

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Cuban workers discuss challenges of food production
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Icelandic gov't resigns amid bank collapses

BY ÓLÖF ANDRA PROPPÉ
AND ÖGMUNDUR JÓNSSON

LONDON, January 28—The government of Iceland resigned on January 26 in face of an economic collapse and months of sustained antigovernment protests. A promise of early elections this spring did not suffice to keep the coalition government of the conservative Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) afloat. The SDA is now forming a minority government with the Left-Green Party.

Prime minister and leader of the Independence Party, Geir Haarde, handed in his resignation to President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson after negotiations to save the government failed. Commerce Minister Björgvin Sigurdsson of the SDA stepped down the previous day citing the pressures of the economic collapse, reported AP. The previous week, Haarde had called new elections for May but said he would not lead the Independence Party in them because he needed cancer treatment.

The next government will likely be led by outgoing Minister of Social Affairs Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir, who casts herself as a “welfare politician.”

Coalition governments in several
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Israeli gov't maintains blockade on Gaza

BY SETH GALINSKY

The Israeli government is continuing its economic blockade of the Gaza Strip, delaying aid critically needed for reconstruction after the three-week assault by the Israeli military, which destroyed thousands of dwellings, factories, workshops, schools, farms, and orchards.

While Tel Aviv has allowed 120 UN trucks a day to enter the Strip with food and medicine since the fighting ended, it has refused to permit concrete or steel through the border crossings, claiming that such supplies could be used by Hamas for rocket parts or other military purposes. Tel Aviv also blocked the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority from sending cash, claiming the money would end up in the hands of Hamas.

Hamas has agreed to the return of Fatah forces to help supervise the border crossings. Hamas defeated Fatah, which runs the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, in elections in the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian parliament in 2006. Hamas then pushed Fatah out of Gaza in open fighting in 2007.

Both Tel Aviv and Hamas have been sending representatives to Cairo, where Egyptian officials are helping to hammer out implementation of the cease-fire,
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Joblessness climbs as capitalist crisis builds

U.S. firms announce 75,000 cuts in a day



Getty Images/John Moore

Participants in January 22 job fair in Denver wait their turn to speak with potential employer. About 500 people attended the fair in search of work.

BY CINDY JAQUITH

In a single day, January 26, more than 75,000 layoffs were announced by U.S. employers. Tens of thousands more lost jobs as bosses around the world slashed their workforces.

Heavy equipment maker Caterpillar reported 20,000 jobs will be cut, which is 16 percent of its workforce. Pharma-

ceutical giant Pfizer, which has just acquired rival Wyeth, said it would eliminate 19,500 jobs.

Sprint reported plans to cut 8,000 jobs, 14 percent of its workforce. Philips Electronics will lay off 6,000 and Texas Instruments, 3,400. So far in January, 52 firms in the United States have reported

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Join campaign to increase long-term ‘Militant’ readers

BY ANGEL LARISCY

The goal for the four-week campaign to increase long-term readership of the *Militant* has been increased to 400. Distributors have already pledged to win 392 readers to renew their subscriptions, far exceeding the initial goal of 350. The chart on page 4 shows the results from the first few days. The campaign ends February 24.

In Miami two one-year and one six-month renewal along with a new six-month and two introductory subscriptions were sold last week, reports Deborah Liatos. A woman who had subscribed from a table at the post office in the Black community of Liberty City asked for a visit at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday after she had gotten off her midnight-shift job.

“She had read half of the *New International* no. 14 she bought when she subscribed,” said Liatos. “In addition to getting a six-month renewal to the *Militant*, she bought *New International* no. 7, featuring the article “Opening Guns of World War III: Washington’s Assault on Iraq,” and *Cuba and the Coming American Revolution*.”

Another *Militant* supporter met for

three hours with a subscriber who had sold several subscriptions last fall to friends and other supporters of Puerto Rican independence. He got on the phone right away with those he had gotten to subscribe, urged them to renew, and signed up one new subscriber.

The renewal campaign offers supporters of the *Militant* a chance to introduce the newest titles from Pathfinder Press—*Capitalism and the Transformation of Africa* and a new expanded edition of *Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?* Each is in English and Spanish and on sale for \$6 and \$5 respectively through April 15.

Those who subscribe for the first time for six months or longer through February 24 will be counted toward quotas along with renewals.

Ben O’Shaughnessy of Chicago reports, “We have a regional team this weekend to Peoria, Illinois, in response to the announcement from Caterpillar that it will be laying off 20,000 workers.”

All *Militant* readers can join this campaign. To contact a distributor near you to find out about activities in your area and to help, see listing on page 6.

Cuban president: Shut down U.S. base at Guantánamo

BY RÓGER CALERO

Cuban president Raul Castro has reaffirmed Havana’s call for the U.S. government to close its naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Castro’s remarks came after U.S. president Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the prison on the Guantánamo base within a year. The U.S. government holds some 250 “enemy combatants” from Washington’s “war on terror” at the prison camp.

“I hope that the new U.S. administration will fulfill its promise to close this prison,” said Castro in a January 22 interview with the Russian news agency Itar-Tass. He said the executive order was “insufficient,” however, and called the presence of the U.S. naval base itself on Cuban territory “a big injustice.”

“We demand that not only this prison but also this base should be closed and the territory it occupies should be returned to its legal owner—the Cuban people,” Castro said.

The naval base on Cuba’s southeast coast was established during the U.S. military occupation of the island at the beginning of the 20th century. Under the terms of the agreement imposed on Cuba, Washington’s occupancy of the base had no time limit and could be ended or modified only by mutual agree-

ment. Since coming to power in 1959 the revolutionary government in Cuba has insisted that the base be closed.

Meanwhile dozens of prisoners remain on hunger strike at the Guantánamo camp. The 45 strikers are protesting the inhumane conditions under which they are kept and their indefinite imprisonment by the U.S. government.

Washington set up the prison camp in Guantánamo seven years ago. Even though the U.S. government has maintained that it is holding “the worst of the worst” at the camp, only about 20 of the remaining prisoners have been charged with any criminal act. The rest continue

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Video: a second Bay Area cop hit youth before killing

BY ERIC SIMPSON

OAKLAND, California, January 28—New video has surfaced showing that a second Bay Area Rapid Transit cop punched 22-year-old Oscar Grant III in the face not long before he was thrown face down on a station platform. Grant, an apprentice butcher and African American, was then fatally shot in the back by another cop, Johannes Mehserle.

Grant’s killing was captured on cell phone videos taken by other passengers. When released to the press and posted on the internet, the footage caused widespread outrage and demands that Mehserle be brought to justice. He resigned from the police force and fled to a friend’s home near Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Mehserle’s attorney said the cop and his family had received numerous death threats, according to the *San Jose Mercury News*.

After two weeks of protests, including several street demonstrations, the Oakland district attorney was forced to issue a warrant for Mehserle’s arrest. The cop was returned to Oakland January 14 where he was arraigned, charged with murder, and jailed. A hearing on whether to grant bail is scheduled for January 30.

In the new video shown on KTVU-TV a second cop, identified as Tony Pirone, is seen hitting Grant in the face and knocking him down. According to the TV station, Pirone is the cop kneeling on Grant’s neck when Mehserle shoots him in the back. Pirone has been on paid leave since the kill-

ing, but not under investigation. After the new footage was released, BART general manager Dorothy Dugger promised an internal affairs investigation.

The day after Mehserle was arrested, 1,500 demonstrators in downtown Oakland demanded that all the cops involved be charged as accessories. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, police officials cannot remember the last time a cop was charged with murder for an on-duty incident.

After Grant’s killing Kenneth Carthers came forward to say he was beaten up by Mehserle on November 15 for making disparaging remarks about police to another train passenger. He was charged with resisting arrest coming out of the incident, which sent him to the hospital.

One of Mehserle’s lawyers, Chris-



Militant/Eric Simpson

January 14 protest in Oakland, California, against the police killing of Oscar Grant.

topher Miller, is the lead counsel for the California Peace Officers Legal Services program. Mehserle also hired attorney Michael Rains, well

known in the area for defending cops and getting them off. The cop’s legal fees are being paid by the police “union.”

16 U.S. spy agencies to share massive database

BY SAM MANUEL

Washington is working on a powerful Google-like search engine in an effort to make government spying easier. The Information Integration Program, as it is being called, will knit together the thousands of databases across 16 spy agencies.

It is another step along the recommendations of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission’s hearings in 2004, which sharply criticized the inability of U.S. spy agencies to share information in order to “connect the dots” and

detect plans to attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

The program is part of the latest drive by Democrats and Republicans to strengthen the ability of U.S. spy agencies to snoop and share information among themselves. It is an important component of the U.S. government’s moves to transform its “intelligence” capabilities in the “global war on terrorism.”

