

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Cuba: growing signs of economic stabilization

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10,000 N.Y. students say, 'education is our right'

BY FRED FELDMAN

NEW YORK — The chant of "Fight! Fight! Fight! Education is our right!" echoed through the city hall area in downtown Manhattan March 23. More than 10,000 college and high school students, teachers, and their supporters converged on City Hall Plaza to protest attacks on public education. Thousands more were prevented from joining the rally by cops who closed off side streets and subway exits in the area.

Students at universities around the country held rallies, marches, teach-ins, and vigils March 29 to protest proposed Federal cuts in education.

New York governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani have proposed education funding cuts that will slash \$448 million from the city and state university system. Deep cuts are also proposed in financial aid and other programs. City University of New York (CUNY) officials say the reductions could mean a \$1,000 tuition hike, cancellation of 10,000 classes, and laying off 2,000 faculty and staff on the 22 campuses. Hundreds of millions are also planned to be cut from the city's budget for public education.

The March 23 rally was called by the CUNY Coalition Against the Budget Cuts, one of a series of marches, teach-ins, picket lines, and other protests that have



Baruch College students protest proposed education cuts at March 23 rally in New York City

taken place around the state. The student-organized rally was built through actions on nearly every campus in the city. Feeder marches from City College, Brooklyn College, LaGuardia Community College, and others converged on city hall.

The militant spirit of participants was captured by hundreds of Baruch College

students who marched into the park shouting, "Baruch! Baruch! Baruch is on fire!"

The board of education estimated that 14,000 students at 62 high schools walked out of classes to join the protest — despite warnings by top officials and school principals that students would face disciplinary action.

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Strikes grow in France; candidates change tune

BY NAT LONDON

PARIS — A strike wave in France, taking place in the midst of the presidential election campaign, continues to shake up politics here. Walkouts are now spreading among postal, railroad, bus, and subway workers as well as to the state-run airline, Air Inter.

With production at a virtual standstill at Renault plants March 21, the auto giant agreed in negotiations to do what it had vowed never to do — reopen the 1 percent wage offer it had made two weeks earlier.

The morning of the Renault talks, Prime Minister Eduard Balladur gave an exclusive front-page interview to the business daily *La Tribune* warning, "We have to be very careful. We are in a competitive world. When I see the extraordinary efforts being made by American and German companies to restructure and remain competitive, I say we must be on guard." Nevertheless he moved away from his previous intransigence to wage increases. "I am not saying that we don't have to raise wages," he said defensively. "We just have to do it when it is possible."

The same day, Balladur caved in to the striking Corsican public workers who were demanding that the island be classified a "high cost of living zone" entitling them to an automatic 3 percent wage bonus. The government granted the classification but initially resisted extending the bonus to retired workers. They have now agreed to negotiate this question.

The Corsican strikers went back to work once the government agreed to pay their back wages for the five weeks they were on strike.

Renault strikers press for wage hike

As Balladur was promulgating his views in the big-business press, several thousand Renault strikers from plants throughout France demonstrated in front of the company's headquarters in Boulogne-Billancourt during the reopening of wage negotiations. Thousands of others blocked plant gates at struck plants.

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An appeal to our readers: Help promote socialist press

BY LAURA GARZA

The *Militant* is appealing to our readers to join in an international effort to help distribute the socialist press during a 10-week campaign to sell subscriptions to the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial*, our Spanish-language sister publication, and copies of the Marxist magazine *New Internationalist*, *Nouvelle Internationale*, *Nueva Internacional*, and *Ny International*. April 1 marks the beginning of the effort, which will run through June 11.

Supporters of the socialist publications are organizing to sell 3,000 subscriptions to the *Militant*, 700 subscriptions to *Perspectiva Mundial*, and 1,250 copies of

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U.S. government role in Guatemala exposed: murderer was CIA employee

BY GREG ROSENBERG

After months of U.S. government denials, at least some of the truth about a well-paid employee of the Central Intelligence Agency who presided over the torture and execution of Efraín Bamaca Velásquez in Guatemala has come to light. Bamaca, a guerrilla commander murdered in June 1992, was married to Jennifer Harbury, a lawyer from the United States. The

CIA man, Col. Julio Roberto Alpiéz, is currently second in command at the largest military base in Guatemala. He is a two-time graduate of the U.S. Army School of the Americas. There are no estimates as yet just how many Guatemalan working people were killed by Alpiéz or troops under his command.

The recent revelations stung the White House and the Clinton administration began an immediate campaign of denying U.S. government responsibility for the murder, attempting to pin the blame on individual CIA spooks. The administration, however, has been in possession of classified documents linking Alpiéz to the murder of Bamaca — and also the murder of Michael DeVine, a U.S.-born innkeeper living in Guatemala — since 1992.

Renewed pressure fell on U.S. officials after two hunger strikes and other protests by Harbury. She demanded to know Bamaca's fate after he was captured by the Guatemalan army. The hunger strikes drew new international attention to the genocidal conduct of the Guatemalan military, which up to the beginning of March received large infusions of arms, cash, and training from Washington.

"I am saddened but not at all

surprised to hear of the direct link with the CIA in the assassination of my husband," said Harbury. The U.S. State Department, she said, "has long sheltered, supported, and trained this army, and helped to cover up for its terrible and criminal acts. As a result, its impunity has grown stronger and stronger, and 150,000 civilians lie dead."

"The revelations confirm that the projects of 'national security' that have been practiced in our countries simply follow policies drafted in the United States," said Vinicio Hernández, a member of the executive board of the Union of Guatemalan Workers' Trade Unions (UNSTRA-GUA), in a telephone interview from Guatemala City. "While this deals specifically with the murder of two individuals... it enables people to see the tragedy of Guatemala which involves more than 100,000 murdered in the past several decades. 'This is a testimony of how they fight ideas through assassinations,' said Hernández. "We condemn these murders," he emphasized.

For more than three decades, until 1986, Guatemala was ruled almost continuously by military regimes that enjoyed full backing from the U.S. government. Washington organized a military coup in 1954 to overthrow the elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. Afterwards, the CIA station in Guatemala began recruiting military officers to spy on a growing guerrilla movement, union members, opposition parties,

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Members of Guatemalan counterinsurgency unit. Col. Julio Alpiéz, a member of the unit, was described as CIA 'asset' in Guatemala.

The fight for jobs in today's depression conditions — pages 4-6



IN BRIEF

Bolivian teachers protest

The Bolivian army and police broke up a march and shot tear gas into the crowd of some 3,500 rural teachers heading toward the capital city of La Paz March 21. The teachers were protesting a new education reform law designed to put public education in private hands, weaken the union, and change the system of raises, previously based on seniority.

The government arrested 27 leaders of the teachers union, picked up in raids on their headquarters in La Paz and Cochabamba. They are being charged with sedition and conspiracy. The main union federation in the country, the Bolivian Workers Confederation, threatened a general strike over the government's actions.

Nuclear waste ship unwanted

A British freighter, *Pacific Pintail*, carrying 15 tons of highly radioactive waste defied a ban issued by the government of Chile, entering within the country's 200-mile limit while attempting to pass through Cape Horn in heavy seas. The vessel, traveling from France to Japan, was warned off by officials in Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, and Fiji. Chile's navy chief said the ship took "the worst route possible" to Japan. The ship's course has been kept secret to try and avoid protests. The environmental organization Greenpeace said the freighter holds "more radioactivity than was released in the 1985 Chernobyl nuclear explosion."

The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna issued assurances that the ship was safe stating, "Even if it sank it would be many thousands of years before radioactivity might begin to leach out through the glass," in which the material is encased.

Preventing AIDS not profitable

Donald Francis, an epidemiologist and expert on AIDS, said he believes developing an AIDS vaccine is possible but would require extensive clinical trials and funding, which pharmaceutical companies are not interested in pursuing. In an interview run in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* March 10, Francis, who helped establish that AIDS can be transmitted through blood, said, "The social value of an AIDS vaccine has not been transmitted to the



Riot police arrest a teacher in Bolivia. Government troops broke up a march of rural teachers heading toward the Bolivian capital, La Paz. Twenty-seven leaders of the teachers union are in jail, charged with sedition and conspiracy.

private sector that makes vaccines...The private sector has very little interest in filling that huge public health need."

Drug companies make more money off of products like AZT, which patients have to take several times a day for the rest of their lives, and their funding for research is concentrated on such treatments. "If you have four products...you look at which one's most profitable and a vaccine will be at the bottom of the list," Francis said.

N.Y. building collapse kills three

Three people were killed March 21 when a six-story apartment building collapsed in Harlem, New York. The building's owner, Marcus Lehman, and his former partner, Morris Wolfson, had been charged with more than 1,200 housing-code violations since 1989, with 337 of them still outstanding. The unresolved conditions at the building included lack of heat and hot water, serious leaks, and rodent infestation. Residents said there were gaps between the walls and apartment floors and that the floors sloped so badly

they had to prop up furniture on one side. As of yet, no charges have been filed against the landlords for the deaths.

Montana anti-gay plan dropped

In response to public protest, the Montana Senate reversed a decision made a day earlier by a vote of 41 to 8 to require people convicted of homosexual acts to register with police. The provision was attached as part of a sex-offender registration bill. One senator, Al Bishop of Billings, who described gay sex as worse than rape was forced to apologize the next day stating, "I regret that I made that statement."

An OSHA bosses 'can live with'

The Clinton administration is circulating a newly drafted set of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations covering repetitive-stress injuries. The new version would cover fewer than half the 6.1 million workplaces originally intended, and allows bosses with fewer than 10 employees two years to identify a problem and up to five years to do anything about it. As well, it omits provisions requiring all employers to give information on the dangers of repetitive stress, and employers won't have to pay workers for jobs they can't do as a result of repetitive stress injuries. Joseph Dear, an OSHA administrator, explained "The goal is to make sure employers can live with the regulations."

Algiers kills hundreds in ambush

Algerian troops mounted an offensive against opponents of the regime in late March, killing between 300 and 600 in an ambush and subsequent week-long battle. The fighting took place southwest of Al-

giers, reported *Al Watan*, a paper with close ties to the military authorities. It was the largest armed engagement between the army and opposition forces since elections were canceled in 1992. The three-year-old conflict has taken an estimated 30,000 lives.

The government's special forces continued to hunt down survivors in the forests of Ain Defla, about 80 miles from the capital. Algeria's state-run dailies reported that those killed were members of the Armed Islamic Group.

Egypt pressed on nuclear pact

Under pressure from Washington the government of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt reversed its earlier stance on signing an extension of a worldwide treaty limiting nuclear arms. Cairo, which is currently a signatory to the treaty, had said it would not sign for an indefinite extension in April unless Israel would become a signer. Israel, which has nuclear weapons, has never signed the treaty and indicates it won't.

Washington is working to line up the 85 countries needed to extend the pact. The treaty allows the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and China to have nuclear weapons but requires the 165 other signers to pledge not to develop or acquire such weapons.

Members of Congress argued for holding off on aid to the Egyptian government if Cairo continued to express unwillingness to follow Washington's lead. Mubarak, explained a *New York Times* article March 23, "has recognized that his Government must begin to make concessions to Washington if it wants to keep aid packages at a significant level."

Washington agrees to write off Jordan's \$488 million debt

Jordan, whose economy was especially hard hit after the Gulf war, when it did not join countries like Saudi Arabia in aiding the U.S. war effort, is appealing to Washington to help shore up King Hussein's government. Before signing the declaration ending the state of war with Israel last July, Jordan's foreign reserves had sunk below \$200 million, less than the cost of a single month's imports. Since the signing, Jordan's government has stepped up selling itself as an important ally of Washington, and has asked for \$25 billion in aid over the next 10 years, including for sophisticated F-16 jets and M-1A2 tanks.

During a recent visit to Jordan, U.S. vice president Al Gore pledged that Washington would write off Jordan's \$488 million debt to the U.S. government. But Hussein hopes to up the \$43 million aid package promised by Washington for this year, stating that compared to the more than \$2 billion pledged to Egypt and \$3 billion to Israel it was "a valid question" to ask if his government was satisfied with its allotment.

— LAURA GARZA

THE MILITANT

Defend the Cuban revolution

The 'Militant' brings you unparalleled news and analysis of developments in Cuba—from the vantage point of the working class. Our correspondents travel to the factories and fields, important political meetings, and demonstrations. Opponents of Washington's hostile policy toward Havana need the facts provided by the 'Militant.' Don't miss a single issue!



Militant reporter Jonathan Silberman talks with Cienfuegos farmworkers.

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Turkish gov't launches assault on Kurds

BY DAMON TINNON

The Turkish government unleashed the largest military assault in the Middle East since the Gulf war March 20, pouring 35,000 troops into the predominately Kurd-populated region of northern Iraq. The invasion force included warplanes and commando, mechanized, and armored units.

The aim of this offensive is to deal a crushing blow to the struggle of the Kurdish people for national self-determination. Some 20 million Kurds live in the region where the borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey converge. Turkish prime minister Tansu Ciller has vowed to wipe out all Kurdish fighters in the area. In addition, the government seeks to dampen the resistance of the oppressed Kurdish nationality within Turkish borders, which numbers one-fifth of the population.

Ankara says its aim is to wipe out Kurdish rebel bases run by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and establish a "buffer zone" at the border. Turkish officials justify this offensive by pointing to the PKK's recent ambush of a Turkish military convoy, which resulted in the deaths of 18 soldiers. The PKK, which took up arms in 1984, is one of several organizations fighting for an independent Kurdistan. More than 15,000 have been killed in the conflict — most of them by the Turkish army — since 1984.

In 1992, some 20,000 troops swept the border and then withdrew, allowing Kurdish fighters to regain their positions. Ciller has vowed not to allow that this time. Turkish troops have advanced 25 miles beyond the Iraqi border. Ankara's generals claimed to have killed 200 guerrillas after two days' fighting, and said its troops suffered only 13 casualties.

Broad offensive against Kurds

Turkish forces are leading a broad offensive against the Kurds. Reports cite Turkish troops bombing villages; arresting and beating residents; and looting and destroying Kurdish homes under the pretext of suspected membership or involvement in the PKK.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party, based in northern Iraq, flatly stated that, "The Turks know that these were not PKK villages. The targeted area has no PKK bases and it is strictly populated by Iraqi Kurds." A villager from Hizaw, a town along the Turkey-Iraq border, reported beatings of his neighbors by Turkish troops. A teacher in the same town said that school books not meeting with Turkish government approval were confiscated. Some 3.5 million Kurds live in the invaded region.

Iraqi Kurds are mounting protests against the bombing of civilians. Ciller claims that the "utmost effort is being made not to harm civilians."

The military campaign brought the sharply divergent interests of the main imperialist powers to the surface.

The governments of Germany and France are calling for a withdrawal. Germany, which has a large Turkish population, has already begun to feel the political backlash, as Turkish mosques, travel agencies, and cultural centers were fire-bombed. Although no group has taken responsibility for the attacks, German authorities are blaming the PKK, which is outlawed in Germany.

Paris has made the sharpest criticism of the Turkish military assault. French foreign minister Alain Juppe said that the attack violated Iraq's territorial integrity. The French government has pressed for an end to the United Nations embargo imposed on Iraq, since French capitalists stand to profit from expanded trade with Baghdad.

Washington seesaws

The administration of U.S. president Bill Clinton initially gave strong support to the Turkish offensive. The State Department approved Ankara's use of force as "necessary and appropriate to defend itself." The Pentagon suspended flights providing "humanitarian" aid to Kurds in the region so as not to interfere in Turkish bombing runs. The affected area of northern Iraq is currently under Washington's military control in the guise of a UN mandate.

The administration however, began to

backtrack after press reports shed light on the conduct of the offensive. Claiming Washington's interest was in "human rights," Secretary of State Warren said March 28, "We told them that we thought support of the United States and the international community would be forthcoming only if troops were promptly withdrawn."

The *Wall Street Journal* editors defended the invasion in a March 24 editorial, stating it was necessary "to get the job done." The big-business newspaper added, "Turkey, all agree, remains an important adjunct of Europe and a key member of the Atlantic Alliance. It is a friend

in a troubled region and it deserves our support."

The *New York Times* editors said, however, Washington should oppose the invasion, warning that "harshly repressive army tactics in Kurdish areas of southeastern Turkey have created a million and a half internal Kurdish refugees," and driven millions more to other parts of Turkey.

The Iraqi regime, which has a long history of attempting to drown the Kurdish struggle in blood, remained virtually silent.

There are 12 million Kurds living in Turkey. The Turkish government perpetu-

ates a host of discriminatory measures against them. It is illegal for the Kurdish language to be spoken in schools or used in the media. It is also illegal to discuss the political situation of Kurds in Turkey. In fact, eight Kurdish members of Parliament who spoke out against the oppression of Kurds were recently thrown in jail.

The pro-Kurdish daily *Ozgur Ulke* has been closed, and many artists, intellectuals, and Kurdish independence fighters remain behind bars.

Ciller has "promised" reforms of repressive laws aimed at Kurds — once Kurdish rebels in the border region have been crushed.

Strikes sweep France as election nears

Continued from front page

At the Renault motor and transmission plant at Cléon in Normandy, 16 buses ferried workers to a local demonstration and then back to the plant to await the results of the talks. At the assembly plant in Maubeuge near the Belgian border, workers occupied the plant gates for the first time, cutting off all incoming and outgoing trucks.

At the Choisy-le-Roi parts plant, where this reporter works, trucks were allowed in for the first time in a week as a court order imposed heavy sanctions and management threatened to fire nine strikers. Later that afternoon, however, five buses pulled up unexpectedly in front of the factory and 250 young strikers from Renault's Lardy Technical Center joined us at the plant gate. They had heard about the threats to the strike at Choisy while demonstrating at Renault headquarters that morning. Instead of going back to picket at their own plant, they decided to come over to Choisy and help us out. Since Choisy strikers were prohibited from stopping trucks at the plant gate, the Lardy workers decided to block the entire road in front of the factory on their own. No trucks got into the plant for the rest of the day as, together, we awaited the results of the Billancourt negotiations.

