti as health-care workers, teachers, and in the merchant marine.”

Among those at the conference were members of Friends of Cuba in Tijuana. One of them brought a stack of materials publicizing the International Conference on Martí, Juárez, and Lincoln in the Soul of Our America, which will take place May 18–19 in Monterrey, Mexico. The literature says the event will discuss “how to confront the world crisis today and how to defend the interests of the vast majority of toiling humanity.”

UN okays U.S. military operations in Somalia

Continued from front page

Somalia’s coast underscore the deep political chaos that has marked the country for the past two decades and subjected the toilers there to nearly two decades of civil war.

After U.S.-backed dictator Siad Barre was overthrown in a 1991 coup, central authority in Somalia collapsed. Imperialist-fostered divisions based on clan rivalries have left the capitalist class fragmented among six major clans, each vying for political influence.

Immense economic underdevelopment from a legacy of imperialist domination is a major factor in the weakness of the capitalist-landlord class there and its inability to maintain any kind of political stability.

Somalia’s economy remains largely based on nomadic cattle raising and trading in the ports. There is a very small working class.

Washington has attempted to stabilize the region by military force, including a 1993–94 failed invasion. In 2004, Washington patched together a “transitional” government, which was too weak to take the capital and operated instead out of the western town of Baidoa.

In June 2006, the Somali Islamic Courts Council, a rival military force to the rulers in Mogadishu, took power. That December, an invasion by Ethiopian troops with U.S. military support routed the council and replaced it with the imperialist-backed transitional regime. Ethiopian troops have since remained in Somalia, trying to maintain the transitional government’s hold. Recently, the Ethiopian government announced it will soon be withdrawing its troops, a move that may hasten the fall of the transitional regime.

Without outside force to back it up, the transitional government is losing ground. President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed announced December 14 he was firing Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein because the government had “failed to accomplish its duties.” Hussein said that the president had no right to fire him and he was not going anywhere. In a confidence vote, the parliament backed Hussein 143 to 20.

Somalia’s strategic position in the Horn of Africa is of high interest to the major imperialist powers for military reasons and because it is an important trade route between Europe and Asia. As many as 21,000 ships pass through the area each year.

There have been some 100 pirate

attacks off the coast of Somalia in the past year. As many as 14 ships and nearly 300 crew members are currently in captivity, according to the U.S. Navy. Last month the Saudi supertanker the *Sirius Star* was captured loaded with \$100 million of crude oil. Somali pirates are also holding a Ukrainian ship carrying tanks and other weaponry.

The European Union December 15 sent four warships and two maritime reconnaissance aircraft to the region to replace a NATO operation that has been patrolling the waters there since the end of October. Britain, France, Greece, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands have agreed to contribute at least 10 warships and three reconnaissance aircraft to the one-year mission, the EU’s first naval operation.

Washington has justified its intervention in Somalia as part of its “global war on terror.” Last May, at least 10 people were killed when the U.S. military carried out a missile strike in the city of Dusa Marreb while going after an alleged al-Qaeda leader.

That same month protests and riots erupted there over rising food prices, part of the worldwide response to the economic crisis and its impact on toilers in the semicolonial world. Tens of thousands took to the streets in early May and at least five were killed when government troops fired into the crowds. At that time skyrocketing inflation had sent prices for basic cereals such as rice and sorghum up between 100 percent and 400 percent from the previous year.

In January 2007, U.S. helicopter gunships bombed several towns in southern Somalia, claiming they were hunting for al-Qaeda operatives.

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Canadian rulers face parliamentary crisis

BY JOHN STEELE

MONTREAL—Under the pressure of the unfolding world economic crisis, Canada’s capitalist rulers have faced political instability and a parliamentary crisis since the October 14 federal election won by the Conservatives.

On December 1 the Liberals and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) formed a coalition backed by the Bloc Quebecois (BQ), a capitalist party that supports sovereignty for Quebec, to replace the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. They accuse the Conservative minority government of not doing enough to stimulate the economy.

To prevent a no-confidence vote that would oust him, Harper shut down Parliament December 4. He also launched a chauvinist, anti-Quebec propaganda campaign slamming the new coalition as “a betrayal of the best interests of our country.”

The officialdom of the Canadian Labour Congress and the three Quebec union federations initiated rallies in at least 12 cities across the country backing the moves toward a Liberal-NDP coalition government. At a Montreal rally of about 1,000 people, Liberal, NDP, BQ, and union speakers claimed the coalition was defending “Can-

dian democracy” and the interests of working people. Many spoke against the Conservative “Quebec-bashing” campaign.

Following the parliamentary shut-down, a long-term leadership crisis in the Liberal party ended with the resignation of its national leader, Stéphane Dion, and his replacement with Michael Ignatieff.

Parliament will reopen January 26 and the next day the Conservative government will present its proposed budget. If it is defeated by the opposition, that could precipitate another federal election or revive the Liberal-NDP coalition option.

Tens of thousands of layoffs

The backdrop to this political instability is the rapid contraction of Canada’s economy.

In November 71,000 workers were thrown out of work, the biggest monthly job loss since the recession of 1982. In Ontario, Canada’s industrial heartland, 66,000 jobs were cut, many in the automobile industry. Nationally, 38,000 jobs in the service sector were lost.