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article, the program will allow spies at the agencies to “search through secret intelligence files the same way

they can search public data on the Internet.” The program is being developed in the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI).

The impact of the new program will be “staggering,” says the outgoing director John (Mike) McConnell. According to the *Journal* a senior official also said the program will allow intelligence analysts to search about 95 percent of available data.

The DNI was established in 2005 following hearings the previous year on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. It brought all U.S. spy agencies under a central director.

THE MILITANT

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Jan. 4, 2009, demonstration in Sydney, Australia, protesting Israeli assault on Gaza Strip.

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By Nelson Blackstock

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“Washington’s 50-year Domestic Contra Operation” by Larry Seigle in *New International magazine* No. 6. \$16

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Obama's 4th day in office: U.S. missiles hit Pakistan

BY DOUG NELSON

On its fourth day in office, the U.S. presidential administration of Barack Obama carried out two simultaneous aerial drone strikes in Pakistan.

The missile attacks in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas January 23 killed some 20 people. In North Waziristan a house belonging to Khalil Dawar, a local resident believed to host Taliban fighters, was hit with three Hellfire missiles. Dawar was killed along with his two sons, reported the *News*, a major Pakistani English-language daily. A Pakistani government official told the *News* that six of those killed were Taliban fighters.

The other drone killed 10 civilians, including four children, when it struck the home of South Waziristan resident Dil Faraz Gangikhel Wazir, according to a local official.

The two attacks continue the previous administration's use of drone strikes in Pakistan, which have been stepped up since last September.

Pakistan is "the central front in our enduring struggle against terrorism," President Obama said January 22 at a State Department meeting.

At a conference in early January, Chief of U.S. Central Command Gen. David Petraeus described Afghanistan and Pakistan as "a single problem set." Obama recently appointed Richard Holbrooke as special U.S. envoy to represent Washington's interests in both countries.

Washington seeks new supply routes

Meanwhile, Washington is seeking alternative routes to supply U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan, as the Pakistani military has been losing ground against Islamist forces in parts of Pakistan's northwest.

U.S. and NATO forces receive some 70 percent of their supplies and 40 percent of their fuel through a Pakistani supply route that runs from the Karachi port to the Khyber Pass on Pakistan's northwest border with Afghanistan.

U.S. military officials are preparing to nearly double U.S. forces in Afghanistan over the next year to quell the growing Islamist insurgency in the region.

The main U.S. and NATO military supply route to Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass has become less reliable for the imperialist armies because of continued Taliban assaults on supply depots. As a result, Washington has begun to negotiate with Moscow and some Central Asian countries to secure an alternative route from the north.

Since the latter part of 2008, Taliban forces have destroyed more than 300 trucks and other vehicles in attacks

along the Khyber Pass route. The Pakistani government temporarily closed the pass January 19 after Taliban forces attacked a military base in Khyber, killing one Pakistani soldier and wounding 10 others. Islamabad had briefly closed the pass on four other occasions since September.

Islamabad's paramilitary Frontier Corps launched a new offensive against Taliban forces in Khyber following the January 19 attack. A joint operation of CIA operatives and Pakistani paramilitaries raided a village there January 21, reported the *News*. The Pakistani military has announced victory over Taliban in this area twice before—once in November and again in December—only to see the Taliban reemerge.

Russian president Dmitry Medvedev confirmed January 23 that Moscow had agreed to work with Washington to establish an alternative route for U.S. military supplies.

Details on the exact plan remain unknown. But the only feasible possibilities go through those former Soviet countries where Washington could not secure any deals without Moscow's agreement. The only other possibility is a much shorter route through Iran.

Moscow will likely press for political concessions as part of a deal as the two rival powers have been locked in a contest for influence over countries that had been part of the former Soviet Union.



Gen. David Petraeus, who as head of U.S. Central Command has responsibility for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, said January 9 that the command's mission will require a "regional approach" that includes Russia, India, China, the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, and "perhaps at some point, Iran."

The Taliban operate in the predominantly Pashtun mountainous region along the Afghan-Pakistani border. In Pakistan this includes the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the North West Frontier Province, and the northern part of Baluchistan Province.

The Taliban movement is one of the Islamist formations that the Pakistani government organized, funded, and armed to extend its political influence in Afghanistan. But under pressure following Washington's invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Islamabad launched its own war against major factions of the group.

Taliban forces have increasingly used strongholds in Pakistan as bases from which to organize and launch assaults against U.S., NATO, and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. In a break from this pattern, some 600

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Raúl Castro: U.S. Navy out of Guantánamo

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to languish there without any charges.

To undermine the hunger strikers' protest, military authorities at the camp are force-feeding at least 31 of them, using "lawful" and "clinically appropriate" means, they claim. The American Civil Liberties Union issued a protest saying force-feeding is a form of torture and a violation of the prisoners' rights under U.S. and international law.

Prisoners who are forced-fed are masked and strapped to a chair twice a day and fed liquids through tubes inserted in their noses, putting them at risk of infections and lung collapse, according to lawyers representing Guantánamo prisoners.

The widespread knowledge of the inhumane treatment of prisoners in Guantánamo has become a political liability for the U.S. rulers, as growing numbers oppose arbitrary detention and the use of torture.

In the last year, the U.S. rulers have made a series of moves in an attempt to defuse public outrage over the "excesses" generally attributed to the last Bush administration, in order to clear the road for new attacks on democratic rights.

Earlier in January, Judge Susan Crawford, a senior Bush administration official responsible for reviewing practices at Guantánamo, admitted to the press that Mohammed al-Qahtani, who had been accused of planning to take part in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, had been tortured during interrogations at the prison camp. Back in May 2008, Judge Crawford dismissed war crimes charges against him because "his treatment met the legal

definition of torture," she told the Jan. 19, 2009, *Washington Post*. Even though the charges were dismissed, Crawford ordered that al-Qahtani be kept in Guantánamo.

"The fact is, if the only evidence against an individual is obtained through torture, there is no reliable evidence. Period," said a statement issued by the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which represents al-Qahtani and other Guantánamo detainees.

The credibility of the "evidence" being used to accuse the detainees of being enemy combatants has increasingly come into question, with courts or tribunals in the last three months declaring that 24 prisoners were improperly held. Since a Supreme Court ruling in June 2008 gave the Guantánamo prisoners the right to have their cases reviewed by federal judges, more than 200 habeas corpus requests have been filed in federal court on behalf of detainees.

"The government's failure in case after case after case to be able to prove its case calls into question everybody who is there," Susan Baker Manning, a lawyer for 17 Uighur detainees from China, said to the *New York Times*. A federal judge ordered their release in October but the Justice Department appealed that decision.

The barrage of criticism against the use of torture and other blatant violations carried out under Washington's "war on terror" led Obama to sign executive orders on

January 22 ordering the closing down of the Guantánamo prison within a year and directing the Central Intelligence Agency to shut down its network of secret prisons.

Two days before that, the new administration also ordered an immediate halt to proceedings to prosecute detainees in Guantánamo, and requested a federal district court in Washington to stay habeas corpus requests to allow for a review on whether the prisoners should be transferred, released, or prosecuted.

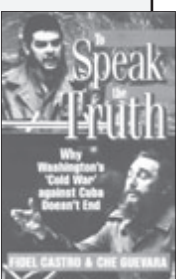
"It only took days to put these men in Guantánamo; it shouldn't take a year to get them out," said Vincent Warren, executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

Obama's order does not affect some 600 people detained from the "antiterror war" who are being held at the prison on the Bagram air base in Afghanistan. That prison is being expanded to hold 1,100 prisoners.

To Speak the Truth Why Washington's Cold War Against Cuba Doesn't End

by Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara

In historic speeches before the United Nations General Assembly and other UN bodies, Guevara and Castro address the peoples of the world, explaining why the U.S. government fears the example of the socialist revolution in Cuba and why Washington's effort to destroy it will fail.



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U.S. Africa Command sends ‘aid’ to Darfur

BY OMARI MUSA

The U.S. Africa Command (Africom) has carried out its first major mission on African soil, flying equipment to African Union and UN troops in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Sudan is the third largest oil-producing country in Africa. The U.S. government wants to pressure the government in Khartoum, which has long been at odds with Washington, to get in line with U.S. dictates. Khartoum’s bloody repression of non-Arabic-speaking and non-Muslim peoples in the Darfur region has been used to justify imperialist intervention there, under the guise of “peacekeepers” from the African Union and United Nations.

On January 6 then-president George Bush authorized sending 150 tons of military equipment to the Darfur region. He waived a requirement that he notify Congress 15 days in advance before such a mission. The delivery of heavy equipment, trucks, water purification systems, and several thousand pounds of spare parts for vehicles was carried out by Africom.