Unions reject company offer

Renault management finally came up with a 2.5 percent wage increase plus a 100 franc monthly increase for all workers. This means about a 3 percent to 3.5 percent increase for most workers.

The two unions leading the strike movement on a national level, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT), refused the wage offer as insufficient. The unions are demanding a FF1,500 increase for all workers. This would amount to a 20 percent pay hike for most workers.

Strikes, demonstrations, and work stoppages have been continuing in a number of plants. There was another national demonstration of Renault workers March 28 as the company reported FF3.64 billion



Militant/Nat London

Renault workers picket entrance to Choisy-le-Roi plant. Walkouts are spreading.

in profits (\$732 million) for 1994. At the same time Renault president Louis Schweitzer announced he would go no further in raising wages.

As workers assert themselves through strike action across France, presidential candidates are being compelled to adapt to the new situation. Jacques Chirac, the leading candidate and a conservative Gaullist politician, is the best example.

Chirac's public proclamations have undergone a radical transformation since January when he was a very distant second or third candidate in the race. The British weekly *Economist* pointed out March 25 that during Chirac's last term of office as prime minister in 1986-88 "he espoused a French version of Thatcherism. Now he presents himself as a true Gaullist, standing above the left-right divide, seeking to reconcile the interests of the whole nation."

Chirac launched his "new look" in February when, as mayor of Paris, he seized abandoned buildings to house homeless people, announced that wage increases were justified, and said he op-

posed any reductions in the public medical insurance and retirement systems. Initially, other candidates denounced Chirac's "social demagoguery." Lionel Jospin, the Socialist Party candidate, accused him of "Chirac-Marxism."

Chirac explained his changed politics to the conservative daily *Le Figaro* March 25: "There is a tear in the social fabric like our country has never seen, which is getting worse and imperils the cohesion of the nation." According to the "reformed" politician, unemployment and unequal access to housing, health care, and education were putting in jeopardy the "very principles of the French Republic."

Today, even Jean Gandois, a leading employers' representative, has publicly called on his fellow capitalists to accept the necessity of raising wages. "When companies are doing well, there should be higher wages to augment buying power," he told *La Tribune* March 28. He warned that refusing to increase pay at profitable companies could provoke the unions.

Instead of taking the unions head on Gandois counsels going for massive cuts in the social wage including social security, medical care, and lowering the retirement taxes that employers must pay.

In spite of elections, strikes continue

As the final weeks of the election campaign approach, workers at Air Inter are organizing their third three-day walkout. Each 60-hour strike costs Air Inter the equivalent of its entire profit for 1994. Strikes and work stoppages are continuing at many Renault plants and among some postal workers.

On March 30, Air Inter strikers will be joined by a one-day national walkout of railroad workers and Paris bus and metro workers. Many transport workers see this as a first step toward opening up a more sustained fight "like Renault."

Workers at Renault are in high spirits. While it is clear the employers have not abandoned their plans to get "competitive" and reduce our standard of living, especially by going after our social wage, the recent actions of workers across France have boosted our confidence and demonstrated that the bosses will face stiff resistance.

Nat London is a production worker at Renault in Choisy-le-Roi and a member of the CGT.

April 9 rally for women's rights builds

BY LAURA GARZA

Transportation plans are being finalized and last minute publicity organized for the national Rally for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., on April 9 called by the National Organization for Women (NOW). The rally is called around the demands to stop violence against women, stop antiabortion violence, stop the war on poor women, and stop the "Contract on America." The protest is endorsed by close to 500 organizations and prominent individuals.

Up and down the east coast buses are being organized by women's rights activists, clinic defense groups, students, and others. Participants are planning to join the rally from Alabama where activists from the Birmingham Clinic Defense Task Force are organizing rides for many who have who have joined in keeping clinics open there. In the Minneapolis-St. Paul area car pooling is being organized. In Washington State a march and rally are planned at the state capital in Olympia to coincide with the

national action. Several activists will be flying out to join the Washington, D.C., crowd and report back on the action.

The national rally assembles at 11:00 a.m. on the Mall at 3rd Street and Madison Drive, NW near the capitol building. The rally is scheduled to take place from noon to 5 p.m.

A Young Feminist Summit is also being planned for April 7-8 at the Doubletree Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss the fight for women's rights and how to oppose the bipartisan assault on social gains, unions, and women's rights. Workshops are scheduled on 30 topics including Sexual harassment policies in colleges and high schools; Welfare reform: violence against poor women; Health issues for women/forced sterilization; Terrorist violence at the clinics; and Activism and coalition building.

For more information on the rally or conference call NOW at (202) 331-0066.

How can the labor movement fight for jobs for all in today's depression conditions?

Socialists discuss working-class perspective on budget cuts, Caterpillar strike

BY NAOMI CRAINE
AND JOEL BRITTON

NEW YORK — How can revolutionary-minded workers and youth explain the need in today's depression conditions for a mass, labor-led social movement for jobs for all and to defend the wages, social entitlements, and job conditions of working people?

How can the fight for such demands advance the building of a communist party capable, as revolutionary conditions ripen, of leading the working class to take power out of the hands of the capitalists and establish a workers and farmers government?

What must be done today to build the kind of organization that will be most effective in advancing these goals?

These were among the questions discussed by more than 100 members of branches of the Socialist Workers Party in New York, Brooklyn, and Newark, New Jersey, on two Sundays in March.

The two-part meeting opened with a lively discussion on a report presenting a working-class answer to the anti-labor proposals and trial balloons being floated by Democratic and Republican politicians on the federal, state, and local government levels. The report was given by Joel Britton on behalf of the committee that organized the meeting, made up of members of the body responsible for the party's trade union work in the New York-northern New Jersey area and other SWP leaders from the three branches.

Britton also reported on the growing stakes in the United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against Caterpillar Inc., the most important labor battle taking place in the United States today. "Because thousands of strikers stayed in the trenches," he said, "Caterpillar is under growing pressure to settle without coming close to their central aim of destroying the UAW. We need to keep getting other workers and young people out to the picket lines to support the strike and learn from its example. And we need to bring a perspective to these fighters of how their struggle fits into today's world."

Participants in the meeting also discussed and adopted proposals to strengthen the political functioning of party branches, enable members to improve their work in the trade unions, and participate more effectively in united efforts to defend the Cuban revolution and carry out other activity.

These measures were presented in a report by Naomi Craine, the Socialist Workers candidate for U.S. Senate from New York in 1994. The socialists decided to shift the day of weekly party branch meetings and public forums to free up Saturdays and Sundays for more political work and discussions with workers and young



Elementary school students in New York March 23 protest plans to cut school lunch programs. Capitalists are targeting broad entitlements won by working people.

people attracted to the communist movement. They decided to adjust their work schedules to be in a better position to strengthen branches and participate with other forces in political activity. And they voted to consolidate where they are currently working in industry in order to better collaborate with other socialist workers on the job and in the unions.

Socialist campaign in New York

Many of the questions discussed at the meeting had come up when the Socialist Workers Party in New York launched a campaign for state assembly in a special March 14 election. The party's candidate was Brock Satter, a member of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and leader of the Young Socialists.

The campaign was launched as thousands of students, hospital workers, and others were taking part in protests against proposals by Gov. George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to slash funding for state and city universities, public health services, and welfare programs. Supporters of the Socialist Workers campaign participated in these actions and encouraged others to get involved.

But the initial campaign statements quoted in the *Militant*, Britton said, "did not break from liberal capitalist assumptions" in addressing the proposed budget cuts. What the campaign was saying at

first didn't offer a clear working-class perspective of how to change society and help win workers and youth to the socialist movement.

The March 6 issue of the *Militant*, for instance, quoted Satter as saying, "My campaign opposes all cuts in city, state, and federal social services." The front-page headline declared, "Biggest NY budget cuts proposed since 1930s." An editorial inside urged readers to join "protests against budget cuts."

But "Stop the budget cuts!" is not a working-class demand, Britton said. "We are against the capitalist government taking away one penny of what any mother on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) receives in welfare payments, and we are against any working person losing a single food stamp," Britton said. "We oppose tuition increases or any other measure that worsens the conditions of working people."

"But that doesn't mean we support the bourgeoisie's welfare system and bureaucracy," he said, "or that we think students should pay some tuition, just not a higher one. Thinking workers have to get entirely out of the framework of the capitalist government budgets and present demands that advance the interests of working people."

"The proletariat has as little confidence in the government of the bourgeoisie as in an individual capitalist," wrote Leon Trotsky in 1938. "Not one man and not one penny for the bourgeois government!" Citing this statement by the Russian revolutionary leader, Britton said it represented the position of the communist workers movement from the times of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, to the Bolsheviks led by V.I. Lenin, until today. (See *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* by Leon Trotsky, published by Pathfinder.)

"We demand that the bosses' government fund all kinds of programs in the interests of working people, but we never support the budget of a capitalist government, in full or in part. We propose no alternative budget for the rulers," Britton said. "We propose to get rid of the whole capitalist system, its government, and its state."

"A huge percentage of every capitalist budget goes into the pockets of the wealthy bondholders right off the top," Britton noted. Washington's budget for next year, for example, includes \$257 billion in mandatory allocations just for interest payments to these coupon-clippers, making it the third largest item after Social

Security and the capitalists' war budget.

No wonder Lenin called such payments to bondholders "the essence of imperialism and imperialist parasitism!"

Laura Garza, just back from a *Militant* reporting trip to Mexico, explained that country "is a good example of how you have to get entirely out of the framework of the capitalists and their budgets." The government there is imposing stiff austerity measures on workers and peasants to reassure both Mexican and U.S. capitalists and pay off bondholders. But virtually every current in the labor movement operates in the framework of how to salvage Mexico's capitalist economy, not how to unite and defend working people.

"There is no substantial call for canceling Mexico's foreign debt," for example, Garza said.

Capitalists do have a crisis

The capitalists do face an economic crisis worldwide, Britton said. And as a result, they also face what they call a "fiscal crisis."

As a "reminder of the world we live in," Britton pointed to the front page of the *New York Times* March 12, the day of the meeting's second session. The paper featured an article on the likelihood of a widening Balkan war; a story headlined "Mexicans ask how far social fabric can stretch: political fallout seen if austerity program results in unrest"; further revelations of the cover-up of safety hazards by the government and airline bosses; an account of a garment sweatshop in Brooklyn; and an article on right-wing radio and TV demagogue Rush Limbaugh.

Declining profit rates have slowed capitalist expansion worldwide since the mid-1970s. In the quest for higher returns, Britton said, capitalists have sunk more and more capital into stocks, bonds, and other financial paper, instead of expanding factory capacity to draw more workers into production.

Especially under capitalism's current deflationary pressures, he explained, the huge speculative bubble that has built up can burst—with devastating consequences for working people. Among the most recent reminders are the bankruptcy of Orange County, California; the collapse of Barings, the oldest investment bank in the United Kingdom; and the plunge of the Mexican peso and its heavy toll on workers and rural toilers. "This is the world that is explained in *New International* no. 10, in the articles 'What the 1987 stock market crash foretold' and 'Imperialism's march toward fascism and war,'" said Britton, referring to the latest issue of the Marxist magazine.

Intensified competition for profits impels capitalists worldwide to cut costs by laying off workers, cutting wages and benefits, and speeding up production. In the United States, the bosses have succeeded over the last two decades in actually lowering the average real wages of the working class. The federal minimum wage today buys just 61 percent of what it did in 1968.

Rising unemployment poses a growing danger to the working class throughout the capitalist world, the Socialist Workers Party leader said. In the United States, the bosses try to get workers to accept a level of unemployment as "normal" that was considered high for a quarter century after World War II. And in Western Europe, even the official, understated jobless levels have averaged 10 percent or more for over a decade.

"Unemployment is the deepest division in our class," Britton noted, "because it builds on the competition for jobs imposed on workers by the operations of the capitalist system. All the other ways the bosses seek to divide our class and weaken the labor movement — by skin color, national origin, sex, and age — are reinforced and accelerated by this fundamental division."

Despite big blows to labor, Britton said, nowhere have the owners of capital ac-

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completed nearly enough to fuel a new historic expansion of their system. Nowhere have they crushed the labor movement and dealt a decisive defeat to the working class. "Working people continue to resist new probes against our rights and living standards," he said.

To make further inroads, the capitalist families and their governments have been pressing to erode the social wage the working class has conquered through decades of struggle. The bosses need to roll back Social Security, public health services, unemployment benefits, and workers compensation. All these are paid for out of the value workers produce, and the bosses hope to reverse their sagging profit rates in part by taking back as much as they can.

But the rulers face big obstacles. To most workers and broad layers of the middle class, Social Security pensions and other gains of the industrial union movement and civil rights struggles earlier in this century are now seen as entitlements, as basic social rights.

That's why a central goal of today's bipartisan campaign against welfare, Britton said, is to shift the relationship of forces against the working class in order to begin chopping broader entitlements down the road.

Britton noted that the programs the Democrats and Republicans are talking about cutting today — such as AFDC payments, food stamps, school lunch programs — are a tiny percentage of federal, state, or local government budgets. These programs in themselves are not the main target. They are "part of an ideological campaign to scapegoat working people, especially those with the worst job prospects and smallest paychecks, for the crisis of capitalism."

The bosses seek to break down working-class solidarity and play on panic in the middle class. By inciting fears and exploiting insecurities — about the "underclass," "crime," "the deficit" — the capitalists hope to convince sections of the middle class in particular that "we" all must "sacrifice" to ensure "order" and "stability."

In fact, Britton said, relatively few of the recent rounds of proposed cuts in welfare or programs benefiting working people have actually been carried out. "We should never imply that trial balloons sent up by the capitalist government have already been accomplished," Britton said. "That blinds us to the problems the rulers face. They haven't been able to break the unions and force our class to its knees."

But the bondholders keep up the pressure, and rightist forces that gain strength within bourgeois politics help push the propaganda against Social Security and other entitlements. "Right after the so-called Balanced Budget Amendment was defeated in the U.S. Senate earlier this month," Britton noted, "the right-wing group Lead or Leave staged a demonstration outside the Washington offices of the American Association of Retired Persons." Lead or Leave presents itself as the

voice of American youth against "mortgaging our future" to fund pension and health benefits to the elderly.

The most class-conscious sections of the workers movement, Britton said, have always fought to replace means-tested benefits such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or payments "in kind" such as food stamps, with guaranteed jobs and cash benefits for all — and at union-scale wages.

Welfare and the fight for jobs

Britton and other meeting participants discussed how means-testing is designed to humiliate and demoralize low-paid or jobless workers who depend on relief. These programs are staffed by bureaucrats and snoopers who pry into every aspect of a person's life — how you spend your money, who you live with, whether or not you decide to bear a child.

Britton pointed to some key working-class demands in a front-page editorial in the March 13 *Militant* headlined "Why labor must lead the fight for jobs for all":

A shorter workweek with no cut in pay — unite the employed and unemployed in a fight for jobs.

A massive public works program — at union scale wages — to create jobs rebuilding infrastructure and affordable housing.

Full unemployment compensation to all who are without work.

An immediate, substantial increase in the minimum wage.

Defend and extend affirmative action.

Government-funded social security, public health services, and lifetime public education as social rights for all.

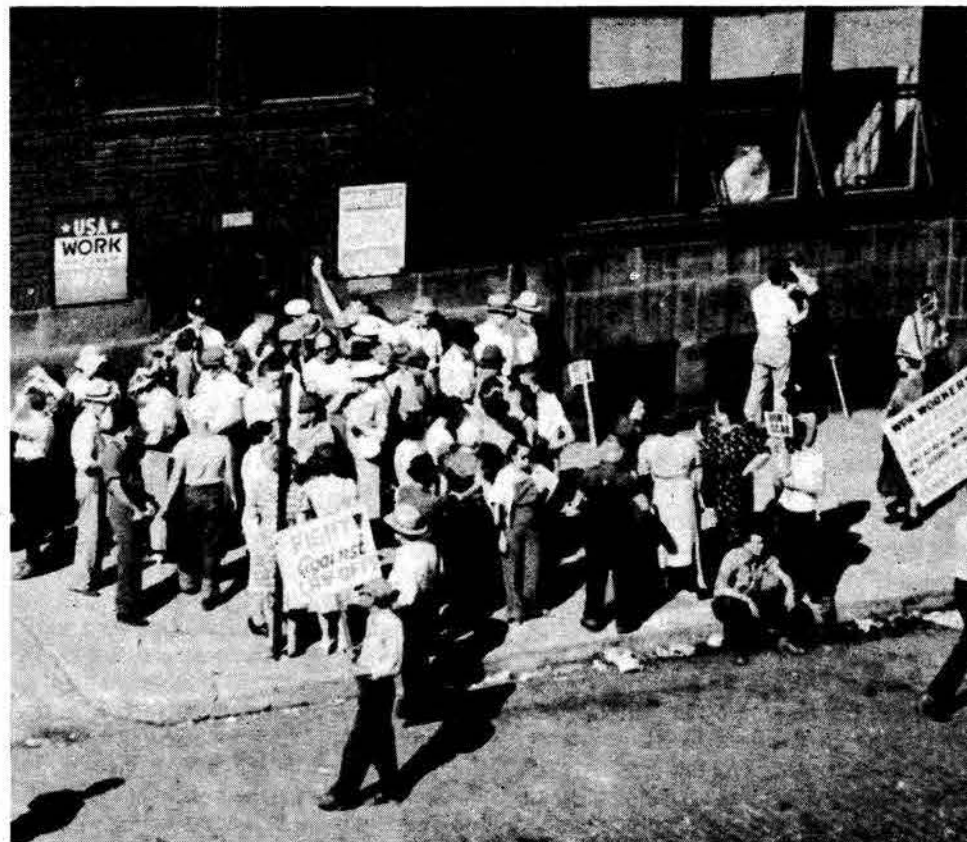
Cancel the Third World debt.