Mining towns like Sudbury are facing massive layoffs with the drop in the price of nickel. In the West, slumping oil prices foreshadow layoffs in Alberta and elsewhere as drilling and

elections and that you commit that this will not be repeated in the future.

“With respect to your surprise, we were the candidates of the Communist League in these elections. . . . It is antidemocratic electoral laws that prevent the name of our party being on the ballot. This being said, it is not only candidates who are concerned by the actions of your administration; such an attack on the freedom of expression threatens the rights of all.”

Communist League opposes attacks on free speech in Canada elections

BY JOE YOUNG

MONTREAL—The mayor of Westmount, Quebec, a city on the island of Montreal, has conceded that it was wrong for city employees to tear down campaign signs for William Sloan, the Communist Party of Canada candidate in Westmount-Ville-Marie in the October 14 federal election. His signs called for “Canada out of Afghanistan” and “End Canadian Support to Apartheid Israel.”

Communist League candidates protested the attack. In an October 20 letter to Westmount mayor Karin Marks, Michel Dugré and Joseph Young, candidates in Rosemont-La Petite Patrie and St. Léonard-St. Michel respectively, said, “This action is a serious attack on freedom of expression. It violates the election law. We demand a public apology on the part of the City of Westmount and a commitment on its part that such actions will not be repeated.”

In her November 7 reply, the mayor said, “I recognize that these signs shouldn’t have been taken down by agents of the Public Safety Service. It was, however, an unfortunate accidental error by a city employee.”

At the same time, Marks questioned the very existence of the Communist League. Her letter said, “I note equally with some surprise that the Communist League is not on the register of political parties registered with Elections Canada. Therefore I permit myself to question your interest in this affair.”

In their December 6 reply, Dugré and Young explained, “We are satisfied to see that you recognize the antidemocratic character of the actions carried out by your administration against the Communist Party candidate in the recent federal



UNITE HERE Canada

Hotel workers at Radisson Suites and Holiday Inn at Toronto airport in July rally for improved job conditions and wages. With contraction of production and rising unemployment, Canadian bosses are demanding deeper wage and benefit concessions from workers.

other oil-related projects are cancelled or put on hold. Layoffs and plant closures are accelerating in the forest and pulp and paper industries.

The Canadian dollar, which has climbed to par with the U.S. dollar, has fallen to about 80 U.S. cents. Across the country home prices are dropping at a sharp rate.

Over the past months the federal government has given \$25 billion to Canada’s banks to avoid a crisis. Ford, GM, and Chrysler are demanding an emergency government financial bailout of up to \$7.2 billion for their plants in Canada.

Communist League candidate speaks

The parliamentary saga in Ottawa completely overshadowed the December 8 Quebec provincial election. The former minority Liberal government was returned with a smaller-than-expected majority of 66 seats in the 125-seat Quebec National Assembly. The bourgeois nationalist Parti Quebecois (PQ), which favors sovereignty for Quebec, moved up, coming in second with 51 seats to become the official opposition.

The previous official opposition, the right-wing Quebec Democratic Action, which is for Quebec autonomy, was reduced to third place with seven seats. Quebec Solidaire, a reformist party formed in 2006, elected one member in a Montreal district. Que-

bec Solidaire is the product of the fusion of several parties of the petty-bourgeois left. It supports Quebec’s sovereignty.

Speaking on the Ottawa developments at a Militant Labor Forum one day before the Quebec election, Michel Prairie, Communist League candidate in the Montreal electoral district of Laurier-Dorion, said, “The anti-Quebec campaign of the federal government aims at weakening our capacity to resist by deepening divisions in the working class along national lines.

“Despite their differences, both Conservative and Liberal-NDP coalition proposals to deal with the economic crisis start with propping up the capitalist system and increasing profit rates at the expense of working people.”

Prairie said that “backing a Liberal-NDP coalition government in no way strengthens the capacity of working people to defend ourselves as the capitalist crisis unfolds.”

“The only realistic perspective for workers is to take the road of independent political action in order to build a revolutionary movement of millions to take political power out of the hands of the capitalist class,” he explained.

Fighting workers should advance the perspective of building a labor party that is based on a transformed and fighting union movement, Prairie said.

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



December 30, 1983

The British labor movement suffered a big blow this month when the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Britain’s equivalent of the AFL-CIO, refused to back the country’s leading printers union, the 133,000 member National Graphical Association, in a key struggle against union-busting laws.

The NGA’s six-month struggle to defend unionized shops in the printing industry has led to a major challenge of antiunion laws enacted by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government. The laws are part of a serious attack that the employers have launched on all fronts against British workers.

At an important turning point in the fight, the TUC general council voted to abide by the antiunion laws rather than extend badly needed support to the NGA.



December 29, 1958

IRINJALAKUDA, SOUTH INDIA—Kerala is the smallest state in India with 14,980 square miles and a population of now over 15 million. Eighty percent of the people of this tiny, but beautiful, part of the Indian sub-continent, depend upon agriculture for a living. Nevertheless, this is a deficit area in respect to food. The state has to purchase about two-thirds of its food needs from other states.

The percentage of literacy in Kerala is 84%, the highest of any state in India. But in the number of unemployed, too, Kerala leads with about four million. Because of that Kerala has been named the “Problem State” of India. The main problems have never been solved although more than half a dozen Congress Party ministries and one Praja Socialist party ministry have ruled the state since 1947 when India achieved independence.



