SOCIALIST ACTION

VOL. 28, NO. 2, FEBRUARY 2010 WWW.SOCIALISTACTION.ORG U.S. / CANADA $1

Little 'change' from Obama

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Humanitarian aid for Haiti — Not troops and occupation!

Luis Acosta / AFP / Getty Images

Stan Honda / AFP / Getty Images

By MARTY GOODMAN

After a 7.0 earthquake hit the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on Jan. 12, U.S. President Barack Obama solemnly told the Haitian people two days later, "In this hour of need you will not be forsaken." The quake was a catastrophe that may rival the deadly tsunami of 2004. At press time, the death toll is estimated at 200,000, and the number of affected or displaced persons is perhaps as high as 3 million to 3.5 million out of Haiti's population of nine million.

Yet, for all the media hype, U.S. aid came with big strings: a U.S./United Nations military occupation and the prospect of more U.S.-led World Bank economic misery for the masses. In short, it's a continuation of a 200-year war by U.S. imperialism against the world's first successful slave revolution. The intention of Washington's so-called relief effort is not the long-term welfare of the Haitian masses but their compliance with U.S. policy at the point of a gun. In response, socialists say, "Food In, Troops Out!" "U.S./UN Troops Out of Haiti!"

As *Time* magazine described it, "Haiti for all intents and purposes, became a 51st state at 4:53 p.m., Tuesday, in the wake of its deadly earthquake. If not a state, then at least a ward of the state."

Thus far, the Obama administration has pledged $100 million in aid to Haiti. That amounts to slightly over $11 per person. In comparison, the U.S. has spent nearly $1 trillion on wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan; 10,000 times as much as the U.S. pledge to Haiti. U.S. banks alone gave $150 billion to its top executives last year, 1500 times larger than Obama's pledge.

As stated by U.S. officials, the first priority in Haiti was military "security," but against whom or what was unclear. On Jan. 17 Navy Rear Admiral Michael Rogers said, "We have seen nothing to suggest to us widespread disorder." Marine Major Gen. Cornell Wilson, in charge of Marine operations in Haiti, refused to outline the "rules of engagement," as bursts of gunfire were being heard around the capital.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said, "There is no logic that U.S. troops landed in Haiti. Haiti seeks humanitarian aid, not troops. It would be madness [if] we all began to send troops to Haiti." Former Cuban President Fidel Castro said in his denunciation of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, "We send doctors, not soldiers."

Most reports on the ground revealed not only relative calm but widespread cooperation, as ordinary Haitians met the incredible challenges of saving lives with their bare hands.

New York City solidarity activist David Wilson, who was in Port-au-Prince during the earthquake, told *Socialist Action*, "At first everyone seemed to be in shock, but some people got to work quickly, taking care of the injured. The aftershocks kept coming, so the neighborhood residents slept outdoors in the street, and many of the people passed the night singing hymns or listening to what sounded like an evangelical preacher.

"By the morning most people were digging out, covering the dead with sheets, looking for family members. Young men with handtools were out systematically looking for survivors in the ruins of bigger buildings like schools, often at considerable risk to themselves. It was inspiring, actually."

Wilson reported that in the immediate aftermath of the quake, Haitian police and UN troops were "basically invisible. I left early on Jan. 17, and up until then, the few police and soldiers I saw were mostly just riding around in trucks. I guess they were supposed to be looking for looters, but I never saw anyone looting—and no one else I knew did, either."

The rhetoric of U.S. officials, reinforced by corporate media, honed in on the so-called threat of riots

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(*Photo left)* UN soldier from Brazil stops a man near the Port-au-Prince airport, Jan. 18.

(*Right*) Haitian boy is treated in Cuban hospital tent.

U.S. adventure in Iraq torn by scandals

By GERRY FOLEY

Scandals continue to break about the massive misappropriation of U.S. funds in the occupation of Iraq. The British *Guardian* reported Jan. 25: "The US state department's gross mismanagement of a multibillion-dollar contract for training Iraqi police has left US funds vulnerable to waste and fraud, a watchdog said today.

"In a scathing report, Stuart Bowen, the special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction, strongly criticised both the state department and DynCorp International, the firm that won the $2.5bn (£1.5bn) contract in 2004—the largest awarded by the state department."

DynCorp is one of the mercenary corporations spawned by the privatization of the U.S. military, along with the notorious Blackwater (now renamed "Xe" in attempt to distance itself from its ill fame). It is also a major contractor in Afghanistan. The article continued: "Members of Congress said the latest findings cast doubt on DynCorp's ability to handle similar contracts in Afghanistan.

"'I don't have any confidence that they're doing a better job there. ... If we don't correct this immediately, we are going to be having the same conversation a few years from now,' said Senator Claire McCaskill, the Democratic chairman of the Senate subcommittee on contracting oversight."

The mercenary outfits represent a level of privatization that exceeds the worst examples of war profiteering in the golden age of the capitalist monopolies in the

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INSIDE SOCIALIST ACTION:

Teamster reformers challenge trumped-up charges

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—After just over one year in power, the reform leadership of Teamsters Local 743, headed by President Richard Berg, has transformed their 11,000-member local from a criminally run enterprise into a union run by the members to defend their own interests. But in the minds of the old-guard gangsters who run Chicago Teamsters Joint Council 25, this example of a local operating for the rank and file was a crime punishable by removal from office.

On Jan. 11, the Joint Council removed Berg and fellow reformer Secretary-Treasurer Gina Alvarez from their elected positions and banned them from membership in the Teamsters, Berg for five years and Alvarez for three years, on trumped-up charges. Berg and Alvarez have appealed the ruling to the International. International General President James Hoffa Jr. issued a stay of effectiveness on Jan. 13, returning them to office until the International issues a ruling.

The charges against Berg and Alvarez were filed by local Vice President Larry Davis and three other members of the local's executive board who ran on the reform New Leadership Slate with Berg and Alvarez. Once in office, however, they became upset when Berg carried through on the slate's campaign promises. Berg cut officers' salaries, including his own, by $70,000. He invested resources in education and representation training for members and staff, and hired professional negotiators. The Davis bloc in the executive board demanded higher salaries and defended incompetent union representatives and staff. They thought that the campaign's promises were hollow, and once in office they could collect fat checks and reward friends with do-nothing jobs.

Since taking office, New Leadership has improved the stewards system, strengthened bargaining, and encouraged rank-and-file activism and education. The local waged a successful 10-week strike at SK Hand Tools that defended members' health-care benefits and grievance procedures in the face of an outright union-busting attempt by their employer. The local has mobilized rank-and-file members for immigrant rights and antiwar demonstrations and to stand in solidarity with other workers in struggle, including during the historic UE Republic Windows and Doors factory occupation.

(*Left*) Teamster President James Hoffa Jr., shown with Obama, has temporarily returned the Chicago union leaders to office pending an appeal, but the bureaucracy that Hoffa heads fears the growing reform movement.

The reform victory in Local 743 took over 10 years of hard-fought battles to accomplish. The former leadership stole elections and in 2004 canceled an election when they knew they would lose. The corrupt old guard used the local as a personal ATM and formed cozy relationships with employers at the expense of the members. Two former presidents of the local are now behind bars, one for election fraud and the other for cocaine smuggling.

The Davis bloc, which controls the executive board, has attempted to sabotage the efforts of the reformers by deadlocking votes on the board concerning union business. When Richard Berg fired a union rep who wasn't doing his job and then later agreed to an out-of-court settlement to avoid litigation, the Davis bloc filed charges with the Joint Council, claiming Berg should have received executive board approval. No charges or accusations have been made that either Berg or Alvarez did anything for personal financial gain.

The Joint Council was more than happy to use what amounts to a procedural dispute as an excuse to deal a setback to the reform movement. But the council had no problem when Local 743 was run by drug dealers, who stole elections and assaulted members who opposed them. The Joint Council is headed by Local 727 President John Coli, who took home $344,849 last year from his multiple positions in the Teamsters. Coli is the son of the infamous Eco James Coli, former Local 727 officer and hit man and enforcer for the Chicago Mafia.

Local 743 reformers have not taken this attack lying down. The New Leadership slate immediately released a statement that has been distributed to the rank and file and are preparing their appeal to the International. And the active membership is standing behind the reformers.

"For years officials treated Local 743 like a piggy bank," said Melanie Cloghessy, a member of Local 743 at the University of Chicago. "We won't go back to those dark days of corruption. The New Leadership team will keep fighting for a union that fights for us. The officials who are making this power grab are going to learn that we'll fight back against their double-dealing just like we stood up to the criminal activities of the past." ■

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

We propose an EMERGENCY CONGRESS OF LABOR to discuss and take steps to implement the following demands —

1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers' committees.

2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.

3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.

4) Immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq & Afghanistan! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people's needs and to combat global warming.

5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to 55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.

6) To combat inflation: A sliding scale of wages and pensions that matches the rises in comsumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.

7) Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimination; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orientation, skin color, or national origin.

8) Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transportation corporations and place them under the control of elected committees of workers.

9) To mobilize support for the demands it adopts, the EMERGENCY CONGRESS should organize ACTION COMMITTEES in every workplace and neighborhood threatened by the crisis. These committees can draw up more concrete demands than the ones outlined above.

10) To put all these measures into effect, we need a LABOR PARTY — based on a fighting union movement and all people who are oppressed and exploited. For a workers' government!

SOCIALIST ACTION. Closing news date: Jan. 29, 2010

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Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. BOX 460501, San Francisco, CA 94146-0501. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — $20. All other countries — $30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor. It is printed by members of Local 583, Allied Printing Trades Council, San Francisco, Calif.

SOCIALIST ACTION

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Obama offers no significant 'changes' for broken economy

By THE EDITORS

In his State of the Union speech, Jan. 27, President Obama did his best to repair the tarnished image of his administration and the Democratic Party. Following last month's "disaster" in Massachusetts, in which Democrats lost a key Senate seat to a Republican newcomer, Obama had the task of recapturing disillusioned voters who a year ago had been enticed by his campaign promises of "change we can believe in."

"Right now," Obama admitted in his speech, "I know that there are many Americans who aren't sure if they still believe we can change—or at least that I can deliver it."

Obama identified many of the problems that the American people care about. In regard to the current economic morass, he said: "One in 10 Americans still cannot find work. Many businesses have shuttered. Home values have declined. Small towns and rural communities have been hit especially hard. And for those who'd already known poverty, life has become that much harder."

In fact, the Federal Reserve and many economists say that hard times will continue, with economic growth slowing and unemployment rising this year. Moody's Economy.com predicts that today's (official) 10 percent unemployment rate will hit 11 percent by next summer, and over 17 percent for African Americans.

Some of Obama's observations in regard to the capitalist system were not off the mark: "We can't afford another so-called economic 'expansion' like the one from the last decade—what some call the 'lost decade'—where jobs grew more slowly than during any prior expansion, where the income of the average American household declined while the cost of health care and tuition reached record highs, where prosperity was built on a housing bubble and financial speculation."

Who is to blame for the bursting of the bubble, the current economic doldrums, and the frustration and anger felt by most Americans? Marxists point out that economic crises are a logical and recurring feature of the capitalist system, rooted in its cycles of overproduction.

But Obama, for his part, gently shunts the blame onto a single portion of the U.S. capitalist class and onto the Republican Party. Republicans are portrayed as troglodytes who find it difficult to understand the need for "change."

On Jan. 29, for example, Obama chided a meeting of congressional Republicans for stalling on the health-care bill: "If you were to listen to the debate," he teased them, "You'd think this thing was some sort of Bolshevik plot! That's how some of you guys presented this."