These demands provide a basis on which to unite working people the world over in a common struggle against the exploiters and their governments. They are central to the fighting program participants in the meeting reaffirmed as the platform for the SWP's New York election campaign. They are what communists need to explain to co-workers on the job and to fighters in protest actions and social struggles.

Paris Commune and cheap government

"Simply calling for an end to 'budget cuts' would give the impression we're for 'big government,'" Britton said. "Communist workers never have been." He pointed to the lessons Marx and Engels drew from the Paris Commune of 1871, the first time workers had their own government. Had it not been drowned in blood by the bourgeoisie after 72 days in power, Marx wrote, the Commune "would have delivered the peasant of the blood tax — would have given him a cheap government — transformed his present blood-suckers, the notary, advocate, executor, and other judicial vampires, into salaried communal agents, elected by, and responsible to, himself."

The working class is the only force that can really achieve cheap government. Certainly the lords of capital will never do



WPA protest 1939. Minneapolis Teamsters helped organize workers on relief to fight successfully for jobs and increased relief benefits and against abusive treatment.

so. Besides hundreds of billions spent for war, maintaining a massive police apparatus, and payments to the bondholders, the capitalist budget supports a bloated and corrupt bureaucracy that workers hate and have absolutely no stake in defending.

Several others in the meeting, however, said that in explaining the nature of the capitalist welfare system, budgets, and government bureaucracy, the party was "bending to the right wing," or might appear to be doing so.

Another participant responded that the right wing "speaks to real questions and concerns created by the capitalist crisis. Unless the workers movement seizes the initiative from those who practice the politics of resentment and scapegoating, we will never be able to unify our class and its allies, win the confidence of middle-class layers, and take power from the hands of the bourgeoisie. And if the working class fails at that, then the fascists will be able to take power."

Some at the two-day meeting said they thought that by explaining the views presented in Britton's report, the party could be seen as disparaging people on welfare. "Bureaucrats come with the programs we win," one participant said. "We should attack them, but in the context of a future workers and farmers government."

Another participant stated, "These cuts will make it more miserable for the poor," noting that "many garment workers and other poor workers depend on welfare to get by."

"We don't want to put forward attitudes that express a prejudice against people who rely on social services," said another speaker.

Part of the difficulty in making the communist program seem concrete today, Britton said in replying to these remarks, is that "the labor movement is not on the march," so workers and youth need to draw lessons from a time when it was. Britton pointed to the fight for jobs led by the Teamsters in Minneapolis in the 1930s. Communists and other class-struggle-oriented workers in the leadership of that union, he said, recognized that a fighting labor movement had to organize the jobless and help unify the working class.

In conditions of mass unemployment and poverty, Farrell Dobbs and other leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and its predecessors helped to organize a Federal Workers Section auxiliary to the Teamsters local. The Teamsters had won a series of battles against the employers in Minneapolis and were spearheading a Midwest organizing drive.

The Teamsters leaders, Britton reported, "didn't approach the working class — including the unemployed part of the class, those on relief of some kind — as a suffering class. The working class is a fighting class." Communists should never speak of other workers as "the poor," he said — "that's not part of our political vocabulary."

The Federal Workers Section organized as part of the labor movement workers on relief or employed by the Works Progress

Administration (WPA) and other federal and state programs. Jobless workers joined union members on picket lines. And with the union's backing, they fought successfully for jobs and increased relief benefits, and against abusive treatment at the hands of government welfare agents. They demanded that WPA workers be paid union wages and called for a massive public works program to build needed housing and for a shorter workweek with no cut in pay to create jobs.

In *Teamster Politics* — one of his four-volume series on these struggles — Farrell Dobbs tells the story of this union auxiliary. He describes the hatred jobless workers felt for the indignities they were subjected to by the welfare snoopers of the day. The Federal Workers Section defeated a state government requirement that they sign a "pauper's oath." These workers rejected being treated as less than human by public relief bureaucrats.

Demands on the capitalist government

Demands like those explained in the *Militant* editorial on jobs for all won't be met "except under a workers and farmers government," said one participant in the meeting.

Britton explained why communist workers couldn't approach the fight for jobs in that way. "We propose the labor movement lead a fight for a program of immediate, democratic, and transitional demands — placed on the capitalist government," he said. The SWP advocates a program of demands that start from the immediate needs of the working class but that, in the course of a serious struggle for them, point toward the conquest of political power.

"We don't counterpose our 'model' of an alternative government or alternative budget," he explained. "We aspire to politically arm workers and youth who want to fight against the capitalist government. Our program is designed to defend and unify the working class."

"And we know from past experience that workers can and will win concessions from the capitalist rulers as a byproduct of revolutionary struggle," Britton said. "We don't place limits beforehand on what can be won along that line of march. That depends on how big and effective a mass movement of working people can be built and how weak the capitalists are in face of it."

We can look forward to settling those questions in practice, Britton said in his final summary of the discussion.

Affirmative action

Britton also addressed another recent focal point of the U.S. rulers' attacks on political gains by the working class: the propaganda barrage against affirmative action.

In California right-wing forces — with open support from the Republican governor and tacit backing from some Democratic party politicians — are campaigning for a referendum to outlaw preferential treatment for Blacks, women, and others.

Continued on Page 6

FOR Further reading

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How can the labor movement fight for jobs?

Continued from Page 5

And President Bill Clinton, while mouth- ing support for affirmative action, has ex- pressed concern about possible abuses and, the week after the socialists' meeting, announced a panel to review federal pro- grams with an eye to needed "adjust- ments."

In both the report and discussion, par- ticipants described the impact affirmative action has had on women and on Blacks and other minorities who have broken down walls of discrimination, gotten into better-paying jobs, and gained added self confidence. In the process, workers as a whole — regardless of skin color or sex — have become more prepared to fight shoulder to shoulder as equals for their common class interests.

Several speakers recounted personal ex- periences of working in steel mills where a consent decree won by the unions in the 1970s opened the door to Black workers previously confined to the hardest, most dangerous jobs. Others spoke of railroads and oil refineries where no women worked as recently as 25 years ago.

The report adopted by the meeting reaf- firmed that fighting to defend and extend these gains is essential to breaking down divisions the capitalists seek to perpetuate to keep the working class and unions dis- united and weak.

Caterpillar strike

The United Auto Workers strike against Caterpillar, in its ninth month at the time of the meeting, was another focus of Brit- ton's report and the discussion. To accu- rately gauge the current stage of this bat- tle, he said, workers have to examine the relations between both of the class forces involved — Caterpillar's owners as well as the striking UAW members.

The giant heavy-equipment company is in a weakening position today, he noted, even though it has kept quite a bit of pro- duction going and racked up big profits last year. But Caterpillar is reaching the limit of what can be done with the line- crossers, temporary workers, and office and management personnel drafted to work in the factories.

"Cat's white-collar workers aren't too happy," Britton noted. "This isn't why they studied accounting, sales, or research and development." More investment ana- lysts and financial press pundits have been complaining that company profits aren't as high as they should be and could be if the company settled with the UAW.

What's more, Britton said, thousands of

union members have refused to buckle to Caterpillar. Given this combination of fac- tors, the company is under growing pres- sure to reach a settlement.

In face of management's efforts to break the UAW in the plants, many work- ers are convinced they will have registered a victory — for themselves and the entire labor movement — by going back with their union intact. This is true even if they take concessions they've held off for some years. They have managed to withhold their labor from the company during a pe- riod when there aren't a lot of other union battles going on.

Having a clear picture of this relation- ship of forces, Britton said, better arms class-conscious workers to build solidarity with the strikers. It also helps communist workers deepen relations with strikers in- terested in their political views and at- tracted to a program to defend workers' conditions and fight for a socialist world.

Participants in the SWAP meeting re- solved to increase their efforts to get to the picket lines in York, Pennsylvania, and central Illinois, along with co-workers, students, and others.

Building a party of socialist workers

The two-day meeting discussed and adopted several proposals presented in Craine's report to strengthen branches of the Socialist Workers Party, enable com- munist workers to carry out work in the trade unions more effectively, and put the party on a better footing to participate in political activity and coalitions in defense of the Cuban revolution and around other questions.

Craine reviewed recent advances in the party's work in the unions. Socialist work- ers have participated in supporting the Caterpillar strike and other labor battles. In the past few months, more party mem- bers have gotten into the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. These unions, scheduled to merge in June, organize workers in an especially important industry for the New York area.

In a recent round of national meetings, party members in various industrial unions have discussed important issues facing the labor movement. Craine cited the example of the discussion among so- cialist workers in the International Associ- ation of Machinists on why the unions must take the lead in the fight for airline safety in face of a spate of deadly crashes. This underlines labor's broader leadership responsibility in the fight for health and



Militant/Kathy Mickells

Caterpillar strikers and supporters at Labor Day march Sept. 5, 1994, in York, Pennsylvania. The company has not been able to break the UAW in the strike.

safety not only on the job but in society at large.

The meeting voted to try to maximize having two or more party members work- ing together at industrial job sites. "We can build on our success in getting hired at different factories to increase the possibil- ity to work collectively," Craine said. This will give each and every party member a better shot at talking socialism with co- workers on the job, selling them the so- cialist press, and participating with them in union activities and social protests.

Craine devoted a portion of her report to the call for action made by the February meeting of the National Network on Cuba. "This provides a chance to involve new forces in defense of the Cuban revolu- tion," she said, "and to win workers and youth who are attracted to Cuba to the so- cialist movement." Planned activities in- clude educational conferences in April and May around the theme "Tell the truth about Cuba" and regional demonstrations October 14 to oppose Washington's eco- nomic embargo and other aggressive poli- cies against socialist Cuba.

The meeting also adopted a measure to make it more possible for every member of the socialist movement to participate in groups and coalitions carrying out Cuba defense work and other political activity. Participants decided that socialist workers should organize to avoid working second-

shift jobs that keep them from attending meetings and events in the evening and engaging in politics with other activists and organizations. Doing so will increase the ability of party members to work col- lectively to strengthen their branches as well.

The meeting also reaffirmed a recent decision by the New York, Brooklyn, and Newark party branches to move the time of their regular meetings to Monday evenings from Sundays. To further ad- vance the political goal of that shift, the meeting also decided to move to Friday from Saturday evenings the public forums party members build and participate in each week.

"A wide variety of political activities take place on the weekends with all kinds of political forces involved," Craine said. By making these changes on meeting times, party members can more fully participate in the political life of the area.

"And," Craine reported, "we can take more time on the weekend to have politi- cal discussions with co-workers and young people who are interested in so- cialist ideas. There will be more time to invite people over to dinner after a day of politi- cal activity, have a couple of go-arounds on some questions informally, suggest some books and pamphlets to read, and win new members to the Young Socialists and Socialist Workers Party."

Taken as a package, Craine noted, these organizational steps to more effectively carry out the political perspectives adopted by the meeting will help the party build stronger branches. And that, in turn, is decisive to prepare communist workers to participate in the class battles that will break out as working people resist the ef- fects of capitalism's depression conditions and stepped-up assaults by the employers and their government.

U.S. government's star witness 'lies as he breathes' in World Trade Center trial

BY MAURICE WILLIAMS

Emad Salem, the U.S. government's star witness in the World Trade Center bombing trial, "lies as he breathes," said defense attorney Lynne Stewart as Salem took the stand in the U.S. District Court in Manhattan beginning in mid-March.

Stewart is the attorney for Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who along with 10 other men, is charged under a Civil War-era sedition law with plotting to blow up the United Nations, the Lincoln and Holland tunnels, and the George Washington Bridge — all in New York City. The U.S. government also recently claimed that Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the supposed mas- termind of the World Trade Center bomb- ing, was only days away from blowing up two U.S. jumbo jets and plotted to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

Salem's seeming inability to utter a truthful sentence was highlighted as pro- secuting attorneys began marching him through his testimony in early March. There he admitted that he had lied to just about everybody he ever met. "His ap- pearance on the stand last week was an al- most surreal scene, with the government seeming to 'impeach' its own prime wit- ness," wrote Eleanor Randolph for the *Washington Post*. According to the *New York Times*, the prosecution sought to "pre-empt" the defense attorneys cross- examination of Salem by "prompting him to admit to his lying."

Government authorities acknowledged Salem will receive \$1,056,200 for his ser-

vices.

During cross-examination Salem admit- ted his life in the United States was built on a tangled web of deceit, which included lying to his wife, his mistress, and intelli- gence agents here and in Egypt, where he was born. Salem said he deceived federal agents about being in Egyptian intelli- gence and knowing several Arab heads of state, including Moammar Gadhafi of Libya, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, and King Hussein of Jordan.

Salem also lied about fighting in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war claiming he "fought the Jews" and admitted he lied about his marriage to a U.S. woman in order to get citizenship. "I was like a big shot in Egypt, and all of a sudden I became just an immi- grant," Salem told the court.

According to the *Washington Post*, Salem complained about being "considered trash" in the United States. Feeling no shame though, he worked part- time for the U.S. Immigration and Natural- ization Service snitching on undocu- mented workers in exchange for the gov- ernment's assistance in obtaining green cards for his two children and citizenship for himself.

Salem became a full-time informant for the FBI in November 1991, at a starting pay of \$500 a week. Later, he received more money. In addition to the cool \$1 million he is getting for services rendered in the World Trade Center bombing case he also gets \$2,700 a month for a living allowance in the witness protection pro-

gram.

Salem said he recorded almost every one he came in contact with when he worked as a government informer in 1993, including his wife and children, and even the FBI agents he was working for.

Under questioning by defense attorney Stewart, Salem admitted that he told an FBI agent that he could obtain a videotape of torture techniques for federal agents and admitted saying that he was an expert interrogator himself. Salem had faxed a picture of a woman being tortured to his estranged wife.

Admitting that the government's most important witness leaves something to be desired, a veteran of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Brooklyn told the *New York Times* he just hoped, in the end, the jury would say, "That guy is a complete lowlife, but he knows what he is talking about because he was there."

One crucial piece of government evi- dence in the case is a video showing sev- eral of the defendants supposedly concoct- ing a "witches brew of explosives." How- ever, the tape may prove damaging to the government as it highlights Salem boast- ing about his skills as an explosives ex- pert, advising the alleged conspirators about technical matters, and even helping rent equipment and the chemicals used in the "brew."

"If you are a liar by nature," said Stew- art, "you don't change overnight, even if they write you a check for a million dol- lars."

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Why is Mark Curtis still in Iowa prison?

Below is the introduction to a new pamphlet on the frame up case of Mark Curtis. It is scheduled to be released by Pathfinder Press April 6. The introduction is reprinted by permission.

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

Why is Mark Curtis still in prison?

That is the question growing numbers of people ask when they hear about this unionist and political activist from Des Moines, Iowa, who in 1988 was framed up and sentenced to twenty-five years for rape and burglary—crimes he did not commit. Six and a half years later, Curtis remains behind bars.

Every arbitrary act by Iowa government and prison officials to deny Curtis justice and keep him in prison makes clearer the pattern of political prejudice that has marked this case from the outset. Each added act of injustice raises the stakes in the fight to win Curtis's release on parole as rapidly as possible. And each extra day behind bars helps open the eyes of greater numbers of people to the political nature of the frame-up of this union fighter and socialist.

For the bosses and their government and cops, Curtis's crime was standing up for immigrant workers, defending unions, and setting an example of struggle and solidarity for fellow workers and farmers.

The story of how Mark Curtis was railroaded to prison is told in this pamphlet, based on a 1993 series of articles in the *Militant*, a socialist newsweekly.

The pattern of punitive bias against Mark Curtis began shortly after his arrest. At arraignment proceedings, for example, prosecutors slapped him with a burglary rap on top of the sexual abuse charge. The burglary charge carried a mandatory twenty-five-year sentence, far more than the ten-year term for sexual assault. Since under Iowa law prisoners are usually released after half their sentence, Curtis served out the sexual assault sentence in 1993. Today he remains in jail for the tacked-on charge of burglary—based not on any claim he committed theft but solely on his presence at the home of the alleged victim.

Year after year, Curtis has been denied parole, despite meeting all the usual criteria such as good conduct, community support, and length of time served. In 1993, and again in 1994, the Iowa State Board of Parole refused him a hearing altogether, under a new rule that allows them to deny hearings to hundreds of prisoners they deem unworthy of review.

State officials have thrown new and arbitrary obstacles in the way of Curtis's release. They hope to break his spirit and undermine his defense campaign. Failing this, their goal is to make him serve as much time as possible.

Since 1991 the parole board has demanded he submit to a prison Sexual Offenders Treatment Program, which requires admission of guilt—something Curtis is not willing to do. In 1993, after Curtis served out the rape charge, the pa-

role board told him they would never consider his release until he underwent psychological testing at the notorious state prison medical facility in Oakdale, Iowa, to determine if he is "safe" to be released. But officials there, saying there were "no psychiatric issues" in his case, refused Curtis admission, putting him in a classic catch-22 situation.

In August 1994, just a month after winning a "gate pass," an upgrade in status allowing him to work as a janitor in the prison hospital and generally viewed as a step toward release, Curtis was falsely accused by guards of assaulting another inmate.

His defense committee had been in the process of preparing a new effort to press the parole board for release.

At a kangaroo court proceeding where he was denied even the right to confront his accusers, a prison judge sentenced Curtis to a month in the "hole" and a year in maximum-security lockup—confined to a small cell for twenty-three hours a day and allowed only a ten-minute shower three times a week and two phone calls a month. In addition, Curtis was penalized one year off the "good time" he had accumulated, time that would have been taken off his sentence.

Prison authorities have repeatedly refused recommendations from their own classification committee to shorten Curtis's lockup sentence for good conduct. By putting an assault conviction on his record, they will try to create new obstacles in his fight for parole.

All these moves have failed to break this working-class fighter. But they do underline the political character of the frame-up that began on March 4, 1988, as described in the pages that follow.

