Landlords Discover Life on the Dole

BY HEATHER HADDON

With a face hardened by struggle, Rosaura Robles stares out of the window of the northwest Bronx apartment she can’t call home. The mother of five was placed in the apartment as part of the “scatter-site program”—a temporary “fix” to the city’s exploding shelter system that, before placing the homeless in more permanent dwellings, pays top-dollar for private rooms.

When she first moved into the cramped one-bedroom, which only had bunk beds, Robles slept on the floor. She was eight months pregnant at the time. While her social worker helped Robles get a couch (landlords are supposed to provide basic furniture in the program), her unit in the 2234 Davidson St. building remains decrepit. Her walls are covered with an overpoweringly foul-smelling mildew from perpetually leaking pipes.

Yet this substandard shelter didn’t come cheap. In the six months of putting up Robles and her family, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelled out more than $18,000 to Buchanan Realty, despite the fact that the building has racked up over 300 housing code violations.

Before placing homeless families in an apartment, DHS is required to make sure the unit is cleared of housing code violations. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), another city agency, has a publicly available website that lists housing code violations for every building in the city. DHS also claims to conduct periodic visits to ensure landlords that tenants say this doesn’t happen and that there is little if any communication between the two agencies. “The Homeless Services Department and HPD don’t talk to each other,” said Yvette Smith, who was placed in the building through the scatter-site program.

According to Barbara Flynn, chief of staff for HPD, 2234 Davidson Ave. is currently under review by her agency’s “anti-abandonment unit”—the last stage for a building with an uncooperative landlord before HPD brings legal action.

“[DHS] doesn’t tell us what buildings they are going into beforehand,” Flynn said. “If they were to say, ‘What do you think of this building?’ we would tell them.”

Working with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, tenant setting aside the U.S. legal system; scuttling the ABM treaty; trashing the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 against introducing weapons in space; conducting extra-judicial assassinations; organizing a coup; engaging in unprovoked aggression against sovereign nations, and violating virtually every convention on conduct during wartime.

Worse, the lawlessness of these nuclear desperados is fast becoming the international norm. Pakistan has adopted a U.S. first-nuclear-strike position against India. In turn, India has been threatening a White House-style preemptive war. Israel is in on the game, pummeling the Palestinians under its own nuclear umbrella. North Korea may already have nukes and Iran is racing to join the club before its regime changes.

Yet, following the example set by nuclear resisters like Philip Berrigan (page 11), civilian weapons inspectors (page 10) around the world are challenging the right of any government to control nuclear weapons and to threaten the ultimate form of terrorism: nuclear war.

Decisions being made by our current rulers may well make the world much more dangerous for decades to come. The rise of a passionate, life-affirming peace movement is the best hope for halting the war in Iraq and braking the descent into nuclear chaos. Regime change starts at home.
The Independent

JANUARY 2003

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Neumann, Ana
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Jocz, Miguel
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What can I do to get involved?

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WHAT IS THE IMC?

With autonomous chapters in more than 100 cities throughout the world, the three-year-old
media center has become an international network of
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The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate
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AFRICAN-AMERICANS FIGHT FOR PEACE ABROAD,  
UNITY AT HOME

BY NIKOLAS KOZLOFF

There is overwhelming opposition in Harlem to a potential war in Iraq, Nellie Bailey recently told an anti-war conference at Manhattan's New School. But Bailey, Executive Director of the Harlem Tenants Association, also noted that anti-war organizers face formidable challenges in the community.

Forming lasting alliances with whites could prove daunting, she said, due to the pronouncement of black nationalist sentiment. Another obstacle is the Democratic Party, which according to Bailey has often co-opted leadership in the African-American community. Additionally, Bailey said, many African-Americans are wary of the present political climate. “A lot of people are fearful about attending events and remark of organizers, ‘Those people could be Communists.’”

Bailey also remarked that patronizing white organizers sometimes alienate black residents. “These residents, who include tenant organizers and local civic leaders,” said Bailey, “don’t always have the power of words. On the other hand, white organizers must give respect to their capabilities.”

Other black leaders argue that white organizers must concentrate on more bread-and-butter issues. At an October speak-out at St. Mary's Church, Jim Haughton of Harlem Fight Back said, “Harlem is already feeling a depression, so simply trying to end the war is inadequate. We need to fight for affordable housing, education, health-care and environmental protections.”

Other organizers are encouraged by recent political activity but warn of ways to overcome the cultural and racial divide separating whites and blacks. Lorenzo Kombou Ervin, author of Anarchism and The Black Revolution, says the global justice movement must now transform itself into an anti-war movement. “When African-Americans saw whites at large protests against the IMF, a lot of them felt disconnected and asked, ‘What are those crazy whites doing fighting in the streets?’” says Ervin.

Ervin suggests that blacks need not be amalgamated into the global justice movement or the incipient anti-war movement, but instead might form “an alternative tendency” or a separate cause.

Ervin also notes that anarchists must do a better job at developing an anti-racist consciousness, and must support black movements tangibly by providing resources and political support. “Whites must not look upon the African-American community opportunistically but as political allies,” he remarks. Ervin also recommends that African-Americans challenge whites within political meetings and demand their own voice.

Judging from recent events, many organizers are thinking about ways to overcome the cultural and racial divide separating whites and blacks. At the New School, a pre-dominantly white audience listened intently to Bailey speak about the “European ethnic chauvinism” of white progressives. And at the St Mary’s Church speak-out, an audience of many blacks but also some whites turned out to hear anti-war speakers, almost all of whom were people of color.

Where is all this organizing headed? Bailey does not deny that it will be difficult to shake people out of their lethargy. But, she says recent speak outs organized in Harlem have featured people of color, and have been drawing large numbers of people. “We’ve made progress,” she says, “and our numbers have gotten larger. When you have 90 people at an event on a Friday, that’s a good turnout.”

FOREIGN STUDENTS FEEL THE HEAT FROM FEDERAL DETAINMENTS

BY PANDI HOPKINS

The City University of New York (CUNY) of old was like the Ivy league campuses of the well-to-do—a safe haven. Both CUNY’s two- and four-year colleges had abundant remedial classes to settle the academic background needed bolstering.

Older students with full-time jobs or families were welcome to earn their degrees through part-time study over an extended period of time. Moreover, the New York City Department of Welfare was willing to support college education, and immigrant students were welcomed.

Fifteen years ago, it was CUNY policy to ask no further questions. Stephanie Perez, a CUNY student from the Dominican Republic, says that now one feels threatened, looking over one’s shoulder, never knowing who is watching.

Another student, from Guyana (of Middle Eastern descent), explained his abrupt absence from class: his uncle had been a victim of one of the government sweeps in Brooklyn of Middle Eastern men.

The latest source for apprehension on campus is the Security Entry and Exit Registration System under which the Justice Department is requiring that all visitors volunteering to help specified countries register with the department.

It affects a large number of CUNY students. During the first phase of national registration, between 1,000 and 2,500 persons in California, upon obediently presenting themselves for registration, were arrested.

Students from four Colorado colleges were detained and threatened with deportation for not carrying full course loads.

Bobby Kahn of the Coney Island Avenue Project reported that as many as 100,000 Pakistani immigrants (including legal residents) have left the country to avoid pursuit, prosecution or persecution.

The Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was adopted in 1996. It is currently being implemented by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

In hundreds of other cases, New Yorkers from affected countries have decided to ignore the call to register. The Indypendent

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It provides for an on-going tracking system to ensure that an electronic database of information on all foreign students will be readily available.

A mandatory compliance date for new students has been set for Jan. 30. Citing the Patriot Act, the FBI claims the right to receive personal information on foreign faculty and students from universities. The Center for Constitutional Rights warns a wide range of information can be obtained about students who are not suspected of anything wrong.

Immigrants certified by the Attorney General as “suspected terrorists” can be subjected to an indefinite period of detention with no opportunity for court challenge. The United States Department of Education has taken the view that personal information cannot be obtained without a court order or subpoena, a position backed by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) who notified Attorney General John Ashcroft of their position in mid-December.

Meanwhile, the Coney Island Avenue Project has announced a program of free legal counseling. A protest letter signed by The National Lawyers Guild, the American Civil Liberties Union and others evokes memories of Nazi Germany: “Let them not look back on history and say we stood by and did nothing.”

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**PAGE 3 LOCAL**
Jan. 27 UN Protest
On Jan. 27, several New York peace groups including No Blood for Oil, the New York City Civilian Army, and Net in Our Name have planned various protests outside the United Nations beginning at 9 a.m. Chef UN Weapons Inspector Hans Blix will be at FN to present his initial report on Iraq. For more info visit http://www.nblo.net.

West Side Organizes Against Olympic Stadium
West Side community groups will have a chance Jan. 30 at 1 p.m. to tell City Council what they think of a proposed billion-dollar sports stadium over the rail yards between West 30th and 34th streets and 10th and 12th Avenues. Last November, New York was named U.S. nominee to bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics. Neighborhood activists fear the stadium is only one part of a larger plan to overrun their mixed-use low-rise neighborhood with skyscrapers and luxury apartment buildings. Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen groups and elected officials are planning an organized protest Jan. 30, followed by a Chelsea forum Jan. 23, to mobilize residents for the Jan. 30 hearing. “Communities can be preserved, but only if city residents take the time to show up and work on it,” said John Fisher of the Clinton Special District Coalition. For more information, see http://www.hellskitchen.net.

OPP Explains ABCs of NYC
Community Boards: Business Improvement Districts and a bewildering array of city agencies and departments. Ever wonder how New York really works? How show ordinary people can create real change from the bottom up? On Jan. 23, Organizing for Popular Power New York City (OPP NYC) will launch a series of monthly workshops at the Brecht Forum (122 W 27th St., 10th Fl.) to bring together activists, grassroots community leaders to share knowledge and experience. Former Black Panther and City College professor Charles Barron and Borough of Manhattan Community College political science professor Ron Hayduk will speak at the opening workshop. Subsequent workshops will be held Feb. 27 and March 27. For more information, call (917) 807-3777 or email opp.nyc@hotmail.com.

NYC Holds First Social Forum
On January 11, over 400 people attended New York City’s first-ever Social Forum. In solidarity with Brazil’s World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, these New Yorkers gathered at the CUNY Graduate Center to discuss, debate and reflect on a range of social justice issues and ideas. Large opening and closing sessions focused on linking themes of the day and connecting groups addressing them in their work. The bulk of the day was devoted to a series of workshops highlighting common issues, bridging local and global, and skills needed to confront them.

TRANSIT WORKERS CONTRACT
A mixed bag of benefits and compromises

BY STEVE DOWNS
As several thousand transit workers and supporters marched across the Brooklyn Bridge to demand a decent contract on Dec. 16, word came that Roger Toussaint, President of Transport Workers Union (TWU) 100, was on TV announcing an agreement with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) on a new contract. This seemed to be a fitting cliam to several intense weeks during which Toussaint and Local 100 members were demobilized in the press, threatened with massive fines and arrest, and deserted by the president of their national union—all because they would not renounce the possibility of a strike if they could not reach an acceptable agreement. (An article in the January issue of Labor Notes provides background and a report on events up to Dec. 7.)

However, as the terms of the agreement became known, the satisfaction felt by many transit workers gave way to disbelief at the contract their leaders were proposing they accept. The proposed contract calls for a wage freeze in the first year (cushioned by a $1000 lump-sum payment “in recognition of substantial past productivity of the workforce”). The second and third year each have a 3 percent increase. Barely a week earlier, Toussaint had vowed that “hell would freeze over before Local 100 accepts zero!” The contract also calls for the union to agree to the consolidation of two distinct bus systems in the city and the loss of protection against layoffs.

On the plus side, the disciplinary procedures are overhauled in ways that will likely produce a significant reduction in the amount of discipline transit workers face. Health benefits, which were threatened because the Trust Fund bankrupt, are preserved. However, where benefits used to be provided via a jointly administered trust, the MTA now has sole control over the provision of health benefits. And co-payments are increased. New provisions in the proposal call for full health benefits to be provided for domestic partners and part-time workers; a prescription plan for pre-Medicare retirees; a pilot childcare program and a “humanized” sick leave policy.

While President Toussaint predicted the agreement would pass easily, nine Executive Board members—including the Local’s Recording-Secretary and VP for Rapid Transit—voted against it and have urged members to reject the contract and send the negotiators back to the bargaining table. They have been joined by a large number of low-level officers and stewards. For its part, the Local leadership has hired a Public Relations consultant and has mounted an aggressive pro-ratification campaign.

Differences over the contract revolve around whether one thinks the positive elements outweigh the negative and whether one thinks the union could have done better if it had taken its own rhetoric about a strike seriously and made it clear that it was, in fact, ready to strike. Fuel was added to this latter debate when Basil Paterson, an adviser to the union, remarked, “The MTA always believed Roger was serious—but never serious about a strike.” (NY Post, 12/17/02)

Local 100 members are voting in a mail ballot, with the ballots being counted on January 21. Although the contract is quite unpopular, clouds of uncertainty remain concerning its final fate.

Steve Downs is an Executive Board member, TWU 100.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE USES FUZZY MATH

BY BENNETT BALMER
Recently laid off from his job in one of New York’s many clandestine garment factories, Alvaro Salvedra found part-time work in a restaurant. Having acquired valuable work experience in the garment industry, Salvedra sought to stay in it, but only if city residents take the time to show up and work on it,” said John Fisher of the Clinton Special District Coalition. For more information, see http://www.hellskitchen.net.

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Steve Downs is an Executive Board member, TWU 100.
ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT:
NYC Cop Suspended for Refusing to Arrest Homeless Man

BY DIANA WURN

When Officer Eduardo Delacruz refused his supervisor's order to arrest a homeless man in late November, as per NYPD policy, he wasn’t looking at the people under their blankets as an inevitable blight upon the urban landscape. Instead, he saw them as people who needed help and in turn he acted with compassion and a sense of justice. At the NYPD, this is grounds for insubordination.