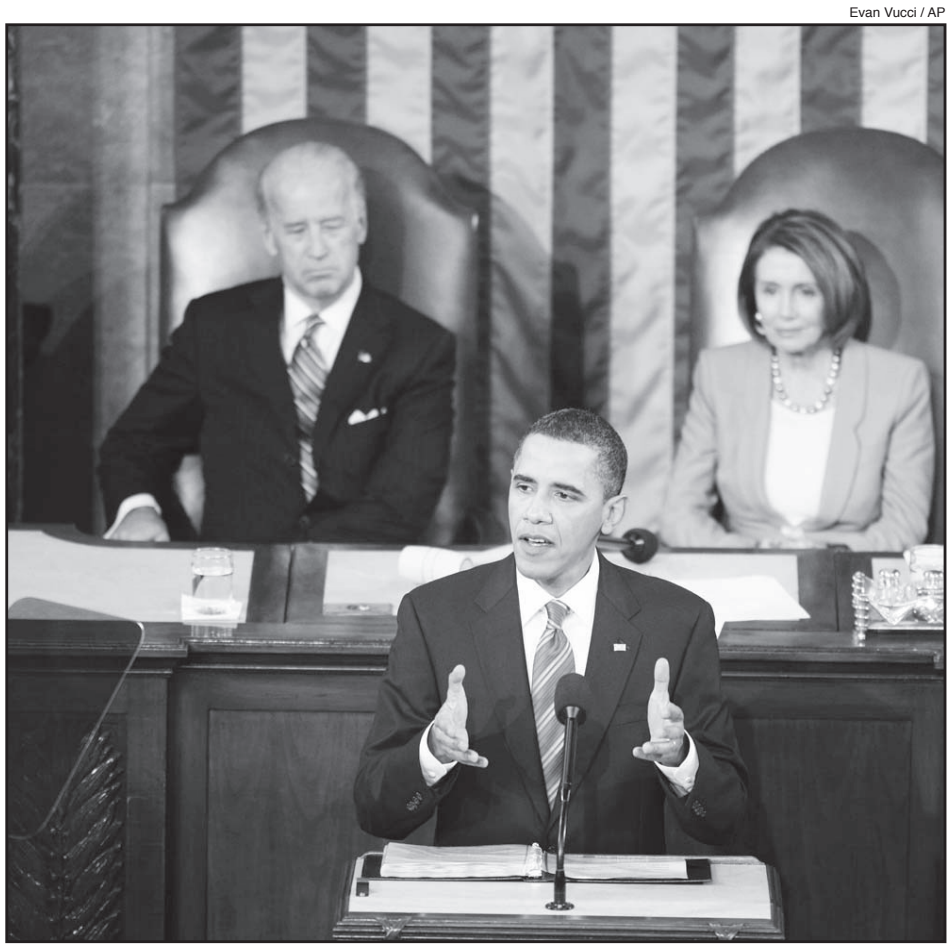
Obama brought his case to the Republicans to reassure Congress members on both sides of the aisle that the watered-down health-care bill should present no dangers for the insurance, pharmaceutical, and other big corporations that their parties represent.

But he also got the chance to set the stage for the next round of national elections, encouraging the Democratic Party's supporters who lead the unions and other social organizations, and in the media, to counsel their constituents to defeat the "backward" Republicans by voting for the Democratic Party.

Yet the Republicans have not been the sole target of Obama's recent criticisms. He hinted in his State of the Union address that a large share of the blame for the economic crisis rests with "Wall Street" and "the banks." And similarly, during a Dec. 7 interview on the CBS News "60 Minutes" program, Obama asserted, "I did not run for office to be helping out a bunch of, you know, fat cat bankers on Wall Street."

"Nothing has been more frustrating to me this year," he added, "than having to salvage a financial system at great expense to taxpayers that was precipitated, that was caused in part by completely irresponsible actions on Wall Street. And I've spoken out repeatedly about this. The people on Wall Street still don't get it."

Evan Vucci / AP



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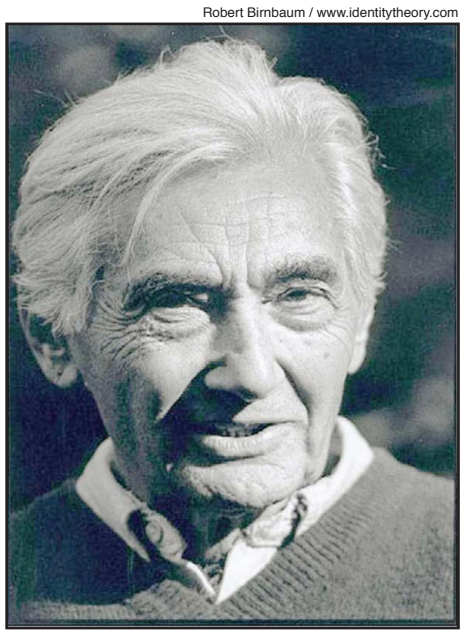


(*Above*) Obama gives State of Union address, with Vice President Biden and House Speaker Pelosi observing.

(*Left*) Historian Howard Zinn (who died Jan. 27) said he expected Obama "to be a typical Democratic president. On foreign policy, that's hardly any different than a Republican..."

With this, the president was attempting to divert people's anger toward a very handy target, as his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, did in a more dire situation. Blame it on the banks! But instead of nationalizing the banks, Obama simply hands them the keys to the Treasury.

Business as usual

Of course, despite his calls for "change," Obama has been unable to offer any course for U.S. capitalism that is markedly different from what was done in the past. How could he?

As before, capitalists will feel compelled to bolster their profit rates by any means necessary—including financial and real estate speculation, polluting the environment, shutting down factories, making workers pay more for health care, and wage cuts. And they can count on the government to help them along in all these endeavors.

Accordingly, in his State of the Union speech, Obama's new proposals for the domestic agenda were extremely timid (as most of the media were quick to point out)—and hardly likely to have much effect on the economy.

He vowed to keep nudging Congress to enact some sort of health-care "reform" and to pass the paltry jobs bill now stalled in the Senate. He mentioned tax-relief measures for small businesses and the "middle class," additional funding for high-speed passenger railroads ($8 billion, which won't go very far), and a few other promises.

And while Obama is seeking an across-the-board spending freeze on governmental programs for next year, the White House says that money for the military would continue to rise, as it would for programs to "secure our borders" against undocumented immigrants.

In foreign policy, Obama affirmed—using diplomatic language, of course—that he would continue to pursue "free-trade" policies in the neo-colonial world that are favorable to U.S. imperialism at the expense of its major competitors (like China) as well as local economies:

"We have to seek new markets aggressively, just as our competitors are. If America sits on the sidelines while other nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores. But realizing those benefits also means enforcing those agreements so our trading partners play by the rules.

"And that's why we'll continue to shape a Doha [World Trade Organization] trade agreement that opens global markets, and why we will strengthen our trade relations in Asia and with key partners like South Korea and Panama and Colombia."

And how does the White House intend to "enforce" such agreements? The Obama administration's support of repressive client regimes like that of Colombia has ominous implications for Latin America and beyond. The Obama White House is expanding Plan Colombia (a military campaign begun under President Clinton and ostensibly used as part of the "War on Drugs"), and now plans to establish seven military bases in Colombia.

The scale of repression already wreaked on Colombia, with U.S. backing, was glimpsed on Jan. 28, when a mass grave containing about 2000 bodies was found in La Macarena. For years, the U.S. government has advised and supported the Colombian army in its sweeps against so-called guerrillas in the area. Residents told the Miami *Nuevo Herald* that family members and local political leaders, who were non-combatants, had disappeared, and they thought their bodies were in the graves.

The "lesser-evil" syndrome

With the election of Barack Obama as president, U.S. capitalism had no alternative but to try to match and exceed the reactionary policies of George Bush.

The ruling-class decision to choose Obama to lead its offensive against working people in these troubled times was carefully calculated. Without doubt the selection of the intelligent, well-spoken Black Democrat, who campaigned with a light touch against the crudities of his predecessor, struck a responsive chord among millions of Americans looking for change—especially when the system was in crisis under Bush's watch.

It is now becoming clear to many that no such change is forthcoming. But such realities have never deterred leaders in the labor movement and elsewhere from portraying the Democratic Party as a vehicle for progressive reform. These forces see no option but to paint Obama's failures as partial successes—as with the present health-care bill and his decision to match the sending of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan with a vague promise to begin to remove them in 18 months.

These manufactured illusions were certainly evident in a recent exchange on the pages of *The Nation* magazine (Feb. 1), in which political commentators had been asked to list what they considered the highlights of the Obama presidency, as well as their greatest disappointments with it. The most refreshing response was submitted by the late historian Howard Zinn, who had given Obama's candidacy "critical support" a year ago.

In the recent *Nation* article, Zinn said: "I've been searching for a highlight. The only thing that comes close is some of Obama's rhetoric; I don't see any kind of a highlight in his actions and policies."

"As far as disappointments," Zinn wrote, "I wasn't terribly disappointed because I didn't expect that much. I expected him to be a typical Democratic president. On foreign policy, that's hardly any different from a Republican—as nationalist, expansionist, imperial and warlike."

Zinn concluded, "I think people are dazzled by Obama's rhetoric, and that people ought to begin to understand that Obama is going to be a mediocre president—which means, in our time, a dangerous president—unless there is some national movement to push him in a better direction."

There is no doubt that determined social movements that are *independent* of the Democrats and Republicans can push the government to enact basic reforms. But the political arena should not be left to the two parties of the capitalist class. A key step toward abolishing the "lesser-evil" syndrome in U.S. politics would be taken with the construction of a mass working-class political party, armed with a clear program of how to achieve real change. ■

Mark Ralson / AFP / Getty Images

(*Left*) Faculty and students protest at UCLA against California cutbacks to education funding.
(*Below*) Hotel workers picket the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, Nov. 11, during three-day walk-out.

New evidence of need for a turnaround in the unions

By BILL ONASCH and ANDREW POLLACK

Organized labor started off 2010 not with a bang but with a whimper. In mid-January, top labor officials knuckled under to Obama's insistence that they accept taxes on workers' health plans—only to see the prospects of the whole health-care "reform" package for which they'd made this sacrifice of workers' income go into a tailspin. Soon after, new statistics revealed an unprecedented decline in unionization rates, which starkly captures the need for a drastic turnaround in labor policy and practice.

Scott Brown, a state legislator who initially agreed to be the Republican sacrificial lamb in the special election to fill the late Ted Kennedy's Massachusetts Senate seat, ended up being elected as the forty-first Republican Senator—denying Democrats their already shaky super-majority needed to hold off GOP filibusters against health-care "reform" bills.

Giddy Republicans proclaimed this a referendum against "government-run health care." But the Obama health-care "reform" was no more "government run" than the Massachusetts state reform established on a Republican governor's watch. Yet there's no doubt that working-class voters were not pleased with the Obama plan. The last straw was the tax on benefits insisted upon by the president—after swearing during the election campaign he would never agree to such a tax.

Despite last-minute campaigning by prominent national Democratic and union leaders, more unionists voted for Brown than his opponent. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka claimed this was an indicator of an apparently previously undetected "working-class revolt," and warned the Democrats to get back on the track leading to jobs, jobs, jobs.

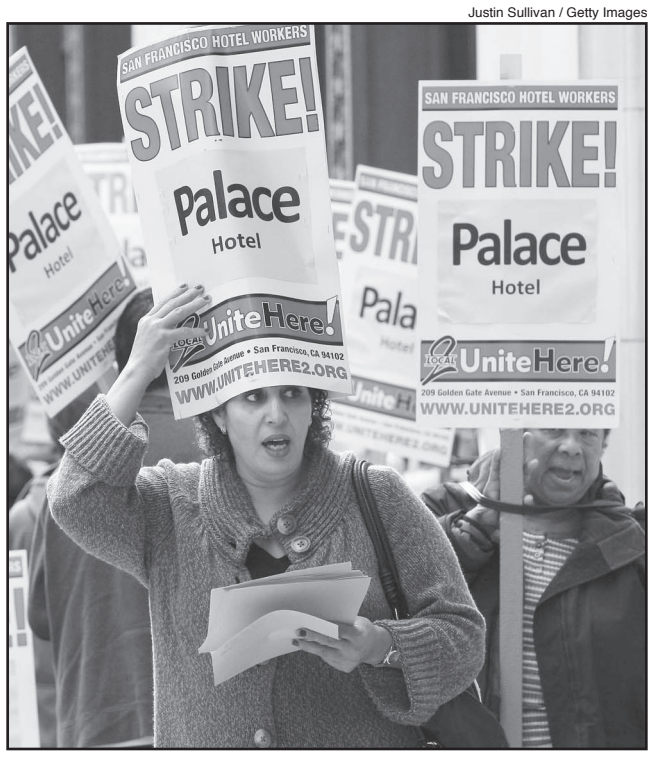
But for Democrats there is only one track—and it doesn't lead to jobs. While one party is always shunted off to a siding, both their trains are competing to deliver the rest of us to the same destination—the place described by Canadian labor party (NDP) leader Tommy Douglas as Mouseland, where the Fat Cats rule.