Originally the mission called for delivering 75 tons of oversized trucks and heavy equipment. But according to an Africom spokesperson on the ground in Rwanda, Eric Elliott, “Since they’re flying the missions anyway, they loaded the aircraft with anything else that they [the UN-African Union forces] needed.”

U.S. Air Force C-17 planes flew from the United States to Djibouti, where Africom has a base at Camp Lemonier. From Djibouti the aircraft went to Kigali International Airport in Rwanda to load the equipment and then to Darfur. The mission consisted of five flights.

U.S. troops are not supposed to be

involved in direct military action in the Darfur region, only “support” for the “peacekeepers.” However, another Africom spokesperson, Vince Crawley, said that a small number of U.S. troops would provide protection aboard the two C-17 cargo planes the Pentagon is sending and would remain in Darfur only long enough to unload the aircraft.

To make the point that U.S. military forces were prepared to engage in combat, Maj. Sean Pierce, the commander of the second C-17, said, “There’s no specific concern, but we’re prepared to react to anything that comes our way.” The Rwandan government and military made clear their support for the U.S. role in a statement by Rwandan Defense Force spokesperson Maj. Jill Rutaremarara. Rwanda maintains a contingent in the African Union forces in Darfur. “The demands are many,” said Rutaremarara. “We hope that this cooperation with Africa Command is going to continue.” As part of transforming the U.S. military on a world scale, Africom was



S. Sgt. Samuel Bendet, U.S. Africa Command

U.S. troops secure equipment inside C-17 cargo plane at Rwanda airbase in preparation for flight to Sudan. This is first major mission on African soil by U.S. Africa Command.

established in February 2007 by Bush shortly after Ethiopian troops and U.S. Special Forces invaded Somalia and overthrew the government ruling the capital, Mogadishu.

President Barack Obama has vowed more aggressive action in Darfur, including imposition of a no-flight zone. His nominee for ambassador to the

United Nations, Susan Rice, told the Senate panel at her confirmation hearing that she will push for the United Nations to speed up sending additional “peacekeeping” troops to Darfur. She said the Obama administration is considering more “robust action,” including economic sanctions against the Sudanese government.

Israeli gov’t maintains blockade on Gaza

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following the Israeli defeat of Hamas in the assault.

As part of the deal, the Egyptian government is considering tripling its current force of 750 guards at the Gaza-Egypt border and patrolling there 24 hours a day to prevent “weapons smuggling” to Hamas. It has already sent hundreds of additional guards to the border.

The *Jerusalem Post* reported January 23 that a “new mechanism” set up with Cairo to prevent Gaza arms smuggling includes three layers: “intelligence co-operation, obstacles in Sinai and the deployment of new tunnel-detection technology along the border.”

Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni flew to Brussels to meet with representatives of the European Union to work out details on the forces, ships, and technology the EU will contribute to enforce the Israeli cease-fire terms.

French president Nicolas Sarkozy on January 23 ordered that a helicopter-carrier be sent immediately to the Mediterranean Sea to patrol the waters off the Gaza coast.

The *Post* reported progress on an Israel-Hamas prisoner exchange. According to the paper, Tel Aviv has said it will exchange hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by the Israeli government and open Gaza border crossings when Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier held by Hamas since 2006, is released.

More details on the destruction caused during the three-week siege are emerging. Even before the Israeli assault, unemployment in Gaza was nearly 50 percent and 80 percent of its residents survived on less than \$2.30 per day, according to the United Nations.

Some 50,000 people moved to shelters during the fighting, according to UN officials. They say 15,000 are still there and many more are staying with relatives.

“We have two types of families here—those whose homes were completely destroyed and those whose homes were half-destroyed,” the manager at one UN shelter told the *Washington Post*. “If you have at least one room left in your home that’s livable, you have to leave. The ones whose homes were completely destroyed can stay.”

Some Israeli officials dispute the total number of civilians reported killed and wounded. An Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson told the *Jerusalem Post* that it had checked on 900 of the estimated 1,300 killed, but claimed they were mostly Hamas combatants.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, which is independent of both Hamas and Fatah, has counted 1,285 dead, 82 percent civilians. It says that among the dead are 280 children and 111 women and has posted a report on its Web site with the names, ages, and circumstances of death. The center says that 4,536 people were wounded, including 1,133 children and 735 women.

Tel Aviv is also disputing charges that it used white phosphorous as a weapon during the assault, although it does not deny that it was used for making smoke-screens in open battlegrounds. White phosphorous sticks to skin and burns all the way through to the bone.

Transformation of Israeli military

Besides defeating Hamas, Tel Aviv demonstrated progress in transforming the Israeli military, drawing on the lessons of the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

While the assault was still in full gear, the *Jerusalem Post* wrote that “one conclusion that can already be made is that in this war, the intelligence is unprecedented, as is the cooperation among the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), the IDF’s Southern Command and the air force.” Unlike in past wars, when each branch worked independently, this time

they established “a single joint command-and-control center.”

At least four types of special forces were used heavily during the invasion of Gaza including paratroopers; Shayetet 13 (navy seals); Shaldag, trained in counterterrorism; and the undercover Duvdevan Unit.

In an interview with *Yedioth*, the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, said that senior officers personally led the troops during the Gaza invasion, unlike the 2006 war in Lebanon when brigade commanders watched the action from computer screens.

The assault forced Hamas to stop firing unguided missiles into Israel. Prior to the assault, Hamas fired some 70 homemade rockets into Israel a day, aiming at nearby towns. That number rapidly dropped to less than 20 once the Israeli assault was in full swing. Hamas did not shoot down a single helicopter, blow up a single tank, or capture a single Israeli soldier during the fighting. Despite this, Ismael Haniya, a top Hamas leader, announced in a January 18 television broadcast that the group had won a “popular victory.”

Arabs in Israel raise demands

The January edition of *Commentary*, a conservative magazine that pays close attention to Israeli politics, published an article by Hillel Halkin that expresses concern that the growing number of Arabs inside Israel would undermine Israel’s Jewish “national identity.”

Arab citizens of Israel make up 20 percent of Israel’s population today and 25 percent of school-age children.

Israel, Halkin writes, “even if it withdraws completely or nearly to its 1967 borders, has to prepare for the day on which three out of ten, and possibly more, of its citizens are Arabs.”

Halkin notes that over the last several years, Arab-Israelis have raised a series of demands that would mean “revising practically every aspect of Israeli existence” from symbols like the Israeli flag and national anthem all the way to “the restitution of lands expropriated for Jewish use.”

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CANADA	15	0	0%
UNITED KINGDOM			
Edinburgh	*	0	0%
London	15	0	0%
UK Total	15	0	0%
NEW ZEALAND	12	3	25%
SWEDEN	8	0	0%
Int’l Totals	392	39	10%
*No quota yet			

ON THE PICKET LINE

Ottawa transit strike solid in face of antiunion attacks

After more than 46 days, picket lines by 2,300 Ottawa transit workers remain solid in face of a massive antiunion campaign by Ottawa's city council. The capital of Canada has been without transit service since December 10, when the members of Local 279 of the Amalgamated Transit Union walked out over management demands for concessions on scheduling, assigned routes, hours of work, and working conditions.

Other issues deal with wages, sick days, and contracting-out language. Union officials have offered to end the strike by putting the scheduling issues into a non-binding mediation process and referring all other issues to binding arbitration.

"This is a union-busting operation by the council," Local 279 president André Cornellier told the *Militant*. Mediated talks between the union and city bosses broke off on January 23. City officials are now organizing an anti-strike rally for Parliament Hill on January 26. In

a letter to Local 279 members Cornellier said the union will show the City of Ottawa that its members cannot be broken.

—John Steele

Italian unions strike over deaths on the docks

Dock workers' unions in Italy held a national one-day strike January 23 to protest unsafe working conditions that have caused a series of deaths on the docks. The strike was called by Italy's major port unions, Filt Cgil, Fit Cisl, and Uiltrasporti.

Dock worker Giuliano Fenelli was crushed to death the previous day by a mobile crane in La Spezia. There have been two other fatalities on the docks since the beginning of January.

In a joint statement the unions said, "It is now clear that we face a genuine emergency in terms of workplace safety in the ports."

They added, "There are precise causes for such accidents, related to workplace safety measures that have long been



Striking transit workers and their supporters rally January 9 in Ottawa, Canada. The workers have held strong since December 10 despite massive antiunion campaign by city officials.

promised but never delivered."

The unions want a meeting with the government to take up ways to improve safety, including proper training programs.

