

Obama's election victory: The corporate choice to handle capitalist crisis



Tony Savino / Socialist Action



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(Above) New Yorkers line up for gasoline in wake of Hurricane Sandy. Capitalism has been shown incapable of combatting climate change — responsible for increased storms, floods, and droughts worldwide. Despite his rhetoric on global warming, Obama plans to boost the use of fossil fuels.

(Left) Harlem protesters in January 2012 against indefinite detention of political prisoners — a policy flagrantly promoted by Obama's White House.

BY JEFF MACKLER

The \$6 billion U.S. election extravaganza—conducted virtually year round in the modern era to consciously dull the senses of capitalism's working masses with an unending torrent of myths, half truths, and lies—is over. The mask of a progressive, humanistic, caring, environmentally concerned, if not antiwar president, Barack Obama, has been carefully fitted over the white racist, warmongering, corporate ruling-class elite. The one percent—or better, the one thousandth of one percent ruling-class elite—who employ the world's best minds to create a “Truman Show” or “Potemkin Village” fantasy-world reality aimed at convincing its victims that their “choice” is significant, emerged victorious—as was expected.

In the absence of a serious working-class alternative, the Big Lie school of politics prevailed yet again, and the vast destruction wreaked on tens of millions of people, stemming from a crisis-ridden U.S. and world capitalism, went unchallenged. Anger was channeled, as intended, into the two-party “lesser-evil” shell game that U.S. politics is designed to be.

President Obama's victory speech to

some 10,000 cheering and flag-waving campaign workers at Chicago's McCormick Place was a staged performance of a fairy-tale America. The highly skilled and tutored head of the executive committee of the ruling rich proclaimed without shame that the strength of the nation was “not in its military might”—the world's greatest, he felt compelled to note—but rather in the “unity of its people,” in the promise of “equality and justice for all, including Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, gays, straights, rich and poor.”

We want a nation, he asserted, “that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.” We need to “fix our tax code,” and to “reform our immigration system,” he pledged. Obama declared that our “economy is recovering” and that “a decade of war is ending.” The president repeatedly insisted during his campaign that his bailout had “saved the U.S. auto industry” and tens of thousands of jobs, that he was a champion of women and abortion rights, of America's teachers and education.

The tragedy of our times—which are rapidly changing to be sure—is that there was no working-class-based, fighting-union candidate or party to challenge Obama's ruling-class party and its real

bipartisan agenda. There was no opposition, except the modest, courageous, and unintimidated band of socialists, unswerving mass-movement antiwar and social-justice campaigners and radical activists to tell the truth that under the Obama's watch:

- Racism is on the rise in capitalist America, with an ever-expanding and increasingly privatized near slave-labor prison-industrial complex that incarcerates 3.5 million of the nation's poor and oppressed—the majority Black and Latino. In total, 7.1 million are under the jurisdiction of the criminal “justice system.” Unemployment among Blacks and Latinos is double the rate of whites and increasing.

- A record 400,000 immigrants have been deported in each of the past two years.

- Military spending for new and expanding wars has reached an historic high, with the U.S. accounting for close to the entire world combined.

- Civil liberties are under unprecedented attack. Some 700,000 Muslims have been interviewed by the government in regard to “suspected” terrorist activity. Islamophobia and the associated “war on terrorism” have become the vehicles to

justify the heinous presidential “kill list,” indefinite detentions, drone bombings, grand jury/FBI persecution of political activists, extension of the Bush-era Patriot Act and imprisonment of leaders of innocent Muslim charitable organizations.

- The use of privatized mercenary death-squad armies in Afghanistan and around the world is on the rise, and now comprises close to a majority of the U.S. fighting forces in Afghanistan.

- The U.S. government, which bailed out the banks and corporations to the tune of more than \$20 trillion, oversees and implements the greatest disparity of wealth since the years preceding the Great Depression. The rich are richer than ever while the 99 percent have suffered the brunt of a failing U.S. capitalism.

- New wars, overt and covert, in Libya and across Africa, and threatened wars, sanctions and blockades against Iran and Syria are today top government priorities.

- Massive deterioration of social services and public education: Next on the legislative agenda are “grand compromise” bipartisan agreements to reduce expenditures for Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and public education.

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U.S. antiwar activists join march against drones in Pakistan

By USMAN KHAN YUSUFZAI

For a week, beginning on Oct. 3, Code Pink sponsored an antiwar delegation of 31 activists from the United States to re-search the impact of drone attacks by the U.S. military on Pakistani soil, concentrat-ed mainly in Pakistan’s Federally Admin-istered Tribal Areas (FATA), and to meet with survivors and families of victims.

The peace delegation also participated in a massive march from Islamabad to South Waziristan, the southernmost agency in FATA and a hub for airstrikes, incursions by the Pakistani military, and various Is-lamic militant groups that operate in the region. The march was organized by the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf party (PTI), Imran Khan.

The march, beginning on Oct. 7, man-aged to reach the FATA border, where they were finally turned back by the Pakistani armed forces. The reason given was, as always, security, despite the fact that all along the route, they were met and welcomed with ex-pressions of solidarity for justice and peace by local Pakistanis. Upon returning to Islamabad, the activists participated in a symbolic fast in front of the Islam-abad Press Club to protest drone strikes.

Drone warfare, since its first large-scale military use in Afghanistan in 2001, has quickly become the weapon of choice for American military intervention abroad; they are currently being used in several other countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and the Philippines. Drones provide a quick, lethal, and low-cost means of enforcing American military might; there is little threat of retaliation, no chance of U.S.



(Left) U.S. activists sit with families of drone victims in Islamabad.

deaths, and at-will attack and surveillance. The Ameri-can military and corporate media hails the drone pro-gram as a solution to all of the problems its own impe-rialist agenda has created abroad, allowing precision strikes with a minimum of collateral damage.

The story on the ground, however, is different. A recently released report by the law schools of New York University and Stanford, entitled “Living Under Drones,” reveals the extent of the terror that those ci-vilians living in the targeted areas live under. Although official statistics on civilian deaths from drone strikes is difficult, as the drone program is officially secret, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates that 474-884 civilians have been killed in attacks in Pakistan,

including 176 children. Drone attacks have hit weddings, funerals, and those at-tempting to provide aid to those wound-ed in previous strikes.

Though the Obama administration has claimed that the vast majority of those killed are “militants,” the administration has also defined “militants” as “all males between the ages of 18 and 35.” The NYU/Stanford report estimates that only around 2% of those killed in these attacks are “high level” targets.

The result of U.S. drone policy for the people in FATA and in Pakistan is an at-mosphere of terror. There is a massive psychological crisis underway in the trib-al areas, as ordinary people are forced to go about their daily lives in fear that their homes, their families, and their lives might be destroyed from above without warning.

It is an atmosphere that provides right-wing Is-lamist groups their most fertile ground for recruiting members and propagating their reactionary ideology, which in turn results in the violent repression of those in Pakistan and elsewhere genuinely fighting for peace and justice. The tragic shooting of 14-year-old feminist and socialist Malala Yusufzai by Islamic reactionaries is just the most recent example.

Malala was targeted because she stood up against the closing of girls’ schools in the region by the Taliban. But she has also spoken out against U.S. drone strikes. Two days after the Taliban shot her, a U.S. drone attack killed 18 people. ■

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 withdrawal of all U.S. troops and mercenaries from Iraq & Afghanistan! No war on Iran! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war indus-tries 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 match-es the rises in consumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.**
- 7) **Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimi-nation; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orienta-tion, skin color, or national origin.**
- 8) **Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transporta-tion 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!**

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Socialist Action newspaper editorial offices: socialistactionnews@yahoo.com Website: www.socialistaction.org

WHERE TO FIND SOCIALIST ACTION

- ASHLAND, Ore.: damonjure@earthlink.net
- BOSTON: bostsocact@gmail.com (781) 630-0250
- CARRBORO, N.C.: (919) 967-2866, robonica@lycos.com
- CHICAGO: P.O. Box 578428 Chicago, IL 60657, chisocialistaction@yahoo.com
- CONNECTICUT: (860) 478-5300
- DULUTH, MINN.: wainosunrise@yahoo.com. www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com
- GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.: Kowalskimike@comcast.net
- KANSAS CITY: kcsa@workernet.org (816) 221-3638
- LOUISVILLE, KY: redlotus51@yahoo.com, (502) 451-2193
- MADISON, Wis.: Northlandiguana@gmail.com
- MANKATO, MINN.: Misshbradford@yahoo.com
- MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, socialistaction@visi.com

- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157
- PHILADELPHIA: philly.socialistaction@gmail.com
- PORTLAND, ORE.: (503) 233-1629 gary1917@aol.com
- PROVIDENCE: ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM (401) 592-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: ANNMTAGUE@COMCAST.NET
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610 (510) 268-9429, sfsocialistaction@gmail.com
- WASHINGTON, DC: christopher.towne@gmail.com, (202) 286-5493

SOCIALIST ACTION CANADA

NATIONAL OFFICE
526 Roxton Road, Toronto, Ont. M6G 3R4, (416) 535-8779
<http://socialistaction.ca/>

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Hurricane Sandy: An unnatural disaster

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



By ANDREW POLLACK

By now the scientific consensus is clear: the fury of Hurricane Sandy was greatly magnified by human-caused climate change.

Scientists, said a *Scientific American* article, are now linking climate change “directly to intense storms and other extreme weather events.” In the case of Sandy, this meant the interaction of a hurricane moving unusually further north with a southbound jet stream, a rising and warming sea level, and a warmer atmosphere—each on their own magnified by global warming, and all together ramping up Sandy’s strength.

The hurricane’s destructive force meant that even the mainstream media felt compelled to report on studies linking global warming to the increased frequency and heightened severity of other extreme weather events, including drought, heat waves, and sudden strong rain downpours. Earlier this year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded: “A changing climate leads to changes in the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and timing of extreme weather and climate events, and can result in unprecedented extreme weather and climate events.”

The media even dug up studies from a decade or more ago, warning that New York City was in danger of just the kind of severe flooding that proved to be the most catastrophic feature of Sandy. And the consensus of scientists globally is that the factors of climate change that influenced the severity of Sandy’s impact, such as rising sea levels, are still accelerating, and that they are ever more tightly wound up with other results of global warming.

The storm resulted in over a hundred deaths in the United States (and dozens more, largely ignored by the media, in the Caribbean), as well as leaving millions without power and equal numbers with no way to get to work. Five nuclear power plants lie in Sandy’s path and were forced to shut down to avoid problems with electricity and/or water, both key to stopping plant meltdown.

The storm also exposed, to borrow the phrase of an article by Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Rohde, “The Hideous Inequality” of our society. Those most likely to have gone without not only power but even food and water in the days after Sandy were Black, Latin@, and Asian residents in public housing complexes, the elderly of all nationalities living in high-rises whose elevators were out, workers in places such as Staten Island and the farther reaches of Brooklyn and Queens, and huge chunks of New Jersey—all far out of sight and mind of the region’s ruling class.