The Nov. 22 incident resulted in 30 days of suspension and over $3,000 in lost wages. Officer Delacruz has been reassigned to a transit post in Brooklyn, according to his lawyer. The New York Post called for Delacruz's resignation, warning that “chaos” will result if officers think for themselves.

Yet the benevolent act resonated with many people, including the homeless. Through Housing Works, an AIDS services organization, homeless New Yorkers raised $3,000 for the officer and presented a check to his family at Christmas.

ACTIVISTS are beginning to organize to draw attention to the scatter-site program’s failures. Earlier in January, a group of East New York tenants filed a lawsuit against their landlord, charging him with wrongful eviction of some 15 permanent residents to cash in on the scatter-site program’s generous subsidies.

“The landlord is getting money from the city for us, so we should be getting something for the building,” said Marta Cruz, a long-time tenant who is working on a multi-building organizing campaign with the Coalition.

Program started in 1983

The city’s scatter-site program—officially known as the Emergency Assistance Relocating Program (EARP)—began in 1983. EARP paid stipends and bonuses to private and non-profit landlords to house homeless families in hotels and apartment buildings. Ineffective for its first 10 years, EARP only grew when landlords received, in addition to bonuses, federal Section 8 subsidies for low-income housing. In 1994, a peak of 3,072 homeless families were placed in private housing according to a report issued by the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, a public interest organization. That’s where the city’s overflowing shelter system.

Homeless people placed in private housing jumped from less than 5 to over 40 percent between 1989 and 1997. As of February, DSH paid about 60 private entities to house the homeless. Scatter-site management companies account for 16.

There are 14 scatter-site properties in the northwest Bronx, according to residents, the proportion of scatter-site tenants has been increasing rapidly. Willia McKever, a resident of 1928 Walton Ave. for 24 years, remembers there were 12 scatter-site tenants in her building last year. Now, over a quarter of the 80-unit building is devoted to EARP.

Doing the math explains why. A one-time bonus received by landlords to house a family starts at $2,000 and caps off at $10,000 (for eight). Landlords also receive roughly $95 a day per family. To date, Buchanan Realty, the management company for 2234 Davidson, has made an estimate $25,000 from the Robles family.

Though a weathered “apartments available” sign is still tucked to 2234 Davidson Ave., permanent residents are far less profitable than the 10 EARP tenants there.

For instance, Buchanan Realty has received only half as much from permanent resident Anthony Holmes and his wife in their two years of occupying their apartment than it has from Robles in only six months.

“The landlords have found a cash cow,” McKever said. “Most [landlords] in the area have found it, and it’s too hard for them to look away.”

A dangerous environment

Tenants, organizers and housing experts say the way scatter-site has been implemented is a recipe for destabilizing buildings and neighborhoods. A main concern is that landlords have been filling vacant apartments exclusively with EARP placements. “Increasing the density of homeless families to unsupported levels becomes a dangerous environment to those living there before,” according to Frank Barconi of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council.

This is especially true if temporary residents are not getting the services they need from the program. Landlords are contractually obligated to provide support services like help with finding permanent housing. Too often that support is poor or non-existent, organizers say.

“Quality of support services [the homeless] are getting has always been an issue,” Barconi said.

Tenants say all this makes for strained relationships within already difficult buildings. “The pushing of [scatter-site tenants] into buildings is making residents angry with each other,” McKever said.

“It’s not good for the community.”

Lead paint and rats

Yvette Smith will tell you there’s a lot at stake. Down the rickety stairs at 2234 Davidson Ave. past the mailboxes, which no longer lock or receive mail, Yvette Smith lives with her four children. About a year ago, she accepted the EARP placement when her daughter got asthma after a three-week stint at the Emergency Assistance Unit. While an improvement, she remains unsatisfied. When Smith moved into her first EARP placement in the building, she discovered that the apartment had dangerous levels of lead paint.

Now in a second apartment, there are still problems. “My cats are scared of the rats,” said Smith. She is even more fearful of the building’s environment where, according to many tenants, drugs and burglary are on the rise. Smith has her brother stay there during the day and, she said, “I keep the phone near the bed.”

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By MIKE BURKE

HOMELAND INSECURITY: INS STEPS UP REGISTRATIONS & ROUND-UPS

BY ERIC SCHWARTZ

On Jan. 10, thousands of men from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Eritrea, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen stood in line at INS offices across the country to be fingerprinted, and interrogated. The INS’s “Special Registration Program” targets almost all males sixteen or over from 18 predominately Muslim nations who lack permanent resident or refugee status. The list increased Jan. 16 when the INS added Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan and Kuwait.

Bobby Khan, of the New York-based Coney Island Avenue Project, calls the targeting of Muslim immigrants “the worst form of racial profiling … a new wave of harassment and fear to the immigrant community.”

The Jan. 10 registration was greeted by pickets and protests at INS offices around the country including the agency’s Downtown Manhattan office. More of the same is likely on Feb. 21 when Saudi and Pakistani men will be required to register at INS offices. Pakistanis are the largest Muslim immigrant community in New York City and many of them are expressing fear and uncertainty about the INS plan.

Based on recent events, the Feb. 21 turnout is expected to be light, but those who do show up at INS offices may find themselves subject to imprisonment and deportation. There were 125 arrests nationwide of men who registered in January, according to the INS. Many of the men were simply waiting for their applications for permanent residence to come through. Others were locked up due to long-ago criminal convictions, as required by the draconian 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

Developments on Dec. 16, the first INS deadline, were even more disturbing to activists and immigrants-rights advocates, especially those in Los Angeles. Of sever- al thousand Iranian immigrants who came to register at INS offices in Los Angeles, at least a thousand were handcuffed and locked up in facing jail cells. INS officers strip-searched immigrants as young as sixteen, forced detainees to change into prison jumpsuits without underwear or socks. The detainees slept without blankets on metal benches or cement floors in freezing cells. Some immigrants were housed down with cold water or kicked by guards. By the end of the day, the INS had arrested a quarter of those who reg- istered in Los Angeles, and made some arrests in other cities. A 3,000-strong plus 450,000 in the city’s largest Iranian community forced the INS to release many of the detainees, but the INS is still holding deportables. Anyone who fails to register may be arrested or deported under the new rules. The rules also affect future visitors from the countries on Ashcroft’s list. In fact, any foreign visitor can be forced to register if an INS inspector says so. If they register, visitors and immigrants must report back after 30 days, every time they leave the country and any time they change their address or school.

Homeland Insecurity

The registration program, initiated by Attorney General John Ashcroft, contin- ues the mass arrests and deprivations unleashed by the “war on terrorism.” Soon immigrant communities will face another challenge: the Department of Homeland Security.

In the biggest restructuring of the feder- al government in 50 years, the Department of Homeland Security will throw together 170,000 employees from 22 different govern- ment agencies. The INS will be split into the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, responsible for ser- vices, and the Bureau of Border Security, charged with enforcement.

Katherine Newell Bierman, of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), argues that “in an organization whose first mission is Homeland Security, immigration services will become a back seat.” A NAPALC statement predicts that already long waits for services like green cards and work visas will increase.

Other advocates predict an increase in abuses from a more pumped-up, less accountable incarnation of the current INS. Espressa Chacon, from the Mexican group Association Tepayac in New York, says that “they’re judging everyone as if they were a terrorist.”

Continued Crisis

According to Sarkar, “what we’re seeing is the continuing escalation of anti-immi- grant policy that began in earnest with the 1996 laws, accelerated with 9/11, and continues today.” In the three years after the 1996 laws passed, the number of people held in INS detention shot up 70 per- cent. After September 11, INS raids and detentions heated up even more.

And they haven’t stopped. Bobby Khan reports that the INS has targeted Muslim neighborhoods to look for people with immigration violations, in businesses, restaurants and apartments. At Desis Rising up and Moving (DRUM), a South Asian organizing group in Queens, calls keep rolling in from immigrants locked up in New Jersey county jails.

Sarkar explains that the ongoing gov- ernment attacks are also “creating a cli- mate that fosters attacks by individuals. As a result, there’s been an increase in hate crimes and employment and housing discrimination.”
BY DON MONKERUD

Showing an impeccable sense of timing, President Bush chose Christmas to order all federal agencies to allow religious groups to compete for funding, breaking down the constitu-
tional wall separating church and state. He presented it as a compassion-
ate effort to more efficiently deliver government services to those in need.
But a new study by the Texas Freedom Network casts “faith-based initiatives” in not quite so celestial a light.

The October 2002 report, “The Texas Faith-Based Initiative at Five Years,” examines programs begun by Bush when he was gover-
ror of Texas.

In 1996, then-Governor Bush appointed a “task force” made up almost entirely of Christians to guide Texas in eliminating regula-
tions that prevented faith-based providers from receiving government
funds. He pushed agencies to open funding to faith-based groups by changing agency policies and contracts and eliminated licensing and inspection requirements for reli-
gious charities.

Bipartisan groups supported the legislative and regulatory changes to cut through government red tape because Bush claimed that religious groups had achieved worthy results in the states and was the first and most aggressive state in implementing taxpayer-funded religious services.

After five years of such experimen-
tation, according to the report, Texas
discovered:
— The Department of Criminal Justice used $1.5 million to fund the Inner Change prison pre-release program, the purpose of which was to cre-
ate respect for “God’s law” and encourage “the spiritual and moral regener-
ation” of offenders. State funds paid for the program’s Bible-based counseling and Christian-centric mate-
rials.
— The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, which regu-
lates childcare providers, children’s homes and child-placement agencies, stopped licensing and overseeing faith-based childcare providers. Rates of confirmed abuse and neglect at the faith-based facilities were 25 times higher than at state-licensed facilities. Complaints at these facilities were 75 percent, compared to 5.4 percent at state-licensed facilities.
— One of Bush’s highly touted models, Teen Challenge, a Christian-
based drug treatment program, racked up a list of violations 49 pages long, including no properly qualified coun-
selors, no chemical dependency ser-
VICES, illegal handwriting of medications and failure to inform clients of their rights. Clients were supposed to pray to get well.
— Another program, Jobs Partnership, illegally spent $8,000 on bibles, and courts found that evangeli-
ical Christianity permeated the job training.
— The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization was given $1.5 million for a faith-
based teaching structure that incorpo-
rated a religious mission that required a “total surrender to Christ.”

The faith-based initiative became a vehicle for fringe religious providers to avoid legitimate state oversight, and led to the abuse and neglect of people in the programs. The program created so many prob-
lems that in 2001 the Texas legisla-
ture chose not to renew the state’s accreditation program for faith-based childcare providers. With such a track record in Texas, it seems best not to put any faith in the success of Bush’s national initiative.

BUSH PRESCRIBES BITTER MEDICINE FOR SENIORS

By ERIC LAUREN

Gov. George Pataki is threatening to make 2003 a grim year for New York’s elderly—refusing to promise that Medicaid won’t face cuts back if it can’t squeeze more assistance out of the feder-
al government. If Pataki is serious, New York faces the biggest shakeup in health care coverage since Lyndon Johnson introduced Medicare over 35 years ago.

President Bush and his advisors see spiraling prescription drug costs as an opportunity. In exchange for new
Medicare prescription benefits, the White House will likely demand that Medicare be open to competition from insurance companies, HMOs and other private providers.

Backed by a Republican Congress, Bush plans to offer sweeping propos-
als to restructure Medicare in his State of the Union address Jan. 28. Administration officials recently indicated that they are considering two options: either adding a drug pro-
gram or other new benefits in exchange for higher Medicare premiums.

But the healthier and wealthier seniors who make up some 20 percent of the Medicare’s recipient population might find private providers that can offer them lower prices plus a bigger package of benefits and still make a profit. If they opt out of Medicare, leaving it with a pool of poorer and sicker recipients, the program may find itself in a real cost spiral.

Eventually, free-market ideologues could use this as a template for ending Medicare as we know it and throwing the remaining recipients onto the private market if any providers will have them.

Sources in Washington say Bush will have a tough fight getting his plan through Congress, even with a Republican majority. First, he must pass his $674 billion tax-cut package—a bruising process. And aside from some “mavericks” like Sen John Breaux (D-LA), Democratic lawmakers are acutely aware that Medicare along with Social Security is their greatest source of voter loyalty. They will be reluctant to bargain it away. At the same time, though, both sides of the aisle will hesitate to go home from Washington without a prescription drug package.

One possibility: a compromise that would create a limited drug benefit for the neediest seniors, leaving Republicans to push Bush’s partial privatization plan another year.

Cheney Scuttles Life-Saving Drug Deal

During Geneva WTO talks in December, Vice President Dick Cheney blocked a deal that would have axed the global patent law, providing cheap lifesaving drugs to poorer developing countries.

The pharmaceutical industry contends that the billions a year spent on research will disappear once pirated drugs are sold at discounted prices, but others argue that the drugs would only be sold to countries that needed the dis-
count. “George Bush is arguing that [treatments for] diseases his own children receive treatment for are off limits to poor children in poor countries,” said Jamie Love, director of the Consumer Project on Technology, a US lobbying group.

Share Your Vacation Plans with Uncle Sam

Later this year, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) may require all U.S. citizens to check in and out of the country by providing their itinerary. The new rule proposed by the INS would apply to passengers and crew on all commercial airlines, cruise ships and cargo flights and vessels, with the excep-
tion of most ferries, according to a Jan. 14 news report in the Toronto Star.

Commercial buses and trains, as well as private transportation, would not be affected. Deputy Prime Minister John Manley has reported that such restric-
tions would clog the U.S.-Canadian bor-
der. “It would turn cities like Detroit into a parking lot,” he said.