And the inevitable consequences of being stuck like Casey Jones on this runaway train were seen once again in labor's dual capitulation on health care. Not only did labor officials fail to lift a finger for the only immediate solution that would benefit the entire class—single-payer—but in the end it cried "Uncle" when Obama insisted it accept taxes on its members' "Cadillac" plans. And the bone Obama threw them in return—that their members could pay the taxes later than the rest of the working class—will only leave unorganized workers prey to right-wing rhetoric about labor being a self-centered "special interest."

The so-called "Cadillac" plans are not, in fact, expensive boondoggles full of needed frills. Under our irrational and wasteful health-care financing system, they are the kind of plan a typical working-class family needs to have adequate coverage without ending up bankrupt when a medical emergency strikes.

But under the deal with the White House, a 40 percent tax would be imposed starting in 2013 on the amount by which premiums for employer-sponsored health coverage exceeds specified thresholds. This arrangement was counterposed to calls by labor to instead raise revenue for health-care changes through higher income taxes on earnings above $1 million a year for couples.

Justin Sullivan / Getty Images



The agreement exempts unionized workers and state and local government employees from such taxes for five years. This supposedly allows unions time to negotiate new contracts to gain wage hikes to make up for the cuts in health benefits that will inevitably follow the new taxes. Needless to say, bosses will resist any such demands for pay hikes. And when labor looks for allies against such resistance, it will find many unorganized workers saying, "Where were you when they imposed the tax on *my* health-care plan?"

Shrinking membership rolls

This failure of labor tops to fight for the entire class on health-care issues is symptomatic of unions' increasing isolation at a time when it should be gathering around it millions of new workers looking to resist the fallout from the deepening economic crisis.

Union density in the private sector now stands at 7.2%, down from 7.6% last year, and is the lowest since at least 1900. Unions lost 10% of their members in the private sector last year, the largest decline in more than 25 years. The broader drop in U.S. employment and a small gain by public-sector unions helped keep the total share of union membership flat at 12.3% in 2009. In the early 1980s, unions represented 20% of workers.

The U.S. public sector has long had greater union density than the private. Now, for the first time, government unionists actually outnumber those in the market economy. This shocking statistic doesn't represent growth in public unions. Layoffs and contracting out by state and local governments and quasi-public transit agencies are common and growing. And in coming months they're going to get far worse, as state budget woes are leading politicians of both parties to demand massive cuts.

The larger numbers of unionized workers in public rather than private jobs registers the collapse of remaining union bastions in construction and manufacturing. Last year—continuing the massive job loss of 2008—construction employment fell by another 900,000, while 1.3 million more factory jobs were slashed. As a result, even though aggressive organizing successes have been achieved by a few unions such as National Nurses United, during the first year of the Obama administration overall union membership fell 771,000.

Ironically, during the very year in which this shocking decline occurred, union officials had put on the back burner, at the request of the Democratic Party, its fight for the Employee Free Choice Act, a supposed remedy to low unionization rates, until health-care "reform" was won.

While some of the construction work will probably come back, most of the good paying manufacturing jobs—such as the tens of thousands eliminated during Obama's bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler—are gone for good. And any regained jobs will come with much lower wages, benefits, and stability—and more often than not without union protection.

Where will new jobs & union members come from?

How does this fit in to the above-cited refrain of Trumka calling for Democrats to focus on "jobs, jobs, jobs"? The efforts of one union located at the intersection of jobs and climate struggles offers some lessons.

UAW Local 879 in St Paul recently held a press conference urging Ford to build plug-in electric or hybrid cars at their plant currently producing Ranger pickups—and scheduled for closure by the end of next year. They are calling for a government subsidy to Ford to keep this product line.

Nearly all government jobs plans revolve around subsidies and tax breaks to private employers as an incentive to hire or keep workers. The track record of such schemes is not good. In this particular case, Ford is building its popular hybrid in Mexico, where labor costs are about 20% of St Paul's. There's no way either the workers or government incentives can compete with that.

Previously, the local had, in collaboration with environmental and community groups, campaigned for public ownership of the plant and conversion to new products. They nearly landed production of new clean buses ordered by the local transit agency. But the local establishment put the kibosh on those logical plans, leading to the latest last-ditch effort to keep Ford.

Local 879's original strategy was sound. But it's hard for one isolated group of workers to implement even the best of ideas in the face of hostility from the bosses and their politicians. We need a national jobs policy that replaces trying to bribe employers with nationalizing the key industries needed for a healthy economy. A whole new public sector—including finance, energy, transportation, and auto for starters—could lead the way in putting everyone to work in decent paying jobs and in rebuilding an economy to tackle the threat of climate change and other urgent needs.

A labor movement with such a bold and broad strategy would also find itself picking up members in existing industries—as well as the new ones—as newly-inspired workers began fighting to organize.

Coming attack on public workers

One place to start gathering the forces for the fight for those new public jobs is in defense of existing ones. Conservative think-tank pundits seized on the new data on unionization rates as proof that the time had come to wipe out unions from the public sector as well.

Fred Siegel of the conservative Manhattan Institute told *The New York Times*: "At the same time the country is being squeezed, public-sector unions are a rising political force in the Democratic Party. They depend on extra money for the public sector. In four big states—New York, New Jersey, Illinois and California—the public-sector unions have largely been untouched by the economic downturn. In those states, you have an impeding clash between unions and the public at large."

The attack on public sector workers comes simultaneously with new attacks on the most popular and needed portion of public services. Both parties in Congress are preparing to permanently gut Social Security and Medicare in order to "save" them from their supposedly inevitably looming bankruptcy.

For months, the media has been predicting that budget woes from declining revenues at the state and municipal level must lead to massive jobs and services

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... Adventure in Iraq torn by scandals

Spanish-American war, when more U.S. soldiers were killed by defective supplies than by enemy bullets. In those days, the profiteers were only suppliers, not private armed forces as they are now.

However, the older form of corrupt war profiteering has apparently also flourished in the occupation of Iraq. The British *Independent* reported Jan. 23: "Hundreds of people have been killed in horrific bombings in Iraq after a British company supplied 'bogus' equipment which failed to detect explosive devices.

"The head of the company, which has made tens of millions of pounds from the sale of the detectors, has now been arrested and the British Government has announced a ban on their export to Iraq."

The article continued: "... questions were being raised last night about why action had not been taken sooner on the supply of the detectors which leading weapons specialists had condemned months ago as 'useless and dangerous.' The equipment—which operates on a 'dousing' principle and has no electronic components—was also sold to Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan, all countries suffering deaths and injuries through terrorist bomb attacks."

Questions may have been raised but it is unlikely that there will be any answers, because the firm in question, like the war profiteers in general, undoubtedly had powerful political connections who will continue to protect themselves if they are unable any longer to defend their protégés. The people who suffered from this corruption are raising a huge outcry.

"Iraqi families who have suffered in the blasts last night condemned their own government as well as the British authorities for allowing the extraordinary security failure. Among the attacks that the detectors, it is claimed, had failed to prevent were suicide bombings in October last year which killed 155 people and blasts two months later which resulted in 120 more deaths."

The business of "security" has been a bonanza for capitalist profiteers. About 15 percent of all construction contacts given to U.S. firms in Iraq, for example, have gone to "security," usually benefiting mercenary outfits like Blackwater and DynCorps. The corrupt construction and "security" companies have so far been the major beneficiaries of a U.S. war effort expected to cost more than a trillion dollars, and which has cost more than 4000 American lives.

The U.S. war on Iraq was motivated by the hope of getting control of Iraqi oil, as top U.S. officials have admitted. But the hatred that the brutal war has engendered in the Iraqi people has put in doubt any material or political gain for the U.S. Even the government that arose in the shadow of the occupation cannot ignore the feelings of the overwhelming majority of the people over which it aspires to rule.

Pat Sullivan / AP

The *Washington Post* reported Dec. 13: "Chinese, Russian and European companies won the right this weekend to develop major oil fields in Iraq, while U.S. firms made a paltry showing at auctions that represent the first major incursion of foreign oil companies into Iraq in four decades. The companies that secured 10 contracts in auctions held over the weekend and in June stand to profit handsomely, but they are taking a significant gamble.

"Iraq has the third-largest proven crude reserves in the world, but the country remains perilous; it suffers from chronic corruption and acrimonious politics that have prevented the passing of new laws to regulate the sector.

"Of the seven U.S. companies that registered for the auctions, only one emerged as the leading partner in a consortium that won a contract. Another U.S. company has a minority stake in a contract. China's state-owned oil company has a major stake in two contracts. Russian firms are parties in two others. European firms made a strong showing. Royal Dutch Shell, Italy's Eni, British Petroleum and Norway's Statoil got deals. Companies from Malaysia and Angola were parties to five winning bids.

"Oil analysts say the outcome was surprising, considering that U.S. oil companies have long yearned to work in Iraq."

In fact, the contracts held by foreign competitors of U.S. oil companies were abrogated by the U.S. occupation in its initial period. But sabotage and bombings by insurgents reduced the production of Iraqi oil fields to a trickle for many years.

The *Washington Post* noted that it was probably this experience that dissuaded the U.S. companies from bidding:

"Security concerns, underscored by coordinated bombings Tuesday, and the threat of political instability as the U.S. military withdraws probably gave American oil executives pause, analysts said."

Even the U.S. client Iraqi government obviously fears to be seen giving away Iraqi oil to foreign companies. It is offering only service contracts to the oil companies, not ownership of the oil. And the service contracts awarded have included a per barrel price that is only about half what the oil companies wanted.

Furthermore, as the U.S. hold on their country weakens, the ruling Shiite theocratic politicians are steadily edging closer to Iran. The U.S. needs Sunni politicians as a barrier to a reconciliation between majority Shiite Iraq and Shiite Iran. But recently a large number of Sunni candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections have been disqualified under the accusation that they were accomplices of the Saddam Hussein regime.

The Jan. 28 issue of the British *Economist* reported that the banning of the Sunni candidates was the result of an initiative by Ahmed Chalabi, who was a protégé of the CIA when he led an exile organization opposed to Saddam Hussein. He spent most of his adult life as an exile. After he returned to the country he quickly became discredited. And he lost his credibility also with U.S. officials, since the intelligence he offered proved false. But once spurned by the U.S., Chalabi turned to the Iranian regime for support. The *Economist* speculated that the banning of the Sunni candidates got "a wink" from the Iranians.

Essam al-Sudani / AFP / Getty Images

(*Above*) U.S. soldier guards Basrah airport following withdrawal of British troops from the area last year.

(*Left*) Houston offices of KBR, the major U.S. maintenance contractor in Iraq. Hundreds of soldiers were injured by faulty KBR electric wiring.

Overall, the United States seems to have won no reliable allies in Iraq, except perhaps for the Kurdish nationalists, who were threatened with extermination by Saddam Hussein. U.S. oil companies have gotten juicy contracts in Iraqi Kurdistan (netting a top U.S. diplomat a payoff of $100 million, by the way), but this area is a landlocked northern enclave. The oil fields in southern Iraq, near the Gulf port of Basrah, are the richest.

Thus, the greatest U.S. imperialist adventure since World War II has ended in massive losses for the United States. And the politicians that rule the U.S. for the corporations (who themselves have profited, at the expense of the U.S. economy) refuse to extricate the country from the entanglements they and their like have gotten it into. Only direct pressure from the American people through mobilization independent of the corporations' twin parties can stop the drain on the country resulting from such imperialist adventures and forestall even greater losses in the future. ■

... Trade unions

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cuts. The beginning of such cuts has already led to massive actions in defense of jobs and services in California and on a smaller scale elsewhere.

Yet while unions and students in California prepare for a day of mass action March 4, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced even more cuts. His latest budget plan would privatize and deunionize prisons, curtail seniority protections for teachers, and reduce the number of sick, disabled and elderly cared for by the state's In-Home Supportive Services program (staffed by union workers) while cutting what their caregivers are paid.

The dire need for more public services—and the connection to the jobs crisis—was cruelly highlighted in a recent *Washington Post* profile of parents quitting jobs because child-care costs are more than they get in wages!

Meanwhile, teachers and health-care workers have been fighting against schemes like No Child Left Behind that penalize them for what the irrational systems in their "industries" do to students and patients respectively. What's needed instead of victimization of education and health-care workers for alleged performance problems are many *more* education and health-care workers (with more control over their working conditions)—as well as more child-care, home-care, and library workers, etc. And a fight for such jobs would lead to a discussion in labor about a class-wide approach to real education and health-care reform.