Naturally, the resentment of those ignored was magnified by news of the Stock Exchange’s speedy reopening, and by the fact that in Lower Manhattan the only lights to be seen for almost a week were those of Goldman Sachs. The Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are repeating their post-Katrina negligence. A week after the storm hit, reports from many of the most-impacted neighborhoods were that neither agency was anywhere in sight.

While their families and neighbors huddled in the dark, many of the cities’ lowest-paid and least-organized workers—especially those in the service and retail sectors, who are overwhelmingly workers of color

and/or immigrant workers—slept at their worksites, fearful of losing pay if they couldn’t get back into Manhattan after returning home to the outer boroughs. Without power, the poor can’t even use food stamp cards, which must be swiped through an electronic reader.

Of course, the big-hearted banks pitched right in to help—by offering to drive further into debt devastated homeowners, small businesses, and over-stretched workers in general through new kinds of loans and raised credit card limits.

But cop harassment didn’t stop the massive effort of such volunteers, mobilized primarily by Occupy Wall Street and community groups such as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), and the Peoples’ Survival Program. Thousands of activists have turned out in neighborhoods throughout the city, mobilizing in turn local residents. The scale and type of assistance provided has been incredibly impressive, the coordination within and across sites efficient, the spirit an admirable combination of love and militancy.

Occupiers and other grassroots groups have handed out food and water, clothing, and flashlights. This often meant climbing many flights of stairs to visit the elderly stuck on higher floors without power or running water, marooned by nonworking elevators. Substantial monetary and material donations flowed in to Occupy accounts and relief sites.

Occupiers see this not as a one-time effort, but as part of their ongoing movement to change society. Reflecting the dominant ideology of Occupy, several refer to what they’re doing as “mutual aid” (an anarchist concept reflecting a society based on small, autonomous collectives). One leading Occupy Activist wrote that “this relief was in itself an act of resistance.” Another said they were organizing communities, not doing charity.

Occupiers and activists in the Occupy-initiated Strike Debt campaign are already discussing how the Sandy relief efforts can fit into their longer-term goal of breaking the 1%’s grip on society. One key factor in determining such a fit will be the residue of organic community and workplace self-organizing that is left in place for the long haul of repair and reconstruction. In that regard, OWS’s own popular assembly model for discussion and decision-making could be used by community members to discuss needs, to formulate demands, and to mobilize to win them.

Occupiers reported seeing people to whom they had delivered food one day showing up the next to join the relief effort. Certainly, such community activists can organize themselves to compare notes on which blocks have power out or homes destroyed, who needs gas or food, what federal and other agencies are doing (or more often failing to do), etc.

Another factor is the question of the social bases of ongoing relief and reconstruction efforts. In addition to organizing at the community level, workplace-based and industry-based organizing is essential. One opportunity to do so is around the wages lost and transportation costs incurred by huge chunks of the

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region’s workers. This means on the one hand organizing to make sure that benefits from the various special Federal programs announced—disaster unemployment benefits, FEMA grants or loans to homeowners, etc.—go to all who need them, and that if the criteria for who qualifies are too restrictive, that they be extended. Not one worker should suffer loss of pay due to storm-imposed workplace closure or the costs of taking car service to get to work. This includes making sure the undocumented are not excluded or afraid to apply.

Instead of being allowed to increase workers’ indebtedness through new loans to repair or rebuild destroyed homes, the banks’ assets should be seized to fund special grants to every homeowner in need, every wage-earner with a lost or diminished paycheck.

Every union and workers’ organization in the region should form a special committee, enrolling, and led by, members impacted by the storm. Such committees can tally the various ways members have been impacted, formulate lists of needs and demands, and join with other committees in an ongoing campaign to recoup lost pay and housing. Such workplace-based committees can also discuss what went wrong, and discuss how the region’s infrastructure should be rebuilt and extended to prepare for coming storms.

No one knows better than the electricity, transportation, health-care, and other workers who were plunged into the middle of the crisis what’s lacking in the region’s infrastructure—including how budget cuts have damaged maintenance and repair. It is they who know best what is needed to rebuild and extend it, including to minimize loss of life and property in coming extreme weather events.

Most importantly, such committees can begin discussing how to build a movement to reverse the global warming that gave Sandy its force. A campaign for ongoing reconstruction and against global warming led by workplace and neighborhood committees would also confront the question of resources. As massive as were the donations given to Occupy relief committees, they don’t come close to the billions that will be needed to fully rebuild lost homes or to compensate for lost wages or jobs, not to mention the billions that will be needed to protect close-to-shore communities against coming storms.

What’s more, if we are to reverse global warming, mutual aid efforts sprouting up alongside huge capitalist corporations and banks are inadequate. A climate-friendly economy will not be built until the resources of the energy companies and their financial backers are seized and put under worker/community control.

See <http://www.facebook.com/OccupySandyReliefNyc> for more information on how to help. ■



Lessons of Chicago's teachers strike

By DAVID BERNT

CHICAGO—In the aftermath of the historic Chicago teachers' strike there are many lessons to be learned. The strike of 26,000 teachers was the most significant strike in the United States since 15 years ago, when UPS workers walked out in a national strike. In striking, the Chicago Teachers Union was able to halt the worst of the massive concessions that Mayor Rahm Emanuel had sought. The teachers won important gains, while accepting some concessions at the same time.

The leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union, elected in 2010 as a reform caucus, mobilized their rank and file and maintained a level of union democracy that is sadly very rare in unions these days. CTU did just about everything that could have been done to win the best contract possible. The fact that CTU was compelled to give some concessions is more a reflection of the general situation facing the entire labor movement than anything the Chicago Teachers Union did or didn't do.

The labor movement everywhere, and especially in the public sector, has accepted massive concessions. When the rest of the labor movement is accepting concessions, it makes it that much harder for individual unions to resist concessions and make gains. In the case of CTU, its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers, has been on the "cutting edge" of accepting concessions, agreeing without a fight to much of what the Chicago Teachers Union was fighting against.

Much of the labor movement's failure to fight against concessions can be traced to its near universal support and dependency on the Democratic Party. The leadership of the labor movement is trapped in the two-party shell game, in which massive resources are spent electing Democrats and all hopes for gains are placed in those Democratic politicians elected with labor support delivering gains for working people.

The problem with this strategy is twofold. On the one hand, the elected "friends of labor" rarely deliver on the most modest of demands from the labor movement, such as EFCA. Certainly, the Democrats in general talk better on labor; however, their politics generally differ little from that of the Republicans. While defenders of the lesser-evil position will point out the most technical of differences—for example, appointments to the NLRB, which can make some difference to workers, such as in the NLRB's ruling on Boeing—the differences are so minute that they hardly register in the day-to-day life of most union members.

That being said, the reasons for the labor movement to not support the Democrats extend beyond the small differences that might exist between the Democratic Party and the Republicans. Any gains the labor movement makes are due to mobilizing, or threatening to mobilize, its members—especially through their power to stop production. There is no clearer example of this point than the Chicago teachers' strike and the Democratic Party's role in opposing it.

The Democratic Party at every level, from Chicago aldermen to the White House, supported the attempt

The need for a labor party, based on reinvigorated, democratic unions, has never been more striking.

to bust CTU. Thirty-three of the 50 Chicago aldermen, including several "progressives," signed a letter demanding that teachers abandon their strike. The most treacherous of the bunch was Alderman Proco "Joe" Moreno (who previously made national headlines and praise from liberals for his opposition to the opening of a Chik-Fil-A restaurant in his ward based on the chains homophobic owner's opposition to same sex marriage). During the strike Moreno appeared on Fox Business News, where he appeared indistinguishable from the usual far-right Fox commentators, stating that CTU doesn't represent "good" teachers and is an impediment to school "reform," and calling for more charter schools. Moreno nodded approvingly while anchor Melissa Francis said that public schools should be "blown up," the entire CPS system replaced with charter schools, and the teachers unions eliminated.

Barak Obama refused to take a public position on the strike. However, his public "neutrality" was a thin veil over his union-busting politics and intended only to not appear anti-union in an election year, when he depended on hundreds of millions dollars from unions and thousands of union volunteers to win reelection. In fact, Obama's footprints were all over the attempt to bust the teachers union.

Obama's signature education policy is "Race to the Top," a program that offers states money in exchange for the adoption of teacher-evaluation systems that rely heavily on standardized testing, lifting caps on charter schools, and encouraging merit pay. Race to the Top was the motivation for SB7. Obama has been a vocal proponent of everything Rahm Emanuel wanted CTU to accept, including merit pay, elimination of seniority, more charter schools, and teacher evaluations based on test scores.

To summarize, the Democratic Party president created a program to encourage states to adopt anti-union laws, while the Democratic-controlled legislature passed such a law in Illinois, signed by a Democratic governor. This law, drafted to weaken teachers unions' rights, was used by the Democratic mayor of Chicago, a former chief of staff and longtime ally of the president, to pressure the Chicago Teachers Union into accepting huge concessions. This effort was backed by the city council, which is 100% Democratic. It's hard to make any clearer which side the Democrats were on in this labor struggle.

The truth is that a political party cannot serve the interests of both the Chicago Teachers Union and billionaires like Penny Pritzker. When confrontations between unions and the ruling class arise, politicians must choose a side, and it could not have been any clearer which side the Democrats supported.

Rank-and-file teachers often led chants at rallies calling for CTU President Karen Lewis to run for mayor. This was a reflection of the idea that working people should run their own candidates for public office, as opposed to the present subordination of the union bureaucracy to the anti-worker Democratic Party.

The need for a labor party—based on reinvigorated, democratic unions in alliance with the oppressed—has never been more striking, as Democratic and Republican governors and mayors alike demand historic concessions from public sector workers. A labor party could advance the interests of working people because it would be controlled by workers' institutions. The unions would not have to fight for space with the Penny Pritzkers of the world, since the billionaires who call the shots in the Democratic Party would be excluded from a labor party.

Unfortunately, nearly every union, including CTU's parent union, enthusiastically endorsed and worked for Obama's reelection campaign. Labor unions spent hundreds of millions of dollars and donated the time of tens of thousands of members and staffers to support Obama.

While many locals actively supported CTU and tens of thousands of rank-and-file workers played a role by attending rallies and picket lines, donating money, or volunteering with strike support efforts, the national labor bodies and international unions, who have plenty of resources on hand, could have and should have done more. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win Federations could have called for a national mobilization on Chicago and bused in workers from across the country as well as holding solidarity rallies in every city.

CTU called for a "Wisconsin-style" rally on the first Saturday of the strike, calling on unions from across the country to march in solidarity. While some unions did mobilize, including Madison teachers, the march of 10,000 would have been much larger if the national labor federations had mobilized in the same way they were mobilizing for the Democrats this November. A march of 100,000 instead of 10,000 could have only strengthened the teachers in bargaining.