NE States Say Bush’s Clean Air Plan Stinks

Nine northeastern states ranging from Maine to Maryland recently filed suit in federal court challenging the Bush adminis-
tration’s decision to ease national industrial pollution restrictions for the first time since enactment of the Clean Air Act in 1970. The filing occurred as the Environmental Protection Agency formally issued final revi-
sions to the New Source Review clean air enforcement rules that would likely prevent future government legal action in all but the most flagrant cases of pollution. Under the new rules, refineries, manufacturers and some utilities will be presented with new ground rules for upgrading or expanding their plants without the threat of lawsuits and without having to add costly antipollu-
tion equipment required by law to control smog, acid rain and soot. During the Clinton Administration, federal and state authorities used New Source Review to sue more than 50 power plants in 12 states.
No News is Good News

On Christmas Eve the Bush Administration quietly killed off the Labor Department’s report on the number of mass layoffs each month. The program gave money to the states to collect data on companies laying off more than 50 people at once. A paragraph buried in a longer report released Christmas Eve stated the program had run out of funding. The program cost $5.6 million a year out of a Labor Department budget of $44 billion dollars. State officials, who rely on the report to help steer unemployed people to jobs in growing or stable industries, were surprised and critical of the decision to shut down an important indicator of the nation’s economy.

GE Striker Dies on Picket Line

A recent strike against GE was marred by tragedy as Kjetson “Michelle” Rodgers, 40, was hit and killed by a police car while on the line in Hallow Creek, KY, near Louisville. Nearly 20,000 U.S. workers struck on Jan. 14 to protest GE’s abrupt increase in employees’ health care costs. “GE is making so much money—a projected $16 billion this year. It doesn’t need to do this,” Carmen Di Paolito told Albany’s WGY news.

The two-day walkout, affecting 48 locations in 23 states, was the first major strike against GE since 1969. Roy Truxal, chief of the local two-person force, was driving the car. “I’ve been in labor negotiations quieted off,” said IUE/CWA Local 761 President Randy Payton. “She was killed doing what she believed in.”

Thomas Kean’s Osama Connection

Former New Jersey governor Thomas Kean, chosen by President Bush to head the 9/11 Commission, has been selected because he was reportedly “close to the families of the 9/11 victims.” What hasn’t been widely reported is how close he is to the family of Osama bin Laden. Kean, it turns out, is a director of Amerada Hess Corporation, which is involved in the Hess-Delta joint venture with Delta Oil of Saudi Arabia, Khalid bin Mahfouz, whose family owns part of Delta Oil, is Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law.

Code Pink Issues Peace Alert

Code Pink is a non-stop women’s peace vigil in the shadow of the White House that will culminate with a peace rally March 8 to celebrate International Women’s Day. To learn more, see http://www.code-pink4peace.org.

SmallPox Vaccine Plan Rejected

By Cathiina Stewart

Amid a barrage of criticism from health experts, the Bush administration decided in December to reject plans for a population-wide smallpox vaccination, opting instead to offer the controversial vaccine to some 500,000 “first responders,” including healthcare workers and other personnel critical in a bio-terror emergency.

This revised plan, however, still leaves many hospitals and healthcare professionals feeling uneasy. Declared one of the most dangerous vaccines available today by Dr. Anthony Fauci, current director of the National Institutes of Health, the smallpox vaccination introduces a living form of the virus Vaccinia into the bloodstream, generating a range of side effects from an itchy rash to smallpox-type pustules.

Before vaccinations were discontinued in the 1970s, about a thousand of every one million people vaccinated experienced serious reactions, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). However, demographic changes since then will likely affect these statistics. For the more than one in six Americans who are either pregnant, have a history of eczema and other skin disorders or have suppressed immune systems due to cancer, transplant treatments or HIV, contact with the Vaccinia virus could be deadly.

While the Bush plan has provided ample financial and legal protections for vaccine manufacturers against potential fallout from mass vaccinations, including immunity from liability, the protection given to healthcare workers and their patients is minimal. In a scathing statement, Andrew L. Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the nation’s largest healthcare union, accused the government of putting the health of patients at risk. “These diseases are all out there. With this knowledge many healthcare professionals are rejecting the Administration’s hasty plans. As one public health worker from Staten Island said, “These diseases are all out there. You wash your hands, you know the symptoms, and you’re treated if there is something there. The vaccines are only a false protection.”

THE CLIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’
Recent Report Warns of Rapid Climate Change

By Mike Wu

In its only move to curb greenhouse gas emissions to date, the Bush administration has called for a whopping 1.5 mpg increase in fuel economy for SUVs and light trucks by 2007. According to a report released last year by the National Academy of Sciences, by 2007 we may need to send the US to head for the hills.

The report, titled “Abrupt Climate Change: Inevitable Surprises,” warns that instead of taking thousands of years to shift from an ice age to a warm era, the earth switches quickly from one “regime” to the other—in some cases, in less than ten years. Tree rings, ice core evidence and sedimentary records reveal large, widespread abrupt climate change over the last 100,000 years and beyond.

Scientists call the most recent and most studied example of this the Younger Dryas Event. As the earth came out of its last major ice age about 12,800 years ago, a cooling trend began and the earth went into an ice age. But about 11,600 years ago the earth suddenly switched to a warmer “regime,” with the earth’s annual mean temperature jumping 14 degrees in just ten years, and the annual precipitation doubling in just three years. Events like this have occurred more than 24 times in the last 110,000 years. No one can say with any exact certainty what triggers these abrupt changes.

In a chapter of the report titled “Global Warming as a Possible Trigger for Abrupt Climate Change,” the authors conclude that “human activities could trigger abrupt climate change.” What this could mean for human societies is unknown given that most reports on climate change impact embrace the scenario of gradual change.

The authors point out, “There is no plan for improving our understanding of the issue, no research priorities have been identified and no policy-making body is addressing the many concerns raised by the potential for abrupt climate change.”

What will happen in the event of a climate flip? Nightmares scenarios abound. Ocean currents could weaken or collapse, plunging the earth into a new ice age.Radically altered weather patterns could cause droughts to dry up and burn. Centuries of drought could turn croplands into deserts. What is certain is that the poorest countries of the world will be the most vulnerable to any rapid and devastating changes.
I saw the Clash at their first New York City gig at the Palladium on 14th Street in February 1979. It was probably the best rock ‘n’ roll show I’ve ever seen in my life. They were obviously ambitious, representing British punk rock in the city that produced the Ramones, the Dolls and the Velvet Underground, but in a way that made them uniquely up for the gig. As Joe Strummer was tuning his Telecaster, guitarist Mick Jones leaned into the mic and muttered, “Let’s get on with it, Strummer.” And then they blasted off with the blazing-octaves “Let’s get on with it, Strummer.” And then they blasted off with the blazing-octaves “London Calling,” their third album, broke them commercially in the U.S. in 1980, with the apocalyptic swing of the title track, the bass-heavy militancy of “The Guns of Brixton” and a minor hit with the soul-flavored “Train in Vain.” That success enabled them to stretch out as musicians; Sandinista, their next album, was a sprawling three-record set. It was highly self-indulgent, but contained some great cuts, including “The Magnificent Seven,” a Brit-rap groove funky enough to get on WBLS-FM in 1981.

But their U.S. success backfired culturally, as they increasingly drew a conservative “rock” audience. (Their militant/military stance was a double-edged sword; despite the Clash’s numerous anti-imperial songs, Gulf War I pilots played their 1982 hit “Rock the Casbah” on bombing runs over Baghdad.) At their legendary series of shows at Bond’s in Times Square in 1983, they got Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five to open for them. The rappers left the stage with wings 10 feet long battered by a hail of bottles and “get off the stage, you fucking niggers” catcalls. “We’re from the South Bronx and we’ve played some rough places,” Flash announced, “but we’ve never had anything like this.”

By 1982, the Clash were weary and close to breaking up, even as the “Combat Rock” album became their biggest seller yet. Strummer’s bitter, elegant “Struggle to Hell” captured that mood best.

“The only band that matters” was a CBS Records marketing slogan, but it contained a taste of truth. If the idea of rock ‘n’ roll rebellion has long been co-opted into a soundtrack for SUV commercials, Joe Strummer was a relic of a time when bands did matter, when they meant more than just corporate entertainment product. The Clash played anthems for a community that hated authority and wanted justice, that despised musical pap and loved getting out of their heads on energy and passion.

Steven Wishnia, author of Exit 23 Utopia, was the bassist in the False Prophets and now plays in Gateria.

LONDON STILL CALLING: Joe Strummer, 1952-2002

By STEVEN WISHNIA

BY EMILY RENNEHMEDT

Using his cell phone, the famous faux-CIA agent Jack Ryan (Ben Affleck) rescues the president from a nuclear device planted in a soda machine at a football game. Once the bomb goes off, Baltimore (an expendable city) is obliterated, but Arnold Schwarzenegger comes out of the catastrophe with only a few cuts on his face. He then heads for Ground Zero, walking around without protective gear, to discover what has happened to his mentor, Morgan Freeman.

Those scenes are from the 2002 summer blockbuster “Sum of All Fears,” a highly imaginative film depicting a nuclear bomb blast with no long-lasting repercussions—no nuclear winter, no children born with six arms. Baltimore would be rebuilt, and American football games and soda machines would survive intact.

Since the end of the Cold War, nuclear explosions in films have become more annoying, destroying “important” American cities, and valued allies, saving humanity from astroids, aliens and even the Earth itself. This furthers the fiction of nuclear weapons as a sustainable threat. In a country where most citizens learn about nukes from the movies and TV, rather than from scientists or books or the left-wing media, this misrepresentation may very well lead to disaster.

The wildly popular Arnold Schwarzenegger is one of this phenomenon’s biggest culprits. In “True Lies” (1994), a romantic moment between Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis is framed by the “beautiful” sight of a nuclear bomb destroying a Florida Key. Schwarzenegger’s hand, reaching for the button of the bomb, is apparently the only protection they need.

In both “Armageddon” and “Deep Impact,” nuclear weapons are used to save the world, exploding dangerous asteroids before they can damage the earth. In “Independence Day,” the bomb is both destructive and redeeming: Houston is destroyed in a nuclear attempt to vanquish aliens, and the aliens are ultimately vanquished by a bomb planted in their hovering mothership (by a cigar-smoking Will Smith, no less). Then, in the forthcoming sci-fi thriller “The Core,” wherein the Earth’s protective light goes out, a group of brave “Terra Nova travelers” travel to the center of the planet and rupture it with a nuclear bomb.

These films reside entirely in the prehistoric past, never showing the consequences of these weapons. The audience never sees what Houston, Baltimore or that poor Florida Key look like after they are nuked.

Films of the 1950s and ’60s were far more concerned with the dangers of the bomb: “Dr. Strangelove” (1964) and “On The Beach” (1959) replaced Hollywood’s usual happy ending with the pointed warning that nuclear weapons could bring about the end of humanity.

These films also did not underestimate the impact of nuclear effects such as radiation. For example, in the 1954 B-movie “Them!” radioactive ants destroy Los Angeles. Similarly, 1970s films like “The China Syndrome” realistically portrayed the risks and consequences of nuclear power and radioactivity.

In the ’80s, when Reagan reanimated fears of The Soviets and war threats surged, nuclear portrayals were more realistic, frightening and shattering, as in “The Day After” and “Special Bulletin.”

The British film “Threads” (1985) included a young heroine devouring rats and barely surviving after a nuclear attack vaporized her loved ones.

And the comedic documentary “Atomic Cafe” (1982), was a hard-hitting look at the nuclear era and all its lunacies, including clips of children hiding under their school desks as instructed by their teachers. “Atomic Cafe” openly mocked American navets about the bomb, a reality much more terrifying than Ben Affleck pushing buttons on his cell phone.

As entertainment and star vehicles, many recent American films are advancing the idea that nuclear war wouldn’t be such an awful thing. Those films should carry a special warning label.

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Radical Nuns Face 30 Years for Inspecting U.S. Nukes

BY JOHN TARLETON

A year after the U.S. began bombing Afghanistan and seven weeks before U.N. weapons inspectors returned to Iraq, three Dominican nuns performed their own weapons inspection on the wind swept high plains of northeastern Colorado.

Sisters Carol Gilbert, Jackie Hudson and Ardeth Platte entered Minuteman III missile silo N-8 near Greeley, Colorado at dawn last October 6 wearing white mop-up suits which said “Disarmament Specialists” in front and “Citizens Weapons Inspection Team” in back. After cutting through two fences, they hammered on the silo and on the tracks used to open the silo’s 120-ton concrete lids. They also used their blood to make the sign of the cross on the tracks and on the silo. They concluded their inspection with a liturgy and a burst of songs and hymns.

Within an hour of the first fence cutting, military personnel arrived in humvees with their machine guns pointed at the nuns. The three women were arrested and forced to lie down in the cold for four hours. They now each face 30 years in prison on charges of sabotage and destruction of government property.

“For some of you this news may be difficult,” the nuns wrote afterward. “We can respond only by telling you that we are breaking through our own fears and intimidation, that we refuse to be immobilized by the intense call to patriotism that masks the lies, theft and killing of permanent government property.

While an hour of the first fence cutting, military personnel arrived in humvees with their machine guns pointed at the nuns. The three women were arrested and forced to lie down in the cold for four hours. They now each face 30 years in prison on charges of sabotage and destruction of government property.

“If anyone did something like this in Russia or Iraq or Pakistan or India, we would be applauding them,” added Anabel Dwyer, a Lansing, Michigan-based human rights lawyer and longtime friend of Sister Platte. “But if you do it here, it’s criminal.”

The inspection of silo N-8 was the first Plowshares action (see Berigan page 11) performed on American soil since the early ‘70s, realizes that few promises that there will be supporters of the three nuns. “They have become celebrities in that little mountain town. It’s hard to overestimate their magnetism. You’ve got to see them in action.”

Sulzman, an anti-nuke activist since the early ‘70s, realizes that few people will ever take the risks that Platte, Hudson and Gilbert have. Still, he hopes that more people will be inspired to take some kind of action.

“If you had a lot of people putting their body on the line, things would change,” he said. “Maybe someday we’ll get that critical mass of people who won’t take government handouts answers, who seek more questions and take some risks.”