In the years since his conviction and sentencing, Curtis has kept up his fight for justice. He took the cops who beat him bloody on the night of his arrest to federal court and won an important victory. In January 1992 the court found the police guilty and awarded Curtis \$64,000 in damages and attorneys' fees. By finding the cops had lied about the young worker's beating, the ruling further undermined the credibility of the police testimony in his 1988 trial.

While seeking broad public support in his fight for parole, Curtis also appealed to the Iowa and U.S. courts, pointing to the violations of his constitutional rights during the trial. All ruled against him, culminating in a January 1995 decision by a federal district appeals panel in St. Louis.

Despite the authorities' attempts to isolate him, Curtis refuses to get down on his knees, and he continues his political activity behind bars. Early on, he and his supporters pushed back prison officials' efforts to deny him books and newspapers in Spanish.

He discusses politics with fellow inmates. He reaches out in solidarity to other unionists and fighters around the world who are victimized by bosses, cops, and government officials.



Militant/Stu Singer

Mark Curtis at protest on March 12, 1988, against the raid by immigration agents at the Swift meatpacking plant earlier that month. He was framed up for his political activity including speaking out in defense of immigrant workers.

Even under the restrictive conditions of lockup, Mark Curtis writes a regular column for the *Militant* newspaper and engages in other political discussions. Curtis, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, was elected to its National Committee at the party's 1994 convention. He has kept up the struggle to win international backing for his fight to get out of jail so he can once again function fully in politics.

Today, new layers of fighters being propelled into action can be won to Curtis's fight—from striking auto workers at Caterpillar and rubber workers at Firestone, to opponents of the immigrant-bashing Proposition 187 in California, supporters of Cuba's socialist revolution, and activists protesting attacks on abortion clinics. Among recent messages sent by supporters of his release, a small sampling of which appears in the appendix to this pamphlet, are the following:

"It is with shock that this Branch of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers Union in Doncaster, Britain, have learnt that Mark Curtis has been placed in solitary confinement for thirty days, and given one year in the prison disciplinary centre on a false charge," said E. Shawcraft, secretary of that union local, in a letter to Iowa officials. "We demand that our co-worker and fellow trade unionist be released from the 'lock-up' immediately and demand that he is given immediate parole."

"We ask you to release [Curtis] from

lockup and to investigate the nature of this latest verdict and his previous sentencing," wrote Kgalema Motlanthe, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa.

"Please be assured that we stand with you, Mark, and the many supporters hoping for [your] freedom," wrote American Indian Movement leader Dennis Banks. "Just as I was freed, just as Leonard Peltier will be free, so will Mark Curtis." Peltier is a Native American leader who has spent almost two decades in jail on trumped-up charges of murdering two FBI agents.

"I am asking you to support the parole of Mark," wrote Mike Griffin, vice president of United Paperworkers International Union Local 7837 in Decatur, Illinois, whose members have been locked out by A.E. Staley Company in a hard-fought struggle that is intertwined with the strikes against Caterpillar and Firestone. "I have followed the Mark Curtis story for some time and I am convinced that the arrest and court proceedings were seriously flawed."

This pamphlet contains the most potent political weapon Mark Curtis and his defenders have—the unvarnished truth about what happened on March 4, 1988; the political circumstances in which the frame-up unfolded; and the facts about the anti-working-class character of the capitalist government and its cops, courts, and prison system.

March 1995

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Mark Curtis is a union activist and socialist who was framed up by police on false charges of rape and burglary in March 1988. At the time he was involved in a struggle to defend 17 Mexican and Salvadoran co-workers arrested in an immigration raid at the packing-house where he worked in Des Moines, Iowa.

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Mark Curtis at 1987 rally to support striking meatpackers in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Available in English April 6, in Spanish April 20 at bookstores, including those listed on page 12, or write Pathfinder, 410 West St., New York, NY 10014. Tel: (212) 741-0690. Fax (212) 727-0150. Or contact the Mark Curtis Defense Committee, P.O. Box 1048, Des Moines, Iowa, 50311. Tel: (515) 246-1695.

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Cuba: signs of economic stabilization put workers on footing to meet new challenges

(Last of three articles)

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS
AND MARY-ALICE WATERS

HAVANA, Cuba — "Although we can't say that the economy as a whole has begun to recover," Cuban finance minister José Luis Rodríguez told the Cuban daily *Granma* at the end of 1994, "the decline that lasted until summer of this year has been halted."

For the first time since 1990, Cuba's National Assembly, meeting December 20-21, adopted a budget for the coming year. The abrupt termination of long-standing development aid and preferential trade relations with countries of the former Soviet bloc had triggered a virtual collapse of production in Cuba in the opening years of this decade. The resulting economic instability has made it impossible to adopt meaningful budget projections.

Further compounding the crisis, the Cuban government's efforts to establish new trade relations, secure credit, and attract investment have continued to be undercut by Washington's intensified trade embargo.

Economic recovery is still far from irreversible, Rodríguez told the national legislature during its 1994 year-end meeting. But he insisted the first signs of recovery are unmistakably there.

The national leaders of the Central Organization of Cuban Workers (CTC) drew a similarly positive, if cautious, assessment at an enlarged meeting of its national secretariat held December 17. They concluded that collective efforts by the workers themselves — through three successive rounds of assemblies organized by the CTC in the plants, fields, and other workplaces across Cuba last year — had made a difference. Productivity had increased. Despite a second disastrous year for sugar production and increased subsidies for the sugar industry, overall subsidies to keep plants running were down by 40 percent over 1993. And "in the heat of the assemblies," measures had been implemented to curtail the theft of raw materials and finished products destined for the black market.

In his report to the meeting, CTC first secretary Pedro Ross Leal stressed the leadership role taken by the workers assemblies and their political impact on workers' consciousness.

"We do not want to give the impression that the assemblies on efficiency are responsible for the signs of progress we see in some sectors," Ross remarked. "That would be simplistic." But together with other measures that have been taken, he insisted, "we do say that this democratic and participatory process," which has the support of the country's leadership, "is

bearing fruit in the transformation of the thinking and attitudes of cadres and workers."

Cuba's workers increasingly see themselves as capable of "compelling management to operate in a more competent manner," Ross said.

Signs of recovery

Reports on the projected 1995 budget to the National Assembly session, which took place several days after the CTC leadership gathering, detailed the shifts in Cuba's economic situation in the latter half of 1994.

At the beginning of that year, the economic crisis remained acute and was escalating rapidly. In 1993 Cuban industry operated at 15 percent of capacity, down from 20 percent in 1992. In 1989, industry had operated at more than 85 percent of capacity. Imports in early 1994 stood at one quarter of their 1989 level, and gross domestic product was estimated at 50 percent of the 1989 figure.

As scarcities of all essential goods mounted, so had corruption and theft. More and more produce was withheld from the rationing system and diverted onto the burgeoning black market. Growing numbers of Cubans — as high as 80 percent by some estimates — were forced to resort to the illegal underground market to meet daily needs, including for food.

While production had substantially collapsed, the large majority of workers continued to receive all or most of their salaries. With few goods available for

sale, black market prices soared — imposing the equivalent of a highly regressive tax burden on the lowest-paid workers. The national budget deficit ballooned, topping 5 billion pesos in 1993.

Following extensive discussion in the National Assembly, but even more importantly in the tens of thousands of workplace assemblies organized by the CTC, a series of measures were implemented between May 1994 and the end of the year. The goal was to reduce the amount of money in circulation and cut the budget deficit, thereby curbing inflation and thus reducing the accelerating decline in the purchasing power of the peso.

Two of the new measures were genuinely popular.

In May, Decree 149 was promulgated mandating the confiscation of wealth illegally attained through theft and black-market profiteering. Those living high on the hog through black marketeering are widely hated in Cuba. Working people call them *macetas*, or flower pots, because they do nothing but sit in the sun and soak up wealth produced by others.

By December, Rodríguez reported to the National Assembly, more than 425 investigations had been initiated under the new decree, resulting in 177 confiscation rulings and the expropriation of more than 50 million pesos worth of goods.

The second broadly popular measure was taken later in 1994. After a period of trial runs in several provinces, hundreds of agricultural markets were opened throughout the country on October 1 (see first arti-

cle in this series, in the January 30 *Militant*). Individual farmers, as well as cooperatives and state farms, are now permitted to sell their surplus products directly to consumers at these markets. Cubans heaved a collective sigh of relief, anticipating that food supplies would gradually increase. Prices on the new markets are still too high for most Cubans to buy more than occasional supplements to the subsidized rations. But food is at least more accessible and more affordable than when the black market predominated.

Other measures, while not as popular, have been largely supported by the majority of the population. Through extensive public discussion at the workplace meetings, most Cuban working people became convinced that some painful steps were necessary to lay the foundation for economic recovery.

Increased rates and fees

The government imposed hefty price increases on nonrationed tobacco, alcohol, and gasoline for private vehicles. Electricity, intercity transportation, and postal and telephone rates were raised. Subsidies were eliminated for workers' cafeterias. Fees were imposed on lunches at boarding schools. A monthly fee is now charged for continuing education courses for adults to learn a foreign language. Grants to university students for living expenses must now eventually be repaid, except by those who graduate with top grades (there are no admission fees or tuition). Nominal fees have been imposed on nonstudents for entrance to cultural and sports events; for water utility service; and for vitamin tablets. Health care, however, remains available without charge to all residents.

Rodríguez reminded the December National Assembly meeting that Cubans in the lowest-income brackets are exempt from fees for the most vital services. Recent measures, he said, have "aimed at avoiding, as much as possible, effects on vital staples or services for the population, and at providing a protective buffer for lower income citizens." But the price increases and fees have raised the cost of living for all Cubans, hitting hardest at those with the least resources.

This widening inequality was at the center of debate at the CTC national leadership meeting in December, as it had been in discussions during the third round of workers assemblies that took place between October 15 and November 30. In his report to the national secretariat, CTC first secretary Pedro Ross noted that workers are "preoccupied" with the fact that "wages today are relatively low and under strong pressure from the increases in prices and fees that have been approved," as well as from the high prices in the new markets.

For that reason, Ross said, workers expressed worries about the proposed new social security fund tax. Uncertainty about the tax rate and when it will go into effect, combined with concerns about price increases already instituted, and substantial layoffs expected in early 1995, meant that "this was not an easy discussion to have," Ross reported.

Discussion at cigar factory

Discussion at a workers assembly in the Heroes of Moncada cigar factory, located in Marianao, a working-class neighborhood of Havana, confirmed Ross's assessment. A team of *Militant* reporters, including the authors of this article, was present at the day-long assembly on November 30 (see second article in this series in the February 6 *Militant*).

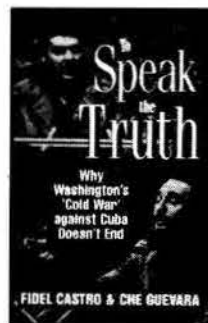
At that meeting, Orlando Luis Marín Valdés of the tobacco workers union national leadership reported on the proposal that in addition to the payroll tax already paid by all enterprises in Cuba, earmarked to cover retirement benefits, individual workers now begin paying a monthly fee designated for that fund.



Caridad Rivero (left) and Sonia Sarria (center) during workers assembly at Heroes of Moncada cigar factory November 30. Thousands of meetings like these took place across Cuba in 1994.

Militant/Argiris Malapanis

The Cuban Revolution in World Politics — from Pathfinder



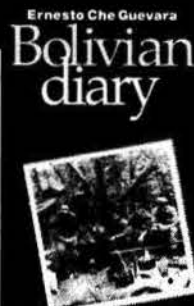
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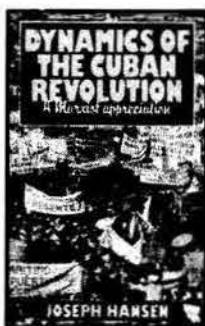
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During the discussion, several workers said this might be the only way to preserve pension benefits given the economic crisis Cuba is now living through. Others, however, expressed reservations and skepticism.

"What will be the percentage of this contribution?" asked Caridad Rivero, a 30-year old production worker. "Will there be a sliding scale according to income?" There were a few seconds of silence after she spoke. These questions were on the minds of many at the assembly, as several workers indicated later during informal discussions.

Marín Valdés explained that those issues had not yet been decided.

At the end of the discussion on the proposed tax, Vilma Iturralde, the union secretary at the factory, asked for a vote. Many workers banged their blades on their workbenches in the traditional expression of approval by tobacco workers. But the blade banging was not nearly as enthusiastic as during an earlier point on the agenda. Several workers did not bang their blades at all, but no one voted against the proposal.

"I am very concerned with the idea of any taxes," Rivero said in an interview after the meeting. "With 180 pesos a month, I can't make it under the circumstances." She pointed to increased utility fees on electricity, water, and sewage services and to high prices on the agricultural market, which she must use since what she gets from the monthly state ration card is "barely enough for two weeks."

Sonia Sarria, a co-worker of Rivero rolling tobacco leaves on the adjacent bench, said her monthly electricity bill had more than doubled from 9 pesos to 21 pesos.

"It is beginning to be very difficult to make ends meet," Rivero said. "It's time to consider raising wages on the low end of the scale."

New levels of inequality

A process of "redistribution of income is taking place between diverse sectors of the population," Rodríguez confirmed in closing his report to the National Assembly. And measuring income distribution in peso terms alone gives a distorted picture, he added. According to recent polls, Rodríguez reported, 21 percent of the population has access to convertible foreign currency. This number has hit 26 percent in Havana.

The licensing of self-employment and opening up of agricultural and other markets have also significantly increased inequality in income distribution.

In the past, it was easy to identify families that needed social assistance, Rodríguez told the weekly *Juventud Rebelde* in March. "Now it is not so easy." For many years, he noted, significant resources have been dedicated to covering the more than 100,000 people who receive social assistance. Now, those trying to live on 100 pesos a month face very different situations, depending on whether or not they get a few dollars from family members living abroad, or from a relative working in tourism.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the 1995 budget adopted by Cuba's national legislature is the increase in spending for selected areas. Despite an overall reduction in expenditures of 4.6 percent, budgeted spending for education is up 4.4 percent; health up 1.9 percent; housing up 4.1 percent; and science and technology up 5.5 percent.

Projected spending for social assistance was increased by a particularly large 58.4 percent. This is due to anticipation of the need for greater unemployment benefits for workers laid off in the process of restructuring industry and reallocating the workforce. Some 140,000 had been laid off by February 15, according to CTC secretary Ross. Figures as high as 500,000 — or more than 10 percent of the workforce — are being projected during the first months of the year. Government ministries are slated to be reduced by some 11,000 employees, almost 60 per-

cent.

Oswaldo Martínez, head of the Commission on Economic Affairs of Cuba's National Assembly, and now also the minister of economy and planning, commented at the December meeting on the contrast between the class priorities registered in socialist Cuba's austerity budget and those of capitalist countries throughout Latin America.

He reminded the delegates that "privatization and capitalist wealth invade education, health care, and social security; contribute to deepening the pit of poverty and despair; and the few enjoy the benefits on the backs of the many." In Cuba, on the other hand, he said, "even in the most difficult conditions imaginable, social services are assured and the state does not take the back door of privatizing basic social responsibilities."

As a result of the measures taken since May 1994, by the end of December the money in circulation had dropped by more than 2 billion pesos, or 15.5 percent, and the government deficit for 1994 was projected to be one quarter that of 1993. The deficit is expected to drop another 29 percent in 1995. "Non-essential consumption" taxes on tobacco, rum, and beer accounted for 81 percent of this drop in liquidity, Rodríguez reported, with another major factor being the opening of the agricultural markets.

The effect of the declining money supply has already been registered in an "incipient revaluation of the peso," he said. Prices on a range of goods available on the black market have fallen, as has the peso/dollar exchange rate. In August the peso was trading on the streets at about 120-to-1 and sometimes even lower; by the end of the year the rate had climbed to 50-to-1.

The rapid change of direction for such economic indicators was possible for only one reason, finance minister Rodríguez told *Juventud Rebelde* editor Arleen Rodríguez Derivet in early March of this year. "The only secret of success is support from the population. They were aware they were sacrificing in order to achieve a very clear and well-defined goal."

Among the capitalist "international specialists," the finance minister continued, "What has been happening in Cuba has caused much bewilderment above all. When we explain what has been accomplished in reducing inflationary pressures and cutting the deficit without affecting basic services and without social upheaval, they can't figure out how we have been able to do it. They can't admit that political unity and real democratic consultation with the people are factors that have had weight."

"The other predictable reaction has been to try to minimize these results, not to give us credit."

New tax code

In August 1994 the National Assembly made one of its most important political decisions of the year. It adopted a new tax code. Law 73, as it is known in Cuba, establishes under various names some 15 new taxes, most of which will go into effect gradually beginning in 1995. The provisions include:

- tax on revenues of commercial enterprises;
- sales tax on goods;
- taxes on use of telecommunications, electricity, and water services, as well as transportation, restaurants, hotels, and recreation facilities;
- vehicle registration, drivers license, airport passenger fees, as well as various fees to secure copies of vital records such as birth, death, marriage, and other certificates;
- a 25 percent payroll tax on enterprises for "utilization of labor power";
- an environmental protection tax on entities that use natural resources;
- a tax on commercial advertising;
- a personal income tax on all hard currency income except family remittances, and "in principle" on all peso income



Militant/Laura Garza

Agricultural market in Havana. The opening of hundreds of such markets was a popular measure that helped alleviate food shortages facing working people in Cuba.

(wages remain exempt for now);

- property taxes on residences, as well as taxes on boats and on land deliberately left fallow;
- an inheritance tax;
- a social security tax on all employers, and "in principle" a direct contribution to be paid by all who benefit from the social security system (specific legislation on this direct payment by workers remains to be adopted).