Every gain that CTU made in bargaining was due to the pressure on the political ruling class created by the strike and the mobilization of the 26,000 rank-and-file teachers and their allies. No political endorsements of Democrats helped the teachers; there were no "friends of labor" in City Hall. This is a critical lesson, as the labor movement generally and the bulk of progressive social movements are supporting Obama's reelection even though they are disappointed in his failure to enact any significant progressive reforms.

The old "lesser evil" argument is repeated once again; defenders of supporting Obama claim we must reelect him or else face a much more reactionary administration. However, as the Chicago teachers' struggle clearly showed, teachers—and union members generally—will only gain from struggles in the workplace and the street. The reality is that no matter who won the November election, working people will have an opponent in the White House. The question is whether the labor movement will be prepared to fight that opponent. ■

Workers confront abusive practices at Walmart

By DANIEL XAVIER

During the course of the past two months, retail super-giant Walmart, notorious for its low wages, unfair labor practices, and union-busting agenda, faced the first strikes in the United States since the company's founding in 1962. In September, warehouse workers contracted in Walmart's supply chain walked off the job in Illinois and California, demanding safer working conditions and unpaid wages they were owed. By October, strikes and other actions protesting Walmart's labor abuses had spread to a dozen states, including Arkansas, Washington, and Michigan.

The showdown began on Sept. 12 in Inland Empire, Calif., when warehouse workers struck over grueling working conditions and unpaid wages. Their strike culminated in a dramatic six-day-long, 50-mile march to City Hall in Los Angeles. The workers withstood grueling Southern California heat, as thermometers reached 108 degrees during the march; but they proclaimed that the high temperatures paled in comparison to those they faced on the job.

These workers, mostly Latin@ immigrants, face appalling job conditions in Walmart's distribution chain. Temperatures can reach 120 degrees in the metal-box containers that low-wage contractors fill with products destined for retail stores and distribution centers. The warehouses themselves are open structures, with no walls to shield employees from elements such as dust, heat, and precipitation. The pallets of boxes, which are moved via carts, range up to 250 pounds and often collide with the shins of unsuspecting workers, resulting in bruises and other injuries. In addition, employees are often forced to work through breaks and meals and can face harassment from management for even stopping to fill up a bottle of water during their shift. Many are also called into work early and are required to stay late without pay.

On Sept. 28, after being on strike for over two weeks, the California warehouse employees returned to work, having secured key demands for safety improvement in the workplace. Their struggle garnered national and international recognition, with workers from countries such as South Korea, Chile, and Bangladesh sending messages of support to the Walmart strikers.

Simultaneous with the walkouts in California, warehouse workers in Elwood, Ill., employed by RoadLink, a third-party distribution company hired by Walmart, presented a petition to their management on Sept. 15 demanding better conditions on the job. Immediately, management responded by firing four leaders of the petition drive and threatened layoffs against others who dared to organize. This tipped off a strike that would last for three weeks, drawing in community support for the



Seth Perlman / AP

workers' struggle.

On Oct. 1, nearly 650 people amassed outside the distribution center in Elwood, leading to a shutdown of operations that Walmart claims cost it \$8 million. Police donning riot gear loomed over the demonstration while the protesters showed solidarity with the warehouse workers. Seventeen people were arrested for civil disobedience, as they temporarily blocked a road.

By Oct. 6, after presenting a petition with 100,000 signatures to Walmart management in Chicago the previous day, the Elwood warehouse workers won their key demands and returned to work. Their victory included full compensation for the duration of the strike, installation of ceiling fans in the warehouse, shin guards and other protective gear provided by management, and a series of other protocols designed to create a safer work environment.

Retail workers walk out

The modest victories secured by Walmart supply workers in Illinois and California inspired others to take action. On Oct. 5, sixty retail workers went on strike at Walmart in Los Angeles. Within a week, the retail employee strike, organized by the UFCW-affiliated group, OUR Walmart, spread to over a dozen states and encompassed hundreds of workers. As many as 200 retail employees held a protest at Walmart's headquarters in Bentonville, Ark., on Oct. 10, demanding that the multinational corporation give attention to their grievances.

While most of the warehouse workers in Walmart's distribution chain are hired through temp agencies or third-party contractors, the retail associates, totaling 1.4 million workers, are employed directly by the company. Most of these employees barely scrape by on the wages paid by Walmart, with the average wage being less than \$9/hour. Meanwhile, according to *The Huffington*

Post, the Walton family, who owns the Walmart chain, is worth \$89.5 billion, or the equivalent of the poorest 41.5 percent (nearly 125 million people) of Americans combined.

As we go to press, retail employees are threatening to strike on Black Friday (Nov. 23), which is the biggest shopping spree day of the year. According to OUR Walmart's website, forrespect.org, the group's members "are coming together from across the country and are refusing to work on Black Friday in protest of Walmart's continuing retaliation against Associates who speak out for better pay, affordable health-care, improved working conditions, fair schedules, more hours, and most of all, respect."

Direct action: substitute for unions?

One factor that makes these strikes significant is that the workers do not have a labor union; many are organized in workers' centers instead. The three main workers' centers involved in the movement are Warehouse Workers for Justice (WWJ), affiliated with the union UE in Illinois; Warehouse Workers United (WU), part of the Change to Win Federation in California; and Organization United for Respect or OUR Walmart, which is associated with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

Workers' centers play an important role among unorganized employees and the community. They promote labor advocacy, build ties with community groups, organize protests and "direct actions," and perform important support roles for low-income working people. Many of these groups have ties or explicit support from various labor unions.

However, when it comes to organizing on the job there is no *substitute* for collective action and unionization. Workers' centers can serve as an important preliminary to union organizing on the

job, and some groups certainly do have this perspective—for instance, the United Electrical Workers (UE). However, the Walmart strikes have prompted some commentators to argue that workers' centers can replace the need for organizing a labor union in the workplace.

Barry Eidlin, a postdoctoral fellow at UW-Madison, wrote in *Counterpunch*: "The workers are not striking for a union contract. They are not even strictly speaking trying to join a union. They are organizing with the help of groups like the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart), Warehouse Workers United, and Warehouse Workers for Justice. These groups are union funded, but organizationally autonomous. They do not engage in collective bargaining. ... In combining the risky and disruptive tactics of old with new organizational forms, the latest round of organizing at Walmart could be just the ticket."

Workers' centers certainly play an important role and are useful in building support for labor struggles; but ultimately, if working people expect to solidify the gains they've secured in the workplace, all their co-workers must be organized together to bargain and take action as a unified front.

A great example of the power that workers can exercise through unions, when they have a leadership oriented to class struggle and collective action, is the recent teachers' strike in Chicago. When Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Democratic Party went on the offensive against Chicago's teachers, cancelled previously negotiated salary increase, demanded changes to evaluations and pay structures, and fought for the implementation of many other austerity measures aimed at crushing the union, the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) organized a militant strike to defend against the onslaught.

Through a broad campaign to build community support for the strike, with picket lines and rallies outside the schools and an effective educational campaign, highlighting that teachers were fighting for better schools, the CTU was able to beat back the offensive.

Class-struggle unionism must also elevate workplace struggles to the political level. The need for a labor party, based on workers and democratic unions ready to fight for the interests of the working class as a whole, is becoming more evident with each new struggle that erupts and each new concession forced on the 99 percent by the capitalist class.

A labor party could unite the struggles of Chicago teachers, Walmart employees, and all other workers into a fight for a better livelihood, which is necessarily a political struggle. ■

... Israeli credibility

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place the original Palestine, had a semblance of credibility, at least in the eyes of those who believed that the forcible and colonial expulsion of Palestinians from their historic homeland was legitimate. Today the "two state" solution is interpreted, at best, as essentially the forced imposition on the Palestinian people of an economically unviable series of disconnected apartheid-style "bantustans," bereft of even a semblance of nationhood and relegated to permanently dependent enclaves of demoralized and abandoned people. At worst, and more and more emerging as Israeli's prime objective, is the scenario in which virtually all Palestinians are to be driven out of Gaza and the West Bank and dispersed forever—perhaps to poverty-stricken refugee camps across the region and beyond.

This "final Zionist solution" has long been recognized

by the valiant Palestinian people, who can only be expected to resist with whatever means are available. Their development of a united leadership that aims at the creation of a democratic secular Palestine in the original pre-partition Palestine, where people of all nationalities and religions could live together in peace, is increasingly seen as the only viable alternative. This perspective was originally championed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1973, and included the right of return of the Palestinian diaspora.

Coupled with the mobilization of the Arab masses in the entire region for liberation from neo-colonial and capitalist oppression, the struggle for Palestinian liberation is inseparable from the emergence of a socialist federation of the Middle East. The upsurge that swept the region during the Arab Spring offered a glimpse of a brighter future for the long oppressed Arab masses. Achieving that "music of the future"—the potential for massive social change—is today on the agenda of all serious class-struggle fighters. ■



Tony Savino / Socialist Action



THE HELL THAT IS HAITI

By MARTY GOODMAN

PORT AU PRINCE, Haiti—Oct. 22 was a romantic rendezvous for Bill and Hillary Clinton in Haiti, their one-time honeymoon destination. Hollywood celebs were there too—Sean Penn, Ben Stiller and sweatshop magnate Donna Karan, along with members of the Haitian elite, led by President Michael Martelly, a Washington-backed military coup supporter. “Haiti is open for business and we mean it,” Martelly said to his beaming guests.

The occasion was the opening of a new \$300 million sweatshop industrial park in Caracol in northern Haiti, \$124 million of it paid for by the U.S. taxpayers. Signing the Caracol agreement on Jan. 11, 2011, were Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the U.S.-dominated Inter-American Development Bank, and the Korean textile assembly giant, Sae-A Trading. Officials say the park may employ up to 20,000 workers. The promotional material claimed it was created, “without compromising on labor and environmental standards.” Hillary called it “a new Haiti.” It was all lies.

The AFL-CIO had urged American and international officials to reconsider Sae-A Trading, citing “acts of violence and intimidation” in Guatemala. Homero Fuentes, who monitors factories for American retailers, calls Sae-A “one of the major labor violators.” Sae-A Trading closed shop in Guatemala and moved its operation to Haiti. It will now receive tax breaks and duty-free access to the U. S. market. The company’s export to the U.S. has been estimated at about \$900 million.

An initial corporate study claimed that the Caracol area was “devoid” of people. But the week the Caracol deal was signed, Robert Ettienne, an elderly farmer near Caracol, told Haiti Grassroots Watch (HGW), “The first week of January tractors moved across all this area and broke down everyone’s fences. Thieves and animals followed, and our crops were gone.” (See the series “Open for Business” at www.haitigrassrootswatch.org.) Farmers were promised compensation but, so far, haven’t received it.