Activists Inspect Nuclear Sites Worldwide

While U.N. weapons inspectors struggle to find any sign of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, civilians weapons inspectors around the world have made some unsettling discoveries of their own in recent months.

Oct. 5—1,117 people were arrested on or near the Kleine Brogel Air Force Base, in what is likely the largest mass arrest in Belgian history. Kleine Brogel is home to 10 U.S. B-61 nuclear weapons.

Oct. 6—Several protesters managed to enter Pine Gap, a giant American spy base in the middle of Australia. Pine Gap is used to provide satellite intelligence to US operations in Afghanistan, in the preparation for military action in Iraq and in the monitoring and interception of email and mobile phone communications.

Oct. 6—Greeley, Colorado Three Dominican nuns were arrested for entering a Minutemen III Missile silo. They now face 30 years in jail. (See story above.)

Nov. 8—Members of the Berkshire CIA (Citizens’ Inspection Agency) visited the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, where Britain’s nuclear weapons are manufactured and maintained, to conduct a site inspection determining whether the UK government is complying with international laws on weapons of mass destruction. Police refused to let the inspectors into the base, and representatives from the Aldermaston management declined to meet with them. The inspectors then handed in a letter requesting a meeting with the Aldermaston management to discuss international inspection regimes for the UK’s nuclear weapons and arrangements for allowing inspectors into the site. No United Nations weapons inspectors have ever been known to visit the UK to investigate operations at Aldermaston. The inspectors took soil and water samples from the area surrounding the base and then, in a spirit of cooperation, allowed the Ministry of Defense Police to inspect a collection of their own weapons—water pistols, a toy tank, plastic swords and a six-foot high model Trident missile.

Nov. 16—80 civilian inspectors approached the Kattenberg Military Base in Amsterdam to determine the extent to which the base was cooperating in preparations for an attack on Iraq. Two inspectors managed to get onto base terrain, where they were overpowered by military police, while others in a boat were stopped by police on the water.

Dec. 29—Two activists entered the RAF Fylingdale Ballistic Missile Early Warning station in Yorkshire and were arrested while attempting to reach the satellite communication dome.

Sometime in February—Civilian weapons inspectors from the Toronto-based Rooting Out Evil (www.rooting-outevil.org) will cross into the United States in Buffalo, New York to begin what they hope will be an extensive search for caches of U.S. chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Organizers for Rooting Out Evil say they have made the United States their first priority based on criteria provided by the Bush Administration.

According to those criteria, the most dangerous states are those run by leaders who: 1) have massive stockpiles of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons; 2) ignore due process at the United Nations; 3) refuse to sign and honor international treaties, and 4) have come to power through illegitimate means.

—JOHN TARLETON

NUCLEAR CHRONOLOGY

At the beginning of the new millennium, the world has some 30,000 nuclear weapons. This is more than enough to end life on earth. Recent United States assertions of a first-strike and preemptive nuclear attack policy, the U.S. withdrawal in 2002 from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and its current nuclear dispute with North Korea have produced a world situation of great tension, uncertainty and anxiety. The following chronology puts a perspective on some events of the past five decades.


1949 First nuclear test by the Soviet Union at Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan.

1962 World War II war crimes tribunal. “They felt they were justified in what they were doing.”

The nuns are currently being held in the Clear Creek County Jail in Georgetown, Colorado. Bill Sulzman of the Colorado-based Citizens for Peace in Space is doing support work for the women and promises that there will be supporters on hand from all over the country. He said a local minister in Georgetown has also gathered hundreds of signatures of support for the three nuns.

“They have become celebrities in that little mountain town. It’s hard to overestimate their magnetism. You’ve got to see them in action.”

Sulzman, an anti-nuke activist since the early ‘70s, realizes that few people will ever take the risks that Platte, Hudson and Gilbert have. Still, he hopes that more people will be inspired to take some kind of action.

“If you had a lot of people putting their body on the line, things would change,” he said. “Maybe someday we’ll get that critical mass of people who won’t take government handouts answers, who seek more questions and take some risks.”
Philip Berrigan is best remembered as the rebel priest who galvanized the anti-war movement in May 1968 by leading a middle-of-the-night raid on an army induction center in Catonsville, Maryland and setting hundreds of draft files ablaze with homemade napalm. However, Berrigan, who passed away Dec 6, also helped launch the Plowshares movement in Sept 1980 when he and seven others entered a General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania and hammered on two nose cones for the Mark 12A warhead, poured blood on documents and offered prayers for peace.

Inspired by the Biblical injunction to “hammer swords into plowshares that nation will not lift sword against nation or will they ever again be trained to make war” (Micah 4:3), Plowshares activists around the world have continued battering and pouring their blood on long and short range missiles, nuclear submarines, bombers, transmitter antennas and satellite control facilities ever since. Many of them have done hard time in federal prisons, as much as five years. The 79th and most recent Plowshares action occurred Oct. 6 near Greeley, CO. (See page 10).

Berrigan was arrested numerous times and his anti-war activism landed him in prison for a total of 11 years. Shortly before he died, Berrigan gathered family and close friends at his side. “I die with the conviction, held since 1968 and Catonsville,” he said, “that nuclear weapons are the scourge of the earth; to mine for them, manufacture them, deploy them, use them, is a curse against God, the human family, and the earth itself.”

— JOHN TARLETON

PHILIP BERRIGAN, 1923-2002
A Lifetime Spent Beating Swords into Plowshares

“We think what a shame it would be to die now. Life’s normal, only because the macabre has become normal. While we wait for rain, for football, for justice, on TV the old generals and the eager boy anchors talk of first strike and second strike capability, as though they’re discussing a family board game. My friends and I discuss Prophecy, the film of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dead bodies choking the river, the living stripped of their skin and hair, we remember especially the man who just melted into the steps of the building and we imagine ourselves like that, as stains on staircases.”

— ARUNDHATI ROY, Booker prize-winning author, looks at the conflict over Kashmir from her home in New Delhi, June 2002

NUCLEAR ISSUES

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many local groups and general-focus organizations that are also committed to nuclear disarmament.

• Antiwar.com, 520 S. Murphy Ave., Suite 202, Sunnyvale, CA 94086. www.antiwar.com egaarris@antiwar.com
• Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 6042 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago, IL 60637, (773) 702-2555. www.thebulletin.org bulletin@thebulletin.org
• Center for Defense Information, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036-2109, (202) 332-0600. www.cdi.org info@cdi.org
• Center for Economic Conversion, 222 View St., Mountain View, CA 94041, (650) 968-8798. www.conversion.org cec@igc.org
• Friends Committee on National Legislation, 245 Second St., NE, Washington, D.C. 20036-2109, (202) 332-0600. www.fcnl.org fcnl@fcnl.org
• International Action Center, 39 W. 14th St., #206, New York, NY 10011, (212) 633-6646. www.iacenter.org iacenter@iacenter.org
• International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 727 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 868-5050. www.ippnw.org ippnwbos@ippnw.org
• International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 727 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 868-5050. www.ippnw.org ippnwbos@ippnw.org
• Peace Action, 1819 H Street, NW, #206, Washington, D.C. 20006, (202) 862-9740. www.peace-action.org pdec@peace-action
• Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1213 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19107, (215) 563-7110. www.wilmf.org/disarm/disarm.html wilmf@wilmf.org

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“We think what a shame it would be to die now. Life’s normal, only because the macabre has become normal. While we wait for rain, for football, for justice, on TV the old generals and the eager boy anchors talk of first strike and second strike capability, as though they’re discussing a family board game. My friends and I discuss Prophecy, the film of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dead bodies choking the river, the living stripped of their skin and hair, we remember especially the man who just melted into the steps of the building and we imagine ourselves like that, as stains on staircases.”

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established by 12 States. • 1959 Antarctic Treaty demilitarized an entire region and created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone. It forbids all military activity, the testing of any kind of weapon and disposal of nuclear waste. • 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty banned nuclear weapon testing in the atmosphere, outer space and under water. • 1967 Outer Space Treaty prohibited military maneuvers and the placing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in earth orbit and on celestial bodies. This was supplemented by a 1979 agreement to prevent the use of the moon and other celestial bodies for military purposes. • 1968 The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) balanced a commitment by States without nuclear weapons not to develop or possess them, with one by nuclear-weapons States to negotiate their total elimination. The NPT entered into force in 1970. • 1971 The Sea Bed Treaty prohibited the placement of nuclear weapons on or under the ocean floor beyond a 12-mile limit from the coast line. • 1972 A convention banning biological and toxin weapons. It entered into force in 1975, the first major disarmament agree-
STRATEGIC ARMS: TRICK OR TREATY?

BY IRA PANETH

The 2002 Treaty of Moscow, signed by the United States and Russia and proclaiming to represent radical cutbacks in their respective strategic nuclear arsenals, is merely the latest instance of White House subterfuge and farce.

The agreement entails no significant reductions in the number of strategic nuclear weapons the U.S. will possess.

The treaty’s function is a public relations fig leaf for the Pentagon’s plans, wishes and fantasies to overhaul and expand U.S. nuclear arms capabilities with no debate either in Congress or society.

The mass media trumpeted a dramatic cut in numbers, from 6,000 strategic nuclear weapons on each side to 2,200 or less at the end of 2012. Multiple levels of phonyism are at operation here. The most blatant and absurd (excluding the notion that keeping 3,200 weapons is necessary) is the absence of any provision for the destruction of warheads or launchers.

The extent of arms control in this case is to separate the two basic components of a strategic nuclear weapon, and place them in different warehouses, or perhaps different floors of the same warehouse.

Alongside this stockpiling, a reach-through-Pentagon-numbers game exists akin to the accounting practices of the Enron and Arthur Andersen scandals.

According to Faking Nuclear Restraint:

The Bush Administration’s Secret Plan for Strengthening U.S. Nuclear Forces, a report by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), if the Pentagon’s accounting “flexibility” is eliminated, the number of strategic nuclear weapons currently held by the United States balloons to 10,656.

This number, which is almost double the Moscow treaty’s starting point, includes such weapons as those on Trident submarines in overhaul, bombs labeled “nonstrategic” that sit on F-16 and F-15 fighters or cruise missiles; and weapons that are inactive, meaning that the warheads lack tritium and other limited life components needed for the big boom. This tabulation counts 7,970 active and 2,686 inactive warheads in 2002. NRDC’s study shows that at the end of 2012, the “radical cutback” will have produced a numbers shift to 5,070 active warheads and 4,910 inactive: a total of 9,980 warheads, 650 fewer than now.

The treaty’s goal of 2,200 active strategic warheads will be met by more creative accounting. The Pentagon will continue to categorize 800 warheads on F-16 and F-15 fighters as nonstrategic, discount 240 warheads in overhaul and establish a category of weapons called “responsive force” which will comprise 1,670 active warheads not on deployed systems. Finally 160 spare warheads won’t be counted.

The treaty’s next level of absurdity is to be found in how the three-page document is designed for easy subversion. There is no timetable for the dismantling of weapons into warheads and launchers, and the agreement expires in 2012. Thus, if action is delayed until the very end and the treaty is not extended or augmented, 2012 can come and not a single weapon need be dismantled.

Additionally, the treaty does not delineate how weapons are to be cut. In the past, each specific area of weaponry, air, sea or land, was given a precise number. And, in one of the great ironies of arms control history, the treaty scraps the current ban on multiple warhead land-based missiles, which had been negotiated under Bush I. This step backward will allow Russia to redeploy weapons whose danger the U.S. once ranted about.

The treaty’s lack of concrete limits or methods by which solutions are to be achieved in a step-by-step way is damaging to the treaty process itself (a Bush Team general strategy) and lays the groundwork for far-reaching and destructive consequences.

Treaties should not rely for their implementation on the fine fellow-feeling of the men whose signatures they happen to bear, Bush and Putin are supposedly going to ensure that the treaty is pushed forward, yet it is anticipated that each will be long gone from the scene by 2012.

“This treaty will liquidate the legacy of the Cold War,” Bush stated, and in one regard he is correct. Over the Cold War decades, an arms control infrastructure—however shaky, incomplete and ineffective—was built. The Bush Team has wrecked that fragile entity.

The treaty dovetails with numerous other moves in this pursuit. Bush scuttled the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. He has no intention of adhering to those provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that require nuclear-armed states to seek total disarmament.

He has announced plans to resume production of nuclear triggers.

All these actions are part of the same desire in the elite ranks of the Pentagon and civilian government to continue using nuclear weapons as a mainstay of “full spectrum dominance,” a fancy way of saying the ability to kick or threaten the shit out of anyone who challenges the United States empire.

The critical question is whether the U.S. citizenry can rally itself to compel its government to address the actual legacies of the Cold War, including the extensive poisoning of life forms by radioactive substances; the squandering of precious resources on an arms race with no other significant competitors; and nuclear weapons and power in all their variety. Until this happens, the world will grow more dangerous, and while the United States preaches the horror of everyone else’s nuclear weapons, it will be leading the way, buttressing its power with the best nuclear arsenal money can be wasted on.

This is what would happen if modern nuclear warheads with the force of 20 megatons of TNT hit a major American city.*

Ground Zero to two miles:

Within 1/100 of a second, a fireball would form in every direction from Ground Zero enveloping downtown and reaching out for two miles. Temperatures would rise to 20 million degrees Fahrenheit, and everything—buildings, trees, cars and people—would be vaporized;

2 to 4 miles from Ground Zero:

The blast would produce pressures of 25 pounds per square inch and winds in excess of 650 miles per hour; these titanic forces would rip buildings apart and level everything, including reinforced concrete and steel structures.

4 to 10 miles from Ground Zero:

The heat would vaporize automobile sheet metal, glass would melt. At this distance, the blast wave would create pressures of 5 to 10 pounds per square inch and winds of 200 miles per hour; Masonry and wood frames would be leveled;

16 miles from Ground Zero:

The heat would ignite all easily flammable materials—houses, paper, cloth, gasoline, heating fuel—starting hundreds of thousands of fires. Fanned by blast winds still in excess of 100 miles per hour, these fires would merge into a giant firestorm more than 30 miles across, covering 800 square miles. Everything within this entire area would be consumed by flames.