The new tax law was necessary, Rodríguez argued in a report to the August session of the National Assembly, because of recent changes in property forms as well as the organization of labor in Cuba.

Since 1967 individual Cubans have paid virtually no taxes. The elimination of the old bourgeois tax system and its legacy was one of the conquests flowing from the struggles unleashed as workers and farmers took power in 1959 and established their own revolutionary government.

Over the next two years, the workers and farmers government expropriated the plantations, factories, and mines owned by the wealthy families, both Cuban and American. Once capitalist property was gone, the working class had no need to preserve the tax system cobbled together over decades to disguise and protect an antagonistic set of class interests and relations. What's more, it was dangerous to do so. Through several successive stages, involving considerable trial and error, the revolutionary government dumped hundreds of hated taxes, both petty and not-so-petty, along with the entire costly and corrupt tax-collection bureaucracy.

With productive property nationalized, the allocation of surpluses beyond wages and replacement of used-up machinery and raw materials was now decided openly. So there was no need for the kind of obfuscation on which bourgeois tax systems depend. In capitalist society, the purpose of such subterfuge is to disguise the shifts in wealth and income distribution against the interests of working people, as well as to reinforce bourgeois values.

Proletarian norms of distribution replaced capitalist ones in Cuba. Essential social services — health, education, retirement, child care, unemployment compensation — were assumed by society as a collective responsibility. They began to be shared among all residents as an entitlement, paid out of their collective production. These services became a *social right*, free of individual charges and without means testing, no matter where one lived or worked.

Food and housing and basic services were guaranteed at prices any worker could afford. Libraries, museums, and cultural events were made accessible to everyone, not just a wealthy elite. The redistribution of income, and the vastly increased standard of living for Cuban workers and farmers this entailed, were financed openly out of the surplus produced by their labor — just as all development programs and other social investments were made possible by the labor of the Cuban people. And they rationed the product of their labor among themselves to ensure that all had access to goods and services in limited supply.

During a debate in the National Assembly in December 1993, Cuban president Fidel Castro explained this historic sea change with great clarity. Finance minister Rodríguez had argued that Cuba was the only country in the world without a tax system and that this posed a problem. Cubans needed to regain the "awareness," the "tax culture" they had lost.

"No, no, no," Castro replied. "We never had that awareness. The other system was a bourgeois tax system." He went on to explain how the ration book had become the working-class answer to the capitalist tax system, enabling the people of Cuba to finance the country's economic development and social priorities.

"We have been lucky to have the sacred ration book, the blessed ration book," Castro said. "Perhaps one day someone will explain how it has been possible for the revolution to do all it has done. All that was done has not been based on foreign

Continued on Page 10

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'Human beings are the most important,' says Cuban youth

BY MARGRETHE SIEM

HOUSTON — "If by democracy you mean homelessness, or you mean the democracy of racism, or where every four years parties organize a carnival and millions of dollars are spent, where candidates promise everything and nothing changes, then no, we don't want that kind of democracy," replied Cuban youth leader Kenia Serrano to a student's question at the University of Texas (Pan American) in Edinburg. Serrano, along with Rogelio Polanco, were recently in Texas as part of their nationwide tour.

For the first time ever, students and professors in this south Texas campus town near the border with Mexico had the opportunity to hear young communists from Cuba. Some 250 people heard the Cuban youth in several classes and a public meeting.

"When the revolution started we wanted good relations with the U.S., but because we are socialists the U.S. became hostile," Polanco said. For us "human beings are the most important."

Serrano, a 21-year-old student at the University of Havana, explained that eight students her age are members of Cuba's National Assembly, and that 16 percent of the elected municipal government is under 30 years of age. "In Cuba election campaigns are not based on who has money," she said. "The candidates have equal opportunity to campaign."

The two Cuban youth leaders also visited a cooperative organized by the United Farm Workers union, and discussed with them the growing anti-immigrant campaign and its impact on the tens of thousands of farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley.

In Houston, about 50 students attended a class at the predominantly Black Texas Southern University. One student compared the U.S. embargo imposed on Cuba after the 1959 revolution with the U.S. Civil War. "You can't expect a slave mas-

ter to praise the slave for winning his freedom," he said. Serrano and Polanco also spoke to 150 students at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and spent one hour live with Rolando Becerra, Cuban-American host of *La Tremenda*, one of the most popular Spanish-language radio stations in Houston.

At the Iglesia Lutherana Esperanza they spoke to a crowd of mostly Central American immigrants who were invited by church organizers and by the Gulfport Area Neighborhood Organization. Serrano said in Cuba the church and the state are separate, and that despite earlier tensions, "relations between them are more cordial today. Everyone can practice their religion."

Strikers halt transit in Philadelphia

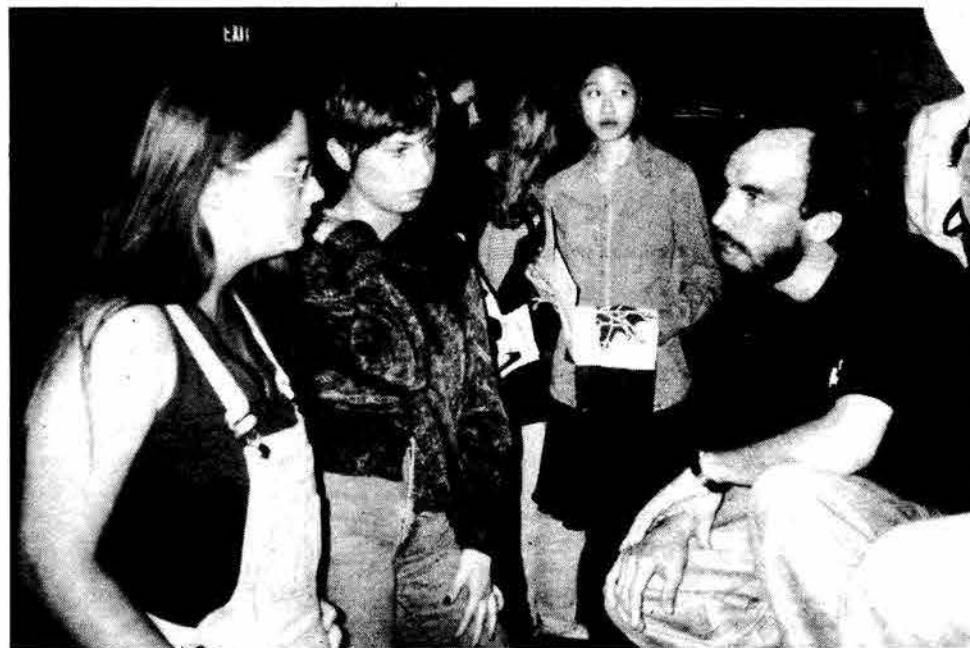
BY PETE SEIDMAN

PHILADELPHIA — More than 5,200 striking transit workers shut down the trolleys, buses, and subways March 28 used by some 400,000 people here. Members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 234 stopped work after a 12-day extension of their contract expired at midnight.

The union agreed to the extension after the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) dropped initial demands for a one-year probationary period, the hiring of part-time workers, and the weakening of the union's "no-layoff" clause. Local 234 won this initial round because it refused to back down from using its power to disrupt the normal functioning of the city.

But as the extension came to an end, SEPTA — as well as city, state, and federal officials — all insisted there was "no money" to meet the TWU's modest demand for a wage increase of 3 percent in each year of a three-year contract.

The union is also demanding improve-



Cuban youth leader Rogelio Polanco (right) talks to high school students in Houston

Serrano and Polanco met with local trade unionists including four leaders of an International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union organizing drive in Houston. These

workers told the Cubans about their experiences trying to unionize mostly Salvadoran and Mexican workers in a number of Houston sweat shops.

ments in pensions and sick-pay benefits that are "out of the question" according to SEPTA, which insists that any wage increases must be paid for out of productivity increases and benefit givebacks.

Strikers are not buying the "no money" propaganda. Referring to SEPTA's notoriously inefficient and highly paid bureaucrats, a driver with 14 years seniority told the *Militant*, "Cut management. Then they'd have the money. We're not asking for the \$100,000 salaries some of them make. Just a decent wage for our families." Government poor-mouthing reeks of hypocrisy in light of Gov. Tom Ridge's recent announcement that he will seek a 9 percent cut in Pennsylvania's corporate income tax.

Shortly after arriving here for a two-day tour, Cuban youth leader Kenia Serrano visited striking transit workers at SEPTA's maintenance barn in South Philadelphia.

After learning of the strikers' fight to maintain their benefits and decent wages,

Serrano began answering their questions about conditions in her country and the Cuban people's fight to maintain the social gains of their revolution. "We want to have a country where the human being is the most important thing," she explained.

"Most Americans would agree with that," responded striker Nick Castellante, who said he was "raised on the Cuban Missile Crisis of the '60s," and to the extent he thought of Cuba, that was the negative image he had of it.

Much later, following a substantial discussion with strikers about Cuba and why the U.S. government lies about it, Castellante told Serrano, "I believe if mainstream America were given the facts about Cuba, they would respond just like we are." About their own strike in Philadelphia, he said, "It's not as important as what you are doing in Cuba, but we think it's pretty important."

Deborah Liatos and Nancy Cole contributed to this article.

Growing signs of economic stabilization in Cuba

Continued from Page 9

cooperation alone," he said, referring to economic relations with the former USSR and other Soviet bloc countries.

"Simply put, the people in this country have been the ones who financed the building of schools, roads, and so forth. When we did not have the money to build a hospital, that hospital would be built. Why? Because we had the ration book," Castro said. "Without that ration book, our budget would have required complete balance to keep the prices down. We built thousands of schools, hundreds of hospitals, many things, and the liter of milk never went up a single cent."

"I can assure you that through taxes and taxes alone," Castro told the deputies, "this country will never be able to maintain the social achievements of the revolution."

Retreats and contradictions

Why is the Cuban revolution today creating a new, multifaceted system of taxes? The reasons lie in the contradictory steps and retreats imposed on the working class in Cuba as its vanguard confronts the economic and political crisis that Cuba can't escape, rooted in world capitalism's deflationary trends. The special Cuban features of the crisis stem from the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet bloc — a collapse for which the toilers in Cuba were totally unprepared.

Since 1990, finance minister Rodríguez told the August 1994 session of the National Assembly, Cuba's emergency economic program has accelerated the establishment of corporations, created by the state but "juridically private, in order to make economic ties with foreign capital possible, and to foster foreign trade as well as tourism. These new entities do not operate on the basis of giving all profits directly to the state, thus it becomes essen-



CTC first secretary Pedro Ross Leal

tial to pick up a portion of those profits through taxes."

Likewise, the new cooperative farms, the Basic Units of Cooperative Production—created since late 1993 out of the old state farm system—will generate profits that no longer go to the state budget. Without changes in the tax law, neither income earned by the growing numbers of Cubans who are self-employed, nor salaries paid in dollars and other convertible currency, would be taxed equitably.

For these reasons, there has been broad working-class support for most provisions of Law 73. In a country where the basic means of production remain nationalized and the workers and farmers retain state power, these tax measures are designed to tap into tourist dollars and to oblige international capitalist investors — as well as Cuban small business operators, farmers,

and foreign exchange holders — to increase the percentage of their surplus that goes towards social services and infrastructure development.

The most controversial point in the tax law debate has been the proposal to impose a tax on wages, which in Cuba range from somewhat more than 100 pesos a month for the lowest-paid workers, to about 450 pesos a month for the highest-paid doctors and other professionals. Most factory workers receive less than 150 pesos a month, although that wage is often supplemented by bonuses for surpassing production goals.

Controversy on taxing wages

During the workers assemblies in early 1994, many workers spoke in favor of selective price increases and other fees that were later implemented. But there was "an overwhelming consensus" in opposition to taxing wages, according to CTC secretary Ross. The May 1994 session of the National Assembly took note of this sentiment, adopting a resolution that called for study of "the selective introduction of a tax on personal income, excluding taxes on wages."

In August, when the new draft legislation was put before the National Assembly, however, it contained a clause enabling the government to impose taxes on wages. After some 12 hours of debate, during which opposition was led by delegates representing the trade unions, a two-part resolution proposed by Fidel Castro was adopted.

The resolution confirmed that "as a general principle all income, wages included, is taxable in proportion to amount." At the same time, the National Assembly, with support from the central leadership, rejected the proposal to tax wages now. "Once the principle has been established," Castro said, "there is no need to establish

— either today, tomorrow, or hopefully ever — any income tax [on wages]. I hope circumstances will never compel us to do that."

In a contradictory action, however, the assembly also voted to establish "as a general principle a special contribution" to be paid by workers who benefit from social security. While not called a tax, and not defined as obligatory in the new legislation, Cuban workers who spoke to these and other reporters do not think of the "contribution" as optional. Most think of it as a tax they are reluctantly willing to pay, as an act of class solidarity, if no other solution is available.

So far, the strong reservations and concerns among working people about the impact of the social security tax have put off its implementation. The amount, how it will be paid, and when it will go into effect are all still to be determined.

The year-long debate over the new tax law and other economic measures has shown not only the reality of growing class differentiation in Cuba. More than anything else, it also shows the ways and the degree to which Cuba's working class brings its weight to bear in resisting the inevitable bourgeois pressures of the forced retreat, and in laying a proletarian basis for resolving the crisis and charting a way forward as it becomes possible to do so.

As Carlos Lage, vice president of the Council of Ministers, put it during the December meeting of the CTC national leadership, everything that has been accomplished through the measures implemented so far, however important, resolves nothing. "It only creates the conditions that enable us to confront our real problems."

That confrontation, and the struggle for a proletarian resolution of it, remains smack at the center of Cuban and world politics.

Farm bill will ignore small farmers' needs

DOUG JENNESS

ST. PAUL, Minnesota — The debate over the 1995 farm bill has begun in meetings throughout rural United States and in congressional committee rooms in Washington, D.C. When this bill is adopted sometime this year it will replace the 1990 farm act, which expires in September.

The new legislation, like its predecessors, will include provisions on commodity price supports, deficiency payments, export subsidies, credit and loan policies, use of forest and range lands, and water supplies.

Whatever farm bill is produced by Congress, it will not offer any relief for tens of thousands of working farmers who are caught in a vise between rising prices for fuel, machinery, and other inputs and lower return for the sale of their commodities. US Department of Agriculture officials expect 38,000 farms a year will go under through the year 2002.

Many public officials — from the White House to the Capitol — have called for cutting farm price support programs and tightening up on loans to "high-risk" farmers. There are disagreements, however, over how much to slash at this time.

Republican senator Richard Lugar from Indiana, who heads the Senate Agriculture Committee, has called for a major overhaul to begin a "gradual glide path out of subsidies." Lugar proposes an \$11.5 bil-

lion reduction in subsidies by cutting target prices for corn, other feed grains, cotton, rice, and wheat by 15 percent over five years. Government deficiency payments make up the difference between the target — what Congress thinks farmers should be paid for their crops — and actual market prices. Lugar also proposes chopping \$3.4 billion in export subsidies.

Lugar has won some praise from Democratic representative Charles Schumer of New York and Republican Richard Zimmer of New Jersey. In a joint statement calling for the elimination of subsidies they declared, "These are welfare programs, pure and simple, and should be eliminated in an orderly manner."

The Clinton administration favors a more modest reduction — \$1.5 billion in the next five years in deficiency payments. It also proposes keeping the export assistance program.

Rob Johnson, public affairs manager for Cargill Inc., the mammoth international grain trader, addressed the pending legislation in an interview in the December issue of *Cargill News*. He argued the farm bill must "distinguish clearly between commercial farmers — people who depend on agriculture for virtually all their income — from people who live on farms but depend on nonfarm activities for most of their income." Commodity program payments to the rural poor must go, he

said.

From within his own party Lugar has met disagreement from Rep. Pat Roberts, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Roberts said Lugar "is a little too far on the frugal side." Roberts comes from Kansas, the state with the third highest enrollment in the land set-aside program.

This underscores one of the chief characteristics of the debate over the farm bill and one of the obstacles to more far-reaching reworking this year — the competition between a wide range of agribusiness interests for a piece of the pie.

The proposals to cut subsidy payments are consistent with measures adopted in 1990. Payments dropped from \$28.8 billion in subsidies in 1986 — the peak year — to \$10 billion in 1994.

Working family farmers, a great many who depend on some off-the-farm work to survive, know that the lion's share of subsidy payments go to the best-off farmers. The 10 percent of farms with the largest gross sales collect about one-third of farm subsidies. Many working families, however, will not be able to survive an assault on the government price support programs — even with the little they get — because they live so close to the margin. And they know that this is not welfare as so many politicians claim. They have worked many long hours producing

products that have a value far greater than what they get back in return.

Both Lugar and the Clinton administration have also targeted the Consolidated Farm Service Agency, formerly the Farmers Home Administration. This agency, established in the 1930s, was set up to be the lender of last resort for farmers unable to get loans from commercial banks. But this role has been severely eroded in recent years as restriction after restriction has made it more difficult for needy farmers suspected of being credit risks from getting loans.

The debate over the farm bill does not address the impact of today's deflationary conditions on agriculture. According to a February report issued by the Federal Reserve bank of Kansas City, net cash income fell 13 percent to \$51 billion in 1994, a decline of 14 percent when adjusted for inflation. That's the lowest farm income since 1986, one of the worst years for farmers in recent times.

Moreover, farm debt is increasing, up by 4 percent last year. And the cost of credit is rising. Each 1 percent rise in the interest rates paid by farmers reduces farm income by \$1.5 billion.

Buchanan's ultrarightist campaign attacks gays, abortion, and immigrants in Iowa

BY SHIRLEY PEÑA

DES MOINES, Iowa — Right-wing politician Patrick Buchanan set out on his Republican Party bid for president here March 22. Traversing the state in a Winnebago, Buchanan presented himself as being a champion of "American workers."

Two days earlier Buchanan held a press conference in New Hampshire, where the first primary vote will take place next February, to officially enter the race. His supporters roughed up a small group of protesters who called Buchanan a racist.

