Bringing Back the Disappeared

Decades after murdering 30,000 people, Argentina’s military dictators may finally face justice.

By Joseph Huff-Hannon

PAGE 8

Forensic anthropologists Luis Fondebrider and Gabriela Ghidini analyze the remains of a young man in Buenos Aires.

PHOTO: JOSEPH HUFF-HANNON
TUE OCT 5
6pm • FREE
BOOK PARTY: THE LAST SOUL OF HIGHER EDUCATION. Come celebrate the publication of Ellen Schwartz’s new book, which discusses the corporate assault on academic freedom. Tamiment Library
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RALLY & MARCH: NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION TO DEFEND PUBLIC EDUCATION. In New York, supporters of public education will rally then march through Harlem from 125th St. to the City College of New York. Have a few dollars to contribute? Building 163 125th St. marchlyny@gmail.com 4defendeducation.org

SAT OCT 9
8pm • $15 suggested
SHOW: UMPHREY & DAVE LIPPMAN. Page, who just released his 19th album, Ghost Bike, has served as a model for many of today’s songwriters. Lipman, a satirical folk singer with a social justice bent, has thrilled audiences of all ages with his post-psychedelic stonies. Doors open at 7:30pm. The Community Church of New York Unitarian Universalist, 40 East 15th St. 212-769-3903 3peoplesvoicecafe.com

SUN OCT 10
pm • $12
CONCERT: MOUNTAINS AND GARDENS SAVE US. Join Roland Bily and The Church of Life After Shopping gospel choir as they defend community gardens and pressure USPS Bldg to withdraw its financing of racist restaurant removal coaling in Appalachia.
Highline Ballroom, 431 West 16th St. 212-314-5994 highlineballroom.com

Sun • 7pm • FREE
CONCERT: JAMSTERDAM 350: This concert is one part of Jam’s ongoing effort to raise awareness about the climate crisis. Come listen to local musicians and support a great cause — and then go to the Green School in Brooklyn.
Sullivan Hall, 505 6th Ave
888-468-7019 nyjamsterdam@gmail.com

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FESTIVAL: 23rd ECOST. This year’s ECOST, sponsored by West Side Cultural Center, will feature dynamic exhibits — including the Sources of Energy. Other than Oil exhibit — environmental groups, a recycling Olympics, music and dancing. Battery Park City Esplanade Plaza, South of North Cove Marina. 212-496-0300 ecofest.org

TUE OCT 12
6pm • FREE
PANEL DISCUSSION: BLACK WOMEN & COMMERCIALIZED BEAUTY. Join panellists Dr. Dana-an Davis, professor of Urban Studies at Queens College and Eisa Ulen Richardson, author of Crystalle Mouthing, for a fresh and contemporary perspective on this complex and controversial subject.
CUNY Graduate Center, 6024, 365 5th Ave • 212-817-8757 events.cuny.edu

WED OCT 13
6pm • FREE
EXHIBIT OPENING: INTERRUPTED LIFE: INCARCERATED MOTHERS IN THE UNITED STATES. A dramatic exhibit of painting, drawings, sculpture and photography that documents the experiences of incarcerated persons in the United States.
CUNY Graduate Center, 6030, 365 5th Ave • 212-817-8757 events.cuny.edu

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National Black Theatre, 2031 5th Ave
212-722-3800 queerblackcinema.org

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Varying • FREE
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Columbia University, Wood Auditorium at Avery Hall, 412 125th Rm 212-951-3800 preservationandclimatechange.org

THU OCT 19
6pm • FREE
ART OPENING: THE CRUDE AND THE RARE. The Crude and the Rare is a group exhibition that features works in photography, video, sculpture, drawing and other mediums that address the political economy of precious substances such as gold, diamonds and oil and the tenuous effects of globalization.
41 Cooper Gallery, Cooper Union 212-353-4200 cooper.edu

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Harlem Healthcare in Critical Condition

By Allan MacOwen

This past July, Harlem workers and residents were hit with yet another blow in the ongoing assault on living standards for working New Yorkers when the 200-bed North General Hospital in Harlem filed for bankruptcy and closed its doors.

The closing left 1,000 employees, most of them Harlem residents — including 900 members of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East — unemployed. Healthcare services for the community will deteriorate further, as other area hospitals are forced to bear additional burdens — such as 36,000 more emergency room admissions per year — with no additional resources.

The New York City political establishment — including Gov. David Paterson; Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Rep. Charles Rangel; Calvin Butts, the chairman of the board of trustees at North General and longtime pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church; and North General President Samuel J. Daniels, the chairman of the board of trustees at North General and long-time pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church; and North General President Samuel J. Daniels — engineered the hospital's shutdown behind closed doors. They then took steps to minimize protest.

First, employees were given only four days' notice of the closure, even though the board of trustees decided on the move a week earlier and the plan had obviously been in the works for weeks. In the week before the announcement, Daniels assured union members that he was unaware of any plans to close the hospital.

Second, a public relations campaign downplayed the closing and assured Harlem residents that their healthcare needs would be addressed. The New York Beacon, a weekly newspaper in Harlem, trumpeted the bankruptcy deal as having "saved" the hospital. Rangel and Butts assured the community that healthcare in Harlem was only getting better — an assertion belied by the fact that Butts stated under oath to the bankruptcy court that the hospital "has been vital to providing the residents of Harlem with the health services they critically require."

Bloomberg similarly brushed off concerns about increased emergency loads at other medical facilities, saying, "These things do have a habit of sort of working themselves out." But workers at other hospitals — which have had to pick up the slack not just from North General, but from other recently closed city hospitals — say the situation in emergency rooms has been chaotic and overwhelming.