Within minutes after the bomb exploded, 1,000,000 would die, among the 7,000,000 survivors, more than 1,000,000 would be fatally injured. Another 500,000 would sustain major medical injuries.

* Assumes a city of about 3,000,000 people.

Source: Physicians for Social Responsibility.
U.S. IS FAKING NUCLEAR RESTRAINT

BY JOSEPH GERSON

Even before the trauma of the September 11 attacks and the wars that have followed, it was clear that the Bush administration was leading us into a more dangerous period of imperial reconsolidation, aggression and possible nuclear war.

Their vision, as Vice President Dick Cheney put it, was to impose “the arrangement [for] the 21st century.”

One of the tragedies of the September 11 attacks has been the inability of United States opinion makers to understand and communicate that, as awful as these terrorist attacks were, they were not the worst act of terrorism and violence in history. If there is any September 11 lesson to learn, it is that indiscriminate mass murder is unacceptable, intolerable.

Along the way, it would be well to bear in mind an observation by Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor Senga Yamaguchi. Speaking in Hiroshima last summer, Yamaguchi reminded his audience that the first atomic bombings were history’s worst acts of terrorism.

Yet compared to today’s nuclear warheads, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs were small and primitive. The U.S. has threatened to initiate nuclear war on more than 26 occasions since Nagasaki, recently on the eve of the Afghan invasion and now as the Bush administration prepares for war against Iraq.

The Bush administration has exploited the anguish and confusion of the past year to promote a dangerous nuclear weapons and war doctrine. That doctrine calls on the nation to prepare for a surge in the production of new nuclear weapons, embracing pre-emptive nuclear attacks, and threatening nuclear attacks against both nuclear and non-nuclear countries.

The recent U.S.-Russian agreement signed by Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin is a manifestation of their tacit alliance rather than an arms control agreement. Neither actually committed to destroying a single nuclear warhead.

U.S. commitments to illusions of nuclear superiority and to first-strike nuclear war fighting are made plain with its abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, the Nuclear Policy Review (NPR) and the planned fusion of the military’s strategic (nuclear) and space commands.

In one of the most widely reported critiques of the NPR, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) concluded that the Bush administration is in fact abdicating with weapons and is “Taking nuclear restraint,” as it attempts to “break out” of the nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) Treaty. Even the New York Times editorialised on March 12, 2002 that the U.S. had become a “nuclear rogue” State.

In addition to naming Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya, China and Russia as its most likely nuclear targets, the administration is seeking to reinforce the Pentagon’s “Full Spectrum Dominance” commitments with a “New Triad” of nuclear and conventional weapons, with so-called “missile defenses,” and with a technologically more sophisticated nuclear weapons infrastructure. Far from honoring its NPR commitments to negotiate the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the Bush administration has reaffirmed that nuclear weapons will remain the cornerstone of U.S. military power for the next 50 years.

The Bush administration is on a fast-track to deploy a strategic nuclear system with the abrogation of the ABM treaty, the construction of a “missile defense” base in Alaska and the construction of increasingly secret and rigid testing.

Finally, there is the revitalization of the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure. The NPR calls for preparing for a “surge” in production of new nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons production plants are to be expanded; new designs teams are to be assembled at the nuclear research laboratories, and new generations of nuclear weapons are to be designed and deployed.

The human race requires the abolition of nuclear weapons. To this end, an “Urgent Call to End the Nuclear Danger” has been launched by leading figures of the 1980s nuclear weapons freeze movement. The NPR calls on the United States opinion makers to understand and commit to this end.

Caldicott Warnings of Nuclear War

Helen Caldicott, Australian medical doctor and anti-nuclear activist, appeals to Americans in her 2002 book, The New Nuclear Danger, to “rise up to save themselves, their children, and all future generations” from nuclear war.

Military planners, scientists, corporate executives and think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation are promoting a new nightmarish level of nuclear weapons development. Caldicott warns that the extraordinary dangers of current United States nuclear strategy, planning and development, sponsored by the Bush administration.

In a piece in the Baltimore Sun on Oct 6, Caldicott declared that it was important to recall the medical consequences of the 1991 Iraqi war. “It was, in effect, a nuclear war,” she said.

“But by the end of that conflict,” she said, “the U.S. had left between 300 and 800 tons of depleted uranium (DU) 238 in anti-tank shells and other explosives on the battlefields of Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.”

“The term ‘depleted’ refers to the removal of the fissionable element uranium 235 through a process that ironically is called ‘enrichment,’” she continued.

“What remains, uranium 238, is 1.7 times as dense as lead. When incorporated into an anti-tank shell and fired, it achieves great momentum, cutting through tank armor like a hot knife through butter.”

“What other properties does uranium 238 possess?” she asked.

“First, it is pyrophoric,” she wrote. “When it hits a tank at high speed, it burns into flames, producing aerosolized particles less than five microns in diameter, making them easy to inhale into the terminal air passages of the lung.”

“Second, it is a potent radioactive carcinogen. Once inside the body—either in the lungs if it has been inhaled, in a wound or in the gut if it penetrates flesh or ingested since it concentrates in the food chain and contaminates water—it can produce cancer in the lungs, bones, or kidneys.”

“Third, it has a half-life of 4.5 billion years, meaning the areas in which this ammunition was used will remain effectively radioactive for the rest of time.”

Since 1991, the U.S. has also used DU weapons in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan.

•1990 The U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to stop producing chemical weapons, to begin destruction of existing stocks and each to take no more than 5,600 tons of chemical agents.

•1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) agreed to by the U.S. and the Russian Federation (formerly the Soviet Union), reducing to 6,000 the number of “accountable warheads” each country could have, and setting a limit for each of 1,600 deployed strategic nuclear delivery vehicles—bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarines.

•1993 General Assembly adopted the Chemical Weapons Convention, the first global verifiable multilateral disarmament treaty. It banned the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and committed States parties to destroy all stocks. It came into force in 1997.

•1994 U.S. began new round of nuclear testing.

•1995 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) continued the cuts initiated by the U.S. and the Russian Federation under START I. By December 31, 2003, land-
A NIGHTMARE: THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES

BY DONALD PANETH

"To exert power in every form was the essence of civilization," wrote Lewis Mumford, social philosopher, historian of cities and architectural critic.

"And now, I think, the meaning of the end of a nation is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction."

And now human destiny is about to be revealed—Armageddon approaches.

On Sept. 28, 2000, Ariel Sharon dropped in on the Temple Mount, igniting the current Palestinian uprising. On Dec. 12, 2000, the United States Supreme Court handed the presidency to George W. Bush. On September 11, 2001, airliners slammed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing some 3,000 people. The following month, the U.S. bombed and attacked Afghanistan.

In 2002, Bush took the U.S. out of the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and directed the Pentagon to build the initial stage of an antimissile system in Ft. Greely, Alaska.

In early 2003, United Nations inspectors searched for evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the U.S. engaged in a dispute with North Korea.

The End Times is the period during which the Apocalypse will take place. The Apocalypse, from the Greek word meaning “revelation,” is used to describe the world’s cataclysmic end and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Armageddon represents the Final Battle between Christ and the Anti-Christ, an evil figure whom He will defeat. At the Final Judgment, Christ will resurrect the dead and consign the righteous to eternal life and the evil to eternal damnation.

To true believers, the end of the world seems less a threat than the fulfillment of a promise, observed Time magazine (July 1, 2002). Time took note that Kyle Watson had written on his prophecy news website, AtlantaChristianWeekly.com: “Trying prophesy and current events as how much closer we are to being with Christ in heaven.”

Other observers also look to the stars above. Karl Gussman, journalist, is the author of Weapons in Space (2001). Despite the 1967 Outer Space Treaty which prohibits the placing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in earth orbit and on celestial bodies, “The U.S. is preparing to make space a new area of war,” Gussman writes.

The U.S. Space Command’s vision for 2020 is control of space and from there domination of the earth. This agenda will require the placing in space of laser beams, orbiting battle platforms and other nuclear-powered weapons.

Globalization of the world economy will continue, the Space Command asserts, “with a widening gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’” The view is that by controlling space and the earth below, the U.S. will be able to keep those “have-nots” in line.

Multiplication of the numbers of impoverished human beings in the world is the whimper behind the big bang being planned by the U.S. military.

Alternatives to apocalypse?

The reality—without reference to religious texts—is that each and every problem facing the people of the U.S. and the world faces has known and detailed solutions. The solutions are as programmatic as the Pentagon’s extensive plans, though a lot less expensive. For example, $9 billion would produce water and sanitation for all who lack it; $13 billion would pay for basic health care and nutrition.

The last hope for humankind requires that ordinary people act to save a world that may well be destined to die.

APOCALYPSE: FAR RIGHT CONJURES NUCLEAR DEMONS

BY MICHELLE GILKES

To the surprise of secularists, the Book of Revelation has seeped into public consciousness commonplace nowadays to find the media either explaining or quoting biblical prophecy. The subject gained the cover of Time magazine in 2002 as well as an in-depth study by Frontline. The entertainment industry has often used prophecy as fodder for entertainment without being conscious of the implications. The Omen,” “End of Days,” “The Seven Seals”—or Marilyn Manson crowning himself as “Anti-Christ Superstar.”

Why is the apocalypse being discussed seriously by conventional news outlets? Because so many people seem to accept a system of religious doctrine concerning last day for judgment, and it even shapes their political judgments. A Time/CNN poll found that 33 percent of Americans are paying more attention to how the news might relate to biblical prophecy, while 59 percent said they believed the events in Revelation are going to come true.

The Remnant by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins is a bestselling novel, the tenth in a series of novels which has sold more than 50 million copies. The books give a dramatized account of what Christians call the Tribulation, the period of seven years when the Anti-Christ (Satan’s front man) takes over the earth.

However, LaHaye is not your ordinary spinner of tales. According to the Institute for First Amendment Studies, he is a founder of the Christian Heritage College, member of the executive board of the Moral Majority and on the editorial board of the Christian Enquirer. Most importantly, he was a founding father of the Council for National Policy, an influential conservative group whose members include Oliver North, Jack Kemp, Grover Robertson and Jesse Helms. The NCNP hosts illustrious guest speakers such as George W. Bush.

So it may be no surprise to learn that The Remnant offers a plot where Baghdad is Satan’s headquarters, and an evil former United Nations Secretary-General operating from Iraq uses peacekeepers to enforce global control. The series highlights Israel as the background for Christian prophetic events. This religious worldview could explain the reasoning behind the Christian Coalition’s stand on Israel during their 2002 “Road to Victory” conference of which the Washington Post wrote: “For more than two hours, prominent conservatives… declared that the U.S. must help protect and preserve Israel at all costs, expand the nation’s current borders, and forget about an independent Palestine.”

According to James Tabor, professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, much of the chronology Christians attribute to Revelation is not in the text. There is no reference to an Anti-Christ, Rapture (when Christians will suddenly rise to heaven and the rest will be left behind) or the Tribulation. These three references are found in other parts of the Bible but have been meshed into the interpretation of Revelation. Not all Christians take the book literally. Mainstream Christianity interprets the text as allegorical.

The text of the Book of Revelation mostly presents an array of esoteric symbols and violent predictions of God’s wrath visited on a sinful mankind. There are seven seals which when broken take peace from the earth and spread death, pestilence, famine, earthquakes and heavenly signs.

If one adheres to End Times beliefs, Revelation can only inspire fear and paranoia.

The dangers of the apocalyptic world view is perhaps best described by Chip Berlet, author of Dances With Devils, who writes, “Ritual purification campaigns by the Christian Right continue to spread divisiveness. For some apocalyptic Christians, the End Times have arrived, and the witch hunt for satanic agents has begun in earnest.”

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**HIDDEN SUBSIDIES OF NUCLEAR POWER IN THE U.S.**

**BY ADAM AUSTER**

The hidden strength of the nation’s 103 nuclear power plants lies in the massive subsidies that made and keep them profitable. But these subsidies have a hidden weakness—their vulnerability to public pressure. Government guarantees and protections enabled electric utilities to build nuclear plants in the 1960s and 1970s without financial risk. In 1973, President Nixon announced the Project-style effort to complete a thousand private (but government-backed) reactors by the year 2000. Nixon’s plan, and the fate of the nuclear industry, founded when citizens activists targeted and ended nuclear construction subsidies in the 1980s. With this fund- ing, construction ground to a halt.

**Follow the Money**

Today, hidden operating subsidies underwrite the profitability of running existing reactors. These subsidies include more than $145 billion in direct federal aid since 1947, according to a study by the Renewable Energy Project. These include direct outlays by such agencies as the Energy Research and Development Administration ($326 mil- lion in 1999 alone) and indirect subsidies such as the liability exemption that saved the industry $359 million in avoided insurance costs in 1999. Other subsidies are embedded in the structure of the industry and have not been fully estimated in dollars. For instance, nuclear plant operators do not bear the cost of cancers, birth defects, genetic damage or lowered immunity related to uranium mining, fuel fabrication, radioactive waste or routine leaks and emissions from nuclear plants. Additional subsidies are related to uncompensated environmental and health effects from the mining and milling of nuclear fuel, a legal limit to the liability that a nuclear plant operator faces in the event of a nuclear accident; lax regulation, allowing nukes to run cheaper and for more days of the year but at greater risk; and Congressional agreement (after lobbying by the nuclear industry) for government to take over the dirty and expensive job of storing nuclear wastes for hundreds of thousands of years.