—Sam Manuel

Rail workers in Germany reject low wage offer

Locomotive engineers in Germany's GDL rail union rejected a revised wage contract offer from national operator Deutsche Bahn January 22, posing the possibility of a strike, reported Reuters. GDL head Claus Weselsky said the company, which employs 130,000 workers, had made concessions on working hours, but insists on only a 1 percent raise.

The union is asking for a 6.5 percent raise for some 12,000 engineers. The two other rail unions, Transnet and GDBA, represent the majority of rail workers and are seeking a 10 percent hike.

Weselsky said GDL would compromise on wages, if the company gave more ground, too. "We'll have no choice but to get our members ready for a strike otherwise," Weselsky said.

GDL reached a separate wage agreement with Deutsche Bahn last year after strikes in 2007. It says no work stoppages will begin before February.

The two other rail unions are not covered by the same agreement.

—Sam Manuel

Cuban 5 offer solidarity to Palestinians in Gaza

The Cuban Five, who have been unjustly incarcerated in the United States for a decade on frame-up charges, released an "urgent message to the Palestinian people" as Israeli troops attacked the Gaza Strip. The five—Antonio Guerrero, René González, Fernando González, Gerardo Hernández, and Ramón Labañino—were arrested in southern Florida in 1998, where they were monitoring the activities of right-wing Cuban exiles who carried out armed attacks on Cuba with Washington's blessing. They were convicted in 2001 on charges of "conspiracy to commit espionage" and in one case, "conspiracy to commit murder." The following translation of their message appeared in the January 21 *Granma International*.

It is with profound pain and infinite indignation that we have witnessed the criminal massacre of the Palestinian people; there are no words to describe this holocaust. The death of every innocent child, women and man and the destruction of the homeland's holy ground are crimes against humanity and debts that will someday be paid for dearly by the government of Israel, the United States—which supports the former—and international imperialism.

From five prisons scattered throughout the bowels of the United States, we condemn this crime with all our strength; we demand that the barbarity stop now and we send all of our love and support from the deepest part of our souls to the beloved Palestinian people.

We will be with you today and always. If there is one thing that profoundly hurts us about our imprison-



Cuban Five—Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández, and René González—have been jailed for a decade.

ment it is that we cannot do much more for you, for your cause, for our peoples, but we trust that soon we will be able to accompany you physically.

The world must unite and condemn the Israeli government, the United States government and the imperialist governments, creators of holocausts.

Stop the war and massacre!

Long live the Palestinian people!
Venceremos!

The Cuban Five
Antonio Guerrero
René González
Fernando González
Gerardo Hernández
Ramón Labañino

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



February 10, 1984

MONTREAL—Build a broad antiwar movement in North America against the imminent threat of a U.S. invasion of Central America—that was the central message of an inspiring rally held here January 21.

The meeting, attended by nearly 400 people, was organized by the Coalition Against American Intervention in Grenada. Earlier that day, 175 people braved sub-zero temperatures to demonstrate in front of the U.S. consulate.

On January 13, 80 people attended a meeting to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Comité de los Amigos de El Salvador (CAS), a group in which supporters of the Salvadoran Communist Party play a leading role. CAS spokespeople emphasized the importance of unity of all Salvadoran forces. This view was echoed in a message read by the Comité Farabundo Martí.

Speakers at the January 21 rally a week later included Nicaraguan government representative Rodolfo Palacios; Oscar Dada of the FMLN and Revolutionary Democratic Front; and Don Rojas, former press secretary to murdered Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop.



February 9, 1959

The newspapers of America's colored people have noted with particular interest how the Castro government has answered the charges of "blood purge" leveled by such senators as Sparkman of Alabama and Fulbright of Arkansas; and also what the new regime proposes to do about discriminatory practices inherited from Cuba's past.

For instance, C.W. Mackay, editor of *Afro-American*, reported an answer by one official to Sparkman that did not appear in such papers as the *New York Times*: "Why is he so broken up over the just punishment of murderers here when he remained so silent while White Citizens Councils and Klan bombers were blowing up the homes and churches and castrating innocent colored people of Montgomery and Birmingham?"

He also reported the reaction of another Castro spokesman to Fulbright; "If he can approve Faubus using armed soldiers to keep little children out of school, he certainly should have no complaints about military trials in Cuba where confessed assassins are being dealt with justly."



February 10, 1934

15,000 taxicab strikers jammed the basement of the Madison Square Garden at 11:00 P.M., Saturday, February 3, in a monster demonstration of solidarity and determination to fight for the unionization of the entire field.

In spite of the attempts of the speakers to dampen the strikers' militancy by demanding over and over again that no violence be permitted or tolerated during the strike, the tone of the men was for a determined and bitter struggle to win their demands for complete and thorough unionization of the taxicab drivers, recognition of the union, full protection for employees on the job, the entire five-cent on all rides and the tax money already collected to go to the strikers, a minimum wage scale and maximum work week.

Ross, the chairman, had difficulty in obtaining order, so high was the enthusiasm and spirit of the strikers.

Ex-Judge Panken, Socialist politician, spoke: "It is high time that the taxicab workers organize themselves. You cannot buy them by nickels now, what they want is union conditions!"

For further reading

Cuba and the Coming American Revolution by Jack Barnes

A book about the class struggle in the United States and the example set by the people of Cuba that revolution is not only necessary, but it can be made. —\$10



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Below is an excerpt from Israel: A Colonial-Settler State? one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month in February. The book explains that the formation of the state of Israel fits into the pattern of 19th and 20th century colonial conquest. Following proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 based on a United Nations-imposed partition of Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian states, Israeli troops terrorized Palestinians into fleeing their land and homes and defeated surrounding Arab governments that sought to block the seizure of these territories. Through the course of this fighting Israeli troops seized four-fifths of land partitioned as the Palestinian

BY MAXIME RODINSON

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I do not want to dwell here on the situation of the Arabs in Israel; for that, I refer the reader to the fine, sensible, and balanced, but also lucid book already mentioned, by Walter Schwarz.² In spite of the recent relaxation of the most blatantly discriminatory measures, it is obvious that the Jewish majority is imposing its rule on the Arab minority. "The main impression," writes a perceptive Jewish-American sociologist, "is that the sympathies of the Israeli Arabs lie in the highest degree with their Arab kindred and that Arab allegiance is not to the Jewish majority that now governs, but rather to their kindred in Egypt or Jordan who promise to free them. There may be many exceptions, but this is certainly the attitude among the majority of the Arabs."³ This is a quite normal consequence of the situation, and it is

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difficult to see how it could have been otherwise. The Arabs in Israel, like the Palestinian Arabs who fled Israel, are in a situation that they have not accepted and that the *Yishuv* has imposed upon them by force.⁴ [The *Yishuv* was the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the declaration of the state of Israel. Since 1920 it began functioning, in effect, as a state within a state.] Whatever justifications one might be able to find for this act, no one should be able to deny that it is a fact.

(*The Revolt, Story of the Irgun*, p. 165, corroborated by J. and D. Kimche, *Both Sides . . .*, p. 124; cf. M. Bar-Zohar, *Ben Gurion, the Armed Prophet*, pp. 107–108). Many Jews like the supreme leader D. Ben Gurion hoped, very logically, that the greatest possible number of Arabs would leave. His hagiographer, Michael Bar-Zohar, candidly writes: “The fewer [Arabs] there were living within the frontiers of the new Jewish state, the better he would like it. . . . (While this might be called racialism, the whole Zionist movement actually was based on the principle of a purely Jewish community in Palestine. When various Zionist institutions appealed to the Arabs not to leave the

Jewish State but to become an integral part of it, they were being hypocritical to some extent)." (*Ben Gurion*, p. 103 f.) It could not have been said any better!

2. Walter Schwarz, *The Arabs in Israel*, London, Faber and Faber, 1959.

3. Alex Weingrod, *Israel, Group Relations in a New Society*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1965 (Institute of Race Relations), p. 70 f.

4. The annexation of the non-Israeli West Bank by the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, placing the Palestine Arabs under a sovereignty they did not want, was a consequence (one Israel hoped for) of proclaiming the Jewish state and of the 1948 war.

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Panel urges upgrading of U.S. nuclear arsenal

Aim is to show readiness to drop bomb

BY DOUG NELSON

A Pentagon commission headed by a former secretary of defense says that the U.S. military must give higher priority to its nuclear weapons if its massive arsenal is to remain a sufficient threat.

The U.S. government maintains some 5,700 active nuclear warheads, about 3,700 of which are ready for launch at a moment's notice. The only time such destructive power was used was in August 1945 when U.S. warplanes dropped one nuclear bomb each on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands.

The commission, led by James Schlesinger, criticized what it called the lack of leadership attention within the Department of Defense to the management of its nuclear weapons program. Its report, submitted December 18, contained recommendations for reorganization within the military, including the creation of a special "assistant secretary of defense for deterrence" to supervise the various aspects of the program.