The productivity of the U.S. economy long ago passed the point where we could churn out the same amount of goods with a far shorter workweek. The hours saved could easily go toward immediately creating tens of millions of new jobs like the ones described above.

And doing so is now also a matter of life or death for the planet and all its inhabitants. Shifting work from emission-spewing industries that make goods toward life-preserving and enhancing services is now essential for our livelihoods, our health, our sanity, our very survival.

Need for a political reversal

These new jobs programs, and the necessary associated restructuring of the economy, haven't a snowball's chance in an overheated Earth if the labor movement remains tied to the Democrats.

While the working class is not yet in full revolt, anger is building. There were high expectations that this administration, now celebrating its first anniversary in power, would move quickly to address job loss, stagnant wages, foreclosures and evictions, and, yes, the health-care crisis. Instead, the situation has gotten worse and the "middle class" that every politician hails is an endangered species. A common expression has spread to many diverse victims of the Great Recession: "If we were a bank we'd be fixed by now."

The American political system is designed to accommodate Massachusetts-style revolts by directing voter discontent with those in power to the column of the only recognized opposition. If you don't like the party that pretends to be labor's friend, you can instead vote for the traditional party identified with Big Business.

As the multiple crises we face deepen, growing numbers will become dissatisfied with this shell game. Our nation's real rulers try to prepare for this by offering extra-electoral far-right backup–the Tea Party, Minutemen, Operation Rescue, and the like. This is a danger we cannot take lightly.

Our only mass organizations, our unions, should be embracing a workers' revolt. It is up to the labor movement to provide a credible working-class alternative to the twin parties of capital and their subcontracted right-wing thugs. That means a party of our own to lead this revolt in the workplace, the streets, and on the ballot. ■

... Humanitarian aid, not troops, for Haiti!

Gerald Herbert / AP

(*Left*) A girl cries out after seeing the feet of her dead brother underneath the rubble of his school.

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and looting over supplies, without much evidence. The endlessly repeated racist image of Haitian culture as somehow responsible for the poverty in Haiti—most live on less than $2 a day—ignores reality. Haiti is undergoing its fourth U.S. occupation in the last century. The capitalist media ignores decades of U.S. support for Haiti's dictators and the imposition of U.S.-dominated World Bank policies based on slave-labor assembly sweatshops.

The U.S. puppet regime of Haitian President Rene Preval and the U.S. surrogate forces of the United Nations were exposed as incompetent and criminally negligent, despite having experienced four deadly hurricanes in 2008. Under U.S. pressure, Preval signed an agreement relinquishing control of Haiti's badly managed airport to the United States. Once in charge, the U.S. quickly gave landing priority to military transport. Jarry Emanuel, the air logistics officer for the World Food Program, complained, "There are 200 flights going in and out every day. ... But most of those flights are for the United States military. Their priorities are to secure the country."

Obama has ordered some 16,000 U.S. troops to Haiti with de facto control of the entire "relief" effort. The despised occupation forces of the United Nation's Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH), which had taken over for U.S. imperialism when Washington needed more troops for its slaughter in Iraq, announced it was adding 3500 troops to its 9000 total, and 1500 more cops to its 2100 international force.

As Dan Beeton writes in *NACLA*, a left-of-center magazine on Latin America and the Caribbean, "The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which began its mission in June 2004, has been marred by scandals of killings, rape and other violence by its troops almost since it began."

Meanwhile, U.S. Coast Guard cutters surround Haiti to intercept Haitians attempting to reach South Florida. The prison at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo, Cuba, originally scheduled by President Obama to close on Jan. 11 over human-rights abuses, was fitted with 1000 cots for Haitians captured at sea.

In a victory for immigrant-rights advocates, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced Jan. 15 that some 30,000 Haitians would receive Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for those in the U.S. who face deportation. TPS, which has been granted immigrants who face natural disasters at home, will give Haitians an 18-month reprieve on deportation, with the right to seek work permits. Napolitano warned Haitians that those caught seeking refuge in the U.S. after the Jan. 12 earthquake will immediately be sent back to Haiti.

"New Orleans all over again"?

And what of getting food, water and medical care to Haiti's earthquake victims? Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a Bush-era holdover in the Obama administration, said, "Without having any structure on the ground in terms of distribution ... an airdrop is simply going to lead to riots."

Obama has ordered some 16,000 troops to Haiti with de facto control of the entire relief effort. Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard surrounds Haiti to intercept Haitians trying to reach Florida.

Six days after the quake, the *Miami Herald* reported, "Thousands of Haitians living in tent cities around the capital and awaiting medical aid outside hospitals show little sign of having received any international aid. An eight hour drive through the capital on Monday produced three sightings of water trucks but no widespread aid distribution."

In a report filed on Jan. 21, the legal director of Doctors Without Borders, Francoise Saulnier, said a plane carrying over 12 tons of aid was turned back from Port-au-Prince airport three times that week. "Now everything has been mixed together, and the urgent and vital attention to the people have been delayed, while military logistic—which is useful, but not on day three, not on day four, but maybe on day eight—this military logistic has really jammed the airport and led to this mismanagement, real mismanagement of vital issues," said Saulnier. Their plane was diverted to the Dominican Republic, delaying the medical aid three days. In addition, teams of Cuban, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, Mexican, and French doctors and aid workers, and a delegation from the Caribbean member-nations of CARICOM were also turned back at the airport.

A searing opinion piece, authored by three surgeons at the Cornell Medical Center in New York City, appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on Jan. 26, which highlighted the gun-crazy priorities of U.S. imperialism. The three assembled a medical team the day after the earthquake in cooperation with the U.S. State Department and the Boston-based Partners in Health.

"We wanted to reach the local hospitals in Haiti immediately—but were only allowed by the U.S. military controlling the local airport to land in Port au Prince Saturday night. We were among the first groups there."

"This delay proved tragic. Upon our arrival at the Haiti Community hospital we found scores of patients with pus dripping out of open fractures and crush injuries. Some wounds were already infested with maggots. Approximately one-third of the victims were children."

"Our operation received virtually no support from any branch of the U.S. government. ... As we were leaving Haiti we were appalled to see warehouse-sized quantities of unused medicines, food and other supplies at the airport, surrounded by hundreds of U.S. and international soldiers. ... For all the outcry about Katrina, our nation has fared no better in this latest disaster."

CNN's Karl Penhaul reported on Jan. 20 from Port-au-Prince General Hospital, where U.S. paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division had just taken up positions. Doctors there said that there was no security problem at the hospital—until troops arrived. Penhaul wondered aloud, "Will this be New Orleans all over again?"

The reporter interviewed a Haitian woman trying to visit her daughter who had been told that she couldn't enter the hospital by a U.S. soldier. "What are you white people in here for? What are you white people coming in and occupying Haiti for?" she told the reporter.

Penhaul said he spoke with other Haitians who accepted the intervention but others who definitely did not. "They say the last thing we need right now is guys with guns; we need medicine, we need food, we need water, and fewer guys with guns."

Already on the ground and without guns were some 400 Cuban doctors who are part of a permanent mission in Haiti. The Cubans reopened three hospitals in Port-au-Prince and set up field hospitals. Cuban-operated clinics, according to Dr. Evan Lyon of Partners in Health and the present administrator of the General Hospital in the capital, have already served 40,000-50,000 quake victims. In addition, Cuba has trained 400 Haitian doctors at Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine. The young Haitian doctors are in Haiti responding to the crisis.

The Palestinians in occupied Gaza also showed their solidarity with Haiti by collecting funds. The Gazans themselves were victims of an Israeli bombing campaign that claimed the lives of 1400 civilians in December 2008. Said Jamal Al-Khudary of the Committee to Break the Siege, "We are here today supporting the victims of Haiti. ... We feel for them the most because we were exposed to our own earthquake during Israel's war on Gaza."

Three amigos: Obama-Bush-Clinton

President Obama selected former Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush to work jointly to coordinate relief efforts for Haiti, symbolizing the continuity of imperialist policy toward Haiti.

The bitter irony for many Haitians was George Bush's support for a brutal CIA-backed coup in 2004, which ousted Jean-Bertrand Aristide from his second presidency with the aid of paramilitary thugs, often called "Tonton Macoutes," as the death-squad backers of the former Duvalier family dictatorships (1957-1986) are known. Aristide and the Democratic Party's Black Congressional Caucus begged for international help, that is intervention. Bush obligingly sent in the Marines, who exiled Aristide aboard a U.S. Air Force plane.

Aristide, now living in South Africa, says he wants to return to Haiti. Previously, the U.S. has cited security concerns over the still popular president's return.

Today, Bill Clinton is defending the criminally slow pace of the U.S. relief effort. In the past, President Clinton intensified a racist naval blockade around Haiti designed to seize and return Haiti's "Black boat people" back into the clutches of a CIA-backed military regime (1991-1994). Clinton's "interdiction" policy violated U.S. and international asylum law. As a candidate, Clinton had condemned as "racist" the same policy when campaigning against George Bush I.

In 1994, in exchange for agreeing to a U.S.-led U.S./UN military occupation that would restore Aristide to the presidency, Clinton persuaded Aristide to sign the Governor's Island Accords, which included adherence to World Bank economic reforms in Haiti, including "free-trade zones" for the slave-wage international assembly industry and "reconciliation" with CIA-backed killers behind the 1991 coup.

Said Christian, a Haitian activist living in New York City, "One of the legacies of Aristide's capitulation to imperialist interests is the legalization of the framework of 'humanitarian intervention.' It set a precedent for the use of UN and other multilateral efforts in

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Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

Jean Philippe Ksiazek / AFP / Getty Images

(*Left*) Jan. 22 protest in New York City.
(*Right*) U.S. paratroopers patrol the streets of Port-au-Prince.

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contravention of existing laws. It justified the favorite means used by the imperialists to intervene in cases of 'failed states.'"

At the heart of the Obama administration's military intervention is the policy of securing Haiti for what author Naomi Klein has dubbed in the title of her book, "The Shock Doctrine"—that is, exploiting a political crisis or a natural disaster by massively restructuring the economy toward pro-U.S./World Bank objectives, often by the use of military force.

A key example was New Orleans after the Katrina hurricane of 2005. About 67% of New Orleans residents were African American, 28% of whom were living in poverty. Democratic and Republican politicians worked hand in glove with powerful capitalist investors to drastically change the economic and racial composition of that mostly African-American city. Rep. Richard Baker (R-La.) said, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

Following the Haiti earthquake, the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation posted on its website an entry entitled, "Amidst the Suffering, Crisis in Haiti Offers Opportunities to the U.S."

Already on the ground and without guns were some 400 Cuban doctors, who are part of a permanent mission in Haiti. The Cubans opened three hospitals in Port-au-Prince.

"In addition to providing immediate humanitarian assistance," said the article, "the U.S. response to the tragic earthquake offers opportunities to reshape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy as well as to improve the public image of the United States in the region." This was quickly replaced by more diplomatic language, though the posting reflects the real thinking of ruling-class policy makers.

Similarly, Raymond Joseph, Haiti's ambassador to the U.S., who also held the same post during the 2004 CIA-backed coup, told C-SPAN, "There is a silver lining. What was not politically possible was done by the earthquake. We will rebuild differently."

At a large meeting of international donors and investors in Montreal after the quake, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive for talking about "decentralizing" the Haitian economy. Clinton continued, "As part of our multilateral efforts to assist Haiti, we should look at how we decentralize economic opportunity and work with the Haitian government and people to support resettlement, which they are doing on their own as people leave Port-au-Prince and return to the countryside from which most of them came."

Referring to her husband Bill's efforts as UN envoy to Haiti, "He had just had a conference with 500 businesspeople," Clinton said. "They were signing contracts, they were making investments." ■

The World Bank's role in Haiti

By MARTY GOODMAN

Beginning in the 1980s, the U.S.-led World Bank tightened its grip on Haitian economic policy. Essentially, it decided that the dysfunctional Haitian elite should encourage international investment in export-oriented assembly sweatshops. This was called a "structural adjustment program." Haiti's trade tariffs on foreign goods were to be removed, public utilities privatized, and all state subsidies removed—including on essential items like gasoline, subject to sharp price fluctuations that can greatly increase transportation costs for workers and street vendors.

Assembling the goods, of course, would be the super-exploited Haitian worker, considered by World Bank experts to be Haiti's greatest asset. The ideal was to make Haiti "the Taiwan of the Caribbean." Today, textile assembly plants produce 90% of exports.