Some 300 farmers, like Ettienne, lost their land, in what is considered a fertile, ecologically fragile region. The nearby port at Fort Liberté is Haiti’s only UN-designated ecologically “protected” area. An internal government document obtained by HGW cited the “significant adverse environmental impact” of the Caracol project. “The fact of having chosen this site,

I’d call it heresy,” said Arnaud Dupuy, head of Haiti’s Audubon Society.

Caracol also has deep historical significance. It is close to Chavert, the site where rebellious peasants of the North, followers of guerrilla leader Charlemagne Peralte, were held by U.S. Marines during the first U.S. occupation. Racist U.S. troops attached hoses to truck exhausts that led to imprisoned Haitians, creating a Nazi-like death chamber.

Hurricane Sandy

Two days after the Oct. 22 Caracol gala, hurricane Sandy ripped through Haiti’s South, smashing through tent cities erected after the January 2010 earthquake. They are still inhabited by 400,000 desperate “internal refugees,” despite \$5 billion raised internationally for earthquake relief. Ordinarily, tent cities, concentrated in Port au Prince, are rife with hunger, misery, unsanitary conditions, sexual assaults, and forced evictions backed by armed goons.

At least 54 Haitians died during Sandy, a majority of the 71 killed in the Caribbean. Some 25,000 Haitians are homeless. Rivers of water and mud cascaded down deforested mountains, stripped bare for use as firewood. Coffee and bean production was devastated, raising prices on already costly food staples, the theme of mass protests in October.

Cholera, an easily treated water-borne disease, reappeared in Sandy’s wake. Starting in late 2010, over 7500 Haitians died of cholera and hundreds of thousands were infected. Since 2010, there has been little preparation for new outbreaks or improved sanitation. About 550 died of cholera over the last year.

Haiti has been called “the NGO republic,” referring to the thousands of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in the country, almost all of which are non-Haitian and get the lion’s share of relief funds. The World Bank estimated 10,000 NGOs *before* the earthquake. A mere 1% went to the Haitian government. The NGOs, funded mainly by wealthy donors, shape relief efforts. There is no national housing plan nearly three years after the earthquake. International “relief” has delivered only 52.3 percent of the \$5.3 billion pledged to Haiti, and, some aid specialists say, there isn’t any plan to make up the difference.

The minimum wage struggle

Big worker mobilizations in 2009 kept the pressure on parliament to adopt a new minimum wage law.

Wikileaks documents, published by *Haiti Liberté* newspaper and *The Nation* magazine, partially reveal the concerted pressure of the Obama administration on parliament to keep wages low.

The 2009 law contained huge giveaways to the assembly bloodsuckers. The law stipulated that prior to Oct. 1, 2012, all workers *except* those doing piece work in the assembly industry would receive a minimum wage of about \$5 US (200 Haitian gourdes) a day—not per hour. Assembly workers were to receive only about \$3 a day (125 gourdes) until October 2011, when it increased to about \$3.50 a day (150 gourdes). A 2011 AFL-CIO study concluded that the needs of a typical family of four was an incredible *nine* times the minimum wage for a 48-hour, six-day work week.

The new Oct. 1, 2012, minimum for assembly workers is about \$7 US a day (300 gourdes). But it is being ignored by bosses, Yannick Ettienne, a union organizer for the leftist Batay Ouvriye (BO), told *Socialist Action*. The bosses imposed nearly impossible production quotas for 300 gourdes, although the law clearly states that workers must receive “at least” 300 gourdes for eight hours.

The Obama administration, the UN, and the U.S.-dominated World Bank envision making Haiti a virtual 21st-century slave state of low-wage workers dominated by the international assembly industry. Since the 1980s, the World Bank’s goal was to make Haiti “the Taiwan of the Caribbean,” a sinkhole of low wage labor, depressing wages for the entire Caribbean and even North America.

Parallel to more assembly development is expanding tourism, whose development will mean little income for the Haitian masses and degrade Haiti’s rich culture. Haiti is “free market” capitalism at its most savage. Most Haitians live on \$2 a day or less. Unemployment is more than 60%. The country is ripe for revolution.

At a meeting that this *Socialist Action* reporter attended of sweatshop workers and North American activists, organized by BO, workers described recent work stoppages and the need for collective action. Workers described how bosses reacted with fury to stoppages over quotas by firing workers or sending them home for days or weeks.

The workers said it is common to cut their lunches short or skip it entirely to meet quotas in order to support their families on their paltry salaries. Some bosses force workers to pay for the company’s miserable food, to be eaten while working. Workers also described their wretched health care, with company doctors suspicious of all their complaints, and even ratting out workers to the bosses. One worker told us that factory owner Charles Baker, a prominent reactionary, made threats against him for questioning policy. The workers appealed for international solidarity.

BO has organized the trade-union SOTA (Sendikat Ouvriye Tekstile ak Abiman, the Union of Textile and Clothing Workers) at six Port au Prince plants out of some 25, mostly in the SONAPI Industrial Park located in the capital, which employs about 12,000 workers. BO has also organized the 3000 CODEVI textile workers in Ouanaminté in the north.

BO seeks to mount an international campaign to force assembly bosses to honor the minimum-wage law. They intend to begin a fight to raise the minimum beyond bare subsistence next year. For more, contact www.Batayouvriye.org

The UN occupation

Keeping a lid on the explosive mix of vastly unequal wealth is a U.S.-led United Nations military occupation force of some 12,000 troops, illegal by its own hypocritical standards and, according to polls, hated by the Haitian masses. Doing Washington’s dirty work, Brazilian troops form the largest contingent of 18 other participating nations within the United Nations Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH). Their participation freed U.S. troops for the Iraq and Afghan wars.

As a creation of imperialism, the United Nations is conducting an illegal occupation even by its own charter. There is no invasion of Haiti or internal strife justifying military force. The Haiti occupation costs \$1 billion a year, about \$2 million a day, funds that could be

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... Hell that is Haiti

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used for housing, sanitation, and food.

MINUSTAH troops have engaged in a number of massacres. MINUSTAH fired into supporters of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (2004) and created a free-fire zone in the impoverished Cite Soleil section of Port au Prince in 2005, where up to 80 people were killed. Numerous sexual assaults by MINUSTAH troops have gone unpunished. UN officials continue to stonewall when confronted by the victim's families and their attorneys. It has refused to create a Standing Claims Commission to hear cases against it, as called for by its own mandate.

After the onset of the cholera epidemic in 2010, two scientific studies and photos proved that UN troops from Nepal dumped raw sewage into a waterway comparable to the U.S. Mississippi River in significance. Strains of cholera active in Nepal have been discovered in Haitian cholera victims. UN officials have arrogantly denied responsibility, refusing to respond to a lawsuit filed by the Office of International Lawyers (BAI). Some 8000 people have died in the epidemic, and another 700,000 have fallen ill.

The MINUSTAH's "mandate" expired on Oct. 15 but was unanimously renewed on Oct. 12 without a withdrawal date. On Oct. 11, in New York City, a delegation of Haitian activists—Haitian Sen. Moise Jean-Charles; several labor officials, including Fignole St. Cyr; general secretary of the Haitian trade-union confederation CATH; *Haiti Liberté* journalist Kim Ives; and several U.S. solidarity activists—met with UN officials to demand the immediate withdrawal of MINUSTAH. Incredibly, William Gardner, the occupation's UN Senior



(Above) Batay Ouvriye union organizer speaks to a crowd of assembly workers in Haiti.

Political Affairs Officer, said he was unaware of the 2011 Haitian Senate vote in favor of the withdrawal of MINUSTAH within one year. Gardner went on to say that MINUSTAH might remain until at least 2015.

In Haiti, anti-MINUSTAH protests have increased, combined with the demand for lower prices and the resignation of President Martelly. Two marches in Cap Haitien in the north numbered in the thousands.

On Oct 15, the day the MINUSTAH so-called mandate expired, a modest, but militant protest blocked the driveway of the MINUSTAH base in Port au Prince. The presence of North American activists may have prevented acts of MINUSTAH brutality. One MINUSTAH soldier was heard to have said to another, "There's 40 cameras and Ipads." Socialists demand, "U.S./UN out of Haiti now, and stay out!" ■

Mario Joseph: Worse than Gaza

PORT AU PRINCE, Haiti—Attorney Mario Joseph, of the Office of International Lawyers (BAI), has received death threats over the phone in reaction to lawsuits and letters that he and his organization have filed. The situation prompted Amnesty International to issue an "Urgent Action" bulletin on Oct. 4. On Sept. 28, the chief prosecutor of Port au Prince, Jean Renal Senatus, revealed on the radio that he had been given orders by the Justice Ministry to arrest 36 political dissidents, including Joseph and two other attorneys, Newton St.-Juste and Andre Michel. Fortunately, the prosecutor refused the order, but the charges were never explained.

The AI alert cited Joseph's and the BAI's role in

pursuing justice for victims of former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, back in Haiti since 2011. In addition, AI cited Joseph's complaints registered with the UN over its role in the spread of the cholera epidemic and forced evictions of people in tent camps. As head of the BAI, Joseph addressed the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights last July. To that list should be added Joseph's defense of the rights of sweatshop workers, represented by Batay Ouvriye.

In an interview with *Socialist Action*, Joseph reacted with a laugh to the title of Barack Obama's autobiography, "The Audacity of Hope." He said, "It's a waste to vote for Obama. Obama never came to Haiti. If I were American I would not vote for Obama. I'm very clear on that. Obama would be a Republican in Haiti, no different than Bush." Mario traveled with a Palestine-solidarity delegation to Gaza not long ago and said that in his judgment, the living conditions in Haiti are worse than Gaza.

— M.G.

Under the heel of U.S. imperialism

U.S. policy toward Haiti has remained unchanged since Haiti's slave revolution proclaimed independence from French slave masters in 1803. The slave-owning U.S. did not recognize Haiti until 1862. The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915-1934, creating a Haitian army trained in repression. In 1994, Bill Clinton agreed to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first elected president in decades (1990), deposed in a CIA-backed military coup in 1991. Aristide supporters asked for a U.S./UN occupation, betraying Haiti's constitution. Haiti became a model for multi-national "humanitarian intervention," which always benefits imperialism, not the masses.

In 2004, George W. Bush led a UN force in support of a second CIA coup against Aristide. In January 2010, Obama dispatched 20,000 U.S.-led UN troops, using the earthquake as a cover. In contrast, Fidel Castro answered Obama's occupation by proclaiming, "We send doctors, not troops!" ■

By TONY SAVINO

DAJABON, Dominican Republic—The bridge over the Haiti-Dominican frontier leading to the twice-weekly market in Dajabon is illustrative of the Haitian economy, where food flows in one direction. In every manner of transport, from trucks to motorcycles and simple wheelbarrows, food is purchased at the market to be sold throughout Haiti. Thirty years ago, Haiti fed itself; it is now a net importer of food.