In June 2008 Defense Secretary Robert Gates assigned the commission to investigate the management of the nuclear program within the air force following two incidents. In 2007, a B-52 bomber flew across the country without anyone realizing it was armed with nuclear cruise missiles. In August 2006, instead of helicopter batteries, ICBM nose cones with nuclear triggers, were shipped to Taiwan.

The report and its implementation are designed to convince Washington's enemies as well as some 30 allies under its "nuclear umbrella" that Washington remains ready and willing to employ nuclear weapons. If these 30 allies are not reassured, Schlesinger warned, "some five or six of those nations are quite capable of beginning to produce nuclear weapons on their own, and the consequence is to add to proliferation. The strength of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, the credibility of that umbrella, is a principal barrier to proliferation."

According to the report, some 49 nations already have the technical know-how to produce nuclear weapons. That number is likely to grow with the expansion of nuclear power, the report said.

In a January 8 briefing on the report, Schlesinger specifically men-

tioned the need to reassure Tokyo and former Soviet republics now allied with Washington, who expressed concern that Washington may not be giving enough priority to its nuclear posture.

The Russian government, the report says, is exerting "strong pressures on its neighbors," modernizing its nuclear forces, and revising its nuclear doctrine to include "first strike options." Meanwhile, Beijing is "modernizing and increasing its nuclear forces, as well as transforming its conventional military capabilities." Both countries have ICBMs that can reach the United States.

The report argued against some U.S. military leaders who have suggested that Washington should remove its nuclear bombs from Europe. These bombs, the report said, play a political role and "remain a pillar of NATO unity," dissuading U.S. allies from developing their own nuclear arsenals.

Schlesinger was asked at the January 8 briefing what he thought the government of North Korea's current perception of the "U.S. nuclear deterrent" was. "I think that probably in today's situation, that they have developed confidence—perhaps misplaced confidence—that the United States, if it were to go after their nuclear capabilities, likely would do so with conventional forces," Schlesinger replied.

On the other hand, Schlesinger said, the government of Iran would regard a U.S. nuclear strike "as a much more



U.S. Navy

USS Shiloh during 2006 test of Aegis antiballistic missile technology in Pacific Ocean. U.S. Navy is expanding use of ABM-equipped warships as part of restoring its ability to use nuclear weapons unchecked. Military panel recommends making nuclear weapons higher priority.

likely development. As you may recall, in the recent Democratic primaries, Mrs. Clinton observed that we can obliterate you. Mrs. Clinton will be the secretary of state. And I don't think that remark will be forgotten in Tehran, even if it has been forgotten in this country."

The report alluded to what the U.S. rulers see as a problem with a nuclear-armed and increasingly unstable Pakistan. "Since some governments or their agents have supported terrorists, there is a strong possibility in the near future of facing terrorists armed with WMD," it said.

Washington is expanding and upgrading its antiballistic missile system to restore its ability to use nuclear weapons unchecked. The navy is upgrading its entire fleet of 18 warships

outfitted with antiballistic missile technology and adding three more such warships in the Atlantic. The U.S. military has also been setting up ABM radar in the Czech Republic, and interceptor missile batteries in Poland, a move that has irritated Moscow.

The report was critical of the fact that there is no overall plan to refurbish and replace nuclear weapon delivery systems, including ICBMs, bombers, nuclear submarines, and cruise missiles, over the next couple of decades. The report also pointed out as a problem that the United States is the only "nuclear state" without the capacity to mass produce warheads. "The problem is that we just do not want to think about nuclear capabilities."

Havana: panel to feature book on U.S., world politics

BY SAM MANUEL

The political themes presented in articles from issue 8 of *Nueva Internacional* will be discussed at one of the panel presentations that will be part of the annual Havana International Book Fair, which opens February 12. *Nueva Internacional* issue 8 is the Spanish-language translation of issue 14 of the Marxist magazine *New International*.

Participants in the panel include Carlos Borroto, deputy director of the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Havana; María del Carmen Barroso, international relations secretary of the National Association of Small Farmers; Gladys Hernández, director of international finances at the Center for the Study of the World Economy; and representa-

tives of the Federation of University Students and Pathfinder Press.

Pathfinder, which distributes *Nueva Internacional*, is presenting several new books at this year's fair, which it has participated in since 1986.

Among the articles featured in the magazine that will be discussed at the presentation is "The Clintons' Antilabor Legacy: Roots of the 2008 World Financial Crisis," by Jack Barnes, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party in the United States. It explains how the economic policies carried out by the Clinton administration enabled the U.S. capitalist rulers to build up the massive mortgage, household, corporate, and government debts, along with an array of derivatives, that are at the foundation of the current world capitalist economic crisis.

The article notes how under the Clinton administration the U.S. rulers stepped up their assaults on the rights and social gains of working people. These ranged from the elimination of "welfare as we know it"—which slashed millions of workers from welfare rolls, pushing many into minimum-wage jobs or onto unemployment lines—to the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which expanded the powers of the immigration police to deport workers without judicial review or appeal.

Another feature in the magazine is "The Stewardship of Nature Also

Falls to the Working Class: In Defense of Land and Labor." This statement by the Socialist Workers Party is a companion piece to the article "Our Politics Start with the World," published in *New International* no. 13. It argues that the conquest of state power by workers and farmers is the only road to the defense of labor and of nature from the ruinous consequences of the workings of capitalism. It explains why capitalist hysteria campaigns and catastrophism—from panics over epidemics to "natural disasters" to the dumping of carbon emissions into the atmosphere—aim to deflect attention from the real source of these threats to civilization: the capitalist mode of production and its world imperialist order.

Yet another topic of discussion from *Nueva Internacional* will be "Setting the Record Straight on Fascism and World War II," which explains the multiple class conflicts that are often obscured under the umbrella phrase "World War II," and the record of the communist movement in these battles.

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Cuba: former sugar workers discuss c

Workers at Havana province farm co-op assess progress in making tran

BY JONATHAN SILBERMAN,
MARTÍN KOPPEL,
AND MARY-ALICE WATERS

(Second of two articles)

MADRUGA, Havana province, Cuba—The year 2008 brought both important changes and new challenges for Cuba's farmers and workers engaged in agriculture.

Between January and September, working people and their revolutionary government began implementing a number of measures to increase food production and reduce imports, which account for some 60 percent of the food consumed on the island.

In the closing months of the year, three devastating hurricanes struck the island, Gustav and Ike in late August and early September, followed in November by Paloma, which hit the eastern provinces. Since then, with more than 90,000 totally destroyed homes still to be rebuilt and continuing food shortages, all efforts have been bent to making the most rapid recovery possible.

More than \$10 billion in damage was inflicted by the three storms. The destruction compounded the economic consequences of soaring costs for food imports during the first half of the year, combined with plummeting world market prices for nickel, which today is Cuba's main source of hard currency income.

Economy Minister José Luis Rodríguez reported to Cuba's National Assembly in late December that annual economic growth for 2008 was 4.3 percent, half the 8 percent growth projected 12 months earlier. The year, he said, was one of the toughest the country has faced economically since the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR and the loss of some 85 percent of Cuba's international trade agreements. It is expected that 2009 will be even more difficult.

Major steps by government

In the first months of 2008 the government took a number of steps to increase food production. These included:



Militant/Ben O'Shaughnessy

Above, Miguel Toledo (right), general secretary of National Union of Sugar Workers, joins discussion at workers assembly at Juan Abrantes cooperative in Havana province, February 2008. Also on platform, from left: farm manager Eugenio Pérez, union secretary Caridad Fundora, and Heriberto Alfonso, provincial union general secretary. Right, co-op member Dora Cairo takes floor during discussion.

- Doubling and in some cases tripling prices paid to farmers for their products.

- Expanding available credit for farm cooperatives.

- Increasing investments in agricultural machinery, including much-needed irrigation equipment.

- Opening local stores where farmers can buy a range of products, from protective clothing to fencing materials, chemicals, and fertilizer, previously supplied only through the national ministries of agriculture or sugar.

- Decentralizing agricultural decision making to assure that matters previously the purview of ministries at the national level will now be decided by "municipal delegations"—local branches of the ministry of agriculture.

- And, perhaps most importantly, making available, at no cost, the use of more than 1 million acres of idle land to anyone who wants to farm—be they individual farmers, cooperatives, or people not currently involved in agriculture.

In the never-ending attempt to "discover" and foster political differences between former Cuban president Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl, who was elected president in February, bourgeois government spokespeople and media commentators around the world have generally attributed the adoption of these and other measures to Raúl's supposedly more "pragmatic" openness to introducing capitalist market relations. News articles have portrayed the steps taken over the past year as a reversal of socialist policies advocated by Fidel.