There are about 20,000 assembly workers in Haiti. They make about 20 cents an hour, about 70 Haitian gourdes a day (40 gourdes equals around $1). A study by the Haitian government showed that a subsistence salary would be closer to 300-400g a day.

Despite heavy quake damage to assembly-plant buildings, Haitian workers in some plants have been ordered back to work. Said Laurance Merzy, 32, a worker at DKDR Haiti in Port au Prince, "The walls are still standing, but they are cracked. It is not safe in there." *The New York Times* reports that the Palm Apparel T-shirt factory in Carrefour, a few miles outside of the capital and at the epicenter of the quake, collapsed, killing at least 500 people.

An essential player in maintaining the virtual plantation system in Haiti is Obama asset Bill Clinton, who, in addition to promoting tourism and sweatshops in Haiti, successfully campaigned for passage of the Hope I and Hope II trade bills. Hope I and II require yearly certification that Caribbean countries are complying with guidelines that mirror World Bank policies—that is, super-low wages that attract foreign investors.

Last summer, a struggle erupted for passage of a minimum-wage increase from 70g to 400g a day. Tens of thousands of workers took to the streets in August, but a massive deployment of UN troops blocked their entry to the assembly sector. In the end, Preval bowed to pressure from Bill Clinton to increase the minimum daily wage to 125g ($3) in 2009, which would rise to 200g ($5) in 2012. Assembly workers are exempt from the new wage levels and will only receive the 200 gourdes in 2012.

In reality, the initial 125 gourdes is worth less than half of the minimum wage that existed in 1980 under the U.S.-backed dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. Annual inflation in Haiti over the last decade was about 12-14%, although it's hard to get accurate figures are hard to come by.

Another key goal of the World Bank plan was to redirect food production away from satisfying the nutritional needs of Haitians to producing food for the export market. A 1982 document of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a federal "aid" agency often linked to the CIA, proposed the "gradual but systematic removal" of domestic crops from 30% of all tilled land, whose products can then be exported.

The result was the massive migration of Haitian rural farmers and workers from the countryside, where most Haitians live, to already over-crowded urban centers like Port-au-Prince, where unemployment stood at 70-80% before the earthquake.

Rice, a staple of the Haitian diet, used to be produced in quantities that would satisfy domestic needs. However, World Bank economic policy meant dropping tariffs on imported goods. Within a few years, cheaper "Miami rice" flooded the Haitian market, resulting in the destruction of domestic rice farming.

In 2008, after a 45% jump in the price of Miami rice in two years, there were "food riots," as thousands poured into the streets in the capital shouting, "We're hungry. Feed us!" Some described their hunger pains as "swallowing Clorox." UN troops killed about a dozen protesters throughout Haiti. The practice of eating mud laced with sugar is not uncommon in Haiti.

Keeping Haiti politically dependent on the World Bank and Western capital are loans from the World Bank and imperialist governments that come with political strings attached, as do the "structural adjustment" programs. Today, over 50% of the almost $1 billion Haitian budget originates from so-called foreign aid.

Foreign debt had multiplied 17.5 times between 1957 and 1986, the years of the Duvalier family dictatorship. In 2001, the yearly debt servicing alone was $321 million.

However, last June the WB, IMF, and Paris Club reduced the current debt by $1.2 billion out of $1.4 billion to make payments "bearable" as part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC), after years of delay. New loans will increase the debt again unless a genuine debt cancellation is enacted. In order to qualify for HIPC, however, Haiti had to be certified by imperialist institutions as being in compliance with World Bank/IMF policies of "structural adjustment," the privatization of public utilities, the elimination of tariffs on foreign goods, and the elimination of all price subsidies, etc.

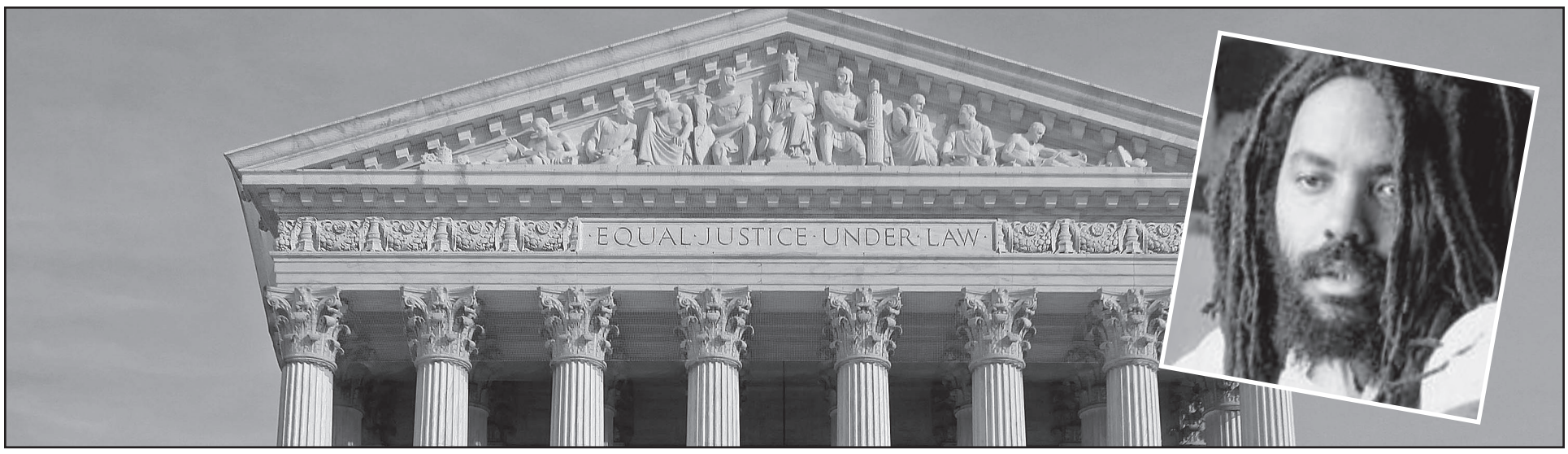
A government study of the public phone company found that its annual revenues amounted to approximately $600 million, but as a result of privatization, this amount was lost to the Haitian people for schools, roads, and medical care—as well as debt repayment.

Although in the wake of the crisis there has been an international call to cancel Haiti's debt, much of it having originated with dictatorships, Haiti is still on the hook for about $764 million to U.S.-dominated lending institutions, which constitute about 80% of all Haitian debt.

Activists in the Jubilee USA network and author Naomi Klein launched a campaign that pressured the World Bank's International Monetary Fund into restructuring a recent $100 million loan into a no-interest loan, with the possibility that the IMF might decide that it does not have to be repaid at all.

What is needed is a powerful workers' movement in Haiti that will challenge the entire system of vulture capitalism and imperialism and reconstruct Haiti under the democratic control of Haiti's working masses. It would enforce the cancellation of all foreign debts. That would require building a revolutionary party and working for a socialist revolution in Haiti, and building a powerful solidarity movement in the U.S.

As the early 20th-century revolutionary leader Rosa Luxemburg put it, the choice faced by humanity is a choice between "socialism and barbarism." ■



Supreme Ct. opens door to Mumia's execution

By JEFF MACKLER

(*Photo*) "Equal Justice Under Law" is emblazoned on the Supreme Court building. The U.S. legal system, however, has repeatedly failed to apply this doctrine to Mumia Abu-Jamal, an innocent man on death row.

In a dangerous decision and a break with its own precedent, the U.S. Supreme Court, on Jan. 15, opened the door wide to Pennsylvania prosecutors' efforts to execute the innocent political prisoner, murder frame-up victim, award-winning journalist, and world-renowned "Voice of the Voiceless," Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Six months earlier, on April 6, the Supreme Court all but shut the door on Mumia's 28-year fight for justice and freedom when it refused to grant a hearing (writ of certiorari) despite its own decision in the 1986 case of *Batson v. Kentucky* that the systematic and racist exclusion of Blacks from juries voids all guilty verdicts and mandates a new trial.

In Mumia's 1982 trial, presided over by the infamous "hanging judge," Albert Sabo, Philadelphia prosecutor Joseph McGill, in explicit violation of *Batson*, used 10 of his 15 peremptory challenges to exclude Blacks from the jury panel. But as with virtually all Mumia court decisions over the past decades, the "Mumia Exception," a consistent and contorted interpretation of the "law," or abject blindness to it, has been employed to reach a predetermined result. Mumia's frame-up murder conviction was allowed to stand.

In contrast, on Jan. 15, 2010, Pennsylvania prosecutors, twice rejected in their efforts to impose the death penalty on Mumia (in 2001 and 2008), were given yet another opportunity to do so when the Supreme Court remanded the sentencing issue of life imprisonment versus execution to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. The latter was instructed to take into consideration the High Court's new ruling in the Ohio case of *Smith v. Spisak*.

Frank Spisak was a neo-Nazi who wore a Hitler mustache to his trial, denounced Jews and Blacks, and confessed in court to three hate-crime murders in Ohio. Spisak saw his jury-imposed death sentence reversed in the federal courts when his attorneys, like Mumia's, successfully invoked a critical 1988 Supreme Court decision in the famous *Mills v. Maryland* case.

The *Mills* decision required, with regard to sentencing procedures, that both the judge's instructions and the jury forms make clear that any juror who believes that one or more mitigating circumstances exist (sufficient to impose a sentence of life imprisonment as opposed to the death penalty) should have the right to have the issues considered by the jury as a whole. Prior to *Mills*, Maryland jurors were effectively led to believe that they had to be unanimous on any possible mitigating circumstances them to be considered in the deliberation process.

Mills explicitly rejected the idea of unanimity; it rejected the notion that a single juror could block from consideration the mitigating circumstances hypothetically found by another juror or even by 11 of the 12 jurors. Before *Mills*, the "unanimity" requirement in the way it was presented to juries essentially eliminated the vast majority of mitigating circumstances, and therefore juries had little or no alternative but to impose the death penalty. Under *Mills*, once all mitigating circumstances were set before the jury, it was then their responsibility to determine whether they were sufficient to impose a sentence of life as opposed to death.

In both Spisak's and Mumia's cases the trial court judge violated the *Mills* principle and in essence instructed the juries that unanimity on each mitigating circumstance was required for consideration of the jury as a whole. As a consequence, Federal District Courts in both Ohio and in Pennsylvania (in the case of Mumia), later backed by decisions of the U.S. Courts of Appeals, invoked *Mills* to overrule the jury-imposed death-sentence verdicts. They ordered a new sentencing hearing and trial with the proper instructions to the jury and where new evidence of innocence could be presented. The jury remained bound, however, by the previous jury's guilty finding.

Even so, the long-suppressed mountain of evidence proving Mumia's innocence drives Mumia's prosecutors to avoid a new trial at all costs. A new trial of any sort could only expose, with unpredictable consequences, the base corruption of a criminal "justice" system permeated by race and class bias. Executing innocent people does not sit well with the American people. In the courts of the elite, as in life itself, nothing is written in stone. The "law" more than once has been "adjusted" in the interests of the poor and oppressed when the price to pay by insisting on its immutability is too costly in terms of doing greater damage to the system as a whole.

The effect of the 1988 *Mills* decision was to make it harder for prosecutors to obtain death sentences in capital cases; the effect of *Spisak* is to make it easier. Armed with this new Supreme Court weapon and order to reconsider the application of *Mills*, Pennsylvania prosecutors will once again seek Mumia's execution before the Third Circuit.

"States' rights" logic of *Spisak* decision

Prior to this unexpected turn of events and for the past 22 years, the broad U.S. legal community appeared to agree that *Mills* applied to all states. That is, if a jury were orally mis-instructed and/or received faulty or unclear verdict forms that implied it needed to be unanimous with regard to mitigating circumstances that would be considered to weigh in against the death penalty, the death penalty would be set aside and a new sentencing hearing ordered.

That is what happened in Mumia's case when Federal District Court Judge William H. Yohn in 2001 employed *Mills* to set aside the jury's death-penalty decision. Yohn gave the state of Pennsylvania 180 days to decide whether or not to retry Mumia or to accept a sentence of life imprisonment.

Since then, Pennsylvania officials have effectively stayed Yohn's order by appealing to the higher federal courts. The Supreme Court gave them the victory they sought.

In deciding to hear Ohio prosecutors' arguments in the *Spisak* case with regard to Mills, the Supreme Court implied that a new interpretation of the concept of federalism was in the making. The political pendulum has swung back and forth on this issue. In past decades, a "states' rights" interpretation was employed to justify racist state laws that denied Blacks access to public institutions and facilities. With the rise of the civil rights movement, federal power was used to compel the elimination of the same racist laws.