**Anti-Nuclear Power**

The technical problems of splitting the atom to make electricity have been subject to intense debate among experts since the industry’s inception in the 1950s. However, it was not until the 1970s that safety concerns galvanized a grassroots movement against nuclear energy. The regional anti-nuclear alliances of the 1970s used nonviolent direct action to dramatize nuclear safety issues and confront the nuclear industry—tactics that led to mass arrests around the country and catalyzed nuclear power into the public spotlight. While concern about catastrophic accidents was the catalyst of this movement, the nuclear power industry has not been immune to scandals or corruption. The energy crisis of 1973 and 1974 and the first Arab oil embargo unleashed a wave of growth for the nuclear power industry, but the 1980s and 1990s were years of stagnation and state government interventions. Federal and state governments have continued to support nuclear power through massive public subsidies.

**Public Pressure**

Today, operating nuclear plants may be vulnerable to public pressure against their operating subsidies. Direct and hidden subsidies increase the profitability and attractiveness of operating nuclear plants. They confer the appearance that the mikes are cheaper to operate than they really are. Meanwhile, artificially cheap nuclear power discourages energy efficiency and boosts demand for electricity. Power plant operators will run nuclear plants as long as the subsidies flow—but they flow through public policy and government blessing. The regional anti-nuclear alliances of the 1970s are now able to change the climate investment climate and for all.

**Indian Point Plagued by Security Failures**

**BY MIKE BURKE**

The security guards work up to 16 hours a day, sometimes for seven days straight. Morale is low. Their confidence in management may be even lower. They admit being under-qualified and under-trained in key security aspects. Also, they often have very little experience. Some even show up for work drunk. They are not the security guards at the local shopping mall, but the men and women entrusted to protect perhaps the most sensitive facility in the New York area, the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

Twenty million people live within a 50-mile radius of Indian Point’s reactors. As security guards at Indian Point in Buchanan, NY, have apocalyptic consequences and could render the entire New York City metro area uninhabitable. And such an attack is no longer inconceivable to many. On Sept. 11 the two hijacked planes that crashed into the Twin Towers flew directly over the Indian Point nuclear site in Buchanan.

But a recently released study by Indian Point’s owner revealed that 81 percent of guards felt they could not adequately protect the site from an attack.

"This report suggests that security at Indian Point has more holes than Swiss cheese," said Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY). In the 18 months after the Sept. 11 attacks, New York and Washington, so-called homeland security has become a key legislative priority. But at Indian Point and nuclear sites across the country, the federal government and Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) have been repeatedly assailed for failing to take proper precautions in the event of an attack.

In early January, Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) accused the NRC of failing to protect nuclear sites from attacks after Sept. 11. Clinton called on the federal security coordinator for each nuclear power plant and the creation of federal teams to protect plants from attacks.

Currently the private firm Wackenhut employs the workers at Indian Point Unit 2, which is owned by the Entergy corporation. Wackenhut is the second-largest provider of security services in the country and has long been charged with cutting security costs and hiring unqualified staff to maximize profit.

Texas terminated its prison contract with Wackenhut after reports that guards were sexually abusing inmates. In New Mexico, prisons, nine stabbings and five murders occurred on Wackenhut’s watch, all within the first year of operations. Investigative journalist Greg Palast said of the situation: "New Mexico’s privately operated prisons are filled with America’s most violent outcasts—and those are the guards.” And now Wackenhut oversees the guards at Indian Point.

To make matters worse, in mid-January, a new study commissioned by Gov. George Pataki confirmed the fears of many critics finding that the county’s evacuation plan would fail in the event of a nuclear disaster.

"...You should evacuate as promptly as possible, but you will have plenty of time to leave.”

The current plan is a sham that has put the lives of New Yorkers at risk for decades,” said John Flanigan of the New York Public Interest Group. “This threat has been looming over New York City like a black cloud for too long. We need to shut off this ticking time bomb once and for all.”

Jan. 30, 2003 North Korea announced that it was withdrawing from the 1965 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty; its withdrawal would take effect in three months.

A broad, diverse new anti-war movement emerged last fall as the Bush administration stepped up its calls for pre-emptive war on Iraq. Shaking off the fear and the uncertainty that had descended on much of America after September 11, protesters marked the first anniversary of the Afghan bombing Oct. 6 with spirited Not In Our Name rallies across the country and followed weeks later with an anti-war march in Washington that drew upward of 100,000 people. Marches, rallies, vigils, banner-hangs, teach-ins and die-ins began taking place with increasing frequency not only in big cities and liberal college towns but in unlikely places such as Augusta, Georgia, Sioux City, South Dakota, Centralia, Washington, Sandton, Idaho and Kingston, New York. Hundreds of thousands of more Americans took to the streets January 18-20 to honor Martin Luther King and speak out against the war. Even larger worldwide protests are expected February 15. Some participants seek to stop the war because they believe it would be an unwise use of American power while many others have begun to draw links between war and corporate-led globalization and are questioning whether such a system could ever produce justice abroad or at home.
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OIL AND POLITICS IN VENEZUELA

What’s with all the strikes?

BY JOHN TARLETON

Carlos Ortega, president of Venezuela’s chamber of commerce, recently spoke in New York at David Rockefeller’s Council of the Americas. At his side was Carlos Ortega, president of Venezuela’s largest labor union. Outside, pot-banging protesters denounced the two men for their repeated efforts to topple the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez. The day’s events highlighted one of the most striking features of Venezuela’s ongoing economic and political crisis: the nation’s most powerful union continues siding with business leaders against the working poor.

The struggle between Venezuela’s government and recalcitrant business and labor leaders revolves around control of oil. Venezuela is the world’s fifth largest producer of crude oil and PDVSA, its giant state-owned oil monopoly, is a $50 billion per year enterprise that accounts for 80% of the country’s exports and half the national budget. Oil workers are among the highest paid in Venezuela and their union (led by Ortega) has sided with PDVSA in its efforts to have the company privatized. Chavez and his followers see the company’s billions of dollars in oil revenues as key to transforming the lives of the 80% of Venezuelans who live in poverty. The company’s 40,000 workers represent a tiny fraction of the labor force but are strategically placed to wreak havoc on Venezuela’s economy.

While the business-led “general strike” that was launched December 2 in order to force Chavez to call early elections has been a flop mainly limited to the upscale neighborhoods of eastern Caracas, oil company executives presided over the sabotage of pumps, pipelines, tankers and other ships, trucks and key points in the flow of oil from the ground to the consumer that has reduced oil production from 3 million to 600,000 barrels per day. Some executives also made public statements that supplies had been contaminated and oil facilities booby-trapped to cause environmental disasters if restarted.

The shutdown has cost the government $4 billion, according to Rafael Ramirez, the minister of energy and mines. “If they had tried anything like this inside the United States, we would see the White House calling them terrorists, locking them up in Guantanamo Bay, and suing them for the millions of dollars of losses that they have caused,” notes Narconews.com’s Ali Giordano, who has written extensively about the Venezuelan crisis. Two thousand dissident managers and employees were fired in mid-January and more changes could be on the way as Chavez implements a Nov. 2001 decree that that makes the government the majority partner in any new energy venture in Venezuela.

“When the final history is written of Dec. 2002,” Giordano says, “it will be known as the month that the Venezuelan democracy took its oil industry back from a clique of over-paid and corrupt coup-plotters after the executives tried to sabotage it.”

Who are the players?

BY BENNETT BANMER

As the rhetoric intensifies, so does violence and the stakes in the nearly two-month national strike in Venezuela. Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations mark a typical day in Caracas, often leaving participants battered, bruised, and even dead. Since the failed coup of April 2002, Venezuela has been caught between President Hugo Chavez’s backers – “Chavistas” – and the opposition, the “Coordinadora Democratica,” a coalition of forces from labor and management.

President Hugo Chavez

A mestizo born to schoolteachers in rural Venezuela, Chavez led a military coup in 1992 against the Andres-Perez administration which implemented austerity policies that disproportionately affected the poor after the oil boom soured. Chavez survived a military coup in April of 2002 by forces angered over recent constitutional referendum that enfranchised the poor. The referendum, as well as his work to solidify his control over the military, have allowed Chavez to retain his tenuous hold on power.

CTV union

“Confederacion de Trabajadores Venezolanos,” representing workers in the oil industry, is the most influential union in the opposition. Critics charge that Carlos Ortega, the union’s leader, became president through fraudulent elections. CTV workers are the backbone of a strike that has shut down oil production.

Business and Oil

Fedecamaras and PDVSA are the two main business and oil players. Fedecamaras is affiliated with the government, though its aim is to promote businesses in the private sector. The president of Fedecamaras, Carlos Fernandez, appears regularly on television with the CTV’s Ortega, delivering updates on the strike. PDVSA is the state-owned oil company and its striking top and middle managers have aided the CTV in shutting down oil production.

The Press

The private Venezuelan press almost uniformly backs the opposition to Chavez. Owners of the press met with coup-plotters during April. Although Chavez supporters have protested the biased coverage from anti-government media outlets, Chavez himself has taken few steps to censor the privately owned TV stations and newspapers.

Military

Most of the military backed ex-Fedecamaras boss Pedro Carmona in the April 2002 coup attempt, though certain sectors supported Chavez and helped him regain the Presidency. After a purge of the disloyal military elements, the military now backs Chavez.

Other Nations

The U.S. hastily recognized Carmona when he momentarily seized power in April, although it has now assumed an officially neutral stance. Cuba and Brazil have offered Chavez moral support and economic help in the form of food and oil. Chavez ironically said he wanted to create an “axis of good” with Cuba and Brazil.

Bennett Banmer is an organizer for Local 1199 SEIU and has worked with independent union movements in Mexico.
Bush’s Bullying Frays U.S.-North Korean Relations

We’re interested in peace on the Korean peninsula,” President Bush said in early January, after meetings with South Korean and Japanese diplomats.

However, before its recent “shift” to finalize a dialogue with North Korea, the U.S. attitude toward the North has been marked with harsh rhetoric and condemnation.

Soon after Bush’s peace parley, Donald Gregg, former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, commented on the Charlie Rose Show, “The North Koreans have not gotten from the Clinton Administration, which is a joint statement saying we [U.S.] and North Korea would no longer harbor relations toward each other and we’d work for improved relations.”

Gregg stressed that North Koreans seem to have an “axis-of-evil” comment, the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review which listed North Korea as one of seven countries which the U.S. may preemptively strike with nuclear weapons, and the building-up for war in Iraq. North Korea’s fear that it may be attacked next has not been dispelled.

Shortly after the Bush administration took office in Jan. 2001, the U.S. dismissed the nuclear threat and threwNorth Korea out of the Agreed Framework. When South Korean President Kim Dae Jung visited Washington that February, he found Bush to be distrustful of the North Koreans and skeptical toward his “Sunshine” policy of peaceful engagement and dialogue with North Korea.

However, eased relations between the two countries have led to increasing personal contact among people of both countries and more economic cooperation. “The Sunshine policy has been very successful,” says Karin Brull, a senior associate at the East Asia Policy Education Project at the Friends Committee on National Legislation. “Kim Dae Jung changed the way South Korea interacts with North Korea. The Sunshine policy has changed the way South Koreans view the North.”

The recent election victory of President-elect Roh Moo Hyun is a harbinger of changing attitudes. Roh, a former human rights lawyer, is a firm supporter of former President Kim’s “Sunshine” policy and calls for continued engagement with the North. His opponent Lee Hoi Chang, a favorite of the American administration, endorsed a less open North Korea policy.

There was little-to-no dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea during Bush’s first year in office. Then on Jan. 29, 2002, the President suddenly included North Korea in his open North Korea policy.

In 1994, the U.S. and North Korea came together on an “Agreed Framework.” In exchange for a U.S. promise not to attack, an annual supply of 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and an agreement to build two light water reactors by 2003, North Korea agreed to shut down its graphite-moderated reactor at Yongbyon and to suspend its nuclear weapons development.

When North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Il admitted last October to a secret uranium enrichment program, Washington interpreted it as a violation of 1994 agreement and halted delivery of fuel oil supplies in December.

North Korea withdrew from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Jan. 10 and the U.S. has responded by allegedly threatening food sanctions that could kill millions in the impoverished Stalinist state and offering financial aid if North Korea dismantles the plant and submits to U.N. weapons inspections. Many people are just wondering where all of this may lead us.

Stephen Schwartz, publisher of the Bulletin for Atomic Scientists, says it’s unclear whether North Korea has nuclear weapons. However, he does believe the situation is dangerous and urges people to ask why North Korea even wants nuclear weapons. “Nuclear weapons give a country a certain level of prestige, which North Korea does not have. We have to understand the reasons they are doing this.”

They’re doing this because they fear the U.S. Kim Jong Il is using nuclear weapons as a deterrent.”

These generous men, like all others we talk to all over Iraq, insist that they have no hard feelings towards the American people. They view “the one main source of evil in the world now” to be the current administration in Washington.

Why do they treat Iraq as guilty until proven innocent?” they ask.

And then they were pressing more food and ammunition on us, insisting that we stay for sugared tea served in little glasses in the traditional Iraqi way, pressing upon us their goodwill as we left.

My throat ached with tears. It was most humbling to be treated with such “Christian kindness” by Muslims on Christmas Day in a year when the image of the Prince of Peace seems very faint in my own country.”

Theresa Kucharik
Jan. 1, 2003

Life Goes On

The longer I’m here, the more I see behind the outward picture of normalcy, the more I feel the heaviness that the people carry as they go through the day. But I also see a very strong spirit and sense of determination to survive, to rise above the moments of despair, even if it is only for the sake of their children. Yet there are times of celebration and joy.

Families joke around and tease each other. Children are playful and mischievous. The streets of Baghdad still bristles with work and activity. New buildings arise out of the rubble. Musicians continue to make music that brings them life. As much as possible, even in the face of war, life goes on.