The flooding of the market with subsidized U.S.-grown rice, often referred to in Haiti as "Miami Rice" and freely distributed by USAID, has resulted in the displacement of many small farmers, while creating a market for American rice-growers.

Former President Bill Clinton has used his influence as co-chair of the Haiti Recovery Commission, the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund, as well as the Special UN envoy to Haiti to promote sweatshop apparel factories in the so-called free-trade zones as the "solution" for Haiti's wrecked economy. In fact, *The New York Times* (July 5, 2012) reported that money for the earthquake reconstruction effort is being used for the construction of a free-trade zone in the northern area of Caracol, rather than to house the homeless or build sanitation infrastructure. A reported US \$224 million in earthquake relief money has gone to subsidize the Caracol Industrial Park.

The new park, which displaced farmers on rich, fertile land, will host Sae-A, a Korean clothing manufacturer, as one of its principal tenants. In a Dec. 10

Haitians must haul food over the border

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



(Left) Haitians at Dominican border carrying in essential food products.

memo, the AFL-CIO highlighted Sae-A's use of "bribes, death threats and imprisonment to prevent and break up unions in Guatemala."

Washington's policies toward Haiti are reminiscent of the policies of enslavement under apartheid in South Africa, where the African majority was removed from rich, fertile land to the non-arable land of the "homelands," denied the right to farm, and forced to work as laborers.

In a recent *Socialist Action* interview with factory workers in the free-trade zone in Quanamthe, Haiti, workers reported making around US \$15 per week.

That was for working a 10-hour day and a six-day week. As we walked up a newly constructed roadway that led to the gate of the free-trade zone, dodging delivery trucks, workers explained that an NGO had recently built the road that benefited the factory owners' delivery trucks but neglected to build a sidewalk for the workers.

In flawed elections in 2010, kompa singer Michel Martelly was declared president of Haiti, after pressure from the Obama administration on both the Haitian Provisional Electoral Council and the OAS. The country's most popular political party, that of former President J.B. Aristide, was prevented from participating, and Wikileaks memos show that the Obama administration attempted to pressure the South African government into preventing his return from exile. Martelly, who declared at his inauguration that Haiti was "now open for business," has bragged of his friendship with Duvalierist figures like convicted murderer Michel Francois, the architect of the bloody 1991 coup against Aristide.

A recent wave of demonstrations against the UN occupation, the ever-increasing cost of food, the continued spread of cholera, the need for housing, and the autocratic and antidemocratic reign of Martelly has swept the nation. Many of the demonstrations have been met with arrests, tear gas, and other forms of government repression. ■

Ontario Premier Quits — Suspends Legislature

By BARRY WEISLEDER

When Premier Dalton McGuinty announced on Oct. 15 that he had prorogued the Ontario Legislature, and that he would leave office in the new year, it stunned the province. Put in perspective, however, these moves, accompanied by another massive federal government Omnibus Bill, show how the capitalist crisis is radically reducing the democratic pretenses of the ruling elite.

It is true that McGuinty has particular reasons to try to shield himself and his minority government from scrutiny over spending scandals (the costly cancellation of gas-fired power plants, timed to save the seats of local Liberal MPPs, and corruption at ORNGE air ambulance service).

But it is desperate economic times that beget the most desperate measures. The global capitalist recession/depression is far from over. Workers have less work and less money to spend. Ontario and federal debts are in the hundreds of billions of dollars, and mounting, exacerbated by huge cuts to corporate and wealth taxes, not to mention rising military expenditures.

The corporate rulers aim to make working people pay for the crisis. To that end they are imposing lower wage rates on new hires and cutting pensions in the private sector. They see this also as an opportunity to freeze wages, slash jobs and services, and reduce pensions and benefits across the public sector.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's federal budget calls for spending reductions of \$5 billion annually and the elimination of 19,200 federal government jobs over several years.

Ontario Premier McGuinty has been cutting jobs and services too. In August he got the leaders of Catholic and French school board teachers to accept wage and sick leave concessions. But Elementary and Secondary school teachers and sup-



port staff refused, so he stripped them of their right to bargain and strike, and simply legislated his plan, with support from the Conservatives.

Then McGuinty hit a roadblock. His bid to do the same to 481,000 workers across the public sector failed to get Conservative backing (the Tories want more stringent, long-term anti-labour measures). And the labour-based New Democratic Party (weakly) opposed McGuinty, so the minority government Premier was unable to pass his "Protecting Public Services Act" (sic), Bill 155.

Unwilling to lead his Liberal Party into a snap provincial election, McGuinty opted to suspend the legislature, and try to impose his austerity programme without legislation, while making his exit from office. Liberals will choose a new leader on Jan. 27 in Toronto. Meanwhile, the business of the Assembly, including standing committee enquiries into government secrecy and corruption, is put on hold for months. The toll this anti-democratic course has taken on the ruling party is reflected in Provincial Treasurer Dwight Duncan and Energy Minister Chris Bentley choosing to retire from politics, rather than seek the Liberal leadership.

Compared to Harper, McGuinty is a piker. Stephen Harper has prorogued Parliament twice, and after the Tories lied, cheated, and robo-called their way to a federal majority government, they

jammed their whole agenda into an Omnibus budget bill last spring. Now they have done it again with the 457-page "budget" Bill C-45. Attaching the word "budget" makes it a non-confidence vote, so the bill is immune to amendment, even by Conservative backbenchers.

The previous Omnibus bill gutted environmental assessment, cut Employment Insurance, raised the age to collect a pension, shut down long-standing government agencies, and made big changes to the Fisheries Act. Bill C-45 again denies House of Commons Committees the chance to closely examine pipelines, small business tax credits, interprovincial trade rules, cross-border travel, and the re-definition of an aboriginal fishery. These matters, including environment assessment issues, will be reviewed quickly and superficially by a few MPs on the Finance Committee, before it is all pushed through the Commons and the Senate.

Speedy assembly-line austerity is what the bosses have ordered. It is what they think they need to stabilize their system. And it is what their governments are delivering, taking advantage of weak resistance by labour and the NDP.

Opinion polls show that the NDP continues to rise in Ontario, buoyed by the by-election win in Kitchener-Waterloo. But putting all their eggs in the electoral basket is the mistake of party officials who think they can hold voter allegiance by posing as better managers of crisis-ravaged capitalism.

What's wrong with this approach, especially in the light of recent experience? By abstaining on McGuinty's Spring budget, Leader Andrea Horwath and her NDP Caucus paved the way for anti-teacher Bill 115, now Law 115. To coin a phrase, the aim should be to "make the legislature work" for working people, not for the corporate ruling class.

By arguing that Law 115 is bad mainly because it will cause a great waste of money, because the courts will overturn it and force the government to compensate its victims, Horwath really missed the mark. She failed to sound the alarm about the tremendous injustice of removing the right to collectively bargain and the right to strike from hundreds of thousands of Ontario workers. The 'costliness' argument also fosters illusions in the court system, where union victory is far from certain.

Playing the waiting game entrenches bad practices in the school system for years to come; a court decision may take

four years or longer. This will have a demoralizing impact, and a long term de-forming effect on the working conditions of educators and school support workers. Furthermore, it centralizes power in the hands of a Cabinet minister who now does not have to answer questions in the Assembly.

Which brings us to the proroguing of the Legislature. McGuinty is aping Stephen Harper—suspending the Ontario Parliament for the convenience of his party, to facilitate a change of face. McGuinty is curtailing inquiries into government wrong doing, in order to continue to bully unions into a totally one-sided capitalist austerity agenda. A few news releases and rallies didn't stop Harper. Why would an even less aggressive approach stop McGuinty?

Can we do better than that? Of course we can, and we must, because the future of the working class in Ontario, and beyond, is at stake. What do we need? Mass action. When do we need it? Now. What else do we need? More democracy in our unions and the NDP.

For example, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association officials signed the Memorandum of Understanding with McGuinty without holding a vote of OECTA members. Now there is a membership revolt. One of its districts is taking OECTA to court, and a grass roots movement is underway to defeat provincial executive incumbents next year.

The ONDP provincial convention, last April in Hamilton, voted to direct the ONDP Legislative Caucus to oppose the Liberal budget. But that direction was ignored.

As well, the party executive decided to delay unreasonably the provincial convention in 2010, to overturn the executive election at an Ontario New Democratic Youth convention, and to rescind the NDP candidate nomination in Thornhill constituency. It seems that democracy is an endangered species, not only in the Legislature, but also in the NDP. It is in dire need of protection and recovery.

If working people are to defeat the capitalist austerity agenda in Ontario, and beyond, we need to take mass job action. Socialists are not alone in saying this. The Toronto and York Region Labour Council decided at its Oct. 4 meeting to explore the launch of Days of Action. These would be city-wide general strikes of the kind labour waged against the Mike Harris Conservative regime in the 1990s.

Now is the time to enlist workers' organizations for a showdown with all the austerity-minded government—for which even the pretense of "democracy"—is increasingly passé. ■

S. Africa police shoot militant miners again

By DEMOCRATIC LEFT FRONT

Oct. 29—The Democratic Left Front condemns the police for shooting workers in Rustenburg on October 27. Two workers who work at Amplats were hit by live ammunition, and one, hit in the chest, is in a critical condition in hospital. Eleven other mineworkers were injured by rubber bullets. The DLF also condemns Blade Nzimande, SACP general secretary and minister for higher education, for condoning this shooting by the police. This so-called "Communist" defends the shooting of workers in the interests of the capitalist bosses.

The rally of the Tripartite Alliance of the African National Congress, South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions was called by COSATU leaders supposedly to "reclaim Rustenburg" from the mineworkers who have been on strike against mining bosses since September with a demand for at least a 12,500 rand living wage. While the workers are

opposed to anyone speaking on their behalf, COSATU leaders aimed to try to reinstate the [pro-ANC] National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) as the mineworkers' union in the town. This was an extremely provocative action.

It was well known to the COSATU leadership that the mineworkers had rejected the NUM because of its failure to represent their interests. Through its actions, including shooting workers in Marikana in August and identifying strike leaders to police, the NUM leadership has in fact revealed itself as a union that sides with the bosses against the workers and its own members. The rank and file members of NUM must rescue the union and lead it back to its fighting and anti-capitalist traditions.

Otherwise it will be increasingly be seen amongst mineworkers and the broader working class as a bosses' yellow union. Already at other mines COSATU general secretary Vavi had failed when addressing workers to get them to allow an NUM representative to speak.

Contrary to Nzimande's lying claims, the mineworkers did not try to disrupt the rally. Some 5000 Amplats workers got to the stadium before COSATU arrived because they wanted to hear Vavi speak, who most still regard as a leader

with integrity. They expressed their anger at the government by burning some of the ANC and COSATU banners and posters. When the police asked them to leave the stadium, they complied and waited by an entrance. This was not an "occupation" as reported in the media. Some 600-1000 COSATU members then arrived in a march.