Butts also assured North General workers that they would be able to find jobs elsewhere, including the new Institute for Family Health (IFH), a clinic take over the building. These declarations have proved similarly hollow — IFH has so far employed fewer than 10 of the 900 union members dismissed at North General.

While the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) announced on Sept. 17 that it would issue a formal written complaint against IFH for violating numerous federal labor laws, the NLRB’s decision is only a minor victory.

Though the complaint acknowledges 1199 SEIU’s grievance against IFH for bringing in a clinic take over the building, the NLRB is under increasing pressure to reduce its overall deficit to $762 million — which amounts to just over 5 percent of investment bank Goldman Sachs’ net profits in 2009.

This article was originally published on SocialistWorker.org.

FBI Raids Peace Activists

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation served 11 antiwar activists with subpoenas and raided eight residences across the Midwest Sept. 24. Activists in three other states, including California and North Carolina, were also approached for questioning in what warrants say is an investigation into material aid for terrorists.

"I was downstairs with my 6-year-old daughter and my 7-year-old daughter running around in her underwear trying to get me to let her watch cartoons," said Steff Yorek, whose home was one of five raided in the Minneapolis area. Eight officers broke through her door with a battering ram, and later left with boxes that included computers and the journal of the recently deceased grandfather of her partner, Jess Sundin. Two homes were raided in Chicago, and five homes in Minneapolis, along with the offices of the Anti-War Committee.

Protests were held in 19 cities across the country in advance of the activists’ October court dates.

— José Alcoff

A Dream Deferred

FINAL DREAMS:

DREAM Act activists rallied outside Sen. Charles Schumer’s office on Sept. 21 to pressure politicians for support. The act would offer undocumented youth raised in the U.S. a chance at citizenship if they commit to two years in the military or college. Although it did not pass in September, numerous organizations are pushing for the DREAM Act to be reintroduced as a stand-alone bill. PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY

‘FBI RAIDS HAVE GOT TO GO’: More than 100 activists marched outside FBI headquarters in Chicago to protest recent raids. PHOTO: JORGE MUYICA/MEXICO DEL NORTE
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barrier-breaking by sex/gender radicals from across the trans-spectrum.

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ist and terrorist academic Ryan Conrad for a reading from his new book and for a discussion of the queer

AGAINST EQUALITY: QUEER CRITIQUES OF GAY MARRIAGE

by Costas Panayotakis

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

The deepening economic crisis is confronting us with the harsh realities of the undemocratic capitalist system we labor under most responsibly for this crisis, such as the Wall Street banks, have been bailed out while corporate America is posting record profits once again. However, corporations are not hiring and the banks are not lending. As a result, the real unemployment rate is above 16 percent and the official poverty rate of 14.3 percent is the highest since 1994.

To add insult to injury, after watching trillions of dollars in public money being handed over to banks around the world, people are told that their governments must adopt austerity policies that sacrifice people's lives in the name of reducing the deficit. In the United States, the mainstream consensus ignores the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs and homes and who find themselves destitute as meager unemployment benefits run dry. On the state level, battling the deficit means massive layoffs and budget cuts that decimate healthcare, education and other social services that are more urgent than ever.

As a student of society and an active member of the union representing the faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York, I wonder: Where is the labor movement in all this? The relative quiescence of U.S. workers, when compared to other parts of the world, both helps to explain the current state of affairs and bodes ill as to the likelihood of reversing it.

REVERSING THE DECLINE

Yet reverse it we must. What it will take, however, is a serious rethinking of the American labor movement's ineffectual long-term strategies, as well as the kind of direct action we saw in the case of the Republic Workers in Chicago, the Stella D'oro workers in the Bronx and, most recently, the Motz's workers in uptown New York.

Prospects for a reversal seem dim. Labor has been in decline since the 1950s, following the gains won in bitter struggles by ordinary Americans and the working class during the Great Depression and the mid-20th century. These struggles resulted in the postwar social contract between labor and capital and a rudimentary welfare state. In these struggles, which included general strikes as well as tactical innovations such as wildcat strikes, labor lifted theureka — too risky, they said, in this depression — but instead to governments, especially the United States.

Lenders now demand austerity programs that effectively shift the costs of the crisis and of governments' responses from the corporations and the wealthy to everyone else. Austerity means laying off government employees and cutting public services, thereby freeing up money to pay the interest and principal what the governments borrowed.

By mid-2007, corporations, governments and individuals were finding it difficult to borrow funds. Prior to this, banks made many bad, uncollectible loans because they failed to properly assess risks. Many enterprises and individuals could no longer repay loans because their businesses, wages and salaries were not growing fast enough. As private borrowers defaulted, banks’ profits and their capital shrank. Rising default risks led banks to cut private lending, further undermining their profits.

CAPITALIST FREEZE

In the fall of 2008 the capitalist system ground toward a halt as the credit system froze. Desperate to unfreeze credit, governments guaranteed bank solvency and many private debts, invested massively in and lent to private banks, and became the ultimate borrower of a huge portion of loanable funds. Banks everywhere lent to govern-

Austerity Hustle

By Rick Wolff

The global capitalist crisis that started in 2007 has been neither short nor shallow. The real unemployment rate, the “U6” rate, has zoomed from 8 to more than 16 percent and remained there since May 2009. Home foreclosures have also soared and some eight million households are currently behind on their mortgage or in foreclosure, according to the Wall Street Journal. Benefits are being cut, real median household income is declining and jobs are increasingly insecure. And analysts are adopting the term “precariat” to describe the growing class of insecure workers.

Making matters worse, governments in many advanced capitalist countries have poured massive sums of money, chiefly into banks and other large corporations, to try to restart their moribund economies. Because governments dared not tax corporations and the rich to get those massive sums, they instead borrowed the money, mostly from those same two groups, by selling them bonds, bills and notes.