Peggy Gish
Dec. 26, 1992

For more information, see www.iraqpeaceteam.org

1 Million to March on February 15

Organizers for the Stop the War Coalition expect 10 million people to participate in a worldwide peace protest to be held on Saturday, February 15th under the slogan of “Don’t attack Iraq.” There will be protests in New York, Oslo, Berlin, Bangkok, Ramallah, Rome, Cairo, Copenhagen, London, Manila, Amsterdam, Paris, Stockholm, Glasgow, Athens, Antwerp, Skopje, Barcelona, Helsinki, Belfast, and more. The protest was inspired by a Nov. 15 antwwar protest of 500,000 people in Florence, Italy that capped the first-ever European Social Forum. Organizers predict February’s event will be the world’s largest ever simultaneous political demonstration.

Halting the War Machine in Its Tracks

A pair of train drivers in west- ern Scotland refused an offer to transport arms believed to be destined for British forces in the Persian Gulf. The offer revolt was the first such industrial action by British workers since 1973 when dockworkers refused munitions intended for Chile’s mili- tary regime led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

NY Woman Heads Up as Human Shield

Manna Jo Greene says she’ll “do whatever it takes” to stop a war in Iraq. For Greene, a 27-year-old environmental activist from upstate New York, that means traveling to Iraq as a human shield against U.S. bombs. As part of the ‘Become the Change’ campaign, Greene is headed to Iraq to live with the Iraqi people before bombs begin falling. Greene believes that the fact that 50,000 Americans are willing to do this will deter the war.” For more information, visit www.becomethemachange.org

Protesting Makes You Feel Good

Protesting is good for you. A British study published last month at the University of Exeter ana- lyzed 160 protests of 40 activists to obtain the results. “The main fac- tors contributing to a sense of empowerment were the realization of the collective identity, the sense of movement, potential, unity and mutual support within a crowd,” said social psychologist Dr. John Drury in a statement in other words, taking action can translate into support within the protest group that can help the individual overcome stress, pain, anxiety and depression. The positive feelings appeared to have a longlasting effect. “Empowering events were almost without exception described as joyous occasions,” said Drury.
UK Nuke Plant Caught Napping

More than 30 anti-nuclear protesters scaled rooftops, erected ladders and wire-cutters Jan. 13 to break into the central control building of the Sizewell B nuclear power station in eastern England. Greenpeace, which campaigns for an end to nuclear energy, said it staged the break-in to expose poor security at Sizewell B and other nuclear facilities. Mike Harrison, the plant’s maintenance manager, condemned the protest as a stunt. “It is a totally irresponsible and criminal act which has caused damage to the insulation after a fence was broken through and a door smashed,” he told the Associated Press.

Modern War: Men Fight. Women and Children Die

A recent report by Child Advocacy International reveals that the international arms trade hit women, children, and the poor the hardest. Over 85 percent of major conflicts since World War II have taken place in poor countries, and more than two million children died in wars from 1986-1996. Western countries often supply both sides in a conflict, eating into the already tiny sums available for health and education. Unfortunately, the world’s biggest arms dealer—the US—has refused to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has blocked an international criminal court. In 2001, a US treaty negotiator promised to block any agreement that infringes the “right to bear arms.”

Lula to Army: Food Not Bombs

Brazil’s new left-wing government recently suspended a $760 million purchase of a dozen new jet fighters, saying it would look for cheaper alternatives like renting or buying used aircraft. 25 million out of Brazil’s 175 million people suffer from hunger and income inequality is among the worst in the world. Lula da Silva has made eliminating the social problem his top priority. Five forefathers of the war have been competing to win the coveted fighter plane contract, among them U.S.-based Lockheed Martin and a joint Franco-Spanish bid.

GM-oh!: Genetically Modified Crops Breed with Wild Plants

A recent report by Greenpeace reveals that GM crops, grown commercially in Britain, whether GM crops should be allowed, and that the six-year government study was to determine the safety of oil seed rape (canola) crossbred with conventional rape crops, as oil seed rape has been used in the UK since the 1980s. The study was based on the published by the UK’s Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, which reveals that GM oil seed rape (canola) crossed with conventional rape crops, as well as with wild varieties. The UK Independent called the results “devastating,” noting that the six-year study was to determine whether GM crops should be grown commercially in Britain.

ZAPATISTAS MARCH Jan. 1 Shows They Stand

BY RAYMON X

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, MEXICO—Midnight, January 1, 2003, the sky is thick with pungent smoke and the old colonial streets are jam-packed with 20,000 spirited Zapatistas. They’ve taken control of San Cristobal, which is desert-ed of locals and security forces. The masked militants of the EZLN have journeyed from all over Chiapas and lit huge bonfires around the central plaza and surrounding streets.

From the stage, Commandante Bruce Lee commanded the cadre to build bigger fires to warm the cool night air. “This struggle has hardly begun. Let the fires shine bright so that the people can see how we have maintained our rebellion!”

The feisty rebels demonstrated that on the ninth anniversary of the uprising, they are still organized, still militant and still enraged. As Chiapas faces an uncertain future, insurgents made it clear that the conflict has entered a new phase.

A Night To Remember

I am very proud we have peace in Mexico, with Marcos, with the Zapatistas.”—Mexican President Vincente Fox

“Fox says we have peace in Chiapas, that there is no conflict,” Commandante David asked a crowd from the podium. “Is the conflict settled in Chiapas?” “NOOOO!” came the emphatic reply from the multitude, banging their machetes and sticks, and holding up burning torches. The mood was combative and the chants, banners and speeches from the stage were uncompromising: Fox is the same as his predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo, Fox’s party PAN equals the corrupt and repressive PRI, No Evictions From Montes Azules, Globalize Rebellion And Dignity.

The rebellion in Argentina was lauded, the Fox government, firmly committed to NAFTA and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, encourages the exodus. Official figures record 150,000 migrants from Chiapas to the U.S. each year, but in the last three years, the establishment of 80 new bus companies shuttling to the U.S. border suggests an even greater number. Combined with migration to work in Cancun resorts and the oil fields of Tabasco, a whole way of indigenous life and culture is in danger of disappearing. “The PPP will respect the territorial integrity of the communities and promote a sustainable development,” says Fox, flying
Poised to Enter New Phase

The Ninth Anniversary

The nine years of struggle of the Zapatistas has opened up vast swathes of land taken from plantations owners. Thousands of campesinos occupy and work the land they have wrested from the government, a de facto rebel zone under the authority of 38 Autonomous Municipalities. This is the one great achievement of Zapatista communities. On the other hand, the autonomous zones are under constant threat, surrounded by the army and menaced by paramilitaries.

Government attempts to buy off rebel villagers has had some success. Traditional pre-1994 Zapatista strongholds are often the focus for persistent counter-insurgency programs that have had some effect. “But we are united here,” says Don Anselmo of the Zapatista village, Diez de Abril. “Although I do worry about some of the other communities,” referring to the handful of surrounding smaller villages that have dropped out of the struggle.

Ex-Zapatista Esteban explains why he left Diez de Abril to live in a non-Zapatista village: “I got tired, and I needed to feed my kids. The Zapatista organization takes up a lot of time and you get little in return.” Taking advantage of a government scheme, he received some construction materials and his children received state schooling. He finished with the Zapatistas?

“No,” says Esteban, “I’m taking a rest.” And this is the importance of the Jan. 1 rally. As the constitutional path seems exhausted and the enemy takes a more right direction, however the reality is that such efforts taken by Starbucks compared to their overall production and profitability margin still only amount to a mere drop in the larger coffee pot. In 2001, Starbucks says it purchased 1 million pounds of “fair trade” coffee, which costs $1.26 a pound. Yet this amounted to less than one percent of its total purchases that year.

On Whose Good Grounds?

Starbucks’ adventures with organic coffee in Chiapas, which it calls “On Good Grounds,” are indeed a step in the right direction, however the reality is that such efforts taken by Starbucks compared to their overall production and profitability margin still only amount to a mere drop in the larger coffee pot. In 2001, Starbucks says it purchased 1 million pounds of “fair trade” coffee, which costs $1.26 a pound. Yet this amounted to less than one percent of its total purchases that year.

Saving the Images of Corporations Worldwide

Corporations are turning to Conservation International, eager for a magical makeover. The GAP and Nike can change overnight from corporations steeped in unsavory sweatshop labor scandals to sensitive multicultural companies providing a common look and ‘tude to a new global society unified in style. Starbucks are the root cause of the economic suffering of campesinos. Starbucks are the root cause of the economic suffering of campesinos.

Across America coffee drinkers are being duped into believing that their consumer choice is a real alternative to exploitative coffee production. Industry leader Starbucks has relentlessly promoted itself as a socially responsible corporation, with a considerable payoff for itself. The reality of coffee farming across Chiapas is cleverly disguised by touting the miniscule effort made to improve the vastly imbalanced relationship between campesino producer and global purchaser. With the help of Conservation International, corporations can now cash in on the concerns of consumers while maintaining their contracting and purchasing practices.

In the case of Chiapas, Starbucks asks “How can you help preserve the world’s biodiversity simply by drinking a cup of shade-grown coffee?” The answer, of course, is to head immediately to your local Starbucks, order a cup of “Shade Grown Mexico” and “discover the connections among coffee, cloud forest and the magnificent jaguar.” Starbucks hopes that while their loyal patrons are busy connecting with jungle wildlife, they will make no such connections between the $2.50 per pound the average campesino producer in Chiapas makes and the billions of dollars the company brings in every year.

With the CI alliance, Starbucks CEO Orin Smith almost seems credible when he claims that Starbucks and CI have made a difference in farmers’ lives with the sale of this exceptional coffee. By paying a premium price for this shade-grown coffee, Starbucks improves the well-being of coffee farmers and encourages them to preserve the forest environment.

While Starbucks advertises their organic coffee initiative in El Triunfo Biosphere in Chiapas, the slight progress pales in light of the enormity of the region’s economic desperation. The manipulation of public opinion obscure the fact that the purchasing practices of companies such as Starbucks are the root cause of the economic suffering of campesinos.

BY SARAH PROESCHER

Though one need not investigate too deeply into Ford’s corporate track record to be convinced of the contrary. With the authority of CI’s position as a well-known environmental organization protecting them, participating businesses can turn their own shade of green with relative ease while spending only a mere fraction of their earnings.

With all the lip service given to social, civic and environmental commitments, corporations still have a hard time hiding the fundamental logic that drives their actions and priorities. As eloquently summarized by Nike, at the end of the day, it’s just business as usual. “Nike often makes decisions that are not the most popular or politically correct view. But our decisions are always thoughtful, and are based on trying to do what we feel is the right thing for our consumers and our business.”

Like Nike, Starbucks upholds the time-honored mantra of most big businesses operating in today’s global economy-profit, by any means necessary.

Starbucks Laugh Last

Oxfam reports that international coffee prices have now reached a 30-year low, having decreased by more than 50 percent in the last three years. For the 20 million coffee farmers worldwide, the scenario is quickly becoming more and more grim. Coffee buyers show no signs of drastically changing their purchasing practices and farmers grow increasingly more dependent on the exploitative relationships. The result is malnutrition and health problems as coffee planting is prioritized over food crops that could be used for local consumption.

Despite the tragic plummet of coffee prices due to overproduction, corporations like Nestle and Starbucks saw their profits skyrocket. Though fair trade alternatives can indeed offer needed outlets to desperate farmers, the big coffee companies will not cooperate without a public struggle.
By Sanja Karam

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC—Santa Claus came to Prague’s Old Town Square this past December. He didn’t arrive on a sleigh, but on a tractor-trailer with a little help from the folks at Coca-Cola. The flared black scene was vintage Norman Rockwell: faux fireplace, an easy chair to hold Santa as he dispensed goodies, stockings on the mantle, and a picture window to nowhere with the requisite winter wonderland scene. Everything was branded with the Coke symbol—signs, games, Santa’s helpers, and, of course, the gifts.

There was only one problem: the jolly old elf isn’t part of the Czech Christmas pantheon—baby Jesus hands out the loot instead. I watched with a Czech friend who found it all rather too much a part of our tradition. We don’t hang stockings on the mantle. And no one has a living room like that.

The episode took place on St. Nicholas’ Day, December 5, when the saint wanders about in a red suit and devil in tow, interrogating children about their behavior. The angel gives nice children a small gift, while the devil dispenses coal to the naughty ones. Unlike the fat man in the red suit, Saint Nicholas looks the part, with mire, robes and staff.

Santa is making his presence known, nonetheless, appearing on Czech television, clothing and advertising. In response, some Czechs grumble that their country is threatened by yet another import from the one-world culture. They have the latest Hollywood movies, internet cafes, Scientologists, skateboard punks, Frank Gehry architecture, stylish couples walking down the street talking on separate cell phones and, of course, McDonald’s (which is presented as another zombie). Prague itself is another cobbledstone backdrop for movie sets and sports car commercials. Cranes speckle the atmospheric cityscape, pulling up commercial and residential towers, hotels and “hypermarkets” that would look at home in any American suburb.

Czechs also sense a threat from the one-world economy. On a clammy December day, nearly 10,000 descended on Prague to protest. Thousands of farmers assaulted the Agriculture Ministry with eggs, apples, corn and manure. They were upset that when the Czech Republic and nine other countries join the European Union in May 2004, new members will receive only 25 percent of the agricultural subsidies given to farming countries in the current member states. Blue-collar workers also showed up to vent their grievances. One demonstrator, a 35-year-old meat cutter, said he’s been working for 40 years. He asked, “How much do you think I make an hour?” About $1.50, he answered, meaning he earned just half of the per capita income of $6,000.

“A lot of older people see that capitalism did not bring any solution, that their lives are getting worse,” says Fabiano Golgo, editor of the muckraking weekly, Novy Prostor. “Their pensions are not keeping pace with inflation,” which has averaged 5 percent annually since 1997. Pensions are a bedrock of support for about 25 percent of the 10.4 million Czechs, and account for 95 percent of the income in pensioner households. Minimum payments are about 6,000 crowns a month, a little less than $200. Combined with other benefits of an activist government—a national health-care system, functioning public transport and a high rate of home ownership—a pension can provide a bearable standard of living.