As they entered the stadium through another entrance some broke away and attacked the thousands of mineworkers, who were waiting to return to the stadium to hear Vavi speak. The COSATU members ripped off T-shirts, which had the demand for a R12,500 living wage on them. In the course of this attack one DLF member had his T-shirt and trousers removed by NUM members and was arrested by police. Strikers went to aid those attacked.

It was clear by this time that the attempt by COSATU to "reclaim Rustenburg" had failed dismally. At this point the police attacked the strikers with live ammunition, rubber bullets, bird-shot, tear gas, stun grenades, horses and water cannon, but left the COSATU attackers unmolested. In the course of this 13 mineworkers were injured, one critically, hit by a live bullet.

The ANC government and its police once again, as in Marikana on Aug. 16,

has defended the interests of the bosses by shooting workers. Unfortunately COSATU and SACP leaders echo the government. The Tripartite Alliance, as mineworkers say, are all "mealies of the same bag." Workers say that they are done with the alliance, because "they are no longer singing the same song as us."

The actions of the police on Oct. 27 go along with a police campaign of harassment of the Marikana community, including the intimidation and arrest of worker witnesses to the commission of enquiry into the events of August 16. All this indicates that another massacre like that in Marikana cannot be ruled out. Only the most massive popular mobilisation can prevent this.

The DLF calls on all members of COSATU to unite with the striking mineworkers to condemn the provocation of the rally and the actions of the police. It is time also for all union members to win back their unions from a labour bureaucracy that stands in alliance with the bosses and the state. What is needed is unity against the bosses and the government to struggle for R12,500 minimum living wage, and against the mass dismissal of workers by the bosses, through the calling of a two or three-day general strike. ■

Postal Workers (CUPW): Vote No to concessions!

By ELIZABETH BYCE

On Oct. 5, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and Canada Post Corporation reached a tentative agreement. They did it by negotiation, not by the arbitration process imposed by the federal government following the employer lockout in June 2011. Arbitration was delayed for months as CUPW challenged federal Labour Minister Lisa Raitt's appointed arbitrators.

The first arbitrator was removed for having no background in labour relations and for not being bilingual. The second arbitrator, a former Tory federal candidate, Guy Dufort, rejected CUPW's demand that he step down in April, and was finally removed after a Federal Court of Justice ruling in August.

The tentative agreement is generating opposition in many CUPW locals because it includes concessions that were rejected by members in 2011 prior to the strike and subsequent lockout. The deal would put in place two-tier wages and pensions for new hires, and rollbacks on other benefits. Accepting the deal would mean alienating new hires and undermining solidarity within the union. It could bust the union from the inside.

Jeff Callaghan, National Director of CUPW for the

Atlantic Region, issued an open letter to members urging them to reject the tentative agreement. Here is a portion of his argument:

"The tentative agreement you are being asked to ratify includes many of the same rollbacks members voted overwhelming against and went on strike just last year to oppose: accepting to give up our Sick Leave benefits for STD, eliminating a wash-up break and the imposition of a two-tier wage scheme for new hires.

"It also includes a major change to our Defined Contribution Pension Plan for new hires. So while wages, benefits and pensions of current workers are protected, for now, workers coming into the post office will face a totally different picture. They will start working beside you making \$6 an hour less and will have to work almost a third of their career before they make what you make in wages (7 years). These workers will also have to work 5 extra years before they will become eligible to retire....

"What will my 'No' vote mean? Contrary to what the majority of the National Executive Board would have us believe, there is another option for CUPW; it's the same option workers have always chosen to stand up and fight back. CUPW has always stood up to an employer hell bent on breaking us and strip-

ping away our rights and on every occasion, an employer who always had a federal government in their pocket. And while the cards have never been stacked in the workers' favour, that never stopped us from taking on those challenges together. This is another one of those challenges.

"Voting 'No' to this agreement means the fight to protect and improve our rights and benefits will continue. The Union at all levels will continue to organize and challenge the employer (and the government) through the legislation and court system and we will take action to ensure workers are once again mobilized to fight back, just as we were last June. Vote 'No' to this tentative agreement and tell the employer this is far from over."

There is a lot at stake here for the entire working class. If CUPW members accept a concessions deal, they would join the Canadian Auto Workers, who recently ratified a two-tier contract with the Detroit Big Three automakers. The year 2012 will go down in infamy as the year two of Canada's historically most militant unions caved-in to the bosses' divide-and-rule tactics.

Ratification votes will take place between Nov. 13 and Dec. 19, so there is still time for the "No" campaign to gather momentum and win. ■

Women say, 'Hands off abortion rights'

On a cool, damp Saturday afternoon, on the front steps of Toronto's Old City Hall, nearly 100 people gathered to demand "Reproductive Justice: Equal Access Now!" Oct. 20 was a Pan-Canadian Day of Action to defend women's right to choose abortion, and to oppose efforts by Conservative and Liberal politicians at all levels to erode or eliminate this right.

Early in October, MPs defeated by a two-to-one margin an anti-abortion Conservative private member's bill, which was nonetheless supported by over 100 MPs. Meanwhile, the Conservative Harper government refuses to implement provisions of the Canada Health Act that guarantee equal access. Women in Prince Edward Island province have no access to abortion, and women in New Brunswick have to pay for clinic abortions.

The Toronto rally, organized by the Abortion Rights

Coalition of Canada and the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, demanded reproductive health care for all, including refugees who the government has just deprived of this benefit.

Two New Democratic Party MPs addressed the rally, including Olivia Chow (Trinity-Spadina), along with a representative of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, a spokesperson for an aboriginal women's organization, youth activists, and veteran abortion rights campaigners.

Youth for Socialist Action and Socialist Action members actively promoted the event, and participated in the rally with prominent banners, leaflet distribution and successful press sales. — B.W.



Photo: Socialist Action

CAW, CEP, and the NDP — Which direction for the new mega-union?

By BRUCE ALLEN

The approaching merger between the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) will create the largest private sector union in Canada, with over 300,000 members employed in 22 sectors of the economy. It could profoundly affect the political direction of both the labour movement and Canada.

Thus, the question is posed: what will be the political direction of the new union? In the CAW, the silence on this issue is deafening.

The only thing known for certain is that the question will be answered by the delegates to the founding convention of the new union expected next summer. But there are a number of related unknowns. Will the delegates be presented with a policy paper, formulated by staff representatives, which sets out the political direction of the new mega-union, and then be expected to rubber stamp it? Or will there be a genuinely democratic, wide-open debate where different political positions will be presented and a choice be made? Officials are not giving members a clue.

From an historical perspective, the silence surrounding the question of political direction and how it will be answered comes as no surprise. The silence is symptomatic of the lack of democracy in the CAW, particularly at the national level, and of the awkwardness for both unions approaching the merger. This is precisely because the current political directions of the CAW and the CEP are at odds, particularly with regard to the New

Democratic Party (NDP). They are like oil and water. One position will prevail. The other will be discarded—likely to disappear into an Orwellian memory hole.

For the past two decades the CEP has been affiliated to the NDP. The CEP actively participated in the life of the NDP, including in the recent contest to elect a federal leader. It supported the unsuccessful leadership bid of Brian Topp, revealing that, while it did not support the Tony Blair-like Thomas Mulcair, it is not inclined to shift the political direction of the NDP to the left.

The CEP's loyalty to the NDP and its leadership has been unequivocal. This was most vividly displayed in Ontario in the mid-1990s. Back then, the CEP was one of the "Pink Paper" unions in the Ontario Federation of Labour that objectively sided with Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae's government during the fight against Rae's anti-union Social Contract.

In stark contrast to the CEP, the CAW has been politically inconsistent towards the NDP. At the time of the fight against the Rae government's Social Contract, waged principally by Ontario's public sector unions, the CAW commendably positioned itself to the left of the Ontario NDP by strongly supporting the public sector unions. But that positioning proved to be short lived.

As the 1990s drew to a close, the CAW made a sharp turn to the right. It embraced "strategic voting" and warmed up to the federal Liberal Party, and subsequently to Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty. This orientation towards the Liberals has continued to this day, effectively making a mockery of the CAW's

past criticism of the NDP from the left.

Indeed, CAW National President Ken Lewenza has gone so far as to openly campaign alongside McGuinty in the last Ontario provincial election, and responded to McGuinty's decision to step down as Premier and Ontario Liberal leader by praising McGuinty's government as one which, Lewenza claimed, improved the lives of many Ontarians. Such praise swiftly followed the McGuinty government's brutal assault on public sector unions and its austerity measures which are clearly worse than those imposed by the Ontario NDP government of Bob Rae. It is noteworthy that in the course of this evolution of the CAW's politics, the union terminated its affiliation with the NDP.

But now, on the eve of union merger, the CAW will likely find itself affiliated with the NDP once again. Developments in the merger process point in that direction. The CEP appears to be intent on maintaining affiliation to the NDP. That was vividly demonstrated by the enthusiastic reception for Federal NDP leader Thomas Mulcair at the CEP convention in Quebec City in October. CEP leaders and activists showed they want nothing like the kind of relationship the CAW had with the Liberals in recent years.

On the other hand, no one in the CAW appears to be working to maintain its defacto relationship with the Liberal Party and the policy of "strategic voting" in elections. This means that CAW leaders will be the ones who drop their politics down the memory hole and become born-again NDP supporters.

This scenario poses additional questions. If the new union does affiliate with

the NDP, what will be the nature of the relationship? Will the new union continue the political legacy of the CEP -- uncritical and unconditional support for the NDP leadership and its policies, making little if any effort to push the NDP to the left? And if so, does this also mean that the new union will revive the approach of the CAW within the NDP prior to the crisis in their relationship prompted by the Social Contract? That approach was essentially to accept the direction set by the NDP leadership and make little if any effort to push the NDP to the left, and even to help the NDP leadership marginalize those who would turn the NDP to the left.

These options pose real challenges to leftists in both the CAW and the CEP. Faced with the growing prospect of a new mega-union affiliated to the NDP, it is imperative that activists not block affiliation with the NDP, because NDP affiliation would bury the CAW's embrace of the Liberal Party. For the largest private sector union in the country to ditch the Liberals would be a very significant step forward for the workers' movement as a whole.

Two equally imperative tasks should be undertaken. One is to initiate a no-holds-barred debate about past and present political practices of the CAW and CEP, and the future political engagement of the new union.

The other task is to wage a political struggle within the new union. This must involve a rejection of the CEP's typically uncritical support for the NDP establishment, and fearlessly taking the NDP leadership to task each and every time it fails to support the interests of workers, and presenting political alternatives *at every opportunity*.

In short it is imperative to rally opinion in both unions in favour of a decisive turn to the left, in favour of struggle against capitalist austerity, and for the fundamental transformation of society. ■



(Left) July 13 rally in Madrid protests cutback measures of Spanish government.