Justice is far from blind in America. It is applied to the advantage of the working class and the oppressed only to the extent that the relationship of forces—that is, the struggles of the masses—demand it.

Since *Mills* was decided based on the facts in the state of Maryland only, Ohio and Pennsylvania prosecutors argued, *Mills* cannot be automatically applied to other states where a different set of jury instructions and jury forms were involved. Indeed, Ohio prosecutors argued before the Supreme Court on Oct. 13 that Ohio and Pennsylvania were the exception and not the rule and that the norm in other states was to essentially reject a strict interpretation of Mills in favor of various state guidelines regarding jury instructions. It was not by accident that Mumia's Pennsylvania prosecutors filed a friend of the court brief (amicus curiae) in support of the Ohio *Spisak* appeal.

Undoubtedly, the U.S. Supreme Court found some delight in rendering their *Spisak* decision. They changed the law in order to allow Ohio to execute a likely deranged Nazi and instructed Pennsylvania prosecutors to use this law to try to execute a revolutionary—that is, Mumia Abu-Jamal.

In every sense Mumia's life is on the line as never before. Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell is pledged to sign what could be the third and final warrant for Mumia's execution. Opinions vary as to the timeline for a final decision of the Third Circuit. Indeed, the Third Circuit could in turn remand the *Mills* issue back to Judge Yohn's Federal District Court, and any decision made therein might well be appealed by either side back to the Court of Appeals and then to the U.S. Supreme Court. The process could take months or years, but the deliberations will be based on new turf that leads closer to the death penalty for Mumia than ever before.

Mumia's supporters around the world and Mumia himself have long noted that the battle for his life and freedom largely resides in our collective capacity to build a massive movement capable of making the political price of Mumia's incarceration and execution too high to pay. Mumia is alive and fighting today because of that movement. Those dedicated to his freedom and who stand opposed to the death penalty more generally are urged get involved. Free Mumia!

Contact the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal in California, (510) 268-9429, or the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal in Pennsylvania, (215) 476-8812. ■

Jeff Mackler is the director of the Northern California-based Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

... 'Outsourcing'

(continued from page 12)

when they're executing the job,' he said. 'You can see how that can lead to other things in the border areas.'

"Blackwater, he said, is paid by the Pakistani government through Kestral for consulting services. 'That gives the Pakistani government the cover to say, "Hey, no, we don't have any Westerners doing this. It's all local and our people are doing it." But it gets them the expertise that Westerners provide for [counterterrorism]-related work.'"

The New York Times raised an alarm about the expanding covert war in an editorial Jan. 11: "There are many reasons to oppose the privatization of war. Reliance on contractors allows the government to work under the radar of public scrutiny. And freewheeling contractors can be at crosspurposes with the armed forces. Blackwater's undersupervised guards undermined the effort to win Iraqi support." [The editorial noted that a third of the egregious cases of abuse in Iraq were perpetrated by mercenaries.]

"But most fundamental is that the government cannot—or will not—keep a legal handle on its freelance gunmen. A nation of laws cannot go to war like that."

In fact, it is inevitable, as abundant lessons of history show, that imperialist adventures will undermine the democracy of the home country and offer incentives for its capitalist corporations to become more corrupt and predatory.

The privatization of the U.S. military, a result of the capitalist offensive of the end of the 20th century, has clearly aggravated this tendency. In a complex part of the world and in a complex time, it threatens to bring disastrous consequences of all those involved and affected.

It is clear, after a year of the Obama administration, that none of the parties that serve big business in the United States, not the Democratic Party of Obama any more than the Republican Party of the Bushes, is going to extricate the country from the ramifying entanglements of its official and covert military forces in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area.

Only a thoroughgoing public exposure of the U.S. rulers' operations (both public and private) and independent mass protests in the street can halt and reverse the slide into an endless and expanding war in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area—and perhaps disasters of an unforeseeable scope. ■

New biography has a poor grasp of Ernest Mandel's work as a theorist and leader of Fourth International

By JOE AUCIELLO

Jan Willem Stutje, "Ernest Mandel: A Rebel's Dream Deferred," translated by Christopher Beck and Peter Drucker. (Verso: London, 2009), 392 pp., $34.95.

This book, the first full biography of Marxist leader, writer, and economist Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), is overall a disappointment. The author's stance is overly academic, as becomes especially apparent in the conclusion, where Mandel is faulted because he "had scarcely any following in scholarly circles."

Yet, despite almost a hundred pages of endnotes, in several key instances the work itself is not sufficiently scholarly. Its many flaws on matters large and small can be summed up in one sentence: The biographer does not understand the breadth and depth of his subject. Not only does the author have an uncertain grasp of Marxist theory, he has little sense of Mandel's work as a revolutionary political leader.

Ernest Mandel was one of the principal theorists of the Fourth International, which has member parties in countries throughout the world. For more than 40 years, Mandel authored documents, resolutions, and reports that provided ideas that framed the political theory and guided the political work of the world organization.

In addition, Mandel was a supremely gifted individual who led a multi-faceted political life. He was a remarkably prodigious writer who produced thousands of articles. He wrote more than 20 books, which were translated into more than 30 languages. Although his written work always had a political purpose, some of his books won scholarly distinction. He was a professor in Europe and taught and lectured throughout the world.

Mandel achieved intellectual prominence through his first major work, "Marxist Economic Theory," published in 1962 in France and in 1968 in Britain and the United States. His purpose in this work was not to present a cogent summary of Marx's ideas (that useful task would be undertaken a few years later with the publication of the widely read pamphlet, "An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory") but, "*to start from the empirical data of the science of today in order to examine whether or not the essence of Marx's economic propositions remain valid*" [emphasis in original].

Mandel's analysis in "Marxist Economic Theory" focused on 20th-century capitalism (what he termed "neocapitalism") and the postcapitalist economies represented by the Soviet Union. The many translations and numerous editions of the book suggest that Mandel was indeed successful in his effort to demonstrate the "great superiority of the Marxist method compared with other schools of economic thought."

In addition to his economic writings, which led to works like "Late Capitalism," and "Long Waves of Economic Development," Mandel was at the same time a political activist who spoke in party schools, public debates, and at demonstrations whose audiences numbered in the tens of thousands. Fluent in several languages, the impact of his influence was felt throughout the world—an influence appreciated by the ruling classes of several countries, including the United States, who at various times declared him persona non grata.

Perhaps most significantly, in the 1960s and 1970s especially, Mandel provided the necessary link between a youthful generation in rebellion and the classical heritage of revolutionary Marxism. An excellent overview of Mandel's life and political work, written by Frank Lovell, can be found on the Mandel website, ernestmandel.org.

Some of the limitations of this biography are most glaring when the author discusses Mandel's work as a leading member of the Fourth International (FI). Although the book is not intended as a history of the FI, it is, of course, impossible to write about Mandel's life without explaining and analyzing his decades-long leadership role in that organization.

One significant flaw in the biography is that the biographer simply lacks any real understanding of some of the crucial topics. For instance, the major tendency and factional battles in the 1970s that lasted several years and threatened to split the FI are barely mentioned. Yet, Mandel was a central figure throughout this struggle and was the author of some of the main polemics. The biographer's failure here gives a misleading account of the history, the issues, and of Mandel's role in them.

Beginning in 1969, a majority of the leaders of the Fourth International, including Mandel, presented the strategy of guerrilla warfare as the best road to socialist revolution in Latin America. This overly simplistic and misguided approach was opposed by others in the

Serge Hambourg

Ernest Mandel was a central figure of the radicalizing French students in the events of May 1968 (*right*). At the time, large crowds of young people attended his lectures as he toured the world, and a great many studied his books.

FI, particularly the Socialist Workers Party in the United States. The International was soon divided into two large factions that remained locked in conflict for years until the majority faction adopted a resolution that made a self-criticism of their main errors.

Mandel's biographer offers an account of this serious dispute that can only be regarded as bizarre: "It remains questionable whether Mandel, despite his insistence, was a fully convinced supporter of the armed struggle position. He must have recognized the error, as his was a classical way of thinking. … Yet, had Mandel followed this line, he would have alienated the young radicals, particularly the French. Their Communist League (LC), the crown jewel of the International with its hundreds of new members, would have slipped from his hands. He wanted to avoid that, if necessary by defending a position that took no account of reality. Was his decision to do so a failure of leadership?" (p.187).

The author gives no evidence or source for his assertion that Mandel did not really believe his publicly stated position. It is hardly a small point. And is it true that Mandel "must have recognized the error"? Those errors were the subject of long and detailed articles and documents, particularly those written by Joe Hansen of the SWP, but Mandel, who was certainly capable of reading well, not only "recognized" the criticisms, he did his best to refute them

In fact, Mandel did not realize the extent of his error, which is one reason a years-long dispute continued in the Fourth International. A more likely scenario is that Mandel did believe what he wrote but that he made and clung to a serious mistake in political judgment. He may well have been influenced by the young leaders of the French Communist League, whose members, by the way, were never in "his hands" in the first place.

However, for the biographer to write that Mandel's position "took no account of reality" is simply lightminded nonsense. Not even Mandel's most severe critics at the time ever thought to make such a preposterous claim. The position of the majority of the FI was indeed based on reality; their error was to propose and defend a mistaken theory to change it.

The debate on guerrilla warfare in Latin America is not the only shortcoming in this biography when issues of political disagreements are considered. Political disputes in the 1980s between the FI and the leadership of the American Socialist Workers Party—from which Socialist Action ultimately emerged—disputes in which Mandel took a notably positive role, are not mentioned at all.

The significance of Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union hardly figure in the book. Instead, there is comparatively a great deal about the ultimately frustrating efforts to build an FI section in Poland during the years of political ferment there. All this reveals the biographer's lack of political understanding and proportion.

Further, when this biographer does tackle a specific topic, he is simply out of his depth. Here is one typical instance (many more could be cited) of faulty analysis: "In 1979 he [Mandel] still considered all possibilities open. … The resolution on Europe he presented at the Eleventh World Congress of the Fourth International bore witness to Mandel's own irresolution. Anyone could find in it whatever he wanted: upsurge or decline; it was neither fish nor fowl. Mandel recoiled from taking a definite stand, fearing demoralization. … Mandel feared a weakening of the sections and urged caution" (p. 204).

The resolution on Europe was a comprehensive, 40-page document printed in small type. Naturally enough, the examination of each country and significant political trends in the ruling classes and in the workers' movements were not uniform. Still, the document presented a resolute thesis. Mandel wrote: "Socialist revolution is once again on the agenda in capitalist Europe, not only in the historic but in the immediate sense." The validity of this thesis could be debated, but they are not the words of someone who is recoiling from taking a definite stand.

To make matters even more clear, one need only read the opening sentence of the "Report on the World Political Situation" given by Ernest Mandel. It reads, "The central idea in our analysis of the world situation is that there has been a change in the overall class relationship of forces after 1975 to the detriment of imperialism."

What's more, these documents were not merely an expression of Mandel's personal feelings. They were put to a vote and won the support of a large majority of the delegates at the World Congress. Given the biographer's abysmal lack of comprehension, it's fair to ask if he even read this material. It is certainly clear that he did not understand it.

The overall structure of the book is also unsatisfactory. The biography is organized first by topic (analysis of capitalism; the so-called socialist countries; the revolutionary party) and then, within each topic, by chronology. Since, in Mandel's life, the topics are not so cleanly divided, this structure produces unnecessary overlap and confusion. For instance, Mandel's first wife, Gisela Scholtz, dies by page 199, but, then, 30 pages later, "Gisela's health had worsened dramatically…." When the subject matter is more complex, the reader's confusion increases.

Finally, the writing style here is merely competent at best: the author's prose is clunky and mechanical. Not a sentence in this book can be read with pleasure. While occasionally there are some questionable choices in the translation, the unvarying dullness of the writer cannot be blamed on the translators.

So, while the author strives for an "admiring but critical" stance, his criticism is all too often based on incomprehension. The biographer does not understand the political context that shaped Mandel's life.

Despite the value of the factual material gathered here, the critical analysis presented in this work is misguided or erroneous. Overall, the biography is not a success. ■

Two conferences, same hate: Right-wingers and racists in D.C.