In fact, the new measures have nothing to do with the capitalist rents and mortgages system, which for the overwhelming majority of small farmers around the world inevitably results in growing indebtedness and farm foreclosures. The steps had been long planned and would likely have been taken even sooner had Fidel Castro not been incapacitated by illness in July 2006.

The restructuring of the sugar agro-industry, initiated by the government in 2002 and explained by President Fidel Castro in a major address to sugar workers that year, was a precursor and precondition to the more recent steps. And, like the current measures, the restructuring of sugar production, which involved the closing of 90 of the country's least productive sugar mills and reallocation of 3.4 million acres of land from sugarcane cultivation to diversified food production, was carried out in the interests of workers and farmers. It was one of the most sweeping measures in the history of the revolution.

(See "Restructuring an industry: when workers decide" in last week's issue and articles in the Feb. 9 and 16, 2004, issues titled "Radical reorganization and cutback of Cuba's sugar industry" and "Cutback, restructuring of sugar industry: Cuban workers explain how it affects them.")

Challenges facing farmers

To learn more about the challenges of food production the recent measures were designed to address, *Militant* reporters joined Miguel Toledo, general secretary of the National

Union of Sugar Workers (SNTA), and Enrique Fernández, a member of the SNTA secretariat responsible for international relations, on a visit to the Juan Abrantes UBPC (Basic Unit of Cooperative Production). It is an agricultural cooperative in the Madruga municipality of Havana province.

Until 2002 the Juan Abrantes cooperative was devoted exclusively to sugar production. Part of a larger

state farm, it supplied cane to the now-closed Camilo Cienfuegos sugar mill in Santa Cruz del Norte. With the nationwide cutback and reorganization of that industry, the farm shifted to cattle raising for meat and dairy production, as well as to cultivation of root vegetables, fruit, and

trees. Few of those who chose to join the workforce there had previous agricultural experience with anything but sugarcane.

Our visit in February 2008 coincided with the monthly workers assembly at the cooperative, which we were invited to join, listening in as they discussed the problems they were attempting to resolve. Workers expressed pride in what they have accomplished, while focusing on the continuing challenges of making the transition to their new jobs and increasing production.

While output has grown, Eugenio Pérez, the cooperative's manager, reported, "We haven't reached most of the goals in our economic plan." The one exception he cited was meat production, which exceeded the year's targets.

"We can't be satisfied with surpassing last year's totals," said Dora Cairo, one of the workers who took the floor. "We should be achieving our current goals and making continual progress."

Pérez said shortages of supplies and equipment they were counting on had been central to their failure to meet production goals. Lack of water for irriga-



Homes destroyed by Hurricane Ike in Pinar del Río, Cuba, inflicted \$10 billion in damages. Despite storm damage and consequences of U.S. trade embargo, agricultural

For further reading

Land Reform and Farm Cooperatives in Cuba in *New International* no. 4

The revolutionary alliance between workers and peasants of Cuba, to break the yoke of imperialist domination and end exploitation, remains the backbone of the Cuban Revolution today. —\$14

Defending Cuba, Defending Cuba's Socialist Revolution in *New International* no. 10

By Mary-Alice Waters

In face of economic difficulties and challenges, Cuba's workers and farmers continue to defend their political power, independence, and sovereignty. —\$16

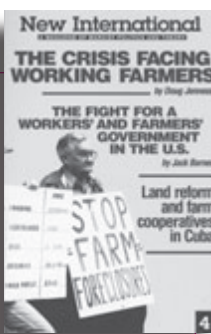
Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?

By Mary-Alice Waters

"To conclude that a socialist revolution in the U.S. is not possible, you would have to believe that the ruling families have found a way to 'manage' capitalism so there won't again be world-shaking economic, financial, or social crises."

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Challenges of boosting food production

Transition to new jobs growing food crops to reduce dependence on imports

tion had set back the planting of crops, for example. “We still don’t have the pump we requested” from the ministry of sugar, noted Julio Ramón. The ministry centralizes and prioritizes expenditures on imports needed by cooperatives like Juan Abrantes that continue to produce some sugarcane.

Last year, as part of their efforts to save fuel, workers here built the housing for an electric pump to replace the old diesel turbine. Months later, they were still waiting for the transformer, and for workers from the state electrical company to assemble and connect it.

The economic warfare against Cuba waged by the U.S. government exacerbates the difficulties faced in replacing antiquated equipment and reducing fuel consumption. The lack of tires, spare parts, and telephone service all came up as part of the wide-ranging discussion at the assembly on inefficiencies that hamper productivity and increase costs. Pérez reported that the cooperative consumes 10 liters of fuel a day just to deliver produce to the nearby village of Aguacate using a gas-guzzling tractor.

In addition, there is only one telephone for the entire community of more than 500 residents, with a limit of 400 minutes of monthly talk time. So workers burn even more fuel to travel to Bainoa, three miles away, for access to a second phone.

“We’re consuming precious fuel at a time of rising prices,” Pérez said. “It’s obvious that it makes much more sense to bring a telephone to Juan Abrantes than to take the co-op to the phone!”

María Elena Rodríguez, a technician, reported that the farm lacks an adequate supply of insecticides and medicines to kill ticks and intestinal worms that reduce the yield of dairy cattle and leave beef cattle skinny and anemic. “We also need to build quarters for milking.”

“Quarters for milking is something we can address immediately,” Pérez replied. But many other problems raised are questions of national development priorities and allocation of resources that cannot be resolved directly by workers at the cooperative.

For example, the telephone technology in the area is obsolete, noted Heriberto Alfonso, general secretary of the sugar workers union in Havana province, who participated in the assembly. “It’s being replaced with digital equipment. But the priority right now is the bigger municipalities. Digital equipment has already been installed in the town of Madruga, and we expect it to arrive here soon.”

“We need wire to fence off grazing areas,” said Raudelio Galván, head of the dairy section. “But we know the problem—it has to be imported.”

Questions such as these have been debated across Cuba in wide-ranging discussions following a speech by President Raúl Castro in the central city of Camagüey on July 26, 2007. Raúl called for a critical evaluation of “everything we do . . . to change concepts and methods that were appropriate at one point but have been bypassed by life itself.”

Following Castro’s speech, some 5,000 workplace assemblies were organized across the island, Toledo told the *Militant*. Problems affecting working people nationwide were discussed, such as income differentials, unequal access to hard currency, inadequate public transportation, shortages and poor training of teachers, and the decline in the number of family physicians. The assemblies also took up local questions such as incompetent managers and expensive services. *Militant* reporters found that such questions continue to figure highly in discussions across the island over the last year and a half.

“It’s through frank discussion that we can make progress,” said Toledo in remarks at the end of the workers assembly at Juan Abrantes, encouraging the kind of exchange that had just taken place. “You have to be critical. That’s the way to advance.”

Progress in milk production

One area where the most progress has been registered at the Juan Abrantes cooperative over the past year is milk production—a priority task nationwide.

The Cuban government guarantees a daily liter of milk for each child under seven. Adults with special dietary needs, including the elderly and women who are pregnant or nursing, are also guaranteed milk, and the government is working to expand the supply available to the general population.

Through the 1980s, Cuba was producing about 900 million liters of milk annually, Raúl Castro noted in his 2007 Camagüey speech. With the onset of the Special Period in the early 1990s—the economic crisis precipitated by the abrupt loss of import and export markets following the implosion of the Soviet bloc—milk production plummeted.

To meet the needs of the population, the government has imported powdered milk. As with foodstuffs in general, however, its price has climbed sharply.

Castro calculated that if domestic production did not continue to increase throughout 2008, then, based on July



Militant/Ben O’Shaughnessy

Members of Juan Abrantes cooperative, formerly sugar workers, are proud of the pineapple production on their farm. Above, co-op manager Eugenio Pérez shows pineapple fields to *Militant* reporters Jonathan Silberman and Mary-Alice Waters during February 2008 visit. In foreground is sugar workers general secretary Miguel Toledo.

2007 prices, Cuba would have to spend on milk imports alone more than three times what was laid out in 2004.

The Cuban president also pointed to the “absurd procedures” whereby domestically produced milk was being transported “hundreds of miles before reaching consumers who in many cases live just a few hundred meters from the dairy farm itself.” One consequence was an excessive use of diesel at a time of high fuel prices.

In 2008 domestic milk production rose 16 percent over the previous year, Osvaldo Martínez, head of the National Assembly’s commission for economic affairs, informed the Assembly in late December. The Cuban News Agency reports that locally produced milk is now being sold in 89 of Cuba’s 169 municipalities.

Cuba’s national cattle herd was halved during the worst years of the Special Period from a peak of 10 million head in the 1980s. Most starved to death, a result of the acute shortage of feed and fertilizer. There was widespread rustling and illegal slaughter of cattle for food.