Governments borrowed and spent trillions to rescue and stimulate major banks and other corporations facing collapse. They purchased private banks’ bad loans, increased the money supply and lent it to banks at government-approved interest rates, invested huge sums in banks and other corporations and finally bought non-financial corporations’ products. The lenders to those governments included many rescued corporations. Major banks used bailouts not to lend to consumers and businesses — too risky, they said, in this depression — but instead to governments, especially the United States.

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AFL-CIO's recent endorsement of Andrew Cuomo demonstrates, this way of thinking prompts labor leaders to endorse even openly anti-labor politicians running on a platform of austerity and freezing public sector wages.

**WHY ECONOMIC RIGHTS?**

Rather than continuing with its failed defensive posture, the labor movement has an opportunity to catalyze a new political and economic project that challenges the undemocratic nature of capitalism. The principle animating such a project has to be economic democracy, meaning the right of all human beings to have an equal say over the economic decisions that affect their lives as well as the goals, priorities and nature of the economic system of which they are a part. Economic democracy could bring about social, economic and political changes to empower working people and make it last for more than a year. Neither effort succeeded. Yet the stimulus was paid for by trillions borrowed from lenders who now demand austerity programs. The implied threat is if austerity is not imposed then governments will face higher interest rates on new and renewed loans or will be denied loans, crippling governments’ usual operations.

Most political leaders fear that the banks’ threats, if carried out under their watch, would end their careers. This was precisely the situation faced by Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Hungary and other European countries as the crisis unfolded.

Austerity policies reveal a political conflict always simmering inside capitalism: who will pay increased taxes and who will suffer being inflicted upon them. In addition, the collapse of Soviet Communism has increased doubts that a radical alternative to capitalism is possible while reducing the willingness of the capitalist class to make any concessions to workers.

Many workers are also wary of engaging in militant action because the difficulty of finding another job amid an economic recovery that they hope will strengthen their hand in their negotiations with employers. As the New York State AFL-CIO’s recent endorsement of Andrew Cuomo demonstrates, this way of thinking prompts labor leaders to endorse even openly anti-labor politicians running on a platform of austerity and freezing public sector wages.
When Manny Babbitt Came Home

By Marti Hiken

Manny Babbitt was walking down the street in Sacramento, Calif., on a foggy December night in 1980. An oncoming car startled him. He heard the movie Story of G.I. Joe airing on a television set, complete with the bombs and guns screaming at him. Leah Schendel was watching the movie at home with her screen door open. Manny’s mind flashed from the dark green and black trash bags beside him outside Leah’s apartment to the green and black body bags loaded onto the helicopters in Khe Sanh, Vietnam. He hurried into her apartment to turn off the television. And, Manny did what he was supposed to do — ensuring that the enemy was dead and his fellow soldiers were protected. He went through the ritual of meditation. He screamed for help. “I am going to hurt someone.”

JUSTICE GONE AWRY
In December 1980, Bill Babbitt, Manny’s brother, made the hardest decision of his life. He told the police that he suspected his younger brother of having killed Schendel. Manny had come to live with Bill and his wife Linda in Sacramento that September after being released from a mental institution. Manny had been suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms ever since he returned from Vietnam in 1969. His life revolved around drugs, medications, internal combat and mental institutions.

Linda called Bill at work one day and said that she had found coins stuffed around the house, and that Manny had been buying the kids gifts with extra money. That night Bill found a little choo-choo piggy bank packed with rolls of nickels, along with a cigarette lighter engraved with the initials “L.S.” He looked through the newspaper and found an article about an old woman who was killed in their neighborhood earlier that week. It hit Bill hard. Leah Schendel had been playing the nickel slots in Reno just days before the murder.

Manny’s brother turned him in to the police. He wanted to get help for Manny. He thought he was doing the right thing and didn’t know what else to do. He was promised counseling and support for Manny.

The trial in 1982 against Manny was a sham. His court-appointed lawyer failed to raise any coherent argument around post-traumatic stress disorder. The lawyer drank heavily, was poorly prepared for trial and gathered no background information. Years later, the lawyer pleaded no contest to charges of embezzling money from a client’s trust fund and resigned from his legal practice.

Manny was found guilty by an all-white jury and was sentenced to death on May 14, 1982.

“should be the focus for discussion groups of activists as they attempt to unite their radical practice with theorizing a radical, democratic, and Marxist alternative for the future.”

—BILL FLETCHER, JR.

REAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

by Michael A. Lebowitz

“should be the focus for discussion groups of activists as they attempt to unite their radical practice with theorizing a radical, democratic, and Marxist alternative for the future.”

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"should be the focus for discussion groups of activists as they attempt to unite their radical practice with theorizing a radical, democratic, and Marxist alternative for the future."

—BILL FLETCHER, JR.
In prison, Manny Babbitt studied Tai Chi. He became a chef and read philosophy and eastern religious books. He read and drew. He taught and counseled.

In March 1998, the Marine Corps sent two officers to pin a Purple Heart on Manny in the warden's office at San Quentin, life. Manny was shackled as he stood proud and tall. No case brought more division and heartbreak to the people of California than the case of Manny Babbitt. It arose in the heat of the law and order and victims' rights campaigns that had begun in the 1980s and spread throughout the nation.

California's Gov. Gray Davis, himself a veteran, refused to commute the execution for Manny Babbitt, in spite of the pleas from thousands of people and the support of veterans across the country.

Marine Lance Corporal Manny Babbitt was executed one day after his 50th birthday and one minute after midnight. He was killed by lethal injection at San Quentin Prison.

He did not remember the murder of the 78-year-old grandmother he killed; instead, he continued to live in Vietnam, where even in daylight enemy soldiers were invisible behind a veil of jungle and mist. “Semper Fi” was his salutation.