December 30, 1933

“Six months of this and I’ll be fit for the lunatic asylum”—this remark of a former taxicab driver sums up the attitude of the C.W.A. [Civil Works Administration] workers to the degrading nonsense which they must go through in order to qualify for the Roosevelt Dole in Prospect Park, Brooklyn.

It is not that we are forced to do hard work, for long hours at low wages. No, we spend 8 hours a day going through the motions of work. Shoveling dirt on a truck only to see it dumped back exactly where it was taken from.

When we gather in a group to talk, the foreman again speaks. “Say boys, don’t stand around talking, you’ll be getting me in wrong. Take it easy but act as though you were doing something.”

So, we start to “work”—push the shovel slowly into the pile of earth [and] carry a couple of handfuls of earth some 25 yards.

Cuba marks centennial of Independence

Two presentations on little-known history of party that championed black

The story of the Independent Party of Color (PIC) in Cuba, from its founding in 1908 to the massacre in 1912 of more than 3,000 of its black and mulatto members and supporters, is a chapter of history largely unknown within Cuba and abroad.

Knowledge of the PIC and the 1912 massacre was buried by the various capitalist regimes in Cuba between then and 1958. Even after the Cuban Revolution's triumph in 1959, these events remained little-known.

The story of the Independent Party of Color is intertwined with the legacy and reality of racism in Cuba. The 1959 revolution eliminated all legal forms of discrimination, including Jim Crow practices imposed on Cuba during the U.S. military occupation following 1898. And by eliminating the source of institutionalized racism—capitalism—it opened the door to unprecedented gains by blacks and mulattos and their fuller integration into all aspects of Cuban society.

But many deep-rooted prejudices nonetheless remained. With the collapse in 1990–91 of the Soviet and Eastern European regimes, Cuba lost 85 percent of its foreign trade. Cuba's increased exposure to the world capitalist market and the economic measures the government had to take in response to this crisis have led to increased inequalities, leading to the reinforcing of racial prejudices that had long been diminishing.

The decision last year by the Communist Party of Cuba to establish a commission to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the PIC's founding was thus of great importance, not just in rescuing this historical chapter from oblivion, but as part of addressing the challenge of combating the legacy of racism today.

The commission's president is Fernando Martínez Heredia, a noted Marxist author and essayist and winner of the 2006 National Social Sciences Award. Other members include Digna Castañeda Fuertes, professor of Caribbean studies at the University of Havana; Marta Cordies Jackson, director of the Fernando Ortiz African Cultural Center; Eusebio Leal, official historian of Havana; Rogelio Martínez Fure, National Folkloric Ensemble of Cuba; author and poet Nancy Morejón; Leida Oquendo, the commission's executive secretary and a member of the Cuban Academy of Sciences; veteran journalist Marta Rojas; and filmmaker Gloria Rolando.

Below are major excerpts from pre-



Col. Pedro Ivonet (left) and Evaristo Estenoz, veterans of Cuba's 1895 independence war, became leaders of Independent Party of Color, founded in 1908.



sentations to two events organized by the commission this year, reviewing the history of the PIC and its importance for today. The first, titled "Social Diversity Is Not a Weakness of the Nation, but Rather a Very Important Example of its Richness," was given by Fernando Martínez Heredia at the opening session of the commission's work on January 14. The second, titled "Preserving Memory," was given by Miguel Barnet on August 7 to a meeting in Havana commemorating the 100th anniversary of the PIC's founding. Miguel Barnet is president of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and author of *Biography of a Runaway Slave*.

The translation and subheadings are by the *Militant*.

—MIKE TABER



BY FERNANDO MARTÍNEZ HEREDIA

The great export-based economy that led Cuba to advance so far materially during the 19th century was built on the bases of a massive slave population numbering a million Africans, the chief labor force of that mode of production. It was a horrific form of exploitation and cultural plunder, embodying a social order of oppression, deep inequalities, castes, and antiblack racism. That social order was the antithesis of the great advances in technology, enterprise, ideas, literature, and art of that era. But at the same time it furnished the material basis that made these possible. Such terrible contradictions could not be overcome through evolution, because the only concern of the ruling class of Cuba was capitalist profits and maintaining its so-

cial power. It therefore defended at all times the system that enabled it to be the exploiter, and it did not hesitate to be antinational when necessary.

Insurrections against Spanish rule

A new situation was created by the armed insurrections of 1868 and 1898.¹ The revolution of 1868 united abolitionism with the fight for independence, and forged ties between the races based on shared blood, sacrifice, and heroism. The revolution of 1895, with its popular liberation war and mass sacrifices by the Cuban people to defeat Spanish colonialism, attacked the root of the colonial order and developed fraternal relations between the races, mutual respect, and the ideal of equality of all before the law and in social life. Decades of evolution and reforms could never have obtained what was achieved during those years of combat and mobilization. Blacks and mulattos participated in that war on a vast scale.

But the imperialist intervention and occupation stymied the revolution and cut short the country's sovereignty. The republic of 1902 remained under a new form of domination by neocolonialism and by the Cuban bourgeoisie, an accomplice and subordinate of imperialism.