The presidential candidate told his New Hampshire supporters and the media that the wages of U.S. workers had "fallen 20 percent in 20 years." He demagogically blamed "a government that does not listen anymore to the forgotten men and women who work in the forges and factories and plants and businesses."

Buchanan made a special target of the Wall Street investment firm Goldman Sachs, pointing to a news report that 58 partners received bonuses of \$5 million a piece last year while a month later 1,000 clerical workers were laid off.

The ultra-rightist politician promoted a nationalist solution to the crisis of unemployment attempting to further weaken and divide the working class. "We're going to bring the jobs home and we're going to keep America's job's here, and when I walk into the Oval Office we start looking out for America first."

Attack on gay rights

"Today's American culture — movies, television, magazines, music — is polluted with lewdness and violence," Buchanan told the New Hampshire crowd.

In a rally of about 125 people at the State Capitol here Buchanan came back to this theme, especially targeting gays. "This cultural war is going on in every town, city, and schoolroom, and classroom today in America," he said. "It's not only coming out of Washington, it's coming everywhere. It came right here to the state of Iowa."

Buchanan was referring to a recent debate over including references to homosexuals in the curriculum of Des Moines public schools. The school board dropped the idea after several stormy sessions dominated by right-wing protesters.

"As I understand it there was an attempt to instruct the children of Iowa in the homosexual rights agenda — the idea that homosexuality and that lifestyle are on a moral par with traditional marriage," railed Buchanan. "That is a moral lie and it is wrong. It is wrong to teach children a moral lie."

Buchanan told the crowd here, which included few if any farmers, that agricultural subsidies are going to have to "take a hit." At the same time he made another demagogic appeal to those who work the land saying, "What are we doing when we are chopping off benefits to American farmers but giving a \$53 billion bailout to a government with the incompetence and deceitfulness of that regime in Mexico City?" Buchanan vowed to cut off immigration from Mexico, if elected.

As with other tribunes of incipient fascist movements, Buchanan aggressively defines who "Americans" are and aren't, scapegoating immigrants for the problems produced by the capitalist system.

He accused Germany and Japan of "freeloading off the United States and getting their budgets balanced with the tax

dollars of people from Iowa."

Among the crowd were children bused in from nearby schools. Many wore stickers that read, "Just Parents," indicating support for a proposed parental notification law pending in the legislature, which requires women under 18 years old to notify their parents before obtaining an abortion.

The antiabortion candidate

"I'm not like my old friends who are slipping and sliding, shucking and jiving and moving away from a right-to-life stand," Buchanan said. "I am pro-life. I'm going to be a pro-life candidate. I'll be a pro-life president."

Shirley Peña is a member of United Auto Workers Local 997 in Newton, Iowa.



Militant/Jon Flanders

Dairy farmers protest in New York state in early 1990s.

Chicago socialist campaigns for mayor

BY FRANK FORRESTAL

CHICAGO — Socialists here have been getting out the word about the campaign of Ray Parsons for mayor and Sandra Nelson for city clerk. The write-in campaign was announced at a March 9 press conference at city hall attended by both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Parsons, 32, is a rail worker and member of United Transportation Union Local 620. Nelson is a member of Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union Local 7-507.

Mayor Richard Daley won the February 28 Democratic primary by a 2-to-1 margin

over rival Joseph Gardner. Voter turnout for the primary was the lowest in almost 50 years. "Happy or mad, voters stay away in historic totals," read a *Tribune* headline. The Republican nod went to Raymond Wardingley, also known professionally as "Spanky the Clown." His vote total was 2,407, compared to more than 500,000 for Daley.

At his press conference, Parsons said he and Nelson are campaigning on a program to unify the working class. "Millions of us are being forced into part-time, minimum-wage jobs, or into desperate conditions of unemployment," he said.



Militant/Diane Sarge

Ray Parsons (right) talks with rail workers in Canada during national rail strike

A recent study, reported that in the Chicago area alone there are 150,000 part-timers, many working in industrial jobs, that are living below the federal poverty level. Parsons said he is campaigning for jobs for all — a campaign to radically reduce the workweek, with not a nickel reduction in pay.

In addition to providing jobs, a shorter workweek would "help lessen the increasing safety hazards in the workplace," the Socialist Workers candidate said. For the past few weeks, Parsons and Nelson have been actively campaigning at workplaces and on campuses. Parsons recently returned from Windsor, Ontario, where he went to show his support for the rail strike across Canada.

On March 22, Parsons protested along with 150 others in front of the Stateville Prison in Joliet, Illinois, against the double execution of James Free and Hernando Williams. The rail worker was able to talk with a dozen students who, along with their teacher, came from nearby Naperville High School to be part of the midnight vigil. Both prisoners were executed by lethal injection.

Parsons appeared on the WGN radio program entitled "Communism After the Fall of the Soviet Union." He will also appear on Chicago radio station WLS.

Campaign supporters have put out a statement in defense of immigrant rights in Spanish. In the final days of the campaign, supporters will be campaigning in Latino communities. Tens of thousands of Latino workers, many from Mexico, have moved to the Chicago area in recent years.

Guatemala

Continued from front page and others.

The struggle waged by Guatemalan workers and peasants against the landlords and capitalists has been fueled in large part by the oppression of the largely Indian population in the country, and the fight for land and union rights.

The 1979 triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution impelled initial advances toward unity by revolutionary forces in Guatemala. In response, the regime unleashed a scorched-earth campaign, with Washington's full support, that claimed the lives of tens of thousands.

Washington knew for months

The CIA involvement in the Guatemalan murders was officially made public by Rep. Robert Torricelli, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, on March 22. Wide layers of top officials in the administration, State Department, National Security Council, and select members of the House and Senate were aware of the facts for months.

Senior administration officials now admit they got new information on the case as early as January, and claim they had "agonized" over withholding the information from Harbury. But, asserted the officials, they could not release it under laws protecting CIA "sources and methods." CIA officials were reported to be "enraged and embarrassed" by the disclosures.

As part of the events leading up to the revelations, the Clinton administration suspended remaining military aid to the Guatemalan government on March 10 — two days before Harbury was to begin a hunger strike in front of the White House. Earlier Clinton reassigned the CIA station chief in Guatemala.

Alpírez was hired on as a CIA "asset" in the 1980s. Earlier training had prepared him well for this position. In 1970, Alpírez studied at the U.S. Army School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. The academy's alumni include Salvadoran rightist and death squad leader Roberto D'Aubuisson; 19 Salvadoran soldiers named in the 1989 assassination of six priests and three more accused of the 1980 rape and murder of four U.S. clergy; Lieut. Gen. Raoul Cédras and other leaders of the bloodthirsty regime that ran Haiti from 1991-1994; and Gen. Hugo Banzer, dictator of Bolivia from 1971-78. Alpírez signed on for a graduate course in 1989.

CIA officials claim they ended Alpírez's employment around the time of Bamaca's murder, offering up \$44,000 severance pay in cash.

Summoned to the offices of the Guatemalan attorney general March 27, Alpírez declared, "I'm totally innocent."

Gen. Héctor Gramajo, former defense minister, defended Alpírez as "a soldier above all...He is the kind of officer who you would want under your command." Current defense minister Mario Enríquez complained that "it hurts the army's dignity to learn that there are members of the army serving in the CIA."

New peasant land occupations

The opening of 1995 has seen a marked rise in peasants occupying land throughout Guatemala. Some 2.2 percent of the population owns 65 percent of the land.

In response to peasant protests and union activity, the military's death squads have been unleashed once again. Tortured bodies are appearing daily on the streets of the Guatemalan capital. Twenty-two young men were found in late February, most with hands tied behind their backs and many of them shot through the back of the head with a single bullet.

UNISITRAGUA leader Hernández reported that in 1994, 25 union leaders were assassinated. Since August, eight members of his union have been killed. On March 13, Alexander Gómez, an organizer of textile workers, was kidnapped. His severely beaten body was found six days later. Gómez had been leading a fight against the owners of a clothing plant.

"The fact that this information is out," said Hernández, in respect to the murders of Bamaca and DeVine, creates expectations that "we can find out who is responsible. The revelations underline the fact there is no rule of law in our country. What prevails are methods of torture and extralegal executions."

Luis Madrid contributed to this article.

-MILITANT LABOR FORUMS

The Militant Labor Forum is a weekly free-speech meeting for workers, farmers, youth, and others. All those seeking to advance the fight against injustice and exploitation are welcome to attend and participate in these discussions on issues of importance to working people.

At the Militant Labor Forum you can express your opinion, listen to the views of fellow fighters, and exchange ideas on how best to advance the interests of workers and farmers the world over.

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston

The Irish Struggle for Self-Determination. Speaker: John Harris, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., April 7, 7:30 p.m. 780 Tremont St. Donation: \$4. Tel: (617) 247-6772.

NEW YORK

Manhattan

The Irish Freedom Struggle Today. Fri.,

April 7, 7:30 p.m. 214 Avenue A (between 13th and 14th Sts. Donation: \$4. Tel: (212) 388-9346.

PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia

Socialist Workers 1995 Campaign. Socialist Alternative to the Capitalist Crisis: Jobs for All! Sat., April 8, 7 p.m. Reception: 6 p.m. 1103 E. Carson St. Donation: \$5. Tel: (215) 546-8218.

AUSTRALIA

Sydney

Socialist Educational Weekend.

- 1) Fascism and War. Video and discussion. Speaker: Marnie Kennedy, Young Socialists. Sat., April 8, 3 p.m.
- 2) Anarchism: Today and Yesterday. Speaker: Doug Cooper, Communist League. Sun., April 9, 11 a.m.
- 3) Politics in New Zealand. Speaker: Patrick Brown, Communist League in New Zealand. Sun., April 9, 2 p.m.

Events will take place at 66 Albion St., Surry Hills. Donation requested. Tel: 02-281-3297.

CANADA

Toronto

Crisis in Mexico: Currency Collapse and Class Struggle. Sat., Apr. 8, 7:30 p.m. 827 Bloor St. W. (between Christie and Ossington). Donation: \$4. Tel: 416-533-4324.

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland

Socialist Education Day.

- 1) The Russian Revolution - Lessons for Revolutionary Fighters. Sat., April 8, 2 p.m.
- 2) The Socialist Revolution in Cuba in the World of the 90s. Sat., April 8, 3:45 p.m.
- 3) Dinner. Sat., April 8, 5:30 p.m.
- 4) Freedom and Justice for Mark Curtis. Sat., April 8, 7 p.m.

All events held at 203 Karangahape Road (opposite McDonald's, down arcade). Dinner: \$5. Tel: (09) 379 3075.

N.Y. students say 'education is a right'

Continued from front page

plinary action. Some elementary school teachers brought their classes to the rally.

The mood of the rally was also expressed by banners and signs in English and Spanish, some which read: "Save education for all" and "Without education there is no future." Students were particularly outraged by Mayor Giuliani's attack on the protest. He said, instead of protesting, the students should, "go find a job for the day so you make a little extra money so you could pay for your education."

Giuliani also attacked the open admissions policy of city colleges that allows any high school graduate in New York to enroll. "You have to have the courage to at least raise the question and say, if we have a certain amount of money that can be spent for higher education of young people, do we spend it on every single young person, irrespective of that person's ability to learn, that person's performance, or even that person's willingness to cooperate and be educated? Or do we spend it on those who show some ability to be able to function better?"

Roger Patterson, a 20-year-old CUNY student angrily replied, "The mayor is crazy to say that. I can hardly afford to go to school working 20 hours a week. If tuition goes up, I won't be able to continue my education."

About 2,000 cops in full riot gear were mobilized to confront the demonstrators. When some organizers attempted to lead a peaceful march to Wall Street, cops used the excuse that the students did not have a permit to attack the rally. Mounted and

club-wielding cops formed an ever-tightening cordon around the protest, attacking groups and preventing participants from leaving. Dozens were struck by police clubs, trampled by horses, or sprayed with mace. Some 50 were arrested.

Despite the police provocation, enthusiasm remained high. About 1,000 marched a few blocks to Borough of Manhattan Community College for a late afternoon meeting. A few hundred marched to the police headquarters to protest the brutality and arrests.

The next day, hundreds of high school students held another rally at city hall. At John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx, students walked out of class and staged an outdoor rally.

The increasing size and breadth of these protests are producing cracks in the bipartisan assault on education. Political figures from the Democratic and Republican parties are groping for ways to get the protesters off the streets. Pataki responded by downplaying the scope of the cuts and accusing critics of fear-mongering. A spokeswoman for his office said, "We may be able to restore some of the [education] budget cuts, but not all of them."

Meanwhile, the protests continue. Thousands of students at state universities marched on the State Capitol in Albany March 27. The CUNY Coalition Against the Cuts is building teach-ins on local campuses March 29. The hospital workers union, Local 1199, has issued a call supported by the student coalition, for a city-wide march and rally against the cuts in

health care and education, on April 4, the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

— CALENDAR —

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston

Inside Cuba Today: A Young Cuban Talks About Her Country. Speaker: Kenia Serrano, Cuban youth activist from the Center of Studies for Youth. Wed., April 12, 7 p.m. Roxbury Community College, Student Center, Room 102, 1234 Columbus Ave. Sponsored by Caribbean Focus Program and the July 26 Coalition. For more information, call: (617) 427-0060 X5151.

MICHIGAN

Detroit

Stop the Assassination of Hope. Protest rally against elimination of affirmative action, Headstart, and other social programs. Tue., April 4, 10 a.m. Howard and 6th, 11 a.m. McNamara Bldg, noon Woodward and Jefferson. Sponsored by NAACP, UAW, YWCA of Metropolitan Detroit, and others. For more information, call: (313) 871-2087 or (313) 259-9922.

Release All Irish Political Prisoners in U.S. Jails. Protests on Sat., April 8, from noon to 2 p.m. at Federal Buildings in: San Francisco; New York City; Philadelphia; Fort Lauderdale, Florida; St. Louis; Chicago; Minneapolis; Phoenix, Arizona; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information, contact Irish Action Coalition: James Mullin 757 Paddock Path, Moorestown, NJ 08057, (609) 727-4255.

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Read it and retch — "CHICAGO — A federal appeals court has ruled that thousands of hemophiliacs who contracted the AIDS virus from blood-clotting medicine cannot join in a lawsuit



Harry Ring

against drug companies because it might bankrupt the industry." — News item.

Retch again — "Tobacco company stocks gained sharply as the industry celebrated dismissal of a

hemophiliacs' class action lawsuit against drug companies, saying the ruling could help end a massive suit filed against cigarette makers on behalf of millions of addicted smokers." — News item.

Taking care of business — Asserting it will reduce costs "in the long run," the feds coughed up a \$1-billion taxpayer subsidy to cover the costs of the Lockheed/Martin Marietta merger, which will eliminate 30,000 jobs. Now the government has decided to contribute a third of the \$92 million bonus the top dogs at the two companies voted themselves for putting over the merger.

The can-do society — To spare motorists a hard trip over a mountain road in western Greece, a two-

mile tunnel was drilled through the mountain. It took two sets of companies and eight years, but it was completed two years ago. However, it has yet to open. There was no money left to build short but necessary entrance and exit roads.

Downsizing priesthood? — A Montreal prof hopes to market the Automatic Confession Machine — a computerized confession booth. Select from a menu of Seven Deadly Sins and the Ten Commandments.

The machine then administers penance. But, the prof cautions, it tends to be heavy on the Hail Marys. To deal with this, he's offering a remote-type Personal Pocket Penance Assistant. It will

say your penance automatically.

Why assume they didn't know? — When Congress recently debated a bill to permit use of illegally seized evidence, an amendment was introduced — apparently to embarrass its supporters — to bar illegal search and seizures and issuance of improper warrants. Defeated 303 to 121, it was the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Science in the service of society — Tack it on your toilet lid — His 'n Hers Night Light. When someone approaches in the dark, the sensor-activated device signals if the seat is up or down. \$28.45, batteries included.

Act quickly — Place your or-

der now for the new Ferrari F50. It will go from 0 to 60 mph in 3.7 seconds and has a max speed of 203 mph. Seats are custom built and they throw in a pair of special driving shoes. \$500,000. They estimate they can sell 350, and they're making 349. Why? Because it's "something cultural, a monument," and so it should be hard to get.

Great Society going global — In the past few weeks we received clippings for this column from readers in Christchurch, New Zealand; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Montreal; and Athens, Greece. We hope more readers will do likewise. Clippings should be sent c/o Pathfinder Bookstore, 2546 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, 90006. Fax 213-389-1268.

Maoris occupy land in New Zealand

BY JANET ROTH AND MICHAEL TUCKER

WANGANUI, New Zealand — Supporters of Maori land rights from across New Zealand began arriving here over the weekend of March 26-27, swelling a Maori land occupation in the city. They were responding to an appeal for support by leaders of the occupation after the Wanganui District Council, the city administration, issued an eviction notice March 23 ordering the occupants to leave the land within seven days.

As the *Militant* goes to press supporters continue to arrive as the March 30 deadline approaches.

Up to 200 Maoris and supporters began occupying Moutoa Gardens in the middle of the city February 28 to press their demands for control over the two and a half acres of public park land. The area has been turned into a *marae* (meeting place) and renamed Pakaitore, the Maori name for the site last century.

Protesters erected scores of tents for sleeping quarters. Cooking facilities; a dining area; and a media center, complete with computer and photocopier, are also under canvas. Lighting has been strung up, powered by a generator, after the council cut off the electricity supply to the gardens.

At the center of the complex sits a newly constructed wooden meeting house, where visitors to the *marae* are welcomed as they arrive. Demonstrators built a log gateway at the entrance to the gardens. Security patrols keep watch 24 hours a day.

Maoris have been calling for the return of Moutoa Gardens over many years. In the 1980s it was the focus of protest ac-

tions on Waitangi Day, New Zealand's national holiday.