Bill Babbitt watched his brother's execution, and he cried. The Marines cried. The lawyers cried. The warden cried. The guards cried. Manny saluted as well as he could; he was shackled tightly.

THE HYPOCRISY OF WAR

Manny's case remains alive because closure cannot occur through vengeance. The politicians involved in Manny's case answered the misguided needs of the victim's family, but ignored their own roles in the wars they support, in the realities facing the veterans when they return home, the very atrocities of those wars, and the crimes against humanity involved in the death penalty itself.

These politicians who have never been in war, who have never fought in Khe Sanh, in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Somalia, who never dropped the nuclear bombs, smelled the burning flesh, wiped and peeled their own skin off their bones, burned and charred from napalm, how can they wholeheartedly support killing?

Diane Feinstein stated it very succinctly in the Military Honors Preservation Act, May 1998:

“A member of the United States armed forces may not enter a federal, state, or local penitentiary for the purpose of presenting a medal to a person incarcerated for committing a serious violent felony.”

This bill ensures “that those who have served this nation with distinction will not see their service medals devalued by the crimes of others,” said Feinstein, who supports funding wars, never having served in one.

The Schendel family stated that it was through Manny's death that they felt their family could begin to heal. As though veterans could heal by continued killing.

Manny was executed in a legalized war field. Its name is either Khe Sanh or San Quentin, death row.

Marti Hiken is the director of Progressive Avenues (progressiveavenues.org). She is the former chair of the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force and the former associate director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.

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During those years of blood and fire, this temporary dictatorship that seized power in the spring of 1976 was busy providing diplomatic cover. In the calculus of the Cold War, Argentina was just one of a number of strategic “security states,” bulwarks against “international communism” generally prepared up with U.S. military aid and bilateral relations. The case of Argentina was not exceptional, President Carter was quick to point out recently. “If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly,” then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Rafael Videla. “The Indepen...
Antonio Smith, a 25-year-old “bananero” or banana worker, hailed from the modest Panamanian town of Changuinola, smack in an expanse of tropical flatlands bordering on Costa Rica and the Caribbean Sea. A leader in the Banana Industry Workers’ Union (Sitraibana), Smith and his fellow workers, mostly indigenous, were veterans of street actions to defend gains they had won in wages and working conditions over the years. Smith was also a member of the Cambio Democratico party and campaigned for Ricardo Martinelli in his successful bid for the presidency in 2009.

This past June 12, Martinelli’s government pushed Law 30 through the National Assembly after just four days of deliberation. Named the Chorizo Law, it mashed together parts of different bills that outlaw union shops, eliminate environmental impact surveys for industrial projects, make it more difficult to hold police accountable for abuses and killings and allow the permanent replacement of striking workers.

Observers claim Martinelli’s government is trying to undermine Panama’s labor laws to help win passage of the U.S.-Panama Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2007 but has been stalled in the U.S. Congress. According to a recent report by the Congressional Research Service, “Panama’s relatively high labor costs (for the hemisphere) and inflexible labor laws can be a frustration if not an impediment to U.S. foreign direct investment.”

The Chorizo Law’s impact was immediately felt in Changuinola, home to the Bocas Fruit Company, a subsidiary of the notoriously anti-labor Chiqua Brands. Bocas announced days after the passage of Law 30 that it would no longer collect union dues from workers on its huge banana plantations, violating its contract with Straiabana. All 4,200 bananeros at Bocas, including Antonio Smith, launched a 48-hour strike on July 2.

With the support of the Labor Ministry, Bocas declared the strike illegal and locked the workers’ pay, including two weeks of back pay. This only inflamed the protest in Changuinola as banana workers extended their strike, joined by 3,500 more bananeros affiliated with a cooperative; students walked out of local public schools; and trees were felled across streets to hinder riot police being flown in. Demonstrations grew further as members of two indigenous communities, the Ngabe and Nabo, streamed into the town to protest evictions by Marti- nelli’s administration, which wants to build hydroelectric dams on their lands.

On July 8, bananeros marched on a local highway. National police arrived in armor, on foot and in a helicopter and began shooting teargas and buckshot into the crowd. Dozens fell. Antonio Smith took his last breath. Another bananero, Virgilio Castillo, was shot, handcuffed, beaten and executed by police, according to a report by Human Rights Everywhere. The government admitted two bananeros were shot to death, and human rights investigators said three young children and an elderly protest- er died of asphyxiation from tear gas. Hun- dreds were wounded, including 47 people who lost one or both eyes.

ARRESTED MOVEMENT

In the ensuing days, mass protests shut down towns in Bocas, and the national police arrested 300 union leaders and activists from around the country; some were snatched while meeting to plan a response to the killings. Migrants from unions and the left burned down a local bank, blockaded more streets and took captive three police who were released within days.

Martinelli cancelled plans to fly to the World Cup in South Africa, and his government announced on July 11 that provisions in Law 30 relating to labor, the environment and police would be suspended for 90 days while it convened a “national dialogue.”

Not one to back down, Martinelli told the media the same day, “We will not allow the banana industry in Changuinola to disappear, thanks to union leaders ... who have no idea of what democracy is in a country and who want to end the rule of law.” Panama’s two main labor federations held a successful nationwide general strike on July 13 and battle lines were drawn.

“This is war. Anything can happen now,” says Cesar Santos, an activist based in Chiriqui, just south of Bocas del Toro province, where Changuinola is located.

MARTINELLI COMES TO TOWN

A white, ultra-conservative grocery chain magnate, Martinelli seemed an unlikely candidate to capture the presidency in a his- torically rebellious country of 3.3 million people, nearly 90 percent of whom are of African, indigenous or Asian descent. Marti- nelli campaigned in favor of a flat tax and neoliberal policies opposed by most Panamanians. He was nicknamed Loco because of his hot temper and a rumored bipolar dis- order. His supporters adopted it as a badge of honor with shirts and bumper stickers declaring “Los Locos Somos Más” (“The lunatics are more”).