Cuba attained its independence as a republic and the popular masses achieved citizenship, but under those conditions there were no social changes in the interests of working people or small farmers. Black and mulatto Cubans suffered permanently from the very disadvantageous social situation in which slavery and colonialism had left them, and they lacked the possibilities to pressure, negotiate, and obtain their rights. Racism was able to preserve great strength both in work and in society as a whole, as well as in the political arena. There was a great contradiction between this situation and the ideals of the *mambí* effort,² and with the democratic character that

the republic should have had. Dissatisfaction among the old combatants and among the black and mulatto population often found expression during those first years of the century. . . .

On Aug. 7, 1908, the Independent Group of Color was founded in Havana. Chairing the meeting was war veteran Evaristo Estenoz Corominas, and the secretary was journalist Gregorio Surín. Following the elections of November of that year, intensive organizational work was conducted. Soon the Independent Party of Color was constituted in virtually the entire country, coming to have thousands of sympathizers and followers. In February 1910 Colonel Pedro Ivonet joined. A *mambí* hero from the Invasion and the Pinar del Río campaign, he assumed the chairmanship of the party in Oriente.

The new party organized its activities utilizing legal methods of public expression and electoral activity. Like many other blacks and mulattos, the Independents linked their republican and democratic nationalism to demands and efforts for social advancement and to achieve civil rights as men and women "of color." But they tried to achieve these goals and confront racism through a political party, as a tool that could theoretically be used within the norms of the system.

I call attention to the demands of their program, because these were very advanced and went far beyond the racial dimension. The Independents always identified themselves as Cubans, and demanded a sovereign, egalitarian republic, defending jobs for the native-born, for the return to Cuba of economic emigres, and for immigration without racial discrimination. They advocated the eight-hour day and labor courts to hear disputes between workers and bosses; distribution of state and other lands to poor Cubans who worked them; and defense of farmers against land grabbers. They called for free education on all levels, and state control of education. They called for changes in the administration of justice and the prison system that favored fairness and education of the poor. And they advocated other measures that transcended racial questions.

Together with other Cubans, the Independents criticized U.S. domination, the usurpation of territory by the Guantánamo base, and the prevailing racism in the U.S. But the relations between nationalism and the racial question were complex and uncertain, because racism clearly expressed the country's retreat with regard to the revolutionary practices and program of 1895. Social conservatism was the necessary counterweight to the existence of the republic and economic liberalism. Patriotism had to be blind to races, and therefore keep quiet in face of injustices committed for racial



Independents of Color by Serulín Portuondo was first published in 1950, it was



Left, Fernando Martínez Heredia speaks in London, September 2006. Right, Miguel Barnet during 2007 interview. They spoke at Havana event on centennial of Independent Party of Color.

1. From 1868 to 1898 Cubans waged a series of wars for independence from Spain. The first, the Ten Years War, lasted from 1868 to 1878, followed by the "Little War" in 1879–80. The final war for independence was fought from 1895 to 1898, leading to the end of Spanish colonial rule. It was immediately followed, however, by a U.S. military occupation of the country.

2. *Mambí* was the name given to fighters against Spanish colonial rule in Cuba's wars of independence.

Independent Party of Color

Black rights in Cuba in early 1900s

reasons. The idea of risking the loss of sovereignty at the hands of the U.S. was linked to the untouchability of the existing order, and every movement that genuinely or supposedly threatened this order was condemned. “National interest” could be used to wall off demands and organizations of social or racial struggle, with the oppressor and oppressed having common interests. This wasn’t simply imposed. The nation had meaning and it had values that were very important for the majority of the country. Therefore the majority of persons “of color” kept apart from, or rejected, political actions based on race in the case of the Independents of Color, even during the great crime of 1912. Some undoubtedly had little consciousness. But many did not agree with racial mobilization as a basis of political action.

From 1908 to 1912 the members of the PIC confronted all this—indifference or incomprehension, but above all the systematic attacks of the neocolonial bourgeois power and its instruments. Slandered in a thousand ways, cynically accused of being racists, the PIC was outlawed in 1910 through an amendment to the Electoral Law (the Morúa Amendment), with many leaders and activists imprisoned for six months. With great tenacity and consistency, they defended their cause in the newspaper *Previsión*, and every way they could, without getting involved in political wheeling and dealing as was common at the time.



Los independentes de color by Serafín Portuondo. First published in 1959, this book is the first serious work on the history of the Independent Party of Color. First published in 1959, it was reissued in 2002.

May 20, 1912, the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic. Their aim was to demand the party’s legalization. In Oriente thousands of Independents rose up with very few arms, and without a real plan of war, with Estenoz and Ivonet in charge. In Las Villas there were also uprisings.

That tactic turned out to be disastrous. The government of José Miguel Gómez went from political juggling to mobilizing thousands of troops against them, while a very dirty press campaign demonized them. During June and July a bloodbath was carried out with impunity by the republican government. Estenoz, Ivonet, and at least 3,000 non-white Cubans were murdered, the majority in Oriente province. This served only to repress a broad sector of the Oriente peasantry that was dispossessed and impoverished by capitalist expansion. A great wave of repression, prisons, persecutions, and an intensification of antiblack racism swept over the entire country. The official republic celebrated the great crime at the end of that summer, and then immediately consigned it to oblivion, a situation that lasted almost half a century.