By DARYLE LAMONT JENKINS

In the midst of racial tensions and hatemongering raised from virtually all circles on the right, a conference of politically connected white-supremacist academics, politicians, and activists is about to be held in the Washington D.C. area. It will be just in time for a mainstream and well-attended conservative conference that also is coming to town.

American Renaissance (*AmRen*), the white-supremacist newsletter edited by Jared Taylor, will sponsor a conference on Feb 19-21, the same weekend that the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) will be held at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel.

The *AmRen* conference was originally booked at the Dulles Airport Marriott but was disallowed by the hotel administration after receiving calls from people who were outraged it was to take place there. The conference then attempted to move to the nearby Dulles Airport Westin hotel, but lost its booking after the hotel management also received complaints.

The white supremacists have reportedly now obtained another location for their meeting, but this time the organizers will only tell attendees its location 48 hours in advance. Meanwhile, opposition is growing.

The progressive Mormon newspaper *Mormon Worker* made a public call to oppose the conference. And Workers Uniting (a merger of the United Steelworkers with the British trade union, Unite) put out a press release against the conference that calls attention to the scheduled appearance of Nick Griffin—head of the far-right, racist British National Party (BNP)—as keynote speaker.

Griffin's attendance at the conference and in the U.S. is curious as he may be facing charges in Britain for violating a court order to open the membership of the BNP to non-whites. If Griffin indeed goes to jail for this (he has until this month to comply), it will not be the first time, having served a nine-month sentence in 1996 after being found guilty of "publishing material likely to incite racial hatred."

Keon Neal / AFP / Getty Images

(*Left*) BNP leader Nick Griffin on BBC news show, "Question Time," Oct. 22. Meanwhile, police attacked protesters outside the London television studio.

Griffin even had a connection with James Von Brunn, the neo-Nazi terrorist who shot and killed a security guard at the D.C. Holocaust Museum in June 2009. Von Brunn, who died in January, was a member of the American Friends of the British National Party, and had been at events where Griffin spoke.

Recently, Griffin sparked controversy over his remarks regarding the victims of the earthquake in Haiti, saying that more attention should be paid to those that die during the winter in the United Kingdom. "While the Haiti earthquake is terrible, the winter death toll in Britain will be similar," he said in a post to Twitter and Facebook. "No aid here though."

Others scheduled to speak are Dan Roodt, the head of a South African white-supremacist group called the Pro-Afrikaans Action Group, who argues that Blacks are genetically programmed to commit violent crime; lawyer Sam G. Dickson, who advocates white nationalism and fights against non-white immigration, affirmative action, interracial marriage, homosexuality, and school integration; University of Delaware Professor Raymond Wolter, who argues against school racial desegregation and believes that Blacks have more natural IQ limitations than whites; and longtime white-supremacist activist Wayne Lutton, who is the director of a group that publishes the racist *Occidental Quarterly* journal, and the anti-Semitic *Occidental Observer* magazine.

The more mainstream CPAC conference will be starting a day earlier, on Feb. 18. This conference annually brings out a "Who's Who" of the right, but many of CPAC's attendees, such as *Frontpagemag's* David Horowitz and VDARE's Peter Brimelow, have associated themselves with Taylor and in many cases the white-supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens, a group of which Taylor is a board member.

The group Youth for Western Civilization, which sponsored the Tom Tancredo speaking engagement at the University of North Carolina that was disrupted by protests, held its inaugural event at last year's CPAC. YWC associate Marcus Epstein, who along with Brimelow was at the inaugural, is a co-thinker of Jared Taylor, and all three are associated with Pat Buchanan, who had Jared Taylor on the stage with him as he announced his run for president in 2000. This year, the John Birch Society has been announced as a co-sponsor of CPAC, and that alone has prompted a number of circles to voice concern over the climate the right is trying to create.

The right seems more determined to force their agenda down the throats of people who have no desire for it, but progressives are just as determined not to allow that to happen. Activists are planning protests outside the *AmRen* conference. ■

Readings for revolutionaries:

An American socialist

By BARRY WEISLEDER

There was a time when hundreds of thousands of American workers defied politicians, courts, the cops, and paramilitary gangs to strike for decent wages and union rights—and when over a million men voted for a revolutionary socialist to be president (before women won the right to vote). The first great U.S. mass radicalization against deadly work conditions and miserable exploitation produced a generation of proletarian rebels.

"Eugene V. Debs, A Biography", by Ray Ginger (Collier Books, New York, N.Y., 1962, 543 pages) is the story of the leading voice and most resilient symbol of that late-19th-century generation.

Eugene Debs (1855-1926), a shy, polite son of Terre Haute, Indiana, quit school to labour as a boilerman on the Vandalia railroad. When his friend fell under a train and died, Debs quit and pledged to reform the horrendous working conditions by recruiting for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen.

Starting with conservative views about strikes and political action, Debs radicalized alongside his co-workers, founded the American Railway Union, and became a leading proponent of industrial unionism and class struggle politics. He became a prominent national figure due to his tireless, eloquent, and courageous leadership of the Great Northern Railway strike of 1877 and the famous Pullman Boycott of 1894 (for which he went to jail).

He quit the Democratic Party and embraced socialism as the solution to economic tyranny, poverty, and waste. Though the momentous labour struggles he led suffered vicious repression, and often had mixed immediate results, they laid the basis for mass working-class self-organization. They also challenged the complacent, pro-capitalist policies of the dominant craft unions, symbolized by Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labour, with whom Debs frequently clashed.

The author portrays Debs in all his complexity. He was a chivalrous Victorian gentleman whose fiery speeches were the bane of the ruling class; a proponent of sedate home and family values who lived mostly on the campaign trail, away from his wife Kate for months at a time. He eschewed the comforts of union office, and routinely gave away his money, even his overcoat and jacket, to fellows he met who appeared to be in need.

Debs's extreme selflessness had a political counterpart in his aversion to fight for his policies within his own organizations. This applied especially to the U.S. Socialist Party, whose candidate for president he was on four occasions. The SP was a broad coalition of disparate currents, from anarcho-syndicalists to Marxists to pro-business reformists.

Although the SP enjoyed a massive radical base, boasting up to 135,000 members and nearly half a million subscribers to its weekly newspaper *Appeal to Reason*, not to mention a host of other publications, its apparatus was dominated by crass reform politicians, dubbed 'sewer socialists' for their association with basic municipal improvements. Under their influence, the SP capitulated to the craft unionism of the AFL, to its tolerance of racist job segregation, and to the patriotic hysteria linked to the imperialist World War I.

In all his years as the leading spokesperson for the SP, Debs only once attended a convention of his party. He refused to organize a fight for revolutionary socialist policies within the organization, believing that his job was "to convert the rank and file, who would then convert the leaders". Unfortunately, this extended to a belief that revolutionary politics would spontaneously survive and prosper in a broad, undisciplined party riven by factions.

Another weakness was his view that, despite widespread racism and sexism, socialists should advance no special measures, no affirmative-action policies for any distinctly oppressed section of the working class: his answer to oppression under capitalism was socialism, full stop.

Debs' dream of the SP as the voice of a united, triumphant working class, independent of the bosses' parties, was publicly desecrated when the party backed the capitalist Progressive Party in the 1924 election. After the vote, the Progressives dissolved and the discredited SP shrivelled. The nascent Communist Party, champion of the Russian Revolution (which Debs ardently supported, in contrast to the ambivalent SP leadership), attracted the bulk of radicals.

Although Debs' health was broken by the two and a half hard years he served in an Atlanta, Georgia, prison for opposing World War I, his militant spirit, his promotion of industrial unionism and mass action, and his faith in socialism as the antidote to capitalist exploitation and war continue to inspire generations of fighters for social justice and workers' power.

The great socialist was a leading campaigner for civil liberties and defender of victims of capitalist repression, from the Haymarket Martyrs to Big Bill Haywood. He identified closely with the victims of capitalist injustice. No one expressed the thought more forcefully, more eloquently than he did in his own defense in 1918: "While there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

This biography is worth reading, if only for the many fabulous quotes from some of the greatest speeches ever delivered by a working-class leader. Despite its superficiality in dealing with Marxist theory, competing tendencies on the left, and questions of political strategy, Ray Ginger's book is artfully packaged with fascinating details, delivered in a heartwarming fashion, about a great man and a great time in U.S. labour history. ■

Pie in the Sky

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

Co-writer and director Jason Reitman was prescient when he and Sheldon Turner wrote the screenplay for "Up in the Air," a sad, poignant film that is heartless in showing the plight of the millions of jobless Americans.

The filmmakers used people's uncertain status in today's working world to tell a story about a seemingly emotionless, smooth-talking, handsome, Human Resources contract hit-man man, Ryan Bingham (George Clooney). Reitman interviewed real people, with a couple of exceptions, who had been fired, using the footage in segments throughout the film. In today's economy, job-loss and unemployment figures are the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s and the downturn of the early '80s.

Bingham is the top guy at a large corporation specializing in the business of helping companies "downsize." His job is to convince workers that losing their job is a good thing. He flies to all the major U.S. cities, rents a car, and drives to identical "office parks" of companies that have hired him.

Here is Clooney at his slickest in dress and manner. One might be almost happy to be fired by such a person. (On a personal note, I was fired by a hugely obese, heavily made-up woman. Whenever she lumbered past our cubicles, we would quake in our boots, knowing heads would roll.)

Bingham's lifestyle, when not spending almost the entire year up in the air or in high-end hotels, is spare. He has a small apartment with a kitchen nook, a bedroom accessed by pushing aside a tacky folding door, a closet with just so many look-alike suits and shirts, a dresser filled with carefully folded underwear, and socks. He lives out of his wheeled carry-on with its collapsible handle. And loves it.

We hear Clooney in the occasional narrative voice-over talking about the crazy things people do when they're fired: The dreaded disgruntled employee syndrome that ends in a massacre at a former workplace or household.

At the start of the film, Reitman shows people reacting as they listen to Bingham. They are middle-age employees for the most part, seen full-screen sitting in front of a desk; Bingham is off camera. Their faces crumple as they speak about losing their homes, maybe having to sell their cars, and what will happen to their kids' college fund?

With a sympathetic yet encouraging smile, Bingham tells them that now, they can do whatever it is that they've always dreamed of before signing on to a job they were never passionate about: "You can be your own boss, start your own company, be an entrepreneur." Before him are a stack of severance packets, detailing the terms of their being "let go."

"Up in the Air," a film directed by Jason Reitman; screenplay by Reitman and Sheldon Turner.
Starring George Clooney, Jason Bateman, Vera Farmiga, and Anna Kendrick.

-"Never say 'fired' or 'terminated,'" he advises Natalie (Anna Kendrick), a new hire for his company. She is the epitome of the young professional woman who wants it all—career, marriage, kids. She is crisp, pony-tailed, with an expressionless face that looks like a computer drawing.

He meets his match and more in no-nonsense Alex Goran (an excellent Vera Farmiga) in a swanky hotel bar. They start off by one-upping each other in displaying their plastic—credit cards, hotel keys, executive suite cards—and swapping travel stories. After one night together, they gladly go their separate ways and later refer to their packed schedules for when they can meet again. They're in it for the fun, companionship—someone with whom to drink, dine, and bed. No strings, yet Bingham seems anxious at times.

Things are great until his boss, Craig Gregory (Jason Bateman), tells him they're going to save money by firing people via video-conferencing, a program proposed by Natalie. In effect, Bingham will be grounded.

Natalie is appalled by Ryan's lifestyle, his detachment. She tells him that everyone needs the company of other people. Bingham takes her on the road. She gets her shot at a teleconference firing. A woman responds to her question, "What are your plans?" "I think I'll jump off a bridge," she says. A tragic result of one such impersonal firing sends Ryan back on the road.

The film is not all the cold, calculating business of firing people. Ryan takes Alex to his niece's wedding back home. Despite the economy, she and her fiancé are getting married and will start a family. Ryan and Alex dance, laugh, carry on then go their separate ways. Ryan ponders Natalie's observation.

He seeks out Alex only to find she's been playing him all along—the film's only twist. She's basically fired him; now he knows how it feels. Still, being Ryan, he carries on.

Reitman's films, as in many mainstream films passing as "indie" or "art" films, carry the message that unless you're married and/or have a huge, loving, yet quirky family that nevertheless ascribes to convention, you can't possibly be happy. Once Ryan gets back on track, following a familiar routine, with all its perks, he certainly will be content if only to one day find love, and reconnect with his family. A last shot shows him entering yet another airport terminal. Home. ■

Socialism and U.S. cultural traditions

By LEVI TURNER

The ideas of revolutionary socialism are not alien to the traditions of the American people. The history of the United States begins with a revolution against a despotic empire in 1776. It is also graced with a second revolution in 1864, whereby the slave power was overthrown and the bondage of chattel slavery tossed into the muck of history.