At first, the occupation was tolerated by the district council and largely ignored by the media. But two weeks into the protest, as it became clear the Maori occupants planned to stay, official attitudes hardened. Since then, the Wanganui land occupation has dominated the headlines daily and sharply polarized public debate.

Speaking in Parliament March 14, Prime Minister Jim Bolger appealed to the "traditional leadership" of Maoris to assert their authority against the protest or face a repetition of the Bastion Point eviction in Auckland in 1978, when the government mobilized hundreds of police and soldiers to end a 507-day land occupation.

Wanganui mayor Chas Poynter asserted that the district council was under pressure to take "hard-line action," and had been swamped by phone calls hostile to Maoris. The council claims ownership of the land.

Two demonstrations held in Wanganui reflect the political polarization around the occupation.

A 10-hour protest against the land occupation was organized outside Moutoa Gardens March 18 by the rightist group One New Zealand Foundation. About 30 protesters carried placards demanding "one nation, one people, one law."

On March 24, close to 100 people gathered in the central city to demand that the council lift its eviction threat and continue negotiations. The protest was organized by the Citizens Council for Peaceful Process.

Throughout the land occupation the protesters have had to respond to a series of provocations, including racist abuse

and physical threats and assaults. From the beginning they have urged Wanganui residents and others to visit the occupation. But ongoing police warnings attempt to deter people by claiming that those who go near the gardens are in danger of being attacked by gang members and violent criminals.

One opponent of the protest provoked an incident March 11 by trying to tear down the log gateway, and then appeared on national television claiming to be the victim of an assault. A bomb threat March 25 forced occupants to clear the site temporarily at midnight.

The Wanganui land occupation comes in the midst of a growing debacle for the National Party government over Maori land rights. Its highly trumpeted plan, known as the "fiscal envelope," proposed to settle Maori claims to land and resources by the year 2000 in exchange for NZ\$1 billion (NZ\$1=US\$0.64).

During February and March, 11 regional meetings were held between government ministers and tribal leaders and members, involving thousands of Maoris. At all the meetings the government's proposal was overwhelmingly condemned. As well, the meetings became a focus for protest demonstrations that drew hundreds.

Following the last of the meetings



Waitangi Day, Feb. 6, 1995. Hundreds rally in support of Maori land rights.

March 25, the government was forced to admit that, despite several years of preparation, its "fiscal envelope" proposal lay in tatters. The mounting support for the Maori land occupants at Wanganui has further highlighted the government's inability to take the issue of Maori land rights off the political agenda.

Janet Roth is a member of the United Food, Beverage & General Workers Union in Auckland, New Zealand.

Dominican Republic: protests force gov't to rescind bus hike

BY RON RICHARDS

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — A wave of protests has forced the Dominican government to quash a proposed 50 percent hike in bus fares in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

Government repression against the workers and students protesting the measure was fierce. At least four people were killed in fighting that broke out in working-class sections of the city. More than 100 people have been arrested. Television news here showed pitched battles from behind barricades of burning tires between demonstrators and the police and army units.

News reports indicate Arcadio Jiménez, a 28-year-old hospital janitor, was the last victim. His mother, Ana Mercedes de los Santos, says that he was wearing pajamas and brushing his teeth when he was shot by the police. Jiménez's family says he was not even involved in the protests.

Police spokesman Col. José Betances said that Jiménez "had a revolver in his right hand and a knife in his left" when he was shot.

The Dominican newspaper *Hoy* ran a photo of a funeral procession for a child who died in the working-class neighborhood of Capotillo. The family says that the child was killed by tear gas used by the

police.

The protests began when bus owners announced fare increases from 2 pesos (1 peso=US\$0.08) to 3 pesos. University students were the first out into the streets March 20. By the second day the protests had grown and the government headed by President Joaquín Balaguer was forced to rescind the fare hike.

José Francisco Peña of the opposition Dominican Revolutionary Party did not support the protests. He denounced the demonstrators as being manipulated by the government party to create instability so that the elections scheduled for 1996 could be canceled.

Dominican working people are suffering from rapidly rising prices. Besides bus fares it was announced the price of flour would be increased 19 percent, sparking a 100 percent hike in the price of bread.

On March 21, some 8,500 nurses at public hospitals went on strike. They currently earn about 1,044 pesos a month and are demanding a 100 percent raise. The minimum wage in the Dominican Republic is 840 pesos a month. The government has offered the nurses a 30 percent raise.

Ron Richards is a member of the American Federation of Government Employees in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

— 25 AND 50 YEARS AGO —

THE MILITANT

Published in the Interest of the Working People
April 10, 1970 Price 10¢

DENVER, March 30 — "We are going to appeal to all Chicano organizations, the GI Forum, MAPA [Mexican-American Political Association], UMAS, MECHA, social and political groups, to support La Raza Unida Party in the state of Colorado.... We are going to support a Chicano political party. We will structure and create this party and make the legal demands to share in all financial expenditures of our tax money being used for elective purposes.... We are going to have a full slate of candidates for this year.... It will be statewide.... It will even go by districts because the way they have the districts cut up now, we can only elect one.... But even if we can't elect, we are going to run."

This statement by Elizabeth Montoya sums up the press conference that launched the Colorado State La Raza Unida Party.

The press conference was held by members of the Crusade for Justice and representatives of the workshops convened during the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. The representatives reported on the conclusions reached by the various workshops during the four days of deliberation. But the bombshell was the announcement by Elizabeth Montoya and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales that the Crusade for Justice was launching the Colorado State La Raza Unida Party.

The significance of such a party is sharpened by the fact that Elizabeth Montoya, who delivered the statement, was formerly on the state executive committee of the Colorado Democratic Party. She and about 38 other local officials of the Democratic Party in Denver County are signing a letter of resignation to be sent to Hugh Burns, the state chairman of the party. They are also trying to get other ranking Chicanos in the party from around the state to sign the letter.

THE MILITANT

PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE
NEW YORK, N.Y. FIVE (5) CENTS

April 7, 1945

A partial victory was won by field and mill workers in Puerto Rico's sugar producing industry. The strike was called in the middle of the season and crippled the industry for almost six weeks. The strike took place under the direction of the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) with between 125,000 and 150,000 participating.

Wage increases of 23 cents for workers in the field and 24 cents for those in the mill were won, bringing daily wages up to \$1.73 and \$1.83 respectively.

In an attempt to break the strike the Department of Labor handed down a directive in the midst of the strike, raising minimum wages for mill workers to 37 cents an hour. The attempt failed.

That the U.S. government has no intention, however, to make the planters pay for the increased wages out of their profits is clearly seen by an agreement of the Commodity Credit Corp. to increase the subsidy on sugar to cover the wage increases.

Contrast Cuba with the Americas

For half a decade, the Cuban revolution has confronted what is referred to as its "special period." This describes the severe economic crisis precipitated by the collapse of preferential trade with the Soviet Union, and exacerbated by the effects of the criminal economic and trade embargo organized by the U.S. government.

As the article appearing in this issue of the *Militant* reports, the first signs of economic recovery have begun to surface. While not out of the woods yet, the workers and farmers of Cuba are in a better position to address the host of challenges they face.

Contrast this with what working people in the rest of Latin America are coming up against.

In December, presiding at the so-called Summit of the Americas — which excluded representatives of the Cuban government — U.S. president Bill Clinton was giddy over the profits boom resulting from imperialist investment in Latin America. "These are remarkable, hopeful times," Clinton said, asserting that capitalist investments "are working wonders" in Latin America.

A week later, the peso was devalued and all hell broke loose in Mexico. The subsequent shock waves have devastated the lives of millions from the Rio Grande to Buenos Aires. The bourgeois regime in Mexico, egged on by Wall Street and Washington, has unleashed a draconian austerity program that has already resulted in hundreds of thousands of layoffs. Prices have soared, real wages are falling, and the banking system is shaky.

Resistance in city and countryside has begun.

How far behind are Argentina and Brazil, where panicky investors have yanked capital out? Even in the most advanced capitalist powers, there are growing signs that workers and farmers will soon confront their own "special period" as fiascoes such as the Orange County collapse and the Barings bank failure point to the instability of the capitalist financial system.

Working people in Cuba are in a much better position to combat the world economic crisis than those of us living in Mexico, Argentina, the United States, or France. In Cuba, a workers and farmers government is in power. In the capitalist world, the administrations of the exploiters reign.

The first signs of economic recovery in Cuba result from the leadership role taken by Cuban workers in meeting this challenge. And despite shortages of everything from oil and soap to foreign exchange, hospitals, schools, and child-care centers are not being closed. Contrast this with the measures being proposed and implemented by the governments of Mexico or the United States, in order to satisfy the demands of wealthy bondholders.

The road taken by the workers and youth of Cuba — seizing power out of the hands of the exploiters and building socialism — is the example of how working people the world over can move forward in these tumultuous times.

Jail the criminal landlords!

Three people died when part of a Harlem building collapsed March 21. The landlords, Marcus Lehmann and his former partner Morris Wolfson, should be locked up for the crime.

The tragedy in Harlem is clearly a case of class injustice. Two greedy capitalists, with government collusion, put profits before safety and three working people paid with their lives. Many others were injured and are now without their belongings.

A city housing agency is asking a judge in New York City Housing Court to fine the two landlords \$1 million and maybe even give them a short jail sentence, because they ignored a past court order on more than 300 building code violations supposedly unrelated to the collapse. But what about charges for the deaths? Somehow the "anti-crime" rhetoric of capitalist politicians and editorial writers for the big-business press peters out when some of their own are involved.

The building owned by those vultures was cited more than 1,200 times since 1989, and not even one arrest warrant was issued. Could a worker receive 1,200 citations for violation of the law — even parking tickets — and not go to jail?

The building owned by Lehmann and Wolfson was a persistent source of complaints by tenants for shoddy maintenance and other problems. Of the 337 outstanding violations, 56 are considered "immediately hazardous."

Two months ago, a tenant actually won a judgment for \$84,000, because her ceiling caved in on her. The tenant spoke of rodents in the complex and a rat bite that sent her husband to the hospital.

Like many dwellings for working people in Harlem, or any other big city for that matter, the apartments were rarely inspected and many are in a state of advanced decay.

Lawyers for the two bloodsuckers even had the gall to blame the tenants, citing rent strikes and squatters in the building as the cause of the disrepair. "It would be hard to find a building in a high-crime area that is free of violations," said their attorney. Even in this outrage the attempt is made to turn working people into the criminals.

The building collapse in Harlem is not an "unfortunate tragedy that is no one's fault," as the propertied class would have us believe. The onus rests on the landlords and the criminal capitalist class.

A *New York Times* editorial, sidestepping the question of who's to blame, mildly protested that "housing officials must find ways to make landlords more responsible." Locking up those money grubbers for the deaths of three working people would be a good example to make landlords become "more responsible." Meanwhile, those who have been forced to become refugees living in public shelters or on the streets should be provided decent housing by the government.

Stop Turkish assault on Kurds

Daily reports of bombing raids on villages, brutal handling of displaced workers and peasants, and unwarranted arrests carried out by Turkish government forces against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq makes clear who the real "terrorists" are. Ankara says its invasion of 35,000 troops with heavy artillery is aimed at 2,500 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), but its real target is crushing the struggle for national rights of the Kurdish people and gaining control of new territory and resources.

The invasion also brings to light the hypocrisy of the United States government and the rulers of other capitalist countries who, when it is convenient, use humanitarian cover to advance their imperialist aims.

Under the banner of saving Kuwait and the region from Saddam Hussein, Washington orchestrated the Persian Gulf war just a few years ago — a massive, almost unchallenged assault against Iraq that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi working people. Shortly thereafter, Kurds in northern Iraq rebelled against the Hussein regime. Their fight was brutally crushed by Baghdad. Washington came in when the worst of the slaughter was over, offering "humanitarian aid" and establishing a "no-fly zone" and supposed safe haven for Kurds.

Now Turkey is bombing this "safe haven" and the response from Washington is to support Ankara and suspend "humanitarian" aid flights until the campaign is over.

The Gulf War debacle has left the U.S. rulers with few reliable allies in that part of the world, so the Clinton

administration is not in a hurry to denounce the brutality of a client regime. The U.S. government utterly failed to meet its goal of creating a politically and economically stable Middle East where it calls the shots and dominates the market. What the latest flare up again reveals is the new problem that Washington faces coming out of the Gulf war. Old conflicts are exacerbated and new ones arise, as uncontrollable social forces are at work.

Competition for control of this mineral-rich region is more intense than it was during the Gulf War and Washington is weaker. Opinion is split in U.S. ruling circles on what to do about Ankara's brutal war on the Kurdish people. A few days after offering its full support the Clinton administration toned down its backing for the offensive.

Turkey's assault brings to the fore once again the unresolved fight for Kurdish national self-determination. Some 12 million Kurds live in Turkey today and millions more are divided between northwestern Iran, northern Iraq, and northeastern Syria. All are denied their national identity by the respective governments of those countries.

The Kurdish people enter the stage of world politics not primarily as victims of imperialist slaughter and national oppression but as fighters for national rights who have not given up. Kurdish workers and peasants deserve the support of working people from around the world. In opposing the assault on the Kurds, the labor movement should also demand that the imperialist powers end their hypocrisy and open their borders to Kurdish refugees.

Why April 9 rally deserves support

Reader Mark Lichtman writes to suggest that the *Militant* should take a more critical view of the April 9 national Rally for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., called by the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The most important thing about the rally is that a mobilization to defend women's rights has been called. It presents an opportunity to involve thousands in a public protest action, one we hope *Militant* readers will encourage others to join. The rally comes on the heels of the murders of two abortion clinic workers in the Boston area in December and a continuing series of assaults on abortion facilities in other parts of the country. After demonstrations to condemn the Boston murders, the April 9 rally took on the character of being a national mobilization to stand up in defense of abortion rights.

The four demands listed on the national flyers for the rally are ones working-class fighters can support, including opposing violence against women, standing against the attacks aimed at scapegoating women on welfare, and opposing the aims of the Contract with America. It is true that organizers of the rally single out the role of the Republicans in the two-party offensive. But this is no different than virtually any other rally, union demonstration, or protest today.

For most people who will be travelling to D.C., the April 9 rally offers an immediate response to the assault on the living standards, working conditions, and democratic rights of working people. It can also be a help in gathering the forces needed for the fights to come.

The rally will likely incorporate a range of views, from those pushing gun control to calls to get out the vote for Democrats. The April 9 action, however, has been marked by the push to respond to the real assaults on women's rights, from attacks on abortion rights to cuts in social spending.

Attending and encouraging others to participate in the April 9 rally, the young feminist summit, and other events is an essential part of the presentation, discussion, and consideration of different perspectives by those looking for a way to fight.

There are not too many big mobilizations taking place right now. Working-class fighters need to participate in such activities when they happen, and take every opportunity to join with others in making it as large as possible.

— LAURA GARZA

Appeal to our readers

Continued from front page
New International. Two new issues of the Marxist magazine are available as we begin this international campaign — in Spanish and Swedish — and a French-language issue is soon to follow.

One of the best opportunities for a successful kickoff to the campaign will be the Rally for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., on April 9. Thousands, including many young people from college campuses, will gather there to defend women's rights. Mobilizing for the rally are also many young fighters who have been on the front lines of the abortion rights fight defending clinics from right-wing attacks. That weekend will also be the first time a new pamphlet titled *Why is Mark Curtis still in prison?* will be available, detailing the facts on the case of the socialist and unionist framed up in Iowa for his political activity. The international circulation effort will provide the best opportunity to introduce the case to thousands of people for the first time and get the facts into their hands with the pamphlet.

Another opportunity to expand the readership of the socialist press and to discuss the Mark Curtis case will be on April 8 when events are scheduled in many cities to demand justice for Irish political prisoners.

In Texas, distributors of the socialist publications from Houston got a head start on the circulation campaign with a visit to the Pan American campus of the University of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. During three days of activities surrounding the tour of Cuban youth leaders Kenia Serrano and Rogelio Polanco, students there bought 14 subscriptions to the *Militant*, two became new readers of *Perspectiva Mundial*, and four bought copies of *New International*.

Special teams to visit campuses and work sites are being planned in other areas. Supporters in Salt Lake City, Utah, plan to field teams April 8-14 to New Mexico and Arizona to speak with coal miners. Supporters of the *Militant* are organizing to get time off work to join this effort and are encouraging anyone interested in joining them to sign on, including from other cities.

Readers and supporters around the world are taking goals for this campaign. So far, the initial goals come up short of the overall target we are shooting for.

Local areas need to take another look at their goals this week and make detailed plans on how to meet their targets. This can include looking at special target weeks where extra effort will be marshaled in cities around the world to introduce new readers to the socialist literature. Through these discussions supporters can assess whether or not it will be possible to raise some goals above the initial projections. A chart of goals adopted in each area will appear in the next issue of the *Militant* along with initial sales totals. Subscriptions received by noon each Tuesday will be included, and supporters can fax in figures on sales of the *New International*.

Seattle bus drivers strike to win pension plan

This column is devoted to reporting the resistance by working people to the employers' assault on their living standards, working conditions, and unions.

We invite you to contribute short items to this column as a way for other fighting workers around the world to read about and learn from these important struggles. Jot down a few lines about what is happening in your union, at your workplace, or

employees.' Nothing but a bold-faced lie."

On March 20, the drivers rejected by a 2-to-1 margin an alternative proposal supported by the company — to help drivers set aside money from their paychecks in an IRA account, instead of a pension fund. One picket commented that anyone could go to a bank and do that right now, with or without Laidlaw.

Since the strike began, the com-

ON THE PICKET LINE

other workplaces in your area, including interesting political discussions.

Three hundred bus drivers organized by Teamsters Local 763 struck Laidlaw Co. March 7. Laidlaw is under contract with the Seattle School Board to provide bus service to about 13,000 students. The drivers have been working without a contract since September 1, 1994. They are asking to be included in the Teamsters pension plan, which is the only issue in the strike.