In 1959 the victorious insurrection put forward for all Cubans a supraracial egalitarianism. The vast transformation of life, social relations, and institutions created the foundation for that goal to

be attainable. In the struggles and intensive work that followed, the unity of the people was extolled as a higher political virtue. Brotherhood among Cubans of different races and social origins was considered an ideal that could be realized quickly, and a clear announcement of definitive liberation. In the midst of concrete work and the development of consciousness that offered equal opportunities, racism was rejected and condemned as a scourge of the past. And confidence grew that the advance of socialism would eliminate defects among individuals and social remnants.

In the 1960s some publications referred to the great racist repression of 1912 as part of an abominable past, but there was little analysis of its meaning and its place in the history of racism and capitalist rule in Cuba.³ Following this, 1912 returned to the shadows in the historical culture that was becoming socialist in the country, even though a number of authors were doing historical research into this event, something that in recent years has made significant contributions.

Initiative by Cuban leadership

Nevertheless, the initiative of the Communist Party in creating this commission is not the result of such advances, but rather of the realities, needs, and plans of Cuba today. The great crisis that hit the country 15 years ago—and the measures adopted to overcome it—have produced notable changes in a number of aspects of material and spiritual life, and have had an impact on behavior, values, ways of living, motivations, and expectations. Social disintegration has brought to light many diversities—and in some cases has fueled them. But we are not observing such processes with fear. Social diversity is not a weakness of the nation, but rather a very important example of its richness. It’s not a question of simply admitting these things, or tolerating them. They must be understood as a force with extraordinary potential. The socialist road will become strong and will deepen if it is capable of embracing these diversities and living with them, of leading them and learning from them simultaneously, of respecting their identities and attending to their demands—at the same time as they are asked to contribute to the effort of all and to give a large part of their virtues and their work to the community.

The racial question has been raised increasingly in recent years. We note again that a large part of those who continue to be the most disadvantaged are

3. The main proponents of this line were leaders of the former pro-Moscow Popular Socialist Party (PSP), who asserted that going back to this history would be “divisive.” For example, the only serious work on the Independents of Color until recently was a 1950 book by a PSP member whose father had been a leader of the PIC (*Los independentes de color* by Serafín Portuondo). But immediately after publication, the book was attacked in the PSP’s press as being “un-Marxist,” with criticisms of the PIC for “dividing the working class.”



Cuban *mambises* (independence fighters) during 1895–98 war against Spanish colonial rule. Blacks joined in massive numbers and helped lead Cuban independence struggle, which was intertwined with fight to abolish slavery.

blacks and mulattos, and that racism flourishes when ties of solidarity and socialist values weaken. In the muffled but tremendous cultural battle taking place between those ties and the relations and values of capitalism, it’s clear which side should be taken by those who are conscious of their position in society and of the social process they must defend. Today a part of the Cuban population are Cuban above all, like the Independents of Color almost a century ago, but also identify themselves as blacks and mulattos. We need those identities and that consciousness to march hand in hand, and to strengthen the socialist revolution and its work. Like all important things, this is very difficult to realize in practice. . . .

It’s the job of this commission to help recover the historical memory of a stage of the struggles and aspirations of the Cuban people for their rights and their liberation from all domination, broadening one part of the national consciousness and helping to better understand the painful and tenacious cultural legacy of racism in our country.

It must thus encourage an understanding of the pluralistic character of the nation’s culture, and turning that complex richness into a greater force in our way of life and of the social undertaking we defend. . . .

If we work as brothers and sisters, in an organized way and without faltering, and we advance along this road, then we will fulfill this task.

Thank you very much.



BY MIGUEL BARNET

As is almost always the case, history is written by the conquerors, and the conquered are therefore described through the eyes and psychology of the ruling classes. Such was the fate of the Independent Party of Color, humiliated and outraged by bourgeois politics and history during the neocolonial republic. All Cubans owe a great debt to those patriots who, on Aug. 7, 1908, exactly 100 years ago today, led by Pedro Ivonet and Evaristo Estenoz and meeting in the latter’s home, founded a party that was stigmatized for almost 100 years. . . .

The party, apart from calling for civil rights for Cuban blacks and mulattos, had a broad social program to benefit the poorest strata, irrespective of color. This included the right to strike, the eight-hour day, the right to education up to the highest levels, health care, and other benefits that, if achieved, would have been a social conquest unprecedented in the history of the continent.

Not only did “persons of color”—the term of the day—constitute the members and sympathizers of the party, but

it was essentially a Cuban party. Those who did not act like patriots were their oppressors, the veritable traitors who committed an unforgivable holocaust.

In 1908 Cuba was undergoing its second military occupation by Yankee troops. As we know, the newly emerging empire employed all methods at its disposal to economically and politically dominate our country. Racial and social discrimination played a part in its strategy, just as it did in the United States itself. This schema was mechanically imposed on Cuba, which left traces that have still not been erased. . . .

History has not done justice to the movement of the Independents of Color. Cuba’s history has been a history of genocide. Of our aboriginal peoples—the first inhabitants of the island—whose numbers decreased by several hundred thousand during the sixteenth century. Of the Ladder Conspiracy.⁴ Of Valeriano Weyler’s concentration camps in the last battle for liberty.⁵ Of the tyrant Fulgencio Batista, who showed off his methods of torture and terror at Monca-

Continued on page 9

4. In 1844 Spanish colonial authorities announced they had discovered plans for a slave revolt organized by free Blacks and slaves, which became known as the “Ladder Conspiracy,” referring to the ladders to which suspects were bound as they were whipped until they “confessed” or died. Although the existence of such a conspiracy is in doubt, 98 people were sentenced to death, and many others were imprisoned, exiled, or died under torture.