Many American cultural traits—ranging from holidays, style, food, and music—originated with the toiling masses. When one thinks of American music, one may think of the folk music of the Appalachian peoples or the blues music and spirituals of African Americans.

Both of these musical traditions in turn were blended into rock 'n' roll by the mid-20th century, and ever since then American popular music and culture—ranging from rock, folk, rap, metal, hip hop, and so forth—has come to be a symbol of youth self-expression outside the norms of bourgeois social conservatism.

In the late 19th century up to the 1930s, a popular art and writing culture called "Regionalism" arose, which celebrated the cultures and histories of nationalities and also of smaller sub regions. Regionalism did not blindly praise regional characteristics without recognizing the very real problems that faced it, and more times than not those problems addressed were of a *class* nature.

An example of Regionalism can be seen in the works of James Whitcomb Riley. Riley wrote various poems and prose on the regional aspects of his native rural Indiana and of "middle America." He would often weave in the colloquialisms of his native Indiana (he was a college-educated man, so this style of writing was not really his own). But Riley was no chauvinist, nor was he ignorant of the problems that faced both the United States and his native Indiana. "A Peace Hymn of the Republic" was Riley's profound response to the rise of imperialism, and works such as "Jamesy" and "The Raggedy Man" expressed his understanding that class struggle was a very real problem for the land that he loved.

Other progressive artists and cultural icons—such as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, John Mellencamp, and Bruce Springsteen—have through their work celebrated their regional and national backgrounds while maintaining an expressed love for humanity and a cry for the downtrodden and exploited peoples of the Earth.

Woody Guthrie, who was sympathetic to socialism and the Communist Party, wrote a song that almost became our national anthem: "This Land is Your Land." (Unfortunately, many of the radical lyrics were censored out, thanks to the McCarthy era.)

Of course, the United States is not unique in its rich history or its cultural contributions. And in many ways, the greatest of revolutionary heroes treated their homelands in very much the same way.

In Russia, the revolutionaries of the early 1900s were inspired by their country's traditions through the populist works of Tolstoy. In Yugoslavia, the communist Partisans inspired the masses to fight fascism through public performances about legendary Slavic peasants who had rebelled against the landlords in medieval times. In Cuba, the people were inspired by the truly Cuban works of Jose Marti and the liberating tune of "Guantanamera."

In his 1948 piece, "The Two Americas," James P. Cannon, the major founder of the Trotskyist movement in the United States, outlines that in America, as in every country, there are two "nations": that of the working people, and that of the bosses and exploiters. "One is the America of the imperialists—of the little clique of capitalists, landlords, and militarists who are threatening and terrifying the world. This is the America the people of the world hate and fear.

"There is the other America—the America of the workers and farmers and the "little people." They constitute the great majority of the people. They do the work of the country. They revere its old democratic traditions—its old record of friendship for the people of other lands, in their struggles against kings and despots—its generous asylum once freely granted to the oppressed.

"This is the America which must and will solve the world crisis—by taking power out of the hands of the little clique of exploiters and parasites, and establishing a government of workers and farmers. The workers' and farmers' government will immediately proceed to change things *fundamentally*….

"We, the American Trotskyists—we, the national convention of the Socialist Workers Party, summon our America to her great destiny—not as conqueror but as liberator of the world."

Here is the most revolutionary attitude towards one's home country. Socialists in the U.S. do not declare war on the name "America" nor are we here to destroy its very existence. We seek only to destroy that part of "America," and that great ulcer on the whole world that allows one class to oppress another: capitalism. ■

Mandel Ngan / AFP / Getty Images

(*Above*) Pete Seeger (*left*) and Bruce Springsteen sing Woodie Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" at Obama's inaugural celebration, Jan.18, 2009.

SOCIALIST ACTION

U.S. Aghanistan goals dim as 'Taliban' gains strength

By GERRY FOLEY

Brennan Linsley / AP

The outlook for the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan has darkened further in recent weeks. On Jan. 18, the Taliban succeeded in carrying out a large-scale attack in central Kabul, showing that they could penetrate all the security barriers protecting the Afghan capital. The operation was a costly one for the Taliban, involving suicide commandos. But it made its point. Moreover, it demonstrated the new Taliban tactic of avoiding indiscriminate slaughter, a break from the pattern of the suicide bombings carried out in Pakistan.

The New York Times reported Jan. 20: "The Taliban have embarked on a sophisticated information war, using modern media tools as well as some old-fashioned ones, to soften their image and win favor with local Afghans as they try to counter the Americans' new campaign to win Afghan hearts and minds."

The article continued: "Now, as the Taliban deepen their presence in more of Afghanistan, they are in greater need of popular support and are recasting themselves increasingly as a local liberation movement, independent of Al Qaeda, capitalizing on the mounting frustration of Afghans with their own government and the presence of foreign troops. The effect has been to make them a more potent insurgency, some NATO officials said."

The shift of the Taliban makes still more doubtful any success of the recruiting of local irregular forces as auxiliaries of the Afghan army and the occupiers, the tactic that was decisive for the U.S.-led occupation getting the upper hand in Iraq.

In Iraq, the U.S. strategy was based on the backlash against the ruthlessness of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The Taliban leadership's new tactical stance apparently also reflects, as the article indicates, that the base of the insurgency is becoming politically broader.

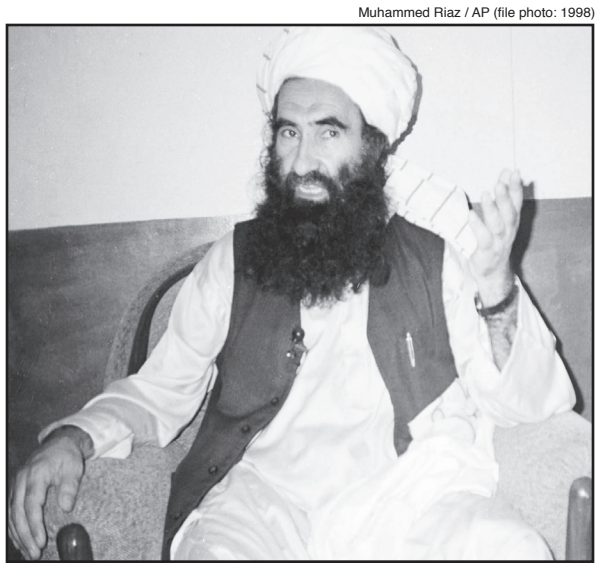
On Jan. 26, *The New York Times* published excerpts from cables from the U.S. ambassador in Afghanistan that indicated a sharp disagreement in U.S. ruling circles over the escalation of the intervention in Afghanistan: "The cables—one four pages, the other three—also represent a detailed rebuttal to the counterinsurgency strategy offered by Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the top American and NATO commander in Afghanistan, who had argued that a rapid infusion of fresh troops was essential to avoid failure in the country.

"They show that Mr. Eikenberry [the current U.S. ambassador], a retired Army lieutenant general who once was the top American commander in Afghanistan, repeatedly cautioned that deploying sizable American reinforcements would result in 'astronomical costs'—tens of billions of dollars—and would only deepen the dependence of the Afghan government on the United States."

The new Taliban tactic of avoiding indiscriminate slaughter indicates that its base is getting broader.

After the release of the cables, Eikenberry tried to quiet the sensation, claiming that his concerns had been satisfied. But the publication of such internal government documents by the official in charge of U.S. relations with Afghanistan was extremely unusual, if not unprecedented. It must reflect grave worries in the U.S. ruling circles about the future of the U.S.-led occupation. They have good reason to worry. The Afghan occupation is leading them into murkier and murkier waters. ■

Muhammed Riaz / AP (file photo: 1998)



(*Top*) U.S. Marines react to attack by Taliban on Oct. 4 in Helmand Province, southern Afghanistan.

(*Below*) Jalaluddin Haqqani, pro-Taliban leader with forces in Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.

'Outsourcing' the war effort

By GERRY FOLEY

More and more, the big business press, as well as liberal investigative journalists, are reporting how the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan has become entangled in a web of corruption and intrigue. In particular, the "outsourcing" of military tasks to private profiteers leads the intertwining of the occupation with criminal networks and even with the enemy that the U.S. government is devoting hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of lives to defeat.

The Jan. 21 issue of the *Huffington Post* carried an article from *GlobalPost* reporting that a number of U.S. government agencies are investigating corruption related to military and development contracts: "As *GlobalPost* first reported in September, USAID's Office of the Inspector General is probing allegations of a protection racket in which Afghan subcontractors are paying protection money to local Taliban leaders to prevent their projects and employees from being targeted. That investigation is underway, but USAID officials have declined to comment on specifics of the case."

In the Jan. 22 issue of the liberal on-line journal *Counterpunch*, Malalai Joya, an independent Afghan feminist radical, declared: "In the last eight years, they [the occupiers] have turned my country into the centre of drugs. ... They are saying to the poor farmers, 'stop planting poppies,' but the governors of these provinces are drug traffickers. Four persons who have high posts in Karzai's cabinet are famous drug traffickers."

Counterpunch summarized: "US complicity in the multibillion dollar drug trade, as evidenced by Hamid Karzai's brother's close connections to both the CIA and the heroin underworld ... have made it clear that poppies are not just a convenient cash crop for the struggling farmers. They are a new natural resource and the drug lords and their occasional allies in the occupation forces are the new colonialists who mean to prosper in the market that leaves most Afghans living in dire poverty."

Moreover, the intrigue extends to Pakistan, a country of 180 million people, where public opinion has been whipped into a fury of hatred of the U.S. by repeated and now multiplying illegal bombings of alleged Taliban targets in which many Pakistani civilians have been killed.

The Dec. 13 Taliban suicide bombing in Khost revealed that the Blackwater (now Xe Services) mercenary outfit is working (on military and assassination protects) with the CIA, despite earlier denials by the U.S. government. Two Blackwater operatives were killed, along with six CIA agents.

In his recent visit to Pakistan, Defense Secretary Gates let the cat out of the bag about U.S. mercenaries operating within Pakistan, with the shamefaced approval of supine Pakistani officials. Jeremy Scahill reported in the Jan. 22 web edition of *The Nation*: "On Thursday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates confirmed that Blackwater is operating in Pakistan. In an interview on Express TV, Gates, who was visiting Islamabad, said, 'They [Blackwater and another private security firm, DynCorp] are operating as individual companies here in Pakistan,' according to a DoD [Department of Defense] transcript of the interview."

Gates then tried to get the cat back in the bag, to no avail. As *The Wall Street Journal* reported, 'Defense officials tried to clarify the comment Thursday night, telling reporters that Mr. Gates had been speaking about contractor oversight more generally and that the Pentagon didn't employ Xe in Pakistan.'" The Blackwater (Xe) operations did have a local cover, but there can hardly be any doubt that the U.S. government stands ultimately behind its operations.

Scahill continued in *The Nation*, "Today [apparently Jan. 22, although the date is not specified], the country's senior minister for the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Bashir Bilour, also acknowledged that the company is operating in Pakistan's frontier areas. Bilour told Pakistan's Express News TV that Blackwater's activities were taking place with the 'consent and permission' of the Pakistani government, saying he had discussed the issue with officials at the US Consulate in Peshawar, who told him that Blackwater was training Pakistani forces."

"Bilour's statements," Scahill commented, "are consistent with what a former Blackwater executive and a US military intelligence source told me in December—that Blackwater is working on a subcontract for Kestral, a Pakistani security and logistics firm. That contract, say my sources, is technically with the Pakistani government, which helps cloak Blackwater's presence."

Scahill went on to quote one of his earlier articles: "According to the former executive, Blackwater operatives also integrate with Kestral's forces in sensitive counterterrorism operations in the North-West Frontier Province, where they work in conjunction with the Pakistani Interior Ministry's paramilitary force, known as the Frontier Corps (alternately referred to as 'frontier scouts').

"The Blackwater personnel are technically advisers, but the former executive said that the line often gets blurred in the field. Blackwater 'is providing the actual guidance on how to do [counterterrorism operations] and Kestral's folks are carrying a lot of them out, but they're having the guidance and the overwatch from some BW guys that will actually go out with the teams

(continued on page 8)