Martinelli found an opening in the pe- rennial issues of crime and corruption and by opposing legislation by his predecessor, President Martin Torrijos, to militarize secu- rity forces and increase surveillance.

While the Panamanian left is active, it has no electoral organ. All the major par- ties are on the right. Relative to these, Torrijos’ party, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), is on the left. The party of the former military regime, the PRD pushed through the free-trade agreement, favored privatization, kept a tempered foreign policy and was socially moderate. But it began to re-militarize the national police and coast guard in a country whose constitution, im- posed by the United States after it invaded in 1989, forbids a military. Toward the end of its administration, the PRD alienated some supporters by killing three members of Sun- tracs, the Marxist construction union.

Like all Panamanian politicians, Marti- nelli’s campaign against corruption meant cracking down on past corruption so his cronies could have a freer hand to skim the treasurys. In alliance with personality-based far-right parties se- cured his election victory.

And the army, a stable of race- horses was off, bickering with Venezuela, sending Cuban doctors who provide free medical care packing and supporting the coup d’état in Honduras. Martinelli has also come under fire for trying to appoint par- tisans to the Supreme Court and rengeniting on promises to demilitarize the police and because many political appointments and handpicked candidates have been mired in corruption scandals.

Many Panamanians were especially upset when, in a meeting with Obama last year, Martinelli opened four naval bases to the Pentagon. U.S. forces first landed in Panama in 1904 and were forced out in 2000 after decades of struggle.

THE CHORIZO LAW

Leticia Montilla, a law student in the capital of Panama City, says chrizo “may be need- ed for a lot of recipes, but you never really want to know what it is.” That’s how the opposition characterizes two new laws passed in June by the National Assembly after being ground and molded together by Martinelli’s government to read them, and the government tried to bury the official publication in an obscure document.

Law 30 begins with reforms of the civil aviation industry and segue to measures such as:

• Ending environmental impact studies on projects that are in the “social interest,” whether public or private, such as highways, hydroelectric dams, and strip mines.

• Banning mandatory duties for workers in union shops, which makes union-bust- ing much easier by allowing employers to pressure workers individually to drop away from the union.

• Allowing employers to fire striking workers and permanently hire scabs.

• Criminalizing street blockades, which are a daily occurrence in Panama.

• Prohibiting court action or pre-trial incarceration for murder and other charges.

Law 14 was next, offering concessions for mining companies and requiring nonprofits to conduct monthly audits online, which could force many small NGOs that lack in- ternet access to shutter.

The laws have led Panama’s leftist social movements to overcome some of their dif- ferences. Thousands of environmentalists hit the streets in their biggest protest yet, accompanied by union workers, students and indigenous activists. Radical unions of the CONUSI labor federation and the rank and file within the moderate CONATO federation organized further protests, accompanied by environmental and feminist groups.

On June 28, a general strike and large marches were held with different unions or- ganizing their own actions. Suntracs workers constructing new locks in the Canal

**By José Alcoff**

**A SEA OF RED FLAGS:** Construction work- ers march against the Chorizo Law. PHOTO: ERIC JACKSON.
While Martínez’s administration called for a national dialogue, it all but uninvited CONUSI. The National Front for the Defense of Economic and Social Rights, an umbrella group that includes CONUSI, also stayed away, pointing to the government-picked moderates and businesspeople who dominated the meeting. Unity of the Integral People’s Struggle (ULIP) is the radical wing of the labor federation. Some 80,000 strong, it includes banana, construction and manufacturing workers and the main teachers union.

The National Confederation of Organized Workers (CONATRO): Moderate labor federation of 150,000 mainly drawn from the healthcare, manufacturing and government sectors.

Law 30: Passed immediately after the Chorizo Law, it imposed multiyear prison sentences for street blockades and making it difficult to prosecute police officers for various offenses, including murder.

Law 14: Passed immediately after the Chorizo Law, it imposed multiyear prison sentences for street blockades and making it difficult to prosecute police officers for various offenses, including murder.

Suntracs: A Marxist union of 40,000 construction workers, it is the largest union in CONUSI and a leading force in Frenadeso.

Sitribana: Approximately 4,000 banana workers, predominantly indigenous, who live and work in Western Panama.

Democratic change (CD): Socially conservative, this party represents the wealthier and whiter sectors of Panama and it leads a coalition of right-wing parties.

José Alcoff is a Panamanian-American freelance reporter. He can be contacted at jose.alcoff@gmail.com

Glossary

Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD): Political party founded by the Gen. Omar Torrijos dictatorship in the 1970s. The PRD favors the re-militarization of Panama and last controlled the presidency from 2004 to 2009.

The National Front for the Defense of Economic and Social Rights (Frenadeso): Founded in 2003 during the successful struggle against the privatization of social security. A Marxist-based umbrella group that focuses on street actions over electoral politics, it includes radical student groups, the banana workers union, construction workers union and CONUSI, the radical labor federation.

Unity of the Integral People’s Struggle (ULIP): Founded in 2004 by CONATRO, a moderate coalition, ULIP is connected to the left wing of the PRD.

The National Union Council (CONUSI): The radical wing of the labor federation. Some 80,000 strong, it includes banana, construction and manufacturing workers and the main teachers union.

The National Confederation of Organized Workers (CONATRO): Moderate labor federation of 150,000 mainly drawn from the healthcare, manufacturing and government sectors.

Law 30: Passed immediately after the Chorizo Law, it imposed multiyear prison sentences for street actions over electoral politics, it includes radical student groups, the banana workers union, construction workers union and CONUSI, the radical labor federation.