The members of the Juan Abrantes UBPC are among those working hard to meet the challenge of reversing this decline.

“We started with 16 head of cattle in 2006. We’ve bought 190 since then and now, with breeding, the herd is at 635,” reported Eugenio Pérez with evident pride. “And all this has been achieved by former cane-growers.”

“We’ve been learning in the school of hard knocks,” Galván, head of the dairy section of the cooperative, told the Cuban newspaper *Trabajadores*. Fourteen workers currently tend 400 cows. “We have sufficient good grazing land for significantly increasing the herd” and dairy output, and workers have made big strides in clearing the land of a thorny bush called *marabú*, Galván noted.

But realizing the full potential involves shifting to artificial insemination and mechanized milking, which require greater investment.

Agricultural diversification

Workers at the Juan Abrantes cooperative produce a wide variety of foodstuffs, from peanuts to plantains, squash, and *boniato*, a sweet potato. As it does with the milk, the cooperative supplies both the local community and Cuba’s broader food distribution network.

Workers are particularly proud of the pineapple production. “Pineapples are nutritious—they serve an important need,” said Amado Brito, head of agricultural production on the cooperative. “And they fetch a good price.”

But growing them entails back-breaking work. One of the measures Cuba’s revolutionary leadership took to boost production was establishing a results-based payment system that increases wages for workers engaged in the most demanding physical labor. Through this system, those who work in the pineapple fields on the Juan Abrantes farm receive about 3,000 Cuban pesos a month. The dairy workers earn 1,200–1,300 pesos, and other workers on the farm receive 600–700. Average pay in Cuba is around 400 pesos a month.

Members of the administrative staff at Juan Abrantes, who are not eligible

Continued on page 10



Reuters

Cuba, September 2008. Three major hurricanes last year, impact of global capitalist economic contraction, production in Cuba grew 1.6 percent in 2008.



Farmers deliver milk in Trinidad, Cuba, October 2007. Dairy producers at Juan Abrantes co-op and other farms are working to increase milk production. A nationwide priority is to reduce dependence on costly imported powdered milk.

Cuba food production

Continued from page 9

for production bonuses, receive 480 pesos per month. Nine members of the co-op are not involved in production, including five members of the leadership council. Through discussions at their assemblies, workers there have decided to increase the wages of the administrators so they receive the average wage of the co-op's members.

Basic Units of Cooperative Production

The Juan Abrantes is a particular kind of cooperative known as a Basic Unit of Cooperative Production. The UBPCs were formed in 1993 out of what used to be state farms. Unlike workers on state farms, however, members of the UBPCs own their own harvest and sell it either to the state at government-set prices, to local schools and hospitals, maternity clinics and child-care centers, or directly to the population. The workers receive wages linked to production results. They receive a daily minimum wage supplemented through their individual share in the surplus they collectively generate.

The land remains nationalized. As with other land in Cuba, it cannot be sold, rented, or used as collateral for loans. As a result, in contrast with what happened in prerevolutionary Cuba or what happens today to debt-burdened farmers in capitalist countries, farmers cannot be subjected to foreclosure or eviction. They cannot lose use of their land.

The establishment of the UBPCs through the breakup and reorganization of state farms some 15 years ago was made necessary by the harmful consequences of economic planning and management policies copied from the regime in the Soviet Union. These policies had fostered the growth of a massive bureaucracy. It was not unheard of, for example, for a state farm to have more personnel in administrative positions than workers in production. The elimination of this bloated social layer and other changes opened up the possibility for workers and farmers themselves to establish greater control over the production of food and other crops.

But the difficult economic conditions at the depth of the Special Period, when these cooperatives were

launched, and depressed sugar prices on the world market, limited the gains that were made in confronting the crisis facing Cuban agriculture.

An agricultural development program established in 2007 brought benefits to UBPCs in Havana province, according to Julio Gómez, a provincial leader of the Communist Party, quoted in the April 30, 2008, *Granma*. Irrigation and access to fertilizer, pesticides, and other inputs improved.

But major problems remain, Gómez said. Of the 132 UBPCs in the province, 58 do not cover their production costs. Nationally, that is true for more than half of these cooperatives.

Juan Abrantes is one of the more efficient UBPCs in Havana province. "As with all such matters, this is a leadership question," Toledo said. Because of the progress there, it has been attracting new members in recent years. The workforce was 40 in 2002, when reorganization of the sugar agro-industry began. Today it is 153.

At the same time, many UPBCs have either been consolidated with other co-ops or dissolved.

The workers at Juan Abrantes continue to be members of the sugar workers union. When we asked a group of members of the cooperative whether they considered themselves workers or farmers, they emphatically replied, "We are workers!"

Thirty-eight of the 153 members are women. Women make up 60 percent of the members of the co-op's leadership council and both the secretary of the union and secretary of the Cuban Communist Party unit there are women.

"This reflects the leading role played by women members of the union nationally," Toledo remarked. "Women make up 21 percent of the union's membership but 32 percent of its leadership. Two of the six members of the



Reuters

Cuban president Raúl Castro speaks in Camagüey, Cuba, on July 26, 2007. He urged a "critical evaluation of everything we do" to confront economic and social challenges. Following speech, working people held 5,000 workplace assemblies nationwide to discuss such questions.

national secretariat are women."

Together, the UBPCs and state farms account for 65 percent of land farmed in Cuba but only 35 percent of agricultural production.

Small farmers are more productive. Tilling about one-third of the country's arable land, they account for more than half of agricultural production.

The amount of land under cultivation in Cuba dropped by 33 percent between 1998 and 2007, President Raúl Castro told the National Assembly last July. The new land distribution measures aim to slow and reverse this trend by expanding the numbers of small farmers and the acreage they till, while the leadership addresses the more difficult challenge of making the UBPCs the major source of foodstuffs in Cuba.

The 2008 hurricane damage had a serious impact on the pace of realizing these objectives. Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth in the west—historically on hurricane paths—were particularly

devastated. In the east, Holguín and Las Tunas, which were less prepared for the damage they encountered, were also very seriously hit.

A nationwide rebuilding effort is under way, including housing repair and construction, cleanup, and mobilizations of voluntary work in agriculture. Within four months, 22 percent of the half-million damaged houses were repaired.

Despite the combined effects of the hurricanes, the ongoing consequences of the U.S. embargo, and the acceleration of the world capitalist economic contraction, agricultural production grew 1.6 percent in 2008, economy minister José Luis Rodríguez, told the National Assembly in December.

As these efforts continue, the experiences of workers like those at the Juan Abrantes UBPC and the lessons they have learned will be part of the broad national discussion preparing the next congress of the Communist Party, scheduled for the end of 2009.

Missiles hit Pakistan 4 days into Obama gov't

Continued from page 3

Taliban fighters crossed over from Afghanistan January 11 and joined an assault on a military base in Pakistan's Mohmand Agency, to the north of Khyber.

Frontier Corps soldiers responded with air and artillery strikes over the following week and a ground offensive in which soldiers bulldozed or burnt down hundreds of homes and businesses.

Pakistani forces have also launched major offensives in several areas of the country, including Bajur and Swat. Civilians in the region have been killed by both sides, and hundreds of thousands have fled their homes. At least 200,000 people have left Swat alone—some 12 percent of the district's population.

Government troops have made gains in Bajur Agency and other areas, government officials have told the *News*. But Taliban forces have made major gains in Swat and now control nearly the entire district.

Under Taliban rule

As part of its latest offensive operations in the Swat valley, the Pakistani military issued an indefinite around-the-clock curfew in five towns beginning January 25. A press release from the Swat Media Centre said anyone found violating the curfew will be shot on sight.

A Taliban faction led by Maulana Fazlullah has set up *sharia* (Islamic) courts with public mutilations and executions throughout the Swat valley. The same day Pakistani officials established the curfew, a Taliban council headed by Fazlullah ordered some 50 national and provincial politicians as well as local *khans* (tribal chiefs) to turn themselves in to face Taliban justice.

Government employees, police, teachers, and female health-care workers have taken out newspaper ads announcing their resignations. Hundreds of businesses and industries have closed, leaving tens of thousands unemployed.

Mutilated bodies are hung and strewn almost daily in the famous

Green Square in Mingora, Swat's capital. Women do not shop. Even at the "Women's Market" a sign hangs outside saying, "No women allowed." Bus drivers in the region have removed stereos and televisions from buses in response to Taliban suicide bomb threats.

Taliban spokesmen have taken over radio waves. In parts of the valley, Taliban fighters have been collecting 10 percent of farmers' crops, a customary feudal tax, the *News* reports.