5. During the 1895–98 war, Spanish general Valeriano Weyler was appointed governor of Cuba, with orders to suppress the independence struggle. His most notorious act was

For further reading...

New International no. 14

“The historical consequences on a global scale of the African slave trade, slave revolts, and anti-Black racism have left a social and political legacy among Blacks worldwide. That legacy cannot simply be wiped clean by the dictatorship of the proletariat, however sweeping and unique those conquests in Cuba may be.”

from “Revolution, Internationalism, and Socialism: The Last Year of Malcolm X” by Jack Barnes

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Chicago sit-in victory

Continued from front page
and Municipal Employees; Operating Engineers; United Auto Workers; Teamsters union; UNITE HERE; and Service Employees International Union. Also speaking were representatives of the Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues and the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

“Our victory is no longer just for workers at Republic Windows, but for all workers around the world,” Robles said.

Ricardo Cáceres, a worker with 15 years in the plant, said his uncle, an electrician in Honduras, called after seeing him in the factory on CNN. “My uncle is union, and he said our fight has opened the door for workers everywhere, giving them confidence.”

The day before, another celebration was held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in the heavily Mexican neighborhood of La Villita (Little Village). Several Republic workers took turns speaking to the assembled crowd there.

Raúl Flores said, “We won because we were Latino immigrants, whites, and Blacks, and we were united. When we started our fight we didn’t know how much support we would get from people we didn’t even know.”

Both events drew participation by other workers who face similar situations such as plant shutdowns and layoffs. Víctor Ojeda said he was laid off by Olmarc Packaging Company when it closed in August. He noted that workers there, who received no compensation when the company declared bankruptcy, have decided to organize a meeting to see what they can do to fight for what they are owed.

Five laid-off workers from the Heine-mann’s bakery attended the event at the Teamsters hall. They have been entangled in legal litigations since 2005 to win benefits under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, under which companies have to give workers 60 days’ warning of plant closures. “We came to support and learn from the fight



Militant/Jorge Lertora

Workers laid off by Republic Windows and Doors and their families celebrate victory at Teamsters hall in Chicago December 15 after sit-in won 60 days’ pay and medical benefits.

of the Republic Window workers,” said Martín Quiroz.

Melvin Maclin, one of the United Electrical Workers (UE) Local 1110 members who participated in the sit-in, said in an interview, “We really wanted to keep this out of the courts. It would

have been years until we saw anything. But the truth is it was already in the court of public opinion, and that’s why we won.”

Workers at Republic Windows had been involved in a series of fights prior to the sit-in. Vicente Rangel, a shop steward, described how they went on strike several years ago. “We lost that strike because the union told us to go back to work,” he said. “After that we decided to decertify that union and get a better union.”

Rangel said workers had also marched in the May Day mobilizations for legalization of immigrants in 2006, 2007, and 2008. “We told the company to give us the day off, because we weren’t going to come to work anyway,” he said. That too, he added, was part of making the union stronger.

UE international representative Mark Meinster said the plan for the sit-in came from workers in the plant. “Republic workers aren’t that different from workers anywhere. The difference is they stood up. They organized this fight.”

Ron Bender, an African American worker with 14 years at Republic Windows, said, “This was an important victory because for so long, working people would just lie down and take things without a fight. We took a step forward for all working men and women in this country.”

Alyson Kennedy contributed to this article.

Fort Dix ‘antiterror’ trial in New Jersey

Continued from front page
the watching of al-Qaeda videos.

Government officials are using the trial to deepen their attack on the political rights of working people.

U.S. senator from New Jersey Frank Lautenberg commented immediately after the arrests that there was a need to close a “terrorist gap” that allows people to purchase guns in the United States. Richard Canas, director of the state of New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, called the defendants “homegrown terrorists.” He said “they are people who live and work in our communities and who enjoy the social benefits of our society while secretly aspiring to commit violence against our nation.”

Leading up to the trial, over a dozen motions presented by the defense were denied by the judge. The five were denied bail. The judge also denied their request to move the trial out of New Jersey so they could receive a fair trial.

The defendants are being held at the Federal Detention Center in Philadelphia in a special unit where they are each allowed only one telephone call a month. “I’m caged like an animal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” Shnewer wrote to the judge, complaining about their living conditions. Dritan Duka wrote, “I don’t know why they are treating us like this. I’m worried that we won’t receive a fair trial with all the lies being said in the media and by the prosecutor.”

In response, U.S. District Judge Robert Kugler said, “All of the defendants need to understand it’s called a jail for a reason. It’s not a motel, it’s a jail.”

No evidence of an illegal act

During the entire trial, the prosecution has not produced any evidence of an illegal act by any of the five men. The media has tried to whip up a campaign complete with headlines of “jihad training,” referring to a vacation the defendants took in the Pocono Mountains.

The government’s case rests on testimony by two FBI informers who infiltrated the group. What becomes clear in the testimony is that these FBI informers were the ones trying to prod the group to take action. Mahmoud Omar, one of the FBI agents, complained to Shnewer in August 2006, “You keep prolonging it.