Congress of Nationalities: The main teachers union.

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Austerity

Continued from page 5

suffer decreased government spending? Millions of workers in Greece, France and elsewhere in Europe have organized general strikes under the slogan, “We have paid for their profits; we will not pay for their crisis.” Millions more mobilized by trade unions and their political allies participated in a Europe-wide day of protest on Sept. 29.

They are challenging the efforts by Europe’s capitalists and politicians to pass austerity programs cutting public payrolls and services. In the United States, the continuing crisis and state and local austerity embitter millions who have yet to replicate Europe’s mass mobilizations. Many Americans blame Obama and the government, seek scapegoats such as immigrants, and threaten to vote for Republicans, who favor austerity even more than Democrats.

It is not uncommon to read or hear comments such as the following: An Athens trucker says, “Public employees here don’t work hard enough, so it is reasonable to cut their pay.” A Parisian clerk thinks it “reasonable to postpone the official retirement age a few years; we all live longer now.” A New York lab technician son’s a few years; we all live longer now.” A crisis and state and local austerity embitter millions who have yet to replicate Europe’s mass mobilizations. Many Americans blame Obama and the government, seek scapegoats such as immigrants, and threaten to vote for Republicans, who favor austerity even more than Democrats.

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Yet, if austerity is to be imposed, there are other, far more “reasonable” options to consider.

A different kind of austerity — collecting income taxes from U.S.-based multinational corporations and wealthy individuals — could generate vast revenues. For example, the United States currently levies no property tax on the trillions of dollars of intangible property such as stocks and bonds. If Washington levied a small tax on anyone’s intangible property over, say, $1,000,000, it would raise huge new revenues, reduce deficits and weaken the rationale for austerity; so would ending tax exemptions for multi-billion-dollar private universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford. Exiting the Iraq and Afghanistan disasters could divert money to overcome crisis without mass austerity. Such alternatives are being struggled over in other countries.

Capitalism first generated this global crisis and now proposes mass austerity to “overcome” it. We should learn from capitalism’s repeated failures and be publicly debating whether America and the world might be better served by transitioning to a new, non-capitalist system. Having learned hard lessons from the first socialist attempts during the last century in Russia, China and beyond, we need to rise to the challenge to make a new attempt that avoids their failures and builds on their strengths. When better than now?

Rick Wolff teaches in the graduate program in International Affairs of The New School in New York. His work is available at ndwolff.com.

Argentina

Continued from page 9

released by the National Security Archive, a Washington, D.C.,-based nonprofit investigative journalism institute. “We won’t cause you unnecessary difficulties.”

“The vision we have from the South is of the U.S. as custodians of a horrific order,” Ramón Abalo, a retired journalist, tells me in his office in downtown Mendoza. I ask Ramón why it’s important to look at the past, when present-day Argentina has plenty of other daunting problems — unemployment, poverty, capital flight and brain drain.

“When we talk about 30,000 people, we’re not talking about an imaginary number. We’re talking about how they got rid of a whole class of people who thought a certain way. All of this happened to install a socio-economic plan.” Ramon says he usually doesn’t smoke, but he lights a cigarette as he talks, saying he has to when he discusses those times.

“So, look at the Pope [John Paul II]. Somebody shot him, and he pardoned the guy, but a judge still tried him. The constant fight of the human rights movements here has led to an understanding among a large majority of Argentines that here a genocide happened. There’s no consensus. But here nobody has ever asked for forgiveness. Let’s look forward, too, but when you have an open wound, it doesn’t close by itself.”

Besides justice, truth is the other salve that the human rights movement in Argentina has been demanding for decades now, and among the myriad unsolved crimes, one thing those declassified intelligence documents might be able to clear up is what happened to a young U.S. citizen named Billy Lee Hunt, whose bones may or may not be buried in a cemetery in Mendoza. After her brother’s disappearance Evie Lou visited the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires a number of times and was told each time that they had no knowledge of his whereabouts. Her U.S. passport, and that of her brother, offered little protection at the time. The American intelligence apparatus, which had close ties with the junta, and the embassies, run by the State Department, operate on notoriously different tracks.

These distinctions don’t matter much to Evie, who spends the last Thursday of every month at a vigil with other human rights activists and families of the disappeared in front of the federal courthouse in Mendoza.

“I want to know what happened. I want to know who brought him.”

One afternoon Evie shows me the plaque with hundreds of names on it, mounted on a monument to the disappeared across from the courthouse. She rubs the dust from her brother’s name. “You poor thing,” she says.

“He was such a happy guy, always telling jokes. That’s why nobody could believe it when they took him.”

After a walk around a downtown park, we eat a late lunch at Evie’s house, vegetarian lasagna with a glass of red wine. Evie proposes a toast: “Here’s to seeing those military bastards finally facing justice.”
The current nativist impulse is not new. The right’s anti-Muslim campaign is eerily similar to 19th-century anti-Catholic bigotry in America. Catholics here were subject to discrimination and violence because many didn’t speak English; religious practices such as confession, veneration of saints and transubstantiation seemed alien; many of their women (nuns) donned strange garb; and they were characterized as a fifth column loyal to a sinister foreign power, the Pope.

Likewise, Islamophobia goes back two centuries to Orientalism, which portrayed the West enfeebled by secularism and liberalism. From there followed the “Worse Than Hitler” parade: Grand Ayatollah Khomeni, Yasser Arafat, Muammar Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The Islamophobia that sprouted after the Sept. 11 attacks was planted in this noxious soil. Curiously, it has taken nine years for Islamophobia to reach a fever pitch, at least in America (Europe was quicker to the game). So why now?