A January 15 deadline to end all girl's education in Swat, announced in late December, was extended to include neighboring Malakand. The Islamists have instilled fear by recently burning down or blowing up some 200 elementary and high schools in the area.

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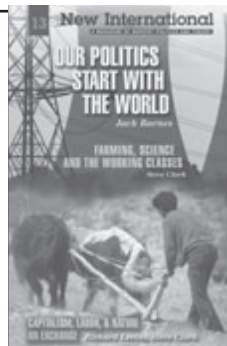
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U.S. troops out of Guantánamo!

In the wake of President Barack Obama’s executive order to close the prison at the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in a year, the revolutionary government of Cuba has called on Washington to end its illegal occupation of Cuban territory and get out of Guantánamo altogether.

Welcoming the promise to shut the infamous camp, Cuban president Raúl Castro called it “insufficient.” He said, “We demand that not only this prison but also this base should be closed and the territory it occupies should be returned to its legal owner—the Cuban people.”

All working people should support this demand.

The continued occupation of Guantánamo against the will of the Cuban people is an arrogant violation of Cuba’s right to self-determination. The U.S. naval base was first established when Washington occupied the island at the beginning of the 20th century. Under the terms of the agreement imposed on Havana at the time, the U.S. presence has no time limit unless both governments agree. Ever since 1959, when a revolutionary government of workers and peasants came to power in Cuba, Washington has simply ignored repeated requests from that government to withdraw from Guantánamo.

The naval base is one piece of the more than 50-year campaign by Washington to overthrow the Cuban Revolution—a campaign that has involved direct invasion; threat of nuclear annihilation; sabotage; assassination plots against the revolution’s leaders; an economic, commercial, and financial

embargo; travel restrictions; and most recently, the frame-up and imprisonment of the Cuban Five, working-class fighters arrested in 1998 in Miami, where they were keeping Havana informed of the activities of Cuban exile groups that have carried out armed attacks on Cuba with the U.S. government’s blessing.

The Guantánamo base is part of Washington’s attempt to punish the people of Cuba for the example they set in mobilizing by their millions to remove the capitalists and landlords from power in 1959. The new revolutionary government mobilized working people and youth to get rid of the Batista dictatorship’s torturers and dungeons, carry out a literacy campaign, grant land titles to landless peasants, nationalize companies to combat economic disruption by the capitalists, and uproot the institutions of race discrimination. It came to the aid of liberation struggles around the world, from Vietnam, to Africa, to Palestine, to the Black rights movement in the United States.

The working-class solidarity that is the hallmark of the Cuban Revolution stands in sharp contrast to the dehumanizing abuse meted out by U.S. jailers and torturers at the Guantánamo prison and at the even larger, more secretive prison Washington is expanding at the U.S. air base in Bagram, Afghanistan.

Shut down all U.S. “detention” centers immediately and release the prisoners! U.S. troops out of Guantánamo! Lift the embargo! Free the Cuban Five!

Iceland gov’t resigns amid bank collapses

Continued from front page

countries in Europe face similar instability resulting from the worldwide contraction in capitalist production. Massive and angry protests have taken place in Greece, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and other countries around Europe.

At the beginning of October the government took over Iceland’s three major banks. They had collapsed after an orgy of company takeovers across Europe, resulting in their debt growing to 10 times the size of the country’s gross domestic product. In November the government got a \$5.1 billion “rescue” loan from the International Monetary Fund and several European governments. The IMF projects that the government’s debt will rise to 108.9 percent of GDP by the end of 2009.

Unemployment shot up from 1.3 percent in September 2008 to 4.8 percent in December, according to the Directorate of Labour. Most layoffs have been in construction, followed by retail and industry. By January 28, unemployment had reached 7.8 percent. The Finance Ministry projects the GDP will contract by 9.6 percent in 2009.

Since mid-October thousands have joined weekly demonstrations in downtown Reykjavík called by “Voices of the people.” They have been held in a nationalist and resentful framework, denouncing “corrupt and incompetent” officials and demanding the resignation of the government. Since January 20 there had been rallies with protesters banging pots outside parliament from midday into the night. Police have in some cases attacked demonstrators with clubs and pepper spray. On January 21 they used tear gas for the first time since 1971.

As the rulers attempt to cut the social wage, working people are starting to respond. In the town of Hafnarfjörður, near Reykjavík, the staff of St. Joseph’s hospital has led a campaign against plans to close it, collecting 14,000 signatures.

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LETTERS

Gaza protests in Sweden

Some 12,000 people went out in the streets of Stockholm to protest the Israeli assault in Gaza. It was not only the largest protest in Stockholm in many years, but very large protests also took place in Gothenburg, Malmö, and other places in Sweden. It adds to the picture of the protests of working people around the world. Also interesting at the protests was the awareness of the danger of rising anti-Semitism. The Pathfinder titles *On the Jewish Question* by Leon Trotsky and *How Can the Jews Survive* by George Novack were among the best sellers to protesters in Stockholm.

Dag Tirsén
Stockholm, Sweden

Shell contract talks

Negotiations between the United Steelworkers (USW) and Royal Dutch Shell in pattern bargaining for all USW-represented refineries are not going well, according to reports filtering back to unionists in locals around the United States.

With most contracts set to ex-

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pire February 1, Shell’s wage offer of 2 percent, 2 percent, and 1.5 percent for a three-year deal has been rejected by the union. In local bargaining the oil refiners are demanding significant takebacks on work rules, wage premiums, bidding rights, and dues check-off in various sets of negotiations taking place.

Mitchel Rosenberg
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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

Joblessness

Continued from front page

210,000 layoffs, according to CNNmoney.com.

General Motors said it is laying off another 2,000 workers and will shut down 10 of its North American plants for a week or more this spring. Chrysler announced it had reached agreement with the United Auto Workers union to close its jobs bank, under which 1,000 laid-off employees received unemployment compensation. GM and Ford are seeking to do the same.

The crisis in the auto industry and in construction was felt by workers globally as British-owned Corus, Europe’s second largest steelmaker, slashed 2,500 jobs in the United Kingdom and 1,000 in other European countries; Nippon Steel Corp. of Japan announced it will reduce production through March by 4 million metric tons; Toyota said it is planning to lay off more than 1,000 workers in North America and the United Kingdom; and Hyundai and Kia in South Korea announced plans to cut auto workers’ hours.

In China, the government reported January 22 that 6 million workers, most of them “migrants” who left the countryside to work in large city factories, are now jobless. Many are returning to their villages.

U.S. Medicaid rolls grow

Mounting unemployment and the lack of affordable health care is forcing growing numbers of U.S. workers and their families to apply for Medicaid.

Although so-called Cobra legislation allows many insured employees to continue health coverage for 18 months after leaving a job, the vast majority of workers are either not covered by Cobra or cannot afford the premiums, according to a study by The Commonwealth Fund.

Some 34 percent of the workforce would not be eligible for Cobra if laid off. They are employed by companies that don’t provide health insurance or are too small to qualify under Cobra regulations or are excluded by other provisions, the study said. For workers eligible to continue insurance under Cobra, the premium payments can be as much as six times higher than what they paid when they were working.

The percent of the population on Medicaid has increased up to 10 percent in the last year in a number of states and will probably increase even further, the January 22 *New York Times* reported.

In Kentucky, where the state budgeted for 1,000 new Medicaid patients each month, 3,000 have been added monthly since June 2008. The *Times* said that over the last year one-sixth of the U.S. population, or 50 million people, were receiving Medicaid at any one time.

State governments have stepped up their attacks on health care as the cost has grown. The Nevada state legislature is considering major cuts in the 2009–2011 health budget. If approved, 8 of 11 rural health clinics in the state would be closed; 126 positions in the Southern Nevada mental health program eliminated; wages for personal care assistants cut by \$3 an hour, to \$15.52; and hospital intake reduced by 5 percent.

Payments to providers have also been cut in California, Minnesota, New York, South Carolina, and Utah.

Medicaid capped in Rhode Island

The state government in Rhode Island has put a \$12 billion cap on Medicaid spending for the next five years as part of a deal under which it will have the power to alter Medicaid programs normally regulated by the federal government. The *Providence Journal* reported that “only those in the greatest need would be guaranteed coverage under the new system, according to Department of Human Services Director Gary Alexander.” The state has an official 10 percent unemployment rate, higher than any other state except Michigan, where the rate is 10.6 percent.

The Labor Department reported that new jobless claims for the week ending January 17 were 589,000, the highest since November 1982. The total number of people receiving unemployment checks is now 4.6 million, up from 2.7 million a year ago.

At least two states are borrowing federal money to pay for unemployment compensation. The government of South Carolina borrowed \$15 million to pay January unemployment checks. The New York State unemployment fund has run out of money. It borrows \$90 million a week now in order to pay claimants.