We’ve been talking about this matter for three months. Start taking some steps. That’s it.”

Omar offered to get machine guns and said he would put up \$10,000. He secretly recorded hundreds of hours of conversations with the other men over 15 months. At least 125 files were confiscated from Shnewer’s laptop computer.

In one conversation recorded between Omar and Shnewer they talked about car repairs, about the injustices faced by Muslims around the world, and their admiration for Osama bin Laden.

Shnewer, speaking in Arabic, is quoted as allegedly saying, “If you want to do anything there is Fort Dix.” Ten days later the two men drove to Fort Dix with the FBI watching and listening as they discussed a possible attack. But no attack ever took place.

The second FBI informer, Besnik Bakalli, also secretly recorded conversations with the men. One recording was of Eljvir Duka saying that he watched the video that showed the May 2004 al-

Qaeda beheading of Nicholas Berg in Iraq so many times that “now we can watch it with no problems.” Bakalli also went with the Duka brothers to the Poconos, where he alleges they held “training” with ammunition and weapons. However, in all of the secretly recorded conversations there is no reference to any specific timetable, target, or method of attack.

These two FBI informers reveal a lot about the character of the secret police in this country. Omar was recruited to the FBI in 2006. He had pleaded guilty to bank fraud and was facing deportation to Egypt. The FBI has paid him more than \$200,000.

Bakalli was also facing deportation when he agreed to work for the FBI. He had been convicted of a weapons charge after shooting a man in Albania.

Ferik Duka, father of the three Duka brothers, commented after leaving the courtroom, “Everything is set up. I said this from the beginning. They are all innocent. It’s the use of criminal informers.”

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Cuba: 50 years of workers’ power

The 50th anniversary of the victory of the Cuban Revolution is cause for celebration by workers and farmers around the world. For five decades, Cuba’s working people have held state power, using it to advance the interests of the toiling classes at home and internationally. They offer a living example that a socialist revolution is possible—and necessary—throughout the world, including in the United States.

The proletarian road of the Cuban Revolution stands as an alternative—the only one for working people—to capitalism, a system that offers us increased exploitation, wars, and degradation. Today we have entered the deepest crisis of the capitalist economic system since the depression of the 1930s, and are only at the beginning of the mass layoffs, foreclosures, and drastic cuts in basic social services in store for workers and working farmers on a world scale. The need to replace capitalist rule with a government of workers and farmers has never been more urgent.

Cuban working people embarked on that road on Jan. 1, 1959, when they overthrew the U.S.-backed tyranny of Fulgencio Batista. Exploited by capitalists and landlords who stole their land, repressed their protests, and denied them basic democratic rights, Cuban workers and peasants revolted, led by the Rebel Army and July 26 Movement under the leadership of Fidel Castro. They ousted the wealthy property owners from government. The new state power took over

the large estates to give land to the landless. Working people took control of the factories and big enterprises and began learning how to manage them in the interests of the majority. The government outlawed racist segregation and discrimination. Working people stood up to Washington’s assaults, from a punishing trade embargo that continues to this day, to a 1961 mercenary invasion that was roundly defeated at the Bay of Pigs.

Since then Cuba’s communist leadership has continued this course—from sending volunteer troops to help defeat the apartheid regime in southern Africa, to providing doctors who serve in countries around the world.

The capitalist rulers in the United States and elsewhere have predicted the impending death of the Cuban Revolution many times. They are incapable of understanding the proletarian solidarity and strength that prevails among Cuba’s working people, in contrast with the dog-eat-dog competition and values capitalism fosters. An example of the kind of people produced by the Cuban Revolution is the five working-class fighters, unjustly incarcerated in U.S. prisons for 10 years, who remain in the front ranks of the class struggle in the United States today.

These are all reasons to celebrate the Cuban Revolution’s 50th anniversary. And to redouble our efforts to win freedom for the Cuban Five.

U.S. officials: Afghan war more complex

Continued from front page

former Baathist regime that had continued to fight U.S. forces. Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr was forced to draw down his Mahdi Army militia as the Iraqi army and police force, which grew to some 320,000 by December 2006, gained battle experience.

By comparison, explained Rumsfeld, Afghanistan is 80,000 square miles larger than Iraq, while the military and police force is less than one-fourth the size.

Also, unlike Iraq, Afghanistan has little natural resources, while a massive narcotics industry continues to thrive there.

McKiernan cites Afghanistan’s 30 years of war and long-term political chaos as well as its continued economic and social underdevelopment—a condition in which U.S. imperialism has played no small role—as “environmental reasons” why their war in Afghanistan will require an “extended commitment.”

Their war in fact extends well beyond the Afghan borders into Pakistan, where Islamist forces, includ-

ing the Taliban, have historically been funded and nurtured by the government, which has used them as a proxy for extending its political influence in the region.

Islamabad’s policy of support for Islamist fighters had previously also served the interests of U.S. imperialism—which backed Mujahideen forces against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s—until the U.S. rulers began to consider the establishment of the Taliban government resulting from that course as a problem.

Following Washington’s invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Pakistani government turned against elements of the Taliban and other Islamist groups on its own soil. The Pakistani military launched a war against these groups in parts of the country’s northwest, predominantly Pashtun mountainous region.