Laidlaw has refused to grant their request, even though it would not cost the company more money. Laidlaw state operations director Kevin Mest was quoted in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as saying the company opposed this proposal because it would "encourage greater than necessary affiliation with that group [Teamsters]. It's just a recruiting tool."

Pickets pointed out to the *Militant*, they are already a union shop — they don't need another "recruiting tool!" A union newsletter, *From the Picket Line*, also noted that Laidlaw has "in place retirement plans with at least 17 other bargaining unions nationwide. Imagine! For years these words: 'Never will we negotiate a pension plan for any of our

pany is reported to be losing nearly \$60,000 a day from the school board contract. The school board is charging Laidlaw with the bill for Gray Line buses it has chartered to provide transportation to about 1,700 students.

Two weeks into the strike, not a single union bus driver has crossed the picket lines, which are up every day from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Laidlaw's two bus sites. Laidlaw has begun to advertise for replacement drivers. They are calling them "temporary replacements," but they have already stated that when the strike is over, these replacement drivers will become permanent.

This has angered many workers in Seattle, and disturbed many parents who fear their children will be placed in unsafe situations.

Despite company and media attempts to blame the strikers for the rise in student absenteeism and inconveniences suffered by parents trying to cope with their children's transportation needs, the striking bus drivers are getting support. Members of the International Association of Machinists who work at Todd shipyards, Kenworth Truck, and Alaska Airlines have joined the picket lines, as have other Teamster union local members.

At the South Park picket line, drivers from the Gray Line buses



Militant/Steve Marshall

Some 1,800 workers at Casino Windsor in Windsor, Ontario, struck March 9 for higher wages and a union contract. Pickets are getting support from passersby. Windsor lies across the river from Detroit.

who are in the United Transportation Union, stop their buses to chat or honk their horns in solidarity, as do many of the passing truck drivers. Some nonunion drivers of the Ryder Bus company, which transports an additional 13,000 students for the Seattle School Board daily, show their support for the strikers.

Casino workers walk off the job in Canada

Some 1,800 casino workers in Windsor, Ontario, walked off their jobs March 9 in a fight for higher wages and a union contract. The Casino Windsor brings in more than Can\$1 million (Can\$1 = US\$0.70) per day. The average wage of the casino workers is Can\$9 an hour. Some workers, such as bartenders, earn a little more than the Canadian minimum wage of Can\$6.85.

One young striker on the picket line said he was fighting for more than wages. He described the harassment that women workers in particular get from customers and said he wanted to see the workers

win a seniority system because everything is based on favoritism now.

Other workers on the spirited picket line commented that they are getting a lot of support from passersby from Canada and the United States. Windsor is just across the river from Detroit. Most of the customers at the casino are from the United States. The Casino is owned by the province of Ontario and operated by a consortium of three U.S. companies. The Ontario government gets a 20 percent gaming tax as well as a cut of the profits.

Striker Vito Mezzapelle told the *Militant*, "We are prepared to stay out until they make an offer we agree with."

Aerospace workers in Italy protest layoff plans

Some 2,000 aerospace workers in Turin, Italy, blocked railway lines on March 16, protesting Alenia's plans to lay off up to 950 employees as part of a restructuring plan. Alenia, Italy's state-run aerospace and military equipment

manufacturer, has already laid off 1,500 workers under similar schemes. The unions called for action against the layoffs as the Italian government announced further spending cuts that would affect production at Alenia's Turin plants.

Oil workers in Kuwait end seven-day strike

Oil workers in Kuwait suspended a seven-day strike in late March after the government pledged to consider their demands for wage increases and better promotion procedures. Earlier, the government had said it was not being affected by the walkout and was going to replace striking workers. Kuwait's oil production normally tops 2 million barrels a day.

Contributors to this week's column include: Scott Breen, a member of International Association of Machinists Local 289 in Seattle, and Carolyn Allen, a member of United Auto Workers Local 600 in Detroit.

LETTERS

Critical of April 9 action

The *Militant* has run two articles (one front-page) and an editorial over the past two weeks (issues no. 12 and no. 13) supporting the April 9 action called by the National Organization for Women [NOW].

While I agree that the demonstration provides an important opportunity to support abortion rights and to protest the attacks on welfare and other social gains, I think the *Militant* should take a more critical view of it.

The demonstration is billed as a "Rally to End All Violence Against Women." Even if NOW doesn't currently view it this way, the logic of this abstract slogan is to call for more cops.

Another slogan is, "Stop violent media imagery." The logic of this is to support censorship.

Finally, NOW and other liberals have been calling the Republican Party's Contract with America, the Contract on America. The *Militant* has simply repeated this. To take out a contract on someone means to hire a gunman to kill them. The victims of the Republican program and that of the Democrats as well, is the working class, not "America."

Mark Lichtman
New York, New York

High school conference

Over 200 high school students attended the Environmental and Social Action Coalition's Third Annual High School Conference

held at Swarthmore College March 14.

The all-day conference was organized to discuss how to stop racism, homelessness, AIDS, rain forest destruction, genocide against Native Americans, water and air pollution, animal testing, landfills and violence. Major presentations as well as workshops took up these topics.

A workshop on the anti-immigrant California Proposition 187 and how to combat xenophobia was kicked off with a presentation by Isaac Wheeler of the American Friends Service Committee.

The Campaign Against Xenophobia, which organized the march of 500 people in Philadelphia December 10, is planning an anti-xenophobia contingent at the upcoming April 9 Rally for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. The rally and the April 7-8 conference on women's rights in D.C. was part of the list of upcoming events in the packets given to all conference participants.

The conference discussions centered on destruction of the world's rain forests and how to stop it. Actions projected included protesting Mitsubishi Corp.'s involvement in rain forest destruction.

Deborah Liatos
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Students boycott mall

Some 500 Indiana University of Pennsylvania students protested at the Indiana Mall in response to the



arrest of Aaron Johnson on February 4. Johnson was arrested after he was denied permission to sit at a Pennsylvania photo drivers license center to wait for a bus.

A faculty member has met with the mall management and the local district attorney, but the charges are still pending against Johnson. Many students and faculty feel this incident was racially motivated as Johnson is Black, but this is really a student issue.

A list of demands has been issued by the student body, but mall management and the local authorities want to sweep this matter un-

der the rug. Students make up a large percentage of the mall customers, and we are boycotting the mall until the charges against Johnson are dropped.

David Weaver
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Campus racism in Iowa

A mass student meeting of 400 was held at Grinnell College March 12. Sponsored by the Concerned Black Students, Students of Latin Descent (SOL), ASIA, Poverty Action, and the campus National Organization for

Women, the meeting was called to protest recent incidents of racism on this campus of 1,300 students.

"A combination of events led up to these protests," said Delaney Dixon, a spokeswoman for Concerned Black Students. There was a basketball game a couple weeks ago where white students shouted, "nigger" at a player from an opposing team. As the player removed his gold necklace, the same students shouted, "is that necklace part of your scholarship."

Another incident, she explained, "was when two campus radio disc jockeys used the word 'nigger' on the air." These students were subsequently suspended from the radio station.

A couple of days before the demonstration, 70 students organized a day of protest, which included wearing tape over their mouths and standing in silence at the rear of a classroom.

"We are silencing ourselves. We are not allowing you to silence us. Through our silence, you will hear our rage," Dixon explained to the *Des Moines Register*.

Maurice Peret
Dick Macalester
Grinnell, Iowa

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of general interest to our readers. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

Ottawa orders rail unions to end nine-day strike against takebacks

ROGER ANNIS

MONTREAL — More than 30,000 rail workers are back on the job following a nine-day national strike that paralyzed most rail transport in Canada. Workers returned after the Canadian Parliament adopted an anti-strike law March 26 that imposes heavy penalties for defiance.

Fourteen thousand track maintenance workers, engineers, and conductors at Canadian National Railways (CN) walked off the job March 18 after contract talks broke down. They joined 3,200 track maintenance workers at Canadian Pacific (CP) on strike since March 13.

Six hundred engineers and conductors at VIA Rail, Canada's passenger rail network, also walked out March 18, shutting down the system.

The strike hit the owners of Canadian industry hard. Some auto assembly plants in southern Ontario were closed or forced to operate at reduced time. Many other manufacturers cut back production and fumed as their goods sat unmoved. Grain shipments in western Canada ground to a standstill. Mines, paper mills, and chemical producers couldn't transport their products.

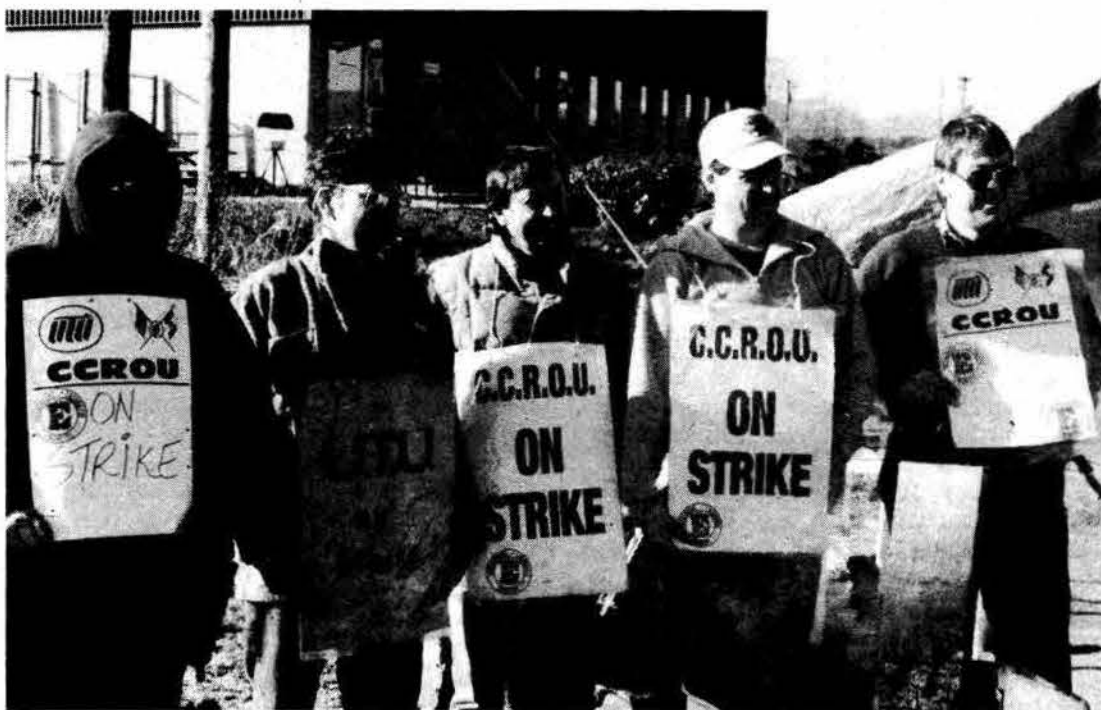
More than 60,000 commuters in Toronto and Montreal were left without service, as were more than 20,000 daily users of VIA's inter-city trains.

The anti-strike law establishes a three-member arbitration board with the power to impose new collective agreements on the 40,000 rail workers at Canada's three national railways. If the board deadlocks, the government is empowered to impose agreements.

The law instructs mediators that contracts have to be "consistent with the economic viability and competitiveness of a coast-to-coast rail system in both the short and long terms." Despite earning high profits in recent years, CN and CP say their labor costs are higher than their competitors in the United States and must come down.

On picket lines across the country, rail workers responded angrily to the government's move.

"Canadian law doesn't respect workers' rights," said Mario Coulombe, a conductor and member of the United Transporta-



Workers on strike at Canadian National Railways display their picket signs during their nine-day strike. The walkout forced production cutbacks in industry and paralyzed commuter rail.

tion Union (UTU) at CN. "It's a dictatorship. The companies never intended to seriously negotiate, they were counting on the government to step in and order us back to work."

More than 500 workers from all four striking or locked-out unions held a rally at the Turcot freight yard in Montreal March 23 to protest the threatened legislation. Participants included four busloads of striking workers from Quebec City.

Demonstrators denounced the collusion between the three rail companies and the federal government.

"The law won't end our fight," said one striker March 25 while picketing at CN in Montreal. "Our union is strong. We'll keep up the pressure after we return, and if the government mediator sides with the company then we'll go out on strike again," he vowed.

Issues in the strike

The walkouts were provoked by sweeping demands for concessions by the railway companies.

CN is demanding a 20 percent wage cut and wages for new hires at only 50 percent of the top rate. VIA wants to impose steep

pay cuts by replacing its pay-per-mile salary structure with hourly rates.

The companies want to force workers whose position is eliminated to move elsewhere in Canada to retain their job. Workers would fall to the bottom of the seniority list in the new region and thus be vulnerable to any new layoffs.

Currently, more than 20,000 workers are protected by an Employment Security provision. The carriers must pay a full salary to a senior worker whose position is eliminated through technological change or downsizing if the company can't provide alternative employment. Workers see the new scheme as a way to get rid of existing employees and hire new ones at much lower wages and benefits.

Over the past five years alone, railway companies in Canada have reduced their staff by 24 percent.

According to company figures, about 1,000 workers at the three rail companies are currently drawing salaries from provision. Workers say it's hardly a free ride.

"I think (CN president Paul) Tellier likes to promote the image of the union guy sitting on the couch and making his money, but it's not true," explains Bill Roberts, a CN worker in Belleville, Ontario.

To be eligible, Roberts must be available to work every day on an on-call basis. He was recently required to take a job in Toronto, 150 miles away. He now spends only weekends with his family.

"Being on ES was the most stressful time of my life," explained track worker Gerry Desrochers in Winnipeg. "All it does is give the company the freedom to play with our lives. We basically become their slaves."

Speedup and downsizing on the railways has taken a heavy toll on workers. Safety on the job has worsened. "It's unsafe out there with all the reductions," said CP track worker John Pereira in Toronto. "The media should get out there and look at the track joints."

Unions forge unity

Workers are pressured or obliged to work large amounts of overtime. Many train operators work on-call, seven days per week, 24 hours per day, and never have weekends off.

The strike dealt a blow to the railway bosses' offensive. "This strike shows what potential power we have," said UTU member Barry Munro in Windsor, Ontario.

"We've come together during this strike," said one CN worker in Montreal on the last day of the walkout. "I've met people on the picket line that I've never talked to before. Now we know each other well and we won't lose that contact."

Workers on Canada's railways are organized into four main union groups. Track workers are members of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE). Engineers and conductors belong to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) and UTU respectively. Repair workers are organized by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW).

Officials of the CAW, which represents 17,000 workers who repair rail cars and locomotives at the three companies, refused to join the strike. Most CAW members, however, respected the picket lines. As a result, they were locked out.

Engineers and conductors at CP crossed picket lines and continued to work. Many strikers at both CP and CN expressed anger that the unions had not organized to shut down the entire rail system.

Nevertheless, CP's efforts to maintain operations on its main lines largely failed. It closed secondary lines altogether.

Debate over legislation

The Bloc Quebecois (BQ), Canada's official opposition party, opposed the anti-strike legislation and delayed its adoption by several days. It called the right to strike a "fundamental right." That action was widely supported and appreciated by rail workers.

The BQ proposed the alternative of a forced return to work and a 60-day period of non-binding mediation. Deputies of the New Democratic Party and the Reform Party supported the legislation. The Reform Party called for a law to outlaw all strikes on the railroad.

While criticizing the legislation, officials of the rail unions treated it as a fait accompli.

Officials of the CAW and BMWE had adopted a strategy of local, rotating strikes against CP. They said a national strike at one or more companies would trigger anti-strike legislation. The strategy blew up when CP responded by locking out any worker engaging in a rotating strike or respecting picket lines. BMWE officials then called a national strike at CP and later at CN. Both moves were publicly condemned by CAW officials.

Many workers hope that the strike will force a better settlement from mediators than would otherwise have been won.

"We should go back together and if in one month there is no progress in negotiations we should strike again," said CN track worker Joe Almeida in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Larry Felton, a 17-year UTU member in Vancouver said, "We'll go back to work and nothing will be resolved. In nine months our contract expires and we'll be out again."

One woman conductor at CN in Montreal commented, "This strike is important for all the unions in Canada. They want to destroy our unions everywhere. But when workers stick together, we can do something. That's what we've done here."

Roger Annis is a member of Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union Local 841 in Montreal. Ned Dmytryshyn in Vancouver, Steve Marshall in Detroit, and John Steele in Toronto also contributed.

New Zealand unionists shut down freight, passenger rail for 24 hours

BY MICHAEL TUCKER

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Railway operations shut down throughout New Zealand March 29 when members of the Combined Union of Railway Employees struck for 24 hours to press their demands in contract negotiations with New Zealand Rail. It was the first nationwide rail strike since 1967.

Most freight services and all commuter and long-distance passenger lines came to a halt. The union organized to pick up crews where their trains stopped March 28 at midnight. Management ran a few freight trains during the 24-hour shutdown.

Workers mounted picket lines at major freight marshaling yards. At Wellington railway station opposite Parliament, more than 50 workers staged a protest rally.

The rail unionists are resisting the company's plans to hire new employees at inferior wages and conditions, de-

manding they be employed on the same terms. They are also opposing the introduction of casual labor, and want a limit on shift length for locomotive engineers and no split shifts. The union is demanding a 3 percent wage hike. New Zealand Rail is offering 1.5 percent.

The Combined Union of Railway Employees covers train drivers (engineers), signal operators, and office staff. It represents 2,600 of the country's 3,800 rail workers. The 1,200 shunters (brakeperson), track workers, and conductors, who are members of the National Union of Railway Workers, honored the strike. Their contract has been settled.

Previously state-owned, New Zealand Rail was sold by the government in 1993. Its major shareholders are the U.S. rail carrier Wisconsin Central Transportation Corp. and the New Zealand merchant bank Fay Richwhite and Co.