Revolutionary socialist politics in the era of world capitalist crisis

With this issue of Socialist Action we present the first of a series of resolutions on key issues in U.S. and world politics that were approved by the elected delegates to the 15th National Convention of Socialist Action, held in Minneapolis last Aug. 16-19. Socialist Action is the fraternal U.S. section of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky and his collaborators in 1938.

The National Convention was preceded by a lively three-month internal discussion period, in which Socialist Action members in branches and at-large members in some 25 cities engaged in written and oral discussion and debate. Some 120 written contributions were offered for membership consideration. International guests from Fourth International groups and friends attended from Greece, Ireland, and Canada.

We begin this first installment of a multi-part series with Part I of an edited version of the approved Draft Political Resolution (DPR), the document that represents Socialist Action's assessment of the decisive international and national developments upon which the party's politics and practice are based. The remaining sections of the DPR dealing with additional key national and international developments will be published in separate installments.

In coming issues we will reprint major excerpts from a number of the adopted resolutions dealing with the U.S. antiwar movement, the ecological crisis, women's liberation, LGBT freedom, and Socialist Action's views on current debates in the Fourth International. Space considerations require that each resolution be abridged.

Those interested in receiving the full text should email socialistaction@lmi.net.

The Draft Political Resolutions adopted by Socialist Action's 2008 and 2010 National Conventions explained at length the underlying causes of the worldwide capitalist economic crisis, now in its fourth year. The documents outlined several causal factors, including the long-term decline in the average rate of profit and the associated crisis of overproduction, the intensification of international competition, the financialization of capital and the associated bursting of the speculative bubbles, and the de-industrialization of the major capitalist countries.

These factors compelled world capitalism to attempt to resolve its inherent contradictions at the expense of the world's working class and with total disregard of the consequences of the blows inflicted on the earth's physical environment.

We cited numerous indices demonstrating the growing and increasingly unpayable debt of the major capitalist powers, enormous deficit budgets, deepening across-the-board austerity measures, continued weakening of the dollar as the only world currency, the ongoing shift in industrial production from the "central" imperialist nations to the low-wage "periphery," mounting unemployment, stagnant or regressive GDP "growth," and more. These dilemmas continue to plague the world capitalist system, with no exceptions.

And these, in turn, give rise to increased imperialist rivalry; militarization of all the major powers; never-ending wars; and the re-colonization of continents in the Middle East, Africa, and beyond. They also lie at the root of government and corporate efforts to provide a worldwide, mobile, near slave-labor or super-exploited "migrant work force" at the service of world capitalism. In order to achieve this, we see government-promoted scapegoating—the "war on terror," anti-immigrant prejudice, sexism, homophobia, racism, Islamophobia, broad-ranging attacks on civil liberties, and unprecedented and massive global attacks on women.

There are no exceptions to the horrors underway today. Germany, the most economically powerful European nation, has experienced a steady decline in wages. The U.S. debt, \$16 trillion, for the first time exceeds the GDP. China's double-digit growth rate—which lasted many years—has today declined to some 5 percent, while the real U.S. growth rate over the past four years has been close to zero.

The rise in the GDP of the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—masks the impoverishment of the great majority of the populations of all these countries. That is, the capitalist-created small layer of "middle class" or higher-paid worker/consumers, usually in the range of 10-15 percent, promoted to create the semblance of an internal market, has been more than offset by the immiserization of the vast majority.

China's new generation of "middle-class" consumers, touted by the bourgeois press, is countered by hundreds of millions pressed into a government-controlled transient internal migrant workforce, with virtually no rights. Eighty percent of Beijing's industrial workers, for example, are migrants, mostly young women from the countryside, who labor at sub-minimum wages aimed at satisfying the competitive needs of Chinese and world capitalism. Half of China's multi-national corporations are U.S.-owned.

The recent exposure of [Apple Computer's](#) super-profits from the exploitation of Chinese workers, on a scale unimagined in the past, shocked more than a few. Apple's China-based iPhone and iPad factories, employing some 1.2 million workers, were recently exposed as classic super-low-wage sweatshops, with workers forced to labor endless hours on demand under unsafe conditions, including breathing in poisonous chemicals.

Apple is a perfect example of what world capitalism has in store for all workers in poor countries, not to mention the United States. It has amassed the largest

cash reserves in the world—some \$100 billion—and plans to keep the great majority of it abroad until the U.S. Congress "decides" to change U.S. tax laws to allow Apple to repatriate its blood money under conditions as close as possible to tax free. Apple's policy is matched by virtually every U.S. multi-national, not to mention the ever-declining number of powerful U.S. corporations that have absorbed their weaker competitors in the ongoing process of the concentration of capital. All pay less and less taxes, if any, while the burden is ever more shifted to a working class less and less able to pay.

We live in a time of great contradictions. The hammer blows struck against workers everywhere have not yet been matched by an equivalent working-class response. Working people increasingly understand from direct experience that they are the victims of a failing system. Yet they retain illusions, in decreasing but still significant numbers, that the system will, as before, turn around eventually and restore much of what has been lost.

Serious and massive mobilizations have been on the order of the day in some nations, but they have been far from adequate to reverse the unrelenting capitalist austerity drive.

Greece is Europe's future

In attempting to understand the effects of the capitalist economic crisis on the world's working class, it is useful to look at the dire situation that confronts the Greek masses. Greece, as with all the weaker industrialized capitalist nations—including Portugal, Spain, Ireland, and now Italy—lacks the imperial resources to effectively compete on world markets. This said, the same observation holds for the rest of Europe and indeed the entire world. Never-ending capitalist competition—driven by generalized declining profit rates, shrinking markets, and scarcity of raw materials—drives all to seek solutions against the others, with the first victims being the weak nations of the underdeveloped world, followed by all the others.

The Greek ruling class has imposed an austerity program that has cut deeper into the standard of living of working people than anywhere in Europe, although as the Greek Fourth International comrades aptly note, "Greece is Europe's future." Some estimates put the decline, including massive cuts in social services, a series of new and heinous taxes, and wage cuts, all in a myriad of forms, at close to 40 percent.

This has generated some 17 general strikes since the crisis began some four years ago. However, from the vantage point of the world's ruling classes, there is no room for any concessions to workers. Few, if any, have been recorded despite unprecedented massive mobilizations. The need to impose even greater cuts at every level of the economy is capitalism's prime directive and only solution.

Most of the Greek general strikes were pro-forma, merely for the record, but they nevertheless resulted in massive outpourings with huge popular support. They were organized by a trade-union bureaucracy whose intentions were qualitatively more to release pent-up working-class anger and to pose as defenders of workers' interests than to mount serious efforts to compel a ruling-class retreat. This parasitic layer's worldview accepts capitalist rule without question; their vision is limited to making the existing capitalist system work.

Greece's future, as with all other nations, lies not with a pro-capitalist variant of social reform, however left sounding, but rather in a challenge to the capitalist system itself. This requires the building of a Leninist revolutionary socialist party in Greece and everywhere else, as well as mass independent and class-struggle working-class formations.

The various "anti-capitalist parties" and "left fronts" that have emerged in Europe reflect the view that new vaguely defined political formations can become mass organizing vehicles as "left" alternatives to the increasingly bourgeois social democratic parties. Socialist Action strongly disagrees with any policy of subordinating the building of Leninist parties, with explicit revolutionary socialist programs, to politically indistinct "anti-capitalist" formations. We discuss these questionable assumptions in various resolutions that Socialist Action has submitted in our fraternal capacity to the Fourth International.

Can China save the world?

By all accounts China's capitalist economy, inevitably subject to the same contradictions as all the others, is

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... Socialist politics

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in decline. Chinese imports in April 2012, for example, rose just 0.3 percent as compared to 11 percent for the same period last year.

China's export power, the result of low-wage labor and increasingly high technology, the motor forces of its economy, grew 4.9 percent in April, *half* of the April growth rate the previous year. Other indices demonstrate the same regression. The almost 50 percent reduction in China's GDP growth, if continued, can have drastic consequences for Chinese and multi-national corporations. That China's capitalist economy could continue to prosper in the context of a world economy in crisis is problematic at best.

China's advance, to be sure, has nothing to do with any special Chinese variant of capitalist production, other than its super-low-wage and benefit levels and horrific working conditions, including excessive hours worked under hazardous health and safety conditions. These, of course, are key factors that attract the advanced capitalist world's investment.

It is increasingly obvious to workers everywhere that the only way for capitalists to compete on world markets is to adopt the Chinese "model." In the U.S. this means the classic race to the bottom—the offshoring of jobs and the use of low-wage immigrant and near slave-wage prison labor.

Changing face of world working class

The de-industrialization of the major capitalist nations has become a permanent feature of capitalist development. Even the most powerful economies are compelled to take all measures required to maintain competitiveness in increasingly saturated world markets. Germany, Europe's strongest economy, has lost 20 percent of its factory jobs from 1991 to 2007. That equals the percentage of manufacturing jobs lost in the U.S. Japan, the manufacturing behemoth of the 1980s, lost 30 percent during the same period. In the U.S., job losses, mostly in better-paid manufacturing industries have exceeded one million per year since 2007.

Workers nevertheless retain enormous power in the major sectors of the economy and can still—if the leadership, will, and unity of purpose are present—shut down their entire country and pose the question of power.

The ruling rich are not lacking in the crudest schemes to lower production costs in the U.S. as well, including the criminalization of a generation of



(Above) Banner of Greek revolutionary coalition ANTARSYA in anti-austerity march in Athens.

youth, the majority Black and Latino. Virtually every comparison between Blacks and Latinos on the one hand and whites on the other demonstrates that the gap is widening, with unemployment rates among oppressed nationalities close to double the rate of whites. In some predominantly Black and/or Latino cities the unemployment approaches 50 percent.

A corrupt and racist criminal "justice" system, combined with some of the most racist legislation on the books—"stop and frisk" and "three strikes"—helps fill increasingly privatized "for profit" U.S. jails to capacity. Here the ruling rich have found a way to secure triple profits—new prison construction, government payments for prisoner "maintenance" and a near slave-labor wage system (averaging 50 cents per hour nationally).

Today's prisoners are "employed" by Fortune 500 corporations to produce state of the art commodities for the world market, and now in the agricultural sector in some cases replacing undocumented immigrants at even lower wages!

The U.S. incarcerates the largest number and percentage of its population in the world; 7.1 million are under the jurisdiction of the prison industrial complex. These include workers on probation. Some 3.5 million are in prison today and 3500 are on death row; in both cases, the majority are Black, Latino, and Native American. The nation with the highest GDP and the greatest wealth incarcerates and executes the greatest numbers!

Similarly, women are increasingly victimized as super-exploited workers or as sex slaves around the world. The proletarianization of labor in poor nations in this modern era takes on the most despicable forms, reminiscent of capitalism's earliest periods when it came into being, as Marx explains, "dripping with blood."