The government has been able to buy the peace with a robust welfare state. However, there is a sense that the social fabric is unravelling. Ten percent of the workforce is on the dole, and four percent are long-term unemployed. Drug use has skyrocketed. There are estimates there are about 30,000 PVD drug users. One Prague resident describes the place beneath the Prague Castle as “a curtained, carpeted with heroin addicts in the sumertime.” Prostitution is all but legal, earning Prague the title “Central Europe’s Banggok.”

It would be unfair to say that this is the legacy of President Vaclav Havel, who is stepping down after 13 almost-uninterrupted years in the post. After the Velvet Revolution ousted the four-decade-old Communist regime, there was revived talk of “socialism with a human face.” But, as of a country of 10 million, the Czech Republic had few choices but to turn westward.

The solution didn’t have to be the mass privatization that ensued, says Milos, a pensioner who used to work in the state-run media. “It could have gone different ways after 1989.” He favored “nationalization of the industries, public works, everything, even the petrol stations.” A pensioner who used to work in the state-run industries.

The CSSD talks a good game. Labor and Social Affairs Minister Zdenek Skromach says the Czech Republic should be a place where “an individual doesn’t have to be afraid if he gets into a difficult situation.” The CSSD’s commitment to social welfare is questionable, though. It has proposed that pensions become a pay-as-you-go system, ending minimum payments. It also suggested that the five percent tax on property sales—used to subsidize the purchase of homes by first-time buyers—be eliminated and replaced with government giveaways to developers. And the labor minister, borrowing a page from Tony Blair’s “Third Way,” wants to end employment benefits for jobless graduates and create a welfare-to-work program.

Both parties are also tainted by corruption, which is rampant in the Czech Republic. Fabiano Golgo says when the CSSD or the Civic Democrats are in power, “It’s about administering the country and taking what you can.” Prague Mayor Jan Kasl of the Civic Democrats resigned last May, citing pervasive corrup- tion. He charged that the public’s dealings with government officials usually had to be eased with bribes. Havel has labelled it “mafia capitalism,” earning the enmity of both parties. Most blatant is the looting of state-run industries. Politicians sell them on the cheap to multinationals in return for a payoff.

One Czech government study notes that since 1998, barely one-fifth of 6,853 public projects have had the required open bids. In June, for example, the government signed a backroom deal with Housing and Construction, Israel’s largest construction firm, to build an 80-kilometer-long highway in Northern Moravia. Jeri Petranka, a consultant whose firm worked with the government on the project, told The Prague Post, “We were under enormous pressure to agree [to] any terms offered by Housing and Construction.” Petranka said the 30-year contract could end up costing $7 billion, while the government could build and manage the highway for one-quarter of the cost. Golgo claims one Czech official working in the deal was rewarded with a beachfront residence in Tel Aviv.

Big business has taken to the Czech Republic because of its well-educated, low-cost workforce and central location between East and West Europe. Foreign money is buying up the choicest assets. Just three countries—the Netherlands, Austria and Germany—account for over 70 percent of the investments.

Czechs are paying the price to enter the global marketplace, however. Despite, for example, Dutch telecommunications firm TDC and Deutsche Bank purchased 51 percent of Czech Telecom for a steal—just ten times its 2001 earnings of $200 million. Already, according to the Czech daily Economic News, the new owners plan to lay off 2,000 workers. Adding insult to injury, the purchasers have put the deal on hold, reportedly hoping to drive down the price even further.

The beneficiary of much of the discontent is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), which is regularly polling around 20 percent. The average Communist Party voter is not a bitter pensioner or ex-civil servant, but a worker over 40 who feels left in the lurch. The Communists are the only ones talking about rising unemployment, a potential economic crash stemming from a rising trade deficit and inflation, and cuts in social spending demanded by the IMF and EU. They are also the only major party critical of the decision to join NATO and the looming possibility of a war with Iraq.

That’s not to say there’s nostalgia for the Communist era. “There was nothing in the stores. No garlic, no onions, no meat,” recalls Roman, a 79-year-old mathematician. “You couldn’t travel. Everyone was the same, but we had little.”

While Czechs are better off than most of their Eastern European cousins, their future is uncertain at best. The crown has appreciated substantially in the last two years, and many businesses say labor costs are getting expensive. It’s all relative, of course. Volkswagen, which owns Czech automaker Skoda, pays its workers one-tenth of what workers earn in Germany.

Czechs realize they are at the mercy of the market. And more and more of them may find themselves on the dust heap of history, like Jarda, who begs in the old town. He was recently hit by a car and lost his job. Fifty-six, he says he can’t even get a job as a bathroom attendant. His partner’s pension barely covers the rent. Jarda says, “Under Communism we were forced to work, which was bad. Now I don’t have any work and that is worse. Life before 1989 was shit. Now, it’s twice as much shit.”
CHIAPAS: NUEVOS DESAFÍOS

El primero de enero marca el noveno aniversario del levantamiento zapatista, el inicio del Tratado de Libre Comercio con América del Norte y el día en que son levantadas todas las restricciones a las importaciones de productos agrícolas de Estados Unidos (una medida del TLCAN). Encima de todo, el gobierno mexicano está conduciendo los desplazamientos forzados de las comunidades indígenas en el área conocida como “Montes Azules”. Como resultado, miles de zapatistas de todo Chiapas llegaron de las montañas y leves vientos de la ciudad de San Cristóbal de las Casas, dando fin a un periodo de silencio que empezó casi dos años atrás, después de la Marcha a la Ciudad de México en abril del 2001.

Extractos de las palabras de los comandantes zapatistas

“Por mi voz habla la voz del EZLN. Hermanos del campo y de la ciudad, yo les voy a decir con estas humildes palabras que hace muchos años que nosotros las mujeres venimos sufriendo la discriminación, la explotación y el olvido por los malos gobiernos. Igualmente nos pasa en nuestras casas pero también nosotros lo administramos y sabemos como vivimos...”

“Hermanos y hermanas reciben esta invita de las mujeres a hacer un llamado que se organice para que juntas nosotros podamos defender nuestro derecho y también nos tengamos igualdad.”

Comandante Fidelia

… “Vamos a luchar por nuestra existencia en contra del extermínio. Así seguiremos hasta que todos juntos legremos y conquistemos un lugar para todos en la vida de la humanidad. Por eso, hermanos y hermanas de todo el mundo, les pedimos que mantengan su lucha y sigan luchando todo el tiempo que sea necesario. Porque nosotros los zapatistas no vamos a traicionar a todos los luchadores políticos y sociales de todo el mundo y para luchar en el mundo no pedimos permiso a nadie, mucho menos aceptar que los gobiernos nos digan lo que debemos hacer o qué es lo que vamos a decir. Pero es un hecho que apoyamos a todos los luchadores sociales y políticos de todo el mundo porque tenemos esperanza en todas las luchas del mundo. Vamos a ganar porque nuestras demandas son legítimas.”

Comandante Mister

“Aunque nos estén matando, otros van naciendo. Pero dejarse engañar, eso no. Por lo tanto estamos aquí con nuestras bases la pequeña parte de nuestros pueblos en resistencia para demostrar y desmentir todo lo que han dicho los mentirosos de todo México y el mundo. Jóvenes, ya no se dejen engañar más. Ya nos han engañado muchos años. ¿Qué esperanza vas a tener con los partidos si solo te aprovechan que votes por ellos y después te persiguen, te roban, te matan, te encarcelan o te amenazan a tu familia y solo por bailar o cantar como tu quieres o por cortarte el pelo o vestirte como te gusta, solo por eso te sospechan o te acusan que eres terrorista o criminal. No te respetan tu costumbre ni tu cultura.”

Comandante Omar

“Ya es tiempo que todos nos organizemos y que formemos nuestros municipios autónomos. No hay que esperar hasta cuando el mal gobierno dé permiso. Deberemos organizarnos como verdaderamente rebeldes y no esperar que alguien nos de permiso para ser autónomos, sin ley o con ley. De manera que así debemos funcionar nuestras autoridades en rebeldía y así poder autogobernarnos. Sólo así puede funcionar verdaderamente la democracia del interior de un municipio.”

De atracción turística a “niño de terroristas”

Paradoja que el mismo jefe de la delegación estadounidense para la lucha antiterrorista en la Tripló Frontera tenga dificultades para seguir el discurso oficial que rotula a la zona como nido de terro-ristas. Si bien la Triple Frontera estuvo asociada a actividades de contrabando y otros ilegales desde hace tiempo, fue en noviembre de 2001, cuando se encontró un mapa de la región en una “casa de seguridad” de Al-Qaeda en Kabul, Afganistán, que la Triple Frontera cambió de estatus. Gracias a este cambio ahora frecuentemente se la menciona en la misma frase con Irak, Irán, Sudán y Corea del Norte. Parece excesivo cuando la única prueba mencionada a la BBC por el comisario paraguayo Carlos Altemburger es una carta de Hezbollah a comerciantes libaneses de la región. Deberíamos preguntarnos cuántas cartas similares fueron dirigidas por la mismísima Al-Qaeda a miembros de la familia real saudita, por ejemplo, sin que haya cambiado el estatus de Arábia Saudita, de aliado de Estados Unidos a guardia de terroristas. El editorial de un diario local de Foz de Iguazú desafió a los investigadores de EE.UU. que están en la Triple Frontera, que hagan bien su trabajo, que “investiguen bien, pero las comunidades les agradeceremos que, si no encuentran nada, nos den un certificado de inocencia definitiva.”

LUNA DE MIEL EN LA TRIPLE FRONTERA

Viene de la página 24.

Por su parte, el ex presidente Menem ha acusado a residentes de la Triple Frontera por los atentados contra instituciones israelíes que ocurrieron durante su mandato. Pero diversos sectores, incluidos dirigentes de la comunidad judía argentina, declararon que Menem está buscando chivos expiatorios y que su gobierno corrupto no hizo nada para esclarecer los crímenes de más de 100 per- sonas (Embajada de Israel (1992) y AMIA (1994).

Iniciativa argentina

El 16 de diciembre de 2002, se reunieron en Buenos Aires funcionarios de inteligencia de EE.UU., Argentina, Brasil y Paraguay. La reunión se hizo por invitación de la cancillería argentina con el fin de identificar y estudiar los puntos vulnerables en la Triple Frontera. Algunos comentaristas opinaron que esta iniciativa de Argentina ponía en mán- fiesto una continuidad de la política de subordinación a Washington en un momento clave para la renegociación de la deuda externa con el FMI (Fondo Monetario Internacional). Otros vieron que era un gesto amistoso hacia el gobierno de la Argentina, que no ha logrado el pleno reconocimiento de las fuerzas de financiamiento, el narcotráfico, el lavado de dinero, controles aduaneros y migratorios y el tráfico de armas en la región. Luego la delegación se trasladó a la Triple Frontera. Cofer Black, Coordinador de Antiterrorismo del Departamento de Estado y jefe de la delegación estadounidense, se pasó dos días para hablar con los habitantes de los espectaculares maravillosos de las Cataratas del Iguazú. Un periodista le preguntó qué pensaba y Black respondió: “Que le recomiendo a mi hijo que cuando se case, venga a pasar su luna de miel aquí.”
LUNA DE MIEL EN LA TRIPLE FRONtera

SERVA ARAÑA

El gobierno de Estados Unidos ha decreto que la Triple Frontera es un nido de terroristas. El área está formada por tres ciudades: Foz de Iguazú (Brasil), Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) y Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). En esta zona de gran actividad comercial están las Cataratas del Iguazú, las más altas del continente americano. Viven cientos de miles de inmigrantes de origen libanés, egipcio, chino, coreano y croata. En diciembre de 2001 Francis X. Taylor, el entonces Coordinador de Antiterrorismo del Departamento de Estado, declaró en Asunción del Paraguay: “Organizaciones extremistas del Islam, como Hezbollah, Hamas y al Gaum al Islamiya, utilizan esta zona pujante como base de apoyo del terrorismo.” Dijo que se fundamentaba en información compartida por las fuerzas del orden y oficiales de inteligencia de los gobiernos involucrados, pero no proporcionó pruebas. Posteriormente, frecuentes reportes de CNN y otros medios, citando fuentes de inteligencia del gobierno de EU, acusaron a Al-Qaeda de estar detrás de ataques en Asia, África y América Latina. Los latinos de este país juegan un rol importante al momento de decidir el éxito o fracaso de este plan de dominio mundial por las grandes multinacionales de EU. Estas son las mismas que saquean a nuestros países al apoderarse de las empresas antes públicas como las telefónicas, generadoras de electricidad y los hospitales. Al privatizarlas han eliminado millones de empleos de lo cual ha provocado una salida masiva de nuestros compatriotas hacia EE.UU. en busca de empleos y una vida mejor. Al llegar a esta nación nos enfrentamos con una sociedad que nos rechaza y que no comprende que sus empresas, al apoderarse de nuestras economías, son la causante de nuestro éxodo. Aquí somos superextraviados en el trabajo y al alquiler vivienda. La mayoría no contamos con seguro de salud a diario corremos el riesgo de ser arrestados por policías racistas. El estado se ha aprovechado de los ataques del 11 de septiembre para montar una cariera de brujas contra todos los inmigrantes y en particular los latinos. Miles de latinos han sido deportados desde el 11 de septiembre y miles se encuentran en las cárceles del Servicio de Inmigración y Naturalización. Históricamente, los latinos y los negros han muerto en números desproporcionadamente altos en las guerras de EE.UU. En la Primera Guerra Mundial, en Corea y en Vietnam, los latinos eran enviados a las misiones más peligrosas. Recientemente hemos escuchado a jóvenes latinos que no tienen sus papeles en orden expresar su intención de ingresar al ejército con el propósito de obtener la ciudadanía. No debemos permitir que otra generación sacrifique sus vidas. Daniel Vila es un activista de la organización New York Labor Against the War (Trabajadores de Nueva York contra la guerra).