One explanation is Bush, who, after 9/11, described Islam as “a faith based upon peace and love and compassion.” Bush had to deny the role of religion in the “war on terror” to ensure broad international support for new wars. Later, however, Bush claimed “Islamofascism” was an “ideology that is real and profound.” So while Bush the Republican was willing to throw red meat to the bigots, Bush the president was compelled to tone down the bigotry in the interest of statecraft. Now, freed from the burdens of power, the Republicans can reap the benefits of Islamophobia by stoking the base passions of the right, while not having to pay the price for any international repercussion. What makes the bigotry so powerful at this point is Obama’s standing.

Going back to the 2008 election, the right has successfully painted Obama as the Other. Since Obama took office, the percentage of Americans who say Obama is Muslim has increased sharply. In August, during the run-up to the anti-Muslim rallies on Sept. 11, one poll found that 31 percent of Republicans think Obama is a Muslim; nearly double the percentage who said so in March 2009.

Believing Obama is a Muslim or foreign born or motivated by “Kenyan anticolonial behavior” is indicative of the conspiratorial mindset that the right cultivates. In Mobilizing Resentment, Jean Hardisty writes that the “right uses three specific forms of intolerance — stereotyping, scapegoating and demonizing — to mobilize and organize recruits.” These techniques “reinforce an us-them dichotomy” and “help a protest movement fix blame for social ills on easily understood targets.” Hardisty explains that demonizing the hated group “draws anger away from real sources of social ills.” This “allows for greater dominance by elites, while creating the impression of increased empowerment for those expressing their intolerance.”

Stoked to a white-hot fury by the right, many Americans castigate Obama and his policies. But this opposition is both remote and abstract; venting rage on mosques and Muslims offers a concrete outlet.

The hatred (the appropriate term) goes far beyond opposing the Cordoba House in Manhattan. A Gallup poll from 2006 found that 39 percent of Americans think Muslims should carry a special identification. Today, a Time magazine poll found that a majority of Americans have an unfavorable view of Muslims and nearly one-third think Muslims should be barred from running for president or sitting on the Supreme Court.

These sentiments get acted on with public hate-speewing and attacks against mosques, a rise in hate crimes against Muslims over the last decade and a huge surge in employment discrimination.

By targeting the Other, the right also defines “real” America. Thirty-five years ago, historian Richard Hofstadter argued that the “modern right wing … feels dispossessed.” They feel “America has largely been taken away from them and their kind.” Anti-Muslim protests are both an attempt to deny the public display of the other’s symbols and a way to stoke resentment that the government is de-valuing the true majority’s values and beliefs.

While the racism is real, it is given co-herence by right-wing fanatics like David Horowitz, Frank Gaffney, Wayne Kurtz, Michelle Malkin, Gary Bauer, Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin, who support and in some cases organize and fund the anti-Muslim campaign. Since last year, the right has been hysteri-cally claiming that Sharia, or Islamic law, is being imposed in the United States with the backing of the Obama administration. Frank Gaffney’s Center for Security Policy has been leading the charge, having just published a 177-page report entitled “Sharia: The Threat to America.”

Linking Obama to Islam is a way to turn tactical opposition in the upcoming midterm elections into a holy war in which no com-promise is possible. Hofstadter described it as a paranoid mindset that believes “the enem-y is totally evil and totally unappeasable [so] he must be totally eliminated.”

In a recent Newsweek poll, a staggering 52 percent of Republicans said they think it is definitely or probably true that Obama “sympathizes with the goals of Islamic fundamentalists who want to impose Islamic law around the world.”

These wild beliefs reveal how much of the population is mentally unhinged. Though if the Obama White House had shown as much concern for the average worker as it did for investment bankers, there would be far less economic and social anxiety for the right wing to exploit. But that’s now history.

The Indypendent

MOM, APPLE PIE AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

¡Viva Machete!

Machete

Directed by Ethan Manoous and Robert Rodriguez

20TH CENTURY FOX, 2010

Speeding on a dusty road to arrest a drug lord, the Mexican Federale named Machete is told to turn around. Instead he rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like...
Caught Between a Wall and a Shipwreck

Midnight on the Mavi Marmara: The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and How It Changed the Course of the Israel/Palestine Conflict
Edited by Moustafa Bayoumi
OR Books, 2010

A Wall in Palestine
René Backmann, Translated by A. Kaiser
Picador, 2010

BY ALEX KANE

The Israel/Palestine conflict has become so all-consuming that even objects are central to the struggle. Two recent books illustrate this fact. René Backmann’s A Wall in Palestine looks at the planned 490-mile-long, 25-foot-high wall, complete with fencing, trenches, physical imaging and sniper towers, that Israel is building in parts of the West Bank. The second work, Midnight on the Mavi Marmara, is a collection of essays examining the deadly Israeli attack on an international_seaborne convoy. The “Freedom Flotilla” was attempting to break the crippling blockade of Gaza, which began in 2007 when Hamas took power after winning democratic elections and defeating a U.S.-backed effort to install Fatah, the party that lost the elections, into power.

Both works reveal how inanimate objects — the wall and the flotilla of six ships — have become so imbued with conflicting meanings and ideas that they can be seen as actors that create new actions in their wake, such as the plans by international activists to launch new ships to Gaza or the growing boycott, divestment and sanctions movement that takes aim at Israeli colonization, particularly what many have labeled the “apartheid wall.”

While French journalist Backmann’s work is a useful contribution to understanding the separation barrier, the author all too easily adopts the language of the Israeli occupation and spends little time on crucial context and history relating to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Midnight on the Mavi Marmara, on the other hand, gives readers a much more comprehensive look into the current situation as well as vital history and context, like explaining why the ongoing “peace process” is bankrupt.

The International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion, ruled the separation barrier to be illegal under international law in 2004. The vast majority of it snakes through occupied Palestinian territory, slicing up Palestinian villages and cutting off access to urban areas.