(to be continued next month)

... Obama's win

(continued from page 1)

- In the name of "energy independence," the government has projected an increase in the use of fossil fuels of 25-40 percent over the next 10 years, a death-sentence for the environment and millions, if not billions, of the earth's people.

President Obama was explicit on his fossil fuel plans during the second presidential debate on Oct. 16. When challenged by Romney as to who was the best representative of "big oil," he stated: "We have increased oil production to the highest levels in 16 years. ... Natural gas production is the highest it's been in decades. We have seen increases in coal production and coal employment. ... We still continue to open up new areas for drilling. ...

"We've opened up public lands. We're actually drilling more on public lands than in the previous administration—and the previous president was an oil man. ... And natural gas isn't just appearing magically. We're encouraging it and working with the industry. ... We made the largest investment in clean coal technology. ... We've built enough pipeline to wrap around the entire earth once. ... So, I'm all for pipelines. I'm all for oil production."

The skilled and highly professional exponents of U.S. capitalism played the two-party election charade to the hilt. The initially "moderate" Massachusetts Republican opponent Mitt Romney was originally cast in the role of a right-wing Tea Party type, presumably to first win the Republican primary contest between assorted representatives of the "extreme right" in U.S. politics.

This had the desired effect of moving

the ruling class's political, economic, and military agenda to the right, affording Obama as much room as required to follow suit. The president eagerly obliged, matching Romney's corporate agenda nearly word for word, while taking care to enunciate a few sound-bites on occasion to keep his presumed "nowhere to go" supporters on the leash.

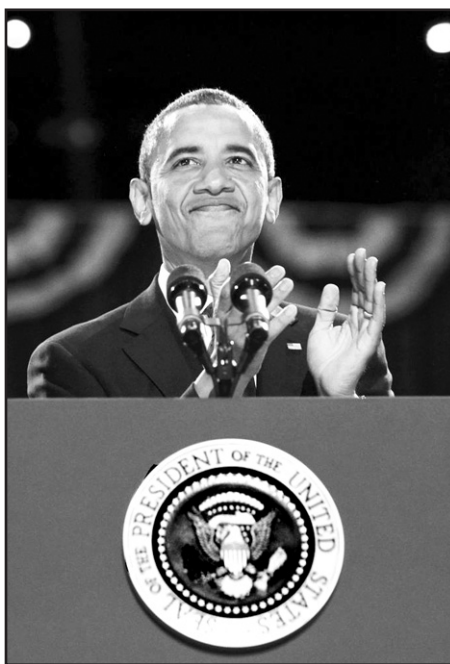
It should be noted that several million, perhaps 20 million, likely disgusted previous Obama supporters did abstain from voting, with the 2012 popular vote declining below the totals registered in 2008 and 2004.

Upon winning the Republican primary, Romney's advisers pulled the plug on *his* "nowhere to go" supporters and surprised a "deer in the headlights-like" Obama during their first debate by attacking the president from the left. Romney told the truth about the real unemployment rate being much larger than the official figures and otherwise effectively debunked the administration's pretensions that a recovery was underway.

The fake debate over the auto bailout was similarly aimed at the naïve. Obama's multi-billion-dollar bailout was carefully considered by the U.S. ruling class, whose top echelons debated whether the industry should move to bust the historic UAW contracts with General Motors via government-overseen bankruptcy proceedings, wherein a judge would be assigned to gut the UAW contract, or whether the government itself would orchestrate the affair to achieve the very same end.

Regardless of which scenario was contemplated, neither included ceding the manufacture and sale of autos in the U.S. to any foreign competitors.

GM, formerly the world's largest corporation, still retains big-time clout in



ruling-class circles. It required one or another clever mechanism to destroy what UAW workers had achieved over decades of class combat.

The auto-bailout charade, a debacle for workers and a boon to the bankers and GM's corporate elite, was transformed by Obama administration strategists from an election-time minus to a Big Lie plus. The union-busting president was miraculously transformed into the "friend of labor."

Similarly, the corporate elite's "education reform," pro-charter school, privatizing, and anti-teacher president—whose Arne Duncan and Rahm Emmanuel associates were backed by some of the richest Bill Gates and Co. billionaires in the country—was transformed into an advocate of teachers and public education. Duncan is Obama's secretary of education; Emmanuel, Obama's former

chief of staff and currently mayor of Chicago, led the charge in the failed effort to break the Chicago Teachers Union.

CBS anchors/analysts covering Election 2012 couldn't help but note that none of the "big issues" were subject to discussion or debate during the two-year campaign. It was "a knife fight," one opined. I would suggest instead that the campaign was fought with feathers and replete with lies and invention to give the impression that there were serious stakes involved.

In truth, both candidates were sworn in advance to defend and advance the interests of corporate America. The fact that the very significant majority of voting trade unionists, Blacks (95 percent), and Latinos (75 percent), women, and youth voted for what they mistakenly considered to be the lesser evil, was more a reflection of their compulsion to express, as well as they could, opposition to the worst of what corporate America offered in this orchestrated contest than it was an expression of confidence in the system itself. The great majority of Americans, the polls indicate, believe that the rich run the country.

Those who voted for one or another of the socialist candidates—on the ballot or write-ins—and who struggle to advance the building of massive, independent, and class-struggle social and political movements, will prove to be the most effective fighters for a better future for humanity.

The gap between the present moment, when workers and their allies are reeling from the corporate offensive, and the time when these movements inevitably emerge to offer a fundamental challenge—in the electoral arena and in the streets—is drawing closer, the Obama "victory" notwithstanding. ■

Credibility of Zionist Israel unravels



Tony Savino / Socialist Action



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

Israel is increasingly seen as the major instrument of U.S. neo-colonial policy in the Middle East.

BY JEFF MACKLER

When 15 national leaders of U.S. Christian churches call on the U.S. Congress to reconsider giving aid to Israel because of human rights violations as well as the continued expansion of Israel settlements, including “claiming territory that under international law and U.S. policy should belong to a future Palestinian state,” and when this appeal is covered in *The New York Times* (Oct. 21, 2012), it’s clear that the credibility of the racist, Zionist colonial settler state of Israel is at an all time low—as is the myth of a beleaguered Israel threatened by “terrorist” Palestinians.

The statement’s signers included representatives of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee, the, Orthodox Peace Fellowship, American Baptist Churches USA, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

The letter called for Congressional investigation into Israel’s activities only, although it stated that both Israelis and Palestinians had “suffered.” Nevertheless, *The Times* article’s title, “Church Appeal on Israel Angers Jewish Groups,” missed the point altogether. It is not the “anger” of Jewish leaders that is relevant to the present discussion questioning the atrocities committed by the Zionist state, if not the legitimacy of the state itself, but the outrage of millions around the world concerning the ongoing dispossession, persecution, and starvation of the Palestinian masses, including the reduction of their historic homeland to some 17 percent of pre-partition 1947 Palestine.

Jewish leaders protesting the Christian leadership statement, including Rabbi Steven Wernick of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, responded, “When Israel is the only one called to account, that’s when it becomes problematic.” Wernick’s view that since both Israel and the Palestinian Authority receive U.S. aid, both should be investigated, is, in this writer’s view, the moral equivalent of demanding that World War II Jewish resistance to Nazi atrocities be placed on the same plane as the Holocaust, in which the Hitler regime murdered six million Jews across Europe.

Jewish leaders criticized the appeal by essentially mainline Christian churches, as “a momentous betrayal.” Announcing their intention to withdraw from a scheduled Oct. 22 meeting for a Jewish-Christian



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

dialogue, they characterized the appeal as “a step too far” and an indication of “the vicious anti-Zionism that has gone virtually unchecked in several of these denominations.” Ethan Felson, vice president and general counsel of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, stated, according to *The Times*, “Something is deeply broken, badly broken. ... We’re certainly not getting anywhere now.”

The choice of the term “anti-Zionism” above is noteworthy. The traditional response to criticisms of the Israeli apartheid state has been accusations of “anti-Semitism.” But putting that label on mainline Christian churches, several of which have adopted positions in favor of BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel), is no longer tenable or sufficient to rebut charges that the whole world knows to be true.

The myth of a democratic, peace-loving Israel has increasingly been shattered by events past and present. In September 1982, for example, the Israeli-abetted massacre of some 800 helpless Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon was vigorously denied by Zionist state leaders. Today, evidence from Israeli archives has exposed yet another myth perpetrated by Israel with the aid of the U.S. corporate media. A September 2012 on-line *New York Times* article entitled, “A Preventable Massacre,” informs us that outright denial of reality is no longer viable when it undermines the capacity of the U.S. state power to maintain a semblance of credibility:

“On the night of Sept. 16, 1982” [during the period when Israel invaded Lebanon during a civil war], *The Times* reports, “the Israeli military allowed a right-wing Lebanese militia to enter two Palestinian refu-

gee camps in Beirut. In the ensuing three-day rampage, the militia, linked to the Maronite Christian Phalange Party [similar to the classical 1930s fascist parties of Italy and Spain], raped, killed and dismembered at least 800 civilians, while Israeli flares illuminated the camps’ narrow and darkened alleyways. Nearly all of the dead were women, children and elderly men.” ...

“The verbatim transcripts [from the Israeli State Archives] reveal that the Israelis misled American diplomats about events in Beirut and bullied them into accepting the spurious claim that thousands of ‘terrorists’ were in the camps. Most troubling, when the United States was in a position to exert strong diplomatic pressure on Israel that could have ended the atrocities, it failed to do so. As a result, Phalange militiamen were able to murder Palestinian civilians, whom America had pledged to protect just weeks earlier.”

There have been several other recent incidents that point to Israeli’s isolation. For example, the University of Connecticut-based UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) center had scheduled an Oct. 23 forum in which family members and associates were to honor several key human rights activists. When four invited speakers learned that Israeli President Shimon Peres was among those to be honored, they cancelled. Peres’ son-in-law was the only speaker.

Two years ago, at the founding conference of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), attended by 800 activists from 25 states, a resolution demanding that the U.S. government “End All Aid To Israel: Military, Economic and Diplomatic,” was approved by a 90 percent margin. The UNAC conference was a first for the U.S. antiwar movement, a major departure from the view that criticism of Israel must be a “split issue.” Since then, UNAC’s influence has grown, with new supporters from a broad range of groups supporting Palestinian self-determination.

Israel, the world’s largest recipient of U.S. military aid, is increasingly seen by a wide spectrum of social and political activists as the major ally, if not instrument, of U.S. neo-colonial policy in the Middle East. Most recently, Israel’s repeated threats to bomb Iran’s nuclear research facilities, risking a wider war in the Middle East and beyond, as well as its repeated military moves to enforce its illegal blockade of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians of Gaza, has deepened its isolation and lent increasing credibility to the demand for a democratic and secular Palestine with the right of return to the forcibly exiled Palestinian millions.

For decades the so-called two-state solution, in which a new Palestinian state was to be created to re-

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