Civilians have been caught in crossfire and displaced by the hundreds of thousands, while forces connected to al-Qaeda and the Taliban remain entrenched in Pakistan along the Afghan border.

Independent Party of Color in Cuba

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da,⁶ in city streets, and during a rash of murders committed during the Bloody Christmas massacre.⁷ Of the genocide of military aggression and terrorist acts against the revolution. What is almost never mentioned, however, is the genocide of those courageous Cubans who, between 1908 and 1912, defended the rights of the Cuban people to join a political party that at the time was the only one that

herding more than 300,000 rural residents into concentration camps to prevent them from aiding the independence fighters. At least 200,000 died from starvation and disease.

6. On July 26, 1953, some 160 revolutionaries under the command of Fidel Castro launched an insurrectionary attack on the Moncada army garrison in Santiago de Cuba together with a simultaneous attack on the garrison in Bayamo, opening the revolutionary armed struggle against the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. After the attack’s failure, Batista’s forces massacred more than 50 of the captured revolutionaries. Fidel Castro and 27 others, including Raúl Castro and Juan Almeida, were tried and sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. They were released on May 15, 1955, after a public defense campaign forced the regime to issue a general amnesty for political prisoners.

genuinely represented them.

Our best tribute to them in this centennial year is the commemorative plaque unveiled this morning as part of other activities that have taken place at various times throughout this year, and that will continue over the following months.

Making a reality, with ever increasing revolutionary consciousness, of the social justice advocated by those of us who carry forward our Marti-ist, and Fidelista socialist undertaking—embodying within it full social equality, is to also recall Ivonet and Estenoz and all the patriots who followed them. It is to recognize the human right to knowledge of the historical truth. It is to prevent crimes like that of the Little War of 1912 from recurring. It is to preserve the memory of men like Aponte,⁸ Estenoz, and Ivonet, who must not remain, even a single day longer, in oblivion.

Glory to them.

7. On Christmas Eve 1956, Batista’s police in a number of towns in eastern Cuba kidnapped and murdered 23 members of the July 26 Movement and Popular Socialist Party.

8. José Aponte led a slave rebellion in 1812. He was captured and hanged.

Smithfield

Continued from front page

someone relieve us so we could go to the bathroom,” Hernández said, “but now they don’t do that. So whenever one of us has to leave, three have to do the work of four. It’s too fast.” He noted that supervisors sometimes make workers do jobs even when they are injured. He added, “There’s a lot of racism in the plant” on the part of bosses.

“We are thrilled. This moment has been a long time coming. We stuck together, and now we have a say on the job,” said Ronnie Ann Simmons, quoted in a UFCW press release. She has 13 years’ seniority.

Lemuel Heslip, who has worked 10 months in the plant, told the *Militant*, “I’m excited to see what it’s about. My dad always said you need a union. He was in the union for 25 years at the post office.”

Heslip also pointed to the importance of unity among the workers. “This vote isn’t about Smithfield, it’s about the workers coming together. It’s a challenge.” He described how the company tries to divide workers. “They organized one meeting for us who speak English and another for the Latinos. Who knows what they were told? We need unity.” Heslip works on the conversion loin packing line.

The union organized house meetings and leafletting in the plant. Some workers gave speeches in the lunchroom and in the days leading up to the vote, some wrote “Union Time” on their hard hats, the *New York Times* reported.

The organizing victory has been closely followed by other workers. At a gas station near the plant, Jerome Purdie, a truck driver, said, “The union is a good thing. Someday I may have to work there!”

This is the third time a union representation vote has been held in the plant, which opened in 1992. Workers’ efforts to organize there go back more than 14 years.

Union elections were held in 1994 and again in 1997, amid what workers said was widespread company intimidation, including beatings and arrests of union supporters, spying on union activists, confiscation of union materials, and harassment by the company’s own in-plant police force.

The results of both elections were thrown out in 2006 by a federal court. This year in October the way was cleared for the latest secret ballot election when the company agreed to drop its racketeering lawsuit against the union. In return, the UFCW agreed to end its national “Justice at Smithfield” campaign. Smithfield claimed the union had caused losses of \$900 million by organizing rallies and calls for a boycott of their products.

Workers’ increasing confidence

In recent years workers at the Tar Heel plant have demonstrated increasing confidence to stand up to company threats. In January 2007 more than 4,000 signed a petition demanding that Martin Luther King Day be a paid holiday. Hundreds took the day off despite company threats of disciplinary action. The company backed down.

In November 2006 about 1,000 workers marched out of the plant to protest the firing of several dozen coworkers accused of working with false papers. The protest ended when the company agreed not to discipline those who walked out and to allow those fired to return to work with more time to verify their legal status.

In reaction to more aggressive enforcement of immigration laws, about 1,500 Latino workers quit their jobs, according to the *New York Times*. In recent years the percentage of workers who are Black in the plant has increased from about 20 percent to 60 percent.

The plant is the largest hog slaughterhouse in the world. It employs about 4,650 workers and processes up to 32,000 hogs a day.

Smithfield Foods, the parent company, recently reported a 76 percent drop in earnings for its second fiscal quarter from \$17.4 million last year to \$4.2 million this year.

North Carolina has the lowest rate of unionization of all states at 3 percent.

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