The idea of separating the Palestinian population has deep roots within Zionist ideology and has been proposed by Israeli officials for decades. But it wasn’t until the aftermath of the second Palestinian Intifada that began in 2000, and Ariel Sharon’s rise to power, that the idea of constructing a physical barrier was seriously considered. Ironically, the right-wing Likud Party, of which Sharon was a long-time member, was originally wary of the concept. The idea of a barrier built on Israel’s borders as established in the aftermath of the 1947-49 war — as some Israeli politicians on the left suggested — might create the boundaries for a future Palestinian state and leave Israel’s colonization project of the West Bank in jeopardy, something that right-wing Zionists had no interest in.

In 2002, after a wave of Palestinian suicide bombings inside Israel, the Israeli government under Sharon decided to begin building the barrier. Although security for Israeli civilians was the stated justification for the wall, its route made clear that it was primarily an annexation project. As the Israeli human rights group B’Tselem explains, “a major aim in setting the route was de facto annexation of land: when the barrier is completed, some nine percent of the West Bank, containing 60 settlements, will be situated on the western — the ‘Israeli’ — side.” Other benefits of the route of the barrier from the Israeli perspective include, as Backmann notes, the taking of fertile land and precluding the possibility of a Palestinian state.

When describing the Sharon government’s siege of the Occupied Territories in 2001, Backmann refers to civilian casualties as “collateral damage.” On a number of occasions, he refers to the West Bank uncritically and without quotes as Judea-Samarria, which is the biblical term used by Israeli settlers.

Backmann fails to discuss the events of 1947-49 that led to the creation of Israel, including the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians by 1949. An exploration of the colonial nature of Zionism would help explain why Israel sees no problem with building a separation barrier that tramples on the human rights of Palestinians.

Also missing is an in-depth discussion of the rise of popular resistance movements across the West Bank, which developed in response to the building of the barrier.

Resistance to the Israeli occupation isn’t just confined to Palestinian villages, though, as the events of the May 31 Freedom Flotilla, explored magnificently in Midnight on the Mavi Marmara, show. The flotilla was an international effort that included 600 passengers from a multitude of nations, and attempted to break the blockade of the Gaza Strip by sea.

The book is a comprehensive antidote to Israel’s attempt to spin the events as a group of savage Islamist terrorists “lynching” defenseless Israeli soldiers. The reports from eyewitnesses who were aboard the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara are clear: As the flotilla was in international waters, Israeli commandos rappelled onto the Marmara, opened fire and killed nine people. A recently released U.N. report authored by three human rights experts found the Israeli raid to be illegal, “disproportionate” and brutal.

Beyond the lucid eyewitness accounts, the book includes exceptional analyses of what the attack means and where the international solidarity movement goes from here. Philip Weiss and Adam Horowitz, editors of the blog Mondoweiss (for which I am a contributor), aptly call the attack on the flotilla a moment that has caused “many to consider what Zionism has built in the Middle East.”

Yousef Munayer, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Palestine Center, reminds readers that Israel massacring civilians is not a new phenomenon, nor is the world’s apparent unwillingness to hold Israel accountable for war crimes.

While it is a one-stop shop for all things “Freedom Flotilla,” Midnight on the Mavi Marmara has a dearth of original content, with most contributions being reprints. It’s an understandable shortcoming given the lightning-quick turnaround. But it reads more like an immediate reaction to the flotilla killings than a reflection on how and why the flotilla marks a “turning point” in the Israel/Palestine conflict. There are a couple of duds as well. For instance, Stephen Walt, the co-author of The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy, writes an uncharacteristically boring “how-to” guide on “defend[ing] the indefensible.”

By and large, though, if one wants to understand the attack on the flotilla and the utter necessity of building an international solidarity movement that will finally bring Israeli apartheid down, this is the book to read. It couldn’t have come out at a better time; while the world’s media incessantly focus on recently re-launched “peace talks,” the real work of bringing about liberation for the Palestinian people can be found in efforts like the Freedom Flotilla.

Adam Shapiro, a co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement, succinctly closes out the book with his piece on the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement and the effort to break the blockade of Gaza through ever-escalating direct action: “The days of the oppression of Palestinians — whether in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in refugee camps, or in the diaspora — are numbered. It is now in all our power to expedite that day of liberation.”

Activists are organizing to send a U.S. boat with the next flotilla to help break the siege of Gaza. To get involved, visit ustogaza.org.
Feminism, Paint and Matzo Meal

Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism
The Jewish Museum
516 Fifth Ave.

By Mike Newton

Do you know Phyllis Schlafly? An outspoken activist and accomplished attorney, a die-hard conservative and lifelong right-wing pamphleteer, a staunch advocate for traditional domesticity, she’d never let herself be mistaken for a feminist. But oh, how the ground shifts: among others on the right, Sarah Palin now trumpets herself as a proud feminist—a free-market, anti-abortion, “family values” feminist. The question becomes one of essences, foundations: surely not all powerful women are feminists, but what are feminists, then? In the ‘60s and ‘70s, many second-wave feminist writers linked feminism with socialism and with then-burgeoning social justice movements. Is there feminism without radicalism?

It’s a good question to consider while viewing Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism, a small but potent exhibit at The Jewish Museum. The show is heavy on abstract painting, heavy on work from the ‘60s and ‘70s—times when “feminism” was more starkly realized. Or was it? Artists like Melissa Meyer and Joan Snyder give us bright, action-packed work in the famously masculine Abstract Expressionist idiom; like the proverbial female disciplinarian, or the stern, blue eyes of the womanly priestess in Lucian Freud’s portrait painting of a woman’s breast.

“Matzo Meal” by Audrey Flack.

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